



HVTN Research and Mentorship Program (RAMP) Scholar Awards

Request for Applications – Due January 3, 2018

The HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN) is pleased to announce that applications are currently being accepted for the eighth cohort of Research and Mentorship Program (RAMP) Scholars, supported by the Division of AIDS, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and the National Institute of Mental Health, both parts of the National Institutes of Health. RAMP Scholar awards support African-American/Black and Latinx medical students considering careers in HIV vaccine research.

PURPOSE

RAMP aims to increase the participation of members of the African American and Latinx communities in HIV prevention research, both as participants and as researchers. We pursue this by identifying promising medical students from these communities who wish to engage in HIV prevention and vaccine-related research activities. Our goal is to develop future physician-scientists whose careers are dedicated to the search for a safe and effective HIV vaccine. To achieve this goal, HVTN created this grant program to select and support competitive U.S. medical students and provide outstanding mentorship and training. These students, under the mentorship of HVTN-affiliated investigators, will conduct short-term research projects in aspects of basic, clinical, behavioral, and social sciences aligned with the HVTN scientific agenda.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- 8-16 week or 9-12 month-long research projects
- Structured mentorship by HVTN Investigator(s)
- Travel to HVTN Clinical Research Site
- Opportunity for international travel
- Attendance at an HVTN Conference (May 2019 preferred)
- Oral and poster presentations and potential for publication

PROGRAM RESOURCES:

- Up to \$25,000 for short-term project (8-10 week projects: maximum \$20,000; >10-16 week projects: maximum \$25,000)
- Up to \$70,000 for long-term project (9-12 months)
- Funding includes salary, materials, and travel
- Career mentoring and access to HIV vaccine research expertise
- Four training webinars through the course of the year, and a professional development workshop at the conclusion of the program.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: January 3, 2018

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

RAMP resulted from discussions with the Legacy Leadership Initiative, whose goal was to strategize to increase participation of African American and Latinx physicians in HIV prevention and care-focused research; the program is now in its eighth year. Each year, the HVTN puts out a call to medical schools and student organizations to recruit a cohort of outstanding students for the program. Interested students are paired with HVTN-affiliated investigator(s) based on interests; the investigator(s) then work closely with the student to develop a RAMP project proposal that will outline research and mentorship activities. RAMP scholars may propose to conduct short-term (8-16 weeks) or long-term (9-12 month) research projects.

- Short-Term Projects involve a minimum 8-week experience (i.e. 40 workdays onsite) and can be timed during the summer between academic years, as a clinical elective block, or during an MPH or PhD program.
- Long-Term projects involve an academic year-long experience that is best timed with a distinct, non-degree associated research-focused year, but is also available concurrent with a planned masters or doctoral program (e.g., MPH or MD/PhD program), or during medical school research years.

All projects are conducted at a U.S. and/or international HVTN Clinical Research Site (CRS). The mentoring investigator(s) will be responsible for identifying a feasible research project commensurate with the student's level of training and length of time planned at the site, as well as budget constraints. The mentor(s) must work closely with the student to develop a fleshed-out research plan. Ultimately, however, the student is responsible for completing and submitting all application materials.

Applications will undergo competitive review by the RAMP Review Board, HVTN Scientific Governance Committee, and the National Institute of Mental Health. Once selected, scholars will work closely with mentors and site staff to plan their research experiences, finalize logistics and create a project and mentorship plan. The scholar will then travel to the HVTN CRS to conduct the research project for the allotted time. During the project period, the mentor will oversee the student's progress during the project's implementation and also work with the student on professional and career development. In addition to investigator-led mentorship activities, scholars will participate in HVTN-organized training activities designed to develop their skills in research methods, academic writing and working within the scientific community. Students should expect to complete the bulk of their research while onsite at the CRS, and will finalize data analysis and drafting of results at their home institution.

The culmination of the project will occur when the scholars present their projects at an HVTN Full Group Meeting in the form of an oral plenary presentation and a poster.

ELIGIBILITY OF SCHOLARS

This program specifically seeks U.S. medical students who self-identify as African-American/Black or Latinx. We acknowledge that there are a number of other racial, ethnic and other minority groups that are underrepresented as researchers in the HIV vaccine community. However, the disproportionate impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the African American and Latinx communities in the U.S, combined with structural barriers that have limited career development opportunities for these students, warrant attention by programs such as RAMP.

To be considered for a RAMP Scholar award, a candidate must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. They must be currently matriculated at an accredited U.S. medical

school, and express an interest in pursuing a future career in research relevant to HIV prevention and/or vaccine research. Students should be in good academic standing at their medical school and must be able to commit to working at their site full-time (approximately 40 hours per week) for the entirety of their project period.

