



AIR-P SCHOLARS PROGRAM AND PILOT AND FEASIBILITY FUNDS: CALL FOR APPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

AUTISM INTERVENTION NETWORK FOR PHYSICAL HEALTH

In September 2020, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) assumed leadership of the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) under the direction of Dr. Alice Kuo. Funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, the AIR-P is an interdisciplinary, multicenter research network for scientific collaboration and infrastructure aimed at increasing life expectancy and quality of life for autistic individuals, with a focus on underserved/vulnerable populations.

The AIR-P supports innovative life course intervention research in six areas (Research Nodes):

- (1) primary care services and quality,
- (2) community-based lifestyle interventions,
- (3) gender, sexuality, and reproductive health,
- (4) health systems and services,
- (5) neurology, and
- (6) genetics.

The mission of the AIR-P is to develop a robust research infrastructure that will foster measurable improvements in optimal physical health and well-being of autistic individuals and their families across the lifespan. The AIR-P envisions a future where autistic individuals experience optimal multi-dimensional health and well-being. More information about the AIR-P is provided at airpnetwork.ucla.edu.

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS/PROPOSALS

Deadline: March 31, 2021

The Autism Intervention Network for Physical Health (AIR-P) seeks applications for the AIR-P Scholars program. In addition to applying to the Scholars program, the AIR-P welcomes proposals for pilot and feasibility funds during the 2021-2022 academic year. **Proposal must address a topic or topics related to autism and physical health with a focus on enhancing the health and well-being of autistic people.** Preference will be given to projects with an emphasis on underserved groups.¹

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

The goal of the AIR-P Scholars Program is to launch the next generation of researchers seeking to **promote the health and well-being of autistic individuals across the lifespan**. The Scholars program has the following specific objectives:

- To provide pilot and feasibility funding. These are funds that will support researchers conducting preliminary research and data collection, when applicable, or secondary data analysis, especially in areas in need of preliminary research;
- To provide mentorship, training, and professional development for new researchers; and
- To foster collaboration among Network members and new researchers.

¹ As has been discussed in AIR-P informational webinars, the AIR-P is also developing a mechanism to promote scalable research across the Network (i.e., the AIR-P Engine). The current RFP is separate from the engine. More details on how to submit proposals to the research engine will be released as the project progresses.

ELIGIBILITY

- Affiliation with one of the 15 AIR-P Collaborating Research Entities (CREs) or Node Leader institutions (see lists below).
 - Applicant organizations may submit more than one application, provided that each application is scientifically distinct, and each is from a different candidate.
- Early-stage investigators (e.g., doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows, & early-career faculty) and any/or investigator interested in transitioning into research in autism and physical health.
 - Any candidate with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research is invited to work with their Project Advisor and organization to develop an application.
- Individuals from underrepresented gender and racial and ethnic groups, as well as individuals with disabilities including autistic people, are particularly encouraged to apply.
- By the time of award, the applicant must be a citizen or a non-citizen national of the United States or have been lawfully admitted for permanent residence (i.e., possess a currently valid Permanent Resident Card USCIS Form I-551, or other legal verification of such status).

AIR-P Collaborating Research Entities (CREs)

Researchers associated with the following centers are eligible to apply. A letter of support from the CRE lead is required.

- Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Center for Developmental Disabilities at University of Tennessee Health Science Center
- Center for Human Development at University of Alaska Anchorage
- Center on Human Development and Disability at University of Washington
- Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University
- Institute on Community Integration at University of Minnesota
- Institute on Disability and Human Development at University of Illinois at Chicago
- JFK Partners at University of Colorado Denver
- Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities at University of Kansas
- Kennedy Krieger Institute
- Mailman Center for Child Development at University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
- Rose F. Kennedy Center at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Montefiore Medical Center
- Sonoran UCEDD at University of Arizona
- The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School
- University of California Davis MIND Institute

Research Node Leader Institutions

Researchers associated with the following institutions are eligible to apply. A letter of support from the node lead is required.

