



R01 Immersion Program Guide



Guidelines for R01 Immersion Program

The R01 Immersion Program is a 9-month program designed to help School of Medicine research-intensive junior faculty/new investigators receive R01 grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Senior faculty with strong track records of NIH funding guide groups of mentees through the proposal development process, while the team structure encourages peer support and feedback. With a structured environment and mentorship-focused program, investigators can learn what is needed to successfully submit and receive a grant.

The R01 Immersion Program has a dual purpose: to improve the School of Medicine's R01 success rates and to cultivate a cohesive community of peers and mentors with strong relationships between faculty and members. To promote these aims, participants are grouped into small teams of mentees and coaches and include team science training throughout the process.

Participants are required to submit a grant within one year of the end of the program. There are timed metrics to meet and multiple checks, including a mid-program progress report, which is sent to Department Chairs.

Participants are divided into groups based loosely on the subject of their grants: there are a mix of basic science, computational, and clinical grants. A team coach and advisor will be assigned to each group. In addition, each participant must identify an internal subject matter expert (ISME) to help with the proposal process, as well as an external subject matter expert (ESME) to review the final proposal.

R01 Immersion Program Participants

Mentees	Team Coaches	Team Advisors	ISMES	ESMEs
Four to five faculty mentees per team in a peer group setting with a structured environment and mentorship-focused program.	Faculty coaches with established track records of external funding and a commitment to mentoring meet with and advise their assigned mentee group.	Team Advisors support the coaches, act as back-ups, and impart domain experience. They assist with accountability and communicate with Dept. Chairs regarding progress.	Internal subject matter experts (ISME) provide counsel on mentees' research plans and help mentees prepare, present, review, and critique proposal drafts. Help identify and recruit ESME. Help prepare for chalk talk.	External subject matter experts (ESME) review the mentees' final proposals.

Who is eligible to participate as a mentee in the program?

Participants in this program must be UVA School of Medicine junior faculty/new investigators (tenure or nontenure track) who are seeking to develop a competitive NIH-style research grant proposal. We are particularly interested in enrolling investigators who are preparing R01 or equivalent proposals in the biomedical, behavioral, clinical, and social sciences.

The study is ideal for researchers who are preparing their first major NIH proposal or who have submitted a previous NIH proposal that was not selected for funding. Researchers who already have been awarded a K-series award are eligible to participate in this program if they are now writing an R-series proposal. Individuals who have already been awarded R01-level funding are not eligible.

Mentees will be expected to submit an R01-equivalent grant proposal within one year of completion of the program and should already have conceptualized specific aims.

To apply to the program, a participant must complete and submit an application, along with a specific aims draft.

Mentee Responsibilities

The number of available spaces for the R01 Immersion Program are limited. Thus, if the mentee commits, they are responsible for the following:

- **Active participation:** Attend all sessions, workshops, and meetings promptly and actively engage in discussions and activities.
- **Task completion:** Submit assignments and complete required work on time and to the expected quality standard, including the submission of an R01 or equivalent NIH grant proposal within one year of program completion.
- **Seeking guidance:** Proactively reach out to mentors for advice, feedback, and clarification on concepts.
- **Self-reflection:** Regularly assess personal progress, identify areas for improvement, and actively work on developing those skills.
- **Open communication:** Communicate openly with mentors about challenges, concerns, and progress.
- **Feedback provision:** Offer constructive feedback to improve the program curriculum and overall experience.
- **Networking:** Build relationships with other mentees and leverage the network opportunities provided.
- **Professionalism:** Maintain a positive attitude, respect guidelines, and demonstrate professionalism.

Mentee Time Commitment

Mentees will be expected to attend several large group events/workshops, monthly team meetings, writing accountability sessions, and meetings with their own internal subject matter expert (who will have specialized insight into the scientific field of study). Each mentee must also work with their department to schedule a Chalk Talk, an exercise designed to help mentees present and refine specific aims.

Mentees must allocate sufficient time to study, complete assignments, and participate in scheduled activities. A 2025-2026 program timeline is detailed at the end of this document.

What is the role of the Team Coach?

