HHMI Application Strategy Workshop — Meeting Transcript (Cleaned)

Date: July 22, 2026

Welcome and Panel Introduction

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: Thank you so much for joining us today. My name is Adriane, and I'll be your facilitator for today's session. Before we start, I'd like to give a quick introduction to our panelists. We have four UC Davis faculty members who have firsthand experience as HHMI Investigators or Freeman Hrabowski Scholars, along with two experts who have extensive experience helping investigators with NIH and/or foundation funding applications. Together, they'll bring complementary perspectives on what makes an HHMI application stand out. Over the next hour, we'll hear from our panelists about what they learned about what makes an HHMI application compelling: articulating a bold scientific vision, demonstrating scientific leadership, embracing intellectual risk, fostering an inclusive research environment, and addressing what HHMI calls the deletion test—asking whether the same scientific questions would be answered if you and your unique approach to the work didn't exist. The way we'll do this is by having me read the prepared questions and have the panelists answer them.

From NIH-Style Proposals to an HHMI Research Vision

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: We'll start with the first question, which is navigating the NIH-to-HHMI transition. To our panelists, what was the biggest challenge in shifting from thinking about the detailed what and how of experiments to articulating the broader scientific vision behind your work? And how did you find the right level of abstraction?

For Erica and Matt, our experts, what do you see applicants struggle with most during this transition?

> **Erica Chédin, Ph.D.:** I want to throw it to Matt first.
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> **Matt Boitano:** Sure, sounds good. Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for having us here, Adriane. To introduce myself briefly, my name is Matt Boitano. I've worked with many of you in this webinar. I'm part of the Development and Alumni Relations team within Foundation and Corporate Engagement. Our role is to work with PIs to submit proposals to the foundations and companies we work with, including HHMI, which is in my portfolio. As many of the panelists will tell you, HHMI funds people, not projects. To clarify, the Freeman Hrabowski Scholars Program is the one that will be open for this cycle, so I'm mostly speaking to that, although faculty here can speak to the Investigator Program and any differences in that application. This program focuses on your overall research portfolio rather than one particular project. I'm happy to help. Part of my role is to review applicants' materials, provide feedback, and offer one-on-one, hands-on support, because this can be a tricky transition. Think less about specific aims and more about the research themes you are interested in pursuing, and try to group them. I can provide hands-on help to each of you who is interested in applying. I'd also like to turn it over to faculty who have gone through this process.
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> **Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.:** For me, it was definitely a challenge. I submitted my application in 2022 for the 2023 Freeman Hrabowski cycle and was not selected as a finalist. Comparing that application with my successful application, I realized that people who struggle tend to do one of two things: write in an overly NIH-like style or become too pie-in-the-sky without presenting a well-reasoned research program they will execute. I went a little too pie-in-the-sky and discussed many ideas without organizing them well. The ideas in the two applications were largely similar. The difference was that I

organized my successful application into three broad research areas. The scope proposed in each area was equivalent to roughly two or, at most, three R01s. I did not include the level of detail one would provide in an R01. The challenge was finding the balance between avoiding the nitty-gritty and presenting a clearly defined, executable research program.

