

Implementation Science and Team Effectiveness in Practice
(IN STEP)

Children's Mental Health Research Center

RESEARCH PILOT GRANTS



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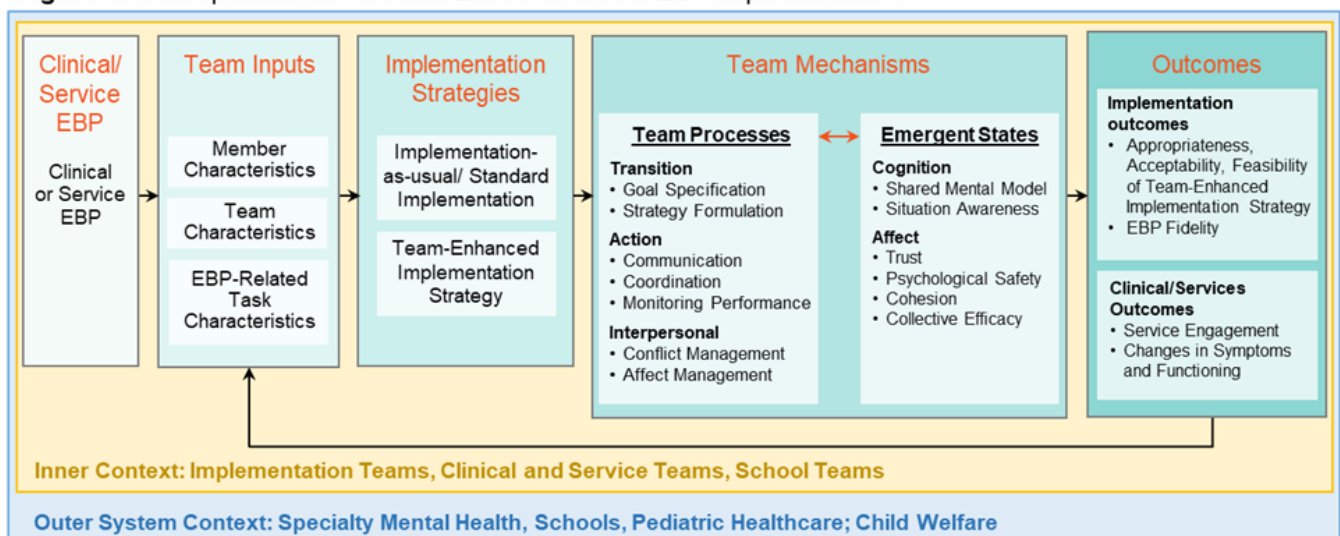
BACKGROUND

The Implementation Science and Team Effectiveness in Practice (IN STEP) Children's Mental Health Research Center offers funding to support pilot feasibility studies that leverage IN STEP Center resources. These studies will position investigators to address critical targets in community services for children with mental health concerns by focusing on strategies that enhance team approaches to the implementation of evidence-based innovations and practices. These pilot projects will foster opportunities for early career investigators to benefit from the substantive content and methodological expertise of IN STEP Center investigators.

The mission of the IN STEP Center is to leverage team effectiveness research (TER) to develop and test novel team-based implementation strategies, methods, and tools to improve the reach, quality, and effectiveness of care delivered in public systems serving children with mental health needs. Gaps between evidence-based practice (EBP) and routine care persist and limit the quality and effectiveness of services for children. High performing implementation teams are essential to effective services, and team-level mechanisms can hinder or facilitate EBP implementation. There is substantial research on team development interventions developed for the military, business, and other complex contexts, but they have not been leveraged to improve children's mental health. The IN STEP Center brings together experts in children's mental health, implementation research, EBPs for children and adolescents, implementation strategies, models, and methods, TER, and computer science to improve team effectiveness in systems that serve children with mental health needs.