A coach is assigned to a team of 4-5 mentees and will guide the group through the NIH policies and practices and the development of an R01 grant application.

In much the same way that a head football coach is not an expert on all the positions, an R01 Immersion Program team coach is not necessarily an expert on the scientific expertise needed for each mentee's grant proposal. Rather, the team coach is a process expert. An Internal Subject Matter Expert (ISME) will be selected by each mentee to consult on the scientific content of the proposals.

Group activities include helping to determine a realistic deadline for each mentee, advising them on developing sections of a proposal, and reviewing proposals in the group. Team coaches will help the group find answers to other issues that may surface, such as how to contact NIH Program Officers or how to select a study section. The Office of Research is a resource for team coaches and can arrange for additional expertise when requested by the group.

Each team is self-governing; team coaches and group members determine when and where the group will meet.

The team coaches' requirements and time commitments are listed on the following page.

Team Coaches' Requirements and Time Commitment

(See 2025-2026 program timeline at the end of this document.)

Attend the Kick-off Meeting and lead table discussions/introductions of assigned peer groups.	1.5 hours
Coordinate and cooperate with the assigned Team Advisor.	As needed
Lead small peer group (team) meetings once per month with activities and discussions. Attend Workshops.	10 hours
Review mentees' research progress, specific aims, and final proposals.	10 – 20 hours
Contact the program managers immediately to communicate any unmet needs of the group.	As needed
Evaluate program experience.	.5 hours
Total Time Commitment	Approx. 30 – 40 hours over 10 months

What are some resources available to team coaches?

The SOM Research office will send out a monthly email to mentees advising them of steps they should be taking (deliverables, upcoming workshops, etc.). Team coaches will be copied as the suggestions can be talking points during the meeting. Each mentee and team coach will receive a copy of a grant writing workbook.

In addition, team coaches may contact the program managers to request assistance with locating resources to meet needs identified by the group throughout the program.

How are teams formed?

Team coaches are formed to meet group research characteristics. Some factors include type of research (e.g., clinical, basic, outcomes), subject area, and common methodologies.

Who determines the content of the team meetings?

The team coaches and mentees are responsible for content. Often it is best to decide in advance who will present at the next meeting. It is expected that much of the time will be devoted to individual proposal sections as they are developed by the mentees. Team coaches should oversee the discussion to ensure that it is respectful and constructive.

What topics should team coaches cover in team discussions?

One of the group's main purposes is to review sections of the mentees' proposals as they are developed. Team coaches should have the mentees circulate their sections in advance and plan for these reviews. Additional topics that should be covered as scheduled by the team coaches:

- Contacting the NIH Program Officer (PO) – how to select, contact and prepare
- Selecting Study Sections (e.g., match with expertise)
- Biases of Study Sections (e.g., methodology preference)
- Identifying primary reviewers and researching their subject expertise and biases (e.g., look at publications)
- Selecting collaborators
- Time management and maintaining a writing schedule
- Communicating with the Scientific Review Officer or PO after the review
- Tips to write and present information/data succinctly and clearly

How will mentee progress be tracked?

Team coaches will be asked to take attendance during small group activities and to provide general information about mentees' progress. In the middle and at the end of the program, the program managers will develop an activity report for each mentee and send a copy to both the program managers and the team advisor. Concerns regarding mentees' participation and progress should be communicated to the program managers and team advisor as appropriate.

What is the role of a Team Advisor?

A team advisor is assigned to a team of 4-5 mentees and will monitor the group's progress throughout the program. Team advisors support the team coaches, act as back-ups, and impart domain experience during the program.

Team advisors will also communicate with Department Chairs to provide progress updates, accountability, and/or concerns regarding their mentees.

Team advisors' Requirements and Time Commitment

(See 2025-2026 program timeline at the end of this document.)

Attend the Kick-off Meeting and observe table discussions/introductions of assigned peer groups.	1.5 hours
Attend monthly peer group (team) meetings.	10 hours
Coordinate with the assigned team coach and provide support as needed throughout the program.	As needed
Assist with accountability and updates to the Department Chairs regarding mentees' progress.	1 – 3 hours
Evaluate program experience.	.5 hours
Total Time Commitment	Approx. 20 hours over 10 months

What is the role of the Internal Subject Matter Expert (ISME)?

