

## Report on Research Compliance Volume 16, Number 1. January 31, 2019 While Some Say 'Time to Act,' NIH Forms Working Group on Harassment

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By Theresa Defino

Despite protestations that the last thing it needs to do is establish another working group, NIH has set up such a panel—one it said will be focused on action—to root out sexual harassment at agency-supported institutions and “incentivize a culture change.”

Working group members will provide recommendations to the Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD), the highest ranking panel offering counsel to NIH Director Francis Collins. If adopted by the ACD, the recommendations would be forwarded to Collins for possible adoption.

The group's efforts are meant to complement steps NIH announced at the June ACD meeting that it is taking to thwart harassment within the agency. It was also at that summer meeting that ACD members criticized Collins and Larry Tabak, NIH principal deputy director, after the latter described what seemed like an essentially hands-off approach when it came to sexual harassment among NIH's extramural researchers. At the time, there was no discussion of standing up a working group (*RRC 7/18, p. 3*).

None of the ACD members at the Dec. 13 meeting where the working group was announced gave a particularly ringing endorsement of its creation. Some offered a few suggestions for areas to explore, and most seemed to raise their hands when Collins asked for a show of support and a “sense of the room” about the topic.

But that was not the reaction of Juan Pablo Ruiz, NIH Oxford Scholar at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and a member of the ACD's working group on next generation researchers. (That panel also presented recommendations and a report, which *RRC* will cover in an upcoming issue.)

Arguing that the time had long since passed for NIH and organizations to discontinue studying the issue, Ruiz said he and others at a recent meeting expressed “unanimous and vocal support for not having another working group because there's been decades and decades of feminist literature on how to prevent and how to address sexual harassment in the workplace.”

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