Call for Letters of Intent: NCI's Global Oncology Research Leadership Training Award

Submissions of Letters of Intent are due no later than May 30, 2023
Grants of up to $200,000 will be awarded to Low- and Middle-Income Country (LMIC) institutions/organizations as defined by World Bank*.

Overview

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) intents to fund research institutions based in LMICs to develop and implement contextualized educational activities (courses and mentoring) to cultivate professional skills integral to fostering successful research careers in LMICs. NCI is currently soliciting Letters of Intent from eligible LMIC institutions/organizations. A small number of full proposals will be invited from submissions received in response to this Call. Grant amounts are expected to be up to $200,000 in total costs to support projects over a two-year period. Successful Letters of Intent will offer a clear vision to bolster professional competencies of investigators in LMICs so that they are well equipped to initiate and lead research in their local institutions.

Background

GLOBOCAN 2020 projects that by 2040, nearly 70% of all cancer deaths will occur in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) as defined by the World Bank*. Stemming the growing burden of cancer burden in LMICs requires strategic and sustainable local research to generate knowledge and an evidence base to inform strategies specific for cancer control in LMICs. To this end, there is a recognized and urgent need to strengthen the capacity for investigators and institutions in LMICs to set cancer control priorities and lead innovative and impactful research in their home countries. Such leadership is key to not only ensuring local relevance and ownership of the research work, but also to fostering equity in scientific collaborations in LMICs. Investigators and institutions in LMICs are well positioned for research leadership as they understand best the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts, and the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities for local cancer control.

Over the past few decades, there has been increased emphasis on strengthening technical research knowledge and skills of investigators in LMICs. Many of the research training programs have focused primarily on cultivating technical research skills including, but not limited to, research design, research methods, and analytic techniques. These technical research skills are aimed at enhancing trainees' ability to conceptualize, analyze, and address cancer research questions. However, alongside the technical research skills, investigators need to develop professional skills which are foundational to effective and transformative research leadership. The professional skills include competencies in grantsmanship, scientific writing, communication and dissemination of scientific information, teamwork and networking, time management and career planning, mediation/negotiation, leadership and mentoring, policy engagement, and community engagement, among others. For a successful and sustainable academic research career, investigators in LMIC will need opportunities to develop these professional skills. Presently, many of the research training programs in LMICs do not offer adequate professional skill development as part of their curricula. To bridge this gap, the National Cancer Institute's Center for Global Health (NCI-CGH), in partnership with CRDF

Global, launches the NCI Global Oncology Research Leadership Training Award. This funding opportunity will support LMIC institutions to develop and implement educational activities (courses and mentoring) that primarily focus on cultivating professional competence among LMIC investigators.

NCI-CGH supports the NCI mission by advancing global cancer research and coordinating NCI engagement in global cancer control, with a primary focus on LMICs. NCI-CGH contributes to the overall expansion of research capacity in LMICs, in part, by issuing funding opportunities to support cancer research training that enables equitable, impactful global scientific collaboration.

Purpose and Scope

The NCI Global Oncology Research Leadership Training Award will be granted to research institutions based in LMICs to develop and implement contextualized educational activities (courses and mentoring) to cultivate professional skills integral to fostering successful research careers in LMICs. The overall goal of this initiative is to bolster professional competencies of investigators in LMICs so that they are well equipped to initiate and lead research in their local institutions. Professional skills are intended to complement scholars' technical research skills, and therefore scholars who have technical research foundation will benefit most from this initiative. To accomplish the overarching stated goal, this award will support creative and innovative educational activities that comprise:

Courses for professional skill development:

This initiative is intended to cultivate a broad range of professional skills needed to prime individuals for success in cancer research. Therefore, the educational program will comprise several courses to develop varied professional competencies. The specific areas of emphasis will be determined and tailored to meet the unique needs of the program scholars. Applicants should describe in detail the courses and training resources focused on developing competencies in various areas including, but not limited to:

- Grantsmanship and technical expertise in grant and scientific writing to compete successfully for research funding
- Technical and non-technical writing and communication to increase presence in scientific literature and disseminate research findings beyond scientific audiences, including to policymakers and community
- Strategies to establish and maintain effectual scientific collaborations and stakeholder partnerships, including teamwork, networking, mediation/negotiation
- Strategies for effective research leadership including time management, career planning, mentoring the next generation of investigators
- Strategies of effective policy engagement, community engagement to impact policy change to improve health outcomes
- Responsible conduct of research including ethics, equity, diversity

