

Academic Career Excellence (ACE) Award, including Awards to Promote Diversity

Center for Cancer Training & Center for Cancer Health Equity

FY26 New PAR Concept

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NCI BSA

Challenges Faced by Postdoctoral Scholars Aspiring to Succeed in the Academic PI Track



Inadequate preparation to successfully compete for substantial NIH funding for cancer research.



Fewer NIH career development awards available for temporary visa holders who comprise ~57% of all U.S. postdocs in science, engineering and health (NSF survey, 2022) but are eligible for only 22% of NCI postdoc funding opportunities.



Insufficient support from mentors to submit NIH grants early on in their postdoctoral career.



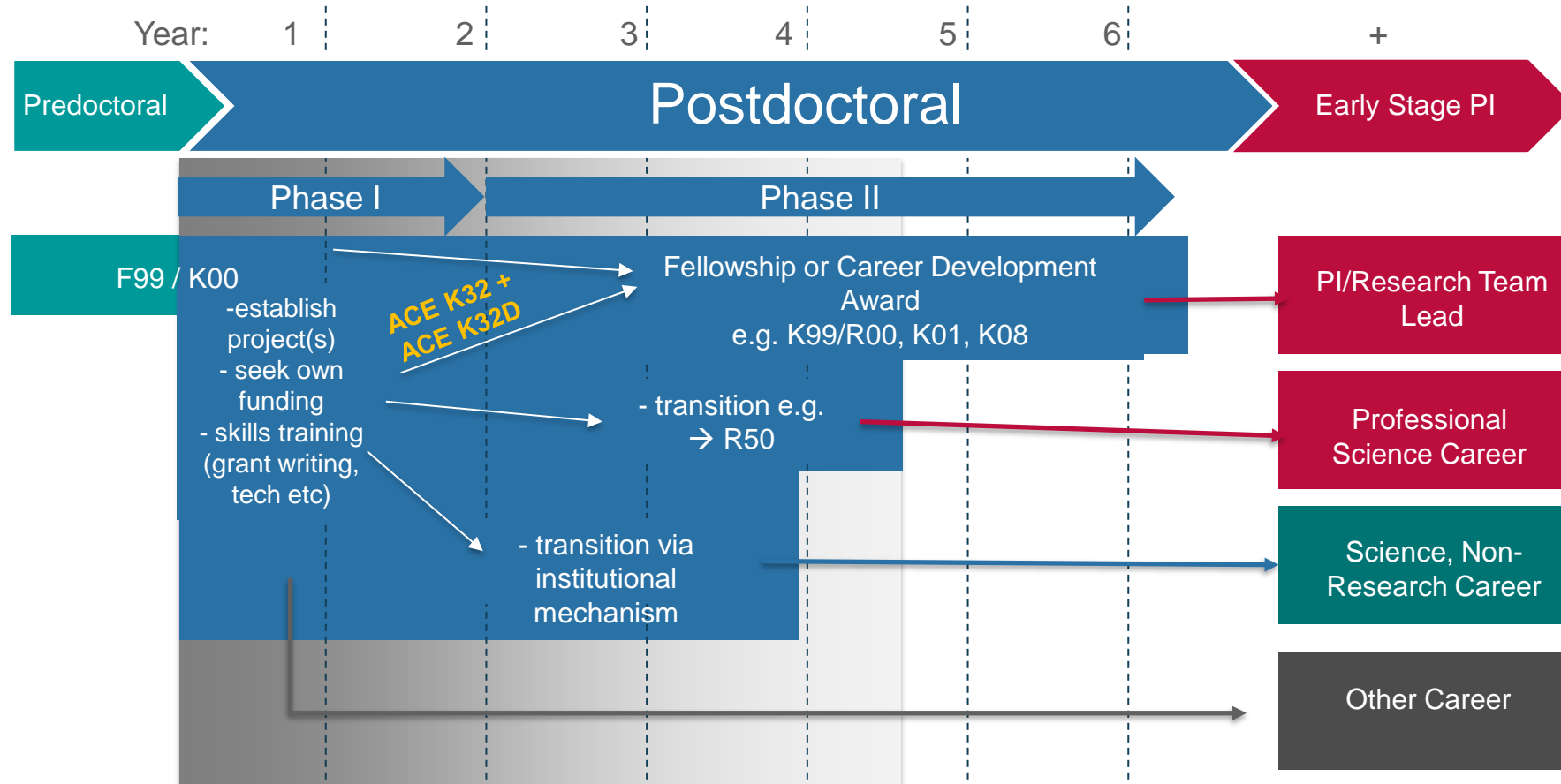
Suboptimal salaries for postdoctoral scholars in academic research settings compared to industry and other sectors.

