

STRUCTURAL BIOLOGY

eIF2B-catalyzed nucleotide exchange and phosphoregulation by the integrated stress response

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The integrated stress response (ISR) tunes the rate of protein synthesis. Control is exerted by phosphorylation of the general translation initiation factor eIF2. eIF2 is a guanosine triphosphatase that becomes activated by eIF2B, a two-fold symmetric and heterodecameric complex that functions as eIF2's dedicated nucleotide exchange factor. Phosphorylation converts eIF2 from a substrate into an inhibitor of eIF2B. We report cryo-electron microscopy structures of eIF2 bound to eIF2B in the dephosphorylated state. The structures reveal that the eIF2B decamer is a static platform upon which one or two flexible eIF2 trimers bind and align with eIF2B's bipartite catalytic centers to catalyze nucleotide exchange. Phosphorylation refolds eIF2 α , allowing it to contact eIF2B at a different interface and, we surmise, thereby sequestering it into a nonproductive complex.

Numerous factors regulate translation of the genetic code into proteins, including eukaryotic translation initiation factor 2 (eIF2), a guanosine triphosphatase (GTPase) composed of α , β , and γ subunits. During initiation, eIF2 binds tRNA^{Met} and GTP to form a ternary complex that scans mRNAs for start codons. After start codon detection, eIF2 γ hydrolyzes its GTP and translation initiates. For eIF2 reactivation, guanosine diphosphate (GDP) is replaced by GTP upon catalysis by a dedicated guanine nucleotide exchange factor (GEF), eIF2B.

eIF2 and eIF2B control translation initiation. Stress-responsive kinases phosphorylate eIF2 α at the conserved residue Ser⁵¹, transforming eIF2 from substrate into a competitive GEF inhibitor. Phosphoregulation of eIF2 is known as the integrated stress response (ISR) (1). Once activated, the ISR reduces overall protein synthesis while enhancing translation of a small subset of mRNAs in response to cellular threats, including protein misfolding, infection, inflammation, and starvation (1–3).

eIF2B comprises two copies each of an α , β , γ , δ , and ϵ subunit that assemble into a two-fold

symmetric heterodecamer (4, 5). The eIF2B ϵ subunit contains the enzyme's catalytic center and associates closely with eIF2B γ . Two copies each of the eIF2B β and eIF2B δ subunits form the complex's core, bridged by two eIF2B α subunits across the symmetry interface (4, 6). Genetic and biochemical studies have identified residues responsible for eIF2B's catalytic activity and have suggested how eIF2 binding to eIF2B may differ after eIF2 α Ser⁵¹ phosphorylation (4, 7–10). Yet it has remained unknown how eIF2 recognizes eIF2B, how eIF2B catalyzes nucleotide exchange, or how eIF2 transforms from a substrate to a high-affinity inhibitor of eIF2B after its phosphorylation.

A potent small-molecule, drug-like inhibitor of the integrated stress response, ISRIB, allays the effects of eIF2 α phosphorylation by activating eIF2B (11–13). Upon adding ISRIB, cells undergoing the ISR resume translation (12, 13). When administered to rodents, ISRIB enhances cognition and ameliorates cognitive deficits caused by traumatic brain injury (14) and prion-induced neurodegeneration (15). Furthermore, eIF2B activation rescues cognitive and motor function in mouse models of leukoencephalopathy with vanishing white matter disease (VWMD), a fatal familial disorder associated with mutations spread over all eIF2B subunits (16).

ISRIB bridges the symmetric interface of two eIF2B subcomplexes to enhance the formation of the decameric eIF2B holoenzyme (17, 18), enhancing available GEF activity by promoting higher-order assembly of the eIF2B decamer. However, it has remained an enigma why decameric eIF2B would be more active than its unassembled subcomplexes. To explore this question, we determined structures of eIF2B bound with both its substrate, eIF2 (α,β,γ), and its inhibitor, eIF2 α -P.

