Frequently Asked Questions

A. General Questions

A.1. Why is NIH planning to allow multiple Principal Investigators on individual research awards?

This effort represents an NIH Roadmap initiative (see http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/interdisciplinary/) as well as a response to a Federal-wide directive to formally allow more than one Principal Investigator (PI) on individual research awards. As part of the implementation plan, a Request for Information (RFI) was issued by the NIH to solicit input on policies and issues of special interest to the health-related research community.

The policy, once implemented, will offer new approaches to maximize the potential of “team science” efforts. The multiple principal investigator (PI) model will supplement, and not replace, the traditional single principal investigator (PI) model. Although the single-PI model clearly continues to work well and encourages creativity and productivity, it does not always encourage multidisciplinary efforts and collaboration. Increasingly, health-related research involves teams that vary in terms of size, hierarchy, location of participants, goals, disciplines, and structure. In fact, a major recommendation from the 2003 “NIH Bioengineering Consortium Symposium on Catalyzing Team Science” http://www.becon2.nih.gov/becon_symposia.htm was to allow more than one PI on individual grants.

Clearly, the selection of the multiple-PI versus single-PI option will be the decision of the investigators and their institutions, and it must be based on the needs of the research proposed. Although the number of applications submitted using the multiple-PI model is expected to be relatively small compared with those within the traditional single-PI format, we know that the impact of the research supported through multidisciplinary efforts can be great.

A.2. To what specific type of research efforts is the multiple-PI model aimed? Can you provide examples of research teams to which this model would, and would not, apply?

The selection of either the single-PI or multiple-PI option should be based on the research proposed, to ensure optimal facilitation of the science. The multiple-PI option can encourage multidisciplinary and other types of “team science” projects that are not optimally served by the single-PI model. Projects suitable for the multiple-PI model could include as few as two Principal Investigators who are jointly responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the project. An example of a multiple-PI project...
would be a jointly-directed obesity research effort directed at a series of phenotypes to investigate the primary effect of specific alleles and the functional consequences of these variants. In this example, experts in imaging, clinical obesity research and metabolism might work together as equal partners in the direction of the project. However another applicant with similar goals might structure the roles of similar investigators as is currently done, that is to providing consultation, collaboration and services (e.g., MRI) instead of sharing in the scientific direction of the project. In the latter case the traditional single-PI model would be the appropriate model. Multiple PI models may also apply to resource-related projects, training grants and other types of NIH supported activities. The full range of such activities will be announced at some point in the near future.

A.3. To which grant mechanisms will this apply? Will it be piloted first before applying it more broadly?

As a first step in the implementation of this policy, the NIH will make the multiple-PI option available for applications submitted in response to a selected group of Requests for Applications (RFAs) or Program Announcements (PAs) with May or June 2006 receipt dates. Additional pilots may be conducted in the Fall of 2006 to test the processing of multi-PI applications submitted electronically through Grants.gov. http://grants.gov/ All such pilots involving RFAs and PAs will be announced as a Notice in the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/index.html. It is likely that the multiple-PI option will become available for most investigator-initiated research grant mechanisms submitted for the January 2007 and later application receipt dates. This second phase will generally follow the implementation schedule for the SF424 electronic grant application form http://grants2.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/, which can accommodate the multiple-PI option. The multiple PI option also will become available for other mechanisms that are tied to RFAs and PAs, with the specific schedules and application guidelines included with the announcements for the various initiatives.

A.4. How would the multiple-PI model enhance research conducted within a single institution? Why not limit this model to team science conducted across several institutions?

The multiple-PI principles are based on the proposed project, not on the number of performance sites or the number of participating institutions. The need for formal recognition of PIs applies to team science projects within single institutions as well as to those conducted through multiple institutions. This includes the ability of PIs to attract externally sponsored research awards and the financial impact of those awards.

A.5. Why not restrict the model to only those grants with direct costs exceeding $500K?

Team science is not synonymous with large science. Limiting the multiple-PI option to large grants could miss important multidisciplinary research opportunities involving less expensive projects.
A.6. Why not simply have applicants use the Program Project Grant (P01) mechanism instead of developing this new model?

