



# **CIRCLE** CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



CENTER FOR  
INDIGENOUS HEALTH

## **Community-Driven Indigenous Research, Cultural Strengths & Leadership to Advance Equity in Substance Use Outcomes (CIRCLE) Center**

**February 2025**

### **Request for Proposals**

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## CIRCLE Fellowship and Request for Proposals (RFP) Overview

This section provides a general overview of this funding opportunity. Please read through this entire document for more detailed information.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health was awarded a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Center of Excellence (P50DA058619) to support the Community-Driven Indigenous Research, Cultural Strengths & Leadership to Advance Equity in Substance Use Outcomes (CIRCLE) Center to address substance use inequities in collaboration with Indigenous Communities in the United States. To learn more about the CIRCLE Center check out our website here: [CIRCLE Center Webpage](#).

**Indigenous:** For the purposes of this RFP, the term ‘Indigenous’ is used to describe American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities in the United States.

As part of the CIRCLE Center, the CIRCLE Fellowship supports new investigators to partner with Indigenous communities to conduct pilot research on the science of substance use prevention, treatment, and policy. The CIRCLE Fellowship is grounded in the CIRCLE Center’s cross-cutting themes listed below. All CIRCLE Fellows will be required to incorporate these themes in their pilot research projects with Indigenous communities.

For more information about the CIRCLE Fellowship, and to learn more about current and past CIRCLE Fellows and their pilot research, check out the CIRCLE Fellowship website here: [CIRCLE Fellowship Webpage](#).

**New investigator:** For the purposes of this RFP, the term ‘new investigator’ applies to any investigator who has not competed successfully as Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) for a substantial NIH independent research award. This includes (but is not limited to) early-stage investigators who have completed their terminal research degree or end of post-graduate clinical training within the past 10 years.

### CIRCLE Center Cross-Cutting Themes

Across all activities, the CIRCLE Center strives to:

- 1) Demonstrate Indigenous leadership or co-leadership
- 2) Demonstrate the use of Community-Based Participatory Research/Tribally Driven Participatory Research (CBPR/TDPR)
- 3) Advance public health approaches to substance use science, prevention, treatment, and/or policy that are tailored to the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities
- 4) Center Indigenous cultural strengths

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### CIRCLE Fellowship Funding and Support

- CIRCLE Fellows will be awarded **up to \$50,000 over two years** to conduct pilot research.
- CIRCLE Fellows will also be integrated into CIRCLE Center research training and mentorship opportunities.

### CIRCLE Fellowship Leadership

- **Dr. Victoria O’Keefe** (Cherokee Nation/Seminole Nation) at the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health (CIH), Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.
- **Dr. Michelle Sarche** (Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe) at the Buffett Early-Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska.
- **Dr. Nancy Whitesell** at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Colorado School of Public Health, Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health.

## Application Questions and Contact Information

CIRCLE Fellowship application questions can be directed to Drs. Michelle Sarche ([michellesarche@nebraska.edu](mailto:michellesarche@nebraska.edu)) and Victoria O’Keefe ([vokeefe3@jhu.edu](mailto:vokeefe3@jhu.edu)).

To submit your application, please click here to access the [application submission portal](#).

## KEY DATES

<b>February 2025</b>	<b>RFP released</b>
<b>April 15, 2025</b>	<b>Applications due by 11:59 pm ET</b>
<b>Early June 2025</b>	<b>Awards announced</b>
<b>July 1, 2025</b>	<b>CIRCLE Fellowship begins</b>

## Background

### Purpose of the CIRCLE Fellowship

Indigenous communities bring deep understanding needed to address health inequities and integrate their cultural worldviews and values into all stages of scientific research.

In January 2024, listening sessions with Indigenous advanced doctoral students, new investigators, and senior investigators were convened to guide development of the CIRCLE Fellowship and RFP. We learned that meeting CIRCLE Fellows where they are is key, and

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therefore flexibility and the provision of resources and training to support their distinct goals and needs are essential. We also learned that the CIRCLE Fellowship is an opportunity to elevate and honor cultural strengths and Indigenous Research Methodologies.

The CIRCLE Fellowship thus aims to foster the next generation of investigators who are prepared to conduct Community-Based Participatory Research/Tribally Driven Participatory Research (CBPR/TDPR) to address substance use in partnership with Indigenous communities. The CIRCLE Fellowship aims to nurture new investigators who are members of Federally Recognized Tribes, but is also open to new investigators of all backgrounds. CIRCLE Fellows must be committed to leading research in partnership with Indigenous communities. Through pilot research funding and mentorship program activities, CIRCLE Fellows will have access to supports to help them overcome academic and institutional barriers that impede independent research success.

