Pre-Application Webinar for an S10 Grant: Q&A Session

FAQs
Monday, April 7, 2025
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EDT

Principal Investigator, Major Users, and Other Users

Q: Can there be co-investigators on an S10 grant?

A: The S10 grant mechanism is designed to have a single Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) structure, but key personnel and multiple users can be on the S10 grants.

Q: What if the equipment is for an active core facility that has many users but few who would represent more than 5% of Accessible Usage Time (AUT)? How would major users be decided?

A: Major users are those who have substantial or higher instrument usage. An S10 application is expected to meet the eligibility requirements for %AUT for all NIH users for different S10 programs (55% of AUT from NIH users for Basic Instrumentation Grant [BIG] awards, 65% for Shared Instrumentation Grant [SIG] awards, and 75% for High-End Instrumentation [HEI] awards).

Q: Can you include users who are not yet NIH funded (i.e., startup or foundation funded) in the AUT calculation?

A: Yes. After fulfilling the AUT requirement for NIH-funded research projects (at 55%, 65%, and 75% of AUT for the BIG, SIG, and HEI programs, respectively), the instrument can be used to support other projects.

Q: Does the minor user need to have NIH funding? Can a minor user be from a university in the region?

A: The application must meet the %AUT requirements for major users and %AUT for the total NIH-funded research. The remaining AUT can be used for non-NIH-funded research. We encourage collaborations beyond the applicant's own institution.

Instrument and Administration

Q: I understand that typically one instrument is applied for. What is your advice for justifying an application for multiple instruments used in a pipeline?

A: S10 grants support the acquisition of a single instrument or an integrated system that performs a discrete function. Applicants are encouraged to contact the Program Officials for eligibility of the device combination.

Q: What should I do if the instrument is so new that there is only one vendor?

A: The S10 Instrumentation Programs encourage state-of-the-art and emerging technologies to advance cutting-edge research. If there is only one vendor, present an overview of the market landscape and make a clear justification for the instrument and justify the need for the users.

Q: What if other existing instruments overlap significantly in functionality but are already heavily booked for other purposes? How would you justify this?

A: One can justify an S10 instrument request by providing quantitative data about the usage of the heavily booked instruments, an availability statement, and a list of intended users/projects for the proposed instrument. It is best if the proposed users are different from the users on the heavily booked instrument.

Q: Could you confirm that only software essential to the instrument operation is allowed?

A: That is correct. Other necessary software should be covered by the institution.

Q: Can a Department Chair where the instrument is housed be the senior institutional official?

A: Yes. A senior institutional official is expected to represent the institutional commitment to the resources.

Q: What are the administration requirements for equipment to be placed in a core?

A: The administration plan should detail an organization’s management and financial plan specific to an S10 instrument, including the users’ accessibility, the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the instrument, and the committed staff support.

Q: With respect to the S10 table submitted by the institution, how many publications per year are considered a productive use of an existing S10 instrument?

A: It depends on the field of research, the institution, and the size of the user base.

Q: For reviewer criticism of the institutional S10 table, what are some tips for responding to those critiques? How would one address a perceived lack of use?

A: While the number of users and AUT depends on the institution, as well as the instrument type, NIH recognizes that instruments can help institutions grow research capacities and attract future users. NIH encourages the applicant to explain the effort and plans for recruiting potential users and research projects, including those from the neighboring institutions.

Q: If my institution has not received any S10 funding in the past 5 years, will that hurt or help my application?

A: It could go either way. Applications are reviewed on the merit of what is written in the application. In addition to the PI's technical and administrative experience in managing the instrument, it will be important to get letters of institutional support for operating and maintaining the instrument.

Q: Is it considered a strength if a PI has been successful in receiving a previous S10 grant, or is the goal to "spread them out" among other investigators?

A: Each application is reviewed based on its own merit, including the team's technical expertise. There is no review criterion about "spreading them out."

Q: Does it help to mention that certain PIs are intending to or have already applied for NIH funding or have a long history of being funded by NIH in the past?

A: Only active NIH-funded grants will be counted towards the %AUT requirements. The information on pending grants or grants to be funded can be included in the applications. If a Just-In-time (JIT) is requested, the user information will be updated to include newly funded NIH research projects.

Q: Do we need a specific advisory committee for S10 grants if we are an established facility with an existing advisory committee?

A: An S10 instrument requires an advisory committee per the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) requirement. An established advisory committee can serve for the S10 instrument, provided it meets the membership requirements as stated in the NOFO.

Q: Full cost recovery is not realistic for shared resources. Should I request institutional support to subsidize the projected shortfall?

A: Yes. The S10 grant only supports the instrument purchase. The institution is expected to provide support for the facility, personnel, service contracts, operation, and maintenance of the instrument. The application should include an institutional financial plan explaining the details.