Mentoring and experiential learning:

The education programs will include mentored and practical learning experiences to afford scholars the opportunity to not only 'learn by doing' under the mentorship/couching of experienced researchers, but also to practice their newly acquired skills in their local contexts/settings. These opportunities will include, but are not limited to:

- Simulation of grant writing, application and review processes that provide an in-depth, hands-on experience of the grant process.
- Practical coaching to assist and enhance scholars' skills to successfully identify, prepare, submit, and obtain grants and increase their awareness of career development and professional enhancement opportunities.
- Practical scientific writing and presentation of scientific information to varied audiences including at academic conferences, local ministries or other policy makers/funders, and community.
- Practical mentor-mentee communication strategies to encourage the establishment and maintenance of strong mentoring relationships (i.e., aligning expectations, fostering independence, assessing needs, active listening, and the provision of constructive feedback).

The educational program will employ context-appropriate training models embracing new educational models including adaptive and flexible learning designs that allow trainees to learn at their own pace, and at times appropriate for their local contexts. The educational programs will utilize both virtual and in-person learning platforms and incorporate strategies to increase engagement and participation such as recording or providing multiple offerings of the sessions.

This funding opportunity offers two years of funding to support the institutions to build strong and sustainable educational programs. The proposed educational programs may complement, but not duplicate, ongoing training programs at the applicant institution. In developing the educational program, the institutions may consider a progressive and phased implementation approach. In the first phase (year 1), institutions are expected to conduct a thorough needs assessment to map professional skill gaps at both the local and regional levels, and then design, pilot, and adapt an appropriate and responsive educational program. In the second phase (year 2), institutions are expected to fully implement the 1-year educational program. When fully developed, the educational program will be delivered over the course of one year, and trainees will be evaluated and issued professional certificates upon the successful completion of the program. These educational programs are intended to be open to scholars from within and outside of the applicant institution, including regional institutions.

Although not required, applicant LMIC institutions are encouraged to establish collaborative partnerships with other LMICs and/or US institutions to ensure availability of diverse expertise, experiences, and adequate resources to sustainably continue the educational programs beyond the award period. The education programs may continue either as standalone programs or be integrated into the broader research training curricula at the institution. It is intended that the educational tools and resources be made widely available to future scholars.

Eligibility

Institution/Organization:

- Applicant institution will be a research-intensive institution based in eligible LMICs.
- Applicant institution must demonstrate capacity and experience in leading and conducting cancer research.
- Applicant institution must demonstrate capacity and provide assurances that all participating scholars will receive adequate mentoring and experiential learning as they

participate in the educational program, either independently or through collaboration with partner LMIC and/or US institutions as appropriate.

Program Director(s)/Principal Investigator(s) (PD(s)/PI(s):

- Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to provide program leadership is invited to work with his/her institution to develop an application for support
- PD(s)/PI(s) from the applicant LMIC institution is the primary contact.

Scholars:

- Scholars will be research or clinician scientists who are citizens or permanent residents of eligible LMICs and, at the time of award, may not be citizens or non-citizen nationals of any high-income country (HIC)
- Scholars must have completed a doctoral degree or its equivalent [such as a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Doctor of Medicine (M.D.). In many LMICs, Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MB ChB, MB BS, BM MCh, MMed etc.) are considered the highest degree of study and equivalent to a doctoral degree.
- Scholars in the early stages of establishing their independent research careers, particularly those who hold academic junior faculty positions or research scientist appointments at their local institutions (including but not limited to instructors, lecturers, assistant professors), are preferred. Strong justification must be provided otherwise.
- Preference should be given to scholars who are involved in ongoing cancer research work in their home institution and who show potential for continued advancement in their cancer research careers.