Challenges corroborated by NIH postdoc listening sessions and NCI Visioning Workshops

Approach to Career Development Awards for Individual Postdoctoral Scholars



Establish new career development (K) award funding opportunities for postdoctoral scholars to obtain experience in applying for NIH funding within the first two years of their postdoctoral phase.



Current: CURE Funding Opportunities are Vehicles for Career Independence

Goal

R01, Scientific Independence & Self-Sustainability

R21

Supports eligible investigators to conduct research projects focused on the basic biology of cancer.

K01, K08, K22

Promote mentored or non-mentored career development activities towards research independence

F31

Supports mentored research training leading to a PhD or MD/PhD degree

R25 YES

Supports cancer research & educational activities for middle school and high school students and their teachers

Diversity Supplement

A bridge for candidates to progress to the next career level
Undergrad thru ESI

Write Grants

Publish

Network

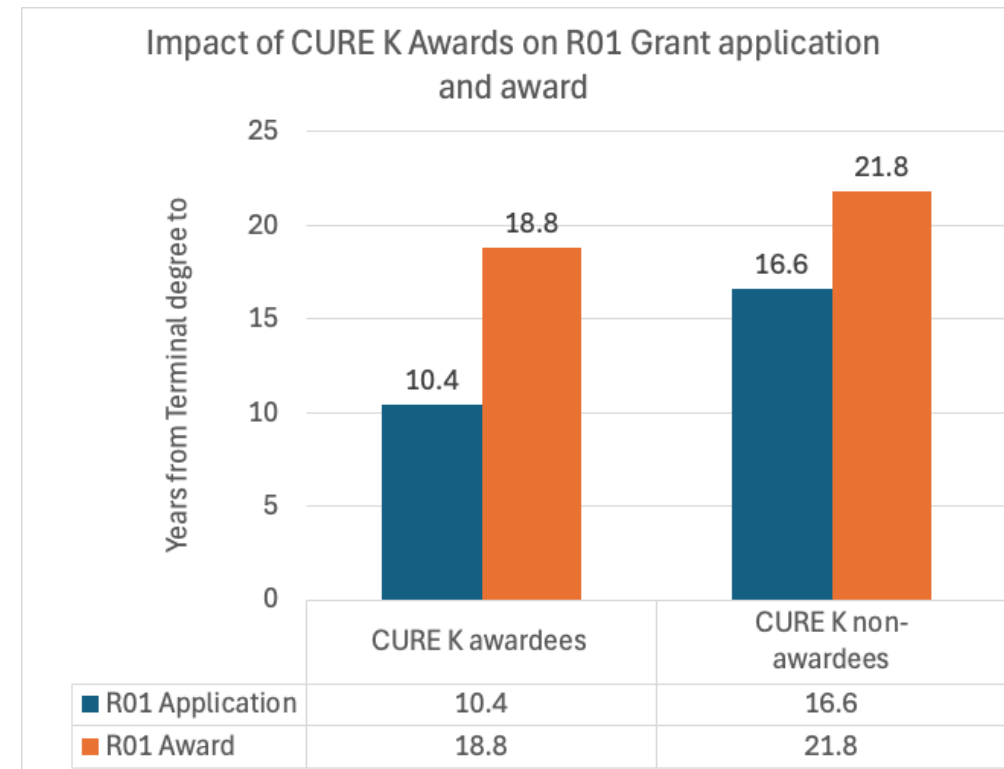
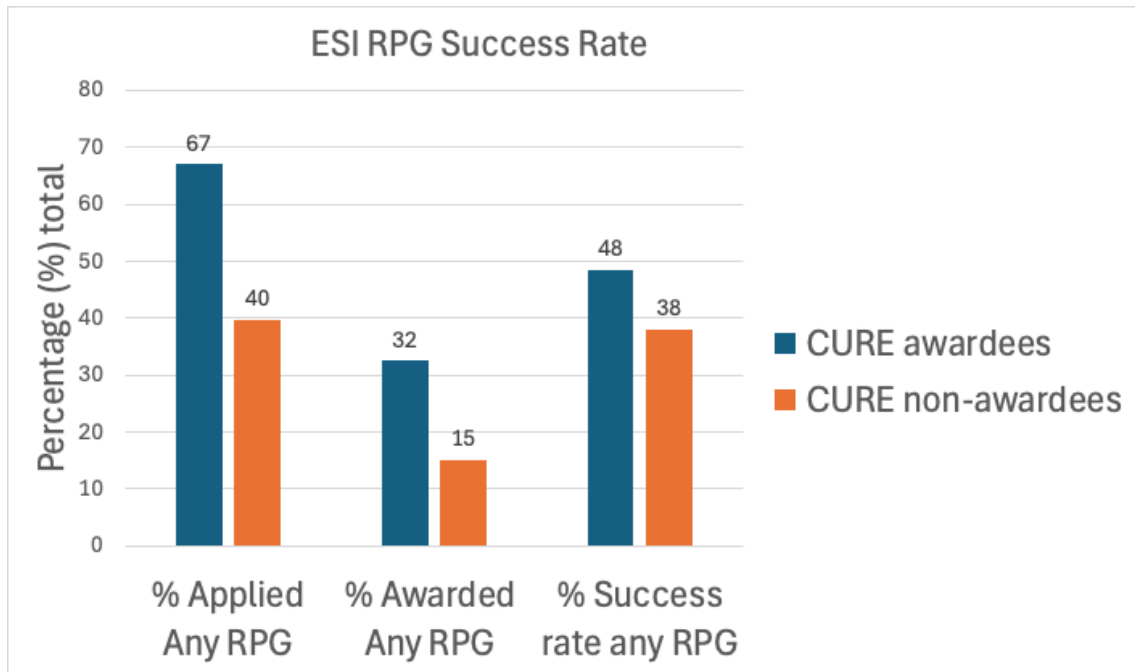
Present scientific data

