

Capacity Strengthening and Engagement (CaSE) Product Development Fellowship Program

Request for Application (RFA) # 2024-001

HIV Prevention Product Development
Track 1 Scholar
RFA



Are you interested in accelerating your career in drug development, data analysis, or regulatory affairs?

Apply to be a CaSE Track 1 Scholar!

I. About the program

[MATRIX](#) is a 5-year \$125 million USAID-supported cooperative agreement aiming to develop safe and effective HIV prevention and MPT (multipurpose prevention technology: products designed to simultaneously prevent HIV, other STIs, and/or unintended pregnancy) products that are acceptable, affordable, scalable, and deliverable through benchmark-driven portfolio management. MATRIX brings together organizations engaged with early-stage research and development (R&D) on novel HIV prevention products, investigators, and partners from the United States (US), Kenya, South Africa (SA), and Zimbabwe, with experts in social and behavioral research (SBR) and market and business case development.

[CaSE](#), the Capacity Strengthening, Engagement and Mentorship hub, aims to enhance capacity and technical skills of aspiring product developers, scientists and institutions in Africa in alignment with MATRIX strategic priority areas and as they relate to early Product development skills expansion. CaSE offers capacity strengthening by providing a multi-tiered program of training and mentorship opportunities.

The Track 1 Scholars program features short-term virtual courses for early to mid-level scientists looking to strengthen critical skills along the product development pathway. These capacity strengthening efforts will enable professional development, build connections with researchers based in the Global South and Global North institutions, enhance and build expertise in HIV prevention research that is focused on building an expanded range of effective and acceptable options for women.

CaSE is collaborating with the [University of Wisconsin, Madison \(UWM\)](#), a leader in the product development field, to cultivate a network of African research leaders. UWM is a global leader in pharmacy education, research, and professional development. They have a program in Applied Drug Development that provides a rigorous background in a range of disciplines that are critical to the success of the next generation of pharmaceutical scientists. They also offer accelerated training on relevant aspects of drug development with opportunities to explore and devise innovative approaches for real-world scenarios.

II. Program description & responsibilities

The **CaSE Track 1 Scholars program** supports early to mid-level career scientists interested in expanding and strengthening their theoretical knowledge and skills in early product development.

Currently on offer are short course e-learning opportunities below that will be facilitated through remote distance learning. Each part-time course includes enrollment into a specific subject matter focused course for a 3–4-month period.

On completion of the theoretical components of the course work, the Scholars will be required to complete a capstone project and presentation. A capstone project refers to a final assignment for students to apply their knowledge gathered through the course completion to a particular project and presentation.

In addition to a traditional certificate from UWM, successful Scholars will earn digital badges signifying accomplishments in various aspects of drug development. Digital badges recognize achievement and establish credibility and qualifications in a specific skill or competency. They are portable and can be displayed, for example, using LinkedIn or other online platforms.

The Scholar may choose one of the following topic areas of interest from the Track 1 menu of opportunities:

- **The Drug Development Process:** Scholars will gain an understanding of the drug development lifecycle from discovery to approval and the accompanying safety and regulatory guidance and requirements.
- **Introduction to Data Analyses in Drug Development:** Scholars will gain knowledge and skills in applied biostatistics related to product development.
- **Product Development and the Regulatory Process:** Scholars will gain an understanding in how to navigate the regulatory process throughout the product development lifecycle. The course will provide an overview of the regulatory environment and regulations applied in the participants' own country as appropriate, for example by cross comparisons between home countries of the participants and benchmarking against the general principles that can be applicable globally, such as those set by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Each topic area has 3-4 months of course work and includes a capstone project and presentation. The details will vary from course to course. We have provided an overview of expectations and grading generally used. The final capstone project components total 400 points, constituting 40% of each student's overall course grade:

- Class meeting attendance (three meetings at 10 points each = 30 pts)
- Spoken delivery of presentation (50 pts)
- Plan Reports (Plan 1 = 30 pts, Plan 2 = 40, and Plan 3 = 50 pts each; 120 pts total)
- Final Project Slide deck (100 pts)
- Appropriate use of professional terms throughout project components (50 pts)
- Effective answering of questions during post-presentation Q&A session (50 pts)

We will invite members of MATRIX, CaSE, CaSE alumni, Track 1 peers, UWM instructors, and regional experts from African countries to attend the capstone presentation. Scholars will be reviewed and evaluated by the instructor, CaSE team and eventually, alumni of the course in subsequent years.

Upon completion, Scholars will receive a certificate of completion from the UWM and will earn digital badges signifying accomplishments in various aspects of drug development.

Depending on the Scholar’s goals and experience, CaSE could also facilitate an opportunity to submit an abstract to a conference or peer-reviewed journal publication based on the Scholar’s capstone project.