The multiple-PI model is not mechanism-based. Although the range of mechanisms eligible for the multiple-PI option will be limited initially (see Question A.3 above), in the future it will be available for almost all NIH mechanisms. The P01 award is for the support of broad-based multidisciplinary and often multifaceted research projects that involve distinct subprojects that address a well-defined major objective or central theme. Clearly, there are examples of P01 grants that could benefit from the multiple-PI model in the same way as single component research projects. Limiting the multiple-PI option to large, multiple-project grants could miss important research opportunities.

B. Principal Investigator Roles and Responsibilities

B.1. How will Principal Investigator (PI) be defined now? Will the role of the PI be diminished?

The “Principal Investigator,” “Program Director” or “Project Director” is defined as any individual judged by the applicant organization to have the appropriate level of authority and responsibility to direct the project or program supported by the grant. Each principal investigator is responsible and accountable to the applicant organization for the proper conduct of the project or program including the submission of all required reports.

The presence of more than one identified PI on an application or award diminishes neither the responsibility nor the accountability of any individual PI.

For applications designating multiple PIs, a section titled Leadership Plan must be included. In this section of the application the governance and organizational structure of the research project should be described, including communication plans and procedures for resolving conflicts. In addition, the administrative, technical, and scientific responsibilities for each specific aim or activity should be delineated for the PIs and other members of the scientific team.

B.2. Will there be a required minimum percent effort or level of responsibility to qualify as a PI?

No. As with a single-PI project, the effort of the PI should be commensurate with the work proposed, and this factor will be considered in the peer view process. Similarly, a substantial level of effort in itself does not qualify an investigator for PI status. A PI must meet the criteria given in Question B.1.

B.3. Will there be a ceiling on the number of PIs? For example, could P01 subprojects have multiple PIs? This could result in a large number for the overall grant.
No upper limit is currently planned for the number of PIs. Although there is no upper limit to the number of PIs, anyone designated as a PI must meet the criteria given in Question B.1 above. Yes, in the future, PO1 subprojects could include multiple subproject directors who could also serve as PIs. In theory this could result in a large total number of PIs. However a research team having a large number of PIs, each of whom is responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the project would represent a special, infrequent situation. It could also entail some risk to the project in case of disagreements within the team. It will be incumbent on the applicant to justify the staffing structure in the Leadership Plan. The qualifications of each PI and the leadership plan will be addressed as part of the peer review process.

B.4. Within the Multiple PI model, can we keep the Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) designation?

NIH has never formally recognized a Co-PI designation, and this policy will continue. Applications can include “co-investigator” positions, but these vary in meaning across individual awards and are given no specific status by the NIH.

B.5. Can there be a Lead PI within the Multiple PI model?

No. Although the structure and interaction of the PI team will be left up to the PIs and the applicant institution, all PIs must be qualified to serve as PIs and will share responsibility for the project. There may be an identified leader of components of the project and a coordinator of the overall team. It is possible that smaller teams composed of PIs of equal rank within the institution may function best as an equal partnership. Larger teams may benefit from identifying a spokesman or coordinator responsible for organizing and coordinating the leadership team. In all cases, the roles and responsibilities of the PIs must make sense in relation to the project.

B.6. Without a single, designated person in charge, how will decisions be made? Decisions by committee may not work well in research endeavors. If one PI moves, or doesn’t produce, who will assume responsibility?

The NIH will ask for a Leadership Plan to describe: the roles and areas of responsibility of the named PIs, the process for making decisions on scientific direction, allocating resources, resolving disputes that may arise, and other information related to the management of the proposed team science project. The purpose of the Leadership Plan is to facilitate and enhance scientific productivity and to protect the project in the case of disagreements. This approach is currently used for cooperative agreements and various types of multi-project grants.

B.7. What is the role of the Contact PI? Could the Contact PI have responsibility for overall project management (i.e., functioning as a “Lead PI”)? Or will the role of the Contact PI be reduced to that of a clerk?
When multiple PIs are proposed, NIH requires one PI to be designated as the "Contact PI." This person is responsible for communication between the PIs and the NIH, but serving as Contact PI confers no special roles or responsibilities within the project team. For example, the Contact PI will be responsible for disseminating information from the NIH about the receipt and review of the application. Other types of information exchange may involve the Contact PI or all members of the PI team. Policies related to the role of the Contact PI are still being considered.

The Contact PI must meet all eligibility requirements for PI status in the same way as other PIs. It will be possible, and may even be desirable, for the grantee institution to periodically designate a change in Contact PI. For example, it may be desirable to rotate the role of Contact PI among the multiple PIs on an annual basis at the time of grant renewal.

