The ACADEMY for Radiology & Biomedical Imaging Research
Advancing Innovation in Imaging Science

1001 Connecticut Ave, NW
Suite 601
Washington, DC 20036
p. 202.347.5872
f. 202.347.5876
www.acadrad.org

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February 20, 2025

Dear Academy Board,

I am sharing this article with you as it may be of interest. Clearly, Council meetings are being cancelled, which means grants can not be signed off on. There were some Council meetings cancelled last week including NCI and NHLBI. The next round of council meetings are scheduled for May.

Federal Register Blackout Blocks NIH Funding | MedPage Today

Federal Register Blackout Blocks NIH Funding
— New strategy is like pouring "cement in the pipes of the federal funding infrastructure"
by Cheryl Clark, Contributing Writer, MedPage TodayFebruary 19, 2025
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Scientists around the country fear that an apparent halt of the Federal Register's publication of meeting schedules for research grant reviews is an attempt to evade a judge's order that was supposed to lift the Trump administration's freeze opens on federal research funding.

Pausing Federal Register notice publication means numerous NIH study sections and advisory councils -- panels of subject experts who evaluate each grant application -- can't meet to make decisions on those proposals.

"This is more proof that the Trump administration has essentially poured cement into the pipes of the infrastructure that funds federal grants and contracts," said Steffanie Strathdee, PhD, of the University of California San Diego, who has received numerous large grants from the National Institute on Drug Abuse since 1998.

"The funding freeze is happening in an insidious way, out of public view," Strathdee told *MedPage Today*. "And its effects will be devastating."

A recent message circulating among researchers from an anonymous NIH project officer advised grant applicants that, "As of last week the Federal Register was closed. Meaning, ICs [NIH institutes or centers] cannot register their Councils."

"Usually an IC submits their register at least two weeks in advance and it is public record and council can take place," the note continued. "With no registrations being allowed at the Federal Register this means that no IC is able to file to reschedule or hold their council."

"This closing of the Federal Register was a change from the week before, where it was open, so things are changing very quickly and what is true today might not be by the end of the week. But as I understand it, right now no councils can be registered meaning no councils can take place," the message stated.

According to a report in The Transmitter, a separate unnamed NIH official's email informed a researcher that the order to put Federal Register notices on hold was issued Feb. 7 by an HHS official.

Researchers interviewed by *MedPage Today* said with the Federal Register hold, and with no definitive timeline for resumption, scheduled grants that may have received outstanding scores can't meet their deadlines for hiring personnel, leasing space, or in clinical trials, recruiting study participants.

"It's a way to slow down and obfuscate what's really happening," Strathdee said.
On social media, researchers awaiting federal grant decisions posted their concerns about the-real world impact of the Federal Register notices going dark.

A check of the Federal Register's document listings for the National Institutes of Health under "Recently Published Documents" showed no publications since Jan. 21, 2025. Previously, the frequency of publications was almost daily and included notices about grant reviews.

Jeremy Berg, PhD, former director of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) at the NIH and former editor of *Science Magazine* posted on Bluesky: "Bad news: Several sources have told me that NIH staff are blocked from posting in the Federal Register. While this is true, it will be impossible to schedule new study section and advisory council meetings."

Berg wrote that eight clinical study report (CSR) study section meetings scheduled for Wednesday have been cancelled due to the Federal Register's pause. "Some reviewers are finding out that their meetings are cancelled when they are notified by their travel agency that their tickets are cancelled," he wrote.

Berg added that he has multiple sources saying the order "is not coming from NIH or even HHS, but from the White House, most likely OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and [new OMB director Russell] Vought."

Another post by a neuroscientist stated, "If the block on the Federal Register isn't removed in the next few months, I fear a majority of labs will close within a year. This small procedural wrench has the power to kill U.S. science indefinitely, losing an entire generation of discovery and innovation."

"I also just saw NIGMS council last week was postponed," wrote Jens Schmidt, PhD, a cancer biologist. "Next date on the website is currently in May. Are we going to lose an entire funding cycle?"

Warmest regards,

Renee

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