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: I can add to that as we think about the competition coming up in November. I had the advantage of having been on the job market that year. I used the research statement from my application to UC Davis, rewrote and reformatted sections, and made sure it met the HHMI application requirements. That may help those interested in the Freeman Hrabowski competition understand the scale and style. At that higher level, there is not enough space to discuss detailed statistics for each direction; the focus is on laying out the broader vision. As Theanne said, my three directions were interrelated but distinct because I had different areas of interest and technologies suited to those areas. If fully developed, each could have stood as approximately one R01. Other formats could have worked as well. I also reviewed four sample Freeman Hrabowski applications available through the HHMI website, I believe through the application portal. I found them late in the process but used them to check whether I had calibrated my application appropriately.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: Elisa makes a good point, particularly for the Freeman Hrabowski program: it is much more like a job application. What you wrote to become a faculty member would be more appropriate than an R01-style grant. I've reviewed three times for the Freeman Hrabowski program. You already have to stand out to some extent, which means bringing a track record. Do not think of HHMI as an alternative to NIH funding; investigators are generally expected to have NIH or other extramural support. Instead, ask what you would do with all that additional money. What is the difference between the work you would package into a risk-averse R01, supported by evidence that it will work, and the vision you would pursue in your lab? As Theanne suggested, do not overdo the pie-in-the-sky examples. But if somebody handed you that money with no constraints and no requirement to follow specific aims, what would you do? What is your vision? Think of it as a job application in which you got the job and received $5 million. I forget the exact amount of the Freeman Hrabowski award.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: The first five years are $500,000 a year, and the second five years are $600,000 a year.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: Okay. If you were working in a model organism and wanted to do some of the work in mice, or wanted to forge a clinical collaboration, those become possibilities within a 10-year timeframe. When I first wrote my HHMI applications, I explained how the money would make a difference to my program relative to what I was doing at the time and identified the significant new work I would undertake. I was not going to do more of the same with more people. That would be a mistake. You can spell that out in the application.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: I'll add to that. For my research vision, I went back to my original job application and to my promotion to professor. I became an Investigator in 2024, so it was relatively recent. Those materials showed how I had consistently articulated the general research question my lab seeks to answer. I also used some creativity to describe why the question is interesting and what the findings from different stages of my career had unlocked. Because I am a plant biologist, I framed my major discoveries so scientists who are not plant biologists could understand them and appreciate their impact within plant biology and more broadly. I'll echo Neil: I made sure to describe how the money could make a difference.

Scientific Vision and Distinctive Research Directions

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: Great. Thank you. We'll go to the audience questions at the end. If panelists have an answer before then, feel free to type it in the Q&A. Question two is about scientific vision and novel research directions. HHMI looks for investigators who are opening new areas of inquiry. How did you articulate the bold vision driving your research and the major scientific directions that make it distinctive? How is that different from describing an experimental roadmap, such as in an NIH application?

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: I'll take that since mine was more recent. I focused on an analogy that could encapsulate everything. I used a puzzle to establish the umbrella and the different parts that formed the analogy, and I retained that theme throughout the application.

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: That's a great strategy. The follow-up question is to other panelists. If you're communicating in that way, how did you communicate your ambition without sounding overly speculative?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: That goes back to not being too pie-in-the-sky. My application included a relatively short paragraph about my prior work. It was not necessarily bold or transformational, but it anchored the bold and transformational work I was proposing in things I had already done. I am a neuroscientist by training, and all my degrees are in neuroscience, but I framed the work as an integrative systems physiology approach to a neuroscience question. I proposed muscle physiology and systemic physiological analyses rather than focusing only on the neural aspect. I highlighted how questions in the field were siloed between neuroscientists on one side and motor-system researchers on the other, and how I sought to integrate these fields to address my research questions. The successful strategy was not to pigeonhole yourself based on what you have already done, but to show how you will leverage your strengths in a new direction.

Matt Boitano: Also demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of your field. I've reviewed proposals in which an applicant is excited about the work, but the narrative loses sight of how it fits into the larger landscape. Be very sharp in contextualizing the work. If your research fills a gap in the field, why does that gap exist, and why is your lab uniquely positioned to address it? That is an important component.

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: If I may add to Matt's point about why your lab is best positioned to address a particular gap: in my case, one of my interests is best addressed using nonhuman primates, which fills a critical gap in the field. We also have the primate center at UC Davis, so that part of the argument largely wrote itself. The direction was bold because it would require many animals and new, state-of-the-art technologies. However, I was not relying on technologies that were not commercially available, so the proposal did not become unrealistic.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: The big picture is very important: demonstrate your command of the broader field and its context, define the important questions, and make clear how you will make a difference. One issue that has irked Freeman Hrabowski reviewers is applicants failing to cite the contributions of others, even their archrivals. Reviewers appreciate an honest acknowledgment of the field rather than a [unclear], "Look at me; I do everything," presentation. I recently wrote a six-page renewal narrative with 203 citations. That may be a rhetorical example, but it illustrates how citations convey your command and overview of the field, your understanding of where contributions come from, and your position as an important part of that field.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: I'll add one more thing. You have to write significance statements for the manuscripts you select as your most important work. In the main narrative, I described what I had

done and my vision and referred to each study in a few short lines. I then used the significance statement to explain in greater detail why the study was an advance, why it was new, and why it was transformative. That provided extra space to elaborate on those bold discoveries.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: Again, as Siobhan mentioned, you're not writing it for an expert study section. For the [unclear] review panel, it has to be general enough, or at least you have to work into the weeds in a way that everybody could get there and understand broadly why what you're doing is important. Again, it probably goes back to thinking about a job application and appealing to everybody in your department; something at that level is probably a good way to think about it.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: Many papers now include an "in a nutshell" explanation of why the paper is important, followed by a description of the work. That format can guide how you describe what you have done and why it matters. That level of engagement is appropriate for the application.