Previously awarded RAMP scholars who are still enrolled in medical school (i.e. not participating in internship or residency) are eligible to apply for a follow-up long-term project (9-12 months). Scholars may apply with mentors from their previous site or at a new site. Returning scholar applicants must submit additional application materials; more information about these requirements can be found in the “Application” section of this RFA on page 6.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR MENTORS AND AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS

Mentors are HVTN investigators who have a track record of successful mentoring of medical or graduate students, or junior investigators, particularly from underrepresented groups. A list of HVTN Investigators interested in mentoring RAMP scholars is posted at www.hvtn.org/ramp. We recommend that interested students e-mail HVTNAwards@hvtn.org to be personally connected with investigators whose interests and location match their own. Co-mentors may be HVTN or non-HVTN-affiliated investigators, but should have knowledge in methods and areas related to the project topic.

The institutions of the mentor/ co-mentor must have capacity to host a RAMP scholar.

Capacity includes the administrative ability to hire the student as an employee of the U.S. mentor’s institution, sufficient site staff to assist with regulatory approvals, and availability of mentor or key staff to meet regularly with the scholar during the project period. More details are included in the Scholar Mentor Expectations Table at www.hvtn.org/ramp.



Figure 1: Characteristics to consider in determining a successful mentor/mentee relationship.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Students interested in applying for a RAMP Scholar Grant are encouraged to contact program staff by e-mailing HVTNAwards@hvtn.org to initiate a mentor/mentee relationship and a research proposal. A list of previous RAMP projects, and a list of HVTN investigators and sites is available at www.hvtn.org/ramp.

Mentors and students must work together to determine if their project and mentor/mentee styles are compatible, considering aspects described in Figure 1 (left). Either mentors or students may end the project planning process during the application period if there is not a good fit.

Mentors and students must work together to determine if their project and

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

All scholars will be required to have a U.S. HVTN Investigator serve as a mentor. If the proposed project is at a site outside of the U.S., then a co-mentor from the international site is required. This requirement is for fiscal reasons. Although the international investigator is listed as the co-mentor, they will provide much of the lead mentorship in all phases of the project. **All mentors must e-mail a letter of support confirming they agree to mentor the applicant if awarded, and should attest to the research environment that will support the student's success.** Many projects will require IRB approval, and the IRB application process should begin as early as possible when the scholar and mentor(s) are notified of award decisions.

All projects will include:

- Orientation Conference Call
- Quarterly RAMP Seminar Series
- Kick-off Conference Call with Mentors
- Travel to and from selected HVTN site
- 8-16 week research project at an HVTN site
- Customized trainings and workshops designed for RAMP scholars
- Attendance at an HVTN Full Group Meeting (May 2019 in Washington, DC preferred)
- Poster and Oral Presentation of Results at the Full Group Meeting
- Potential publication of data

Long-term projects will also include:

- 9-12 month research project in U.S. with up to 16 weeks at an international site
- Attendance at an additional HVTN Full Group Meeting (for instance, November 2018 in Seattle) or attendance at an external scientific conference, such as AIDS 2018 or CROI 2019.
- Publication of abstract or manuscript

The long-term projects may be a stand-alone research activity during a year's leave from medical school, or may be paired with MD, MPH, MS or PhD coursework. Applicants are encouraged to discuss concurrent workload with mentor(s), RAMP program staff and academic program staff to ensure there will be enough time for project completion. Long-term projects are required to have larger scope than short-term projects and applicants must provide a more detailed project description in the RAMP Application Form. After the award is made, the scholar and mentor will develop milestones for the project in the Mentor-Scholar agreement and send to the RAMP manager for tracking.

All scholars are required to present their results at an HVTN Full Group Meeting in the form of an oral plenary presentation and a poster. Scholars are also expected to attend the entirety of the HVTN Full Group Meeting, and strategize with mentors on their conference schedule. Scholars must inform the RAMP Manager of any scheduling conflicts with the Full Group Meeting.

FUNDING

We anticipate that support will be available for up to 8 scholar grants awarded directly to HVTN sites (U.S. or international); including up to 6 short-term project awards, at a maximum award amount of \$20,000 or \$25,000, depending on proposed project length (direct costs), and up to 2 long-term project awards, at a maximum amount of \$70,000 (direct costs).

The majority of funds from each award should be applied toward salary support for the medical student scholar, which will cover the scholar's living expenses during the project, including housing, food, local transportation, personal trips, etc. The salary is a budgeted amount that is distributed to the scholar in paychecks from the U.S. mentor's institution after the scholar has successfully been hired as an employee. If the hiring of the scholar is delayed, the salary support may be delayed and begin after the project start date.

