Promoting Health Equity by Including Underrepresented Participants in Research

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

**PLEASE NOTE:** Two required steps before applying in response to this RFA are to submit a 250-word abstract outlining the proposed project and have a consultation with faculty from CHER and/or TraCS’ Integrating Special Populations (ISP) program. See details in Section III, below.

The UNC Center for Health Equity Research (CHER) and the NC TraCS Institute’s Integrating Special Populations (ISP) component are pleased to jointly sponsor this special call for pilot project applications. CHER is committed to health equity, innovation and translational research, and ISP, a new component of TraCS, is dedicated to increasing the participation of under-represented groups in research.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the pilot program is to facilitate research that promotes health equity for groups who have traditionally been under-represented in health research or excluded altogether (e.g., people who live in rural areas, populations with low socioeconomic status, people with disabilities, adolescents, older adults, the LGBTQ community, African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos).

The pilot program is open to all UNC-Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) investigators and investigators at NC TraCS partner institutions: RTI, North Carolina A&T State University, and NC State. We are seeking projects that can be completed within 12 months and have strong potential to inform subsequent grant applications to the NIH or other funding agencies.

II. AREAS OF RESEARCH FOCUS

Applications must focus on one of the following populations: African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, adolescents, older adults, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, rural populations, or populations with low socioeconomic status. Examples of the types of projects appropriate for this special RFA include, but are not limited to:

- Projects that address health disparities in one or more of the populations listed above
- Projects that demonstrate use of tools to enhance ethically-informed participation of under-represented research participants
- Testing and evaluation of existing resources designed for recruiting and retaining under-represented populations
- Methods and strategies for increasing the inclusion of under-represented populations in research
- Use of mobile and web-based tools for research participation
• Pilot strategies for recruiting under-represented populations through the Carolina Data Warehouse
• Projects that explicitly address barriers to research participation
• Development and testing of novel tools, materials, etc. to improve diverse recruitment
• Developing and testing tailored messaging to improve research participation
• Developing, testing, and disseminating interventions to achieve health and healthcare equity in one or more of the populations listed above

III. ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

• UNC-CH, NC A&T, RTI, and NC State researchers whose appointments allow them to serve as PI on externally sponsored research projects are eligible to apply as PI of a pilot grant. This generally means permanent faculty (not adjunct appointments) and includes those with non-faculty appointments like “research scientist” and investigators from research institutes and centers who are eligible to apply for R01-level funding. A PI from outside UNC-CH must have a UNC-CH faculty collaborator involved in the project.
• Applications may have multiple PIs (“co-PIs”) although one PI must be identified as the main contact PI, with primary responsibility for the administrative aspects of the pilot award.
• Post-doctoral fellows, research associates, and physician residents are not eligible to apply.
• Priority will be given to new investigators who have not yet been the lead investigator on a federally funded independent (R01-level) research project. It is expected that the new investigator will be PI for the external grant to follow.
• All applicants must complete a consultation with a faculty expert from CHER and/or TraCS ISP prior to submitting their application. Request for a coordinated consultation can be made by sending an email with a project abstract (250 words) to Abigail Haydon, ISP Program Manager at NC TraCS (ahaydon@med.unc.edu).

IV. AVAILABLE FUNDING

The CHER pilot program and the NC TraCS Institute’s ISP pilot program have combined their pilot funding to offer 2-4 awards at up to $50k each. All funds must be expended within one year of the project start date.

V. DEADLINES

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<tr>
<td>RFA Released</td>
<td>February 15, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete required consultation</td>
<td>Between February 19 – April 30, 2018</td>
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<td>(with 250 word abstract) with CHER</td>
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<td>and TraCS ISP</td>
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<td>Proposals Due</td>
<td>June 12, 2018</td>
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<td>Award Decision</td>
<td>By September 1, 2018</td>
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<td>Mid-term Progress Report (instructions</td>
<td>6 months after grant begins</td>
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<td>to follow)</td>
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<td>Final Progress Report</td>
<td>1 month after grant period completed</td>
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VI. REVIEW CRITERIA

The primary review criterion is that the pilot work has the potential to lead directly to a fundable external proposal for disparities research, to be written and led by the pilot study PI and submitted to NIH, CDC, or other comparable federal agency within a year following completion of the pilot project.
Pilot proposals that are not part of a longer-term vision for a specific research effort will not be considered responsive to this funding call. The research effort (meaning, the pilot project and the full research proposal to follow) must be designed to generate new knowledge relevant to translation of disparities research to clinical or community settings. Therefore, pilot projects are intended to generate preliminary data to provide proof of concept and/or address issues of feasibility for a planned larger research proposal. Preliminary data are not required for the pilot proposal but some specific evidence that the work has merit scientifically and that the proposed effort is feasible within the timeframe and funding level of the pilot program is required. It is strongly encouraged that the pilot proposal includes specific plans regarding the proposal for federal funding following the pilot work. The pilot project can target primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention or clinical care, and can use whatever study design is appropriate to address the aims of the project.

The following review criteria will be considered:

1. Relevance of the proposed study to disparity populations
2. Significance of the work
3. Novelty/innovation of the research idea
4. Soundness of the proposed methods
5. Feasibility of accomplishing the stated project goals within the 12-month study period
6. Potential for the project to lead to future external funding
7. PI status as a new investigator

VII. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

NC TraCS very strongly recommends involving a biostatistician in the application development process. The online application form will ask for the name of the biostatistician who consulted on the proposal.

