

NIEHS WTP Ebola Biosafety and Infectious Disease Response Training (UH4): FOA Applicant Info Briefing Meeting

Introduction

On September 18, 2015 NIEHS Worker Training Program (WTP) staff hosted a briefing meeting for applicants interested in responding to the [Ebola Biosafety and Infectious Disease Response Training FOA \(UH4\)](#). Applicants are encouraged to take time to digest information in the FOA, and be especially responsive to criteria when submitting applications.

NIEHS WTP staff welcomed all attendees to the FOA briefing meeting, and provided a brief overview of the WTP and background information on the current Ebola and infectious disease response initiative. This included a comprehensive summary of findings from a [gap analysis and needs assessment survey](#) that was completed in summer 2015. These findings provide a picture of where the United States currently stands in terms of response for Ebola and other infectious diseases. For example, most training is still at the awareness level in public and private sectors, where the most common form of delivery is via web-based training.

The NIEHS WTP encourages the need for not only awareness but also operations-level training in Ebola and infectious disease response for a broad range of workers in healthcare and non-healthcare settings. The optimal training would embed awareness and a sense of personal protection that endures past a single exercise or refresher course. NIEHS is hopeful that awardees will utilize existing resources, establish partnerships, and merge federal and private funding to overcome training challenges and sustain high-level readiness in biosafety and infectious disease response across the country.

Information about the meeting agenda, presentation slides, application deadline, contacts, and FAQs can be accessed here:

http://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/funding/current_funding_opps/index.cfm

Application Guidelines and Instructions

Applicants are encouraged to follow the tips below to ensure a successful application:

- Follow all instructions in FOA
- Be sure that the application is clearly written – be complete, concise, and organized
- Closely follow guidelines and criteria
- Follow all SF-424 instructions for font and spacing limitations
- Keep track of deadlines
 - Applications are due on October 21, 2015 by 5:00 PM (local time of applicant organization)
 - Recommend that application be uploaded at least two weeks in advance to ensure it has no errors and is completely uploaded before October 21, 2015 at 5:00 PM

Key Components for Applicants to Consider

In FY 2016, NIH intends to commit \$3 million per year over a period three years to 5-8 selected awardees for the Ebola Biosafety and Infectious Disease Response Training (UH4) grant.

The following section includes key components and guidelines to consider when submitting applications.

NIEHS Minimum Criteria for Health and Safety Training

NIEHS WTP staff encouraged applicants to review the [NIEHS Minimum Criteria for Health and Safety Training](#). Criteria and components from this document must be incorporated in all applications.

This document was released in January 2006. It provides guidance for hazardous waste operations and emergency response (HAZWOPER) and serves as the gold standard of training. It includes minimum criteria for developing training programs that are effective.

NIEHS WTP Strategic Plan Priorities

The NIEHS WTP has its own WTP [strategic plan](#) document to outline key frameworks to consider in developing and implementing effective training programs.

Hierarchy of Control Measures

The NIEHS WTP encourages a hierarchy of control that relies on substitution engineering, administrative work practices, and PPE to implement effective training for target audiences. Awardees should work closely with employers and workers to incorporate this framework.

Resources

The [National Clearinghouse](#) for Worker Safety and Health Training Web page houses several resources to consider for Ebola and infectious disease response training. These include some resources to use in approaching disadvantaged and environmental justice communities and others to use in developing Ebola-specific curricula and non-specific curricula. It also includes current news briefs to stay informed with what's going on in the health and safety world.