B.8. Since co-investigators now can have PI status, won’t most applications use the multiple PI model? All participants will want to have PI status.

It is certainly not the intent for co-investigators to be routinely elevated to PI status. The multiple-PI option is reserved for team science efforts in which the PIs share responsibility for the scientific and technical direction of the project and accountability to the grantee organization and to the NIH for the proper conduct of the project or activity. Multiple-PI applications will need to justify the use of this approach in a clear and convincing manner, and of course this will be addressed in the peer review process.

B.9. How will issues of potential abuse and coercion be handled? For example: some investigators may join a research team only if given PI status. Other applicants may “pad” a grant application by listing senior investigators as PIs.

The NIH cannot address the politics within applicant institutions. However, the multiple-PI application instructions and the peer review criteria will be clear. It is important to note that scientific leadership by itself does not qualify a participant for PI status; otherwise, any investigator, junior or senior, could claim leadership of his/her own portion of the project. The PIs must share responsibility for the scientific and technical direction of the project as a whole and will remain accountable to the grantee organization and to the NIH for the proper conduct of the project or activity. This must be clearly and convincingly presented in the Leadership Plan section of the grant application.

B.10. How does support through a multiple-PI award affect “New Investigator” status?

A PI on a multiple-PI project has the same status and responsibility as a PI on any grant, including a traditional research project (R01) grant. The following quote is taken from NIH’s definition of New Investigators described in the PHS 398:

http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.doc
New Investigator. Check “Yes” in the “New Investigator” box only if the principal investigator has not previously served as such on any PHS-supported research project other than a small grant (R03), an Academic Research Enhancement Award (R15), an exploratory/developmental grant (R21), or mentored career development awards for persons at the beginning of their research career (K01, K08, K22, and K23, K25). Current or past recipients of Independent Scientist and other non-mentored career awards (K02, K05, K24, and K26) are not considered new investigators.

Multiple-PI applicants who believe that one or more PIs meet the NIH definition of “new investigator” should indicate this in the application checkbox associated with the information requested for each PI for purposes of NIH tracking. A “New Investigator” designation will track with the PI, and not with the application.

Once an individual serves as a PI on a funded NIH research project grant (multiple-PI or single-PI project), he/she is no longer considered a New Investigator. Similarly, unless all PIs are new investigators, multiple-PI projects will not benefit from established new investigator incentives during the review and funding process (see http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/new_investigators/index.htm). An established PI will not benefit from these incentives by including a new investigator as a part of the team.

C. Allocation of Funds

C.1. Why will the NIH permit funds to be allocated to the individual PIs? It would seem that allocation of funds in this manner could undermine the research effort by fragmenting the team.

Experience suggests that institutional recognition of faculty and staff for the purpose of promotion, tenure, and space allocation frequently includes an assessment of the ability to attract externally-sponsored research awards and the financial impact of those awards. In many institutions, allocation of funds may determine credit and clarify relationships between PIs. In many institutions, a PI who simply receives credit in the absence of an allocated budget will not have the status in his or her institution of a true PI. This might result in the undesirable formation of multiple classes of PIs. Accordingly, the NIH will permit applicants to request allocation of funds to individual PIs. This may be carried out in different ways depending on community interests and the capabilities of NIH data systems (see C.2, below). In addition, allocation of budgets may be handled by means of linked awards in certain situations (see Section H, “Questions Specific to the Issue of Applications from Multiple Institutions” below).

NIH is aware that the costs of research do not necessarily represent the intellectual contribution of collaborators. Some institutions make decisions about advancement based on an assessment of the PI’s contribution to scientific knowledge rather than on their ability to secure external funds.
It is possible that establishing separate accounts for individual PIs may encourage independence rather than team approaches. It will be important for applicants to design steps to ensure cohesion within the team to avoid fragmentation of the project. PIs will be jointly responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the project and the Leadership Plan should reflect this. However, if the research team has any concern that the budget allocations might fragment their proposed project, they should not request allocations to the individual PIs.

C.2. Allocation of funds appears to be a good idea at the institutional level, but what is the benefit of having NIH impose additional layering? Some institutions are already apportioning credit and dollars internally.

