

Funding Opportunity Announcement (FoA) 2023-2024 HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) Scholars Program Solicitation

Overview Information

The HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) is a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-supported Network designed to study strategies and technologies to prevent HIV transmission and acquisition. It addresses the global HIV epidemic through discovery and/or application of innovative interventions for prevention.

This funding opportunity announcement (FOA) is intended to encourage [early career](#) underrepresented racial or ethnic minority investigators who wish to collaborate with the HPTN in the development and implementation of its research agenda by becoming mentored HPTN Scholars. The HPTN Scholars Program provides scholar recipients with the knowledge, skills, and connections to further their careers as independent investigators in the HIV prevention research field. The Domestic Scholars Program was initiated in 2010 and seeks to develop the next generation of HIV prevention scientists and researchers in the United States. The International Scholars Program, which began in 2015, funds non-U.S.-based Scholars in support of the global agenda to end HIV. The International Scholars Program seeks candidates from low economic resources countries, and historically disadvantaged communities or backgrounds in various geographical areas of the world.

The HPTN invites applications from individuals who wish to engage the HPTN by working with a mentor who has been an investigator on an HPTN study (see a list of [HPTN studies](#) available for Scholars' proposals below). Mentors may be affiliated with an independent academic or research institution or one of three central supportive bodies for the HPTN Leadership and Operations Center (LOC) at FHI 360, the Laboratory Center (LC) at Johns Hopkins University, or the Statistical and Data Management Center (SDMC), "Statistical Center for HIV/AIDS Research and Prevention (SCHARP)", at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

Scholars are not required to be co-located in the same city or in the same country as their mentor, but this is preferred. For those applying to the International Scholars Program, mentors not based in the U.S. is also preferred, as building of HPTN site capacity is one of the goals of the International Scholars Program. For additional considerations about mentors, see the "Identification of Projects and Mentors" section below.

Background

The HPTN Scholars Program is funded by the NIH to increase the number of scientists from populations currently underrepresented in HIV science who are prepared to pursue careers in HIV prevention research in a variety of disciplines.

Through funding to the HPTN Leadership and Operations Center (LOC) at FHI 360, support will be provided from **01 June 2023** through **30 November 2024** for a limited number of HPTN Scholars, who will be selected on a competitive basis.

Applicants will submit project proposals that utilize the data sets from a completed HPTN study. Available studies include: HPTN 037, HPTN 039, HPTN 043, HPTN 052, HPTN 058, HPTN

063, HPTN 061, HPTN 064, HPTN 065, HPTN 067, HPTN 068, HPTN 069, HPTN 071, HPTN 073, HPTN 074, HPTN 075, HPTN 077, HPTN 078 or HPTN 082.

If selecting an older HPTN dataset, please provide a significant rationale on why the proposed research questions, aims and analysis plan are appropriate in the current HIV prevention landscape. All submitted proposals should reflect how its aims and objectives directly impact and relate to the endpoint of HIV.

HPTN studies that are in early development and implementation or are still ongoing will not be made available to Scholars.

Scholarship Criteria

Those applying to the Program should:

- Have experience and/or substantial potential in conducting research with populations at risk
- Have technical background suitable to become involved in a substantial component of the HPTN science agenda.
- Demonstrate plans to work with and be mentored by an investigator actively involved in HPTN research, based at an HPTN site or affiliated independent institution or at the Central Resources of the HPTN.
- Have the support of their host academic or work institutions that would allow them the time to participate in the mentored research program and to travel as required to work with their mentor and to key HPTN meetings

HPTN **Domestic Scholars** should also:

- Be a citizens or permanent U.S. resident.
- Be within 10 years of graduation with such a terminal degree, first postdoctoral fellowship, or first medical residency at the time applications are due.
- Be a member of **underrepresented racial/ethnic minority communities**. Persons from such communities who are also of minority sexual orientation and/or gender identity are particularly encouraged to apply. The NIH gives this guidance regarding such underrepresented racial/ethnic minority communities:
 - Underrepresented racial or ethnic minority group whose representation in science education or employment remains less than their representation in the U.S. population (which combined account for about a third of the U.S. population ages 18–64).
 - Individuals in these underrepresented minority communities are comprised of the following racial or ethnic minority groups: Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, American Indians or Alaska Natives. (Source: [Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering Report](#)).

HPTN **International Scholars** should be:

- Be a current PhD, MD, or MChB/MBBS/etc. student (such as Public Health professionals holding an MPH and registered for a PhD, Lab Staff/Scientists/Study Coordinators holding relevant Masters' degrees and registered for PhDs, Behavioral Scientists holding an MA and registered for a PhD, or anyone holding a Masters' degree who is also enrolled in a PhD program)

- OR be within 10 years of graduation with such a terminal degree, first postdoctoral fellowship, or first medical residency at the time applications are due
- Dentists holding a BDS and Pharmacists holding an MPharm may also apply
 - *Additionally:* Anyone holding a Masters' degree may apply, if the mentor or Principal Investigator (PI) on the HPTN study strongly sees the candidate as a very promising individual and notes such in the applicant's letter of recommendation.
- Communicate effectively in English (via speech, reading, and writing)
- Plan to continue working in the country in which s/he and his/her mentor are located

Researchers with interest in specific issues related to sexual minorities and high-risk populations are encouraged to participate. We seek persons with special insight and potential to address research in the highest risk minority subpopulations in the world.

Applicants must not have previously competed successfully as Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) for a substantial NIH independent research award (e.g., R01 grant).

