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Cell Commentary Urges Actions to 'Expel' Systemic Racism, Fix Funding Disparity

Stating that “racial funding disparity” by NIH “remains the most insidious barrier to success of Black faculty,” 16 women representing an informal network are urging NIH Director Francis Collins to publicly acknowledge that “racism persists in the US academic research enterprise and that it must be expelled” and to announce a plan to “immediately achieve racial funding equity.” Writing in a commentary in *Cell* that was posted online Jan. 26, the authors suggested NIH implement “diversity score-driving criteria, prioritize diverse teams for funding, and diversify review panels” and offer training to empower “NIH leadership, staff, and grant reviewers and recipients to recognize and stop racism.” Individual scientists and institutions also must be engaged, they wrote. “While immediate and radical action by NIH is desperately needed, the collective actions by scientists and other entities have a vital role to play as well. We, the individuals and institutions that comprise our profession, are each ultimately responsible for the racism that permeates it,” according to the commentary.

Steps that should be taken include revamping training for committees tasked with hiring, promotion and tenure to ensure members “know and recalibrate (stated and unstated) expectations based on common disparities, such as NIH racial funding disparity and citation disparity.” NIH itself has documented the disparity since 2011 but not closed the gap. The commentary cites a statistic that the funding rate for Black principal investigators from 2014 to 2016 was 10.2%, compared to 18.5 for white PIs. “It is time for us to stop extinguishing careers of exceptional scientists and instead demonstrate that we truly value innovation and creativity,” the authors said. They represent a network of more than 260 “women faculty in biomedical engineering from all academic ranks, including chairs, deans, and distinguished scientists, such as the few women of color elected into the National Academies” who came together to “address racial injustice in our profession and society.”

[Link to Cell commentary](#)

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