

## Professional Development Core (PDC)



## Independent-Research Professional Development Fellowship Program

### I. Rationale

The Independent-Research Professional Development (I-RPD) Fellowship Program is a new initiative created by the Puerto Rico Clinical and Translational Research Consortium (PRCTRC) Professional Development Core (PDC) in collaboration with the Evaluation Core (EC). This new program will support the PRCTRC to attain the following stated goal and aim during its renewal funding period of 2014-2019:

**PRCTRC Goal:** Enhance and support existing training and mentoring programs to increase the number of new minority investigators in Clinical and Translational Research.

**PDC Aim 2.** Expand the reach and breadth of the Mentored-Research Professional Development component for the PRCTRC Pilot Project awardees and unfunded applicants.

To attain these objectives, the program will expand its focus not only on PRCTRC pilot project awardees and unfunded applicants, but also it will include as potential candidates the participants of The Art of Grantsmanship Intensive Workshop. It will provide the opportunity to New and Early Stage Investigators to participate in a structured mentored/guidance program designed to coach talented researchers together with their mentor/collaborator. The program activities will be carried out to support the implementation of an **Individual Development Plan (IDP)** that will focus on the participant's goals to compete successfully for external funding and become an independent researcher in a specific health disparity area.

### II. Program Description:

The I-RPD Fellowship Program will be under the direction of the PDC leader, Co-leaders and staff from the three institutions, University of Puerto Rico-Medical Sciences Campus (UPR-MSC), Ponce Health Sciences University (PHSU) and Universidad Central del Caribe (UCC). To implement the I-RPD Fellowship Program, the PDC leadership will be strengthened by the addition of a group of outstanding researchers. These researchers will be nationally recognized leaders of successful independent grants with an extensive publication record and a demonstrated commitment to help build research training, capacity building and infrastructure development. This I-RPD team will be working closely with external consultants, the mentors/collaborators of the participants and the participants themselves, to design and implement the activities that will provide individual and group professional development opportunities. The PDC leadership will work in collaboration with EC for the evaluation of activities and outcomes.

The active participants of this program will be known as **I-RPD Fellows**. The I-RPD Fellowship Program will consist of one to five years depending on the Fellow's IDP, **Stage of Proximity to become an Independent Researcher**, their commitment to the program and their annual outcomes. The first one to two years for each Fellow will consist of individual coaching/ mentored-guidance in addition to participation in trainings, workshops, seminars and workgroups. After completion of each year, the Stage of Proximity as well as the specific targeted outcome for each Fellow will vary according to their level of research productivity. Progress will be

evaluated for level of achievement to further each individual professional planning. This period will be followed by a third year of outcomes evaluation and self-assessments. At this stage, the Fellow with their Mentor/collaborator and PDC leaders will evaluate status of achievement of projected goals according to their IDP's consonant with their need, interest and commitment to continue in the program to complete a 5 years cycle.

The Fellows' groups will be classified according to criteria established by the I-RPD Fellowship Program relevant to the candidate's **stage of proximity** to become an independently funded researcher in a specific area of health disparities. For this program, the stage of proximity will be determined by the number of first, second or corresponding author peer-reviewed publications in a specific area of health disparities during the previous 5 years. The program activities will be planned on an annual basis for each of the three main groups. Some of the activities will be designed specifically for each group and other activities will include all participants to facilitate basic research skills such as effective networking, multidisciplinary collaboration, scientific communication, peer review, critical thinking and feedback. In addition, small working interprofessional groups will be formed with participation of Fellows at different translational research levels to facilitate group discussion and positive critique.

The **Stage of Proximity** of the candidate preparedness to submit an independent competitive research award is the critical factor to determine the group's stage to which the candidate will be assigned. The characteristics of the stage will determine the program's focus in the planning of annual activities for each group and their expected outcomes. For example, **Stage 1 Fellows** will be the most advanced in research productivity and will have the highest attention for individual coaching in grant submission. For this group, the focus will be developing skills to submit a successful competitive grant with activities tailored made to respond to their needs. **Stage 2 and 3 Fellows** will concentrate their efforts in submitting first, second or corresponding author manuscripts in a health disparity to increase their level of competitiveness for submission of a successful grant application. For these groups, the focus will be to convert their published abstracts, manuscripts in process or research presentations into submission of manuscripts.

Since this is a new initiative, there will be two major I-RPD program sessions during the PRCTRC funding period of 2014-2019:

- An **experimental I-RPD Fellowship Program** offered to candidates that demonstrated interest in pursuing or advancing their research careers by submitting to PRCTRC pilot projects (awardees and unfunded) and participants of the Art of Grantsmanship Intensive Workshop during the previous PRCTRC funding (2010-2013).
- **A transformed I-RPD Fellowship Program** - the program will be implemented according to outcomes and recommendations obtained during the transition year (2016-2017) described below. It will be offered to PRCTRC pilot project (awardees and unfunded) and participants of the Art of Grantsmanship Intensive Workshop during this funding period (2014- 2019) or the previous one (2010-2013).
- In between these two sessions, there will be a transition year (2016-2017) to evaluate and analyze the development, implementation, outcomes and challenges of the experimental model in order to make the necessary changes for the next session. The difference between these two programs is that the experimental model is similar to a pilot project in which the fellows' outcomes and experiences will set the baseline for the transformed program.