A comprehensive list of safety and health resources for Ebola and infectious disease response workers can be accessed here: <http://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/index.cfm?id=2542>

Training Objectives and Goals

There is a need for a nationally coordinated training program and partnerships to promote occupational biosafety training outside of the laboratory setting. The major goals of the Ebola Biosafety and Infectious Disease Response Training FOA and initiative are to:

- Identify and have access to target worker populations with the potential for biohazard exposure
- Establish and maintain the capacity to provide relevant training in a manner that is understood
- Evaluate effectiveness and continued quality improvement of the overall program

Summary of Training Approaches and Performance Objectives

- All-hazards approach: Addresses a comprehensive range of hazards
- Whole of community approach: Addresses needs of the entire community across high-risk target populations
- Reinforcement of usable concepts and information for day-to-day operations

- Impart skill sets that contribute to occupational risk assessment (risk stratification), critical judgement of potential impacts and outcomes, understanding of controls (biological and environmental) to prevent injury and disease
- Awareness-level training: To promote workers' understanding and knowledge of relevant potential exposures, precautions, safety standards, and guidance
- Operations-level training: To promote workers' understanding and demonstration of effectively executing standards of proficiency, by practice, for applicable activities related to potential occupational exposure to Ebola or other emerging infectious diseases and hazardous scenarios
- Encompass different methods of training delivery: Train-the-trainer (TTT) model or direct training

Quality Control and Evaluation Plan

The [WTP logic model](#) is a planning and evaluation tool that clarifies and visually represents plans and intended outcomes. WTP also closely follows the [Kirkpatrick model](#) for training and evaluation – reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

Goals of evaluation in the Ebola biosafety and infectious disease program

- To ensure program effectiveness: Health and safety of workers in biohazard and infectious disease occupational settings
- To ensure accountability: Responsiveness and reporting out

Key evaluation concepts

- Trainings completed and hours provided
- Relevance/satisfaction feedback on the training from workers
- Learning, knowledge and skill acquisition from training
- Worker use of training leading to capacity, protection, and empowerment
- Safety culture and safety climate in the worker environment
- Integration and coordination around worker training in occupational settings with the potential for exposure to Ebola and other biosafety hazards

Grant Application Process and Peer Review

Application Process and Tips

- Start early and submit early!
- Applicant organizations should register in NIH Commons and Grants.gov
- PIs should register in <https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/>
- Firm receipt date: October 21, 2015 5:00 PM (local time)
- Electronic submission through ASSIST is the only acceptable submission process.
- The ASSIST system has been well tested; however, it is built with flexibility for different FOA requirements, so not all errors will be prevented.
- Immediately contact the NIEHS Helpdesk should any problems arise.
- Periodically check your eRA Commons account – if you can't see your applications, chances are NIEHS can't see it either!

Peer Review Process and Scoring

The first step in the review process is to evaluate the responsiveness of application, which evaluates the application for programmatic and other technical details such as font size and page limit. If the application is not responsive to the criteria, it will be returned.

If the application passes criteria for responsiveness, it will move on to be reviewed by a special emphasis panel (SEP) in February 2016. The SEP is made up of a group of peers with proven expertise that is closely related to the grant applications and the FOA. All conflict of interest regulations are followed closely when considering and selecting the SEP. Review meetings are closed and confidential.

The SEP will review the scientific and technical merit of grant applications based on specific review criteria outlined in the FOA. Reviewers will specifically assess the significance, investigators, innovation, approach, and environment. NIH policy is to narrow down and select meritorious applications. For example, if 100 applications are received, the SEP will spend time discussing the most appropriate and meritorious applications (upper half). These applications will receive a full summary of review and written critiques. Applications that are not selected for the upper half of review will only receive written critiques, without a summary of review. The summary statement for discussed grant applications will be available in eRA commons.

In scoring applications, the SEP will evaluate the impact of the proposed project on the field, and what it will accomplish if successful.

- High impact score: 10-30
- Moderate impact score: 40-60
- Low impact score: 70-90

Although they are not part of the score, budgets will be reviewed for their appropriateness to the scope of work and the level of effort for key personnel.

A consortium budget form should be completed by **each** applicant organization. The prime grantee will have the detailed budget and the sub-award budgets will be reflected in that section. The prime grantee will have its own budget displayed categorically.

Q&A

Where should proposals and applications be submitted? There is some discrepancy within the RFA on pages 4 and 23 about where they should be submitted?

The NIEHS website has video tutorials on submitting applications. Applications can be submitted through grants.gov or ASSIST – this is totally dependent on the preference of the applicant organization. However, ASSIST gives you an opportunity to see what your actual application will look like once it is submitted. Once submitted, ASSIST will let you view an image of your application. This image is an exact replica of what NIEHS will see.