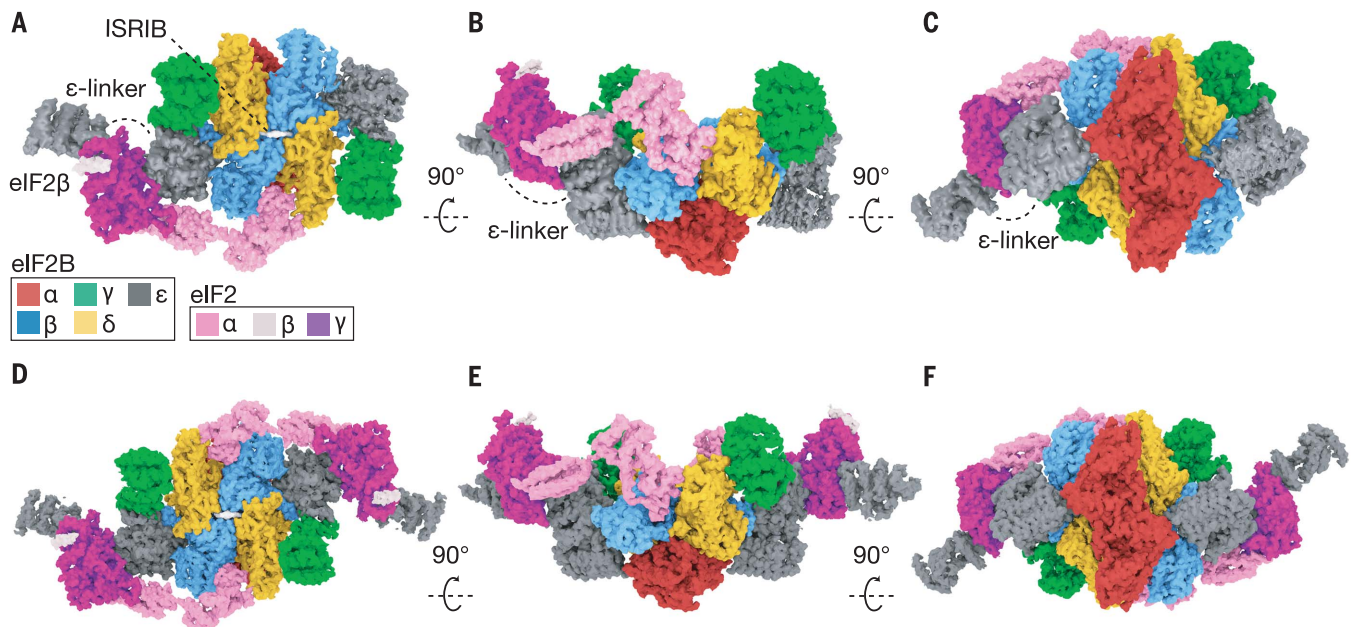


Fig. 1. eIF2B heterodecamer bound to one or two eIF2 heterotrimers. (A to C) Orthogonal views of a single elongated eIF2 heterotrimer bound to ISRIB-stabilized eIF2B decamers. ISRIB density is rendered in white. (D to F) Orthogonal views of a pair of elongated eIF2 heterotrimers bound to ISRIB-stabilized eIF2B decamers. ISRIB density is rendered in white.

We coexpressed all five subunits of human eIF2B in *Escherichia coli* and all three subunits of human eIF2 in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (fig. S1, A and B). The yeast expression strain lacked GCN2, an eIF2 kinase, to ensure expression of homogeneously nonphosphorylated eIF2 (19). We incubated ISRIB and purified eIF2 at concentrations near the Michaelis constant of the nucleotide exchange reaction [$K_m = \sim 1.5 \mu\text{M}$ (17)] and added an inter-amine cross-linker to stabilize complexes before sample vitrification and cryo-electron microscopy (cryo-EM) analysis (fig. S2, A to C). We resolved two structures: eIF2B bound asymmetrically to a single eIF2 trimer and eIF2B bound symmetrically to two eIF2 trimers (Fig. 1, figs. S3A, S4, and S5, and tables S1 to S3).

Snaking across the surface of eIF2B, we observed density consistent in size and shape with eIF2 subunits and the previously unresolved eIF2Be HEAT domain. Comparison with homologous structures of eIF2 α and eIF2 γ revealed that the assembled eIF2•eIF2B complex retained similarity to the structures of these individually analyzed domains (20–22) (Fig. 2 and fig. S6). We resolved only a single helix of eIF2 β (Fig. 1, A and D, and Fig. 2A), consistent with other studies (20, 21). In both reconstructions, all five subunits of eIF2B can be superimposed on previously determined structures lacking eIF2 [root mean square deviation (RMSD) $\approx 0.6 \text{ \AA}$] (17). Thus, eIF2B retained its overall arrangement when bound to one or two eIF2s (Fig. 1), indicating that eIF2 binds via equivalent modes to both sides of a static eIF2B scaffold with no allostery in eIF2B upon eIF2 engagement. This is consistent with noncooperative kinetics reported for nucleotide exchange by eIF2B decamers (17).