The remainder of funds will be applied to purchase research supplies and cover travel to the site, HVTN Conference and, for those with long-term projects, to other conferences. To support the investigators' research mentorship activities, the mentor's site will receive a supplement in addition to the scholar award amount (\$1,500 for short-term project mentors, \$10,000 for long-term project mentors).

Project funding through the RAMP Scholar Award can begin any time starting May 1, 2018, and end no later than December 31, 2019. The exact dates of funding will depend on the schedules of the parties involved.

REVIEW CRITERIA

The following are the review criteria for the HVTN RAMP Scholar Grant applications:

- The interest of the medical student in HIV/AIDS research or clinical care, and in potentially pursuing a career in HIV vaccine research.
- Relevant research background or personal experiences such as laboratory research, clinical experiences, strong interest in gaining new research experience, and/or personal experience with HIV/AIDS. Relevant research experience is not a requirement of the program but will be viewed favorably.
- The student's ability to successfully complete a large-scale project like RAMP. Demonstrated evidence of qualities such as intellectual rigor, independence, curiosity, responsibility, drive and ability to manage multiple priorities.
- Significance and innovation balanced with practical feasibility of the proposed research project. The relevance to the overall goals and scientific agenda of the HVTN.
- The appropriateness of the project considering the student's level of training and knowledge. Aspects of the proposed research plan, including research question(s), data collection, methods and analysis plan.
- Support from an HVTN Investigator to mentor the applicant. The extent to which the investigator has a demonstrated commitment to mentoring underrepresented minority medical students, post-doctoral students, or junior investigators to pursue careers in HIV research.
- A preliminary mentoring plan that assures the investigator(s) involved in the project can dedicate time to oversee the activities of the student during the RAMP Scholar experience. The plan should detail approaches that will be used to support the academic advancement of the student including, but not limited to, research methods, writing and presentation skills, cultural competency and skills necessary to succeeding in a research environment.

APPLICATION

Applicants must fill out the application form, describing research and career interests, the project plan and mentoring plan. Please refer to the application form for further instructions at <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/3803186/2017-2018-RAMP-Scholar-Application-Form>.

If interested in applying, please e-mail RAMP program staff at HVTNAwards@hvtn.org to begin the process. Read all materials on the RAMP webpage including the HVTN Mentor and Site List, Scholar-Mentor Expectations Table, Sample Budgets and Application Form. The RAMP Manager will suggest an appropriate HVTN investigator who may serve as a mentor. The mentor will suggest project topics appropriate to the site's objectives and the student's skill level and interest. The project idea will be summarized in the application. If accepted, the scholar will work with the mentor to further define the project in an IRB application, and respond to any requests from the HVTN Auxiliary Studies review process, if applicable. The RAMP Scholar award application form and further details are available on the HVTN website at www.hvtn.org/ramp.

The deadline for receipt of applications is **January 3, 2018, by 5:00 PM PST**. All application materials must be submitted electronically, either through the application form or via email to HVTNAwards@hvtn.org. **No paper documents will be accepted.** The application, resume, transcript(s), and the proposed budget should be submitted electronically via the form at <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/3803186/2017-2018-RAMP-Scholar-Application-Form>. The letter of recommendation and letter of support from the mentor(s) should be either emailed directly to HVTNAwards@hvtn.org or uploaded with the application form. All RAMP mentors should submit the letter of support confirming they have agreed to mentor the applicant if awarded. The applicants will be notified of receipt of application materials.

Application Materials

- Application Form
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae
- Transcript (unofficial PDF preferred)
 - First year students should provide a medical school and an undergraduate transcript
 - Second, third and fourth year students should provide a medical school transcript
- Detailed Budget Form
- Letter of Recommendation (from professor, dean, or relevant professional)
- Letter(s) of Support from Mentor(s) (e-mail from all involved HVTN investigators)

Additional Requirements for Returning RAMP Scholar Applicants

- An essay on why the applicant wants to return to the HIV vaccine research field, and how the proposed project will align with the scholar's short- and long-term career goals (1 page maximum)
- Letter from previous RAMP mentor(s) providing detailed feedback on previous RAMP research and mentoring experience

AWARD DATE

Awards will be announced by mid-February 2018. Funding will be available for students to begin projects as soon as May 1, 2018, although starting in June or later is preferred. The award is contingent upon the availability of funds provided by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases under the cooperative agreement with the HVTN and the National Institute of Mental Health. HVTN staff will work with students' medical school leadership to ensure institutional support for the students' participation in all aspects of the program.

INQUIRIES

Questions regarding the RAMP Scholar Grants can be directed to HVTNAwards@hvtn.org or:

Jenna Udren, MPH
RAMP Manager
HIV Vaccine Trials Network
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
judren@fredhutch.org
Office: 206-667-6712