**SUGGESTIONS REGARDING SECTION II – SPONSOR  
AND CO-SPONSOR INFORMATION**

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[Note: Beginning as early as FY 2017, NIH will require in Section II a detailed description of instruction in rigorous experimental design to ensure reproducibility. See NOT-OD-16-034. Plans for training in BGS relevant to these requirements are being discussed.]

**A. Research Support Available**

•Research support to be noted here is support specifically available to the applicant. It is essential that the reviewers get a clear sense that research support will exist for the duration of the fellowship.

•Research support includes not only that of the sponsor but that of a co-sponsor, should a co-sponsor be part of the application and if that support is available to the applicant. Support of this nature may be one reason (but not the only one!) to bring a co-sponsor into the mix.

**B. Previous Fellows/Trainees**

•The directions ask for the number of pre- *and* postdoctoral students previously supervised, and to provide as well a list of 5 that are representative along with employing organization and position titles or occupations. What’s important here is to get across your experience and success as a mentor. NIH doesn’t describe what ‘representative’ means – you’ll need to come up with your own logic for this. The greater the numbers, the loftier the positions of those specifically listed, the more compelling the argument for experience and success.

•New or relatively new investigators are given some but not a lot of slack by reviewers here. It is almost imperative for a new investigator to bring a co-sponsor on board for this reason, making sure of course that a co-sponsor makes sense from all other angles (see ‘Remarks regarding a co-sponsor’ below).

**C. Training Plan, Environment, Research Facilities**

•With regard to the training plan, instructions call for classes, seminars, and opportunities for interaction with other groups and scientists. But there’s much more that should be considered:

•It is important to show that the applicant will evolve as a scientist over the period of the fellowship, that he or she will acquire career-defining skills, will be exposed through classes and workshops to information that provides unique perspectives and expertise, and will otherwise be encouraged through identified activities to push conceptual boundaries. No training plan should be static.

•It is also important that you as the sponsor are able to articulate not only the strengths of the applicant, but any weaknesses as well, carefully framed of course, and that your plan considers both. Strengths/weaknesses should coincide with those discussed earlier in the application by the student, i.e. it should appear in the application that you have talked a lot with each other, are on the same page, and a plan of action has been developed accordingly. No training plan should be one-size-fits-all.

•Be fully aware of what the applicant expresses as a career trajectory and other professional desires, so that that the plan you devise provides key, specific support to this end.

•If a co-sponsor exists, this is the time to talk about how the co-sponsor provides an added dimension to the training plan and how – specifically (very important) – the student will be guided by you and the co-sponsor.

•You may want to speak to formal or informal training in career-related competencies: communication, time-management, leadership, group dynamics, etc. Workshops toward some of these competencies are provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning and Career Services.

•With regard to environment, you will talk about seminar series (both broad topics and those highly relevant to the topic of student’s thesis), interactions with other groups and scientists, etc., but make sure the talk is not generic. Make it specific, about what each experience brings to the table. Extra points for *unique* experiences relating to career trajectory.

**D. Number of Fellows/Trainees to be Supervised During the Fellowship**

•Too few, or too many, is the point of interest. Too few, the synergies afforded through interactions, ideas, and camaraderie are lacking. Too many, the student can get lost in the crowd. You’ll want to address any issues you perceive here – and regardless, address the time and form of mentorship – above in the training plan. Sponsors with any administrative responsibilities should address the time/effort dedicated to mentorship of the applicant (state how many hours per week will be devoted to meetings with students).

**E. Applicant’s Qualifications and Potential for a Research Career**

•This section should speak formally to the academic record and research experience level of the applicant, but it should not miss the opportunity to speak again to the applicant’s unique strengths. Because this section is intended to address everything that relates to creating an independent researcher, it is in a sense the summary with everything discussed above brought together in a compelling fashion. The tone should be objective, stressing how from your stance as an investigator with experience and success the applicant has all the attributes of a star.

**Remarks regarding a co-sponsor:**

The rationale for adding a co-sponsor can be varied, but it is always centered on complementation as it relates to the training plan – at the level of research, skills to be conferred, training history and mentorship. To be sure, a co-sponsor can address deficiencies in research support, etc., but complementation must be central. The inclusion of a co-sponsor should *not* look like an ad hoc arrangement, for example simply to add some kind of heft to an inherently weak application. The best applications involving co-sponsorship show evidence of interactions between the sponsor and co-sponsor that extend through time and have been distinctly beneficial to trainees. Co-authored publications and grant proposals are great in support of this. For a new investigator, the idea that interactions have been developed through meetings and recruitment, and that the new investigator provides a missing piece in an institutional research program, make good sense. The specific elements of complementation should be discussed extensively by the applicant and the sponsor in respective training plans. The enthusiasm of the co-sponsor should be made evident in his or her biosketch (Personal Statement).