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NIH Announces 'UNITE' Effort to End Structural Racism in Biomedical Research, Issues RFI

As part of a new initiative called UNITE created to "identify and address structural racism within the NIH-supported and the greater scientific community," NIH has formed five internal committees, made a statement, launched a new website and issued a request for information (RFI). UNITE was first announced during a special meeting of NIH Director Francis Collins' Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) held Feb. 26. "To those individuals in the biomedical research enterprise who have endured disadvantages due to structural racism, I am truly sorry. NIH is committed to instituting new ways to support diversity, equity, and inclusion, and identifying and dismantling any policies and practices that may harm our workforce and our science," Collins said in a March 1 statement. According to the RFI posted the same day, which has a deadline for comments of April 9, the agency is seeking "input on practical and effective ways to improve the racial and ethnic diversity and inclusivity of research environments and the biomedical research workforce across the United States, to the extent permitted by law." The primary focus of the RFI is "actions and solutions—through policy, procedure, or practice—NIH should consider in order to promote positive culture and structural change through effective interventions, leading to greater inclusiveness and diversity." The open-ended RFI solicits "approaches and strategies that can be implemented in the short-term (e.g., within the next three to six months), as well as those that can be implemented within the next one to three years."

The five committees are Committee U ("Understanding stakeholder experiences through listening and learning"), Committee N ("New research on health disparities, minority health, and health equity"), Committee I ("Improving the NIH culture and structure for equity, inclusion, and excellence"), Committee T ("Transparency, communication, and accountability with our internal and external stakeholders), and Committee E ("Extramural research ecosystem: changing policy, culture, and structure to promote workforce diversity"). The committees have "separate but coordinated objectives on tackling the problem of racism and discrimination in science, while developing methods to promote diversity and inclusion across the biomedical enterprise."

Link to ADC meeting videocast

Link to statement

Link to UNITE website

Link to RFI

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