Funding Overlap: HHMI and Federal Awards

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: I want to ask the HHMI-funded panelists a question we often receive from early-stage investigators: Is there a conflict or overlap with NIH funding? For example, can someone with an R21 apply for HHMI, or can someone with HHMI funding apply for NIH funding? Are there any restrictions?

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: There is no restriction, but writing your HHMI application like an R01 you already have would make no sense. HHMI likes to see federal funding, and investigators are generally expected to maintain federal funding, although the current climate may be an exception. An R01 would represent one part of your broader scientific vision. Write the HHMI application as though you already have the unrestricted money, without being tied to achieving specific aims or renewing the grant in four to five years. They do not generally consider funding conflict at that level. I do not know how they would view four R01s covering all of your research, but I have not heard that issue arise in a review session.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: Now that I have the money, I always keep this in mind: HHMI funds the person, not the project. The projects are your individual grants. As the person being funded, I represent the work that has come from my lab over the last 17 years, so there will naturally be areas of overlap. HHMI allows me to pursue a risky, unconventional idea that would have been over the top for an NSF grant panel. Focus on the person and what that person could contribute with the funding.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: Fernando placed questions in the chat that I want to bring to the main stage. One asked whether reviewers give priority to investigators who list Cell, Nature, or Science. HHMI is moving far away from journal names; we are not allowed to put journal names on our slides. My understanding is that, for renewals, we submit revised preprints, so we are not necessarily judged on the final journal article. Reviewers may value the impact and boldness associated with those papers, but they are blind to whether the work appeared in those journals. Fernando also asked for examples of large conceptual advances. My pitch was that sensory neurons, traditionally viewed as detectors of external or internal cues, are more than detectors or sensors: they drive broader physiological processes. I anchored that proposal in the literature and cited supporting evidence, then proposed pushing the relatively new concept further. I study sensory neurons that detect muscle movement, so my tagline was "more than movement, more than muscle, more than motion detectors."

Scientific Leadership and the Deletion Test

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: Thank you. The next two questions may address more of this. Question three concerns HHMI's interest in investigators who lead their fields and show promise of significant future contributions. This connects directly to the deletion test: Would someone else answer the same scientific questions on a similar timeline if this investigator and their work did not exist? How did you show that you were not merely conducting research in your field, but leading it in a new direction? What evidence demonstrated leadership beyond what reviewers could see in your CV?

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: I pointed to major gaps in the field. For example, uterine stem cells remain largely unknown. I explained why this is a major open question, how it relates to gynecological and obstetrical challenges, and how this highly regenerative organ could provide insight into mammalian-specific regenerative processes. To demonstrate prior scientific leadership, my proposal included a few sentences about my scientific journey. I described my unusual path from biochemistry and biophysics into women's health, an understudied area that I found compelling. I do not know whether that caught the reviewers' attention, but it showed my willingness to enter new areas that need attention.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: That is a trickier question, but the answer becomes apparent from the application, the CV, and the narrative surrounding the CV. Some applicants have developed a technique that makes them stand out and positions them to address specific questions. Tool building is clearly part of many investigators' repertoires, although not mine. The complete package should show that you are doing something special, understand the important questions, and can address them. I cannot prescribe exact wording; it becomes apparent as the application comes together and its sections reinforce one another. If there is no compelling core, the writing cannot manufacture it. It may be too early in your career to apply; perhaps you need to publish the major paper or develop the method first. As a reviewer, you can tell when a person stands out.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: I heard from another Freeman Hrabowski Scholar that HHMI may be looking for one of two archetypes. One is a person working in an established area at the very top of the field. The other is a person doing something no one else is doing, perhaps developing a tool, entering a new research area, or thinking in a new way. You either need to perform established work at an exceptional level or take a genuinely new angle. If you were removed from the applicant pool, there should be a noticeable gap.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: The deletion test was very useful because it helped me formulate why I was different. I tested my explanation with peers both within and beyond my field, including investigators across the United States whom UC Davis colleagues helped me contact. I tried to convince them that I passed the deletion test. When parts of my explanation did not convince them, I revised it repeatedly. That process clarified why I was different and how I had a bold vision. As Theanne noted, I fall into the group that develops new techniques and methodologies. HHMI values fearlessness in doing that, but you must explain how the methods enable you to answer an important biological question that could not previously be answered. You must show why the approaches are bold and how they address that fundamental question.