### III. The Experimental I-RPD Fellowship Program

#### A. Candidates

The **Experimental I-RPD Fellowship Program** has a target of 70 potential candidates including thirteen (13) PRCTRC pilot project awardees and 57 researchers, including unfunded pilot projects applicants and participants of The Art of Grantsmanship Intensive Workshop. As expected, the potential candidates to participate in this program will be at different stages in their research careers with varying levels of knowledge, support, resources and research productivity.

All 70 candidates will be invited by the PDC leadership to participate in an **Orientation Activity to the I-RPD Fellowship Program**. This activity will be repeated every year to obtain the feedback of the selected I-RPD Fellows and offer a new opportunity to participate in the program from the candidates that did not join any of the three Stage of Proximity groups during previous years. In this activity, the attendees will have the opportunity to discuss the program, provide recommendations and perform an exploratory exercise of their actual status in research productivity. This activity will offer the opportunity to support all candidates to further determine their needs to attain the goal of obtaining external funding and scientific publications in health disparities.

#### Criteria for Stage Selection of the I-RPD Fellows

	Criteria for Stage of Proximity	Outcomes
Stage 1	<p>Four or more first, second or corresponding author peer reviewed publications that specifically highlight the candidate's experience and qualifications in clinical and translational research related to a specific area of health disparities within the last five years.</p> <p>Has submitted at least one external competitive grant – Not a pilot project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Design and implement an IDP</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Submit at least one first, second or corresponding author manuscript to peer-review journals in the specific health disparities area</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Submit an independent research grant.</i></li> </ul>
Stage 2	<p>At least three publications in peer reviewed journals within the last 5 years.</p> <p>Has submitted at least one local or national pilot project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Design and implement an IDP</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Submit at least two first, second or corresponding author manuscripts to peer-review journals in a specific health disparities area</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Submit a competitive research grant.</i></li> </ul>
Stage 3	<p>Does not meet the criteria established for Stage 1 or 2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Design and implement an IDP</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Submit at least three first, second or corresponding author peer reviewed publications in a specific health disparities area</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Submit a local or national pilot project</i></li> </ul>

#### B. Overview of Major Activities

1. Develop skills in writing the Specific Aims page.
2. Understand review criteria and study sections.
3. Participate in mock reviews.

4. Apply reviewers' recommendations in the development or re-submission of a grant.
5. Practice how to establish successfully collaborations with external experts in your area.
6. Learn to review and understand NIH FOA and RFPs and their Institutes' goals.
7. Do peer-review of manuscripts and grants outside your expertise.
8. Develop the fundamentals of writing a manuscript according to peer-review guidelines.
9. Implement an IDP for reaching goals in one, three and five years.

### **C. Application Process for the Experimental I-RPD Fellowship Program**

The I-RPD Fellowship Program 2014-2017 will open two opportunities to participate in the program, one in 2014 and the second one in 2015. The announcement of a **Orientation Activity of the I-RPD Fellowship Program** will be sent by e-mail to all 70 candidates that participated during the previous funding in the Pilot Projects- funded and unfunded and Grantsmanship Intensive Workshop. All candidates that participate in the Presentation Activity to the I-RPD Fellowship Program each year will be eligible to submit an application to be considered for admission that year. The maximum capacity for admission in the program as an I-RPD Fellow will be ten (10) applicants per year, for a maximum total of 20 I-RPD Fellows, an approximate 30% of the total 70 potential candidates.

To be considered, the following documents must be submitted:

- ✓ Letter of Intent - describing their Stage of Proximity and interest/commitment to participate in the program (one page)
- ✓ For applicant - An updated Biographical Sketch following the NEW NIH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH FORMAT – in the contributions to science please include manuscripts in process and published abstracts
- ✓ Letter of support from a Mentor/collaborator(one page)
- ✓ For mentor/collaborator - An updated biographical sketch

### **D. Admission Process**

**All applications received** will be considered for assignment in one of the three groups of Stages as justified by the applicant. The applicants will receive a Letter of Notification.

The Fellows will be organized by their year of entry and the program will have a maximum capacity of ten (10) I-RPD Fellows. If there are more than 10 qualified candidates, the following additional criteria will be used for priority in the ranking of the ten candidates that will compose the next I-RPD Fellows group.

**Priority 1:** Early Stage Investigators - New Investigators who are within 10 years of completing their terminal research degree or within 10 years of completing their medical residency.

**Priority 2:** Graduates from a formal research degree or training program.

If there are qualified applicants interested to participate in the I-RPD program that are not accepted due to capacity restraints, these candidates will be given priority for admission in the next group of I-RPD Fellows.