Acquire research skills

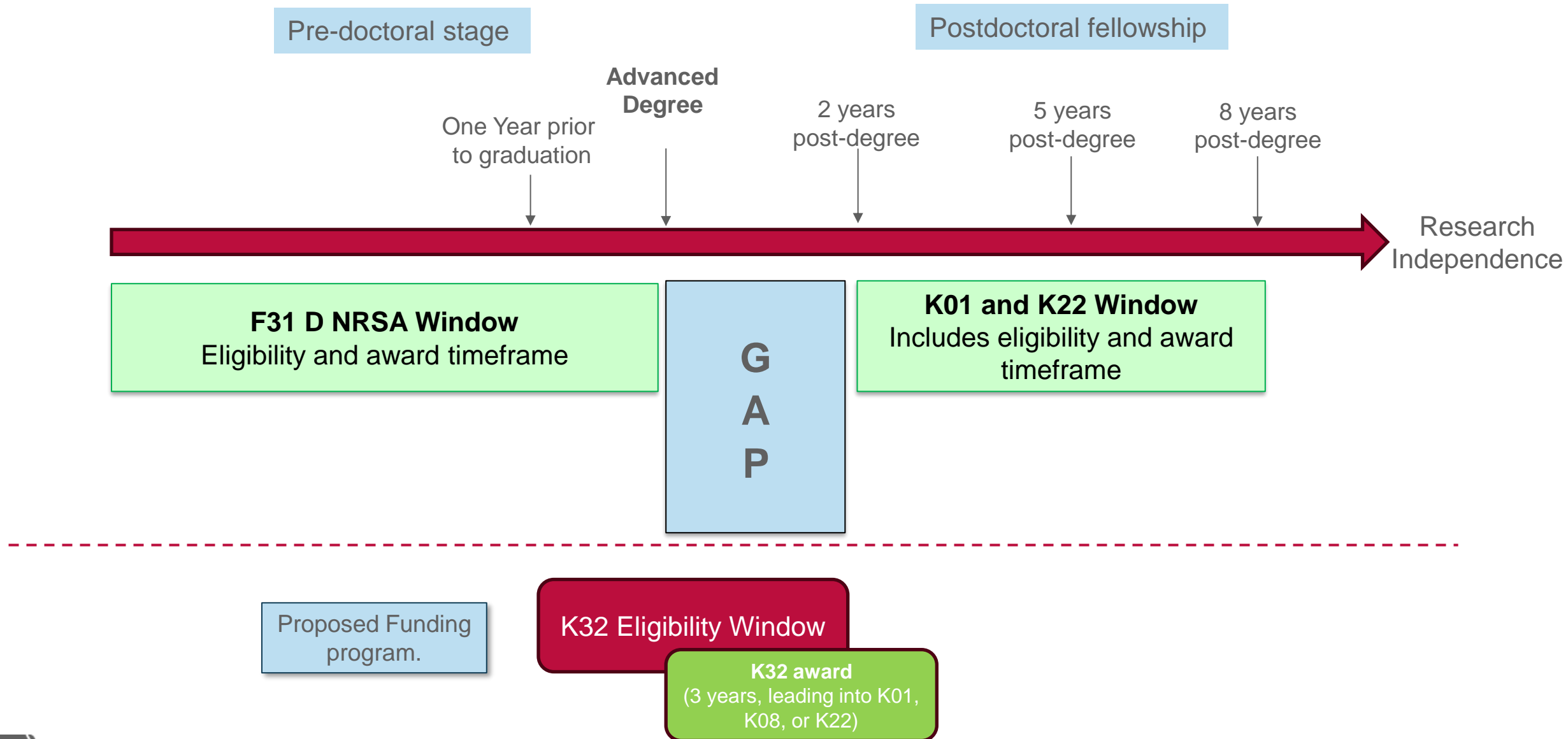
CCHE Continuing Umbrella of Research Experiences (CURE) Program Successes

