

Engaging Communities of Hispanics for Aging Research (ECHAR) Network Pilot Grant Program

Hispanic/Latinos (H/Ls) comprise 18% of the United States population and are the largest minority group. H/Ls are at a 1.5-times greater risk for developing ADRD for reasons that are not completely understood. Given this increased risk, the number of H/Ls living with ADRD are projected to increase more than 800% by 2060. In comparison to non-Hispanic whites, H/Ls show symptoms of ADRD earlier, are diagnosed later, and are less likely to use ADRD medications. Yet H/Ls comprise only 7.5% of research participants across NIH-funded AD Research Centers. This persistent “Hispanic paradox” means that the persons most likely to be affected by ADRD are not represented in clinical research efforts. Inclusion in AD research is crucial not only for better understanding of the disease in this population, which would aid in development of better targeted assessments and treatments; elucidation of the possible risk and resilience factors that may explain the Hispanic paradox additionally has implications for AD in non-Hispanic populations. This disparity also exists across other minority populations.

Considering short-comings of traditional recruitment methods for minorities in ADRD research, the parent grant for this pilot grant program, “**Engaging Communities of Hispanics for Aging Research (ECHAR) Network**” (R24 AG065170) aims to enhance engagement of H/L by developing a transdisciplinary network that will adopt methods and approaches related to community engagement (CE) and community-based participatory research (CBPR). ECHAR Network capitalizes on the specific and combined strengths of: community residents, patient/volunteer liaisons, clinical scientists, health communications scholars, health disparity investigators, the Alzheimer’s Association and other community-based organizations.

The ECHAR Network pilot grant program aims to leverage the scientific, mentoring, and administrative infrastructure of the ECHAR Network to help junior investigators 1) develop innovating ideas to enhance representation of H/Ls and other underrepresented groups in ADRD research and 2) solicit, review, and fund innovating pilot studies to enhance representation of H/Ls in ADRD research. The ECHAR Network Pilot Grant Program allow young and/or new investigators to: 1) Gain mentored experience in grant-writing and responding to reviewers in the area of minority health disparities and aging; 2) Gather pilot data to support and power future applications for Federal grant mechanisms (e.g., K- and R-series awards) to answer larger-scale issues in minority health and aging; 3) Demonstrate the feasibility of their proposed methods and approaches in support of future applications for Federal grant mechanisms (e.g., K- and R-series awards); 4) Gain invaluable mentored experience in managing the administrative, fiscal, and scientific aspects of a grant; and 5) Obtain data to support the production of career-building professional presentations and publications in the area of health disparities in aging and ADRD. We welcome applications from anywhere in the United States.

Pilot applications will ideally align with the priorities of the ECHAR R24, such as creating a comprehensive analysis of populations across published studies and designing research programs that seek to understand cultural distinctions (values, beliefs) that hinder and facilitate older research participant recruitment. In particular, given the current COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on racial/ethnic minorities, we are particularly interested in pilot projects that leverage telehealth approaches to engage such under-represented communities. We expect to fund 2-3 applications in this cycle.

Applicants may access the pilot grant application template from the ID Core page on the ECHAR Network website (<https://www.echarnetwork.com/>). The application should include: 1) A cover page with basic details regarding the investigator and mentors (if relevant), the R24 topic area with which the application aligns, and several administrative details (e.g., conflicts of interest, funding overlaps, the status of IRB approval); 2) An NIH biosketch for all investigators; 3) A structured abstract (max 500 words) that outlines the rationale, aims, methods, future plans, and alignment with ECHAR; 4) Budget and budget justification; and 5) Research Plan.

The research plan will be limited to 4 pages and will include: 5A) Introduction; 5B) Aims and Hypotheses; 5C) Strategy/Design; 5D) Limitations/Alternate approaches; and 5E) Expected publications and grant applications. Revised applications should also include a one-page response to the prior round of critiques. Applications are limited to a maximum budget of \$25,000 in direct costs (no indirect costs are allowed) and are expected to be completed in one year. Graduate students, fellows, and junior investigators are eligible to apply and should include a letter of support and brief mentoring plan from a senior investigator. More senior investigators are also eligible to apply if they are new to research in this domain and have identified an established investigator to provide peer mentoring on the planned work. Applications are due by July 2, 2021 and should be submitted electronically to ECHAR R24 administration via <https://www.echarnetwork.com/>. We expect that grants will be reviewed within 8 weeks and funding decisions will be made within 3 months of the submission deadline. Grants will be reviewed using standard NIH scoring and guidelines on the following criteria:

- **Innovation:** Is the project original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or clinical practice? Does the project develop or employ novel concepts, approaches or methodologies, tools, or technologies?
- **Methodological Approach:** Are the conceptual or clinical framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, well-reasoned, and appropriate to the aims of the pilot project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative approaches?
- **Investigator qualifications:** Are the investigators and other key personnel appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience of the principal investigator? Do the investigators have a track record of peer-reviewed publications commensurate with past funding?
- **Research Environment:** Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Is there evidence of institutional and/or mentor support?
- **Alignment with ECHAR Network aims and priorities:** Does the proposed research relate to enhancing the representation of under-represented minorities in dementia-related research?
- **Potential for External Funding:** If successful, is the proposed pilot study likely to lead to a competitive grant application for external funding from federal funding agencies (e.g., NIH, SAMSHA), or a private foundation (e.g., Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)?

Grant funding will be determined by the outcome of peer review and the priorities of ECHAR in alignment with NIH. Grant funds will not be distributed until the appropriate IRB approvals have been obtained. Awardees are expected to present their progress and findings to the ECHAR team.