



MERCK VACCINE NETWORK – AFRICA (MVN-A)

2006 Request for Applications

October 24, 2006

1. Introduction

The Merck Vaccine Network - Africa (MVN-A) is an initiative designed to provide sustainable training for mid- to high-level immunization program managers, at the national and regional levels, focused on improving immunization coverage for children.

The Merck Company Foundation¹ is seeking applications from academic institutions in the United States (US), European Union (EU), or other countries, working in collaboration with academic institutions in Africa, to establish new training Centers in Africa and help build health care capacity.

As a global corporation, Merck & Co, Inc.² (Merck) supports initiatives to improve access to medicines and vaccines in developing countries around the world. Through these efforts Merck hopes to make a substantial contribution to achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. For example, Merck pioneered a program almost 20 years ago that today is widely regarded as one of the most successful public-private partnerships. In 1987, Merck announced that it would donate MECTIZAN®, for the treatment of onchocerciasis (river blindness), to all who needed it, for as long as needed. In 1998, The MECTIZAN® Donation Program was expanded to address the prevention of lymphatic filariasis (LF) in African countries where LF co-exists with river blindness. Also, for nearly 20 years, Merck has sought to make a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Formally established in 2000, the Botswana/Gates/Merck partnership (also known as the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnership or ACHAP) seeks to support and enhance Botswana's approach to prevention, care, treatment and support.

Merck is a founding partner in the GAVI Alliance³ (GAVI), a historic alliance between the private and public sectors committed to the mission of saving children's lives and protecting people's health through the widespread use of vaccines. In support of GAVI, Merck

¹ Whitehouse Station, NJ, USA.

² Merck & Co., Inc., Whitehouse Station, NJ, USA operates in most countries outside the United States as Merck Sharp & Dohme or MSD.

³ The GAVI Alliance was formerly known as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations, or GAVI. Partners include national governments, UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO), The World Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the vaccine industry, public health institutions and non-governmental organizations.

launched the MVN-A program to provide for the development of sustainable immunization training Centers in Africa that provide training to health professionals. In 2003, The Merck Company Foundation, through the MVN-A program, awarded two grants to establish training Centers in Kenya and Mali.

The training Center in Kenya is a collaboration between Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis and Moi University Faculty of Health Sciences in Eldoret; and the Center in Mali is a collaboration between the Center for Vaccine Development at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore and the Center for Vaccine Development-Mali at the Centre National d'Appui a la Lutte contre la Maladie in Bamako.

With the Centers in Kenya and Mali fully operational, Merck proposes to expand the scope of the MVN-A program to include an additional Center within a GAVI-eligible country in Africa.

2. Objectives of the MVN-A Program

The Merck Vaccine Network-Africa (MVN-A) program is designed to support the establishment of Centers in Africa that will provide sustainable training in vaccine management and immunization services for national and regional mid- to high-level vaccine program managers in support of GAVI. These Centers can serve as potential models for use in addressing immunization program and training needs in other developing countries. Effective immunization programs require adequate numbers of trained mid- to high-level managers who are knowledgeable in vaccine management and immunization services and capable of training additional staff to ensure sustainability.

In addition, these managers: (1) help to build and strengthen the immunization program infrastructure in their countries; (2) are able to communicate the importance of immunization programs to senior-level administrators; and (3) provide guidance and training to the primary caregivers who are in direct contact with children and parents.

It is hoped that the MVN-A program will contribute to strengthening health care infrastructure and building capacity in order to improve the existing immunization programs in Africa. Further, it is anticipated that MVN-A will help position the training Centers as an integral part of a sustainable source of skilled staff for the successful operation of immunization programs in Africa, and ultimately contribute to increased immunization coverage.

In subsequent years, MVN-A grantees and their affiliated institutions may be encouraged to apply for supplemental funding to conduct vaccine-related epidemiological research, including burden of disease analyses, of particular importance for future vaccines in Africa. Also, this funding may be used to expand training activities to include: increasing the number of health professionals who are trained, expanding the number and types of courses that are offered, extending training activities into other countries, or assessing the impact of the training (e.g., on burden of illness or upon surrogate markers of successful program implementation). These efforts will assist in laying the groundwork for sustaining the global objectives of immunizations as one of the most cost-effective approaches in disease prevention. Future programs are at the discretion of The Merck Company Foundation.

3. Training Program Scope and Administration

Scope

The training program in each application should be designed with the immediate goal of increasing the number and skills of mid- to high-level managers of national and regional

vaccine management and immunization programs and with the longer-term goal of building a sustainable, government-funded (or other funding source) infrastructure. The curriculum will use source materials provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) and GAVI partners as the basis for developing training materials (see Section 10), although it may be necessary to develop materials specifically to address country needs. Programmatic areas will include course work that will enable managers to procure, manage, and oversee the delivery of vaccines to children in urban and rural areas.

