

*Career Awards:  
Paving Your Pathway to Success in D&I Research*

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Hosted by MT-DIRC

# Overview

- Learn about the benefits of a career award
- Obtain guidance on whether a career award suits you
- Describe the various career award mechanisms and odds of success
- Review tips for writing a successful career award application
- Describe the process and lessons from an MT DIRC Fellow

# Why a Mentored K?

## Two Big Benefits: Mentor and Time

- Having a mentor
  - An experienced investigator who will help guide and support your research endeavors, as well as ensure that you have the resources you need
- Protected time (three to five years)
  - Time to focus on your project, sharpen your skills, and gain hands-on experience

# Why a Mentored K?

## Promising Prognosis for Attaining Independence

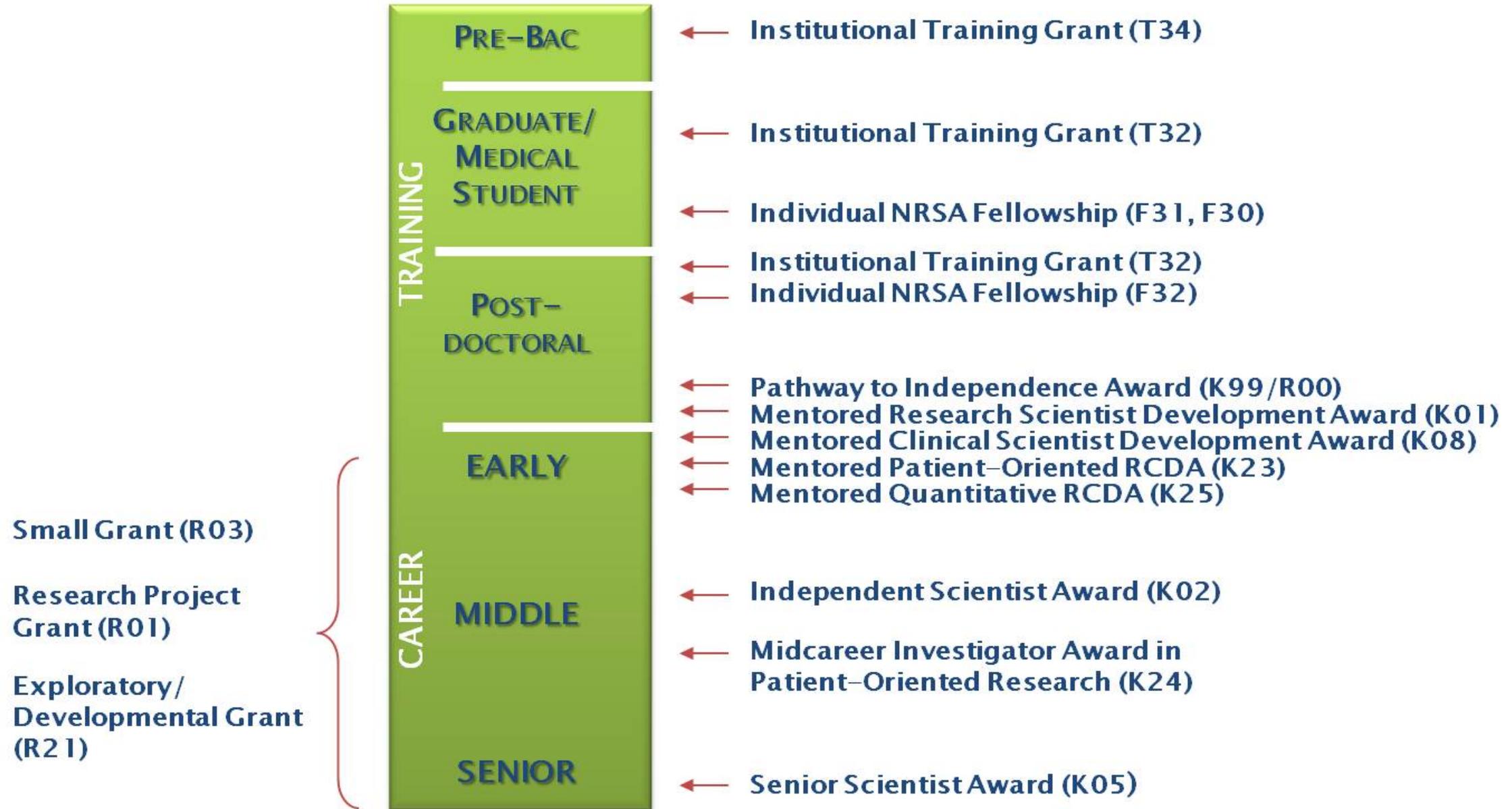
- Based on a study of three Ks—K01, K08, and K23 —the evaluation has several notable findings, including:
  - Securing a mentored K award had a significant impact on program participants, as seen in their publication records and subsequent applications for and receipt of NIH grants
  - Researchers who previously received a K01, K08, or K23 award later had a markedly higher R01 award success rate than those without prior career development support
  - Awardees received more subsequent NIH research support and were more likely to apply for—and receive—R01 renewals

