

Full notice: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-23-163.html>

Submission portal: <https://rfi.grants.nih.gov/?s=64caaa8bb1112e46ad0a1d52>

Due Nov 24

Information Requested

This RFI invites input from interest groups throughout the scientific research, advocacy, and clinical practice communities, those employed by NIH or at institutions receiving NIH support, and the public, on a proposed revised mission statement. The bolded language reflects differences between the current and proposed mission statements.

- Current mission statement:
“To seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.”
- Proposed revised mission statement:
“To seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and to apply that knowledge to optimize health and prevent or reduce illness for all people.”

Prompts (750 words each)

Feedback on whether the proposed new mission statement reflects the goals and objectives as outlined in the [NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025](#)

Omit

Suggestions for specific language that could be added to the proposed mission statement and why

We propose replacing “living systems” with “humans” in the NIH’s revised mission statement so that it reads: “To seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of humans and to apply that knowledge to optimize health and prevent or reduce illness for all people.” For the NIH to achieve its goals in the latter part of the mission statement (“optimize health and prevent or reduce illness for all people”), the agency must move away from experiments on other animals, which do not provide the relevant, reliable, or translatable fundamental knowledge that is necessary to achieve these goals.

The last available estimate (2012) indicates NIH spends roughly 47% of its annual budget on experiments on animals (<https://www.nap.edu/read/13322/chapter/4#23>). In 2023, the agency is actively funding experiments on animals in areas where their use has led to no meaningful improvements in human health, such as sepsis and neurodegenerative disease. Across the board, experiments on animals have a low rate of translation to humans, with NCATS reporting that 95% of human clinical trials for new drugs fail (<https://ncats.nih.gov/research/research-activities/ntu>), despite having gone through safety and efficacy testing in animals.

While the NIH has increased its investment in human-relevant in vitro methods such as tissue chips, this investment remains paltry in comparison to its funding of animal-based experimentation. In fact, the agency appeared to double-down on its outdated support of animal models by shrouding what could be an innovative new program to replace animal use with a title that explicitly centers on the continued use of animals, and relegating human-relevant methods to a “complementary” status. (<https://commonfund.nih.gov/complementarie/strategicplanning>).

According to a November 2023 Pew Research poll, Americans’ trust in science has declined in recent years (<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/11/14/americans-trust-in-scientists-positive-views-of-science-continue-to-decline/>). Thirty-nine percent of respondents think that the U.S. is losing ground in scientific achievement, compared to the rest of the world (45% believe it is staying the same; only 14% think it is gaining ground). This could be attributed in part to the U.S.’ inexplicable, unprogressive attitude toward more advanced, human-based methods. Compared to the U.S., other countries have made a more substantial push to move away from animal use toward human-relevant methods. For example, the Netherlands created the Transition Programme for Innovation without the use of animals (TPI), which aims to bring together stakeholders and offer a platform for identifying and developing activities to increase the pace of the transition toward animal-free innovation (<https://www.animalfreeinnovationtpi.nl/>). In 2021, members of the European Parliament almost unanimously supported a motion for a resolution calling on the European Commission to develop an action plan—with a timeline and milestones—to phase out experiments on animals and accelerate the transition to innovation without the use of animals in research, regulatory testing, and education (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0387_EN.html).

Scientists with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals have developed a common-sense strategy that NIH can implement to phase out animal use and move toward superior, non-animal methods in an evidence-based way. The Research Modernization Deal (<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/peta-research-modernization-deal.pdf>) calls on the agency to take the following steps:

- 1) End animal use in research areas in which animals have been demonstrated to be poor “models” of humans and their use has impeded scientific and medical progress. Multiple reviews have documented the overwhelming failure of animal use to benefit human health in specific areas, including neurodegenerative diseases, neuropsychiatric disorders, cardiovascular disease, strokes, cancer, diabetes, obesity, inflammation and immune responses, HIV/AIDS research, addiction studies, trauma research, and medical training as well as for regulatory testing. Experiments and tests on animals in these areas should be ended as soon as possible and replaced with non-animal methods.
- 2) Conduct systematic reviews of the efficacy of animal use to identify additional areas in which non-animal methods are available or the use of animals has failed to protect human or environmental health and can, therefore, be ended.
- 3) Redirect funds from animal studies to the use and development of reliable, non-animal methods. We have previously sent ideas for how this can be achieved within NIH’s current structure.

- 4) Implement a harm-benefit analysis system for research involving animals that includes an ethical perspective and consideration of lifelong harm inflicted on animals, to be applied to all NIH intramural and extramural research.
- 5) Educate and train researchers in the benefits of and how to use non-animal testing approaches. Suggestions for how this could be achieved is also available in our previous correspondence.

By making NIH's mission explicit to seeking fundamental information about humans, the agency aligns itself with a more innovative, effective, and socially-acceptable research paradigm.

Feedback on any specific language that could be removed from the proposed mission statement and why

We propose to remove the phrase "living systems" in the current proposed mission statement and replace it with the word "human" for the reasons listed in the previous prompt.