

**NOTES FROM THE APPLICANT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CALL  
FOR PAR-05-026, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH  
Sponsored by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health  
Funded in part by the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research  
January 28, 2005**

This document contains edited notes from the technical assistance call and contact information for the speakers. It is not a complete transcript. We strongly suggest that readers who were not on the call also listen to the complete audio recording, available online at <http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pastpresentations.html>

The program announcement discussed on this call is available at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-05-026.html>.

**Welcome and Overview (Sarena D. Seifer).** I'd like to welcome all of you to this technical assistance call for prospective applicants to the federal program announcement for Community Participation in Research, otherwise known as PAR-05-026. My name is Sarena Seifer with Community-Campus Partnerships for Health and I'll be moderating the call. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) is a national nonprofit organization that promotes health through partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a central focus of our work. Many of our members are involved in CBPR. We support CBPR at the national level through our work, for example, to identify best practices, disseminate information, provide training and technical assistance, link networks of CBPR practitioners, and advance funding and policies that support CBPR.

Like all of you, we were absolutely thrilled to see the release of this program announcement, with its emphasis on CBPR. And we are delighted that the federal agencies involved in the PAR agreed to work with us to put on this call. I'd like to especially recognize the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at NIH for their financial co-sponsorship of this call. Their support enabled us to boost the number of incoming lines from about 120 to about 250.

Let me also say a few words about the composition of the audience. Most of you have several people in the room for the call, a handful having more than 10 people in the room. Just speaking about the person who registered for the call, 20% are from community-based organizations, 65% are from colleges and universities, and 7% are from government agencies, with the rest a mix of people from foundations and other agencies. 8% reported having no experience with CBPR, 55% reported having some experience with CBPR, 31% reported extensive experience and 6% reported being experts.

**History and Overview of PAR-05-026 (Shobha Srinivasan).** The Community Participation in Research program announcement with a special review (PAR) is a joint venture of institutes and centers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (NIOSH at CDC), and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). This is an outcome of the collaboration among various institutes involved in the Federal Interagency Working Group on CBPR and shows the

commitment of all the listed organizations to this endeavor. NIH, CDC and AHRQ have a history of funding CBPR projects; however this is the first time a joint announcement has been made.

CBPR is a process that allows for partnership among researchers and communities to address issues that are of concern to the community. For details on partnerships please refer to the publications on page two of the PAR, some of which discuss in detail the benefits and challenges of these partnerships.

The PAR uses two funding mechanisms: R01 and R21. R01s are hypothesis driven based on existing scientific knowledge. R21s are exploratory/developmental grants, meaning there is insufficient evidence for these research applications but the knowledge base that exists can be used to develop some preliminary hypotheses. Below, Bill Elwood provides more information about these funding mechanisms.

There are two required partners for all the studies being proposed – research and a representative of a community-based organization. In the case of intervention studies there has to be representation from the community/organization/institution where the intervention is being conducted. The role of each of the partners is to be defined by the scope of the project being proposed. These are preexisting partnerships (i.e., prior to submitting the application) and named on the grant application. Any one of the partners can be the principal investigator (PI), but that person will have to show that they are capable scientifically to head such a project based on their previous work and publications.

The best scientific research applications (for both R01s and R21s) will be funded through this PAR as judged by the peer review committee (see section below on the Review Process for this PAR) and the goals as stated by each of the institutes. Applications focusing on capacity building or development of infrastructure are not the focus of this announcement. Once you've developed a firm idea for an application, you should contact the program officer for the institute to which you are directing the application. Contact information for these individuals is listed in the PAR.

The applications have a receipt date of once a year and an ad hoc review group called a special emphasis panel will be set up by the Center for Scientific Review – which will review both the R21s and R01s simultaneously (again, see section below on the Review Process for this PAR).

**Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (Jared Jobe).** As Shobha said, NIH has been funding CBPR for many years. We have funded community-based organizations (CBO) as the lead grantee in the past, including Sovereign Federally Recognized Indian Tribes. NIH is committed to this or we wouldn't have issued the PAR. However, there are no set aside funds, so we can't say how many awards will be made. You will compete against all other investigator-initiated applications for funding at each institute. NIH institutes are generally funding about 1 in 5 or 1 in 6 applications right now. We expect that the review will be very competitive.

Questions about the quality of the partnerships. We won't award a grant just because the partnership is good; the research must be good as well. The reviewers will weigh both the

quality of the partnerships and the quality of the research proposed. You may propose research with a new partner, but the partnership must be formed by the time of submission. However, it does not mean that the partners must have worked together in the past. After the award, you can take a few months to develop exactly how the project will be implemented, including formative research, but reviewers look very negatively on applications that are vague on details. Letters of cooperation should be provided as appropriate and the quality of the partnership should be described in the application. For example, you may have a partnership between an academic organization and a CBO; either the academic organization or the CBO may be the lead grantee.