## CIRCLE Fellowship Resources

### Pilot Research Funding and Award Period

- CIRCLE Fellows will be awarded a **total of up to \$50,000 over two years** (\$25,000 maximum per year, inclusive of indirect costs as set by the Fellow's home institution and their negotiated rates with the federal government) to support pilot research projects.
  - 1) Year 1: July 1, 2025 -- June 30, 2026
  - 2) Year 2: July 1, 2026 -- June 30, 2027
- Pilot research funding may not supplement or prolong ongoing research projects or be used as bridge funds when other support is no longer available.

### Pilot Research Requirements

- Pilot research aims and activities must focus on **Indigenous substance use** science, prevention, treatment, and/or policy.
- In alignment with the CIRCLE Center cross-cutting themes, pilot research aims and activities must:
  - 1) Demonstrate **Indigenous leadership or co-leadership**
  - 2) Demonstrate the use of **Community-Based Participatory Research/Tribally Driven Participatory Research (CBPR/TDPR)** throughout the project
  - 3) Advance **public health approaches to substance use science, prevention, treatment, and/or policy that are tailored to the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities**
  - 4) **Center Indigenous cultural strengths**

## Applicable Uses of CIRCLE Fellowship Pilot Research Funds

- CIRCLE Fellowship pilot research funds may be used to support pilot research projects carried out in partnership with Indigenous communities that use CBPR/TDPR to address community priorities related to substance use science, prevention, treatment, and/or policy.
- Projects in various phases of development are welcome, including those that are in earlier versus later stages of partnership development. For example, funds may be used to support the **development of partnerships** with communities and to conduct formative research in support of community substance use research priorities. Alternatively, funds may be used to support the **expansion of existing or well-established research partnerships** to conduct research that builds on or expands existing or previous substance use research, so long as the aims and activities are novel and distinct (i.e., funding may not supplement or prolong ongoing research projects or be used as bridge funds when other support is no longer available).

## CIRCLE Fellowship Mentorship and Training Resources

The CIRCLE Fellowship includes access to a variety of training, mentorship, and resources to support Fellows and their work.

Fellows will be **required** to participate in the following activities:

- **CIRCLE Quarterly Collaboratives** are virtual quarterly meetings designed to promote team science and collaboration. They include brief updates on progress and challenges, upcoming events, collaborative opportunities, and announcements about trainings, workshops, resources, and activities in alignment with overall CIRCLE themes.
- **The CIRCLE Annual Summit** is an in-person meeting to foster synergy across the CIRCLE Center. The Summit includes progress reports by CIRCLE Cores, Research Projects, and Fellows; break-out discussions; and plans for publication and outreach. Funding is provided for Fellows to attend the Summit; therefore, applicants do not need to include these travel costs in their budgets.
- **CIRCLE Mentorship & Training** activities include a virtual kick-off meeting to welcome Fellows and determine mentorship and didactic sessions to fit Fellows' needs, as well as quarterly CIRCLE Fellows group and programmatic individual mentor meetings (all held virtually). Depending on Fellows' needs, mentorship and didactic sessions may cover grant writing, grants management, compliance with federal regulations/policies/human subjects protections, tips and tricks for writing productivity, CBPR/TDPR, and Indigenous Research Methodologies.

Fellows are **strongly encouraged** to participate in, or avail themselves of, the following additional resources to support their pilot research and personal and professional growth:

- **The CIRCLE Elders in Residence (EIR) Program** offers culturally appropriate support to enhance spiritual and cultural connections and uplifts Indigenous

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perspectives and ways of knowing in research. We will share guidance with CIRCLE Fellows about the support and guidance available to them through the EIR program.

- **The CIRCLE Research Core** provides comprehensive research design, methodological, and analytic support, including but not limited to the following areas:
  - Indigenizing Methodologies and Measurement
  - Community Partnership and Culturally Responsible Engagement
  - Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods
  - Multilevel and Mixture Modeling
  - Substance Use Epidemiology
  - Implementation Science
  - Data Management, Sovereignty, and Stewardship
  - REDCap Building, Logic, and Project Set Up
  - Sample Size/Power Calculation
  - Data Analysis
  - Data Reporting, Presentations, and Visualization
- **The CIRCLE FUN WIP (*Facilitating Support for Understanding Methods in Native Health Research Work-in-Progress*) and Analytic Meetings** occur virtually on a biweekly basis. Discussion topics include methodological support requests, novel methods from recent publications, and project updates.
- **The CIRCLE Journal Club & Webinar Series** occurs virtually on a quarterly basis. This series is focused on Indigenous methodologies, particularly in the context of substance use prevention.
- **The CIRCLE Resource Library** is available to Fellows so they can access examples and templates of research study materials, such as IRB protocols, consent forms, Data Safety and Monitoring Plans, recruitment materials, etc.

