Mixed methods research training program in the health sciences

Specific Aims

The overarching goal of this proposal entitled, “Mixed Methods Research Training Program for the Health Sciences” is to provide a state-of-the-art methodology training program to enhance the mixed methods skills of NIH investigators, in response to RFA-OD-13-009, “Short Courses on Innovative Methodologies in the Behavioral and Social Sciences (R25).” Public health researchers are increasingly using mixed methods approaches without substantive training in rigorous scientific techniques. As a result, findings from mixed methods investigations do not advance the potential for integration of qualitative and quantitative data, present confusing and inadequate results, and ultimately diminish the potential of their scientific impact on communities, public health agencies, and patients. Indeed, investigators today - often being asked to participate on collaborative teams using mixed methods - have little access to training opportunities, advice from health researchers skilled in this methodology, and ongoing mentoring needed to conduct rigorous and systematic investigations. Nevertheless, an increase in proposals submitted to NIH using mixed methods reflects the growing awareness of the importance of this approach in addressing population and behavioral health. In proposing our training program we are building on the expanding interest in mixed methods across the health sciences in fields such as nursing, medicine, mental health, cardiovascular health, palliative care, public health, intervention development, implementation science, health policy, global health, and health disparities. The proposal is timely in that NIH (OBSSR) issued “best practices” recommendations on a website in 2011, and quickly followed with NIH sponsored workshops on mixed methods (Implementation and Dissemination Science) and conference sessions on mixed methods in prevention science. We build on initiatives by Johns Hopkins and Harvard Universities to provide training in mixed methods through a “master course” on mixed methods at Harvard, the Summer Institute in Mental Health Research at Johns Hopkins, and individual faculty consulting. Our proposal is unique because no other national program in mixed methods education and mentorship exists for the health sciences.

The specific aims and objectives of this training program are:

1. to identify and recruit investigators (called Scholars) using mixed methods approaches to the Mixed Methods Research Training Program;

2. to provide a research training program in mixed methods research that addresses study designs, data collection, measurement, theme development, data analysis procedures, visualization of designs and procedures, and models of exemplary mixed methods NIH-funded studies through didactic instruction, individualized feedback and project consultation, use of online training materials, and carefully-designed immediate and long-term assessments; and,

3. to evaluate the outcomes (both short-term and long-term) of the Mixed Methods Research Training Program using metrics aimed at skills development, research performance, and capacity building.

To accomplish these aims, we will nationally recruit 14 investigators (called Scholars) in each of 5 cohorts representing diverse interests in the health sciences and including individuals representing underrepresented minorities. Scholars will participate in a 3-day training program supplemented with other activities. We will administer a baseline assessment of their quantitative and qualitative entering skills and experience with mixed methods (as evidenced by workshops, mentoring, resources, collaborations). We will match them with resource consultants across the United States who have (a) a background in consulting or directing NIH-funded projects in the research area of the Scholar; (b) a published record of articles or books that establishes them as a leader in mixed methods research; and (c) a record of successfully mentoring other investigators either at their home institution or at other schools in the US. After matching, and following an introductory webinar on mixed methods, we will provide an interactive 3-day summer course on mixed methods research. The course will alternate yearly between the Schools of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University. Scholars will be expected to bring a project to the course as a focus for training, e.g., draft proposal for a NIH investigation (such as a K-award or a proposed R-level grant). During the summer course, the Scholars will receive training in mixed methods research. Following the summer course, the Scholars will interact with Program Directors and consultants through on-line conversations and learning communities that will help them further develop their research training through application to their area of interest. In addition, through this Program, on-line videos, developed by the Project Directors on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods will be available for continued skill development. An evaluation plan, incorporating a measure of research activities and productivity will be assessed for each individual, and on-going reviews and revisions in the Program will be undertaken based on a program evaluation plan. The significance of the Program lies in enlarging the national pool of trained...
Applicant Eligibility

The program targets doctorally-prepared applicants who have evidence of their potential for conducting R01/R34 quality research in mixed methods applications, scientific leadership in mixed methods in their field, and benefiting from program participation. While the prototypical participant may be in the middle years of an NIH mentored K award, participation in the program will not be limited to K awardees but will welcome qualified applicants who have achieved other sources of significant research support (e.g., R03s, R01s, institutional career development awards, foundation funding).

The following criteria will be employed to determine eligibility:
1. Holds a doctoral degree (PhD, ScD, MD, DrPH, DO, DNSc, etc.);
2. Has demonstrated experience in health sciences (e.g., medicine, behavioral medicine, nursing, medical anthropology, health economics, health policy);
3. Committed to attend the summer course;
4. Committed to participate in the webinars before and after the summer course;
5. Submit a concept for research amenable to mixed methods approaches to bring to the MMRTP (can be a full proposal, a draft, or a 1 to 2 page outline of background, specific aims, and research strategy);
6. Willing to participate as a resource person in mixed methods research in their home institution; and,
7. Provides a letter of support from a mentor at their home institution or employer.

Applicants should submit the following information for review to Joseph Gallo MD MPH at jgallo2@jhu.edu and cc’ing Crystal Stone at cstone12@jhu.edu (with “Application for Mixed Methods Research Training Program” in the subject line):
1. A one-page statement indicating the basis for interest in attending the summer course and joining the learning community, with a description of their current program of research, mentoring and scientific advisory needs, and other gaps that could be addressed by participating in the Mixed Methods Research Training Program;
2. A letter from their employer or institution supporting the time to attend the course and participate in the activities before and after the summer course;
3. A letter from a mentor or supervisor at their home institution;
4. A current curriculum vitae; and,
5. A 2-page concept paper (or full draft application) describing the research project, including questions, aims, and general approach, to employ mixed methods that the Scholar will develop into a submitted proposal.

Applications due November 26, 2014. Applicants will be notified in January for Spring 2015.
References


