Research Opportunity Title: NIH HEAL Initiative Research Dissemination and Engagement Center

Participating Organization(s): National Institutes of Health

Components: The anticipated Other Transactions (OT) Research Opportunity Announcement (ROA) will be part of the Helping to End Addiction Long Term® Initiative, or NIH HEAL Initiative®. The research opportunity will be administered by the NIH Immediate Office of the Director.

Funding Instrument: The funding instrument is the Other Transactions (OT) Award mechanism. OT awards are not grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts, and use an Other Transactions Authority, provided by law. Policies and terms for individual OT awards may vary between awards. Each award is therefore issued with a specific Agreement, which is negotiated with the recipient and details specific terms and conditions for that award.

Research Opportunity Purpose: The purpose of the anticipated announcement is to invite applications from eligible organizations to implement and support activities in the role of the HEAL Research Dissemination and Engagement Center (R-DEC). The successful applicant(s) will work closely with the NIH HEAL Initiative and with other awarded organizations to meet the needs of the overall program.

Given the urgency of the evolving opioid crisis, the results of HEAL research must reach affected people and communities as quickly as possible. HEAL intends to disseminate findings and data as broadly as possible, including to pain and addiction researchers, the broader research community, and various non-researchers and community groups. The evidence built upon decades of NIH efforts in community-engaged research supports the benefit of enabling a more robust focus on meaningful engagement within the NIH HEAL Initiative infrastructure. Specifically, through the NIH Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA), the Research Centers in Minority Institutions Program, the NIH All of Us program, and recent efforts focused on public health challenges (such as the NIH Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL), and the RADx® Underserved Populations (RADx-UP) initiatives) the benefit of community-engaged research has proven successful. To successfully reach these audiences and engage them in meaningful ways, HEAL will fund the R-DEC to interface with the HEAL research community, key partner organizations, and the intended beneficiaries of this research. The R-DEC will work closely with the existing HEAL Data Ecosystem that accelerates sharing of HEAL-generated data to be searched, analyzed, and used to make new discoveries. Most importantly, this partner will understand and translate data and findings in ways understood at the community level to address needs and priorities of communities standing to benefit most from HEAL research.

The R-DEC will generate, manage, and coordinate processes and products that connect the growing evidence base of HEAL research with communities, organizations, government entities, and other
potential beneficiaries of HEAL research results. Applications should include proposals for the initial planning phase of the HEAL dissemination and community engagement program to define and develop culturally appropriate, inclusive ways to communicate with the beneficiaries of HEAL research. The R-DEC will identify diverse stakeholders both within and outside the research contexts that are impacted by the opioid crisis and underlying challenges with pain and pain management, and apply community engagement strategies to create awareness, provide education, and build strong bidirectional relationships with these groups. Applications may include multiple organizations as needed to ensure the best balance of expertise and capabilities. During award phase, the R-DEC will be expected to identify and support additional partners to sustain community engagement activities and augment the skills and expertise to achieve the tasks outlined under the core functions described below, and other areas of need identified during the initial year and planning activities.

**Funds Available and Anticipated Number of Awards:** The budget for this activity is planned for up to $25 million over a 5-year period, including the operations and support for the R-DEC as well as any proposed activities, sub-projects, infrastructure, or investments, once established. The OT mechanism allows for significant flexibilities to make adjustments as needed to pursue new and transformative activities. HEAL intends to issue up to four (4) awards as a result of this ROA. Award levels may increase or decrease over time based on programmatic needs, funding availability, and recipient performance. Requested budgets must be justified based on proposed milestones and deliverables.

**Award Project Duration:** Project duration is anticipated to be five years, but may be shortened or extended, as needed.

**Authority:** Other Transactions awards will be made pursuant to current authorizing legislation, including Section 402(n) of the Public Health Service Act, 42 U.S.C. 282(n), as amended.

Letters of intent are anticipated.