The program will give priority to investigators who are within 10 years of completing their terminal research degree, first post-doctoral fellowship, or first medical residency at the time of application. Candidates should consult their Program Officer to determine if they qualify for early-stage investigator status.

Scholarship Program Goals

The goals of the Scholars program are:

1. Through completing the scholarship requirements and by working with their mentor(s), the HPTN Scholars will acquire new knowledge, skills, and connections to further their careers as independent investigators in HIV science.
2. The Scholars develop a research project, to be approved through study specific HPTN review processes, which will make use of data the Scholars will identify from completed or ongoing HPTN studies. Further, that the Scholars, working with their mentors and other Network resources, will have completed their approved project and will present findings from their projects at the HPTN Annual Meeting (and preferably at one or more other scientific meetings) and submit a manuscript from the project to a peer-reviewed journal by the end of the 18-month program period (typically with the scholar as the lead author).
3. Through the experience of the program, Scholars will become knowledgeable of the process of doing research in NIH-funded HIV networks and have the opportunity to build their research networks within the context of the HPTN.

The HPTN Scholars Program is designed to provide partial salary support (up to 30% time) to complement other support that the Scholars receive from their home institution.

Scholarship Program Offerings

1. Regular meetings, in-person, with the primary mentor on-site - if the mentor and mentee are co-located in the same city - or by conference call if not co-located.

2. In-residence experience at the mentor's institution, during which the scholars will be encouraged, to the degree possible, to participate in study design, conduct, analysis, writing, and community engagement. For travel to a mentor's institution which constitutes international travel, this in-residence experience is limited to two weeks.
3. Travel to up to two (2) HPTN annual meetings and to one (1) national or international scientific meeting, during the program period. International travel is approvable only if affordable and if a Scholar is presenting work, although this does not have to be HPTN work. Attendance at the HPTN Annual Meetings is **required** and must be included in the budget. The additional conference must also be included in the original budget.
4. Participation in a series of group activities designed for further career development of the Scholars, including monthly conference calls to discuss ongoing research projects, new funding sources for career development, and skills-building and networking opportunities for wider collaboration as well as additional training activities coordinated by relevant NIH bodies.
6. Proposed 10% to 30% scholar salary support, depending upon the nature of the proposal and resources available.

Identification Mentors

Each Scholar must work with an HPTN mentor to participate in the program. The mentor must be affiliated with the HPTN study that the Scholar's proposed project will be based upon. The initial task of a prospective applicant therefore is to identify both a dataset (study) that will allow support development of a research project of interest, **and** a mentor from that study who is willing to work with the Scholar.

Mentors must be contacted by well in advance to allow the potential Scholar and mentor to have enough time to work together on the proposal before the **due date for the proposal**.

Applicants should put thought into potential research topics prior to contacting a prospective mentor and should remember that it is not the role of a mentor to come up with a research topic for the applicant. It is the decision of potential mentor(s) whom to support or whether to support any Scholars.

Co-Mentoring

Persons who have a mentor outside of the HPTN (or who have an HPTN mentor not affiliated with the study upon which the proposed project will be based) must identify a co-mentor from the relevant study. The co-mentorship arrangement will be evaluated as part of consideration of the applicant for the HPTN Scholars Program.

If further information is needed or if the applicant has difficulty locating a mentor, the applicant may contact the Scholars Program Management Team (scholarspm@hptn.org).

Scholarship Application Materials

All materials required as part of the official application package is outlined in the Application Checklist.

Incomplete, non-responsive, or late submissions will not be considered.

Applications not submitted as requested (with documents submitted in **.pdf** with a copy of the project proposal in **Word** format, using titles listed below) will not be considered.

Other Important Information:

Selected Scholars must determine if IRB approvals at their institution are required and if this will delay the execution of a sub-agreement.

Scholars must be able to receive NIH funds from the HPTN through a supporting institution via an agreement with FHI 360. This institution must submit the PHS package as the receipt of funds. This arrangement must be worked out in advance of submission of the application and is a requirement for acceptance as a Scholar. Scholars must consider not only the institution that will support them but must also determine whether other awards from which they receive support will allow the Scholar to receive additional NIH funds. It is the Scholar's responsibility to make these determinations and arrangements. In addition, please review the current FHI 360 Grant terms and conditions prior to applying.

If awarded, the mechanism for funding is a cost-reimbursement sub-agreement. Therefore, an applicant must be able to cover the costs of all travel and other expenses up front, to be reimbursed after their institutional invoice is paid by FHI 360.

Review Criteria and Selection Process

Applicants will be evaluated by a team assembled by the Scholars Program Leadership according to the review criteria below.

- Potential for the candidate to contribute to the scientific objectives of the HPTN prevention agenda
- Quality and feasibility of the project proposed by the scholar
- Appropriate personal and professional background to meet the objectives of the mentored research training objectives
- Commitment of the candidate, host HPTN investigator and mentor, and home supervisor
- Appropriate budget package that follows the guidelines of the instructions above and adequately supports the proposed scoped of work

For more information, inquiries concerning this funding opportunity are welcomed and may be directed to the following:

Scholars Program Management Team: Scholarspm@hptn.org

Scholars Program Leadership:

- Domestic Program Leadership
 - Darrell Wheeler, PhD, MPH, MSW, wheelerd@newpaltz.edu
 - Sten H. Vermund, MD, PhD, sten.vermund@yale.edu
- International Program Leadership
 - David Serwadda, MD, MPH, dserwada@infocom.co.ug
 - Quarraisha Abdool-Karim, PhD, quarraisha.abdoolkarim@caprisa.org