

Strengthening Community-Engaged Research in the Clinical and Translational Science Awards Program

Concept Proposal

The mission of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) is to catalyze the generation of innovative methods and technologies that will enhance the development, testing and implementation of diagnostics and therapeutics across a wide range of human diseases and conditions. The Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) program, which funds medical research institutions to improve clinical and translational research and training, is an essential component in meeting the NCATS mission. This program provides infrastructure to facilitate translational research, promote the training and career development of translational researchers, and develop innovative methods and technologies to strengthen translational research. Institutional CTSA awards are the centerpiece of the program; they support leading biomedical research institutions across the country in the establishment of an integrated home for translational sciences. Part of the mission of these sites is the provision of resources and services to support the full range of translational sciences. NCATS anticipates soliciting applications for programmatic awards in targeted areas, building on the infrastructure created through the institutional CTSA awards to develop and test innovative approaches that will transform translational research in the nation. This proposed initiative focuses on one of several potential focus areas for targeted program development, namely strengthening the investment in community-engaged research.

The spectrum of translational research includes studies exploring strategies for more effective implementation of research findings and the study of factors and interventions that influence the health of populations and communities. CTSA sites have from their inception included developmental projects that focus on community engagement, including direct support for community-based participatory research, community-practitioner-based research networks, science education projects, and a number of projects developing strategies for access to disparate and needy communities. In the current solicitation for CTSA institutional awards, a community engagement component is not mandated, and emphasis is placed on provision of services to investigators rather than direct project support.

NCATS proposes to continue encouraging the development of innovative approaches to engage communities in the research process and to improve the dissemination and implementation of insights coming from NIH research. This proposed initiative will identify major challenges to effective community-engaged clinical research, especially those encountered by institutes and centers (ICs) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and will solicit focused, highly innovative demonstration projects to test strategies to overcome these barriers. This program will be undertaken in partnership with relevant NIH ICs. One goal of this initiative will be to enhance the capacity of the CTSA Consortium to facilitate cost-effective population and community-engaged research.

Examples of innovations that might be evaluated in these projects could include, but would not be limited to:

- Development of quantitative metrics to assess the effectiveness of engagement of community members.
- Mixed-method evaluation strategies to categorize structural, personal and other issues that facilitate or impede engagement in the research process.
- Innovative approaches to implementation science, such as development of analytic approaches to assessment of qualitative information from social media.
- Strategies to assess social determinants on health and interventions that influence social networks.
- Development and/or evaluation of telehealth programs and networks linking academic health centers and health care providers in medically underserved areas.