Questions about the number and type of applications. You may submit applications for randomized controlled trials, community based interventions, observational studies, or mechanism studies. You may also submit based on diseases; or you may submit based on primordial, primary, or secondary prevention. We fund research; we will not fund programs, evaluation, or reviews. By evaluation, I mean program evaluation, which has different standards than research. Be very careful if you propose to intervene on an entire community: A one-group pre-test-post-test design likely won't meet standards.

Multiple academic and community organizations may work together. Subcontracts should be proposed for two or more organizations that will work together. The same organization may submit more than one application and the same person may be involved in more than one application. They will compete against each other in that they will be reviewed by the review group, called Special Emphasis panel (see notes on the Review Process, below). However, if they are considered for funding at different institutes or centers, then they won't compete against each other there.

Applications can be simultaneously considered by multiple NIH institutes, with one of them being primary. You need not submit the application simultaneously to multiple institutes. If you wish to have more than one institute consider the application, then please indicate to which institutes you wish to be assigned for funding purposes in your cover letter, along with which one you want to be primary. We will coordinate. If you submit to an organization or foundation not listed in this announcement, you can submit simultaneously the same application, and if both organizations decide to fund, a co-funding arrangement can be determined later. This is true for both funders within and outside the federal government.

Questions about budget development and experience of potential applicants. The budget should be based on the research to be conducted, not the other way around. Develop the project first, and only then determine how much it will cost to conduct the project. Part of community participation is budget sharing; community members should be hired as much as possible. Applications that have any one year of direct costs that exceed 500K must receive advance approval to submit the application from an institute. Directions are on the home pages of NIH and the institutes (see [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)). AHRQ has a new policy about not funding projects over the amount of \$300,000 per year. If there are projects that come in above that amount, AHRQ could seek additional funding from outside institutes. (EDITOR'S NOTE: See <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-HS-04-007.html>)

Applicants need not have prior experience with federal grants. Highly technical questions about the legal or tax exempt status of an organization should be referred to one the grants management contacts listed in the program announcement.

Questions about rudimentary aspects of setting up partnerships. We assume that applicants know how to conduct CBPR when they apply. We're happy to fund new investigators, but it is not a goal of the program announcement to train people to conduct CBPR. Contact CCPH for suggestions about training and other resources regarding CBPR.

**The Review Process for this PAR (Bill Ellwood).** A program announcement is the official, institutional way that federal agencies communicate their interest in specific areas of research. Similar to requests for applications (RFAs), PAs communicate agency interests; however, PAs are oriented more toward investigator-initiated research than are RFAs. There are different types of PAs (e.g., PA, PAR, PAS). The “R” stands for special considerations in the Receipt and Referral aspect of the peer review process. This PAR (05-026) provides one receipt date each year for three years.

Funding mechanisms for this PAR. This PAR allows investigators to submit applications only under two mechanisms: the R01 and the R21. *The R01* is a Basic Research Grant mechanism awarded to eligible institutions on behalf of a principal investigator to support a discrete project related to the investigator's area of interest and competence. These grants constitute the largest category of NIH funding. *The R21* is an exploratory or developmental grant mechanism intended to support innovative ideas. Therefore, preliminary data as evidence of feasibility are not required. Of greater import is whether an application includes a sound research plan, addresses an important issue, and uses appropriate concepts and methods. Additional considerations generally include whether an application includes novel concepts or methods, whether the investigator has the experience needed to conduct the research, and whether the environment will provide supportive surroundings.

R01s and R21s are two different NIH mechanisms for two very different types of projects. They also differ in permissible proposed budget amounts, time lengths, and even pages allotted for the research plan. Just as researchers use the appropriate mechanism for their proposed projects, Scientific Review Administrators and reviewers follow these and many other guidelines to ensure that applications are reviewed appropriately.

Review process for this PAR. The officials who worked together to create this PAR agreed that applications that respond to this PAR will be reviewed by a special emphasis panel (SEP) especially organized to review these applications. A scientific review administrator (SRA) in the Center for Scientific Review's Division of Clinical and Population-Based Studies, Health of the Population Integrated Review Group, will be the Designated Federal Official for this project. At present, this task is unassigned. Applicants are welcome to check the following webpage that lists SEPs: [http://www.csr.nih.gov/Roster\\_proto/allother\\_sep.asp](http://www.csr.nih.gov/Roster_proto/allother_sep.asp)

Reviewers for this PAR. Simply put, reviewers are the people who put “peer” in “peer review.” They are active and productive individuals with expertise in the applicable scientific areas,

project management, and community-based public health research. Their institutional affiliations include, but are not limited to, colleges and universities, community-based organizations, research institutes, hospitals, and clinics. Investigators who submit applications in response to this PAR are ineligible to participate as reviewers. People who are listed as “key personnel” on a grant application also are ineligible to be reviewers.

