



Request for Proposals-Small Grants for Pilot Studies

Overview

The mission of the Advancing Chronic Care Outcomes through Research and innovation (ACORN) Center is to advance chronic care science through research, development and real-world application. To meet our vision of optimizing quality of life for those affected by chronic conditions, the ACORN Center is seeking proposals for pilot and feasibility studies. The intent of the funding is to allow investigators to generate preliminary data to support extramural grant proposals aimed at improving health outcomes for people with chronic conditions.

1. Timeline

- Announcement Release Date: December 1, 2020
- Application Receipt Date: February 15, 2021 by 5 p.m.
- Notification of Outcome: All applicants will receive notification by April 16, 2021
- Earliest Project Start Date: July 1, 2021

2. Purpose

The purpose of this RFP is to invite pilot/feasibility project applications for research that will improve health outcomes for people with chronic conditions. The primary goal of this pilot and feasibility project program is to promote interdisciplinary and interdepartmental research to generate preliminary data that will support external grants for meritorious research aimed at improving health outcomes for people with chronic conditions. Proposals must include at least one [College of Nursing ACORN Center Core Faculty member](#). Innovative interdisciplinary research that addresses health disparities in South Carolina is particularly encouraged.

3. Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6 in 10 adults in the United States (US) have a chronic condition and 4 in 10 have two or more chronic diseases.^{1,2} Chronic conditions result in significant morbidity, are the leading cause of death in the US, and account for 90% of the nation's \$3.3 trillion in annual health care expenses. South Carolina (SC) currently and historically ranks in the lowest quartile for health outcomes in the US. SC also continues to be ranked in the lowest US quartile for overall quality of life¹ and healthcare access and delivery.² Residents in the state are at higher risk for a range of

poor health outcomes across the lifespan, including obesity, cancer, diabetes, HIV, substance use disorders, heart disease, and stroke.³⁻⁸ While some progress has been made in overall health, health disparities remain high, particularly for individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups. For example, SC has ranked in the top 10 in the US for annual HIV rates for many years, with African American males displaying the poorest clinical outcomes.⁸ When health improvements are made, they are often unevenly distributed. The average rate of heart disease death in SC adults decreased by 2.5% per year for Whites and 2.3% per year for African Americans between 1968 and 2015, however, the disparity in cardiovascular deaths between these racial groups was worse in 2015 than in 1968.⁹ There is also significant rural-urban disparity in these disease conditions¹⁰ and SC is predominantly a rural state, with the majority of the state's population designated as medically underserved.^{11,12}

With the support of SmartState Centers for Economic Excellence, the College of Nursing ACORN Center aims to improve chronic care outcomes by advancing the science of chronic care through translational research. We are particularly interested in improving health outcomes for South Carolinians with chronic conditions, including reducing health disparities. The small grants program will promote the ACORN Center mission by engaging faculty across the University of South Carolina (UofSC) system in collaborative research with members of the ACORN Center to conduct innovative, impactful interdisciplinary research.

4. Research Objectives and Scope

The purpose of this pilot and feasibility project program is to stimulate and promote meritorious interdisciplinary and interdepartmental research to improve health outcomes *among people with chronic conditions*. The program will support research that is prospective or that uses existing data sources to generate needed preliminary data to support an extramural application. Quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods may be used, and the study participants or existing data may involve individuals, communities, or populations. Applications must show how the proposed study will support a larger extramural research grant proposal.

5. Eligibility

Eligible applicants include all faculty who are employees of the UofSC system. At least one member of the interdisciplinary team for the proposed project must be a [College of Nursing ACORN Center Core faculty member](#). Each faculty can only serve as a lead PI on one application but can participate as Co-investigator on one additional application in response to this request.

Proposals should not duplicate applications that are currently funded or under review by extramural or intramural programs (e.g., UofSC ASPIRE, BDHSC). Proposal design and methods must be consistent with the UofSC Office of Research COVID-19 guidelines for conducting research.

6. Funds Specifications

The ACORN Center anticipates funding up to 5 applications in 2021 but the final number of awards depends on the number of meritorious applications, scientific programmatic interest, and availability of funds. Each application can request funds up to \$10,000. An applicant may request a project period up to 12 months beginning July 1, 2021. Under certain conditions and with justification, exceptions to these dates may be requested.

7. Budget Information

Budgets will be presented in general categories and include detailed justification. Although the ACORN Center intends to fund projects as closely as possible to the requested amount, it reserves the right to alter the amount depending on the number of proposals received and funds available. Cost share is not allowed.