Inclusive Leadership, Lab Culture, and Institutional Support

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: Since January 2025, we have experienced many changes at the national level. Is HHMI different from NIH regarding topics or words that cannot be used? Is it freer? Many applications

have come back with requests to rescope the language or avoid certain terms. Has that affected HHMI? I am asking so I can provide information to the attendees.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: I am not aware of anything. Inclusive lab leadership, for example, is extremely important. I have heard nothing suggesting that HHMI is avoiding research topics that could be deemed controversial. Although I received this information before January 2025, it may be an advantage to explain why NIH would not immediately fund the proposed work because it is too risky and bold. I do not know whether that relates to particular words or terms.

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: The only change I am aware of concerns HHMI's public-facing communications and may not apply to applications. I remember Leslie Vosshall saying that HHMI was moving away from the specific term "DEI" because of legal implications. The newer terminology follows what Theanne described: inclusive leadership and inclusive mentorship, with a focus on the word "inclusive." I am not sure that this change applies to the application process.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: When applications are reviewed, the review panel is asked to focus on science. Internally, HHMI reviews other components and conducts an initial triage. Although I do not know how that triage works, HHMI scrutinizes contributions to the host organization and what it calls "how you do science." It has conducted climate surveys of our labs and provided reports based on anonymous comments from lab members over the last decade. Those surveys are not currently used to make funding decisions. Part of the purpose may be to protect the institution from lawsuits, and some well-known issues have arisen. I know the surveys identified actionable concerns that required counsel, including reports of racism or sexism. There are two sides: protecting the institution and placing greater importance on the conduct of people HHMI funds. In the past, HHMI could resemble a tough old-boys' network in which people either sank or swam. Now HHMI cares about lab climate, or at least says it does, and we hope that concern is genuine. This is now part of every application, so it is important to do good work and look after your mentees.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: I'll note that this was the 2024 application, and I do not know what the current questions will be. There was a culture-and-climate section with a question such as, "What is your understanding of systemic inequities, and how did you come to this understanding?" I forget the exact language. Applicants were asked to discuss their understanding of equity or its absence within the scientific community. I do not know whether those questions will change in the current application.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: I suspect some questions pointedly about DEI may be going away. In my renewal, I was asked to provide concrete examples of difficult situations with mentees, such as a conflict over authorship, and examples of how I had advised people on their careers. They want actual examples—trainee X or postdoc Y, without naming anyone—rather than a philosophy. I think those types of questions will continue.

Matt Boitano: For example, if you attend a conference with members of your lab and introduce them to a faculty member they want to meet, that is the type of tangible example people can understand.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: The examples do not have to be positive; they can involve difficult situations, but they should demonstrate mentoring skills. HHMI would not expect junior faculty applying for Freeman Hrabowski to have all those skills, and the program helps develop them. Regarding UC Davis resources, Elisa mentioned the primate center. Reviewers need to know that your institution supports you and that the resources required for your science are available. Review panels are also impressed when junior investigators already collaborate with leading people in their field. Such a network signals the investigator's standing and that the pieces are in place. Resources can therefore include local,

national, and international collaborations. HHMI does not frown upon international collaborations in the way the federal government sometimes does.