# Is a career award the right path for you?

- What is your funding situation at your home institution?
  - Knowing the value of protected time
- Are you at the right career stage for a K-award?
  - You want to be qualified but not over-qualified
- Will the K link you to a new set of mentors?
  - How to identify mentors
  - How to engage them if they are not in your institution
- Can you make a strong case for new training?
  - What is new and different
- Are there benefits if your K award is not funded?
  - Learning the process
  - Turning the research section into some sort of R-grant

# Which award is right for me?

- You can utilize NIH Career Development Kiosk to identify based on career level and interests which award you should apply for
- <https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/career-development>



Graphic represents a small sample of NIH funding mechanisms available.

# Types of NIH K awards

- **K01 Mentored Scientist Career Development award**
  - Early career research scientists committed to research, in need of both advanced research training and additional experience
- **K07 Academic Career Development Award**
  - Either a mentored or independent investigator to
    - develop or enhance curricula
    - foster academic career development of promising young teacher-investigators
    - strengthen existing teaching programs
- **K08 Mentored Clinical Scientist Research Career Development award**
  - For promising clinician scientists with demonstrated aptitude to develop into independent investigators
  - For faculty members to pursue research, and aid in filling the academic faculty gap in health profession's institutions

# Types of NIH K Awards

- **K22 Career Transition Award**

- Newly trained investigators to develop their independent research skills through a two phase program
  - an initial mentored research experience, then
  - a period of independent research

- **K23 Mentored Patient-Oriented Research Career Development Award**

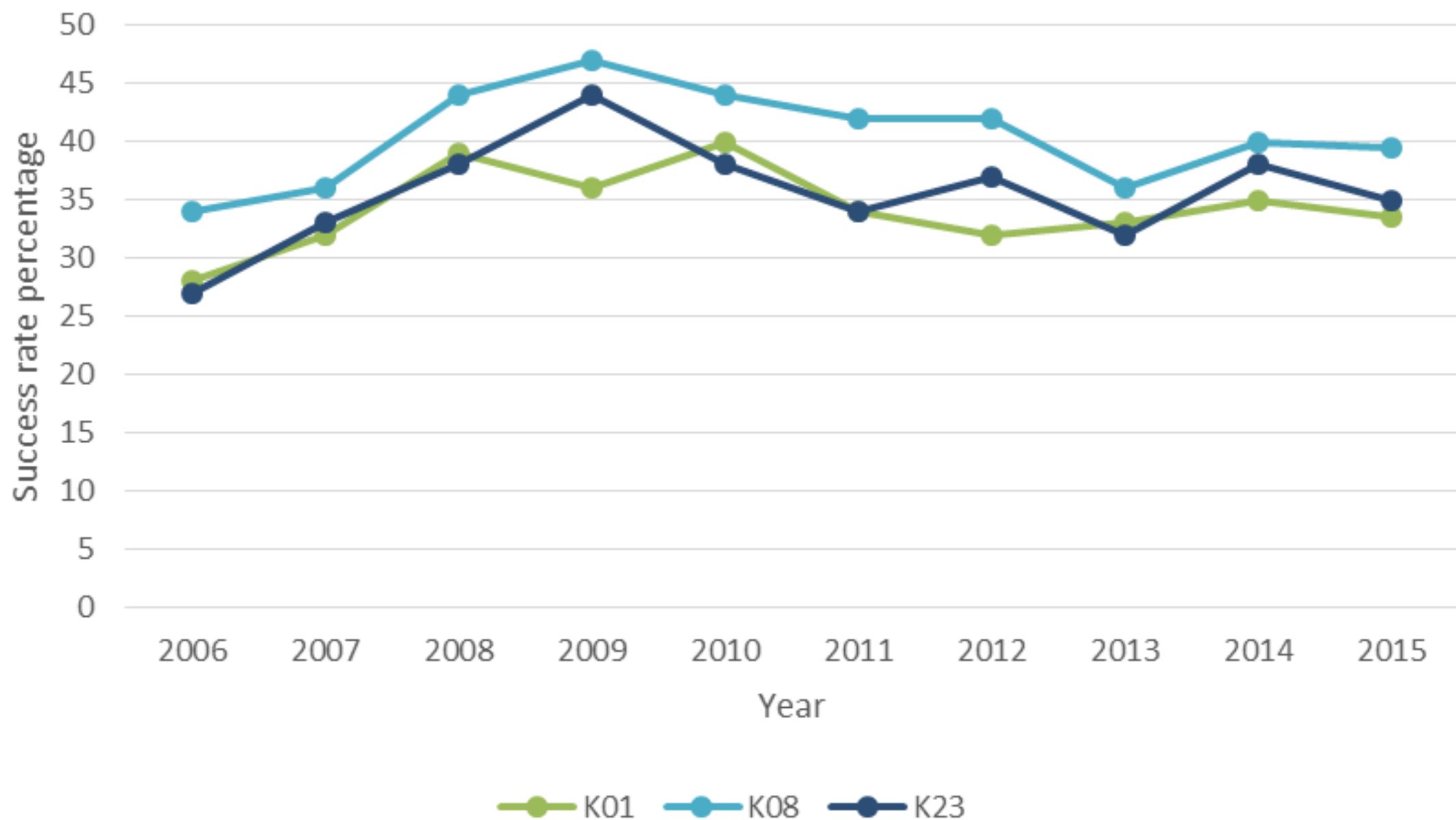
- Clinically trained professionals who have made a commitment to patient-oriented research