Allowable Costs

- Salary and fringe benefits undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and technicians
- Costs of data acquisition and/or storage
- Data management and analytic software
- Consultants *essential* to the project
- Project supplies
- Travel *essential* to conduct the project
- Graduate student tuition

Unallowable Costs

- Food (for use in research/as subject incentives)
- Professional dues
- Undergraduate student tuition
- Travel to conferences
- Faculty salary
- Indirect (facility and administrative) costs

8. Application Procedure

1. Develop a proposal narrative (up to **three pages**) that provides:
 - A brief discussion of the background and significance of the proposed idea, including its relation to the present state of knowledge in the field.

- A detailed narrative of the project that includes the objectives, significance of the research, the research task and expected accomplishments of the project, the specific outcomes/deliverables of the project, and a timeline.
 - A maximum of **one** additional page should include a discussion of how the preliminary data generated will enhance the team's competitiveness for external funding.
 - Proposal should be single-spaced with margins not less than one-half (.5) inch and using a font size not less than 11 pt. Recommended fonts include Arial, Georgia, Helvetica, and Palatino Linotype.
 - Attach a cover sheet that includes the project title, the total budget request, the team members' names, colleges/schools/departments, and e-mail addresses, and a brief summary of the proposed work. The cover sheet is not included in the page limit for the proposal narrative.
2. Attach the following supporting documentation, none of which is included in the narrative page limitation, to the end of the proposal narrative:
- References cited
 - Two-page biographical sketch using the NIH template for the principal and co-investigator(s)
 - A one-page budget and budget justification for total project costs consistent with the list of allowable costs shown above.
 - A statement indicating whether the investigators have any current or pending seed grants (e.g., ASPIRE, BDHSC, PRISMA) in this area and, if so, how the proposed project complements (or is different from) but does not duplicate the other current or pending funding mechanisms.
 - Appendices are allowed if highly relevant (e.g., letters of support for data access or access to research participants); however, do not use appendices to circumvent page limits or to provide general letters of support for the research.
3. **Submit the completed proposal packet as a single PDF by Monday February 15th at 5:00 p.m.:**
- Applications submitted after 5:00 PM on the due date will be returned without review.
 - Please submit all required documents in a single PDF file via email to combsel@email.sc.edu by 5:00pm on the due date
 - Questions about submission? Contact Elizabeth Combs, MA, ACORN Center Project Coordinator: combsel@email.sc.edu; 803-777-7606.

9. Review Process

Applications that are complete and responsive to this announcement will be evaluated for merit by a review committee of qualified faculty. The committee will then provide a prioritized list of recommendations for funding to the ACORN Center Director, Dr. Cindy Corbett based on the quality of the proposals per the review criteria (see below). Awards will be approved based on the review committee's recommendations and available funds.

Applications will be rated using the following criteria:

Scientific Merit, Significance, and Innovation:

- Does the proposal provide a compelling argument for the pilot/feasibility research?
- Does the proposed plan for future research represent a significant contribution to improving outcomes for people with chronic conditions? If so, how?
- Is the proposed project innovative?
- Is there a strong evidence of meaningful collaboration across different disciplines?

Nature of Proposal - Realistic Milestones and:

- Does the proposal provide a clear statement of overall project objectives?
- Are the proposed methodologies appropriate and accurate?
- Is the text of the proposal well-written?

Leverage - Impact on the Field, Potential for Securing Extramural Funding:

- Does the project offer significant opportunities that will lead to extramural funding?
- Will the project lead to further scholarly activity (manuscripts, conference presentations)?

Feasibility - Completion Within One Year and Rationale and Utilization of Proposed Budget:

- Is the timeline proposed reasonable and realistic?
- Does the proposal provide a sound justification with clear and specific budget information?

10. References

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8. Chakraborty, H., Weissman, S., Duffus, W. A., Hossain, A., Varma Samantapudi, A., Iyer, M., & Albrecht, H. (2017). HIV community viral load trends in South Carolina. *International journal of STD & AIDS*, 28(3), 265-276.
9. Van Dyke M, Greer S, Odom E, et al. Heart Disease Death Rates Among Blacks and Whites Aged ≥35 Years — United States, 1968–2015. *MMWR Surveill Summ* 2018;67(No. SS-5):1–11.
10. Rural Health Information Hub. Chronic Disease in Rural America. Available at: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/chronic-disease>. Accessed September 3, 2019.
11. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. *Shortage Maps*. Available at: <https://www.scdhec.gov/health-professionals/shortage-maps>. Accessed September 3, 2019.
12. U. S. Department of Health & Human Services. *HRSA Data Warehouse*. Available at: <https://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/tools/analyzers/muafind.aspx>. Accessed August 30, 2018.

11. Communications

For more information: Please contact Elizabeth Combs, MA, ACORN Center Project Coordinator: combsel@email.sc.edu; 803-777-7606.

For more information about the College of Nursing ACORN Center, please visit our website: https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/nursing/centers_and_labs/center_chronic_care/



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Outcomes through
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