

Seeding Collaborative Research in Obesity (SCRO) Program

PURPOSE

The **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)** announces for fiscal year 2004 the availability of funds to supplement existing NIDDK-funded research projects to support and encourage multidisciplinary scientific collaboration among NIDDK grantees, as well as with other members of the scientific community. This effort, known as the **seeding collaborative research in obesity (SCRO)** program, can support collaborative activities that bring together ideas and approaches from disparate scientific disciplines, including those not currently supported by NIDDK. It is essential, however, that proposed SCRO activities be within the overall scope of the parent award. The SCRO program provides funding support for specific types (described below) of collaborative activity. Grantees with collaborative research needs not covered by this program are encouraged to call their NIDDK Program Director for assistance.

This document describes: (1) the nature of the administrative mechanisms available to promote research collaborations under this program, (2) the application procedures, (3) the evaluation criteria that will be used to determine the relative priority of the requests for supplemental funding, and (4) the post-award obligation for Grantees who are awarded SCRO supplements.

BACKGROUND

The NIDDK supports a wide range of research projects focused on both the underlying mechanisms of obesity and the translation of these discoveries into new therapies and strategies for disease treatment and prevention. Obesity represents disorders of energy storage and utilization. The difficulty in treating this disease reflects to a significant degree the complex regulatory systems which control energy uptake and expenditure in vertebrates. The Human Genome Project and ancillary studies have provided a near complete list of the parts of which these regulatory networks are comprised. Tremendous advances in obesity research in particular are beginning to resolve an image of the key molecules, cells and tissues which interact to regulate energy balance.

The very nature of research aimed at an understanding of homeostatic systems in biology requires a multidisciplinary team approach. These approaches must combine molecular or cellular resolution within the context of the intact organism.

Prior to submitting an application, investigators interested in developing novel research collaborations should first contact their NIDDK Program Director to discuss their ideas. General inquiries are also welcome. See <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/fund/fund.htm> for contact information. Requests for support must be made in writing (see Application Procedures and Deadlines).

RESEARCH AREAS CURRENTLY SUPPORTED THROUGH THE SCROD PROGRAM

1. **Regulatory networks controlling food intake and energy balance**

The connection between integrative centers in the hypothalamus and efferent endocrine and autonomic pathways which control diverse functions associated with energy homeostasis, such as metabolic rate, food seeking behavior, gut motility, nutrient partitioning, and hormone secretion is an area of intensive research activity and discovery. However, few laboratories are equipped to study both the diversity and complexity of inputs and the translation of these diverse inputs into changes in neuroendocrine, autonomic and behavioral function. Systems based approaches will be needed to assemble the components in to a workable model of energy regulation and pathogenesis of obesity.

2. **Ontogeny of neuronal networks related to obesity**

The formation of new neural connections between functionally related set of neurons is a process that continues throughout adulthood. The ontogeny of the hypothalamic neural network that controls feeding behavior and an understanding of important humoral signals that might be critical for the formation of these pathways may be important for understanding the etiology of childhood obesity. Research focused on understanding the plasticity of these critical pathways and its impact on energy balance is needed. These studies will require the recruitment of developmental neurobiologists and those with specialized expertise in energy balance circuitry who are willing to collaborate on this problem.

ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS FOR PROMOTING RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Consortia:

One approach to supporting collaboration is the establishment of research consortia among investigators in complementary fields who are working on related projects in developing or rapidly moving areas of obesity. Typically, SCRO consortia are composed of 2-5 investigators focused on achieving specific research objectives. The Principal Investigator (PI) of the consortium must be a NIDDK-funded investigator. All members of the consortium must have active research funding support, not necessarily from NIDDK. With rare exceptions, members of a successful consortium will be principal investigators on peer-reviewed research grants.

SCRO consortium members are expected to carry out joint research that would not be possible to conduct expeditiously, if at all, in the absence of collaborators and additional support. The specified collaborative research project(s), which must be within the general scope of each of the members' current grants, must be clearly different from any active or previously funded research topic. **The collaborative research project must be new, and preference will be given to applications where the proposed research would not be possible using the traditional R01 grant mechanism.**

Additional activities encompassed by the consortium may include, but are not limited to: sharing of unique reagents, expertise and specific-purpose equipment; shared support for students or research staff; travel to enhance collaboration; and peer-reviewed publication of results of the collaboration.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Only NIDDK-funded investigators may submit and be the PI of a SCRO application.
- The PI must have an active R01, R37, P01, Phased Innovation Award (combined R21/R33), Phase II SBIR (R43), or Phase II STTR (R42) grant **with at least one full year remaining at the time of anticipated funding** (August 1, 2004 for applications submitted on June 1, 2004)
- At the time of application, all collaborating investigators must have an active source of research funding support, but it may be from other peer-reviewed sources.
- Investigators may come from the same or different departments in an institution, or from different institutions.
- Racial/ethnic minority individuals, women, and persons with disabilities are encouraged to participate in this opportunity for APRC supplemental support.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