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: Thank you. I think we've moved on to question five, which is about how the research is done. As panelists have mentioned, this includes inclusive lab leadership. I want to expand on the idea that HHMI evaluates not only what science you do, but how you do it. We've talked about mentoring, recruitment, and culture. I want to ask all the panelists: What was the biggest mindset shift you had to make when moving from an NIH-style application to an HHMI application, particularly when it came to the inclusive-leadership portion—how you do your science?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: The documentation requirements may depend on the mechanism—for example, a T32 may differ from an R01. I want to reiterate that inclusive lab leadership is extremely important for Freeman Hrabowski, although I do not know whether the Investigator Program handles it identically. The first round of triage may occur without reviewing the science; reviewers look at culture-and-climate materials. After that stage, the review is entirely scientific. Applicants must demonstrate inclusive lab leadership and a healthy lab environment. HHMI takes climate surveys seriously, follows up on reported concerns, and may arrange a one-on-one conversation with Leslie Vosshall. Treat this portion of the application with the same seriousness as the mentor statement and training plan in an F31 application. A weak inclusive-leadership or culture-and-climate section can undermine the application just as a weak training plan can.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: For the Investigator Program, I'll emphasize what Theanne said: inclusive lab leadership is critical. In my round, applicants also had to show inclusive service to the broader community. It was gratifying to join my cohort of Investigators and see not only people who did great science, but people who shared a strong commitment to supporting mentees throughout their careers and contributing more broadly.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: One question was almost verbatim: Outside of direct mentorship, how have you contributed to the scientific community and advanced more junior colleagues? It is important.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: Faculty who are told during the merit process that they perform too much service may find that service valued here. Make sure to mention contributions that others may overlook.

High-Risk, High-Impact Science

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: Thank you. In the interest of time, I'm going to move to the last question. HHMI explicitly embraces high-risk, high-impact science. For our faculty panelists, how did you communicate intellectual risk in your application while still convincing reviewers that your vision was achievable? Where is the line between ambitious and unrealistic? Matt and Erica, when you work with a faculty member, how do you advise the investigator to frame risk effectively?

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: There is little risk in NIH grants because you need preliminary data to support them. Distinguishing between two models may be the extent of the risk. An R21 might allow more, although I do not know how many highly risky R21s are funded. The proposed work must still rest on sound logic, including the broad hypothesis and the narrower questions. Discovery components can be included, but nobody wants to fund a completely blind screen, including HHMI. The screen would need to support a larger goal. This is almost the antithesis of an NIH grant, because many people writing NIH grants already know the expected outcome and may have half the data. With HHMI

funding, you do not have to complete everything you proposed. You will probably pursue much of it, but the application presents a broader vision, and circumstances will influence what you can do. During COVID, for example, progress depended partly on who could work in the lab and had the right skills. There are practical limits, but you can follow promising observations. One of our main projects grew from a small observation that we could pursue because we had the flexibility and funding. As Theanne said earlier, too much pie-in-the-sky thinking will not work. The application can, however, present a broad vision of how you think a system works and how you will investigate it.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: I would answer in two ways. First, high risk means a high chance of failure, and you can embrace that. In the application or interview, it is acceptable to say, "This will be extremely difficult. No one else has done it. This is my approach, but it may fail." Second, your academic record will show the risky decisions you made and the ones that succeeded. That record demonstrates your ability to pursue risky, bold, adventurous science.

The HHMI Experience Beyond Funding

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: Beyond the money, how has working with HHMI changed the way you do science?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: Much of this appeared in the chat. The meetings are fantastic, and you can bring at least one—and sometimes two—trainees, making the experience valuable for everyone. The network connects you with scientists outside your field who share creative approaches. It gives you permission to think boldly, while the funding allows you to act on those ideas. HHMI helps you maintain a creative approach to science.

Funding Portfolios and Concurrent Awards

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: Can the panel discuss maintaining overlapping funding from HHMI and an R35/MIRA, R01, or R21? Please describe your funding portfolios.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: It doesn't.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: I had two R01s before I received HHMI funding in 2009, and I have maintained NIH funding continuously since then.

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: So it is possible to maintain multiple funding mechanisms alongside an HHMI award?

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: Absolutely. I think it's probably expected.

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: Could you have an R35 at the same time?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: Definitely. It very much depends upon the stage that you're in. I was kind of on the old end of the eligibility window at the time. They've since expanded it, but still, it was good at the time. I had a K01 and a Sloan, and I believe I had just gotten my R01 right after I submitted my materials. Since being appointed as a Freeman Hrabowski Scholar, I have also received an NSF CAREER Award. There is no restriction. When I was considering an NIH Pioneer Award, an Investigator told me to convert my Freeman Hrabowski application into a Pioneer Award without changing it, because HHMI funds the researcher rather than a specific project, grant, or contract. For

applicants near the later end of the Freeman Hrabowski eligibility window, securing NIH funding can strengthen the application.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: Absolutely. Think of them as accolades and honors and recognition that you're doing great science.