The purpose of this pilot funding announcement is to catalyze the development of projects that improve the implementation and sustainment of EBPs by engaging TER mechanisms. Thus, all proposed pilot studies must focus on **team-enhanced EBP implementation in a community service system caring for children with mental health concerns**. Proposals must apply the Conceptual Model of Team Effectiveness for EBP Implementation (see Figure 1) to guide the research aims and approach and must include a community partner.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Team Effectiveness for EBP Implementation



Pilot funds are to be used for the development of new projects or the expansion of existing projects (including novel secondary analysis of data from ongoing or completed projects) to investigate team effectiveness mechanisms within community-partnered implementation research. It is expected that pilot studies will generate preliminary data to support a future federal funding proposal (e.g., Agency for Healthcare Research Quality (AHRQ), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)). Awards will be issued in amounts of \$25,000 to \$50,000 (total costs, inclusive of direct and indirect costs) to be spent within the 12-month award period. The funding period for the application cycle is June 1, 2026 - May 31, 2027.

PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION

Interested applicants can contact instep@health.ucsd.edu to inquire about the application. You may also request a 30-minute pre-submission [consultation](#) by emailing instep@health.ucsd.edu to ensure that your proposal is responsive to the RFA.

ELIGIBILITY

The purpose of this pilot funding is to leverage IN STEP Children's Mental Health Research Center resources to support innovative proof-of-concept studies. These studies will position investigators to address cross-cutting gaps and critical targets in community systems caring for children with mental health concerns. Projects will foster opportunities for early career investigators to benefit from the substantive and methodological expertise of IN STEP Center investigators, as well as promote collaborations with community partners serving children with mental health service needs. The Center encourages early career investigators to apply and consider proposing a pilot linked to one of the [IN STEP signature or developmental studies](#).

Individuals with Principal Investigator (PI) eligibility can serve as sole, primary, PI of a pilot project. This includes faculty members at research/academic institutions or project/research scientists with an active PI exception. Community practitioners in service settings caring for youth, project/research scientists without an active PI exception, research trainees, postdoctoral fellows and scholars may serve as Co-PIs. Although all eligible individuals are encouraged to apply, in instances of evenly scored proposals, funding preference will be given to early career investigators (≤ 10 years of terminal degree) in research teams that are well positioned to optimize team effectiveness in the context of EBP implementation efforts for children's mental health. Proposed studies must include a community partner.

AIMS

The IN STEP Center aims for this funding opportunity are to:

1. Stimulate Dissemination and Implementation (D&I) research focused on optimizing team effectiveness in the implementation of EBPs in community-based systems serving children with mental health needs;
2. Generate data that will lead to success in garnering major research funding (e.g., NIH, PCORI, IES) or other agencies or foundations that fund implementation science for children's mental health;
3. Support the career development of early career investigators in D&I.
4. Increase the public health impact of EBP implementation efforts in community care settings that serve children with mental health concerns.

BUDGET GUIDELINES

- PIs can request \$25,000 or \$50,000 in total costs (i.e., including both direct and indirect costs). For internal, UC San Diego, proposals, total funding does not need to include indirect costs.
- IN STEP Center Investigators are not eligible to request salary support, but they can be included as Co-Investigators contributing in-kind effort.
- The funding period is 12 months. Requests for carry forward will be considered. Any unspent funds will be returned to UC San Diego. Investigators must have IRB approval in place before the beginning of the funding cycle.
- If any funds in the budget are designated for a community agency, provide a letter from that agency, on their letterhead, that describes: (a) the agency's support for the proposed project, (b) agency's role in the project, (c) the name, address, contact information (e-mail and telephone) of the agency representative who has primary responsibility for that portion of the project.

HOW TO APPLY TO THE IN STEP CENTER PILOT GRANT

1. Submit application via Qualtrics - The IN STEP Center uses the Qualtrics platform for submission of pilot grant proposals. [Click here](#) to access the application. Questions about the application platform and/or technical difficulties may be directed to instep@health.ucsd.edu.
2. Application packages must include the following: a) Specific Aims, b) Research Strategy, c) Community Impact Statement, d) Dissemination Plan, e) Biosketches for key personnel, f) Budget, and g) Human Subjects Report. Applications packages should utilize 11-point Arial font, 0.5 inch margins, single-spaced 8 ½" x 11" (i.e., standard U.S. size) pages, and page numbers.
 - a) **Specific Aims – Prepare a one-page document that addresses the following:**
 - State concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will have on the research field(s) involved.
 - List succinctly the specific objectives of the research proposed (e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, create a novel design, solve a specific problem, challenge

an existing paradigm or clinical practice, address a critical barrier to progress in the field, or develop new technology).

b) Research Strategy – Provide a maximum 6-page application (not including references) describing the project

Content: Organize the Research Strategy in the specified order and use the instructions provided below. Start each section with the appropriate heading – Significance, Innovation, and Approach.

