HVTN Research and Mentorship Program Grants

Request for Applications – Due February 24, 2014

The HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN) is pleased to announce that applications are currently being accepted for a fourth cohort of Research and Mentorship Program (RAMP) grants supported by the Division of AIDS and the National Institute of Mental Health. RAMP Scholar grants support African American and Latino/a medical students considering careers in HIV vaccine research.

PURPOSE
RAMP is a joint activity of the HVTN Legacy Project and the HVTN Training Unit that aims to increase the participation of members of the African American and Latino/a communities in clinical research of HIV prevention and treatment. The RAMP aims to identify promising medical students from these communities who wish to engage in HIV research activities. Our goal is developing future physician-scientists whose careers are dedicated to the search for a safe and effective HIV vaccine. To achieve this goal HVTN built a 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 weeks or 9-12 month long research projects
- Structured mentorship by HVTN Investigator
- Travel to HVTN Clinical Research Site
- Opportunity for international travel
- Attendance at an HVTN Conference (October 2014, May 2015)
- Oral presentation and potential publication

PROGRAM RESOURCES:
- Up to $20,000 for short-term project (8-16 weeks)
- Up to $60,000 for long-term project(9-12 months)
- Funding includes salary, materials, and travel
- Career mentoring and access to HIV vaccine research expertise
- Trainings - previous RAMP workshops included HIV vaccine science webinar, career development workshop, and cultural responsiveness workshop
APPLICATION DEADLINE: February 24, 2014

PROGRAM STRUCTURE
The HVTN investigator(s) will mentor the participating medical student in one of two RAMP tracks:

- **Short-Term Projects** involve a minimum 8 week experience and can be timed during the summer between academic years, as 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).

Established HVTN investigators will work closely with the student to develop a RAMP project proposal that will outline research and mentorship activities. The mentoring investigator 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, and will oversee the student’s progress during the project’s implementation. Applications will undergo competitive review by subcommittees of the RAMP Review Board, HVTN Scientific Governance Committee, and the National Institute of Mental Health. In addition to investigator-led mentorship activities, selected scholars will have the opportunity to participate in HVTN-organized training activities designed to develop their skills in research methods and academic writing.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS
Scholars can propose projects at a U.S.-based or international HIV Vaccine Trials Unit (HVTU). Scholars can apply to participate in short or long-term projects detailed below:

**Short Term Projects:** Up to 6 RAMP scholars will be selected to conduct short-term research projects at a U.S. or international HVTU. All scholars will be required to have a U.S. HVTN Investigator serve as a primary mentor. If the proposed project is at a site outside of the U.S., then a co-mentor from the international site is required. Each mentor 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.

Short-term 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 the HVTN Conference in Washington, D.C. (May 2015)
- Poster and Oral Presentation of results
- Potential publication of data
**Long-Term Projects:** Up to 2 RAMP scholars will be selected to conduct long-term research projects for an academic year at a U.S. HVTU with up to 16 weeks at an international HVTU. All scholars will be required to have a U.S. HVTN Investigator serve as their primary mentor. If the proposed project includes a visit to a site outside of the U.S., then a co-mentor from the international site is required. Each mentor 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.

Long-term projects will include:
- Orientation Conference Call
- Quarterly RAMP Seminar Series
- Kick-off Conference Call with Mentors
- Travel to and from selected HVTN site(s)
- 9-12 month research project in U.S. with up to 16 weeks at an international site
- Customized trainings and workshops designed for RAMP scholars
- Attendance at the HVTN Conference in Seattle, WA (October 2014)
- Attendance at an external scientific conference, such as CROI
- Attendance at the HVTN Conference in Washington, D.C. (May 2015)
- Poster and Oral Presentation of results
- 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 an MPH or PhD coursework. Applicants are encouraged to discuss concurrent workload with mentor, 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 and send to the program administrator for tracking. Most long-term projects will require IRB approval, and the IRB application process should begin as early as possible after the award is made.

