

Concept Clearance

Branch: ERTB

Council Period: 202605

Concept Title: Supporting Programs to Advance Research Knowledge in Environmental Health Sciences (SPARK-EHS)

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Introduction

NIEHS has a long history of supporting large, multidisciplinary T32 training programs. However, smaller programs can play an important role by addressing specialized research niches and providing greater depth in particular areas. Their narrower scope may make them particularly well positioned to explore innovative training approaches and emerging research topics. To provide sufficient breadth, these programs may include faculty from multiple schools within a university or across universities. They may also involve cooperative arrangements with lower-resourced universities to increase the pipeline of students entering the field of environmental health sciences.

Research Goals and Scope

The goal of SPARK-EHS is to extend the institutional, geographical, and research reach of NIEHS-relevant research training. This initiative proposes to launch new and innovative environmental health training programs for research-focused pre doctoral trainees at institutions that have not had a recently funded NIEHS T32. Training programs must be responsive to the mission of NIEHS, which is to support research on how the environment affects biological systems across the lifespan, and to translate this knowledge to reduce disease and promote human health.

It is expected that most of the proposed curriculum should already be in place within the institutional structure; however, the initiative has been designed to include funding during the first year to support the development of additional training resources and administrative systems needed for the training program.

Mechanism and Justification

This proposal recognizes that new T32 applicants seeking to initiate innovative graduate-level training programs may face review challenges when competing with longstanding programs with established curricula, management structures, and training records. It offers a pathway to support the development of new graduate-level training programs.

As SPARK-EHS is intended to launch new environmental health training programs it will focus on predoctoral trainees at institutions that have not had a funded NIEHS T32 during the preceding five years. Institutions that held a NIEHS-funded T32 more than five years ago are also eligible to apply, provided they do not have any current trainees who were funded by the prior T32 award.

To ensure a foundational research base and familiarity with NIEHS mission-relevant research and training, the training director or one of the multiple PIs must have at least one actively funded R01-equivalent research award from NIEHS. Applications which include multiple institutions with a proposed common training program are encouraged; however, each participating institution must have at least one active NIEHS R01-equivalent award.