- Significance
 - Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress that the proposed project addresses.
 - Describe the strengths and weaknesses in the rigor of the prior research (both published and unpublished) that serves as the key support for the proposed project.
 - Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields.
 - Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.
- Innovation
 - Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.
 - Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions. Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
- Approach
 - Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Describe plans to address weaknesses in the rigor of the prior research that serves as the key support for the proposed project. Describe the experimental design and methods proposed and how they will achieve robust and unbiased results. For trials that randomize groups or deliver interventions to groups, describe how your methods for analysis and sample size are appropriate for your plans for participant assignment and intervention delivery. These methods can include a group- or cluster randomized trial or an individually randomized group-treatment trial. Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims.

- If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility, and address the management of any high risk aspects of the proposed work.
- Explain how relevant biological variables, such as sex, are factored into research designs and analyses for studies in humans. For example, strong justification from the scientific literature, preliminary data, or other relevant considerations, must be provided for applications proposing to study only one sex.
- Point out any procedures, situations, or materials that may be hazardous to personnel and the precautions to be exercised.
- References (not included in 6-page limit)

All proposals must apply the Conceptual Model of Team Effectiveness for EBP Implementation. It is expected that team effectiveness mechanisms are made central throughout the project to guide the research questions, design, measure selection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the research findings. You do not need to have a TER expert on your proposal to be successful. You may request consultation from the IN STEP Center Methods Core to inform the development of your team effectiveness and implementation science methods and ensure your proposal is clear and comprehensive. If your proposal is considered for funding, you may be asked to meet with the IN STEP Center Methods Core to respond to reviewer feedback.

c) Community Impact Statement – Prepare a one-page (maximum) statement articulating the Community Relevance and potential impact of your proposal

Create a one-page statement on community relevance that includes the project title and is understandable at an eighth grade reading level (non-scientist reviewer). The statement should address the following:

- Briefly summarize the proposed research study
- How are you engaging and/or partnering with the community to achieve the goals of the project?
- How will all partners benefit from the work, and from future research, treatments or interventions based on the work?
- Describe how the community partner represents, in a meaningful way, the population under study.
- Consider the potential immediate, short term and long term impact of the work. How does the research impact the individuals/participants in the community that is the focus of the proposed research?
- Describe your process for sharing relevant information (e.g., research results, plans for future research, health resources, etc.) with the community after your pilot concludes.
- How important is funding this research to improving human health overall, either in the near or distant future?

d) Dissemination Plan – Prepare a one-page (maximum) description that outlines your dissemination plan and next steps for this project that addresses the following:

- Explain briefly your plan for the dissemination of NIH-funded clinical trial information (if appropriate), and address how the expectations of the policy

will be met. The plan must contain sufficient information to assure the following:

- the applicant will ensure that clinical trial(s) under the award are registered and results information is submitted to ClinicalTrials.gov as outlined in the policy and according to the specific timelines stated in the policy;
 - informed consent documents for the clinical trial(s) will include a specific statement relating to posting of clinical trial information at ClinicalTrials.gov; and
 - the recipient organization has an internal policy in place to ensure that clinical trials registration and results reporting occur in compliance with policy requirements.
- Plans for follow up grants and proposals
 - Dissemination products such as toolkits/playbooks, decision aids, community facing resources/products, and academic products, indicate the target audience (other researchers, policymakers, clinicians, community residents, patients, etc.).
 - Plans for sharing relevant information and products with the community of focus.

e) **Biosketches – Provide an NIH biosketch ([Instructions here](#)) for key personnel.**