CCHE K Awardee Data 1997-2021- Compared to K applicants who did not receive awards, K recipients are:

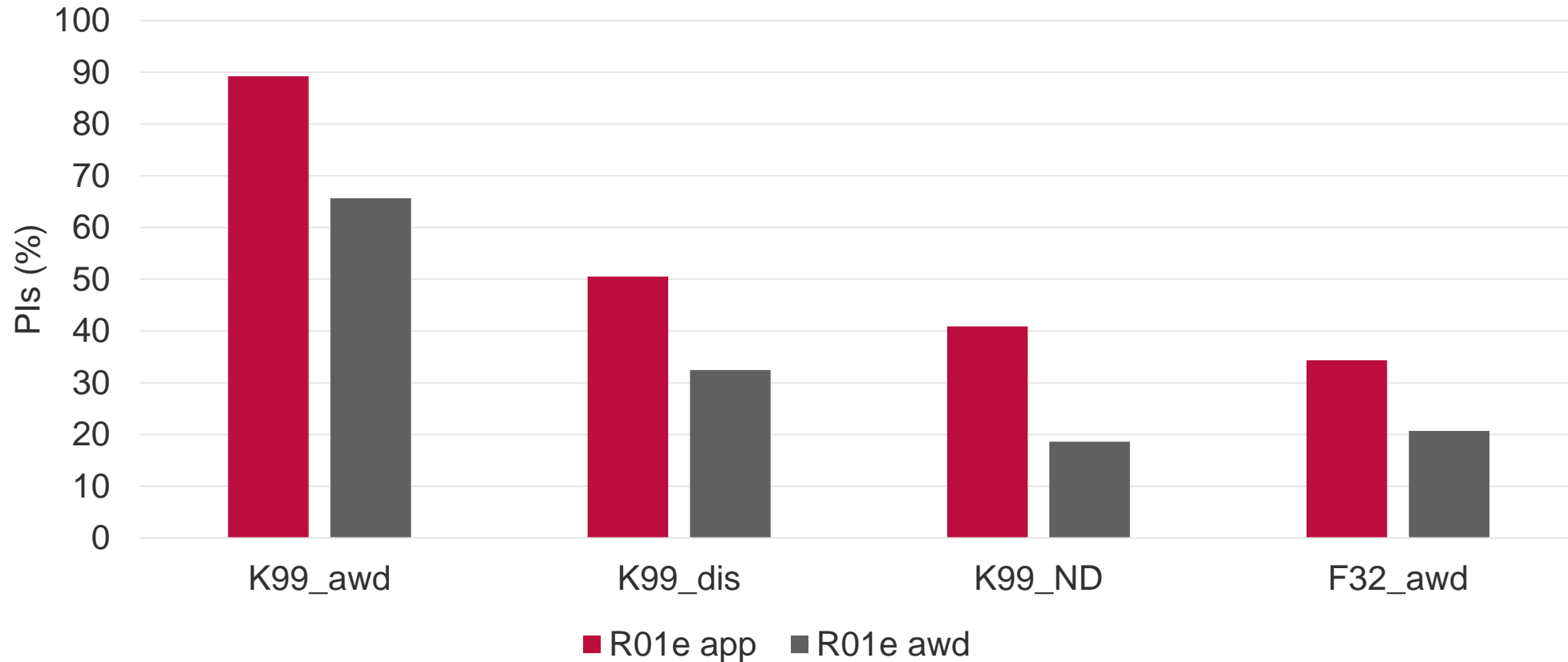
- More likely to apply for RPG grants, be successful in receiving RPG awards, and obtain R01 awards sooner.