Activities and deliverables anticipated in this program will include:

Activity/Deliverable	Time
<p>Coursework</p> <p>This course will require Scholars to dedicate a total of 135 hours for the duration of the program. This includes a combination of class/instructional time and independent study. An average week might look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 hours participation in discussion platform • 4-6 hours of reading and self-paced module • 4-6 hours of assignments or homework 	July – October 2024
Capstone project	October 2024
Capstone presentation (if applicable to the course)	October/November 2024

In addition to the proposed activities above, the Scholar will:

- Participate in monitoring and pre- and post-evaluation activities conducted by the CaSE Program team and UWM.

III. Key Dates

Summary of key dates:

Release of RFA	March 1, 2024 (8:00am PT, 5:00pm SAST, 6:00pm EAT)
Applications due	April 26, 2024 (8:00am PT, 5:00pm SAST, 6:00pm EAT)
Review and selection	May 6 – May 31, 2024
Applicants notified of decision	Early June 2024
Scholar onboarding and orientation	Mid-June 2024
<p>Estimated program start date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-4 months of 10-15 hours/week of coursework • 1 month dedicated to working on capstone project and presentation 	July 1, 2024
Estimated program end date	October/November 2024

IV. Applicant Criteria

Scholars will be selected through a competitive application process. Scholars should have:

- Citizenship or permanent residency in Kenya, South Africa, or Zimbabwe.
- The ability to commit to 10-15/hours of coursework a week for up to 5 months.
- Bachelors, Masters, PhD, or post-doctoral level training in bioscience, chemistry, pharmaceutical sciences, pharmaceutical technology, drug delivery, or other related science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) field.
- Interest in HIV prevention and/or MPTs a plus.
- The ability to commit to follow-up meetings and engagements post-program as part of a MATRIX Scholars peer learning network 2-4 hours annually over the course of MATRIX. This is a platform that offers webinars, continuing education, and networking with CaSE alumni.

V. Award Information

Up to 25 successful candidates from Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa will be selected.

This is a 100% virtual program.

Scholars will remain with their current employer and will make arrangements with their home-institution to participate. Scholar's home-institution must indicate that they fully understand and support the time commitment of their employee that this program will entail.

USAID MATRIX will cover program fees to support the Scholar during the course of the program. The Scholar's home institution is expected to provide workspace and to cover the Scholar's salary for the duration of the program.

This program will provide:

- Program fees for the Scholar
- Certification from UWM upon completion of coursework and capstone project
- Digital badges signifying accomplishments in various aspects of drug development upon completion of coursework and capstone project
- Connections to resources, support and professional networks

VI. Application Components

To apply, applicants should go to the online CaSE Track 1 Scholar Application Form ([link](#)).

1. Applicants will fill out and provide the following:
 - Personal and demographic information
 - Full curriculum vitae (CV)
 - An institutional Letter of Support (1 page max, please see template in [Application Handbook](#))

2. Applicants will then be asked to provide responses to the following questions (responses exceeding the word count will not be reviewed). As you provide responses to the following questions, please ensure that you are responsive to the indicated word limit per question
 - What is your motivation for applying to this program? In your answer, please describe specific tools/skills you would want to gain or deliverables you'd like to accomplish (300 words max).
 - Please explain how you envision this program to advance your career (500 words max).

VII. Review Criteria

All applications will be initially screened by the CaSE team and ranked. Final selections will be reviewed with the MATRIX Prime partner, and USAID.

Applicant acceptance will be based on the extent to which the applicant will help to advance MATRIX's goal of building capacity for HIV prevention and/or MPT product development in Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa, on the application package, the quality and depth of the responses received to the questions listed in the RFA, and the letter of institutional support.

The review criteria described below will be considered in the review process:

- Academic and/or professional record:
 - Is the applicant's academic, and research record of high quality?
 - Are the applicant's prior training and research experiences appropriate for this award?
 - Do the short-answer responses address the applicant's potential in contributing to the field of HIV prevention and/or product development?
 - Is there evidence of the applicant's commitment to meeting the program objectives?
- Career development goals:
 - What is the likelihood that the applicant's career development goals will contribute substantially to HIV prevention and/or MPT product development?
- Environment & institutional commitment to the applicant:
 - Is there clear commitment from the applicant's institution to ensure up to 5 months at 10-15 h/week will be devoted directly to the program described in the application?
 - Is the applicant's institutional commitment to the career development of the applicant appropriately strong?
 - Is there assurance that the applicant's institution intends the applicant to be an integral part of its projects and research programs?

Selected Scholars will undergo performance reviews at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. CaSE will work with UWM to keep track of Scholar performance, which is based on attendance, coursework completion, participation, and their final project.

CaSE seeks to promote diversity within its programs, recognize the scientific achievements of our diverse membership, and foster career development and advancement for individuals from underrepresented groups. CaSE encourages applicants of all backgrounds, irrespective of age, culture, ability, race,

ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, marital status, religious affiliation or socioeconomic status to apply.