For investigators without access to a biostatistician through their Department or Center, biostatistical support can be obtained through the NC TraCS Biostatistics Service by completing a “Request a Consult” form.

Proposals are due by 5:00 p.m. on June 12, 2018 must be submitted using the NC TraCS online system called Foundant.

- Go to this website and click on “Create New User” (or log in if you already have an account). Proposals must be submitted under the Principal Investigator’s name.
- The online application system is very intuitive. However, a step-by-step user’s guide is also available. Click here to see the video.
- Select the “CHER/ISP Joint Pilot” funding opportunity and follow the instructions.

Application sections (except the Abstract) will be uploaded as individual PDF files.

The application sections are:

1. **Scientific Abstract:** A summary of the application for use by NC TraCS (250 word maximum; this may differ from the abstract submitted with the consultation request).
2. **Research Plan:** The Research Plan should include Specific Aims, Significance, Innovation, and Approach. Include where applicable clear evidence of how the application meets the review criteria. 1.5 line spacing, font Arial 11 pt., and 1-inch margins all around. (5 page limit, including tables and figures. References do not count towards the page limit.)
3. **Cited References** (no page limit)

4. **Budget**: Use PHS 398 Form Page 4 (see Section VIII “Budget Guidelines” below for more details). The total budget should not exceed $50,000. If funds are to be spent at more than 1 institution, separate budget forms should be submitted for each institution.

5. **Budget Justification**: Include sufficient detail for reviewers to assess whether appropriate resources have been requested (see “Budget Guidelines” below; no page limit).

6. **Timeline** covering the 12-month funding period.

7. **Human and/or Animal Subjects**: Although Institutional Review Board (IRB) and/or Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC) approval is not required at time of submission, the application should briefly describe any human and/or animal subject issues.

8. **NIH Biosketches** for the key members of the research team.

9. **Letters of Collaboration** (if applicable): Letters of Collaboration may be included if they clearly state a commitment of resources required for the project’s success. Generic or non-specific letters of support are not required or encouraged. (No page limit)

10. **NIH Summary Statement** (if applicable): Applications that reference an external grant review relevant to the research should include the complete grant Summary Statement.

*NOTE: the online system can accommodate one pdf document in the “Letters of Collaboration” section, so if there are multiple letters they must be combined into one pdf document before uploading.

After submitting the application, applicants will receive an email confirmation that the application was received. Applicants will be notified by email within 12 weeks of the deadline whether their application has been selected for funding.

**VIII. BUDGET GUIDELINES**

- The pilot grant budget covers expenditures for a 12-month period. The budget period will begin when applicable IRB/IACUC documentation is provided to NC TraCS and the PI indicates everything is in place for the project to begin. If the PI is not ready to start within 4 months of notification of funding, NC TraCS/CHER reserves the right to withdraw the award. At the end of the 12-month project period, any unexpended funds will be retained by NC TraCS/CHER.
- A detailed budget and justification using PHS 398 Form Page 4 must be provided using the standard NIH expense categories. Award funds may be used for data collection, research staff, mailing of surveys, analyses of any type, interventions, or for other resources necessary to complete the project. Applicants are encouraged to include NC TraCS services in these budgets where appropriate.
- Award funds may not be budgeted for the following: university overhead, clinical patient care, purchase of computer hardware or office supplies, or investigator travel to conferences or meetings (project implementation travel is permitted).
- Funds may not be used for UNC-CH faculty salary support, but requests from researchers at NC TraCS academic partnering institutions for such support will be considered. Researchers at partnering institutions should communicate with the NC TraCS liaison at their institution regarding local policies.
- All elements of the budget will be carefully reviewed; justifications should provide adequate information for this review, particularly for any single item that consumes 50% or more of the total budget.
IX. OTHER GUIDELINES

- Prior to receiving funds, research involving human subjects must have appropriate approvals from the UNC-CH IRB, and research involving animals must have the appropriate IACUC approval. Either an IRB approval letter or an IRB response to a “Determination Whether Research or Similar Activities Require IRB Approval” must be submitted to NC TraCS. Human subjects or animal research must be reviewed in accordance with the university’s general assurances and HIPAA. In addition, if the research involves human subjects, all personnel named on the budget page must have certification of training in the protection of human subjects prior to the start of the grant period.

- The NC TraCS Institute is funded through a CTSA grant from NIH’s National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). NCATS requires that they review and approve all NC TraCS pilot grants involving human subjects research prior to funds being released. If your application is funded and involves human subjects research, NC TraCS will require additional documentation to send to NCATS. NCATS generally completes their review in 21 days or less. The NCATS review can occur concurrently with IRB review but final NCATS approval is contingent upon IRB approval.

- NC TraCS staff will work closely with funded projects throughout the grant period to monitor progress and provide assistance where necessary. A 6-month interim progress report and a final progress report are required. NC TraCS expects the PI to report the outcomes achieved due to the pilot award over the lifetime of the work, e.g., subsequent external funding, publications, presentations and patents, and to acknowledge NC TraCS research support where appropriate.

- If an awardee leaves their position, they should contact NC TraCS to initiate close-out procedures.