K32 proposes to fill the gap in CCHE Training Programs



NCI PI Successes: Submitting Subsequent Applications or Receiving Awards (R01 or R01-equivalent)



Fewer F32 awardees submitted R01eq applications or received R01eq awards compared to K99 awardees

Why not just use the F32?

- The NRSA program, which the F32 is a part of, brings constraints:
 - Stipend constraints we wish to overcome for both ACE and ACE award to promote diversity
 - Visa eligibility constraints we wish to overcome for ACE K32
- Application window eligibility of the K32 is modeled on the NINDS F32

	NRSA F32	New ACE K32	New ACE K32-D
Salary	NRSA stipend is provided: \$61K	NCI will set maximum salary request: \$80K	
Restriction	U.S. citizenship or U.S. permanent residence requirement	No restriction – temporary U.S. visa allowed	U.S. citizenship or U.S. permanent residence requirement
Eligibility Window	None	3-year eligibility window (1-year before doctoral degree to 2-years after degree)	
Preliminary Data	Not required; review bias for preliminary data	No preliminary data required; promote new projects	
Support duration	36 months		

Goals of the Academic Career Excellence (ACE) Award



Improve NCI's ability to attract the most promising investigators into the cancer research workforce.



Determine early in postdoctoral phase if the scholar has skills and interest in communicating and supporting their science through grant writing.



Retain highly skilled scholars by providing a well-supported pathway towards independent careers in all areas of cancer research.



Broaden inclusivity of the NCI career development award portfolio by welcoming temporary visa holders for CCT applicants and offering an award to promote diversity for CCHE applicants early in postdoctoral training.

Details of the ACE Award



Focus on ideas and creativity over productivity.

Preliminary data are optional, eliminating the need to take on previously designed projects and encouraging the development of innovative work.



Offer salary support at higher levels than NRSA stipends and ample funding for research development.

(NCI will offer up to \$80K and \$30K, respectively, per year)



Provide up to 3 years of support, allowing the submission of subsequent career development award applications (e.g., K99/R00, K01).

Details corroborated by NIH postdoc listening sessions and NCI Visioning Workshops

Justification for Two New NCI PARs

- NCI CCT and CCHE propose to offer new career development awards that do not exist at NIH.
 - (1) ACE Award (K32);
 - (2) ACE Award to Promote Diversity (K32).

The new activity code, K32, will be used (*tentatively approved by NIH OER*; K signifies career development and 32 aligns with the F32 NRSA postdoctoral fellowship award).

- Review of NCI applications will be conducted by an NCI DEA-convened Special Emphasis Panel (SEP).
 - Depending on the number of applications received, the ACE award to promote diversity applications will be clustered in review either in the same SEP as the other K32s or in a separate meeting.

Proposed Budget

- Estimated maximum total costs per award are \$140,400.
\$80,000 salary; \$30,000 research development support; fringe benefits; 8% F&A.

Mechanism	Awards (annual)	Years	Direct Costs (annual new awards)	Year 1 Total Costs (FY26)
ACE	40	3	\$5.20M	\$5.62M
ACE Diversity	8	3	\$1.04M	\$1.12M

- CCT will no longer participate in NRSA F32 program after December 9, 2024. The FY24 NCI total investment in new and continuing F32 awards (51) was ~ \$3.7M.
- CCT and CCHE will request increases to cover these costs in their respective base budget allocations.



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