Administration

The training program in each application will be developed and implemented collaboratively by the Program Director (applicant institution) and the Co-Program Director (African institution) (see Section 4), working in consultation with key national/governmental, regional and WHO/GAVI officials. A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) will be established in-country to provide guidance on curriculum content, educational materials, trainees and faculty, and to ensure communication and support with other GAVI components, including the host countries' Inter-agency Co-ordination Committee (ICC) or National Health Sector Coordination Body for Health Systems Strengthening (HSS)⁴, as appropriate.

The Merck Company Foundation is responsible for program oversight to assure adherence to each program's objectives and approved budgets. The Program Director will assume responsibility for overseeing activity in the African country.

4. Eligibility and Selection Criteria

4.1 Eligibility Criteria

To receive funding from The Merck Company Foundation, U.S.-based applicants must meet the requirements of being a tax-exempt institution under the U.S. Tax Code 501(c)(3). International, or non-U.S.-based, applicants must either have a 501(c)(3) U.S.-based affiliate or be able to demonstrate organizational/operational equivalency to U.S. tax codes for non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations.

Institutions that are not eligible for The Merck Company Foundation support include:

- U.S. institutions that do not meet the requirements of being a tax-exempt institution under the U.S. Tax Code 501(c)(3);
- International or non-U.S.-based applicants that do not either have a 501(c)(3) U.S.-based affiliate or are unable to demonstrate organizational/operational equivalency to U.S. tax codes for non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations;
- Political organizations, campaigns and activities;
- Fraternal, labor or veterans organizations and activities;
- Religious organizations or groups; and
- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age, national origin, veteran's status, or disability.

4.2 Selection Criteria

The following criteria will be used (along with "Review Criteria" outlined in Section 6) in evaluating MVN-A applications. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they meet these criteria:

⁴ ICC and HSS: National mechanisms to coordinate activities among the health ministry, multilateral agencies, donors and other groups including NGOs ([www.gavialliance.org/Support to Country/Who can Apply/index.php](http://www.gavialliance.org/Support%20to%20Country/Who%20can%20Apply/index.php)).

- A. Institutions from the US, EU, and other countries must have existing affiliations (“collaborative partnerships”) in infectious diseases and/or relevant public health issues with institutions in GAVI-eligible countries in Africa (Co-Program Director’s organization) and have demonstrated success in competing for funded projects.
- B. Applications must be developed in collaboration with the African institution. Training programs developed under this grant must be conducted at the African institution (Co-Program Director’s organization). The applicant institution must provide a detailed description of its relationship with one or more institutions in a GAVI-eligible African country, including the partnership with a Co-Program Director. The proposed programs must be acceptable to the Co-Program Directors and their institutions, the Ministry of Health in the host African country, and other relevant government bodies.
- C. It will also be necessary to establish a working agreement with the government of the host country to expedite deputation of personnel, equipment and supplies from the U.S. In addition, it will be necessary to establish a working relationship with the ICC and other key national and regional officials/representatives, including the WHO country officials and African regional officials (AFRO), involved with immunization policy, services, and related training activities. All such relationships should be described and documented in the application.
- D. Applications must include a written agreement (“collaborative partnership agreement”) between the applicant institution and the African institution that details the collaboration, including: (1) the support that will be provided by the Program Director to the training program in Africa, and (2) how the Program Director’s organization will provide the administrative support (including administrative training, where relevant), and the necessary management of funds and materials in support of the African institution for the duration of the project.

5. Program Grants and Budgets

The Merck Company Foundation anticipates selecting one applicant to receive a grant award of up to US\$200,000 per year for a period of four years. Total maximum grant award is US\$800,000 per collaborative partnership over the four-year period. The actual number of grant awards, however, will depend on the quality of the applications received, as determined by The Merck Company Foundation. The Merck Company Foundation will make the final grant selections and awards, based on the recommendations of an external academic advisory board using predefined criteria (see Section 6). The grant awards will be reviewed on an annual basis and funds will be distributed only after completion of a satisfactory review of progress toward meeting each year’s program goals, objectives, and timelines.

Use of Grant Funds

It is expected that the grant funding will:

- (1) support the preparation and adaptation of curriculum and educational training source materials developed by WHO and other GAVI partners,
- (2) cover expenses for faculty and trainees participating in training activities, and
- (3) provide resources to enable program-related communication/coordination with national, regional and WHO/GAVI officials to ensure program consistency, sustainability and integration with other GAVI initiatives.