Program officials often suggest potential reviewers for both SEPs and chartered study sections. People interested in participating as reviewers should express their interest to program officers who will provide those suggestions to the SRA once s/he is selected. Principal investigators/applicants always are welcome to suggest types of expertise that they believe are needed to review their applications. PIs/applicants that provide names of potential reviewers to CSR staff members sometimes can create conflicts of interest by doing so. Suggestions from program officials always are welcome.

Peer review issues. Section V of this PAR states that the applications that respond to this application will be reviewed by the NIH’s merit review criteria. Criteria that influence an application’s merit and score appear under numbers 3, and 3A. Reviewers also may address criteria listed under 3B-D; however, these latter criteria do not influence the priority score.

Reviewers always receive comprehensive instructions and individual technical assistance to review the applications assigned to them. For this SEP, they also will receive the PAR. Investigators interested in how their applications are reviewed may peruse the standard review instructions on the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) website. To start, visit, <http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/policy.asp>

Reviewers consider only the scientific and technical merit of applications. CSR makes the results available through summary statements. Program officials use material from summary statements to recommend funding decisions to Institute Directors with input from Advisory Councils. Principal investigators use summary statements to make refinements to imminently-funded projects or for possible resubmissions.

Common application problems. CSR employees cannot provide instructions or feedback regarding applications; nevertheless, the following qualities are typical of applications that do not do well in peer review:

- Lack of new or original ideas.
- Insufficiently developed scientific rationale.
- Lack of experience in the essential methodology.
- Questionable reasoning in experimental approach.
- Uncritical approach.
- Diffuse, superficial, or unfocused research plan.
- Lack of sufficient experimental detail.
- Lack of knowledge of published relevant work.
- Unrealistically large amount of work.
- Uncertainty concerning future directions.

General application suggestions. CSR employees also cannot provide instructions or feedback regarding applications; nevertheless, SRAs frequently provide the following suggestions to investigators who ask for suggestions:

- Read and follow the PHS 398 and this PAR's instructions.
- Expect the reviewers to use *all* NIH criteria to assess your application.
- Conduct and demonstrate a thorough literature review.
- Communicate the significance of your proposed research project in relation to the noteworthy public health problem that your application addresses.
- State the rationale of your proposed investigation.
- Be certain that your stated aims follow your rationale.
- Include well-designed tables and figures.
- Present a complete and organized research plan.
- Completely describe your plans to accomplish your proposed project.
- Send only allowable items in your appendices.
- Obtain and integrate pre-submission feedback from institutional colleagues or other peers.

### **Additional Questions and Answers (All)**

#### **Q: If we have a research idea, should we contact a scientific contact listed in the PAR?**

Yes, and don't be afraid to shop around. Many of the institutes have overlapping interests. You might find that you have opportunities that are differential, depending on individual circumstances at each institute. Use the list of program contacts in the PAR. Most program contacts prefer to be contacted by email. Don't be surprised if you get referred to another person within that institute. It is the job of the person mentioned in the PAR to connect you with the appropriate person. Talking to someone within the agency will help you determine if you are addressing the agency's priorities and objectives. Sending them a short concept paper ahead of time can be helpful. Sometimes the caller isn't quite sure what they have in mind but when they put it down on paper it can help everyone understand better. It makes it easy to bring other people in if there's something short to focus on.

**Q: Can we submit multiple applications from our institution and link them together in some way?** There is a method that's called "linked applications". This is an option for linking multiple applications together. Not all institutes allow linked applications; for example, NICHD does not allow linked applications. (EDITOR'S NOTE: This website of the NIH Office of Extramural Research includes information about NIH funding opportunities, policies and procedures: <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm>)

**Q: Are there any geographic preferences when considering applications? What if more than one application is submitted from a given geographic area?** Each application is reviewed by the special emphasis panel on the basis of its scientific merit, without regard to geographic location. There might be rare instances where a particular region is so underserved, it would receive special consideration by a center or institute.