The NIH recognizes that any additional administrative work associated with allowing the multiple PI option should be kept to a minimum for the grantee institutions. Therefore, various options for administratively handling allocation of budgets among PIs are being considered and discussed by the NIH. In the initial pilot phase of allowing multiple PIs, the NIH will ask the PIs and the grantee institution to indicate whether allocation to the individual PIs is desirable. This will be based on a joint decision by the PIs and the institution at the time of award. This request will then be recorded on the NIH Notice of Grant Award in a footnote that indicates the PI team’s and the grantee institution’s desire for allocation to individual PIs. Under this arrangement the grantee institution can choose to set up internal accounts to implement the requested allocation. This kind of accounting within the institution need not be reported back to the NIH. In the near future, the NIH will explore other options for allocation that could include formal allocation and tracking of separate accounts within an award or the use of linked awards. The NIH will seek feedback and advice from the research community about such options for allocating budgets.

The NIH fully understands that allocation of funds to individual PIs will benefit from the ability to re-allocate resources in response to the changing directions and needs of the research project. The re-allocation of funds during the project period will be via a joint decision of the PIs, and the process should be described in the Leadership Plan section of the application. The use of more formal allocation schemes such as separate accounts and linked awards may entail additional levels of NIH’s oversight regarding re-allocation and re-budgeting.

C.3. Instead of allocating funds to the individual PIs, why not simply credit all PIs through an expansion of CRISP, without linking to dollars?

As explained in the two preceding questions and answers, many researchers and administrators have indicated that budget allocation is important for proper crediting of their role as PI. Crediting through the NIH’s “Computer Retrieval of Information of Scientific Projects” http://crisp.cit.nih.gov/, and including the name on the Notice of Grant Award will provide appropriate documentation for full crediting at some institutions, while at other institutions there will be a need to document the allocation of funds.
C.4. Will budget allocations to the individual PIs be permitted, but not required?

Allocation of funds will be permitted, not required. However, NIH plans to implement the funds allocation policy in a step-wise fashion. For PIs at a single institution, NIH will initially implement a “soft” allocation of funds between PIs by simply stating the requested apportionment as a footnote on the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA). Following the initial implementation of the policy, additional options for allocation of funds in a more formal way will be proposed, and comments and advice will be solicited from the research community.

For projects that include multiple institutions, the NIH will permit the use of linked awards. The option of establishing sub-contracts from a single awardee institution to the home institutions of other PIs can still be used if the multiple PIs and their institutions so choose. A bona fide database linkage to electronically connect linked awards within NIH data systems will not be available for the first round of multiple-PI applications. Therefore, linked awards will be permitted in the first phase of implementation, but the linkage between awards will not be identified in NIH data systems. This is the way NIH makes linked awards already. Linked awards in a multiple-PI mode ideally will be submitted and maintained as a single project, but policies need to be developed in this area. See Section H, “Questions Specific to the Issue of Applications from Multiple Institutions” for more information.

C.5. Will allocation of funds make it more difficult to move money within a project? Will it facilitate or interfere with team science? Will allocation of funds create the need for new and difficult business processes for the grantee? The institutions need flexibility to move funds where needed, quickly and without burdensome paperwork.

As stated in Answer C.2, it is clear that informal allocation of funds will accord PIs maximum flexibility to re-allocate resources in response to the changing directions and needs of the research project. More formal allocation options may necessitate additional NIH oversight regarding re-allocations. Policies will be developed to reduce paperwork and to avoid difficult business processes to the extent possible, while still meeting all PHS Grants Policy standards.

D. Grant Application Format and Content

D.1. How will the application format and content differ from the single PI application?

As a first step in the implementation of this policy, the NIH will make the multiple-PI option available for applications submitted in response to a selected group of Requests for Applications (RFAs) or Program Announcements (PAs) with May or June 2006 receipt dates. An additional round of pilot RFAs and PAs may be conducted in the Fall of 2006 to test applications received through Grants.gov. All RFAs and PAs that permit
multiple PIs will include special application preparation instructions and peer review criteria to accommodate multiple-PIs and to meet the goals of the programs. It is expected that the multiple-PI option will become available for a range of investigator-initiated grant mechanisms submitted for January/February 2007 application receipt dates. This phase will generally follow the implementation schedule for the SF424 electronic grant application form [http://grants2.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/](http://grants2.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/), which can accommodate the multiple-PI option. The NIH will publish application preparation instructions well before the January/February 2007 application receipt date.