Bound to eIF2B, eIF2 adopted an extended 150 \AA conformation (Figs. 1 and 2A) with eIF2's central nucleotide-binding γ subunit flanked by its α and β subunits at its opposing ends. eIF2 γ contains classical GTP-binding motifs, including the nucleobase-binding G4 motif, the phosphate-binding P-loop, and switch helices 1 and 2. eIF2B recognizes eIF2 via coincident binding of both eIF2 α and eIF2 γ . Binding to both eIF2 subunits involves bipartite elements of eIF2B (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, A to C).

First, bipartite recognition of eIF2 γ involves two domains of eIF2Be that function together to splay open the nucleotide-binding site. Our nucleotide-free cryo-EM model is similar to the γ subunit of GTP-bound aIF2 from *Sulfolobus solfataricus* (23) (Fig. 2, D and E; average RMSD $\approx 2.3 \text{ \AA}$). However, surrounding the GTP-binding pocket, the structures diverged considerably, with the P-loop in eIF2B•eIF2 partially occluding the nucleotide-binding site (RMSD $\approx 12 \text{ \AA}$). Prior

work implicated the HEAT domain in catalysis (23–26). In agreement with those findings, eIF2 γ interacts with the HEAT domain, including a partially hydrophobic surface that includes eIF2Be Tyr⁵⁸³ (Fig. 2C). On the opposing side of the nucleotide-binding pocket, the central core of eIF2Be engaged with an open-loop conformation of switch 1. This change appears to be due to

electrostatic interactions between eIF2 γ Arg⁷⁵ in switch 1 and Gln²⁵⁸ and Asp²⁶² in eIF2Be (Fig. 2B). Thus, both eIF2Be's HEAT domain and core collaborate to open the nucleotide-binding site (Fig. 2, B to D).

The second example of bipartite recognition concerns eIF2 α binding in the cleft between eIF2B β and eIF2B δ' (δ' denotes the δ subunit