Grant funds may be used to support project staff salaries, preparation of educational materials and supplies, expenses of faculty and trainees, travel, communication activities (including expenses for the Technical Advisory Group meetings), and other direct expenses of carrying out the activities of the proposed program. The Merck Company Foundation policy limits indirect costs (overhead) to 10% of the total grant amount.

Program Budget

To properly evaluate the breadth and financial viability of the proposed program effort, the applicant will be required to present a budget (reflecting all sources of direct and in-kind funding, if any) for the overall training program.

The actual level of The Merck Company Foundation funding will be commensurate with the scope of the proposed program (up to a US\$200,000 annual cap).

The proposed budget will be reviewed in detail and negotiated to ensure that it meets the goals and objectives of this program. Final budgets must be approved by The Merck Company Foundation.

6. Application Process

Interested applicants should submit their completed Training Grant Application to The Merck Company Foundation MVN-A Program Officer by the deadline (see Section 8), using the attached form. Training Grant Applications should describe the program of training envisioned, with careful attention given to the criteria enumerated in Section 4. Budgets must follow the guidelines given in Section 5.

Review Process

Upon receipt of applications, The Merck Company Foundation MVN-A Program Officer will review applications for completeness and responsiveness to the RFA. An external academic advisory board (experts knowledgeable in training programs, vaccines and immunizations, and/or with experience in Africa) will be convened by The Merck Company Foundation to evaluate the technical merit of the applications. Final selections and funding decisions will be made by The Merck Company Foundation, based upon the recommendations of the advisory board.

Review Criteria

The following criteria will be used in evaluating applications:

1. Ability of the applicant to clearly describe how the proposed training program will address an unmet need in the host country's immunization program and achieve program objectives and milestones (e.g., number of training courses or trainees per year)
2. Evidence that the Co-Program Director and the leadership of the host country collaborated in the development of the training program and that both are appropriately integrated into training activities over the course of the grant period
3. Level of innovation demonstrated in the development and implementation of the training program
4. Evidence of integration into the existing education structure for vaccine managers and health care providers, who should be targeted for recruitment into the program.
5. Evidence that the faculty is committed to training and medical education, with appropriate infrastructure in place to support training activities
6. Strength of relationship, or strength of plans to establish a working relationship, with the Ministry of Health of the host country and other relevant government bodies and the ICC, including the WHO country officials and regional (AFRO) officials, involved with immunization policy, services, and related training activities.

7. Adequacy of the time (% effort) that the Program Director, Co-Program Director and Training Faculty will devote to the training program
8. Definition of how the impact of the training program will be evaluated (e.g., changes in immunization coverage rates, changes in health center staff behavior, programmatic changes, etc.); adequate development of a feasible and realistic budget, timelines, and milestones, given the scope of the proposed training program; and clearly delineated, measurable objectives.
9. Approaches to ensuring program sustainability are clearly articulated and realistic, given the host institution/country situation.

The Merck Company Foundation, at its sole discretion, may reject any applications received hereunder if The Merck Company Foundation determines an application is non-responsive and/or non-compliant, in whole or in part, with the requirements set forth in this RFA. The Merck Company Foundation reserves the right to modify, rescind or revoke this RFA, in whole or in part, at any time. Furthermore, all costs and expenses related to or arising out of the applicant's participation in this RFA process shall be the responsibility of the applicant.

7. Reporting Requirements

During each year of the grant, The Merck Company Foundation will assess the outcome and operation of the overall program in order to: (1) provide recommendations for potential modifications or improvements to the Program Director and Co-Director and (2) determine whether the program merits continued funding. The assessments will include, but are not limited to, the objectives and milestones of the program, either as described in the original application or modified to meet appropriate changes to the program. The Merck Company Foundation may choose to seek the advice of external consultants in conducting the assessment.

8. Submission Details and Inquiries

Applications and supporting documentation should be postmarked and/or emailed by 12:00 p.m. (EST), February 26, 2007, and sent to the address listed in the Training Grant Application Form. Emailed applications should be followed up with a hard copy by mail.

For additional information, contact:

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9. Application Form (attached)

"Merck Vaccine Network - Africa (MVN-A) Program Training Grant Application"

10. Suggested Links to Reference Training Materials (this list is not exhaustive)

World Health Organization (WHO):

http://www.who.int/immunization_training/resources/en

GAVI Alliance:

http://www.gavialliance.org/General_Information/Immunization_informa/Injection_Safety/index.php

http://www.gavialliance.org/Resources_Documents/gavi_updates/index.php

PATH:

http://www.path.org/vaccineresources/training_clinical.php

<http://search.atomz.com/search/?sp-a=00040367-sp00000001&sp-q=training>

<http://aim.path.org>

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation:

http://www.gatesfoundation.org/GlobalHealth/Pri_Diseases/Vaccines/default.htm

TechNet21:

<http://www.technet21.org>