

MPC Spark Grants: Call for Proposals



With funding from the Population Dynamics Branch of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, the Minnesota Population Center (MPC; P2CHD041023) is seeking applications for “Spark Grants.” Spark Grants are small (\$1,000 to \$10,000) grants for MPC members with time-sensitive research needs that have the potential to turn into larger, externally funded projects or to produce impactful research results. Spark Grants fund urgent and time-sensitive research opportunities, including a swift collection of timely data or quick assembly of new interdisciplinary groups that include scholars outside the University of Minnesota. Priority will go to (1) [New and Early Stage Investigators](#) (NESIs)* and [individuals from underrepresented groups](#) and (2) new interdisciplinary teams.

Spark Grants will be made in two ways:

- (1) Open Call: Any MPC Faculty or Staff Member or team of members can submit a proposal at any time in response to a timely or urgent opportunity. Proposals may include collaborators who are not MPC members if they bring relevant expertise to the proposed project.
- (2) Targeted Opportunity: We will put out specific calls for proposals should a time-sensitive opportunity arise (e.g., a special NIH RFA or a public health crisis) to which MPC would like to lead a response. Special solicitations will be announced in a direct email to all members as well as sent via targeted emails to members with especially relevant expertise.

Eligibility: All active MPC research staff and faculty members are eligible. The proposed research must be clearly relevant to the NICHD [PDB mission](#). Preference will be given to NESIs and to investigators from historically underrepresented backgrounds. We will consider applications from more senior MPC members if they meet two criteria: (1) they do not have other available research funds and (2) they are bringing together a new interdisciplinary team. Individuals may not receive more than one Spark Grant per fiscal year. Outcomes from previous Spark Grants will be an additional review criteria for subsequent applications.

Application Process: As these grants are meant to be timely, the application process is designed to be unburdensome. We require (1) a 1000-character (about 200-word) statement of the problem to be addressed or the hypothesis to be tested and why it is time sensitive; (2) a 2000-character (about 400-word) proposal, including significance, specific aims, and plan of work; (3) a 1000-character (about 200-word) statement of anticipated outcomes or deliverables; (4) a short statement about the relevance of the work to PDB’s mission; (5) an [NIH biosketch](#) for lead investigators (up to three); (6) whether the proposed research qualifies as human subjects with an explanation of why it does not, if appropriate; (7) a brief budget narrative; (8) a statement about the availability of other funds and support for the project; and (9) a statement about Administrative or Scientific/Technical resources required. Applications should be submitted [using this form](#).

Review Process and Criteria: We will accept proposals on a rolling basis. A subcommittee of the MPC Advisory Board, MPC Development Core Co-Leads, and the MPC Director will be responsible for review. Decisions will be made within ten business days from the time of receipt of proposals.

Applications will be reviewed on the following criteria: (1) Is the proposed project time sensitive? (2) Does the proposed project promise to advance research in an [MPC Primary Research Area \(PRA\)](#) or another area within the [PDB mission](#)? (3) Does the proposed project have the potential to lead to an externally funded research project or to rapid publication on a time-sensitive issue? (4) Is the investigator a NESI and/or self-identified from a historically underrepresented background? (5) Does the investigator have other funds available to conduct this research? (6) Is the proposed budget consistent with the scope of the work proposed?

MPC Development Core co-Leads Claire Kamp Dush (kampdush@umn.edu) and Gina Rumore (grumore@umn.edu) are available to discuss proposed projects and provide feedback and help in crafting proposals to ensure that applications, at minimum, meet the review criteria.

Anticipated Outcomes: We anticipate funding five to seven Spark Grants per year at an average of \$5,000-\$6,000 each. Spark Grant recipients will be strongly encouraged to work with the Development Core on their subsequent grant applications and will be eligible for internal and external proposal review, as time allows. Other anticipated outcomes include timely publications, especially in venues with the potential to shape public policy or health policy. All award recipients will be strongly encouraged to present the results of their funded project at the [Minnesota Demography and Aging Seminar Series](#) within one year of receipt of funding.

* Early State Investigator = “A Program Director / Principal Investigator (PD/PI) who has completed their terminal research degree or end of post-graduate clinical training, whichever date is later, within the past 10 years and who has not previously competed successfully as PD/PI for a substantial NIH independent research award. See our [list of NIH grants that a PD/PI can hold and still be considered an ESI.](#)”

* New Investigator = An investigator who has not previously competed successfully for substantial, independent funding from NIH.