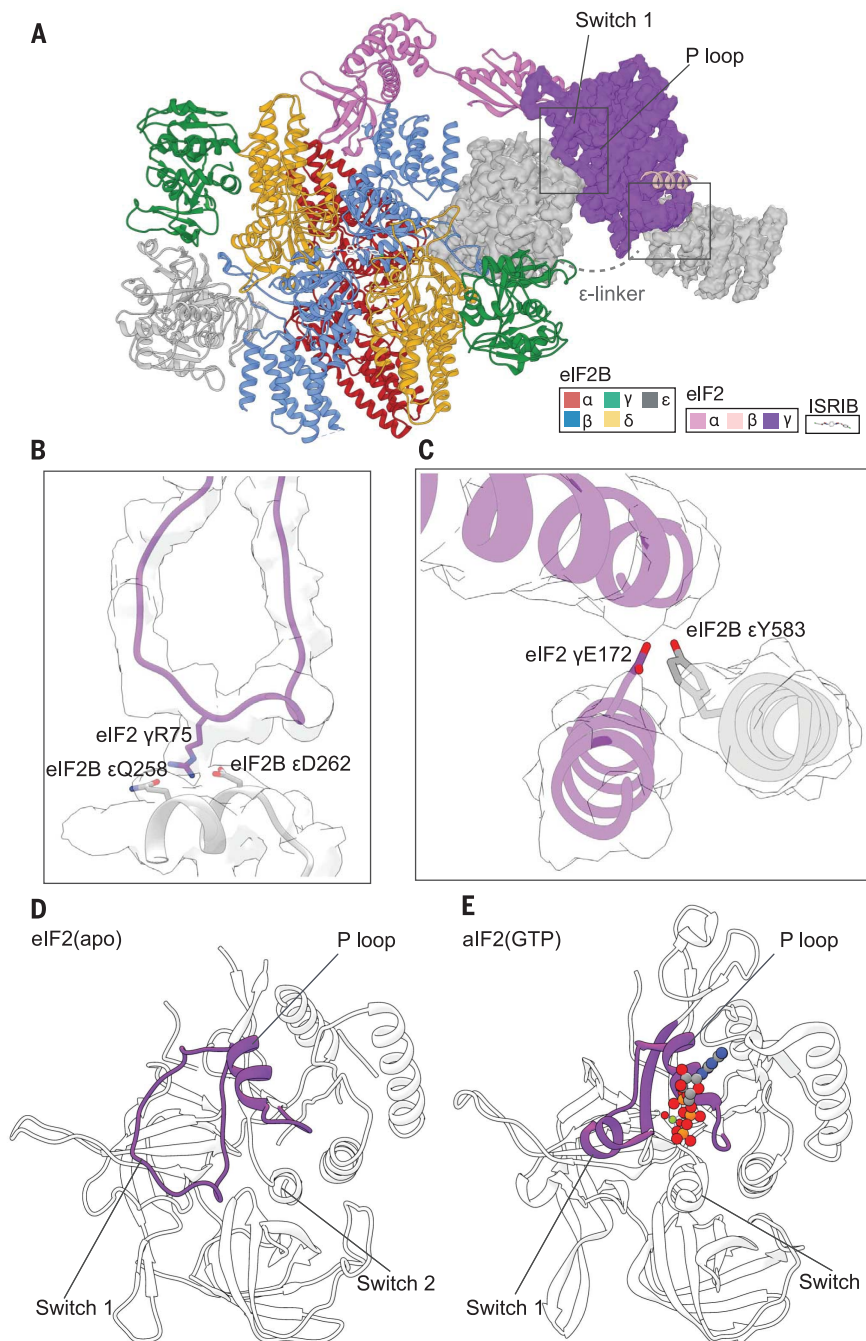


Fig. 2. The bipartite basis of guanine nucleotide exchange by eIF2B. (A) Structural model of a single eIF2 heterotrimer bound to the eIF2B decamer, emphasizing the cryo-EM density for eIF2 γ and its interactions with eIF2Be. (B) Switch 1 of eIF2 γ stabilized as an open loop due to interactions between R75 of eIF2 γ and Q258 and D262 of eIF2Be. (C) Y583 from the HEAT domain of eIF2Be (one helix shown) contacting eIF2 γ E172. (D and E) Comparison of the open, nucleotide-free state of eIF2 reported here (D) and an aIF2 structure bound to GTP (PDB: 4RCY) (E). Amino acid abbreviations: D, Asp; E, Glu; Q, Gln; R, Arg; Y, Tyr.

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Fig. 3. The bipartite basis of eIF2 α recognition and assembly-stimulated activity. (A) Cryo-EM density for eIF2 α bound to the regulatory subcomplex (α , β , δ , or RSC) of eIF2B. (B) Density and zoom-in detail of a cation- π interaction between eIF2B δ and eIF2 α . (C) Polar interactions between eIF2B β and the S-loop of eIF2 α . (D and F) GEF activity of wild-type versus mutated eIF2B ($\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon$) tetramers measured by BODIPY-labeled GDP fluorescence unquenching. (E and G) ISRIB-stabilized eIF2B ($\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon$)₂ octamers measured by BODIPY-labeled GDP fluorescence unquenching. A, Ala; N, Asn.