**Overview of the HEAL Research Dissemination and Engagement Center**

**Background**
In response to opioid crisis, NIH launched the Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) Initiative, a trans-NIH effort spanning basic, translational, clinical and implementation science on opioid misuse, addiction, pain, and related condition. By the end of FY 2021, HEAL funded nearly $2 billion in research, representing more than 600 research projects across the United States. These projects aim to identify new therapeutic targets for both pain and opioid use disorder, reduce the risk of opioids through nonpharmacological strategies for pain management, and improve overdose and addiction treatment in a variety of settings.

Biomedical research aims to improve human health, and data dissemination is key to implementing and interpreting findings appropriately across communities. Rapid availability of publications and the primary data behind them promotes dissemination of new knowledge, enhances reproducibility, and accelerates the ability to make new discoveries. The NIH HEAL Initiative intends to disseminate research...
findings and data as broadly as possible to pain and addiction researchers, along with the broader research community and non-researcher groups through the HEAL Data Ecosystem and other efforts. To that end, the overarching goal of this research opportunity announcement (ROA) is to develop and implement a new central NIH HEAL Initiative resource, referred to as the HEAL Research Dissemination and Engagement Center (R-DEC). The awardee will be an integral part of the Data Ecosystem and is expected to lead engagement, partnerships, activities, and training towards enhanced dissemination.

The R-DEC will also be expected to work closely with HEAL investigators and other HEAL Data Ecosystem awardees to create a feedback loop of communication. The R-DEC will sit at the interface between the general public, HEAL researchers, and the HEAL Data Ecosystem, ensuring that all input is integrated into data sharing and result dissemination practices. By encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships, the HEAL Research Dissemination and Engagement Center will ensure that HEAL research results are broadly and appropriately disseminated.

The HEAL Research Dissemination and Engagement Coordinating Center
Building and sustaining trusted partnerships with groups impacted by the opioid crisis and related health conditions (e.g., pain, sleep, mental health, behavioral health, etc.) are core elements of the R-DEC. These partnerships will inform various activities along the HEAL Initiative’s research development pipeline, including but not limited to results dissemination, study planning, and training development for the HEAL investigator community. It is expected that communities engaged through the R-DEC will vary in terms of their research interests and knowledge around data sharing. A one-size-fits-all approach to infrastructure, training, research directions, or engagement will not achieve the goals of the NIH HEAL Initiative. Applications to this solicitation must address each component below, either through their own expertise, collaborative applications, or inclusion of plan(s) to formally solicit, identify, and support additional expertise.

All applicants are expected to demonstrate their ability to leverage existing resources and expand community partnerships (e.g., Tribal governments and agencies, academic, private, safety-net health systems, grassroots organizations, public health departments, community and faith-based organizations, and schools or childcare settings) and employ strategies that enhance outreach and dissemination activities to inform communities about HEAL research and its findings. Establishing an additional Community Engagement Advisory board(s) that complement and augment the efforts of the HEAL Community Partner Committee and consists of diverse membership in expertise, demographics, and knowledge is a requirement of the R-DEC. Approaches such as team science, community-engaged research, participatory action research, and related approaches should be used to engage communities and underserved and/or disproportionately affected populations to enhance bi-directional relationships between these groups, HEAL, and the HEAL researchers. Study budgets should include funds to support the community partners to be fully engaged and successfully participate in research design, implementation, and results dissemination.
R-DEC Core Components

BUILD AND SUSTAIN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Communication and outreach functions include assessing the HEAL research portfolio and current community engagement landscape across HEAL awards, identifying areas for new and increased partnerships, and establishing long-term, bidirectional relationships with community members and organizations who understand the dynamics of, and serve populations impacted by the opioid crisis and affected by conditions studied through HEAL research. The team completing this work should include individuals who have expertise in relationship development that involves building new relationships and improving existing relationships with or within communities.

