



From: Faculty Research Development Office  
Office of the Vice President for Research

Subject: Limited Competition: NIH Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) Program: FIRST Cohort (U54 Clinical Trial Optional) RFA-RM-20-022

Date: December 16, 2020

The purpose of the FIRST Cohort is to transform culture at NIH-funded extramural institutions by building a self-reinforcing community of scientists committed to diversity and inclusive excellence (defined below). Implementing and sustaining cultures of inclusive excellence within the program has the potential to be transformational for biomedical research at the awardee institutions and beyond. This community will be built through recruitment of a diverse group of early-career faculty who are competitive for an advertised research tenure-track or equivalent faculty position and who have demonstrated strong commitment to promoting diversity and inclusive excellence.

The program will test the primary hypothesis that a cohort model of faculty hiring, sponsorship, continual mentoring, and support for professional development, embedded within an institution implementing evidence-based practices to create academic cultures of inclusive excellence, will achieve significant improvements in metrics of institutional culture and scientific workforce diversity. In addition, the program will test the impact of the cohort on institutional culture change. Implementing and sustaining cultures of inclusive excellence at a range of academic institutions has the potential to be transformational for the biomedical research workforce.

The Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) program (consisting of two components: the FIRST Cohort and the FIRST Coordination and Evaluation Center (CEC)) has been developed to determine if a systematic approach that integrates multiple evidence-based strategies including the hiring of faculty cohorts with demonstrated commitments to inclusion and diversity will accelerate inclusive excellence, as measured by clearly defined metrics of institutional culture change, diversity, and inclusion. The FIRST program goals are to: (1) foster sustainable institutional culture change; (2) promote institutional inclusive excellence by hiring a diverse cohort of new faculty; and (3) support faculty development, mentoring, sponsorship, and promotion.

For this funding announcement, LRIs (Limited-Resourced Institutions, defined as those who have received less than \$50 million average in annual NIH funds within the three years prior to the time of application) are institutions offering doctorate degrees in the health professions or in a health-related science and that have a historical and current commitment to educating underrepresented students.

- LRIs will be expected to hire no fewer than 6 faculty.
- The new faculty hires comprising a FIRST Cohort are expected to be clusters of scientists (no fewer than three scientists per cluster) within several scientific areas.
- NIH will encourage FIRST awardee institutions to enhance the diversity of the FIRST Cohort by actively recruiting candidates from groups identified as underrepresented in the biomedical, clinical, behavioral, and social sciences.

The NIH intends to commit up to a total of \$70.5M to fund up to four awards in 2021. Complete program details can be found at: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-20-022.html>.

The sponsor deadline for full proposals is March 1, 2021.

**NIH Technical Assistance Webinar:**

Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to participate in the pre-application Technical Assistance webinar, which will provide an opportunity to clarify expectations for both the FIRST Cohort and FIRST CEC FOAs. The webinar is scheduled for January 25, 2021, from 2:00-4:00 PM Eastern Time.

Additional information will be posted on the Common Fund website at

<https://commonfund.nih.gov/first/faqs>.

This is a limited competition. UNM may submit only one (1) application under this announcement. If you are interested in submitting a preliminary proposal please send a **statement of interest with a brief abstract (maximum 1-page) and a statement of commitment from the Dean(s)** to [limited@unm.edu](mailto:limited@unm.edu) with the subject line indicating: NIH FIRST Cohort - your name by **noon on January 11, 2021**. Based on the e-mail responses received, the Limited Competition Management Team may announce a call for preproposals. *Only those who responded with a statement of interest by the deadline will be invited to submit preproposals.*

**The 1-page abstract must include the following:**

- Descriptive title of proposed activity
- Name(s) of the PD(s)/PI(s)
- Names of other key personnel
- If applicable - Participating partner institution(s)
- Description of the project

**The 1-page abstract must be accompanied by a statement of commitment from the applicable Dean(s) to show support of the FIRST Cohort program. This statement serves as confirmation that they are aware that his program requires a minimum of 6 faculty hires, as well as the following:** A proposal submission from UNM would be required to include a letter of support endorsed by the applicable Dean(s). According to the FOA, this is likely to include commitment of additional resources necessary to ensure that the program will have the maximum success and sustainability. Including supplemental funding to start-up packages and professional development, laboratory and administrative space, protected time for research independent of grant funding, and access to core resources within the institution. These statements must also identify the specific number of faculty hires expected and commitment to sustainable institutional culture change.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at [limited@unm.edu](mailto:limited@unm.edu).

*If you are affiliated with HSC, please contact Corey Ford ([CFord@salud.unm.edu](mailto:CFord@salud.unm.edu)) or Cassandra Misenar ([CMisenar@salud.unm.edu](mailto:CMisenar@salud.unm.edu)) for more information.*