

Continuing Resolutions are Harmful to NIH Research

Although Congress could not agree on funding for many areas in the federal government by the start of the federal fiscal year (October 1), it averted a government shutdown and passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to support funding for the Department of Health and Human Services, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Unlike regular appropriation bills, CRs forgo increases and instead fund the NIH and other government programs at their current level with some additional restrictions.

Steady funding is essential to maintain momentum from previous investments and support the new opportunities for life-saving medical research. CRs disrupt progress and impede new research because NIH must hold back funds, further restricting funding for R01s and new RFAs.

Examples of how CRs disrupt research:

- A Continuing Resolution affects how long the overall submission process is – during a CR, when the NIH doesn't know what its final budget will be, it cannot make funding decisions as efficiently or quickly as they would like, and consequently there are further delays in the overall process before resubmission.
- Under the terms of most CRs, agencies like NIH and NSF have been precluded from awarding new research grants or contracts. Such delays hamper scientific progress by stalling new research activities and necessary administrative tasks, including hiring staff and recruiting study participants. Depending on the length of a CR, scientists may even be forced to rewrite their studies' specific aim. This can have a long-term negative effect on research efforts.
- It takes nearly 9 months on average between submission and funding decision if a grant is funded, but if a grant just missed the cut and the researcher needs to revise and resubmit, this timeframe can be longer. One issue facing the research community, and young scientists in particular, is related to the challenge in keeping their laboratories afloat during the resubmission process.
- For young or at-risk investigators who have limited other sources of funding, they may not have the resources to fund their labs throughout the delay and may be forced to make staffing decisions or drop out of the research pipeline.
- The negative effects of a CR are amplified in the context of the COVID pandemic when research costs are already much higher than anticipated.