## CIRCLE Fellowship Eligibility

- Applicants must hold a doctoral degree in a health-related field
- Principal Investigators (PIs) should be:
  - 1) Members of a federally recognized tribe, or non-Indigenous new investigators from all backgrounds within the United States (please refer to NIH definitions of New Investigators at <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/early-stage/index.htm>).
  - 2) Have not previously competed successfully as Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) for a substantial NIH independent research award.

## CIRCLE Fellowship Application Process

To apply for the CIRCLE Fellowship, please submit the following materials to the [application submission portal](#). If you have questions or would like to discuss the fit of your proposal with this RFP, please contact Drs. Michelle Sarche ([michellesarche@nebraska.edu](mailto:michellesarche@nebraska.edu)) and Victoria O'Keefe ([vokeefe3@jhu.edu](mailto:vokeefe3@jhu.edu)).

### 1. Specific Aims: 1 page (single-spaced)

- Briefly describe the literature related to the proposed pilot substance use-focused research project and any gaps in prior research, how the project fills these gaps, and the community support and partnership for the project. State the project aims that follow and a brief, clear plan for each.
- Please note community research partnerships may be in different stages. For all projects, a rigorous plan must articulate a clear process with goals and milestones (see Approach section below for more details regarding partnerships in different phases).

### 2. Research Strategy: 3-4 pages (single-spaced)

- **Background and significance: 1 page**
  - State the magnitude and importance of the topic addressed by the pilot research, including how the project will address community priorities related to substance use and any gaps in the field. Identify how knowledge (scientific and/or Indigenous community) will be advanced. Describe how completion of the aims will advance the field of Indigenous substance use conceptually, through methodologies and methods, or through treatment, services, intervention, or policy.
- **Innovation: 1/4 page**
  - Describe how the pilot research is innovative in theoretical concepts, approaches, or methodologies (including CBPR/TDPR/Indigenous Research Methodologies), instrumentation, or intervention.
- **Approach: 2 pages**
  - Community partnership and positionality:
    - Applicants must identify the community with whom they are working and describe their relationship, including how the community helped identify substance use as a priority topic.
    - Applicants must also address positionality by describing their involvement or connection (personal and/or professional) with Indigenous communities, including in research.
  - Research plan, methods, analyses:
    - Please note community research partnerships may be in different stages. For all projects, a rigorous plan must articulate a clear process with goals and milestones.
      - For projects in earlier stages of their partnership, describe clear and specific plans for solidifying the partnership, how the Fellow and their community



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partner will collaborate to create a research plan, and metrics for evaluating progress on goals and milestones.

- For projects with established community partnerships who are proposing to conduct research, please describe the research question(s), procedures and methods to be used to answer the research question(s), plans for analysis, and plans for community and scientific dissemination of results.
  - Applicants must describe how the proposed pilot research addresses the cross-cutting themes of the CIRCLE Center, which are to:
    - 1) Demonstrate Indigenous leadership or co-leadership
    - 2) Demonstrate the use of Community-Based Participatory Research/Tribally Driven Participatory Research (CBPR/TDPR) throughout the project
    - 3) Advance public health approaches to substance use science, prevention, treatment, and/or policy that are tailored to the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities
    - 4) Center Indigenous cultural strengths
  - **Environment: 1/2 page**
    - Applicants must describe their institutional environment and the community partner environment to demonstrate that appropriate resources, support, and capacity are available to successfully conduct the proposed pilot research.
- 3. Applicant NIH Biographical Sketch** (not included in 5-page maximum)
- Use the NIH format (link below) to submit a biographical sketch for the applicant. The personal statement section of the NIH biosketch should briefly describe the applicant’s academic and non-academic qualifications related to the pilot research, background and life experiences related to Indigenous communities, and how the CIRCLE Fellowship will advance the applicant’s research career goals. See **NIH biosketch (non-fellowship; Forms H)** instructions and templates:  
<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>
- 4. Letter of support** from community partner (not included in 5-page maximum)
- 5. Budget and budget justification** (not included in 5-page maximum)
- Budgets can include up to \$25,000 per year (\$50,000 total, inclusive of indirect costs) for project years 1 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026) and 2 (July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027).
  - Funds can be included for salary of PI and staff, fringe, equipment, supplies, travel, consultants, other, research incentives, and indirect costs related to the proposed pilot project.
  - Please use the budget and budget justification templates provided with the application.

