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Designating Roles in Electronic Applications— PIs, Multiple PIs and Co-Investigators



NIH has received numerous inquiries about how to designate the roles of Principal Investigator, Multiple Principal Investigator, and Co-Investigator on electronic applications. Here is a quick explanation on NIH's approach for designating these roles.

Principal Investigator

The SF424 (R&R) cover component includes a section for the Project Director / Principal Investigator (PD / PI). The information from this section is used to auto-fill other sections of the application including the Senior / Key Person Profile and the R&R Budget forms. The role of PD / PI is automatically set as the default.

Multiple PIs

NIH has chosen the approach recommended by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (published in the [Federal Register](#)) that considers all PD / PIs on a multiple PI application to be equal in terms of responsibility, authority and accountability. Therefore, they should have the same role designation on the application. It was determined that designating one individual as the PD / PI and all others as Co-PD / PIs implied some hierarchy that does necessarily not exist. For this reason, PD / PI is the only role that NIH recognizes for PI status and each of the multiple PIs should use this role. Realizing that some other federal agencies may use Co-PD / PI for their multiple PI implementations (e.g., National Science Foundation), NIH provides a warning message when the Co-PD / PI role is used to let you know that if you meant to designate multiple PIs, you have not used the appropriate role for NIH applications. NIH guidance is to avoid the use of Co-PD / PI entirely for NIH applications to avoid confusion. If you choose to ignore the warning, the Co-PD / PI role is stored but no PI status is provided.

Co-Investigators

NIH views the roles of Co-Investigator and PD / PI as distinct. Although NIH does not give PI status to anyone designated as a Co-Investigator, it is an acceptable project role for NIH while the role of Co-PD / PI is not. Co-Investigator is not a value listed in the role picklist of the Senior / Key Person Profile form. To assign the role of Co-Investigator you must select "Other" for the Project Role field and then insert the appropriate role descriptor of "Co-Investigator" in the Other Project Role Category field. In the R&R detailed budget component the Project Role field is free-form text so you can insert any appropriate role.