**Q: Given the participatory nature of CBPR, how can we identify all aspects of the research up-front in the proposal?** You have to make some suppositions and demonstrate what you would

expect to happen based upon your formative research. If just say you're going to go in to conduct formative research, it will be considered by the reviewers to be seriously underdeveloped. State what you think will come out of the formative research. You have to do background work before submitting the application. The research plan has to demonstrate clearly to the reviewers what the investigator is proposing. Will it advance our knowledge in a particular framework? Is it grounded in the literature?

When we talk with prospective researchers, we like to find out if they can give evidence that they've actually done some thing with the community. What have you done, what have you learned, how will the end-products be useful? If you can point to concrete instances where you answer those three questions, you are in a good position for this research.

There is an assumption in this announcement that you've already come to the table together with your partners, what are the issues the community is facing and how best can you address those issues.

**Q: Would you consider applications that conduct research on CBPR as a method?** Yes. It should be clear what the goals are and how it might contribute to the field and to the overall purpose of this PAR. There should be a clear rationale that methodology needs to be developed to answer scientific questions. For example, NICHD funds methodological proposals. They want to be able to see the methodology would be relevant to the kind of subject matter that's core to their mission. Methodological proposals that show the relevance of CBPR research in reference to solving scientific issues relating to child health and human development would be welcomed, for example. Have a conversation with the program officer at the agency you are interested in before you submit the application.

**Q: Is there an advantage to proposing a research topic that cuts across the priorities of multiple agencies participating in the PAR?** The goal is to fund really compelling research. A research proposal can be successful in a narrow or broad range of focus. The more focused the research questions, the better able you are to put together a scientific project. Don't spend a lot of time on multiple appeals to multiple agencies. Get your research design crisp and compelling. Focus on the topic and priority areas described in the PAR.

**Q: Most speaker comments have focused on quantitative research. What about qualitative research?** Qualitative research needs to be rigorous. If it makes sense for the research, it is likely to be competitive. More often, qualitative research isn't presented as well as it could be. It has to match what you want to do. This is the kind of thing that we get into when people send in their concept papers. There's room for both research designs. Although the NIH leans more towards quantitative designs, there have been and will proposals that have solely a qualitative design. Rosters of chartered study sessions are good to review. You will recognize many qualitative researchers who have had NIH funding. The combination of qualitative and quantitative is a hot combination and is very appropriate for this kind of research. Strongly consider combining methods.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In 2001, the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research has published the report Qualitative Methods in Health Research: Opportunities and Considerations in Application and Review, available at <http://obssr.od.nih.gov/Publications/Qualitative.PDF>)

**Q: Should the Principal Investigator (PI) have a background in CBPR?** We are always delighted to fund new investigators. If you want to pursue a new area of research or new method of research, it is a good idea to find someone who is an expert in the field to be a co-investigator. If you are new to the area, you need to show you have colleagues who are more experienced who are working with you.

**Q: For a proposal to be competitive, what are you looking for in a PI?** The PI should be a brilliant scientist, young or old, but brilliant. The PI has to have a proven record of having done this proven work and the capability to carry off the research within the time proposed. If this isn't shown in the CV, then it is that much harder for that person to carry out that project. You are not required to have a doctoral level degree, but it is probably a plus to have it. It speaks to having a proven track record. Does the PI have research-based publications? There should be something, for example a dissertation. Something where they were a second or third author. To determine who should be the PI, pick the person with the strongest CV.

That said, we will fund new investigators. If you have not received NIH funding as a PI before, then you would be considered to be a new NIH investigator. There will be some consideration given to first-time investigators. Even new investigators should demonstrate that they have experience in conducting research. If explicit experience in this type of research is lacking, you will need a co-investigator or consultants. Another purpose for the R21 is to help investigators transition into a new area of research.

**Q: The PAR says it will fund the development of community advisory boards. If we already have a community advisory board, will it fund capacity building of the board?** No to this explicit question, but yes in general. You may pay the board members an honorarium for a special meeting set up for them to provide advice on the specific research project being proposed, but not to serve on the board in general. The funds cannot be used to create a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

**Q: Can we propose a multi-site intervention?** Yes. The numbers of partners and sites is not limited.

**Q: How much flexibility do we have in the development of the intervention being proposed?** As a general proposition, yes there is flexibility. You should have a specific, feasible, well-thoughtout design. Reviewers don't get excited about things they see as a big fishing expedition.

**Q: Can you elaborate on what you see as the difference between a research intervention, program evaluation and program delivery?** If you have a clinic and are going to offer smoking cessation to every person who comes through the door, this would be considered program delivery. If you ask for money to determine how well the program is working, that's evaluation, and will not be funded. If it is a scientific research study for example, using nicotine replacement in one group and nicotine replacement with counseling in another, that is research and would be funded. The key is to be creative and compare the delivery of a program that is

standard vs. the delivery that is very intensive. In that situation, then the program that you are delivering is experimental.

