

Community Health Equity Pilot Studies Program

Request for Proposals from Early Career Investigators

The UB Community Health Equity Research Institute is offering pilot studies grants for projects to support research in health equity and adverse social determinants of health (SDOH). In this funding cycle, the Institute will fund projects with a **minimum budget of \$50,000 and a maximum budget of \$100,000 annually for one or two years.**

Eligibility:

- **Early-stage investigators with appointments at UB**
- **Postdoctoral Fellows in UB research groups**
 - Definition of Early-Stage Investigator (ESI): A Principal Investigator (PI) who has completed their terminal research degree or end of post-graduate clinical training, whichever date is later, within the past 10 years and who has not previously competed successfully as PD/PI for a substantial NIH independent research award. See [list of NIH grants that a PD/PI can hold and still be considered an ESI.](#)
- **Faculty from all 12 UB schools are invited to apply.**

We encourage pilot studies applicants to work with mentors who are established investigators with a history of funding. These mentors can serve as co-investigators on the project. The PI must be an early-stage investigator. Note that it is not necessary to include a mentor on the proposal. We can assist with connecting applicants with mentors.

Health inequities are preventable differences in the burden of disease and opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations. The term “disparities” refers to disproportionate health outcomes, while the term “health inequity” stresses the injustice and oppression that underlies these differences. The root causes of health inequities are often **social determinants of health (SDOH)**, the conditions in which people live, work, learn and play. They are typically found in underdeveloped neighborhoods and communities and are often driven by systemic structural racism. The root causes of health inequities are institutional and societal conditions, practices and policies that create the social determinants that result in adverse health outcomes.

One of the most pressing problems in Buffalo is race-based health inequities, a condition shared with many American metropolitan areas. While proposals addressing health inequities in all marginalized populations are welcome and encouraged, priority will be given to outstanding projects that address health inequities in Buffalo’s African American community.

Proposed studies should address health disparities and the role of social determinants of health in health disparities. SDOH include, but are not limited to:

- Poverty
- Educational opportunity
- High unemployment
- Poor housing stock
- Limited access to healthy food
- Limited access to healthcare
- Underdeveloped neighborhoods
- Unhealthy home and neighborhood built environments
- Criminal justice system
- Access to WiFi
- Access to public transportation
- Access to recreational facilities and greenspace
- Discrimination
- Environmental exposures, including climate change impacts

Successful pilot studies proposals will meet the following three objectives:

1. They will address root problems that underly adverse SDOH and health inequity. While mitigating health disparities is important, the intent of this pilot studies program is to address underlying root causes that will lead to institutional and systemic changes.
2. They will involve at least one community-based partner. The UB Community Health Equity Research Institute prioritizes community-based participatory research, which involves the community in the entire project from planning the project, to conducting the study, to benefiting from the results. We can assist in finding community partners.
3. They are designed with the goal of achieving larger scale extramural funding. The scope of projects to address root causes of adverse SDOH and lead to systemic change will need to be greater than what a pilot study can support. The intent is that the pilot studies will support key preliminary studies that will produce data that will strengthen larger proposals. The pilot proposal should articulate a clear plan for future substantive extramural funding, for example, individual mentored career development K awards, a federal or foundation grant such as an NIH R01, National Science Foundation grant, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant and others.

Study start date and funding period

The anticipated start date for funded projects is February 1, 2025. Funding for one or two years may be requested.

Application Process

Applying for pilot studies funding involves a two-tiered process:

- 1) Submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI), and
- 2) Submission of a full proposal, if invited, following review of the LOIs.

Timeline

Request for proposals released	August 2024
Informational Session	September 16, 2024 at 10:00 AM
Letters of intent due	October 8, 2024
Invitations to successful applicants to submit full proposals	Third week in October, 2024
Presentation to Community Advisory Board	Third week in November, 2024
Full proposals due	November 22, 2024
Notification to applicants	Early-mid January 2025
Funding start date	February 1, 2025

An **Informational Session** on tips for success in obtaining community health equity pilot studies will be held on September 16, 2024 at 10 AM by Zoom.

<https://buffalo.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJItduorz4vEtUgOBwcdzafAQY7TMk7dfwK>

Anyone applying for pilot studies funding is strongly encouraged to attend. Questions about the submission process or scope of the RFA can be sent to Chantazia Bronson at chantazi@buffalo.edu

Letter of Intent (LOI) Submission

There is a 2-page limit for LOIs

Page 1

- a. Succinct title for the proposal
- b. List of names and affiliations of all investigators, including community partners, involved in the project

Page 2 should provide a succinct abstract of the proposal, summarizing:

- a. The problem to be solved and your approach to solving the problem
- b. How the pilot study and the larger program of research will contribute to changing structures and systems with the aim of reducing health inequities
- c. Your community engagement plan
- d. How the pilot study will lead to substantive extramural funding, including identifying one or more target funding mechanisms

Format

LOIs should be submitted as a single PDF in Arial 11-point font, single-spaced text, 0.5-inch margins. **Submissions must be emailed to** commeqty@buffalo.edu. Applicants will be notified

with a decision as to whether their proposal has been selected to move forward to the second tier of the application process.