Q: What should the status of NIH research awards be when we are submitting the application? Should they be active before or during the review of the application?

A: NIH research awards must be active on the S10 application due date.

Q: Does the $750,000 cap for SIG awards include any pricing increase due to import tariffs?

A: Yes, $750,000 is the cap for SIG awards, including tariffs. We recognize the new challenges. Applicants are encouraged to work with their institution to negotiate with vendors and jointly overcome the uncertainties associated with the tariffs.

Q: Companies just stopped providing quotes due to uncertainty with tariffs. What if JIT requires a refreshed quote?

A: A new quote is required at the time of JIT. If the new quote is higher than the amount that the grant was written for, the applicant's institution will be asked to cover the difference.

Q: Can the S10 HEI instrument be used for training purposes, and is it primarily intended to support NIH-funded projects?

A: S10-funded instruments should be used on a shared basis to advance research. The instrument can be used for training purposes, but priority should be given to research projects.

Q: If the requested instrument is brand new and we do not have preliminary data or figures, what should we include in the research project for major users?

A: Preliminary data are not mandatory. However, if accessing an instrument can be arranged, then including preliminary data is highly encouraged. Justifying the need for the proposed instrument and major features for the research objectives could facilitate the review of the proposed technology.

Q: Is there an S10 requirement of a minimal recovery amount from chargeback fees?

A: There is no specific requirement on chargeback fees. The application must include a financial plan for the operation and maintenance of the instrument for at least 5 years.

Accessible Usage Time for an Instrument

Q: How is AUT calculated?

A: An AUT should realistically reflect the instrument's annual accessible time to be used for supporting research projects at the proposed facility, taking all factors into consideration, such as the time allowed to access the facility, supporting staff's availability if staff is needed, time spent for instrument setup and preparation, down time for instrument maintenance, and user training when applicable. The AUT determination should be clearly explained and well justified and should accurately project the accessible time under the specific setting at the applicant facility. In situations where time may not be a good way to estimate the usage, such as central processing unit usage, a justifiable alternative to AUT also is accepted.

Q: How much AUT should be assigned to the major users, and can the system be estimated for different AUT per year (e.g., if there is a ramp-up with training in the first year)?

A: The S10 award requests at least three NIH major users. All NIH major users should use the instrument for at least 25% (for the BIG program) or 35% (for the SIG and HEI programs) of the AUT. The AUT should be estimated to realistically reflect instrument accessible time, taking into consideration the facility access time, staff support, preparation time for instrument startup and shutdown, and downtime for service and maintenance. The AUT is reported on a yearly basis in the Annual Usage Reports and may differ from year to year.

Resubmission (A1) of an S10 Application

Q: Should I mention a previous review score, critiques, and how the revised proposal addresses them?

A: A resubmission can use a two-page Introduction to address reviewers' concerns. The reviewers are given access to the A0 summary statement.

Q: For the resubmission (A1), can I request additional features of the device, given the budget increase from $600,000 to $750,000?

A: Requesting additional features in a resubmission, while allowed, must be justified by the use of at least three major users.

Below are questions that were asked but not answered during the time allotted for the webinar.

Other Information

Q: Have there always been two levels of review for the S10 grants? What is the Council of Councils?

A: Yes. Per the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) requirement, NIH applications are first reviewed by an initial review group (study section) for scientific merit and then undergo a second level of review by the institute, center, or office (ICO) advisory council to validate the study section's review results and relevance to the ICO's mission. The NIH Council of Councils advises ORIP grant activities. For more information about the Council of Councils, please see https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/council.

Q: Should I provide biosketches of the advisory committee members, even though they are not users of the instrument?

A: No. The biosketch for the advisory committee members is not required. Biosketches are required for the PD/PI, major users, selected other users, and key technical people, as applicable. Additional biosketches for advisory committee members with technical expertise can be included.

Q: What are some examples of usage tracking and invoicing software?

A: In addition to commercial software, iSMART**,** accessible via the S10 Reports Dashboard, is a free software provided by NIH for usage tracking and billing.

Q: How are the research project summaries best structured, and what are the essential points needed?

A: The research projects can be structured either by the Major and Other Users subsections or by Specific Research Topics subsections. Since the funded research projects have been previously peer reviewed, describe details only as necessary to explain how they are relevant to the requested instrument or major components and features. Please do not copy the information on the specific aims page of the research grants.

Q: What impact score is required to receive an award?

A: The S10 funding mechanism does not use a payline. Factors considered for making funding recommendations/decisions include impact score, availability of funds, relevance of the proposed projects to program priorities, and the types of supported instruments and geographical distribution of awards.

Q: Would research project references be part of the 20 pages for the Research Projects section?

A: No. Letters of Support and Bibliography sections are not included in the page limitations.