**Q: Have priorities been published for the two agencies that joined the PAR after it was published – the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the Office of Women’s Health Research?** Please review this website. If you have questions, please contact the program officer listed. <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-05-017.html>

**Q: How will the letter of intent be used?** We rely on the letter of intent to make preliminary contact to arrange for the appropriate expertise in our reviewers. They are not required, but they help to assemble appropriate reviewers.

**Q: Can you walk us through what happens to an application once it is received?**

Applications are assigned a number and scanned. Copies go to referral officers. They refer the applications to the Integrated Review Groups and to the appropriate Scientific Review Administrators (SRA). The SRA looks for additional reviewers to cover areas for which there is no reviewer expertise. Six weeks before the reviewers meet, we send packages to the reviewers. The packages include paper photocopies of their assigned applications, instructions, and a confidential CD-ROM with scanned images of all applications. Reviewers review and complete individual critiques of each application.

Then the in-person review meeting occurs. Reviewers have time to revise their critiques and get them to the SRA. The SRA writes a summary of the discussion to illuminate the individual critiques or themes that came out during the discussion that may have not come out during the individual critiques. We try to complete the summary statements within 30 days of the meeting. Three business days after the meetings, the scores are released. Anyone from an institution that has an NIH account can access their score. (Get the account number you’re your institution. To get an account with NIH, check with your information technology people). The program officers use the summary statements to convey recommendations to the institute director then the advisory councils meet. The advisory councils make official the awards.

It’s important to remember that being unscored, or not receiving a score in the higher range, is an invitation to revise and resubmit. Read the comments written and determine whether you can respond to those comments. Formulate a plan on how to revise your application appropriately. Keep in mind that the reviewers are doing you a favor. They are trying to help you develop a better application. Whether or not you receive a score, you will receive a summary statement of reviewer comments.

**Q: Will the special emphasis panel be the same group of people for all three years of this PAR?** No. A special emphasis panel meets only one time. We can’t guarantee availability of people from one year to the next. After application summaries are released, all information is purged from our records of who was assigned to which application.

**Q: What is the relationship between the special emphasis panel for this PAR and the standing study sections?** Study sections consider applications, but they review mostly applications that don’t respond to a specific program announcement. For this PAR, it was

decided that a special emphasis panel (SEP) will review these applications. An SEP is a benefit. For example, there won't be anyone on the SEP who doesn't understand CBPR or see the importance in this type of research. This is an enormous benefit. It's worth your while to take advantage of this benefit.

**Q: Will the cut-off points for scores that receive funding vary by institute?** Yes, sometimes even by program in an institute. Somewhere between 14-20 % of applications will be funded contingent on how many applications are competing with each institute and how much money is available for that round of funding.

**Q: What will the reviewers be looking for in terms of concrete outcomes?** That's a difficult question to answer. The outcomes are what the application is going to propose. What is the public health problem being addressed, what are the outcome measures?

**Q: Will the special emphasis panel review count toward the maximum number of submissions allowed to NIH?** Yes.

**Q: If a community-based organization that is the applicant or a sub-contractor does not have a federal indirect cost rate, what should we do?** Please contact the grants management people listed in the PAR to answer that question.

**Closing Comments (Sarena D. Seifer).** If you have a question that didn't get answered, we strongly encourage you to follow-up with one of the speakers on the line – their complete contact information is in the PAR. In fact, you are encouraged to contact any of the people mentioned in the PAR. If your question is specific to one of the agencies involved in the PAR, then email or call the person listed in the PAR for that agency. Also, if you have questions about CBPR please feel free to post them on the CBPR listserv. If you're not subscribed to the CBPR listserv, you can sign up here: <https://mailman1.u.washington.edu/mailman/listinfo/cbpr>

Please also consider CCPH as a resource – we're happy to respond to questions and to point you in helpful directions. You can email me at [sarena@u.washington.edu](mailto:sarena@u.washington.edu) or visit our website at [www.ccpb.info](http://www.ccpb.info)

Thanks to all of our speakers for taking the time to prepare for this call and to participate in it. And I'd like to thank Virginia Cain and Stephane Philogene in the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at NIH for their financial support of this call.

And to those of you in the audience, thank you for your interest and involvement in CBPR. Although we are unlikely to offer another applicant technical assistance call on this program announcement before the May deadline, we do plan to offer calls on other topics of interest in CBPR. Please send your suggestions to me at [sarena@u.washington.edu](mailto:sarena@u.washington.edu)

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