With the advice of his/her department, each mentee will identify and contact an Internal Subject Matter Expert (ISME) prior to the start of the R01 Immersion Program. The ISME (i.e., a "personal scientific trainer") will advise an individual mentee on the scientific content of his/her R01 grant proposal.

ISMEs will help guide the success of new investigators, contribute to the mentee's research design and rationale, and share their wisdom and insight as an experienced researcher, reviewer, and faculty member.

ISMEs will provide counsel on mentees' research plans and help the mentees prepare, present, review, and critique proposal drafts. The ISME will aid in preparing the mentee for the Chalk Talk, attend the Chalk Talk, and also assist in identifying and recruiting the External Subject Matter Expert (ESME).

What is the role of the External Subject Matter Expert (ESME)?

External Subject Matter Experts (ESMEs) will review the mentees' final proposals and provide an NIH-style grant review along with suggested edits. ESMEs will be provided with a two-week window to review and return the proposals.

What are the responsibilities of the departments and Chairs?

The departments and Chairs play a critical role in supporting mentees as they progress through the program. Some key responsibilities include:

- Recommend faculty members as participants and team coaches for the program.
- Provide recommendations/introductions to internal and external subject matter experts.
- Provide protected time for participation in R01 Immersion Program activities and crafting of the proposal.
- Host Chalk Talks and ensure adequate attendance.
- Work with the team advisors regarding the progress and needed support for mentees from their department.
- Support coach participation in program with release time, if needed.
- Recognize mentees' and coaches' participation in the program (as appropriate).

Program Timeline for the 2025-26 Academic Year

Below is the proposed timeline for the 2025-2026 R01 Immersion Program. Please note that some dates/times could change prior to the start of the program.

August 2025

Prior to the start of the program, Coaches and Mentees must prepare as noted below:

Coaches: Determine dates/times for monthly Peer Group Meetings and inform Advisors/Mentees.

Mentees: Select an internal subject matter expert (ISME) and schedule monthly meetings (from September 2025 to May 2026).

September 2025

September 2 **R01 Immersion Program Kick Off**

Required Participants: Mentees and Team Coaches (Advisors – optional)

Agenda: mixer, introductions

September 8 **WORKSHOP #1: Building a Sustainable Writing Practice**

Monique Dufour, Ph.D., Director of Faculty Development, UVA School of Medicine

Required Participants: Mentees (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional)

September 15 **Writing Accountability Group**

Required Participants: Mentees

Agenda: Supervised writing session

As scheduled **Peer Group Meetings**

Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional

Deliverable: Mentees should be prepared to present an elevator pitch.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Set ground rules on how to operate as a group.
2. Discuss outline of scientific approach/models.
3. Discuss tips and tricks using own experiences/lessons.
4. What is role of ESME and how to identify your ESME.

As scheduled **Mentees begin individual sessions with internal subject matter experts (ISMEs)**

October 2025

October 14 **WORKSHOP #2: Writing Winning NIH Grant Proposals 8:30am – 4:30pm**

John Robertson, Ph.D., Managing Member of Grant Writers' Seminars & Workshops

Required Participants: Mentees (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional)

As scheduled	Peer Group Meetings Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional Deliverable: Mentees must present a draft of their specific aims. Topics for Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposal progress, ISME updates, and peer reviews. 2. Discuss Grant Writing Workshop. 3. Dissect an aims page from a funded R01 chosen by the Team Coach. To Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentees must send invitations to external subject matter experts (ESMEs). • Mentees must work with their department administrator to finalize plans for the November Chalk Talk (can be via Zoom).
October 27	Writing Accountability Group Required Participants: Mentees Agenda: Supervised writing session

November 2025

As scheduled	Chalk Talks Required Participants: Mentees and their ISMEs (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional) Mentees to present Chalk Talks within their own departments.
November 17	Writing Accountability Group Required Participants: Mentees Agenda: Supervised writing session
As Scheduled	Peer Group Meetings Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional Deliverable: Mentees must present Significance and Innovation sections of their proposals. Mentees must provide the dates of their Chalk Talks. Topics of Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposal progress, ISME updates, and peer reviews. 2. How to contact NIH Program Officers. 3. How to choose Study Sections.