# Agencies that fund career awards

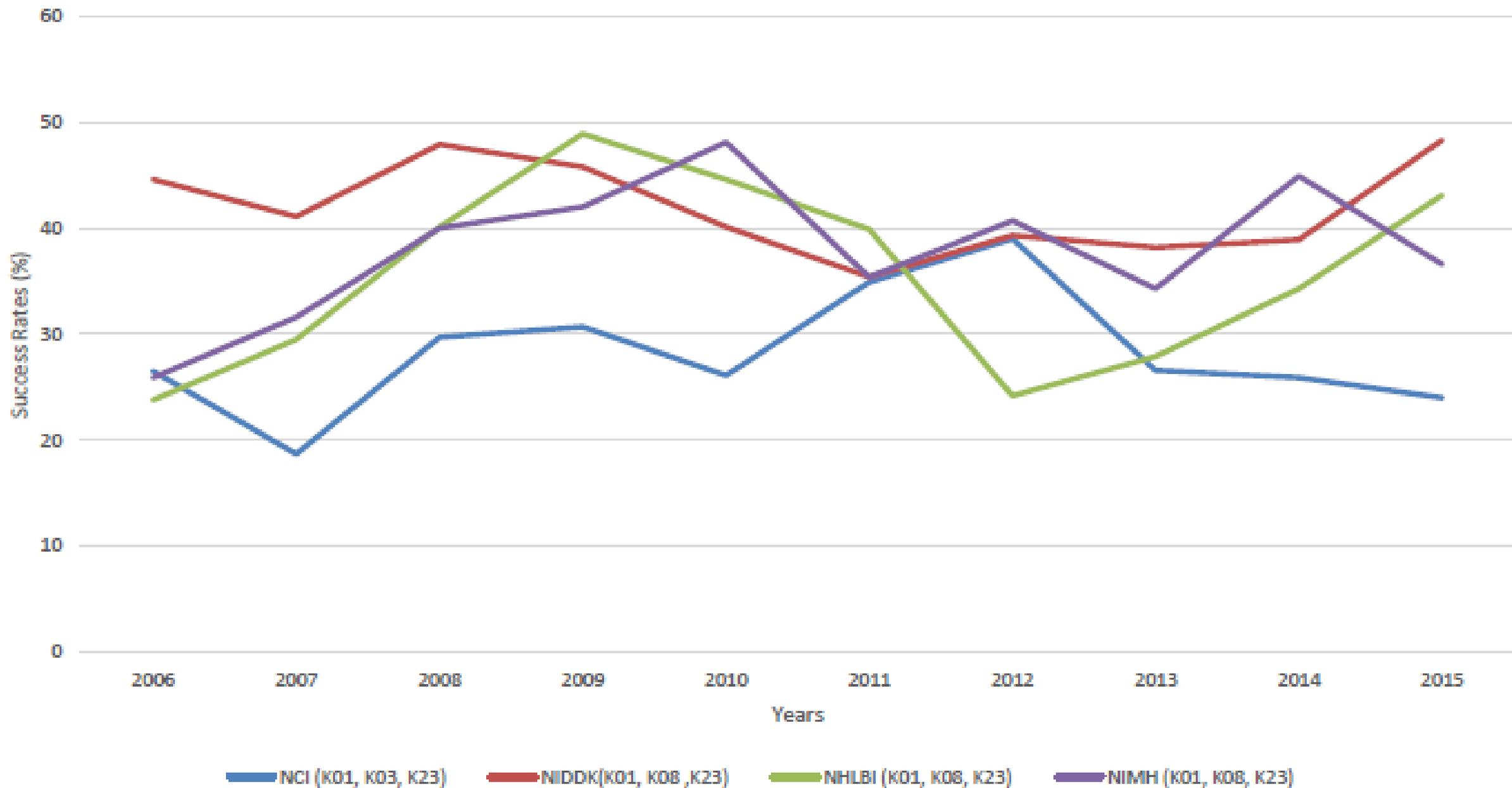
- NIH (examples: NCI, NIDDK, NHLBI, NIMH); each institute has slightly different parameters for career awards
- Internal options via your institution's CTSA
- American Cancer Society