For questions about the format of applications from multiple institutions, see Section H below.

**D.2. The 398 grant application form does not accommodate the names and affiliations of more than one PI. What is planned?**

The NIH is in the process of getting Office of Management and Budget approval (as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act) to modify the PHS398 to permit the entry of information for more than one PI. There will be an expansion page that includes the blocks used for the PI on the face page of the application. This page will be available before the receipt of applications included in the pilot scheduled for May/June 2006.

**D.3. What information should a leadership plan contain?**

The Leadership Plan in the multiple-PI application will provide insight into the PIs’ approach to conducting the team science effort, through its description of: the roles and areas of responsibility of the named PIs, the process for making decisions on scientific direction, allocation of resources, publications, intellectual property issues, procedures for resolving conflicts, and other information related to the management of the proposed team science project. The Leadership Plan presents the PIs’ proposed framework to facilitate and enhance scientific productivity and to protect the project in the case of disagreements.

**E. Peer Review Process**

**E.1. What additional review criteria will be applied?**

As in the review of the traditional single-PI application, peer reviewers will consider whether the designated PIs have appropriate training and experience to carry out the proposed study. Therefore, there will be no “additional review criteria.” The existing review criteria will be used, with the added language for multiple-PI applications as indicated in bold font, below:

**Significance**: Does this study address an important problem? If the aims of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge or clinical practice be advanced?
What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

**Approach:** Are the conceptual or clinical framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, well-reasoned, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics? **For applications designating multiple PIs, does the Leadership Plan ensure that there will be sufficient coordination and communication among the PIs? Are the administrative plans for the management of the research project appropriate, including plans for resolving conflicts?**

**Innovation:** Is the project original and innovative? For example: Does the project challenge existing paradigms or clinical practice; address an innovative hypothesis or critical barrier to progress in the field? Does the project develop or employ novel concepts, approaches or methodologies, tools, or technologies for this area?

**Investigators:** Are the investigators appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level(s) of the principal investigator(s) and other researchers? Do the principal investigator(s) and investigative team bring complementary and integrated expertise to the project (if applicable)?

**Environment:** Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed studies benefit from unique features of the scientific environment(s), or subject populations, or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support?

**E.2. Will there be special review criteria for competing continuation (Type 2) applications?**

The existing special review criteria for competing continuation applications - progress under the previous award - will apply to applications proposing a multiple-PI project. A “Type 2” multiple-PI application requesting support for a project that was previously supported through a single-PI award should state the changes in the project’s direction and management that led the PIs to now propose the multiple-PI model. In addition, the application should state how the research will be enhanced through the multiple-PI approach.

**E.3. Why would the reviewers need to see the Leadership Plan? Shouldn’t the Leadership Plan be tentative and subject to change along with the direction of the science? Could the Leadership Plan be submitted for only those applications with fundable scores, just-in-time?**

Although the Leadership Plan is subject to change, its inclusion within the grant application will provide the reviewers with important information on the proposed approach of the project as well as the roles of the PIs. The Leadership Plan cannot be submitted in a just-in-time manner because the required information is valuable to the
peer review of the PIs’ understanding of the complexities of the science and of project management.

E.4. If one PI is judged to be weak, will this adversely affect the entire application?

Yes. Each named PI is equally responsible and accountable for the research project. The PIs on a multiple-PI application are responsible for the intellectual development and direction of the scientific and technical activities supported by the grant as a whole. Therefore, the PI’s role is more critical than that of “co-investigator” or other collaborator. Inclusion of a “weak” or inappropriate PI will reflect negatively on both the “Approach” and “Investigators” review criteria (see Answer E.1 above for review criteria).

E.5. Will the study section review the application on its own merit, or could the reviewers recommend that a Multiple PI application be re-submitted as a single PI application? Conversely, could a “team science” application with a single PI receive criticism (and a worse score) for not using the Multiple PI model?

Each application will continue to be reviewed on its own merit, as submitted by the PI(s). Reviewers are instructed that it is not their role to advise the applicant or to redesign the proposed project or to suggest other ways of conducting the research. Following receipt of the summary statement for an application that is unlikely to be funded, applicants are always encouraged to contact their NIH Program Officials. Program Officials can discuss the advisability of resubmission and possible revisions, based on comments in the summary statement.

E.6. Will all PIs receive all review process information?