Full Proposal Submission (by invitation only)

Invited applicants should use the current application page limits for NIH R03 small grant applications (half inch margins, minimum font 11):

Specific Aims: 1 page limit

- State concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will have on the research field(s) involved. Note the health disparity(ies) or social determinant(s) of health that the project will address.

Research Strategy: 6 page limit

Use these 4 headings:

- Significance. Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress that the proposed project addresses. Describe the strengths and weaknesses in the rigor of the prior research (both published and unpublished) that serves as the key support for the proposed project. Explain how the proposed project addresses health equity.
- Innovation. Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms. Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies or interventions.
- Approach. Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Describe the experimental design and methods proposed and how they will achieve robust and unbiased results. For trials that randomize groups or deliver interventions to groups, describe how your methods for analysis and sample size are appropriate for your plans for participant assignment and intervention delivery. Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims. If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility, and address the management of any high-risk aspects of the proposed work.
- Plan for extramural funding for a larger project. Explain how the pilot study will lead to substantive extramural funding, including identifying one or more target funding mechanisms.

Also, please provide the following:

- Bibliography
- NIH Biosketches (5 page limit each). Faculty and postdoctoral applicants should provide NIH Biosketches for Principal Investigator and Co-investigators. The personal statements for each investigator should make clear their role as it pertains to this project.
- Resumes. Community partners involved in the proposed study should provide a current resume.
- Budget and Justification. (2-page limit) Budgets should be a minimum of \$50,000 and up to \$100,000 direct costs; there are no indirect costs. All costs needed for the project must

follow the Uniform Guidance Cost Principles and must be allowable, reasonable, allocable and consistent. Please note that faculty salaries/fringe and tuition are not allowable expenses on pilot awards. Salary for staff, students, postdocs, supplies and small equipment that is necessary for the project are allowed.

Projects using vertebrate animals cannot be supported under this Pilot Project Program.

Format

Full proposals should be submitted as a single PDF in Arial 11-point font, single-spaced text, 0.5-inch margins. Proposals must be emailed to commeqty@buffalo.edu. All applicants will be notified with a decision as to whether or not their proposal has been selected for funding and will receive reviewer comments.

Registration with Central Study Registration

The principal investigator must register their study with [Central Study Registration](#) (CSR) *prior to submission of the full proposal*. Exceptions are noted below. To begin the CSR process, a proposal document (at minimum) is required. It is not necessary to submit an IRB proposal at this stage. For any questions regarding CSR registration, please contact the [CTSI Clinical Research Facilitators \(829-4357\)](#). Due to reporting requirements, chart reviews *must be registered* with CSR.

- The HRP-503-Protocol template can be found in the [CLICK portal](#), within the IRB Library section, under the “Templates” tab.

Please note the following exceptions to CSR Registration HRP-503 protocols:

- If you plan to submit your protocol to the IRB for determination of “Not Human Subjects Research”.
- If you will seek “Exempt Status” from the IRB for your study.

If bypassing CSR, please leave a comment in Click indicating you are seeking one of the above listed determinations. This will allow the IRB intake coordinator to know your study should not be returned for registration.

Review Process

PIs invited to submit full proposals will be required to present a brief summary of their projects to the Community Health Equity Research Institute Community Advisory Board (CAB) approximately mid-way through the proposal writing period. This group of community leaders will provide feedback on the project approach and potential for impact. While researchers will not be evaluated on their presentation, they will be expected to be responsive to the CAB feedback. A summary will be provided to both the researchers and the reviewers to evaluate responsiveness.

Applications will be reviewed by independent reviewers and rated using the following criteria.

- a. Scientific merit and innovation
- b. Incorporation of community engagement into the research process
- c. Potential for contributing to the reduction of structural and systemic causes of health inequities
- d. Potential for reducing health inequities

- e. Responsiveness to Community Advisory Board feedback
- f. Potential for securing extramural funding
- g. Potential for advancing the career of the early-stage investigator applicant
- h. Realistic milestones and feasibility of completion within the requested time frame
- i. Rationale and use of proposed budget

Conditions for Awarded Pilot Projects

The following are required of every pilot study PI:

- a. Attend “on-boarding” session regarding requirements associated with funding and award. The PI and appropriate administrative staff must attend before funds will be released and before the project will begin.
- b. Attend a session on “Working with Community Partners.
- c. Submit quarterly progress reports on the status of the budget and the aims using the form that will be provided.
- d. Present a brief update of your project to the Community Advisory Board six months after funding begins.
- e. Submit brief progress reports yearly following the project end date, for three years, using a form that will be provided.
- f. Present findings at the annual Community Health Equity Institute Research Day.
- g. If called upon, serve as a reviewer of proposals submitted to this Pilot Studies Program.

Awarded Pilot Projects

- Pilot Studies Awardees will be assigned an advocate/mentor from the Community Health Equity Research Institute.
- All investigators are encouraged to submit findings to an academic peer-reviewed journal or discipline-specific publication within two years of the pilot project end date.
- All investigators are encouraged to apply for funding at the next level within two years of the pilot project end date.