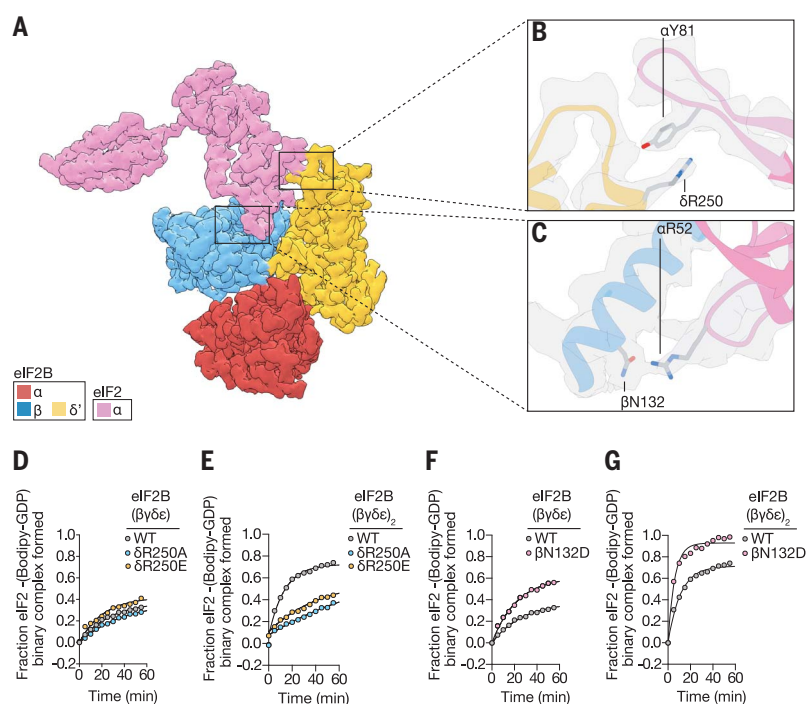
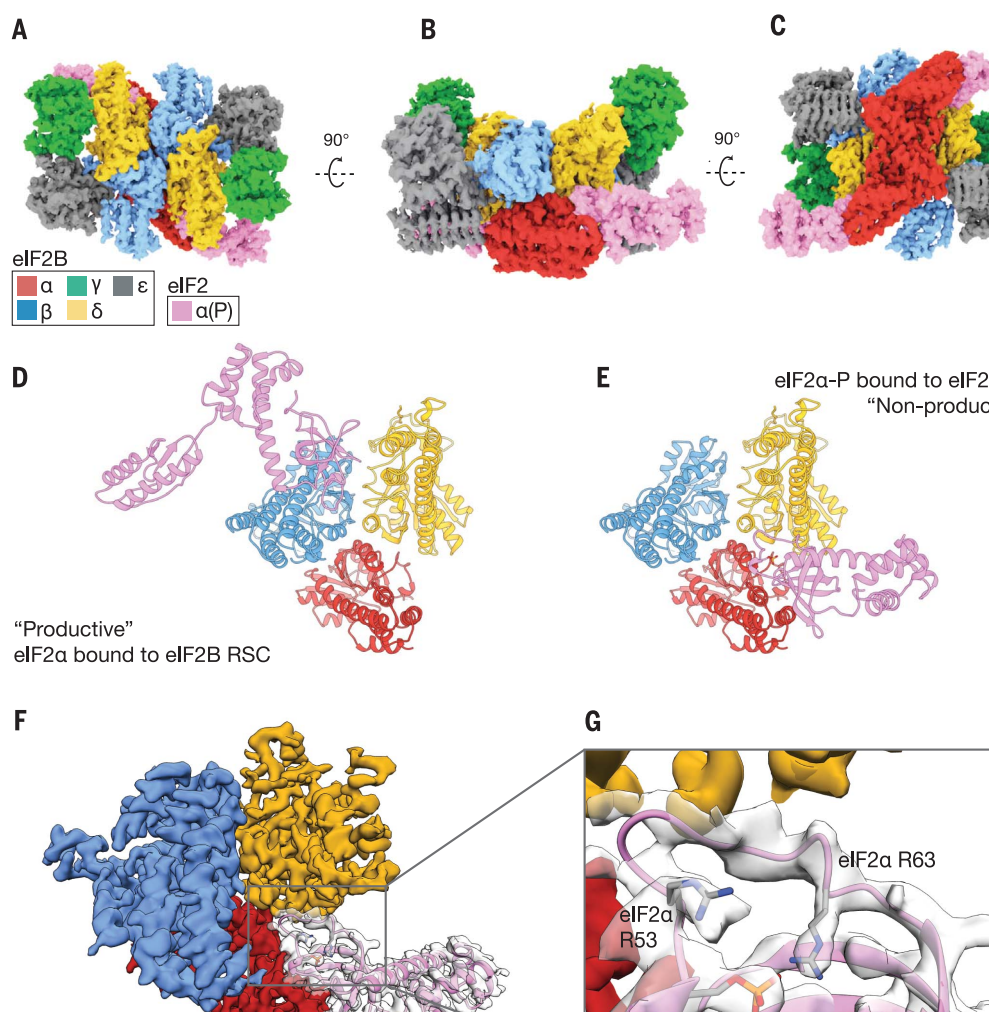