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- Pilot awards will be made as subcontracts to the applicant’s institution, which may apply their Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the federal government. The institution has the option to waive indirect costs altogether for this award. In the absence of a NICRA, JHU will provide the allowed indirect cost rate.
- Applicants who currently hold NIH grants or other sources of federal support must ensure they have time and effort available to conduct the proposed pilot research.
- Note: applicants affiliated with Johns Hopkins University should contact Dr. Victoria O’Keefe ([vokeefe3@jhu.edu](mailto:vokeefe3@jhu.edu)) and Sylvie Perkins ([sperki23@jhu.edu](mailto:sperki23@jhu.edu)) for application support related to budgeting of indirect costs.

### Formatting Guidelines

- Length: 5 pages.
  - The page length limit applies to the specific aims and research strategy only. Biosketch, letter(s) of support, and budget materials are NOT included in 5-page limit.
- Line spacing: Single-spaced
- Font type and size: Must use Arial and be 11 points or larger.
- Smaller text in figures, graphs, diagrams, and charts is acceptable, if legible when the page is viewed at 100%. Some PDF conversion software reduces font size. It is important to confirm that the final PDF document complies with the font requirements.
- Text color: No restriction. Though not required, black or other high-contrast text colors are recommended since they print well and are legible to the largest audience.
- Use standard page size (8 1/2” x 11”).
- Use at least one-half inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages, including continuation pages.
- Legibility is paramount. Applications that include PDF attachments that do not conform to the minimum requirements listed above may be withdrawn from consideration.

### Application Review

All applications will be reviewed by CIRCLE Center Faculty and external advisory board members, all of whom have subject matter expertise in CBPR/TDPR, Indigenous Research Methodologies, and substance use research. Projects will be scored using NIH scoring criteria and additional criteria specific to the CIRCLE Center:

#### 1. Significance

- Does the pilot research address an Indigenous community priority related to substance use?

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- Does the application discuss how the pilot research addresses gaps in prior research on substance use among Indigenous communities?
- Does the application specify how knowledge (scientific and/or Indigenous) will be advanced?
- Does the application describe how completion of the aims will advance the field of Indigenous substance use conceptually, through methodology or methods, or through treatment/services/intervention, or policy?

### 2. Innovation

- Does the pilot research describe innovation in theoretical concepts, approaches, or methodologies (including CBPR/TDPR/Indigenous Research Methodologies), instrumentation, or interventions?

### 3. Approach

- Does the applicant clearly identify the community with whom they are working?
- Does the applicant describe their relationship with the community with whom they are working?
- Does the applicant describe how the community helped identify the substance use priority focused on in the research?
- Does the applicant describe their positionality by sharing their involvement or connection (personally and/or professionally) with Indigenous communities, including in research?
- Does the proposed pilot research address the four cross-cutting themes of the CIRCLE Center, which are to:
  - 1) Demonstrate Indigenous leadership or co-leadership
  - 2) Demonstrate the use of Community-Based Participatory Research/Tribally Driven Participatory Research throughout the project
  - 3) Advance public health approaches to substance use science, prevention, treatment, and/or policy that are tailored to the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities
  - 4) Center Indigenous cultural strengths
- For partners in earlier phases of CBPR/TDPR, does the application state clear goals and milestones to solidify the partnership development, how the community and academic partners will collaborate to create a research plan, and metrics for evaluating progress on goals and milestones?
- For partners who have an established relationship and are proposing research, does the application clearly state the research question(s), detail procedures and methods to be used to answer the research question(s), and detail plans for analysis and community and scientific dissemination of results?

### 4. Investigator qualifications

- Does the applicant provide evidence of sufficient background, experience, and training in leading research collaboratively with Indigenous

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communities, recognizing that new investigators will be in varying stages of readiness to engage in this work?

**5. Environment**

- Does the applicant describe their institutional environment and the community partner environment to demonstrate appropriate resources, support, and capacity are available to successfully conduct this pilot research together?