It is important that the community engagement activities are inclusive and not focused on a particular professional organization or community group. Representation from diverse individuals and communities is essential for success, along with an understanding of differences in health and health care that are closely linked with social or economic disadvantage. Under this core, the successful applicant will be expected to:

- Conduct a landscape analysis to understand HEAL’s portfolio, current outreach methods, and outreach needs;
- Develop an engagement and outreach plan tailored to HEAL and informed by the landscape analysis;
- Build trusted partnerships with communities and individuals that are part of and affected by NIH HEAL Initiative research, including but not limited to clinicians and community care providers; advocacy groups with interest in pain, addiction and other research areas relevant to HEAL such as mental and behavioral health; patients and people with lived experience; and service organizations or community-based organizations in HEAL’s focus areas;
- Effectively engage with at risk population such as racial and ethnic groups, low-income individuals and families, individuals who are incarcerated and those who have been incarcerated, individuals with disabilities, individuals with mental health conditions, youth and young adults, and American Indians and Alaskan Native Communities;
- Interface and collaborate with programs across HEAL, including NIH program staff, HEAL awardees, and the communities that they engage with;
- Run focus groups and listening sessions to determine culturally appropriate data dissemination approaches and inform other aspects of HEAL research processes;
- Establish communications channels and mechanisms to provide feedback and input to Data Ecosystem awardees and report back on progress to community groups; and
- Establish and administer Board(s) that include a diverse ecosystem of partners and leaders engaging in and working with impacted communities across the country.
SUPPORT HEAL RESEARCHERS TO MEANINGFULLY SHARE FINDINGS

HEAL researchers have a wide range of expertise and skill levels relevant to data dissemination and communication. Under this core, the successful applicant(s) will develop resources and provide services to support investigators in the dissemination of study results to the broader community. This includes distilling complex research findings into audience appropriate and culturally appropriate summaries, data visualizations, and other products. The resources and services will help to broaden HEAL investigators’ incorporation of evidence-based engagement and outreach strategies, and support appropriate consumption of HEAL Initiative research findings. Under this core, the successful applicant will be expected to:

- Serve as a central resource for new and existing HEAL-funded programs by connecting them to appropriate community partners in order to better understand the best ways to incorporate their concerns, needs and values into all levels of the research processes, including data and results dissemination;
- Identify HEAL research groups with ongoing engagement support; collate for central dissemination research findings and communication materials prepared by these groups and their partners;
- Coordinate with new and existing partners to translate HEAL research findings, and develop communication products based on unique community needs;
- Develop appropriate communication, data visualization, and infographic products for HEAL, where HEAL research and communications teams are not already doing so;
- Develop HEAL data use cases that include examples of community needs to inform Data Ecosystem data displays and dissemination mechanisms;
- Develop culturally tailored trainings on community engagement and best practices for HEAL researchers to leverage as they integrate community input into their study planning and results dissemination;
- Develop resources for investigators to understand and integrate culturally appropriate measurement strategies and assessment selection, and support implementation for different populations; and
- Develop resources for appropriate procedures for non-English speakers, for example translating measures and documents to non-English languages.
ADMINISTRATION AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Under this core function, the successful applicant(s) are expected to lead and manage the R-DEC and its partnerships and sub-awards. This will require substantial project management capabilities to ensure coordination among the different activities and strict adherence to timelines and budget. The administrative function must be rigid in its planning and tracking, yet flexible enough to meet the progressing needs of the NIH HEAL Initiative and its various partners and stakeholders. Under this competency, the successful applicant will:

- Manage overall project, including but not limited to careful tracking and reporting of partnerships, sub-projects, meetings, and other administrative tasks;
- Apply expertise in the development and use of research instruments (surveys, assessment tools, etc.) to measure HEAL’s needs and successes related to community engagement;
- Develop processes for transparent reporting on project status;
- Establish processes to communicate and share information across groups, including internal and external partners (e.g., NIH, other HEAL awardees, sub-awardees to this award);
- Manage and track budget;
- Manage and track sub-awards.