What should be the focus of training for the program (i.e., Ebola or other infectious diseases)?

Although the NIEHS WTP has tried to keep the program in the scope of Ebola, many of the training responses for Ebola are analogous to other infectious diseases. Ultimately, there is a desire to build program capacity and move beyond Ebola as the primary focus.

Is there a role for ethical and legal considerations in the WTP (e.g., standard of care and liability issues)?

Each applicant organization likely has its own guidance in an SOP. This should be incorporated in any of the training done at the local facility. The role of the NIEHS WTP is to have you adhere to local policies. The issues surrounding HIPAA and human subjects are not primary topics to be dealt with in training workers.

Could you elaborate more on the particular catchment area for training populations? Could this be at a level applicable to a particular region or across several states?

Historically, the NIEHS WTP has tried to assure that grantees respond across states and regions. This may include training populations across multiple geographic areas or different populations within similar geographic areas across multiple states.

Is food an allowable cost for the budget?

Food is not typically an allowable cost; however, it would depend on the program. Exceptions could potentially be considered. (Please refer to the Grants Policy Statement under 'Incentives' for more information).

What if the applicant organization involves a consortium with several institutions – what would be the best way to submit an application and budget form?

If an applicant organization involves a consortium, it is probably best to select one primary institution and principal investigator, with subs to follow.

Is the limitation of submissions applicable for sub-awardees or just the prime grantee?

The FOA states that only one application can be submitted per institution. There is no limit on having the same sub-awardee in more than one application; however, it is important that a prime awardee choose appropriate sub-awardees based on their role and their expertise in the training program.

Is the NIEHS WTP looking to test new or different methods of education within this FOA? In other words, should it be focused on evidence-based facts about better forms or delivery of education? Is it purely educational, or can it involve a little research about education?

The NIEHS WTP is not a research-based program. In some ways, there is an efficacy component to look at the effectiveness of a particular training or educational approach as a means of improving safety practices on the job. Hands-on training has evolved over time to include innovative methods of delivery for PPE or simulated scenarios. However, determining which form of delivery is most effective is considered a research question.

What expertise will peers in the SEP have? Will they have expertise in worker safety and health training?

Peers in the SEP will have the expertise necessary to evaluate applications for the FOA. There have been intense discussions about what reviewers should have in terms of expertise. Direction and confirmation will be received from the NIEHS WTP staff in terms of selecting reviewers.

Please note that principal investigators will have access to the roster of peer reviewers 30 days prior to the review meeting. Though this may not be a final roster of the selected reviewers, it will give applicants an indication of who is on the panel. Three reviewers will be assigned per application to capture every aspect. If you feel that no one is available to address your application, email Janice Allen, scientific review officer for the NIEHS Scientific Review Branch (Allen9@niehs.nih.gov).

Are applicant organizations allowed to include travel reimbursements or stipends within budget?

No stipends are allowed for travel reimbursements within the budget.

When will funding begin for the selected awardees?

Funding will probably begin sometime between April and June 2016. This will coincide with Council.

In order to expand the broad base of workers that receive Ebola biosafety and infectious disease training, will this include disciplines of healthcare trainees (e.g., emergency medical technician students)?

Yes, training programs for students involved in the healthcare delivery process would be appropriate and relevant for this FOA.

In terms of target populations, are there any restrictions on training military groups?

Target populations could include military groups or national guards; however, the NIEHS WTP is trying to focus on domestic populations. In the case of deployment, the NIEHS WTP has tried to avoid training in austere environments and foreign engagement.

What's the NIEHS vision of the Ebola biosafety and infectious disease program following the third year of funding? What can we hope for?

Overall, NIEHS is hopeful about obtaining further support of the Ebola biosafety and infectious disease initiative. Over time, the NIEHS WTP has grappled with different disasters and contributed to general preparedness of the nation in institution and site-specific ways. Continuing partnership with federal agencies such as CDC, ASPR, and HHS would result in future support of these activities.