This may include the following: the principal investigator(s), any co-investigators, and any postdoctoral fellows, residents, graduate or medical students you know will be involved in the proposed project. Please indicate if investigators identify as a member of an underrepresented group in implementation science/health services research/biomedical research supported by NIH. Bio sketches need to be compiled into a single combined PDF for upload.

f) **Budget – Provide a detailed budget ([using NIH Budget Form “page 4” only](#)) along with a brief budget justification. Please adhere to the [budget guidelines](#) in the budget and budget justification documents. Total budgets should reflect both direct and indirect costs. in the budget and budget justification documents. Total budgets should reflect both direct and indirect costs.**

g) **Human Subjects Report – For projects recruiting human subjects, you will be required to submit human subjects enrollment report information ([Instructions here](#), PHS Human Subjects and Clinical Trials Information PDF form can be found in the [Qualtrics application](#)). For projects not recruiting human subjects, please provide a brief explanation (1-2 sentences maximum) describing why your project is not considered human subjects research.). For projects not recruiting human subjects, please provide a brief explanation (1-2 sentences maximum) describing why your project is not considered human subjects research.**

Although not required by the application deadline, funding is contingent on successful IRB approval. We highly recommend that you submit an IRB application to your home institution at the same time the pilot application is submitted to the IN STEP Center.

Applications are due August 1st, 2025 by 5pm PT.

PROPOSED PROJECTS WILL BE EVALUATED USING THE FOLLOWING SCORING SYSTEMS:

1. NIH simplified peer review framework. [See Appendix A.](#)
 - Factor 1: Importance of Research
 - Significance, Innovation
 - Factor 2: Rigor and Feasibility
 - Approach
 - Factor 3: Expertise and Resources
 - Investigators, Environment
 - Evaluated as appropriate or gaps identified; gaps require explanation
 - Considered in overall impact; no individual score
2. The community-based review includes three grading criteria centered on community engagement, strength of community partnership, and short- and long-term population outcomes. [See Appendix B.](#)

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

- 6-Month Interim Presentation- The principal investigator(s) selected to receive funding will be required to present their project at a Center webinar at the 6-month period of funding.
- NIH RPPR Reporting- The principal investigator(s) is expected to share human subjects data with IN STEP for annual RPPR reporting. This includes individual participant data, and enrollment tables. Additionally, the principal investigator(s) must submit a narrative report of progress to date.
- Final Report and Survey- The principal investigator(s) will be required to complete a final report and evaluation survey. This survey will ask for a description of progress to date and a listing of all submitted publications and grant applications (pending or funded), meeting abstracts, and seminars relating to the pilot project and evaluation of the IN STEP pilot grant experience.
- Final Presentation- The principal investigator(s) selected to receive funding will be required to present their project at a Center webinar upon the completion of their project.
- Awardees are expected to publish their findings in one or more scholarly peer-reviewed journals and present this research at professional research, clinical, and/or community meetings.
- Investigators are expected to cite the IN STEP Center grant in all publications/presentations resulting from this pilot award using the following language: “Funding for this work was supported by a grant from the National Institutes of Health (P50MH126231). Opinions expressed herein are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the National Institutes of Health and/or National Institute of Mental Health.”

APPENDIX A. NIH SIMPLIFIED PEER REVIEW FRAMEWORK

Reviewers will be guided to score the proposals using NIH Simplified Peer Review Framework used for applications. Visit Simplified Peer Review Framework for more information: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/peer-review/simplifying-review/framework>.

APPENDIX B. COMMUNITY REVIEW CRITERIA

Community Review Criteria	Considerations
Strength of Community Engagement	Evaluate the strength and appropriateness of the community partnership and/ or community engagement approach. Do community partners share in the design, and conduct of the project? The project oversight? The funding? Will both partners benefit from the work, and from future research, treatments or interventions based on the work? Does the community partner represent, in a meaningful way, the population under study?
Potential Impact on Community	Evaluate the potential for the research to have a significant positive impact on the individuals who are the participants in the community that is the focus of the proposed research. Consider the potential immediate, short term and long term impact of the work. How will the researcher communicate relevant information back to the community?
Impact on Human Health	How important is funding this research to improving human health, either in the near future or distant future?

- Each of these will be rated on an A, B, C scale.