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RE: Strengthening Fellowship Review

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is an international nonprofit scientific and educational organization that represents more than 12,000 students, researchers, educators and industry professionals. The ASBMB strongly advocates for strengthening the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce, supporting sustainable funding for the American research enterprise, and ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion in STEM.

The ASBMB has five recommendations for CSR to strengthen and improve the National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellowship review process to (1) support scientists whose work has been and continues to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) ensure that women in STEM are given fair and equal opportunities and (3) diversify the STEM pipeline.

Supporting scientists affected by the pandemic

The ASBMB recommends that the National Institutes of Health Center for Scientific Review permanently allow applicants to explain how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their education and career.

Studies show that science research grew in 2020, but research in other fields declined. <https://www.asbmb.org/2021/01/20/2020-research-growth-in-biochemistry-and-molecular-biology-research/> that scientists who do not work on COVID-19-related research have had even greater decreases in total work time, publications, submissions and projects. The pandemic has acutely affected trainees, potentially negatively impacting evaluation.

possible by adding an optional letter or statement to fellowship applications that could be written by the student or contributed by the director of graduate studies, graduate committee chair, department chair or dean.

Implement implicit bias training for reviewers

CSR should incorporate implicit bias training in their bias training for scientific review officers, study section chairs, and all reviewers. The ASBMB applauds CSR for introducing bias training; however,