Budget/Administrative Issues

All funding for SCRO consortia will be in the form of administrative supplements to existing NIDDK funded research grants. The number of awards and level of support will depend on the number and diversity of meritorious applications received. The following limits apply:

- The direct costs for research consortia are limited to a maximum of \$75,000 per investigator per year, with a combined total direct consortium cost of \$300,000 per year, regardless of the number of collaborators.
- Indirect costs (facilities and administrative) are permitted, if necessary, at the grantee institution's negotiated rate. These must be detailed in the application.
- Funding is limited to the life of the PI's current grant. Consortia requests should be for 1 year. In all cases, a detailed explanation/justification must be included in the application with each year's budget clearly defined. These supplements are not subject to the modular grants requirements.
- PI and collaborator salary support is not permitted.
- At the conclusion of the funded activity, the PI must submit to the NIDDK Program Director a Final Progress Report that includes a description of the activities and outcomes and an assessment of the success in meeting the stated objectives.
- The PI and collaborators will participate in an NIDDK workshop to be held in Bethesda, MD, within the first 3 months of funding.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND DEADLINES

No specific forms or format are required, although appropriate pages from the PHS 398 form are recommended (see [Office of Extramural Research](#) web site for electronic PHS 398 forms, Applications should contain specific information appropriate to the proposed collaboration (see below). All applications must contain:

- A cover letter listing the eligible parent grant, signed by the PI, collaborating investigators at the same institution as the PI, and the appropriate official from the grantee institution.
- A letter of intent to collaborate from each collaborating investigator located at an institution different from that of the PI, cosigned by the appropriate official from the institution.
- A biosketch for the PI and each collaborating investigator.
- Documentation of active research grant funding (i.e., NIH, other federal, private sources, etc.) for all collaborating investigators.

- All SCRO supplements must have a project title different from that of the parent grant.

The PI is responsible for providing the following additional information:

- An abstract of the consortium's proposed research including the specific aims, objectives, and projected outcomes.
- A description of how the research is programmatically relevant to the NIDDK.
- A summary of each collaborator's specific contributions to the project.
- A research plan for the consortium (**not to exceed 5 typed pages**).
- Justified budgets for each consortium member and a summary budget for the entire consortium. Budgets should clearly specify F&A costs.

Note: All human and animal studies must receive the appropriate IRB or IACUC review and approval prior to funding authorization for the SCRO supplement. Verification of this approval must be sent to the NIDDK program director. Since SCRO-funded projects are supplemental to existing projects and within the scope of those studies, modifications to assurance approvals are usually all that are needed.

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Applications (1 original plus 5 copies) should be sent to:

Sheryl M. Sato, Ph.D.
Program Director
Division of Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolic Diseases
NIDDK, NIH
2 Democracy Plaza
6707 Democracy Boulevard, Room 6105
Bethesda, MD 20892-5460

SCRO applications should be received on or before June 1, 2004.

Applications will be reviewed in July 2004. Budget start dates should be calculated based on a funding start of August 1, 2004.

REVIEW CONSIDERATIONS AND CRITERIA

NIDDK senior program staff will conduct the review. The review criteria are:

- The novelty or uniqueness of the opportunity presented by the proposed activity.
- The novelty or uniqueness of the collaboration.
- The appropriateness of the scope of work proposed, given the time and budget requested.
- The potential benefit to obesity research.
- The degree to which the proposed activity adds value to the underlying funded research (parent grant) of the PI and the collaborating investigators; the relationship and relevance of the research to the parent grant.

INQUIRIES

Investigators funded by NIDDK who are interested in the activities described in this document are strongly encouraged to contact their program director or alternatively:

Philip F. Smith, Ph.D.
Deputy Director
Division of Diabetes, Endocrinology, and Metabolic Diseases
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIH, DHHS
Democracy 2, Room 689
6707 Democracy Boulevard, MSC 5460
Bethesda, MD 20892-5460
Telephone: (301) 594-8816

Grants management related questions or concerns may be directed to:

Kathleen Shino
Supervisory Grants Management Specialist
Grants Management Branch
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIH, DHHS
6707 Democracy Boulevard, MSC 5456
Bethesda, MD 20892-5456
Telephone: (301) 594-8869
FAX: (301) 480-3504
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