Morgan State, UMBC receive NIH awards to attract minorities to biosciences

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Morgan State University and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County will receive millions of dollars from the National Institutes of Health to develop ways to attract and retain more minorities in the biomedical sciences, NIH officials announced Wednesday.

Morgan and UMBC are among 12 schools nationally that will receive the NIH funding during the next five years to improve such efforts, agency officials said.

"While past efforts to diversify our workforce have had significant impact on individuals, we have not made substantial progress in supporting diversity," said NIH Director Francis S. Collins. "This program will test new models of training and mentoring so that we can ultimately attract the best minds from all groups to biomedical research." (Andrew Harrer, Bloomberg)
research."

NIH officials said that the program was projected to award $240 million over five years, beginning with $31 million for fiscal year 2014. Officials said that after the end of the five-year period, schools can request another five years of funding.

Morgan officials said the university will receive $23.2 million over five years for projects such as building a student-led scientific research center with support and mentorship services, creating specialty classrooms and enhancing a program that teaches students to craft research proposals by their junior years.

"In the film 'Field of Dreams,' they say, 'If you build it, they will come,'" said Farin Kamangar, Morgan professor and chair of the department of public health analysis. "We believe that once we build this, the students will come."

UMBC will receive $18 million over five years to target students with interest in science, technology, engineering and math fields who are not as academically strong as traditional STEM majors and are thus less likely to retain interest. UMBC will develop student support models and school officials say they will emulate what works at its existing scholarship programs.

Said William LaCourse, dean of UMBC's College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, "Through a university culture that values both innovation and assessment, we're constantly developing more effective ways to support learning and degree completion, building on the diverse strengths our students bring to the table."

While Morgan and UMBC are the only local universities to receive direct funding, both will partner with other local schools, including the Johns Hopkins University, Howard Community College and the University of Maryland, College Park, as well as with national institutions, university officials said.

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