Allowable Costs

- For the two-year project, the allowable budget shall not exceed $200,000 in total costs per project (direct + indirect costs).
- Costs associated with designing, directing, and successfully implementing the training program including:
    - Costs associated with needs assessment to determine areas of emphasis and to pilot, adapt and tailor training program to the local context; logistic costs including, trainee recruitment, internet access, cloud storage, subscriptions costs, etc.
    - Salary cost-sharing: individuals designing, directing, and implementing the training program may request up to 50% salary and fringe benefits appropriate for the person months devoted to the program (as a cost-share, institutions are expected to cover the other 50% salary costs). Salaries requested may not exceed the levels equal with the institution's policy for similar positions. If mentoring interactions and other activities with participants are considered a regular part of an individual's academic duties, then any costs associated with the mentoring and other interactions with participants are not allowable costs from grant funds.
- Costs associated with experiential learning activities e.g., data analysis and manuscript development, opportunities for scholars to network with peers, mentors, and leaders in cancer research.
- Scholar associated costs including:
    - Scholars may receive funds to defray partial tuition and other education-related expenses.

    - Scholars may also receive subsistence allowance to help defray living expenses during the training.
    - Scholar travel including registration fees associated with scientific meetings, air and/or ground transportation, accommodation, and per diem allowance.
- Indirect Costs are reimbursed at 8%.
- All costs must be sufficiently justified.

Submission Components

Letters of Inquiry must include:

- The Principal Investigator's title and contact information and the names, affiliations, and titles of other key members of the project, if any
- A narrative (maximum three pages in length) of your institution's vision to develop and implement contextualized educational activities to cultivate professional skills integral to fostering successful research careers in LMICs.
- A high-level tabular budget and justification up to $400k (inclusive of up to 8% overhead).
- A brief list (no more than one page) of collaborators.

Letters of Inquiry must:

- Be no more than 5 pages in total, including all components above
- Be in an 11-point font
- Have 1-inch margins
- Include page numbers

LOI's will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

Scope and characteristics of the educational program including the comprehensiveness of of the professional skills offered, innovations considering training design and strategies, contextual appropriateness, mentoring and experiential learning strategies, and how well the educational program is integrated into the ongoing research training and workforce development activities.

Institutional capacity and commitment considering the institution's research environment and capacity to provide strong leadership; recruitment plan with strategies likely to attract well-qualified and diverse trainee pool; adequacy of institutional commitment including financial, technical, administrative resources commitment and cost-minimizing strategies to support the training and ensure sustainability; sufficient numbers of faculty/mentors with expertise and experience to conduct the proposed training and mentoring activities; and commitment to make widely available the educational tools and resources.

Program success and sustainability potential considering proposed rigorous evaluation plan to assess progress towards achievement of program objectives including ability to make mid-course changes based on data collected; plans to track scholars and ensure continued mentoring and engagement beyond the funding period to contribute to our understanding of how the program

impacts the scholars' careers (e.g., new publications, subsequent faculty appointments, fellowship or career development awards); and the likelihood of the proposed educational program to continue beyond the funding period including plans to make the tools and resources widely available. The education programs may continue either as standalone programs or be integrated into the broader research training curricula at the institution. **It is intended that the educational tools and resources be made widely available to future scholars**.

Submission Instructions
*Submissions are due no later than **May 30, 2023***

Materials must be integrated into a single PDF document and uploaded via Formstack. Link will be made available for submission by March 6, 2023.

We expect to invite full proposals from among the LOI submissions by July 15, 2023, with full proposal drafts due August 30, 2023. The full proposals invited will be further reviewed by a set of subject matter experts. Final award decisions for invited proposals are expected in **October 2023.**

Questions about the Call for LOIs can be sent to Kay Kornek at kkornek@crdfglobal.org with James Alaro from NCI-CGH copied, james.alaro@nih.gov.

An information session will be held on March 17th at 9:00 - 10:30 am ET (Eastern Time).
Link to join zoom meeting:
https://crdfglobal.zoom.us/j/98437922861?pwd=MDEyZFNwZFF3TW9VRjVTRENCY29qQT09

Another information session late will be held in late April. Date and time TBD.

**LMICs are defined by the World Bank classification system, according to Gross National Income per capita as "low-income," "lower-middle-income," and "upper-middle-income". In this program, "eligible LMICs" do not include G20 Countries in the "upper-middle-income country" category (UMIC) for funding (except for Sub-Saharan Africa).*