**SUPPORT**

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 (direct costs), and up to 2 long-term project awards, at a maximum amount of $60,000 (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. 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.
Funds should also be applied to purchase research supplies and travel to the site and HVTN Conference. In support of 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 Grant can begin any time after June 1, 2014, and end no later than December 31, 2015. The exact dates of funding will depend on the schedules of the parties involved.

ELIGIBILITY OF SCHOLARS
This program specifically seeks U.S. medical students who self-identify as African American or Latino/a. We acknowledge that there are a number of other racial and ethnic 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 Latino communities in the U.S., combined with historic structural barriers that have limited career development opportunities for these students, warrant attention by programs such as RAMP and is the focus of the Legacy Leadership Initiative.

To be considered for a RAMP Scholar Grant, a candidate must be a U.S. citizen, or a foreign national who possesses a visa permitting permanent residence in the United States. He or she must be matriculated at an accredited U.S. medical school, and express an interest in pursuing a future career in research relevant to HIV vaccine development. Applicants must submit a statement of interest and short synopsis of their proposed research activities (limit to 2 pages). Please refer to the application for further instructions.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR MENTORS AND APPLICANT INSTITUTION
Primary mentors should be HVTN investigators who have a track record of successful mentoring of medical or graduate students, or junior investigators, particularly from underrepresented groups. It is not required that the mentor be from the same institution as the scholar. 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@fhcrc.org to be personally connected with an investigator whose interests and location match their own.

If the scholar candidate proposes research activities outside the U.S., the international site investigator must be affiliated with a Division of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (DAIDS)-funded HIV Vaccine Trials Unit (HVTU), and also have experience in mentoring medical trainees.

The institutions of the primary and co-mentors 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.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
Students interested in applying for a RAMP Scholar Grant are encouraged to contact program staff by e-mailing HVTNawards@fhcrc.org to start developing project ideas. A list of previous RAMP Grant projects, and a list of HVTN investigators and sites, and the application is available at www.hvtn.org/ramp. The HVTN investigator is responsible for working with the applicant to define a project, submit an application, and will oversee the completion of the research project.

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. Proposals that describe areas of research interest and/or research strategies related to underrepresented populations in clinical trials are encouraged.

- Relevant research background or experiences such as laboratory research, clinical experiences, or personal experiences. Relevant research experience is not a requirement of the program but will be looked upon favorably.

- Significance and innovation balanced with practical feasibility of the proposed research project. The relevance to the overall goals and scientific agenda of the HVTN.

- Support from an HVTN Principal 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 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, grant writing, and publication skills.

APPLICATION
If interested in applying, please e-mail RAMP program staff at HVTNawards@fhcrc.org to begin the process. Read all materials on the RAMP webpage including the Request for Applications, HVTN Investigator and Site List, Scholar-Mentor Expectations Table, Sample Timeline, and Application. HVTN will connect medical students interested in applying with 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 briefly summarized in the application, and if accepted the student will work with the mentor to further define the project in an HVTN Ancillary Study Form and IRB application if applicable. The RAMP Scholar Grant application form and further details are available for download on the HVTN website at www.hvtn.org/ramp.

The deadline for receipt of applications is **February 24, 2014, by 5:00 PM PST.** All application materials must be submitted in PDF. The application, resume, letter of recommendation, and the proposed budget should be sent electronically to HVTNawards@hvtn.org. The letter of support from the mentor should be an e-mail (either sent directly to HVTNawards@fhcrc.org or
included with the application packet) from the HVTN investigator(s) confirming they have agreed to mentor the applicant if awarded. The Applicants will be notified on receipt of application materials.

**Application Materials**
- Application Form
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae
- Transcript (unofficial PDF preferred)
  - First and second year students should provide an undergraduate transcript
  - 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 HVTN investigator)

**AWARD DATE**
Funding will be available for students to begin projects after June 1, 2014. 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.

**INQUIRIES**
Questions regarding the RAMP Scholar Grants can be directed to [HVTNawards@fhcrc.org](mailto:HVTNawards@fhcrc.org) or:

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