

The Pacific Biomedical Research Center

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The Pacific Biomedical Research Center (PBRC) is one of the research institutes of the University of Hawaii at Manoa with a broad mission in biomedical and biological interdisciplinary research. Through its initiative in the early 70's, the University of Hawaii was accorded minority institution status, and in 1974 the institute obtained its first grant to train minority undergraduate students in biomedical research. This grant was followed in 1979 and in 1993, by similar grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. The central student experience is to work one-on-one with a faculty mentor on a specific research topic for one to two years. This includes a full-time summer session, either at the University of Hawaii or on the mainland USA. Students are supported by modest stipends and are encouraged to attend mainland scientific meetings to present their data.

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Over the years, the programs have had a 100% retention record for its students to graduation and a 70% success rate for their subsequent entry into medical or graduate schools. This track record placed PBRC in a favorable position to compete for a program initiated in 1985 by the National Center for Research Resources at NIH through its Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) Program, designed to improve the infrastructure for research in those minority schools, offering PH.D. and/or M.D. degrees.

Infrastructure was broadly defined and PBRC was successful in obtaining grants of \$1-\$2 million per annum over a ten-year period to support core facilities and new basic science interdisciplinary programs. More particularly, PBRC initiated an activity in 1991 termed Native Hawaiian Health Research. This was led by Dr. Dave Curb and Healani Chang, MPH, a doctoral student in the School of Public Health and a former minority undergraduate research student. The proposal linked research on diabetes and cardiovascular disease in native Hawaiians to the Hawaiian health care systems, set up by the 1989 Act, through the community-based Papa ola

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Lokahi. This activity yielded two very significant spin-offs—competitive grants from the National Institutes of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIDDK on a diabetes prevention trial and a diabetes intervention trial.

The Native Hawaiian Health Research Project learned the cultural and pragmatic sensitivities necessary to work with a community on its health research problems. The project was successful in obtaining funding for a further five years in October 1995 as a renamed Multi-Ethnic Health Research Activity. Other significant spin-offs from the parent RCMI grant, include a proposal funded through the John A. Burns School of Medicine for a Native Hawaiian Health Mental Research Center. A consortium consisting of the Batelle

Corp. in Seattle, the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Clark Atlanta University, and the University of Puerto Rico developed a proposal to the National Institute for Mental Health for studies on social networks involving adolescence at risk for AIDS. The strength of the proposal was recognized in its four

culturally-distinct, high-risk urban settings and ethnic mix — a model perhaps for trans-Pacific research. We have sought and always received help from Senator Inouye's Office, to use his influence in PBRC's efforts on behalf of minority health research but have never asked specifically for earmarking of funds — a procedure which tends to irritate our particular funding agencies. Likewise, we have developed a strong relationship over the years with NIH's Office of Research on Minority Health, a catalyst but not the engine for charge, in minority health status.

We, like all other institutions, face increasing competition for federal funds and the vagaries of the peer review process, which seems at times to the unfunded investigator irrational and discriminatory. Paraphrasing a quotation from Winston Churchill: it has been said that peer-review is the worst form of review except those other forms of review that have been tried from time to time! Two things are certain in dealing with the funding agencies and the political process: conflicting views within the community simply provide a valid reason for reviewing not funding proposals. Unity is mandatory in a climate where seven out of eight new proposals go unfunded: a corollary is that without submitting proposals through teamwork, the success rate will be zero. □