



FORGE AHEAD CENTER | Achieving Health Equity Across the Deep South

Pilot and Feasibility Scholars Program Special Emphasis – HIV Specific Request for Applications

2023-24 Program Overview and Letter of Intent Instructions

Program Overview

The [Forge AHEAD \(Achieving Health Equity Across the Deep South\) Center](#) encourages research focused on issues of health equity to understand and address contextual factors and social determinants of health that contribute to regional health disparities in cardiometabolic disease and other chronic conditions. The Center has established a rigorous Pilot and Feasibility Scholars Program to prepare and mentor investigators to develop innovative health equity research that applies a precision public health approach (i.e., translational community and clinical programs that provide the right treatment to the right population at the right time).

Funding for this special emphasis round is available for up to 3 pilot awards focused specifically on health equity issues related to HIV and cardiometabolic disease, ranging from prevention efforts to projects involving people living with HIV. The pilot and feasibility program will provide seed support for research projects focused on stakeholder-engaged intervention development, clinical outcomes, implementation and dissemination (T3) and outcomes and effectiveness in populations (T4). Projects focused on other topics in the earlier end of the translational research spectrum (e.g., basic science through early testing in humans) are not responsive to this RFA and will not be reviewed. *If you are unsure whether your research fits within the mission of this RFA, please contact Dr. Trudi Horton (trudihorton@uabmc.edu) prior to submitting your application.*

Forge AHEAD Scholars are provided a mentoring team upon selection into the pilot program, given opportunities to disseminate study results to the scientific and local communities, and offered strategies and assistance to advance the pilot studies to competitive grant applications. Scholars participate in regular training programs designed to foster their career development, complement the execution of pilot research, and engage and network with peers.

Key Dates

Letter of Intent Earliest Submission Date:	October 4, 2023
Letter of Intent Due Date:	October 25, 2023
Invitation for Full Application:	November 13, 2023
Full Application Due Date (by invitation only):	February 1, 2024
Scientific Merit Review:	February 2024
Notification of Awards	March 2024
Earliest Start Date:	May 1, 2024



Eligibility

Funding will be available to early-stage investigators at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Tuskegee University, the University of Mississippi Medical Center, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, or any of the institutions affiliated with the Center for Clinical and Translational Science (CCTS) Partner Network (<https://www.uab.edu/ccts/partnerships/partner-network>). Early-stage investigators are defined as post-doctoral fellows, Instructors, Assistant Professors or Associate Professors who have not been a principal investigator on an independent NIH grant (R01 level grants or equivalent). Applications from historically black colleges and universities in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana and from individuals traditionally underrepresented in biomedical research (<https://diversity.nih.gov/about-us/population-underrepresented>) are strongly encouraged.

Funding

Up to 3 projects will be funded for up to \$50,000 each for one year. A second year of funding can be requested on a competitive basis (investigators applying for a second year of funding will compete against new proposals in that cycle). Investigators proposing innovative high-risk, high-reward projects requiring a larger budget (up to \$100,000) are encouraged to partner with existing pilot programs from institutional centers linked to cardiometabolic disease and/or HIV at one of the four main academic centers to provide appropriate matching funds.

Review Process

This program utilizes a two-stage process. Letters of intent will be scored using an NIH 1-9 scale by individuals from the Center's Scientific Review Committee and Community Advisory Board. It is anticipated that about half of the submitted letters of intent will then be invited to submit full proposals.

Letter of Intent Instructions

Letters of Intent will be submitted as a single PDF containing the following:

- a. A one-page summary including the project title, name and contact information of the PI(s), names of other key personnel, participating institutions and/or non-academic community partners, and declaration of eligibility explaining how the PI(s) meets the eligibility criteria for this funding mechanism.
- b. A two-page research statement that includes the specific aims, background, research design and methods; whether this research relates to Translation to Practice (T3) or Community (T4) focus areas; and the potential impact of the research on the reduction of cardiometabolic disease in the region. As applicable, identify any outreach or partnerships with community stakeholders that are part of project planning and/or implementation. References are required but will not count towards the two-page limit.
- c. A one-page statement on how the project addresses a Center theme area (disparities in HIV, obesity, diabetes, hypertension) and how it will acknowledge key contextual factors and social determinants of health. Applications proposing research related to other chronic diseases (e.g., cancer, kidney disease) should clearly delineate how the research is thematically linked to disparities in HIV and cardiometabolic disease. Applications focused on individuals living with HIV should clearly delineate this in this section.



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- d. A lay summary limited to 1 page that includes the primary goal(s), significance/potential impact, innovation and approach to facilitate review by members of the Forge AHEAD Center Community Advisory Board. In this section, applicants should also describe any community engagement research strategies, including but not limited to community partners, recruitment, retention, and dissemination, as well as community impact components of their proposed project.
- e. Current NIH biosketch of the applicant and the applicant's proposed mentor.

Please submit all documents in a single PDF file via the RED-ASSIST platform [here](#) by 5:00 pm CT on October 25, 2023. Applicants will be notified of the decision on letters of intent the week of November 13, 2023. Please address any questions about the program or timeline to Dr. Horton at trudihorton@uabmc.edu.