Yes, they will receive all the information that is now available to single PIs. Initially, the availability of review process information will be conveyed to the PIs through the Contact PI, who is the single, official point of contact. All PIs will be able to view summary statements and status reports in NIH eRA Commons system https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/, which will allow all PIs on multiple-PI project to have direct access to all critical information (e.g., the summary statement). It will be essential for all named PIs on multiple-PI applications to establish accounts in Commons prior to the submission of the application, to facilitate information retrieval by PIs. For instructions on registration with eRA commons, see http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/preparing.htm.

F. NIH Funding Policies

F.1. It is possible that this model will result in larger grants. Will the NIH Institutes and Centers have additional funds to support the Multiple PI model? Will all NIH Institutes and Centers have similar funding policies regarding these applications?
The NIH does not intend for the multiple-PI model to result in larger grants (see Question A.5). Some teams of researchers who in the past submitted their proposals as single-PI applications may find that the multiple-PI option is better suited to a future proposal. In addition, investigators who in the past did not pursue NIH funding at all, due to perceived constraints of the single-PI model, may for the first time wish to seek NIH support for their multidisciplinary, team science efforts. In either case it does not necessarily follow that the grants will have larger budgets.

The NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs) are aware of the need to anticipate the submission of large grant applications and to manage large awards. The official NIH policy http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-02-004.html requires applicants planning to submit an investigator-initiated new, competing continuation, competing supplement, or any amended/revised version of the original application requesting $500,000 or more in direct costs for any year to contact NIH IC program staff 6 weeks before submitting the application. Discussions with program staff should occur as plans for the study are being developed. This applies to both single-PI and multiple-PI applications.

It is probable that some ICs will announce specific initiatives to encourage multidisciplinary team science and some of these may have special budget guidelines. Potential applicants are encouraged to contract their NIH program directors and to access the ICs' websites http://www.nih.gov/icd/ for Institute-specific programs. The NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/index.html announces all Requests for Applications (RFAs) and Program Announcements (PAs), some of which will be directed toward multidisciplinary team science. As stated in Question A.3, the NIH will make the multiple-PI option available for applications submitted in response to a selected group of Requests for Applications (RFAs) or Program Announcements (PAs) with May, June and October 2006 receipt dates. As an additional resource to potential applicants, all special initiatives that invite multiple-PI applications will be linked to the Multiple Principal Investigators web site: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/multi_pi/index.htm

**F.2. Will this become NIH’s favored research model, thereby rewarding big science and putting small science at a disadvantage?**

No. The model is aimed specifically at those team science projects that do not fit into the single-PI model. It is designed to supplement, and not replace, the traditional single-PI model. Moreover, team science is not synonymous with large science.

**G. Post-Award Issues**

**G.1. Does the increased oversight by NIH run counter to modular grants and expanded authority, both of which give PIs more flexibility?**
No. The PIs supported under the multiple-PI model will have no less flexibility than PIs of single-PI awards. Most of the oversight requirements should be met through the noncompeting continuation (Type 5) application.

Monitoring the awards will be facilitated through enhancements to NIH’s administrative databases and modification of reports, including such as those available through the NIH commons https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/.

Changes in PIs during the award period, including substantial changes in level of effort will require prior approval from the NIH in the same way that such changes are currently required.

G.2. The multiple-PI model appears to require increased oversight and tracking by the NIH. How will NIH ensure that this additional administrative layering does not impede research? For example, what documentation will be needed to revise the Leadership Plan, post-award? Paperwork should be absolutely minimal.

It is understood that investigators supported through grants must have maximum flexibility to respond to new scientific opportunities, within the overall scope of the funded project. Tracking approaches being considered should be as seamless as possible and paperwork should be kept to a minimum. Complex and burdensome approaches will make the multiple-PI model less attractive to institutions and PIs.

One of the most common comments received through the Request for Information pertained to increased administrative burden, and specifically whether allocation of funds will create the need for new and difficult business processes for the grantee. As stated in Question C.2, the NIH recognizes that after the initial allocation of funds is documented in the Notice of Grant Award, the PIs must have maximum flexibility to re-allocate resources in response to the changing directions and needs of the research project. Re-allocation of funds and even revisions to the Leadership Plan during the project period will be via a joint decision of the PIs. These changes will be implemented at the institutional level, with no need for approvals by NIH, beyond the normal requirements for any grant. NIH plans to simply track most revisions through the noncompeting continuation (Type 5) application, as it currently does for any changes to the scientific direction that are within the scope of the funded project.