December 2025

December 1	WORKSHOP #3: Biostatistics <i>Matthew Gurka, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Public Health Sciences, UVA School of Medicine</i> Required Participants: Mentees (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional)
December 8	Writing Accountability Group Required Participants: Mentees Agenda: Supervised writing session

As Scheduled **Peer Group Meetings**

Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional

Deliverable: Mentees must provide a bulleted summary of their Chalk Talk feedback.

Mentees must present a draft of their approach, with preliminary data, potential pitfalls, alternate approaches, etc.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Proposal progress, ISME updates, and peer reviews.
2. Discuss Biostatistics workshop, identify collaborating biostatistician/statistical support.

January 2026

January 12 **Writing Accountability Group**

Required Participants: Mentees

Agenda: Supervised writing session

January 12 **Mid-Program Progress Reports**

Attendance and participation reports sent to Department Chairs.

January 19 **WORKSHOP #4 – Team Science and Graphics**

Required Participants: Mentees (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional)

As Scheduled **Peer Group Meetings**

Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional

Deliverable: Mentees should present a list of proposed collaborators and co-investigators, and any other person who will be providing a Letter of Support.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Proposal progress, ISME updates, and peer reviews.
2. Discuss Team Science/Graphics workshop.
3. Discuss how to establish collaborations.
4. What happens on a study section?

To Do: Mentees must finalize ESME selections by the end of January.

February 2026

February 16 **Writing Accountability Group**

Required Participants: Mentees

Agenda: Supervised writing session

As Scheduled **Peer Group Meetings**

Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional

Deliverable: Mentees must present a draft of 1) a biosketch that conforms to new NIH standards (SciENCv) and 2) a Facilities and Other Resources Document.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Proposal progress, ISME updates, and peer reviews.

March 2026

March 2	WORKSHOP #5 – Budget Preparation and Proposal Submission Required Participants: Mentees (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional) Break-out: Basic Research: <i>Steve Lichtenstein, Asst. Dean for School of Medicine/Director, Grants and Contracts, UVA SOM</i> <i>Lauren Armstrong, Assistant Director, Grants and Contracts, UVA SOM</i> Break-out: Clinical Research: TBD
March 16	Writing Accountability Group Required Participants: Mentees Agenda: Supervised writing session
As Scheduled	Peer Group Meetings Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional Deliverable: Mentees must present a Budget along with a Budget Justification. Topics for Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Discuss ESME proposal submissions (to be submitted by March 30).2. Discuss Budget Preparation and Proposal Submission workshop.3. Facilities and other resources.4. Biological/select agents' research. To Do: Mentees must send their proposals to ESMEs by March 30.

April 2026

April 13	ESMEs' deadline to return reviews to Mentees
April 13	Writing Accountability Group Required Participants: Mentees Agenda: Supervised writing session
As Scheduled	Peer Group Meetings (schedule meetings after April 13th) Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional Deliverable: Mentees must submit ESME reviews for discussion. Topics for Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Refining drafts of proposals, peer feedback.2. How to respond to reviewers' comments.

May 2026

May 4	Mock NIH Study Section Section Coaches and reviewers will convene as a mock NIH Study Section to score proposals from selected mentees. Required Participants: Mentees (Team Coaches and Advisors – optional)
-------	--

As Scheduled **Peer Group Meeting**

Required Participants: Team coaches and mentees (in assigned teams). Advisors – optional

Deliverable: Mentees must be prepared to discuss how the mock study section changed their approach to their application.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Final drafting of proposals, provide peer feedback.
2. Interpreting your score from the sponsor.
3. Discuss final steps of submission.

May 26

UVA Internal Deadline for new R01 proposals

June 2026

June 5

NIH Deadline for new R01 proposals

June 19

Program Evaluation

Mentees complete evaluation of program experience.

June 22

Final Progress Reports

Final Progress Reports sent to Department Chairs.

