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Dear RSA Member,

As you are probably aware, the NIH has issued a Request for Information (RFI) asking for “Input into the Scientific Strategic Plan for the Proposed National Institute of Substance Use and Addiction Disorders” (NOT-OD-12-045) on February 8, 2012.

This RFI is designed to “To ensure a thorough and comprehensive exploration of the scientific opportunities that could potentially be included in the Scientific Strategic Plan for substance use, abuse and addiction research at NIH”. As a member of the RSA and the alcohol research community, we strongly encourage you to submit a response to this RFI. This is an opportunity for you to provide your thoughts and recommendations for this new institute as it pertains to your research program specifically or to alcohol research in general. This request is for all levels of scientists from faculty, postdoctoral fellows to graduate students and it is very important that alcohol researchers be heard.

The response sheet (see the link below) will ask about the areas that you think are worthy of consideration as well as the most important issues to be addressed by this proposed institute. Below are some of the items that have been discussed at some length by the Executive Committee, the Government Affairs and Advocacy Committee and other interested parties. It is important that the committee hear from alcohol researchers and so please if you can take a few minutes and provide your own input.

- The majority of American adults that drink alcohol are not alcoholic but rather moderate drinkers. Therefore, this new institute must include the study of health benefits and risks associated with more moderate social and binge drinking.
- For a new institute on substance use and addiction, the research portfolio must include health promotion. Alcohol is unique in many ways with its health promoting effects at low doses (in the majority of the adult population) and danger with excessive use. Educational programs (and their evaluation) are critical for the youth and public at large.
- NIAAA has utilized a “systems biology” approach to its efforts addressing the impact of alcohol on the entire body and organ systems. This has served research well since alcohol has such a wide array of effects on the organism. There has been some suggestion about removing certain areas of alcohol research (prenatal alcohol exposure and end organ damage as examples) to other institutes. This type of isolation would have devastating effects on these areas of research. It is critical that all aspects of alcohol research remain within this new institute. Fetal alcohol research, as an example, needs to be within an institute that focuses its research program on how alcohol affects not only brain but various organ systems, immune function, behavior, etc.

- Since a major component of this institute will have a focus on addiction, it is important that the many forms of addiction that may share underlying mechanisms be part of this new institute. This must therefore extend beyond alcohol and other drugs to include other addictions that have a tremendous cost to society including nicotine (smoking), gambling, overeating, shopping, and internet or gaming. A number of these are currently housed in other institutes and the logical if not necessary approach would be to transfer them to this new institute.

These are some examples of important issues to consider for this new institute and you are welcome to use any of these that concern you. It is also extremely important that you become an advocate for your research and articulate the fundamental necessity of either your basic or applied research questions. The deadline for submission is May 11, 2012.

We will continue to keep you informed of new information as it arises. If you are going to the RSA meeting in June, the Government Affairs and Advocacy Committee will be holding their annual workshop on June 25th from 12:15 – 1:45 and we will also provide an update of things at that time. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Best Wishes,

The Government Affairs and Advocacy Committee

Susan Barron (sbarron@uky.edu), Sara Jo Nixon (sjnixon@ufl.edu) and Victor Hesselbrock (hesselbrock@uchc.edu), cochairs

Useful links:

RSA “white paper” - <http://www.rsoa.org/2011-04-11RSAWhitePaper.pdf>

Request for Information: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfi_files/nih_nisuad/add.cfm

The URL for the entire document is: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-12-045.html>