

University of Maryland, Baltimore

Eco-Pathogenomics of Sexually Transmitted Infections Cooperative Research Center (EPSTI CRC)

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Solicitation for Pilot Developmental Research Projects in the Area of Sexually Transmitted Infections Research

Solicitation Release Date:	June 15, 2015
Electronic Submission Deadline:	September 1st, 2015 – 5PM EST
Approximate Award Date:	October 1st, 2015

The University of Maryland “Eco-Pathogenomics of Sexually Transmitted Infections Cooperative Research Center (EPSTI CRC)” will foster research on sexually transmitted infection and co-infections, diagnostic and predictive biomarker discovery. This RFP is issued to solicit Pilot Developmental Research Projects (DRPs) to take advantage of emergent technology and new opportunities in research that can be applied to the study of sexually transmitted infections. See “Eligibility” and “Research Objectives” for more information.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Qualified investigators include new faculty members (including instructors and research associates) and postdoctoral fellows about to transition to faculty positions and in need of scientific mentorship to become independent researchers. Investigators must be capable of developing an independent research project and intend to pursue a research career. The Principal Investigator (PI) must commit at least 10 percent effort to the project. However, the equivalent amount of salary support does not necessarily need to be requested if there is cost sharing for the PI’s salary from institutional funds. To encourage interdisciplinary research, previous experience in the field of sexually transmitted infections research is desirable but not absolutely required. DRPs should complement, synergize with and/or extend EPSTI research, and leverage or exploit the resources available within EPSTI. Minorities, women and individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

MECHANISM OF SUPPORT

This mechanism will provide support for research that focuses on sexually transmitted infections in the amount of up to \$60,000 in direct costs for a one-year period per award. There is a possibility of two DRP awards in 2015, and one DRP in 2016 and 2017.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The **key objective** of the EPSTI Pilot Developmental Research Project Program is to solicit new investigators, particularly among member institutions of the EPSTI consortium for innovative research projects that synergize and leverage the infrastructure assembled for the EPSTI program. The DRPs to be funded must relate to the overall theme of EPSTI, which is the discovery of predictive and/or diagnostic biomarkers of STIs, including co-infections. The DRPs may expand on existing EPSTI research projects, or may develop new technologies or basic research concepts. Most importantly the DRPs will provide training and mentoring for new investigators in the STI field. These are pilot projects aimed at generating basic and/or translational science data that can be used to solicit independent funding. Preliminary data are not required but evidence that the proposed research is feasible and its anticipated results are significant is necessary.

Applicants must propose work in the area of sexually transmitted infections in order to synergize with the goals of this STI CRC. These may include research on chlamydia, gonorrhea, chlamydia-gonorrhea co-infection, co-infection with other STIs, STI antibiotic resistance, microbiome, host-pathogen interaction, host genetics, STI pathogen genomics, and the innate or adaptive immune response to STIs, among others. Please visit the UM EPSTI CRC website at <http://www.epsti.org/> for more information.

Funds for support of clinical trials, or travel will not be allowed under this RFP.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Full Applications must include the following:

- a. Face Page to include Title, PI, and other key personnel
- b. Abstract (250 words)
- c. Budget (\$60,000 maximum direct costs for one year; smaller budgets up to a maximum of \$30,000 direct costs can also be submitted to allow the possibility of funding two smaller awards). Also include indirect costs at the currently approved rate for your institution. Please include personnel details (salary, effort, fringe benefits) and totals for other expenses (supplies, other expenses, etc.)
- d. Detailed Budget justification
- e. Biosketch of PI (new format)
- f. Project Description - up to 7 pages of text including:
 - a. Specific Aims (1 page)
 - b. Significance and innovation
 - c. Preliminary Data (not required)
 - d. Research Design and Methods
 - e. Relationship of the proposed work to the activity of EPSTI CRC\
 - f. Career development, mentoring and training plan (1 page).
- g. Mentor's statement (1 page). Note: this is not a letter of recommendation. It should be a description of how the trainee will be mentored, and relevant evidence of previous successful mentoring.
- h. Description of Applicant's Past and Planned Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research (maximum, 1 page). Include all areas required by NIH.
- i. References
- j. Vertebrate animals and human subjects protection sections

Letters of reference from 3 persons, excluding your mentor (who will write a separate statement (see above). Letters should be sent directly to Jacques Ravel (jrael@som.umaryland.edu) and not included with the application. **Letters must be received by 5:00 PM PST on September 1st, 2015.**

Please use PHS398 forms and formatting (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>). For the other components listed above, pages should have a 0.5" margin on all sides and the text should be typed using an Arial 11 or larger font size. The Project Description Section (section f.) should be no longer than **7 pages**. The basic format is similar to that of an R21/R03 application. The application does NOT need to be signed by your institutional official. If your application is selected for award, we will request additional information prior to award of the funds.

