

High-profile NIH funding awards go to NIEHS grantees

By Eddy Ball

Four NIEHS grantees are among the 85 winners of 2014 National Institutes of Health (NIH) High Risk-High Reward program awards announced Oct. 6 by NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.

According to the NIH [press release](#)

(<http://www.nih.gov/news/health/oct2014/od-06.htm>)

, the funding awards will support scientists proposing highly innovative approaches to major contemporary challenges in biomedical research. The winners will share approximately \$141 million in grants funded by the NIH Common Fund and multiple NIH institutes, centers, and offices.

“Supporting innovative investigators with the potential to transform scientific fields is a critical element of our mission,” Collins wrote in the press release. “This program allows researchers to propose highly creative research projects across a broad range of biomedical and behavioral research areas that involve inherent risk, but have the potential to lead to dramatic breakthroughs.”

The NIEHS winners

NIEHS grantees include [Donna Spiegelman, Sc.D.](#)

(<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/donna-spiegelman/>)

, of the Harvard School of Public Health, and [Oliver Rando, M.D., Ph.D.](#)

(<http://profiles.umassmed.edu/Profiles/display/129805>)

, of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, who were given Pioneer Awards; [Manish Arora, Ph.D.](#)

(<http://www.mountsinai.org/profiles/manish-arora>)

, of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, who was granted a Young Innovator Award; and [Perry Hystad, Ph.D.](#)

(<http://health.oregonstate.edu/people/hystad-perry>)

, of Oregon State University, who was named an Early Independence Award winner.

- [Comprehensive Translational Science Analytics Tools for the Global Health Agenda](#)

(http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_description.cfm?projectnumber=1DPIES025459-01)

, administered by NIEHS program official Caroline Dilworth, Ph.D. — Spiegelman, who is one of the few people in the world with a joint doctorate in epidemiology and biostatistics, works to advance the field of implementation science — an area of research that seeks to establish, through rigorous quantitative methods, which public health interventions, directed at achieving the same goal, are most effective in the real world.

- [tRNA \[Transfer Ribonucleic Acid\] Fragments as Transgenerational Information Carriers](#)

(http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_description.cfm?projectnumber=1DPIES025458-01)

, administered by NIEHS program official Lisa Chadwick, Ph.D. — Rando, a professor of biochemistry and molecular pharmacology, focuses on one putative carrier of epigenetic information — the nucleoprotein complex



Pioneer Award winner Spiegelman (Photo courtesy of Harvard University)



Pioneer Award winner Rando (Photo courtesy of NIH)



New Innovator Award winner Arora, right, with postdoctoral trainee Christine Austin, Ph.D., in his lab (Photo courtesy of Manish Arora)

known as chromatin — with the eventual goal of determining how chromatin states are established, maintained, and changed over evolution.

- [Reconstructing Fetal Toxicant Exposure and Homeostatic Disruptions](http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_description.cfm?projectnumber=1DP2ESO25453-01)
(http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_description.cfm?projectnumber=1DP2ESO25453-01)

, administered by NIEHS program official David Balshaw, Ph.D. — Arora, who holds a dual appointment in the Mount Sinai departments of preventive medicine and dentistry, conducts research focused on the application of elemental bioimaging methods, to reconstruct prenatal and early childhood metal exposures from deciduous and permanent teeth (see [story](#)).

- [PURE-AIR: A Global Assessment of Air Pollution and Cardiopulmonary Disease](http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_description.cfm?projectnumber=1DP5ODO19850-01)

(http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_description.cfm?projectnumber=1DP5ODO19850-01)

, administered by NIH Common Fund program official Ravi Basavappa, Ph.D. — Hystad, who completed graduate studies in geography and epidemiology, uses spatial exposure assessment methods to determine the chronic health effects associated with exposure to air pollution, including cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and cancer, that differ between populations in different locations.



*Early Independence Award winner Hystad
(Photo courtesy of Perry Hystad)*

The [Pioneer Award](#)

(<http://commonfund.nih.gov/pioneer/>)

, now in its 11th year, challenges investigators at all career levels to develop groundbreaking approaches that could have a significant impact on a broad area of biomedical or behavioral science.

The [New Innovator Award](#)

(<http://commonfund.nih.gov/newinnovator/>)

initiative, established in 2007, supports investigators who are within 10 years of their terminal degree or clinical residency, who have not yet received a research project grant or equivalent NIH grant, to conduct unusually innovative research.

The [Early Independence Award](#)

(<http://commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence/>)

, with the first awards given in 2011, provides an opportunity for exceptional junior scientists who have recently received their doctoral degree or finished medical residency to skip traditional post-doctoral training and move immediately into independent research positions.

The Environmental Factor is produced monthly by the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](#)

(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>)

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(bruskec@niehs.nih.gov)

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