

# Building Research Infrastructure at Under-represented Minority and Women's Institutions

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The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Extramural Associates (EA) Program began in the mid 1970s to assist under-represented minority and women's institutions in building their research infrastructures. The original initiative was spearheaded by Mr. Frank Cady, formerly the executive secretary of the Grants Associates Program, part of the Division of Research Grants (DRG), the predecessor of the NIH Center for Scientific Review. The EA Program was initially housed in the DRG. A 15-member advisory board of representatives from across the NIH provided guidance to the program director, students, and participating schools.

Initially, the Program consisted of a six-month residency at the NIH. Eligible schools submitted names and curricula vitae for nominees, along with a commitment that the institution would support the nominee when he/she returned from residency training. At the time, there was no distinction among the schools based on their size or level of involvement in externally funded research.

The inaugural class of the EA Program, selected in 1978, consisted of five associates. (Two members of the EA Program's inaugural class, as well as one from the 1979 class are still very active in the Program and are at the same institutions that initially sponsored them.) Despite the fact that associates were not given additional NIH funding when they returned to their institutions, many EAs made significant progress toward reaching the Program's goals.

In the early 1980s, the EA Program was administratively moved to the Office of Extramural Research (OER), a component of the NIH Office of the Director, where it resided until 2000. In June 2000, the Program was moved to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

## The Extramural Associates Research Development Award (EARDA) Program

The EARDA grant program, proposed by the EA Program Advisory Board in 1992, is the most significant addition to the Program since its inception. Two defining events were key in promoting this new mechanism. Upon entering the Program, each EA was assigned to a mentor, who provided guidance to EAs as they navigated their residencies. Each mentor accompanied his or her EA back to the supporting institution for a visit lasting several days. The purpose of these visits was to orient the institutions' presidents and administrators to the goals of the EA Program, and to encourage the institutions to provide support (in-kind and fiscal) to the EA upon his or her permanent return to the institution. The results of a pilot support program, in which an award was given to Alabama A&M University in 1989, were so convincing that the Board decided to award financial resources to all returning EA residents thereafter in the form of the EARDA grant.

At the same time, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was testing a similar program of research capacity-building support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Four HBCUs were selected to receive between \$150,000 and \$200,000 annually for four consecutive years to build the research infrastructure on those respective campuses. Although research activity at HBCUs was in its infancy in 1993, the EA Program Advisory Board recognized the merits of this program and recommended that a similar mechanism be initiated for the EA Program. That mechanism became the EARDA grant.

The first request for applications for the EARDA was issued in 1994 and described two models: the Faculty Research Enhancement Support Program (FRESP), which was limited to eligible institutions that awarded no science degrees higher than the baccalaureate; and the Sponsored Research Infrastructure Program (SRIP), designed for eligible schools that awarded master's

degrees and higher, as well as institutions that granted professional degrees. The SRIP required a five-month residency at the NIH, whereas the FRESP required a 10-week residency. Later that same year, the applications were reviewed and the first awards were made.

The Board also recommended that the EA Program conduct an annual Regional Technical Assistance Workshop that would invite eligible institutions in a targeted geographic area to meet and receive generic instructions on grant and contract proposal development, detailed instructions for preparing the EARDA grant application, and information on the availability of resources at other agencies, as well as to highlight success stories from past and current EARDA recipients. Since 1994, these Workshops have been highly successful and account for the majority of schools recruited for participation in the Program.

Initially, the EARDA was awarded for only three years, but the OER, upon recommendation from the Advisory Board, determined that this timeframe was insufficient for achieving Program goals. The EARDA then became a three-year Phase I award, followed by a three-year Phase II award, for a combined total of six years of support. However, these short-term awards were also inefficient in achieving Program goals. When the Program moved to the NICHD, the current five-year grant was established and has proven to be more efficient.

## Support to Create a Research Development Office

With the move to the NICHD, an EARDA Transition Award was also implemented, which allows EARDA recipient schools more time and resources to create a research development office that will eventually function independent of NICHD support. EARDA awardees who received six years of EARDA grant support under the old Phase I and II system were eligible for two years of Transitional EARDA support. EARDA recipients who received a grant under the newer five-year system can receive a three-year, cost-sharing Transitional Award, thus allowing an EARDA recipient institution to receive up to eight years of support.

More recently, another EARDA component was developed that provides an additional \$20,000 per year to FRESP participants to support faculty pilot research. Prior to this component, FRESP participants served primarily as a focal point of information about research proposal development, and as a source of research opportunities for their respective faculties.

## Other Notable Changes to the EA Program

In addition to the shift from a three-year to a five-year award and the addition of the Transition Award and of pilot research support for FRESP-eligible institutions, the EA Program has undergone a number of significant changes and accomplishments since moving to the NICHD, including:

- Expansion of EA-eligible institutions to include community colleges;
- Expansion of the EA Program staff to include a program analyst;
- Successful launching of the EA Program evaluation;
- Successful recruitment of a Tribal College, which will join the 2004 summer FRESP class;
- Successful launching of the EA Program Web site (<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/od/eap/eap.htm>); and
- Recognition of the EA Program as a Special Interest Group by the Society of Research Administrators.

Under the direction of the NICHD and with the support from the NIH and the NICHD, the EA Program continues to facilitate the entry and participation of faculty members from under-represented minority and women's institutions into biomedical and behavioral research and research training. This cadre of researchers will be instrumental in addressing health disparities that impact these populations.



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*Matthew A. Kinnard received his undergraduate training in biology at Tennessee State University and his Ph.D. in physiology and biophysics at Georgetown University. As an enlisted person, he conducted research in the Virus Department at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, and later as a civilian, he conducted neuroscience research at the NIH. During his career, he served as both a full-time as well as an adjunct faculty member at the University of the District of Columbia and as a consultant in the School of Medicine at Howard University. Prior to assuming his present position as Director of the Extramural Associates Program, NICHD he was a health scientist administrator in another institute of NIH and at the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

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