- University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)
- AJ Drexel Autism Institute at Drexel University
- Kaiser Permanente Northern California
- Mathematica

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Approximately 4-10 pilot and feasibility funding awards for one year ranging from **\$10,000 to \$50,000 (per award)** for the 2021-2022 academic year.

- Can be used to cover research support.
- Covers direct costs only.
- Funds will not be awarded for:
 - equipment costs above \$5,000,
 - salary or benefits for the principal investigator, or
 - any study personnel who hold an academic appointment (with the exception of post-doctoral fellows).
- Funds must be used to supplement and not supplant existing funding.

MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING

This award is intended for independent investigators at all career stages, but it requires the commitment of an experienced Project Advisor and a Career Mentor.

- The **Project Advisor** will be responsible for providing continuous research support for the conceptualization and actualization of project related activities.
- The **Career Mentor** will be responsible for meeting quarterly with Scholars to provide crucial career advice and assistance with long-term goals.

In some instances, one mentor may be able to serve both as the Project Advisor and Career Mentor. In that case, the Project Advisor/Career Mentor should have evidence of successfully mentoring early career researchers and of productive collaborations and be committed both to the career enhancement of the applicant and to the direct supervision of the applicant's research.

It is also possible that candidates may identify more than one Project Advisor and/or more than one Career Mentor, i.e., a co-mentor or mentoring team, if this is deemed advantageous for providing expert advice in all aspects of the research career enhancement program.

- In such cases, one individual must be identified as the primary Project Advisor, who will coordinate the applicant's research, and one individual as a Career Mentor, who will provide scaffolding for long-term goals.

Project Advisor's Role

- The applicant must work with the Project Advisor in preparing the application.
- Both the Project Advisor and applicant must document the availability of sufficient research support to conduct the proposed research, in excess of the pilot and feasibility funds provided through this award.
- If data access is required in order to complete the project, such as in secondary data analysis projects, approved access must be confirmed by the Project Advisor in their letter of support as well as in the proposal materials submitted by the applicant.²

²Data sources and consultative support on study design can potentially be provided by the Health Services and Systems Node. Example data sources include the [National Survey of Children's Health](#), the [Medical Expenditures Panel Survey](#), the [National Inpatient Sample](#), and the [Nationwide Emergency Department Sample](#). Please contact Jessica Rast, jer336@drexel.edu, for more information.

Career Mentor's Role

- If desired, a Career Mentor from the AIR-P network can be assigned to increase collaboration and/or if specific expertise is needed. Please specify in the application.
- A mentorship form will be provided for Scholars and Career Mentors to complete quarterly to ensure structure and consistency in career mentorship across the program.
- All Career Mentors will meet twice a year with the AIR-P Steering Committee for faculty development.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLISHING AND PRESENTING

All AIR-P Scholars will:

- Present their findings at Research Days;
- Contribute to AIR-P Supplements in Pediatrics; and
- Engage in other Network activities.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:

Applications must be **submitted by March 31, 2021**.

The application requires the following information compiled into a single PDF format.

1. **Description of the project**, addressing the following, limited to 6 pages maximum, single spaced, times new roman or arial size 11 font, 1" margins (not including description of community involvement, biosketches, budget proposal, letter(s) of support):
 - a. Project Title;
 - b. An abstract (no more than 250 words);
 - c. Research question and/or policy/practice issue and its importance;
 - d. Goals and objectives;
 - e. How the project addresses issues related to AIR-P research node(s);
 - f. Clear presentation of the design and methods; for secondary data proposals, description of the design, population, and methods of the data source *and* the proposed study;
 - g. For secondary data proposals, a detailed analysis plan including exposure and outcome variables, covariates, and analytic methods;
 - h. Deliverables, products;
 - i. Realistic schedule/timeline for completion;
 - j. Pictures or other demonstrative visuals (optional, not included in page count);
 - k. Demonstrable interest or knowledge on subject;
 - l. Senior researcher supervision from a named Project Advisor, with a brief description of the mentorship environment and how the mentorship will support the project; and
 - m. If a collaborative project, list of all involved collaborators.
2. Specifically detail how this project will **lead into the submission of a larger grant application or completion of a larger study**.
3. **Description of community involvement** (limited to 2 pages maximum, single spaced, times new roman or arial size 11 font, 1" margins), including the following:
 1. Either (1) a statement describing a plan to include autistic people and other community stakeholders (such as their family members and professionals) as collaborators or co-researchers, e.g., through participatory research or a community advisory board or (2) a statement explaining why this is unnecessary

for the project and/or infeasible with available resources. Plans to include community collaborators should consider:

1. how collaborators have been/will be recruited, with attention to which stakeholder groups (including intersectional identities) and what relevant lived expertise will be prioritized;
 2. what the roles of stakeholders in the project should be;
 3. what measures will be taken to ensure accessibility so that stakeholders can serve in those roles; and
 4. what compensation will be available for stakeholders.
- b. If the study includes human participants, either (1) a statement describing the plan to ensure inclusion of gender and racial and ethnic minority populations for appropriate representation and, if applicable, (2) a justification for why representation is limited or absent;
 - c. If the study includes human participants, a statement noting whether or not the study will include autistic individuals with intellectual disabilities and, if not, a justification for why they must be excluded;
 - d. If the study involves secondary data, a statement describing inclusion of gender and racial and ethnic minority populations in the secondary data source and in your analysis plan; and
 - e. A plan describing how research findings will be disseminated to the community.
4. **Biosketches** for all collaborators involved in the research project.
 5. **Budget proposal** detailing amount requested and itemized budget and justification for how the amount will be spent. Please also identify sources (confirmed and proposed) of additional funding.
 6. **Letter of support from either the AIR-P CRE lead investigator or AIR-P node leader**, whichever is applicable based on the applicant's institution, is required in addition to a **letter of support from the Project Advisor** (if not one in the same). Letters of support from stakeholders and community partners are also encouraged.

AWARD REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Mid-year report** (due 15 days after halfway point in project period).
2. **Final report** (due 45 days after end of project period).
3. Projects that are awarded pilot and feasibility funding must **acknowledge the Autism Intervention Network for Physical Health in all programs, public information materials, and publications** resulting from the research project and should be shared with AIRP@mednet.ucla.edu. The following language should be used:
This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) grant, UT2MC39440. The information, content and/or conclusions are those of the authors and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.
4. **Plain language promotional summary** is required at the end of the project to be distributed throughout the AIR-P network.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed in relation to the following evaluation criteria:

- **Significance:** Does this study address an important problem? If the goals of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge be advanced? What will be the effect of the study on the concepts or methods that drive this field? In particular, does the study have the potential to enhance the health and well-being of autistic people?
- **Approach:** Are the conceptual framework, design (including composition of study population), methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, and appropriate to the goals of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?
- **Innovation:** Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are the goals original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?
- **Investigators:** Are the Principal Investigator and faculty mentor appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the Principal Investigator and other researchers (if applicable)?
- **Environment:** Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed experiments take advantage of unique features of the scientific environment or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support?
- **Ethical Issues:** What provisions have been made for the protection of human subjects and the safety of the research environments? Is the design of the study adequate to measure differences when warranted? To what degree has the applicant outlined the inclusion of under-represented and marginalized groups in the proposed research as participants and/or collaborators?
- **Community Involvement:** Does the project include autistic people as collaborators or co-researchers? Does the project include autistic people from diverse backgrounds, with intersectional identities, and with diverse support needs as appropriate to the project? Does the project use a participatory research method? What measures will be taken to ensure accessibility?

DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION

Applications must be **submitted via email** to Scholar.lwnclplw8zw6ro4r@u.box.com by **March 31, 2021 at 4:00 pm PST**. Please contact airp@mednet.ucla.edu should you have any questions. The AIR-P National Coordinating Center (NCC), Autistic Researchers Review Board (ARRB), and Steering Committee will evaluate all proposals. Applicants will be notified of a decision by **June 1, 2021** and pilot and feasibility funds will be awarded by August of 2021.

TIMELINE