Career Development and Mentoring plan:

It is expected that each application will develop a mentoring plan that will help the PI to 1) perform the research goals, and 2) transition the research findings into a follow-up application to be submitted to the NIH or other granting institution. Each DRP Awardee will select a three-person mentoring committee from EPSTI projects PI/core directors, including the mentoring PI. It is expected that the PI will meet with the appropriate mentoring committee on a monthly basis at a minimum to guarantee the good conduct of the research and training and will continue to work with the mentoring committee in the year following the end of the DRP funding period to prepare and submit a grant application.

Budget Development Guidelines and Restrictions

- Requested support for project collaborators who are NOT at the same institution as the awardee should be listed as consultant costs. Subcontracts will not be issued to collaborator's institutions.
- Requested support for equipment and technology must be fully justified in the budget justification with a clear relevance to the scientific aims of the project and not for general office or lab use. Any request for purchase of computers is limited to computers that are used EXCLUSIVELY for the project.
- Costs associated with Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of human research protocols, or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) review of animal research protocols, are not allowable as direct cost charges.
- All costs must conform to the NIH Grants Policy Statement (GPS) and applicable U.S. Office of Management and Budget OMB circulars for necessity and reasonability, allocability, conformance and consistency, as well as allowability. Please follow the link below to section 7.2 cost principles section of the NIH Grants Policy Statement.

Submission of Application:

Completed applications are to be submitted electronically in a single pdf document and emailed to jravel@som.umaryland.edu by 5PM EST on September 1st, 2015. If you are unsure whether your proposed research would fit into the aims of this Request for Proposals, please contact Drs. Bavoil or Ravel (contact information below).

REVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

The submitted Pilot Project proposals will be scored by a panel of reviewers with significant experience and recognition related to the overall objectives of the EPSTI Program. Each proposal will be assigned to 2-4 reviewers for scoring on each review parameter (listed below) and for provision of comments. To avoid conflicts of interest, reviewers will not be assigned a proposal(s) from his/her laboratory or if the PI was a trainee of a potential reviewer. Reviewers will be drawn from the EPSTI consortium and from other institutions with expertise in sexually transmitted infections. Scores from all reviews will be tallied and ranked by the Administrative Core Directors and forwarded to the UMB EPSTI CRC Steering Committee for final review. The Steering Committee will generate a final prioritized list of the proposals and the top ranked 3 or 4 proposals (or more if desired) will be forwarded to the overall STI CRCs Executive Committee, who will make the final recommendations. Up to two awards will be made in response to this solicitation in year 2015, and one award in year 2016 and 2017.

The following review criteria will be applied:

Significance (20 points)

- Does the DRP address an important problem within the overall area of STI research with emphasis on chlamydia, gonorrhea, STI co-infection, polymicrobial infections or syndromes, antibiotic resistance, microbiome, host-pathogen interaction, host genetics, STI pathogen genomics, innate and adaptive immunity, diagnostics, or predictive biomarkers.
- If the Aims of the application are achieved, how will this advance scientific knowledge?
- How will the results of these studies advance and complement the research priorities of EPSTI?
- Are there opportunities to collaborate with EPSTI investigators?
- What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts or methods that drive this field?

Approach and Scientific Merit (25 points)

- Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, and appropriate for the aims of the DRP?
- Does the investigator acknowledge potential problems and consider alternative strategies? (Note - the nature of these awards allows for applications with little preliminary data).

Innovation (10 points)

- Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are the aims original and innovative?
- Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?

Investigator (10 points)

- Are the background, accomplishments and training of the investigator appropriate to carry out the proposed work?
- How does the PI background if not in STI research contribute to this field?
- Is the proposed research commensurate with his/her experience level and or balanced by a strong mentoring plan?
- Level of commitment to a research career in STI and potential to become an independent investigator.

Mentoring/Training Plan (10 points)

- Are the mentors selected appropriate and experienced to help the PI in achieving his/her goals?
- Appropriateness of the plan for achieving scientific independence.
- Consistency with candidate's prior training and career goals.
- How does the mentoring and training plan enhances the success for potential continued funding through other means?
- Mentor's research qualifications in the area of the proposed project.
- Quality and extent of mentor's proposed role in providing guidance to the candidate.
- Previous success in training early career investigators. History of research productivity.

Potential for Continued Funding of this Research beyond the Scope of DRP funding (10 points)

- If the goals of the project are met, is there potential (and is it well-described?) to obtain further funding of the project through an R21, R01 or another type of award?

Synergy/Complementarity with EPSTI Research Priority and Goals (15 points)

- Is the proposal consistent with EPSTI research objectives?
- Does the proposed research leverage existing capabilities or resources of EPSTI?
- Will EPSTI and the applicant provide maximal synergy to assure success?

CONTACT INFORMATION

UMB EPSTI CRC contact for information on scientific scope/research:

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UMB EPSTI CRC contact for information on budgets/forms:

Ms. Riham Keryakos
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