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: That’s amazing. You are all rock stars.

Closing Remarks

Adriane Joo, Ph.D.: We are at the one-hour mark. Thank you to our panelists for sharing your experiences and insights, and to everyone for joining us. I hope today’s discussion clarified what distinguishes an HHMI application and provided a glimpse of the experience. We appreciate your participation and wish prospective applicants the very best. I will provide a transcript. Have a great day.

Workshop Questions and Panel Responses

Eligibility and Application Timing

Eligibility Window and Start Date

For the Freeman Hrabowski eligibility criterion of at most seven years of lab-head experience by 12/5/2026, does the eligibility period begin when an investigator receives an R01?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: No. It is linked to your start date. You do not need an R01 to be eligible.

When to Begin Preparing an Application

Matt, practically speaking, when should investigators begin working with you on an HHMI application, and what should they bring to the first meeting?

Matt Boitano: September 15 is the date when a description of the application components and instructions will be available on the HHMI website. It may make sense for us to meet after you have had a chance to review that information, but I am happy to meet beforehand as well.

Research Vision, Conceptual Impact, and Preliminary Data

Examples of Large Conceptual Advances

Would you be willing to share examples of the large conceptual advances your research or proposal would make?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: My pitch was that sensory neurons, traditionally viewed as detectors of external or internal cues, are more than detectors or sensors: they drive broader physiological processes. I anchored that proposal in the literature and cited supporting evidence, then proposed pushing the relatively new concept further. I study sensory neurons that detect muscle movement, so my tagline was “more than movement, more than muscle, more than motion detectors.”

How Much Preliminary Data to Include

How much preliminary data should you include in the application?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: I had no preliminary data showing that what I was going to do would work, only preliminary data showing that I had the tools and expertise to carry out the work. For example, I proposed in vivo single-unit motor-unit recordings. I had never done those before and did not show evidence that I could. However, I stated that I was working with the creator of the tools for those experiments and noted that the tools were available. That was true for many things in my proposal.

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: I included preliminary data demonstrating that one of the new organoid tools I had developed works and is appropriate for the questions I was proposing to address.

Funding Overlap

Overlap with an NIH MIRA

On the topic of NIH–HHMI overlap, what about a MIRA, which is also a broader-vision type of application?

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: As Siobhan noted, HHMI funds people, not projects. I would not worry about overlap with what you propose in a MIRA. In fact, a current HHMI Investigator told me to take my exact application and transform it into an NIH Pioneer Award.

Neil Hunter, Ph.D.: It is not an issue. The HHMI application should include ideas covered by the MIRA and more.

Publications and Review

Whether Journal Names Affect Review

Do reviewers give priority to investigators who list papers published in Cell, Neuron, Nature, or Science on their CVs?

Matt Boitano: Applicants are required not to mention journal names so the research plan can be judged on its own merits.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: HHMI is moving far away from journal names; we are not allowed to put journal names on our slides. My understanding is that, for renewals, we submit revised preprints, so we are not necessarily judged on the final journal article. Reviewers may value the impact and boldness associated with those papers, but they are blind to whether the work appeared in those journals.

The HHMI Experience and Institutional Resources

Benefits Beyond Funding

Beyond the money, how has working with HHMI changed the way you do science?

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: Becoming a member of the incredible Freeman Hrabowski and broader HHMI communities has been phenomenally educational, inspirational, and helpful. We are also permitted to bring trainees to our required annual meetings, which has been very motivating and exciting for them. The leadership training is also wonderful, including required workshops and optional one-on-one professional coaching, which I have found very useful.

Siobhan M. Brady, Ph.D.: Attending the scientific meetings with a mentee from my lab has been inspirational. It has allowed us to see cutting-edge science and motivated us to try ambitious ideas. I am also excited about the leadership training. I think it will make me a better leader and give my lab more power and agency to do great science.

Theanne Griffith, Ph.D.: I echo everything Elisa and Siobhan said.

Leveraging UC Davis Resources

How did you leverage UC Davis resources in your application?

Elisa Zhang, Ph.D.: In my case, I discussed how UC Davis is unique in having a Primate Center, a medical school, and a veterinary school.

Erica Chédin, Ph.D.: The CNPRC was also recently named the National Biomedical Research Institute. Additional information: https://nbri.ucdavis.edu/