Request for Applications:  
Research Projects on Solutions for Obesity in the Mid-South, 
with a Focus on Social Determinants (RFA-TCC-16-001)

The Mid-South Transdisciplinary Collaborative Center for Health Disparities Research (Mid-South TCC) (U54MD008176), led by the University of Alabama at Birmingham in partnership with Jackson State University, University of Mississippi Medical Center, Louisiana State University, and Dillard University, invites applications for community-engaged research that uses technology approaches to address the social determinants of obesity and related chronic diseases in the Mid-South.

I. Funding Opportunity Description

Background: The importance of social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors for driving and sustaining health disparities is increasingly recognized. The World Health Organization identifies the social determinants of health (SDH) as “the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age.” (WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health: Final Report; www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/finalreport). These circumstances are shaped by social and economic policies, the distribution of power and resources, education, and other fundamental social factors.

For the purpose of this funding announcement, the SDH refer to social conditions (lifestyles, living and work situations), class position (income, education, and occupation), stressful circumstances, poverty, and economic (e.g., unemployment, recession), political (e.g., policies, government benefits), and religious factors that affect the health of individuals, groups, and communities, either negatively or positively. Further information on the topic of SDH can be obtained at http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/.

In exploring the factors responsible for differential health outcomes in obesity and related chronic diseases, the Mid-South TCC promotes an integrative approach that accounts for multiple influences – social, behavioral, and biological – which interplay to affect the etiology, management, and amelioration of obesity and related chronic diseases. Further, the Mid-South TCC promotes collaboration among academic experts and community stakeholders in studying the pathways to disparities in obesity and chronic diseases.

Purpose: The approaches promoted in this Funding Opportunity Announcement are based on public input provided through the Mid-South TCC research crowdsourcing platform (crowdsource.dopm.uab.edu) in response to the challenge launched in October 2015. More than 50 ideas were received, which determined the theme of this FOA: technology-based approaches to address the social determinants of obesity and related chronic diseases. Examples of such approaches include:

- Projects that use smart technology and mobile devices as tools for ameliorating disparities in obesity and related chronic diseases;
- Projects that use technology to promote healthy lifestyles and lead to sustained behavior change in populations at increased risk for obesity and related chronic diseases;
- Family- or school-based interventions that incorporate technology to improve the health of children and youth in disadvantaged populations;
- Formative assessments and feasibility studies to guide future interventions that will use smart technology to ameliorate disparities in obesity and related chronic diseases.
All projects must include academic-community collaboration. Projects that propose the use of incentives must be evidence-based and must be sustainable in the long term.

Available Resources
The Mid-South TCC will provide support to funded research projects through the services of three Cores: 1) Social Determinants of Health Measurement Core; 2) Biostatistics and Study Design Core; and 3) Academic-Community Engagement Core. The Mid-South TCC Academic-Community Engagement Core will facilitate connections between academic investigators and community partners as needed. Applicants are highly encouraged to identify what Cores may be relevant to their proposed research and to contact the Core leaders at their respective institution for a consultation about available Core resources and services.

II. Award Information

Available Funds: The Mid-South TCC intends to commit approximately $300,000 for this round of applications. Funding is contingent upon NIH appropriations.

Number of Awards: Three projects will be funded.

Award Budget: Up to $100,000 in total costs for the entire duration of the project. Funding will be disbursed in phases, contingent upon making adequate progress consistent with the proposed research plan. Community partners must participate in the budget development and be funded at a level commensurate with their role in the project.

Award Project Period: The award project period is 1 year. Quarterly progress reports will be required for all funded projects.

III. Eligibility Information

Faculty members at the rank of Instructor, Assistant Professor, or Associate Professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Jackson State University, University of Mississippi Medical Center, Louisiana State University, Dillard University, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, University of Kentucky, and the University of Memphis are eligible to apply. Applicants at the levels of Instructor or Assistant Professor must have a senior faculty serving as a mentor. Collaboration with community partners is required.

Applicants may participate in more than one application per cycle but may not submit more than one application as the Principal Investigator of a project.

