Request for Pilot Research Proposals

Applications are being accepted for 1-year Pilot Project Awards of up to $25,000 for the project period 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020

The Rio Grande Valley Alzheimer’s Disease Resource Center for Minority Aging Research (AD-RCMAR): Partnerships for Progress is a UTRGV’s Resource Center for Minority Aging Research (RCMAR), is funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) with a focus on Alzheimer’s disease on Hispanics. The RGV AD-RCMAR seeks to enhance the diversity of the research workforce of minority aging and develop the infrastructure and data collections to support researchers from under-represented groups, multiple disciplines and at different scientific career stages, to foster research aimed at reducing the impact of Alzheimer’s disease on Hispanics.

Our overall scientific goal is to support identification of pathways and developmental time points within/at which altering social circumstances and behavior can yield the largest possible improvements in prevention and impeding progression of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias in Hispanics. All disciplines are invited to participate, emphasizing transdisciplinary aspects of social and behavioral sciences.

Those awarded 1-year pilot awards through this mechanism will become RGV AD-RCMAR Scientists and will receive additional career development support by the different cores of the Center. See FAQ to learn about the full set of resources available to RGV-AD-RCMAR Scientists.

Pilot Studies Program

Purpose & Scope. The purpose of the Pilot Studies Program (PSP) is to provide new or early career minority investigators from under-represented minorities with opportunities, necessary support, and guidance to conduct pilot studies. Each pilot study is expected to generate significant results that, upon publication, will contribute to the field and provide preliminary results and data for research grant applications, emphasizing submission to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for support of research relevant to the mission of the RGV AD-RCMAR. Emphasis will be on pilot research projects which address the Center’s topical research focus on Hispanic populations in the RGV and South Texas.

Eligibility. The Center’s Research Education Core (REC) emphasis is on career development for new and early stage investigators, i.e., those within 10 years of completing their terminal research degrees (PhD, medical residency, equivalent) who have not previously competed successfully for a substantial NIH independent investigator-initiated research award in the field of Alzheimer’s disease or Alzheimer’s disease in minority health disparity populations. This includes mid-career investigators below the rank of full Professor who are transitioning into research in the RGV AD-RCMAR’s topical areas.

- Applicants must be doctoral level investigators.
• Applicants must hold a full-time faculty or research faculty position at an organization that is eligible to receive an NIH supported grant in aid of research.
• Applicants must have an identified mentor.
• Pilot funds may not be used to provide interim or extended support for extant projects.
• Total direct costs of a pilot research study may not exceed $25,000.

NIH restrictions regarding prior independent investigator awards apply. Note: Prior NIH awards that do not disqualify applicants are: fellowships (F awards), individual career awards (K awards), loan repayment contracts (L awards), training grants (T & D awards), instrumentation, construction, education, and meeting awards.

**Supported Activities.** Maximum total direct costs of a pilot research project are $25,000. Funds may be used to cover costs of expendable supplies, reagents, laboratory services, and animal research cost, including per diems and procedures, and research-critical travel. Funds may not be used for tuition, fees or stipends; or for interim or extended support of other projects funded by other sources. The expected duration of a funded pilot research project is 1 year (exceptional circumstances may extend this period, but only with prior approval).

**Pilot Study Mentors.** All applicants must identify and enter into an agreement with at least one AD-RCMAR identified mentor, but preferably two – one mentor who is expert in Alzheimer’s disease research and another with expertise in minority studies. Mentors could be based at UTRGV or in other institutions. Currently, the following institutions have agreed to mentor in RGV AD-RCMAR Investigators: Washington University in St. Louis, University of California in Davis, and the Glenn Biggs Institute for Alzheimer’s & Neurodegenerative Diseases at the University of Texas in San Antonio.

**Timeline:**
1. By 12pm noon March 1, 2019, applicants must submit Letter of Intent.
2. By 12pm noon April 1, 2019, applicants must submit application.
3. Project period 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020

Submissions, including the Letter of Intent, should be sent as a pdf attachment of an email to Dr. Michael Mahaney micheal.mahaney@utrgv.edu, Coordinator of the Pilot Studies Program at the RGV AD-RCMAR.

**APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS**

**Letter of Intent (LOI).** The applicant and mentor(s) must submit a brief (2 pages, maximum; Arial, 11-pt, single-spaced) letter notifying the REC of her/his intent to submit an application.

Required information in the letter of intent includes:
• A descriptive working title for the study;
• Names, degrees, ranks, departmental/institutional affiliations, and signatures of the applicant and mentor(s);
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- A brief statement of the objective and significance of the intended pilot research with respect to the RGV AD-RCMAR mission;
- A brief general description of the tentative research plan;
- If applicable, groups/cohorts or animal model to be studied;
- Affirmation that the intended study does not duplicate any currently funded research in which the applicant is involved.
- Signatures of applicant, mentor and supervisor or Chair of the Department or affiliated Unit of the applicant.

**Letter of Intent Notification.** Submitting the LOI does not guarantee approval to submit a grant application. After immediate review and discussion of the project described in the LOI, the Administrative Core (AC) and the REC determine whether the applicant(s) are allowed to submit a complete application or revise and resubmit the LOI for approval prior to submitting a complete grant application. Within a week of the deadline for submitting the LOI, applicants will be notified of decision by e-mail.

**The application.** To familiarize investigators with the NIH system, the PSP models its applications on those for the independent investigator-initiated Exploratory/Developmental Research Grant Award (R21) (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.pdf). The applicant is required to follow currently applicable guidelines and formats for that award (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/format-attachments.htm). There are 2 exceptions specific to goals of the REC (see below).

**Required information in the application includes:**
- Biosketches from applicant, mentor and any other key personnel in current NIH format https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm;
- Budget and Budget Justification;
- Applicable administrative sections (e.g., Protection of Human Subjects, Planned Enrollment Report, Vertebrate Animals, etc.);
- Research Strategy page limits and organization correspond to those for the R21:
  - Specific Aims (1 page) and Research Strategy (6 pages).
  - Examples of NIH-funded grants:
    - https://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/IS/sample-grant-applications.html
    - https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/sample-applications

RGV RCMAR-REC program-specific exceptions include 1) an additional a 2-page (maximum) section immediately following the Research Strategy with a detailed plan for proceeding from completed pilot study to publication and submission of an application for competitive extramural funding for a subsequent study (noting relevant programs, FOAs) and 2) in the Biosketch, a list of previous pilot study awards received by the applicant from any source, identifying publications arising from them. This information is factored into the assessment of likelihood that the proposed study will lead to a successful application to NIH for an independent investigator-initiated research grant award (review criterion 6, below).

**Application process and submission.** Applicants submit their completed applications by the 01 of April, 2019. Each application is assessed for completeness and adherence to page
limitations. Those not conforming to guidelines are returned immediately, with an explanation.

**Multiple submissions:** Multiple submissions by the same applicant (same deadline) are not allowed. Also, an application from an investigator with an active pilot study funded by RGV AD-RCMAR will not be accepted for review.

**Review criteria.** For the most part, each proposal is evaluated according to criteria utilized by NIH study sections: 1) Significance, 2) Innovation, 3) Approach, 4) Investigator, and 5) Environment; plus 1 additional criterion: 6) potential for translation to future research. Each criterion is scored from 1 to 9 (best to worst) and an Overall Impact score is given to the proposal as a whole. The additional 6th criterion focuses primarily on the plan explicated in RGV AD-RCMAR-specific section of the Research Strategy. A well-thought out, feasible plan to leverage results of the pilot study into a competitive extramural research application enhances Overall Impact.

**Please contact**
Dr. Michael Mahaney, michael.mahaney@utrgv.edu with any questions about the Pilot Studies Program.

Dr. Gladys Maestre, gladys.maestre@utrgv.edu for any inquiry about the RGV AD-RCMAR.

Dr. Gabriel de Erausquin, gabriel.deerausquin@utrgv.edu for inquiries on the Research Education Core and specifically on the didactic component.

Dr. Andrew Tsin, andrew.tsin@utrgv.edu for inquiries on the mentoring component.

Dr. John Blangero, john.blangero@utrgv.edu for inquiries on the Analysis Core.

Dr. Francisco Fernandez, francisco.fernandez@utrgv.edu for inquiries on the Community Liaison and Recruitment Core.

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