June 29, 2018

Lynn King, PhD
Chief, Research Training and Career Development Branch
National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research
Democracy One, Room 690
6701 Democracy Blvd MSC 4878
Bethesda, MD 20892

Re: Mentoring Network for Underrepresented Postdoctoral and Early-Career Faculty Investigators

Dear Dr. King:

On behalf of the 3,400 individual and 103 institutional members of the American Association for Dental Research (AADR), we strongly and enthusiastically support NIDCR’s proposed initiative, “Mentoring Network for Underrepresented Postdoctoral and Early-Career Faculty Investigators”. AADR commends NIDCR for its efforts to increase the diversity of the dental, oral and craniofacial research workforce and for its responsiveness to this long-standing need and concern of the research community.

In response to the proposed initiative, AADR members have provided the following feedback and recommendations:

**Use the National Research Mentoring Network as a model.** The proposed mentoring network mirrors the NIH-wide National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN). AADR members have participated in the NRMN and speak highly of the program, particularly regarding the frequency and quality of the interactions between mentors and mentees. As NIDCR develops its mentoring network, AADR recommends looking to the NRMN for programmatic elements and metrics for assessing the impact of the network and success of participants. The NIDCR mentoring network may want to consider developing “hallmarks of success” like those developed by the Diversity Program Consortium, which includes hallmarks of student, mentor and institutional success (https://www.nigms.nih.gov/training/dpc/Pages/success.aspx). For postdoctoral and early career investigators, hallmarks may include quantitative (grants submitted and received, publications, presentations at conferences, etc.) and qualitative (engagement, career satisfaction, career self-efficacy, etc.) measures and others outlined in RFA-RM-18-004, “National Research Mentoring Network: The Science of Mentoring, Networking, and Navigating Career Transition Points” (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-18-004.html). NIDCR should track participants’ careers after leaving the program.

**Mentor Recruitment and Support.** One challenge to effective mentoring is the lack of role models from under-represented groups. NIDCR should recruit mentors from under-represented groups and couple the mentoring program to strategic faculty hires at research institutions. NIDCR should engage minority-serving
institutions to expand the reach of the network and to recruit diverse mentors. NIDCR should also recruit mentors from across the spectrum of career stages as mentees could benefit from people in senior positions as well as those who have just exited the early stages of their careers.

NIDCR should consider how it will best support mentors in the program, especially non-tenured faculty. Many mentors and senior investigators are in tenured, financially secure positions but a growing number are not. Predominantly ‘soft money’ faculty have to be very careful with their time to make sure their own funding obligations and needs are met. This is particularly true for non-clinical scientists. Historically, mentorship has been unpaid, and there are a growing number of unpaid activities and obligations that non-tenured faculty face which puts a great deal of pressure on the traditional model. NIDCR should consider providing financial and/or other support mechanisms to address this issue and to incentivize potential mentors to participate in the network.

**Mentorship components.** NIDCR mentors should provide guidance that will help mentees establish successful independent careers. Mentees could benefit from mentorship in grant-writing; navigation of the academic job search and hiring process; salary, benefits and startup negotiation; engagement with the appropriate level of academic/professional service; time and resource management; and work-life balance. Distinct from "leadership," knowledge and skills in these areas are ultimately necessary for a successful academic career.

To facilitate ongoing and meaningful peer-to-peer and mentee-to-mentor interactions, NIDCR may consider an annual in-person retreat; a virtual mentee-led journal club and affinity groups for mentors and mentees with common interests, such as those led by the Science & Technology Policy Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science ([https://www.aaaspolicyfellowships.org/stay-involved/affinity-groups](https://www.aaaspolicyfellowships.org/stay-involved/affinity-groups)). Because the mentoring network will be spread out across the country, NIDCR will have to use existing or create new virtual platforms for maintaining social and professional interaction.

**Engage professional societies.** Finally, NIDCR is encouraged to engage professional societies in this effort – from dental, oral and craniofacial research societies like AADR to general biomedical and behavioral research societies in which mentors and mentees may hold membership – to assist with program outreach and programmatic support. NIDCR may be able to take advantage of existing webinars, workshops or other materials and opportunities already developed by these societies. NIDCR should consider providing travel support to professional meetings for mentees.

On behalf of the members of AADR, we would once again like to express our enthusiastic support for this initiative and look forward to the development of this network. AADR recently established a Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, and appreciates NIDCR’s engagement with this newly formed committee as we pursue our common goal of increasing the diversity of the dental, oral and craniofacial research community. We stand ready to work with you and NIDCR as this initiative develops. Please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Seun
Ajiboye, Director of Science Policy and Government Affairs, at sajibo ye@iadr.org with questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

Christopher H. Fox, DMD, DMSc
Chief Executive Officer

Maria Emanuel Ryan, DDS, PhD
President