Fig. 4. The structural basis of phosphoregulation by the ISR. (A to C) Orthogonal views of a pair of Ser⁵¹-phosphorylated eIF2 α subunits bound to the eIF2B decamer. (D) The productive binding mode of nonphosphorylated eIF2 α . (E) The nonproductive and nonoverlapping binding mode of phosphorylated eIF2 α . (F) Cryo-EM density of phosphorylated eIF2 α bound to the regulatory subcomplex (α , β , δ) of eIF2B. (G) Zoom-in of the S-Loop cryo-EM density and model, placing the Ser⁵¹ phosphate moiety near eIF2 α Arg⁵³ and Arg⁶³.



from the opposing tetramer) (Figs. 1 to 3). Notably, this binding site only exists when two tetramers of eIF2B ($\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon$) associate to form the symmetry interface in octameric eIF2B ($\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon$)₂. eIF2 α contains two structured domains separated by a flexible linker (Figs. 1 and 2 and fig. S6). The N terminus consists of an OB-fold, common in tRNA-binding proteins (20). The OB-fold is further elaborated with a positively charged loop (the S-loop), while the C-terminal $\alpha\beta$ -fold connects eIF2 α to eIF2 γ . The S-loop harbors Ser⁵¹ and is responsible for all of the resolvable contacts between eIF2 α and eIF2B's β subunit (Fig. 3A). Prior work implicated a conserved "79KGYID⁸³" (Lys⁷⁹-Gly⁸⁰-Tyr⁸¹-Ile⁸²-Asp⁸³) motif in eIF2 α as being important for eIF2B binding (10). Of note, an interaction between Tyr⁸¹ was well resolved adjacent to the equally prominent Arg²⁵⁰ on eIF2B δ' (Fig. 3B). When we mutated Arg²⁵⁰ to either alanine (R250A) or glutamate (R250E), neither mutation affected the residual GEF activity displayed by dissociated tetramers (Fig. 3D; R250A $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.013 \text{ min}^{-1}$, R250E $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.023 \text{ min}^{-1}$, wild-type $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.016 \text{ min}^{-1}$), whereas both mutants diminished the GEF activity of the ISRIB-stabilized eIF2B octamer when compared to the wild type (Fig. 3E; R250A $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.012 \text{ min}^{-1}$, R250E $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.017 \text{ min}^{-1}$, wild-type $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.063 \text{ min}^{-1}$). This is consistent with the notion that unphosphorylated eIF2 α interacts with the trans tetramer only upon assembly of octameric or decameric eIF2B across its symmetry interface.

On the cis tetramer, eIF2 α 's positively charged S-loop binds negatively charged and polar residues along the exposed surface of eIF2B β . This binding site is consistent with yeast studies suggesting that mutations in this site compromise eIF2 binding (7). Examination of the structure identified a potential hydrogen bond between eIF2B β Asn¹³² and eIF2 α Arg⁵² (Fig. 3C). We substituted Asn¹³² with aspartate (N132D), anticipating that the introduced charge complementarity would enhance binding to eIF2 α Arg⁵². When compared to wild-type eIF2B tetramers, eIF2B- β N132D tetramers and ISRIB-stabilized octamers indeed proved to be gain-of-function mutations, exhibiting enhanced GEF activity by a factor of ~ 2 [Fig. 3, F and G, and fig. S1D; eIF2B ($\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon$) β N132D $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.044 \text{ min}^{-1}$, eIF2B ($\beta\gamma\delta\epsilon$)₂ β N132D $k_{\text{obs}} = 0.169 \text{ min}^{-1}$]. This is consistent with eIF2B tetramers possessing reduced activity relative to assembled octameric or decameric holo-eIF2B. eIF2 α binding in the cleft between tetramers further supports the notion that ISRIB enhances eIF2B's GEF activity by promoting higher-order assembly.

