**Request for Applications**
**Cohort Identification and Participant Recruitment**

Participation of individuals from different communities in clinical research is critical for scientific innovation, advancing health care delivery and best practices, and improving population health outcomes. Engaging diverse and underrepresented groups in clinical research is not only a public health priority and pathway for reducing health disparities but a major focus of the University of Pittsburgh in its pursuit of excellence as a leader in research and the application of research to ethical health care. Yet diverse representation in research participation remains a significant challenge for our investigators. Only a small fraction of individuals from surrounding Pittsburgh and Western PA communities participate in health research. In particular, clinical trialists struggle to access, engage, recruit, and retain underrepresented populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, those from socio-economically disadvantaged or rural areas, and/or individuals with disabilities. The lack of diverse representation in clinical research limits our ability for scientific discovery and exacerbates health disparities.

To address this challenge, a School of Medicine Clinical and Translational Resources task force has been initiated to address and support study cohort identification and participant recruitment. The task force identified several barriers to underrepresented communities participating in research including:
- Lack of access to research opportunities or no studies being conducted in their local area
- Feeling that research is not relevant to them or are not convinced their participation will have an impact on outcomes that are important to them
- Confusing consent processes that are difficult to understand
- Frustrations due to poor dissemination of research findings

**Objectives:**

We seek your proposals for scientific projects that will also develop innovative and sustainable resources to help University of Pittsburgh investigators increase engagement of underrepresented communities in clinical research and lower barriers for all communities to participate in research. The types of projects that this competition will fund is broad, however, competitive scientific hypothesis-driven proposals will specifically address methods for improving community research receptivity (willingness to hear about and engage in research) and/or novel approaches to remote participant enrollment. Community engagement should be a core component of a competitive application. Proposals should outline plans to partner with and engage stakeholders from traditionally underrepresented communities throughout the course of the project. Support from the CTSI Community PARTners core will be provided throughout the project. Projects can include development of new infrastructure, but this cannot be the largest component of the budget.

**Areas of High Program Priority**

◦ Studies to understand what patients want to know before they participate in a study or technology (decision logic) to tailor consent information based on the individual's preferences and what is most important to them
◦ Mobile apps or websites (e.g. electronic research kiosk) that facilitate awareness of study opportunities and on-demand electronic/remote enrollment
◦ Exploration of methods to bridge digital divide (e.g. equity for people without smart devices or broadband, low tech literacy)
◦ Programs to develop research literacy in the community
◦ Automated system to deploy customized study engagement messages
◦ Menu of value options for study compensation
◦ Development of an e-consent process that can be standardized or templated
◦ Methods for simplifying the development and use of e-consents for investigators
◦ Study to understand what types of e-consents are the most effective for engaging participants, increasing receptivity, and generating understanding of study protocol.
◦ Develop consent language templates to fit needs of diverse populations, relatable to all literacy/education levels
◦ Programs or methods for disseminating research findings back to research participants and the broader community
◦ Programs to build and sustain a community of people interested/engaged in research

**Applications Not Responsive to this FOA**

• Requesting funds to support an ongoing clinical trial
• Projects that do not result in a resource or tool that has broad applicability to the Pitt research community
• Projects that will not reach, involve, or promote engagement in research of underrepresented community members

**Timeline and budget**
Applications should propose projects that can be completed within 2-3 years, with a maximum request of 4 years. Application budgets are limited to a maximum of $800,000 direct costs for the entire project and need to reflect the actual needs of the proposed project.

**Application process:**
Round 1: Letter of Intent
By October 8, 2021, at 11:59PM, submit a 1-page Letter of Intent to Laurel Yasko lyasko@pitt.edu that includes the following categories:

Study Title: Include the title of the proposal at the top of the page, along with the PI name and a contact email and names of all study team members.
Abstract and Scope of Work: Please provide a high-level overview of the study and the proposed work. Be sure to include:

- How the proposed work indicates a new project for the investigators.
- How the proposed work will improve community research receptivity and/or novel approaches to remote participant enrollment.
- Plans to partner with and engage stakeholders from traditionally underrepresented communities throughout the course of the project.
- A specific hypothesis that will be tested
- How the outcomes of the project will lead to improved clinical and translational research infrastructure at the University of Pittsburgh

*Review Process:*
*Applications will be reviewed, and 2-3 applications will be selected to work with the task force, CTSI, and other partners to submit an 8-page NIH style proposal (Due mid-late December; date TBD).*