

## **Pilot Intramural Keep the Thread Program for Postdoctoral IRTA/CRTAs Checklist for Discussion Between Fellow, PI, and SD**

The Intramural Keep the Thread Pilot Program offers options for postdoctoral IRTA/CRTA fellows who need to increase flexibility or temporarily reduce effort during periods of increased family responsibility. The goal of this program is to help fellows remain connected to their research and to the NIH community, in order to facilitate reentry into full-time research when ready. The program incorporates a variety of flexible arrangements, to be mutually agreed upon by the fellow and PI, with approval of the SD.

**All parties should discuss and reach agreement on the following possible options:**

- Flexible scheduling options.* Many research projects lend themselves to flexible hours. While full-time fellows are expected to work a minimum of 40 hours per week, they do not necessarily need to work during standard hours (i.e., Monday to Friday, 9 am -5 pm). In cases where the fellow is working independently, alternative work hours may be appropriate.

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- Temporary reduction of effort ( $\geq 40\%$ ).* The NIH manual chapter allows fellows to work part time at their supervisor's discretion. Fellows must work at least 40% time (16 hours per week), and will have their stipends adjusted accordingly. In order to retain full coverage of health benefits, fellows must work a minimum of 80% time (32 hours per week). Fellows working 40-80% time are still eligible for FAES health insurance but must contribute a percentage of health costs equivalent to their percent reduction of effort. After two years, fellows must return to at least 80% effort. Fellows working at least 40% time may stay on the waiting list for NIH child care centers. The 5-year fellowship clock may be prorated for these fellows, at the discretion of the Office of Intramural Research.

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- Fee-for-service options for less than 40% effort.* Fellows choosing to work less than 40% time can be hired, at the PI and SD's discretion, as a contractor on a professional services contract. This contract may not exceed 12 months, and may be subject to other requirements. Fellows converted to contractor status are not eligible for health benefits or for NIH day care centers. The 5-year fellowship clock may be prorated for these fellows, at the discretion of the Office of Intramural Research.

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- Special volunteer status.* For fellows unable to commit substantial effort at this time, special volunteer status should be considered. Fellows converted to special volunteer status will not be paid, but will retain access to the NIH campus, libraries, computers, and on-line resources. They will still be eligible for NIH health insurance, but must pay for it out of pocket, and are eligible for the NIH childcare facilities. Special volunteers with no outside funding may request pausing of the fellowship clock from the Office of Intramural Research. Time on special volunteer status may not exceed one year.

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- Other accommodations.* Consider whether other accommodations would be appropriate for this fellow, such as extension of project timelines. Also indicate whether there will be access to support personnel.

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- Specific expectations.* Clearly outline specific expectations for the fellow during the period of accommodation. It is generally expected that fellows will attend group meetings, keep up with the literature, and participate in mentoring activities and one-on-one meetings with the PI. Other possible expectations include working on manuscript or attending conferences relevant to the research project.

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- Agreement duration.* Determine the appropriate duration for this agreement. This initial duration may be reconsidered at a later date, upon approval of all parties.

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- Changes to the agreement.* While this program aims to be flexible and recognizes that it may be desirable to alter percentage effort over time, administrative requirements dictate that the fellow and mentor notify their Administrative Officer and FAES at least two to four weeks prior to any change in percent effort going into effect.

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- Career counseling.* Taking an extended leave of absence or temporarily reducing effort could have unintended consequences for a fellow's career. Before signing this agreement, fellows should meet with a career counselor at OITE; a follow-up meeting should be scheduled 6 months later.

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- Reentry.* Facilitating reentry is a major goal of the Keep the Thread Program. PIs and SDs should consider creative solutions to meet the needs of the laboratory while preserving the fellow's ability to return to full time work when ready. When possible, the ability to return to a full-time position will be guaranteed for the equivalent of one year's stipend, up to two years maximum. For instance, fellows working 50% time will have their positions held for two years. After that point, fellows must return to 80-100% effort. Fellows converted to special volunteer status will have their positions held for one year. Consistent with standard termination policies, all fellows should be given at least twelve months notice prior to termination.

