

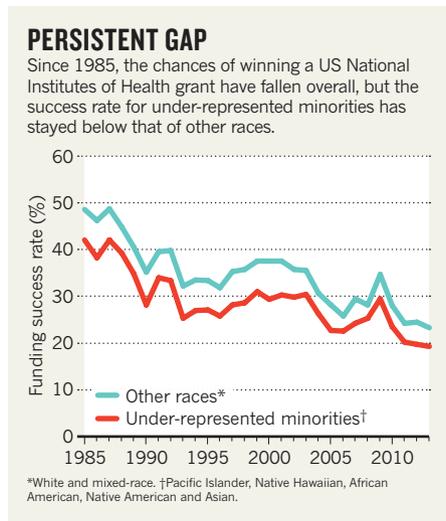
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a US\$19-million initiative announced by the NIH in October 2014 to improve mentorship of scientists from under-represented groups.

But the data offer no clues to such questions, counters Raynard Kington, president of Grinnell College in Iowa and former deputy director of the NIH. “It’s not surprising, not new, and doesn’t answer questions of how we can intervene to give every scientist the opportunity to contribute,” he says. In 2011, he co-authored a paper that found that black applicants for NIH funding were about two-thirds as likely as white people to receive grants during the years 2000–06, even accounting for factors such as publication record and training (D. K. Ginther *et al. Science* **333**, 1015–1019; 2011).

He and others point to evidence that funding can be influenced by personal bias. In February, researchers who analysed nearly 19,000 North American faculty hiring decisions in computer science, business and history reported that elite institutions predominantly hire people who earn their doctorates from the same or other elite schools. One-quarter of the 461 institutions surveyed had trained 71–86% of tenure-track faculty, depending on the discipline (A. Clauset *et al. Sci. Adv.* **1**, e1400005; 2015).

Such studies hold evidence of what biologist Margaret Werner-Washburne of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque calls “positive bias” or in-group bias: the tendency for people



to favour other people and institutions that they know either personally or by reputation.

“I think this happens a lot in the granting world,” she says. “Is it that when you’re on a panel and you have to rate 15 grants from the top people in the field who have really produced a lot, from major schools, you just want to root for them because their skill and potential is so apparent, versus someone who isn’t from that world?”

Cardiologist Hannah Valantine, who became

the NIH’s first chief officer for scientific-workforce diversity in 2014, says that the agency is focused on demonstrating the benefits of diversity and how to achieve it. She adds that in response to Kington’s 2011 paper, the NIH has allocated more than \$500 million to programmes to evaluate how to attract, mentor and retain minority researchers. The agency is also studying biases that might affect peer review, and is interested in gathering data on whether a diverse workforce improves science. Although diversity benefits businesses and individual scientific investigators, it has not been shown to broaden the scope of research, says Valantine.

“We can move forward with a premise that the diversity of scientists themselves is important,” she says. “But it behooves us as scientists to get the evidence that the diversity of scientists makes a difference to the output.” ■ [SEE EDITORIAL P.275](#)

CLARIFICATION

The News story ‘Mega science prize split between more than 1,000 physicists’ (*Nature* **527**, 145; 2015) did not reflect Göran Hansson’s current role in the Nobel system. He is secretary-general of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, the body that awards the Nobel prizes in physics and chemistry.