RUPHI Pilot Grant Program

Patient Safety

The RAND-University of Pittsburgh Health Institute (RUPHI) is pleased to announce a new pilot grant program to encourage collaborative health services research conducted by teams of investigators from RAND and the various schools and departments at the University of Pittsburgh and affiliated institutions. The RUPHI Patient Safety Pilot Grant Program provides seed grants to support efforts by investigators to conduct research related to patient safety and to promote RAND-University of Pittsburgh health services research collaborations.

The RUPHI Patient Safety Pilot Grant Program provides grants of up to $30,000 to fund pilot research projects that will be used to strengthen subsequent larger scale research proposals. Projects should be completed within one year of funding. Funds may be used to cover time spent by investigators on the pilot project, supplies, subject honoraria, or other purposes related to the conduct of the research. The monies awarded will support direct costs only; no indirect support will be provided. Mentors may not receive funding through this Program.

In 1999, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released its groundbreaking report, To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System, in which the issue of medical errors was raised, and attempts were made to quantify the extent of the problem. While scientists and others have disagreed over the number of errors cited, there is no dispute that medical errors constitute a huge problem and that patient safety needs to be improved. AHRQ (then AHCPR) determined that improving patient safety required: the development of a solid evidence base, the design and evaluation of useful strategies and tools, and the dissemination of information and tools for implementation. While some progress has been made, patient safety is still a significant challenge: comprehensive solutions to the problem remain elusive, and bringing the solutions into clinical practice has not occurred in a systematic way.

The RUPHI Pilot Grant Program will fund three pilot projects that examine the issue of patient safety. We are particularly interested in projects that focus on the design of strategies for reducing error and increasing patient safety as well as developing evidence of the effectiveness of the strategies. We are interested in research projects that will lead to publications and future research; quality improvement projects are not admissible in this pilot grant program.

Eligibility:

To be eligible for a RUPHI Pilot Grant, a project must involve collaboration between at least one Pitt investigator and at least one RAND investigator. Priority will be given to those projects that allow junior investigators to develop research programs and research strengths.

- Pilot research projects may be led by either a RAND or a Pitt investigator. Investigators from both Pitt and RAND must have a demonstrable and substantial role; assessment of these roles will be a component of the review of the application. Pitt investigators must hold the rank of Assistant/Research Assistant Professor, Associate/Research Associate Professor, or Professor/Research Professor.

- Since one of the goal of the program is to help investigators new to the area of research obtain experience in health services research, one of the investigators must be established in a field of research that is relevant to the proposed work. That is, one investigator must be able to mentor the more junior investigator, as appropriate.
• Pilot projects should focus on issues related to increasing patient safety in any appropriate setting (e.g., hospital, doctor’s office, nursing home).

• One of the expected work products of this pilot project is a substantial proposal submission to a federal agency, foundation, or equivalent organization.

Application Process:
The application must contain the following in the order listed below:

• A cover page that includes the title of the proposed pilot project and the name, degree, academic title, primary departmental affiliation, and contact information (telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address) of both the Pitt investigator and the RAND investigator. See the budget section, below, for other information that may be required.

• A one page abstract summarizing the study goals, design, and methods (not to exceed 250 words).

• A description of the relevant background of both the Pitt investigator and the RAND investigator (not to exceed 200 words per investigator).

• NIH biographical sketches (PHS 398 or SF424 format) and Other Support pages for both principal investigators. Such documents should also be provided for co-investigators. These documents are not needed for consultants.

• A proposal that includes a description of the pilot project, including specific aims, background and significance, and research design and methods (not to exceed 5 single-sided pages).

• A description of how these preliminary data, if successfully obtained, will be used in a substantial grant application in the future, including a description of the overall aims and a broad overview of the methods of the future grant proposal (not to exceed 1 page).

• A budget page and budget justification; see below.

The application must be clear, readily legible, and conform to the following three requirements: 1) the font must be 11-point; 2) margins, in all directions, must be at least ½ inch; 3) text in figures, charts, tables, figure legends, and footnotes may be smaller in size but must be in black ink and readily legible. If these are not legible, there may be a negative impact on the evaluation of the application. Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is necessary for several reasons. No applicant should have the advantage, by using small type, of providing more text in his or her application. Small type may also make it difficult for reviewers to read the application.

Budget:
Funds may be used to cover investigator effort on the pilot project, supplies, subject honoraria, or other purposes related directly to the conduct of the research. The monies awarded will support direct costs only; no indirect support will be provided. Mentors who are not named principal investigators may not receive funding from this Program. Requests for travel support must be explicitly justified in the context of the proposed research, and such requests may be denied.

Review Criteria:

Applicants
Do the investigators from RAND and Pitt have substantial responsibilities and roles in the project?
Are the applicants prepared, in terms of background and experiences, to undertake this project?
Is there a senior investigator (from either RAND or Pitt) to help guide the conduct of the project?
Is the research plan appropriate to the applicants’ stage of training and experience?

Pilot Project Research Plan:
Significance:
Does the project focus on improving patient safety or reducing errors?
Does the proposal reflect good knowledge of the research content area?
If the aims of the application and the future work are achieved, will clinical practice be advanced?

Approach:
Is the conceptual or clinical framework adequate and feasible?
Are the design, methods, and analyses adequate and feasible?

Innovation:
Is the project original and innovative? For example: Does the project challenge existing paradigms or clinical practice; address an innovative hypothesis or critical barrier to progress in the field?
Does the project develop or employ novel concepts, approaches, methodologies, tools, or technologies for this area?

Environment:
Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success?

Future Work:
Is the way in which the preliminary data will be used in a substantial grant application in the future adequately described (including a description of the overall aims and a broad overview of the methods of the future grant proposal)?
Does it appear feasible that this pilot work could lead to a substantial grant/research project?

Budget and Budget Justification:
Does the budget seem reasonable and appropriate to carry out the work proposed?
Is the budget justification sufficient to support the request for funds?

Submission, Review, and Award:
Applications are to be submitted electronically in pdf format to Ms. Gina Snyder, gsnyder@rand.org. Within one week of receipt of the electronic application, Ms. Snyder will send an e-mail message acknowledging receipt. Investigators should contact Ms. Snyder if such messages are not received.
Applications must be received by 5:00 pm on June 1, 2010. No exceptions will be made to this deadline.
Applications will be reviewed by the RUPHI Pilot Grant Review Committee, and the recommendations of this committee will be carefully considered by the RUPHI leadership in determining which applications will receive awards. All budget items must be explicitly justified and will be reviewed by the Committee; see budget information, above. As noted, applications involving junior investigators, or investigators who are changing their research interests to health services research, are of high priority to the program.
It is anticipated that all projects responsive to this solicitation will require IRB approval. Pitt investigators will need approval from the Pitt IRB, and RAND investigators will need approval from the RAND IRB. Please note that no project funds can be expended until such approvals are in place. Approved protocols need not be submitted as part of the application. However, in order to minimize the time delay between approval of a project and release of funds, applicants are encouraged to prepare protocol submissions in advance of notification that an award is pending so that the protocols can be submitted for approval immediately upon such notification.

RFA Release Date: April 1, 2010
Proposal Due Date: June 1, 2010
Project Start date: August 1, 2010 pending IRB approval
Questions Regarding the Program:

Scientific and other questions can be addressed to RUPHI Associate Directors: Donna Keyser (donna_keyser@rand.org) or Deborah Seltzer (seltzer@pitt.edu).