IV. Application and Submission Information

Key Dates
Letter of Intent due: January 25, 2016
Application due: April 11, 2016
Announcement of recipients: May 16, 2016
Project start date: August 1, 2016

LETTERS OF INTENT AND APPLICATIONS MUST BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY AT www.uab.edu/medicine/mhrc/research/funding-opportunities BY 11:59 PM ON THE DATE DUE.

Letter of Intent (2 pages): Include names and titles of Investigator(s) and mentor(s) (if applicable), and the name of the partnering community organization. Describe the concept and specific aims of the study, the role of the partners in each stage of the project, and projected timeline and cost. Collaboration between academic investigators and community organizations is required. Partnerships must be established prior to submission of the Letter of Intent. Applicants are strongly advised to contact the Mid-South TCC Community-
Academic Engagement Core for consultation. The Core will facilitate academic-community collaborations as necessary. The contact information for the Core leaders is provided at the end of this document.

**Application:** Investigators should submit an NIH-format application on combined PHS 398 forms ([http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html)) as a single Word or PDF file. Applications should be single-spaced, with at least 0.5-inch margins, and should use 11- or 12-point Arial or Times fonts.

Applications should include:
- Face Page
- Project Summary/Abstract and Relevance
- Project/Performance Sites
- Key Personnel
- Other Significant Contributors
- Mentorship Plan – for Instructors and Assistant Professors only (limit to 1 page)
- Table of Contents
- Detailed Budget
- Budget Justification
- Resources/Equipment
- Research Strategy (6 pages, plus 1 page Specific Aims):
  - a. Specific Aims (1 page)
  - b. Significance
  - c. Innovation
  - d. Approach
- Human Subjects Research (if applicable)
- References/Literature Cited
- Targeted Enrollment Table
- Letters of Support are optional

**V. Funding Restrictions**

The following types of expenditures are allowable:
- a. Research supplies
- b. Technical assistance
- c. Domestic travel when necessary to carry out or present the proposed research
- d. Publication costs, including reprints
- e. Special fees (pathology, photography, etc.)
- f. Stipends for graduate students/postdoctoral fellows if their role is to support the project
- g. Equipment costing less than $2,000
- h. Registration fees for scientific meetings
- i. Investigator salary
- j. Consultant/contractor costs
- k. Participant incentives

The following types of expenditures are **not** allowed:
- a. Secretarial/administrative personnel
- b. Tuition
- c. Foreign travel
- d. Honoraria and travel expenses for visiting lecturers
- e. Per diem charges for hospital beds
- f. Construction or building maintenance
VI. Application Review Information

Applications will be evaluated on the scientific merit of the project, its relevance to the scope of this FOA, the mentorship plan (if applicable), and the applicant’s potential for future funding. It is expected that awarded projects will lead to R01/R03/R21 applications, K-awards, or other extramural funding.

Review Criteria

Overall Impact. Reviewers will provide an overall impact/priority score to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, in consideration of the scored review criteria below:

Relevance and Significance. Is the project relevant to the focus of this FOA? Does the proposal address an important issue? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice improve? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

Partnership Plan. Does the project clearly require a joint effort from academic and community partners? Has a contact between the academic and the community partner(s) been established? Is there a description of communication methods (i.e., meetings) between academic and community partners? Is the sharing of resources between academic and community partners appropriate? Is there evidence of support for the project from the community partner(s)? Is there a shared dissemination plan that encompasses outreach to both the scientific community and the community at large?

Investigator(s). Are the PIs, collaborators, and mentors well suited to the project? Do they have appropriate experience and training? Does the proposed mentorship plan ensure accomplishment of the project aims?

Innovation. Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions proposed?

Approach. Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project involves clinical research, are the plans for protection of human subjects from research risks, and engagement with community partners adequate?

Future Funding Potential. What is the likelihood that the pilot project will lead to an R01/R03/R21 application, a K-award, or other extramural funding?

VII. Mid-South TCC Contacts

Principal Investigators

UAB
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LSU
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JSU
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UMC
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Community-Academic Engagement Core

UAB  Yu-Mei Schoenberger, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor, Division of Preventive Medicine
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JSU  Donna Antoine-LaVigne, PhD, Coordinator, Community Outreach & Partnership, Jackson
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