# Odds of Success

## Overall success rates across institutes by awards



Success Rates for NCI, NIDDK, NHLBI & NIHM Institutes for combined K01, K08, K23 Awards



# 5 K Criteria



Candidate



Career Development Plan



Research Strategy



Environment/Institution



Mentor/Consultants

# American Cancer Society Career

- Mentored Research Scholar Grant in Applied and Clinical-
  - Support for mentored research and training to full-time junior faculty, first 4 years of initial appointment
  - Awards up to five years and for up to \$135,000 per year (direct costs), plus 8% allowable indirect costs
  - A maximum of \$10,000 per year for the mentor(s) (regardless of the number of mentors) is included in the \$135,000

<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@researchadministration/documents/document/acspc-027414.pdf>

# Tips for writing successful Mentored K application

1. Form a strong mentoring team
2. Pick mentors who are accessible
3. Highlight mentor funding. A mentored K award provides partial salary and only modest funds for research supplies
4. Create a solid Research Plan
  - Don't skimp on the Research Plan thinking that because you're writing a K (not an R01) application reviewers will be lenient

## 5. Accentuate activities.

- Describe how career development or training activities will lead to your independence
- State how your future research will be independent from your mentors' work
- Build a competencies matrix to outline the key skills you will acquire along with their source
- Get ahold of sample applications

## 6. Get good reference and institutional letters

- Reviewers will scrutinize reference letters
- Ask people who are familiar with your qualifications, training, and interests
  - Provide a draft or template for letters

7. Obtain strong mentor statements. Be sure your mentor statements convey your mentors' wholehearted support of you

## 8. Demonstrate productivity

- Reviewers look closely at your productivity, e.g., number of publications, first or last author. If you're lacking in this area, explain your role on other projects

## 9. Justify sample size

- In this case, size matters, especially if your project is a "spin off" of your mentors

## 10. Address human subjects and responsible conduct of research

- Avoid this common mistake: completing the human subjects research section using the description from a mentor's grant application. That description may not apply to what you'll be doing with your K award
- Do you know what your plan for instruction in responsible research conduct (RCR) should cover?

## 11. Define the D&I angle within your application

- How central to the application, need to educate reviewers

## 12. Get mentors to review your application

# Example: Hendren NCI K07

- The Setting in which I applied for a K:
  - Assistant Professor
    - Goal: career as clinician-scientist
      - VA clinical appointment
- Recently completed MPH degree
  - No experience with NIH grants
- Evolving research interests
  - Mentoring relationship with PhD health services researcher

# Why a K in this setting?

- Mentorship and resources available
- Department supportive
  - Time commitment can be difficult for clinicians
- Gap between skill set and skills needed for high-impact research in area(s) of interest
  - Qualitative and mixed methods
  - Multilevel modeling

# Building a Team

- Primary mentor
  - Shared interests
  - Full-time researcher
  - Commits to weekly meetings, very involved in the design and editing of the K
- Secondary mentors
  - Specific skills mentoring
- Collaborators
  
- Letters from department chair, etc.

# Strategy

- Apply to multiple funding sources
  - I did ACS and NCI
  - Consider VA career development award if eligible

# Pitfalls

- Be very specific about your career development plan
  - Get copies of successful grants in the mechanism you seek for guidance
- Mentorship team should not be too unwieldy
- Show a clear link between your career goals, your career development plan, and your research plan
  - The K should take you on a path
    - To attaining a set of skills that will make you an independent, high-impact researcher
    - The work of the research plan should set you up to write and conduct an R01

# Questions and Discussion