G.3. Will there be one competing continuation (type 5) application and progress report for the overall project, or will each PI be required to submit an individual report?

This question has not been completely resolved, but current thinking is as follows. If there is a single award and a single institution is involved, investigators will submit a single, overall annual report. If there is a single award and multiple institutions are involved, investigators will submit an overall annual report and individual reports from each institution will be appended. Policies involving linked awards are still being developed.
G.4. If funds are allocated among the PIs, could one PI be given sole authority to reallocate money?

No. A basic principle of the multiple-PI model is that each named PI is equally responsible and accountable for the research project. Re-allocation of funds must be via a joint decision of the PIs, and the process for re-allocation should be included as part of the Leadership Plan.

G.5. How will data sharing and issues of confidentiality be handled without having one person in charge?

The Leadership Plan should outline the governance and organizational structure of the research project, including communication plans and procedures for resolving conflicts. This includes data sharing and confidentiality policies; the presence of more than a single PI does not excuse the PIs from official requirements. Note that the NIH policy on data sharing applies only to applications with large budgets (http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/policy/data_sharing/index.htm). NIH policy states that applications requesting $500,000 or more in direct costs for any single year are required to include a plan for data sharing or to state why data sharing is not possible. Data sharing must be addressed in the Significance and Budget sections of the application, and a description of the data sharing plan (or an explanation for its absence) must appear at the end of the Research Plan section.

H. Questions Specific to the Issue of Applications from Multiple Institutions

H.1. In what format will multiple institution projects be submitted?

Multiple PIs at different institutions will be able to use the traditional subcontract mode, or they can request separate awards, with separate grant numbers (i.e., “linked awards”). In the first phase of implementation, it is envisioned that some of the programs involved in the pilot will permit linked awards. The process for requesting linked awards and policies associated with managing linked awards are still being developed. Based on the experience gained from the first phase of multiple institution applications, processes may be modified. As other options for apportionment and linked awards become established, they will be posted on the Multiple Principal Investigator web site http://grants.nih.gov/grants/multi_pi/index.htm.

H.2. Will the individual applications be reviewed by the same study section? This was not the case with Interactive Research Project Grants, and this was a problem.

Yes. A single study section or Special Emphasis Panel will review all submitted documents related to a given multiple-PI project.
H.3. Can a project supported through a multiple-PI award include subcontracted sites to the primary site?

Yes. Multiple PIs at different institutions will be able to use the traditional subcontract mode, or when permitted in selected funding announcements, projects may employ separate awards, with separate grant numbers (i.e., "linked awards"). If any one site includes multiple PIs, the entire project qualifies as a multiple-PI project. The decision to use linked awards versus subcontracts should always be based on the needs of the science. See Question H.1 for application format.

H.4. Can one institution be designated as the lead?

Yes, but only if the satellite institution is supported by a subcontract from the lead institution. If linked awards (not subcontracts) are used, there should be no lead institution.

H.5. Without a single PI, who will oversee the various sites in a multi-site project (In addition to the science, this would include personnel issues, conduct, etc.)

The process for this oversight should be described in the Leadership Plan. In this section of the application the governance and organizational structure of the research project should be described, including communication plans and procedures for resolving conflicts. Potential applicants who have concerns about oversight should consider the subcontract mechanism instead of linked awards.

H.6. If the dollars are fluid and subject to reallocation across the participating institutions, how would facilities and administrative (F & A) costs be managed?

Budget re-allocation across linked awards may occur at the time of the annual progress report if all of the PIs and their institutions agree. The total dollar cost of the project may not increase. F&A costs will be based on established policies.

I. Departmental Ranking Tables

I.1. If departmental ranking tables are eliminated, what other tools will the NIH make available to allow institutions to determine their relative ranking?

With multiple PIs from different departments, it will be difficult to continue to rank medical school departments by the amount of NIH funding they receive. Through the published Request for Information, NIH posed specific questions to determine whether the Departmental Ranking Tables are useful to the scientific community. The most common comment was that the Tables are not easy to use for interdepartmental comparisons. It was suggested that it would be better for the NIH to replace the existing table format with enhanced data systems to allow for more powerful and meaningful
comparisons across departments. The NIH is still considering options, and additional comments are welcome from the scientific community.