Partnering with other applicants and other teaming arrangements

To ensure the best balance of expertise and capabilities, individual applications may be submitted by multi-institutional partners. Once established, the HEAL Research Dissemination Center (R-DEC) is expected to identify and manage sub-awards beyond those included in the initial NIH award to support engagements, assessment, pilot projects, and capacity building with community partners. The R-DEC will identify, compete (as needed), justify, and manage these contractual arrangements and associated relationships in partnership with NIH as subject to the OTA award.

Team science is critical to the success of the R-DEC, which will bring together teams with broad arrays of expertise, as well as technical and non-technical backgrounds in a multi-team system. The R-DEC must include the expertise and diverse viewpoints needed to support team science across all core functions, and work closely with other teams across HEAL.

It is anticipated that the R-DEC program may begin as a multidisciplinary endeavor, with each team member bringing individual expertise. The members will work collaboratively to integrates these different disciplines, sectors and viewpoints into a synergistic team to accomplish project goals. Teaming enables interdisciplinary and inclusive team science within the R-DEC, including:

- Task integration, creating a governance structure and shared common workflows within the R-DEC, including representation from the broader HEAL Data Ecosystem as appropriate.
- Relationship Building and Social integration, from individual relationships to establishing a culture in which a diverse array of participants can thrive, to promote optimal team formation and functioning, efficiency in communication and decision making, and leadership development of participants throughout career stages.
- Team Formation, identifying needed areas of expertise and brokering new partnerships as needed, including partnerships with individuals from diverse social, cultural, economic, academic, industrial, and technical/non-technical backgrounds.
• Executing core elements of the R-DEC, with focus on recruitment strategies, career development and mentoring opportunities, outreach and partnering with various groups and communities, and other strategies to advance inclusivity in alignment with the program goals.

Eligibility

Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria or are otherwise non-responsive to the terms of this ROA will not be considered. The following types of projects would generally not be appropriate and may be deemed non-responsive:

• Applications from entities that lack direct experience in community engagement with a broad range of diverse partners.
• Applications that do not demonstrate an understanding of the breadth of the HEAL Initiative needs.
• Applications that do not demonstrate an understanding of health disparities.
• Applications that do not demonstrate an ability to engage and collaborate with diverse researchers, non-researchers, and various organizations.
• Applications that do not explicitly address and advance the NIH HEAL Initiative goals.
• Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria above or that do not explain how these criteria are met.

Organizations

Non-domestic (non-U.S.) Entities (Foreign applicants) are not eligible to apply. Non-domestic (non-U.S.) components of U.S. Organizations are not eligible to apply. Foreign components are not allowed. Foreign consultants are allowed if approved by the NIH official in advance of the full application submission.

The R-DEC OT may be awarded to organizations that are domestic, public, private, non-profit, or for-profit. Eligible organizations include small businesses, federal institutions, institutions of higher education, and other non-profit organizations such as community-based organizations. The full list of entities are eligible to apply under this ROA include:

Higher Education Institutions
• Public/State Controlled Institutions of Higher Education
• Private Institutions of Higher Education

Nonprofits Other Than Institutions of Higher Education
• Nonprofits with 501(c)(3) IRS Status (Other than Institutions of Higher Education)
• Nonprofits without 501(c)(3) IRS Status (Other than Institutions of Higher Education)
• Faith-based or Community-based Organizations
• Regional Organizations

For-Profit Organizations
• Small Businesses
• For-Profit Organizations (Other than Small Businesses)
Governments

- State Governments
- County Governments
- City or Township Governments
- Special District Governments
- American Indian/Native American Tribal Governments (Federally Recognized)
- American Indian/Native American Tribal Governments (Other than Federally Recognized)
- Eligible Agencies of the Federal Government
- U.S. Territory or Possession Other
- Independent School Districts
- Native American Tribal Organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments)