NIH awards ~$31 million to enhance diversity in the biomedical research workforce

The National Institutes of Health announced the award of nearly $31 million in fiscal year 2014 funds to develop new approaches that engage researchers, including those from backgrounds underrepresented in biomedical sciences, and prepare them to thrive in the NIH-funded workforce. These awards are part of a projected five-year program to support more than 50 awardees and partnering institutions in establishing a national consortium to develop, implement, and evaluate approaches to encourage individuals to start and stay in biomedical research careers. Supported by the NIH Common Fund and all NIH 27 institutes and centers, 12 awards will be issued as part of three initiatives of the Enhancing the Diversity of the NIH-Funded Workforce program.

“At the Department of Health and Human Services we believe that delivering impact begins with building strong teams that have the talent and focus necessary to get results,” said Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell. “These awards will leverage the power of our country’s diversity so that together, we can continue to advance biomedical research and unlock the cures to some of the great health challenges of our times.”

Research demonstrates that economic, social, and cultural factors have a powerful impact on the pursuit of science careers, and has provided small scale data on interventions that have the potential to transform biomedical research training if implemented widely. This body of work suggests that a fundamental shift in the way scientists are trained and mentored is required to attract and sustain the interest of people from underrepresented groups in the scientific workforce at all career stages.

“The biomedical research enterprise must engage all sectors of the population in order to solve the most complex biological problems and discover innovative new ways to improve human health,” said NIH Director Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D. “While past efforts to diversify our workforce have had significant impact on individuals, we have not made substantial progress in expanding diversity on a larger scale. 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.”

The awards have been made to a geographically diverse group of institutions serving multiple underrepresented populations in biomedical research. These awardees will draw upon research to develop approaches to training and mentoring to encourage students from underrepresented groups to enter into and stay in research careers. The consortium of awardees will determine hallmarks of success at each phase of the biomedical career path, including competencies and skills required for a successful research career that extend beyond content knowledge in the sciences, such as leadership, grant writing, innovation, and networking. The consortium will disseminate lessons learned, so effective approaches can be adopted by institutions across the nation.

“These awards represent a significant step toward ensuring that NIH’s future biomedical research workforce will reflect the unique perspectives found within the diverse composition of our society,” said Dr. Hannah Valantine, NIH chief officer for scientific workforce diversity.

The three initiatives, which together form the Diversity Program Consortium, are:

- **Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD):** BUILD is a set of experimental training awards designed to learn how to attract students from diverse backgrounds into the biomedical research workforce and encourage them to become future contributors to the NIH-funded research enterprise. The 10 BUILD awardees will work with multiple partnering institutions. Some of these partnerships will enrich the pool of trainees from less research intensive institutions and others will provide robust research experiences for students and faculty.
The National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN): The NRMN will be a nationwide network of mentors and mentees spanning all disciplines relevant to the NIH mission. NRMN will also develop best practices for mentoring, provide training opportunities for mentors, and provide professional opportunities for mentees. Within the NRMN, an extensive network of collaborating institutions and partners across the country will engage a robust network of mentors and mentees and pilot multiple approaches to mentoring.

The Coordination and Evaluation Center (CEC): The CEC will coordinate consortium-wide activities and assess efficacy of the training and mentoring approaches developed by the BUILD and NRMN awardees. The CEC will develop short- and long-term measures of efficacy, allowing the consortium to continuously gather data and respond to emerging program needs.

“The Enhancing the Diversity of the NIH-Funded Workforce program aims to enable transformation across the spectrum of research training and mentoring,” said James M. Anderson, M.D., Ph.D., director of the NIH Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives, which oversees the NIH Common Fund. “We expect that new models for fostering careers will emerge and be widely adopted, having nationwide impact on biomedical research workforce diversity. Scientists from all backgrounds as well as science will ultimately benefit from these activities.”

For information about the BUILD, NRMN, and CEC awardees and partners, please visit http://commonfund.nih.gov/diversity/fundedresearch.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation’s medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

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