To understand how eIF2 α phosphorylation on Ser⁵¹ transforms eIF2 from substrate to inhibitor, we coexpressed the isolated eIF2 α subunit in *E. coli* with the kinase domain of PERK (double-stranded RNA-activated protein kinase-like ER kinase), an eIF2 kinase (fig. S1C). We incubated preassembled eIF2B decamers with an excess of eIF2 α -P, followed by cross-linking and vitrification. Reconstruction of the eIF2B decamer adorned with two copies of eIF2 α -P (Fig. 4A, figs. S7 and

S8, and tables S1 to S3) revealed eIF2 α -P bridging the interface between eIF2B δ and eIF2B α (Fig. 4A). Intriguingly, we observed no overlap between the binding sites of nonphosphorylated eIF2 α described above and eIF2 α -P (Fig. 4, B and C).

Density for both eIF2 α Ser⁵¹-P and two arginines positioned $\sim 4 \text{ \AA}$ away, eIF2 α Arg⁵³ and Arg⁶³, were well resolved and suggestive of an electrostatic coordination responsible for phosphorylation-induced refolding of the S-loop (Fig. 4, F and G, fig. S8, and movie S1), as initially observed by Kashiwagi *et al.* (27). The phosphorylation-induced rearrangement also positions hydrophobic residues on eIF2 α for potential interactions with hydrophobic residues on eIF2B (including eIF2 α Ile⁵⁵, Ile⁵⁸, and Leu⁶¹ and eIF2B δ Leu³¹⁴, Ala³¹⁵, Ala³¹⁸, and Phe³²²).

This structural model agrees with analyses in yeast and mammalian systems. eIF2B α is dispensable for viability in yeast, yet eIF2B α deletion impairs phospho-inhibition of eIF2B, consistent with the subunit's role in binding eIF2 α -P (28). Point mutations with identical phenotypes cluster at the interface between eIF2B α and eIF2B δ (e.g., eIF2B α Phe²³⁹ and eIF2B δ Met⁵⁰⁶ and Pro⁵⁰⁸) (29, 30). eIF2B δ Leu³¹⁴ complements the hydrophobic surface of the eIF2 α S-loop that is exposed upon refolding, and mutation of Leu to Gln at the equivalent position in *S. cerevisiae*, L381Q, impairs the ISR in yeast (29). These data validate the phosphorylation-induced refolding and relocation of eIF2 α -P observed here.

Our analyses reveal the mechanistic basis of eIF2B's nucleotide exchange activity and suggest how phosphorylation converts eIF2 from substrate to inhibitor. The nonphosphorylated form of eIF2 binds to a composite surface created only in the assembled decamer, allowing both the core and the flexibly attached HEAT domain of eIF2B ϵ to engage its target in concert for enhanced GEF activity.

By contrast, eIF2 α -P adopts a new conformation and suggests how the S-loop may become incompatible for binding to the site where nonphosphorylated eIF2 binds as a substrate (movie S1). Phosphorylation thus enables a distinct binding mode on the opposite side of eIF2B where eIF2 α -P lies exiled at the interface of eIF2B α and eIF2B δ . In eIF2 α -P, the rearrangement of the S-loop derives from an intramolecular electrostatic interaction between Arg⁶³ and Arg⁵³ and the phosphate, which also exposes a hydrophobic surface upon phosphorylation-induced refolding. We surmise that this new binding mode is nonproductive for nucleotide exchange on eIF2-P and sequesters the catalytic domains into an inhibited state that prevents the catalytic moieties of eIF2B ϵ from properly engaging in productive nucleotide exchange.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

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Materials and Methods
Figs. S1 to S7
Tables S1 to S3
Movie S1
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eIF2B-catalyzed nucleotide exchange and phosphoregulation by the integrated stress response

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Integrated stress response on the brain

During translation, regulation of protein synthesis by phosphorylation of eukaryotic translation initiation factor 2 (eIF2) is a common consequence of diverse stress stimuli, which leads to reprogramming of gene expression. This process, known as the integrated stress response, is one of the most fundamental mechanisms of translational control conserved throughout eukaryotes. It is also a promising therapeutic target in neurodegenerative diseases and traumatic brain injury. Kashiwagi *et al.* report the cryo-electron microscopy and crystal structures and Kenner *et al.* report the cryo-electron microscopy structure of the guanine nucleotide exchange factor eIF2B in complex with eIF2 or phosphorylated eIF2. The structures of the eIF2 • eIF2B complex reveal that the single phosphorylation modification on eIF2 changes how eIF2 binds to eIF2B and locks this enzyme into an inhibited complex.

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