Capacity Strengthening and Engagement (CaSE) Product Development Fellowship Program

Request for Application (RFA) # 2024-001

MATRIX HIV Prevention Product Development
CaSE D2D Scholars 2024
RFA

Apply to be a Design to Delivery (D2D) Scholar!

Learn about innovative community-based end-user research and social behavioral research in clinical trials of novel HIV and dual prevention products in development!

I.   About the program

MATRIX is a 5-year $125 million USAID-supported cooperative agreement aiming to develop safe and effective HIV prevention and dual prevention technologies (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.

MATRIX has multiple workstreams and Hubs to ensure the overall goals of the portfolio are achieved. A coalition of partners from the Design to Delivery (D2D) and Capacity Strengthening and Mentorship Engagement (CaSE) hubs are collaborating to cultivate a network of African research leaders with skills to inform manufacturing, demand, and market analyses of HIV prevention and/or dual prevention biomedical products. 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.

This year, CaSE is offering two skills building and capacity strengthening programs in collaboration with the D2D hub:

> **1. D2D Pillar 1: End-User Methods Scholar**
> The goal of the Pillar 1 team is to provide rapid feedback to product developers (PD) and MATRIX partners on 1) product-specific attributes from diverse end-users and key influencers to inform the target product profile (TPP); and 2) priorities of the Target Market Profile (TMP) to inform decisions about R&D investments through MATRIX. This Scholar will have a range of exciting opportunities to get hands-on training and mentorship in one or several social-behavioral research methods to understand end-user acceptability of and preferences for new prevention products in the MATRIX pipeline.

> **2. D2D Pillar 2: Sociobehavioral Research in Clinical Trials Scholar**
> The D2D Pillar 2 team works closely with the MATRIX Clinical Trials Hub and product developers to conduct sociobehavioral research in MATRIX clinical trials. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, this research assesses product acceptability and end-user experience in using the

products; identifies product attributes and use considerations pertinent to acceptability and use; and explores partner perspectives of MATRIX products. The overall objective of the research is to inform product development and implementation of later phase clinical trials. This Scholar position offers an opportunity to work closely with the D2D Pillar 2 team in development of new MATRIX research protocols and data collection tools and contribute to analysis of data and development of dissemination materials from ongoing MATRIX clinical trials.

II.   Program description & responsibilities

The D2D team is a consultative working group for coordinated engagement of a range of stakeholders, including end-users, service providers, key influencers and other local partners, who can provide insight into the acceptability, uptake, positioning, and rollout of different HIV prevention options. What is learned through these efforts will be leveraged to inform and advance the research and development of a diverse and innovative range of emerging HIV prevention options for women. D2D provides expertise and innovation in the behavioral and social sciences, clinical trials, and stakeholder engagement.

D2D's approach is informed by evidence that timely and strategic engagement of end-users, their key influencers, and health care providers early in the product's development pipeline may help to shape the profile of future HIV prevention and multipurpose prevention technology. This integrated approach has the potential to inform ongoing development and modification of product attributes to enhance acceptability, improve adherence among end-users, increase feasibility and ease of delivery, and enable optimized integration into health systems for widespread adoption and impact on public health.

The ultimate goal of this program is to build the social behavioral research and human centered design capacity of the scholar (in particular when it comes to product development) and to expand the professional and resource networks of the scholar. The Scholar will contribute and work collaboratively on D2D activities for several MATRIX products to inform their early development.

1. **The D2D End-User Methods Scholar** will work with mentors to tailor his/her fellowship plan to obtain or enhance skills related to one or more activities planned for this year. Applicants may choose activities that fit their interest, and a customized learning plan will be tailored with their mentor. The following is a list of potential activities and skills that applicants for the End-User Methods Scholar Program can choose among:

- ▪ *Market Segmentation Surveys (MSS):* During 2024, we will be analyzing data from a multi-site survey to inform PDs about end-user segments most and least likely to desire their product. Scholar opportunities include:
    - o Developing a data analysis plan for secondary analysis
    - o Basic data management skills, including data cleaning, merging datasets, selection and recoding of variables

- o Data analysis, including development of analytic tables, introduction to statistical methods like Latent Class Analysis
- o Report and or manuscript preparation
- ▪ ***Participatory Consultations (PC):*** Pillar 1 will plan and implement up to two participatory end-user/stakeholder engagements. These full day events aim to obtain rich, qualitative insights from end-users, partners and other stakeholders about products and the contexts in which they may be accessed and used. Scholar opportunities include:
  - o Theoretical and experiential understanding of human-centered design strategies and more traditional social-behavioral research
  - o Development of visual collateral and interactive strategies for engaging participants
  - o Development of data collection tools
  - o Experiences with group facilitation and other qualitative data collection methods
  - o Rapid, qualitative data analysis and synthesis
  - o Reporting, blogging
- ▪ ***Rapid Response Network (RRN):*** In Year 3, we will work with other Pillars in D2D and with the Matrix hubs to routinely send out polls and other messages through the RRN. Opportunities for scholars include:
  - o Data monitoring and quality checks
  - o Programming in ODK and/or Telerivet
  - o Utilization of Geographic Information System (GIS) component to track responses
  - o Development of new polling questions and data visualization approaches

The D2D End-User Methods Scholar will also have an opportunity for professional development and mentoring with the MATRIX D2D Pillar 1 team's [Dr. Betsy Tolley,](#) Senior Scientist and Director of the Behavioral, Epidemiological & Clinical Sciences Unit at FHI360.

2. The D2D Sociobehavioral Research in Clinical Trials Scholar will work with mentors from the Pillar 2 team to tailor a fellowship plan to obtain or enhance skills related to one or more activities planned for Year 3. Applicants may choose activities that fit their interest and a customized learning plan will be tailored with their mentor. The following is a list of activities and potential skills that applicants for the Socio Behavioral Research in Clinical Trials Scholar may consider:

- ▪ ***Clinical Trials Protocol Development, Tailoring of Data Collection Instruments and Implementation Materials:*** Pillar 2 will contribute to development of multiple new MATRIX clinical trials. Scholar opportunities include:
  - o Experiential learning about research design and development through participation in D2D Pillar 2 protocol discussions and development.
  - o Building content expertise regarding MATRIX products and research gaps pertinent to D2D Pillar 2 scope.
  - o Contribution to development of research protocol focused on perspectives of different cadres of health providers participating in MATRIX clinical studies.

- o Development and pre-testing of data collection tools
- o Development of training materials for study site staff; participation in conducting trainings.
  - ▪ *Sociobehavioral Data Analysis and Results Dissemination*
    - o Contribute to coding and analysis of qualitative data collected in MATRIX clinical trials.
    - o Contribute to analysis of quantitative socio behavioral data collected in MATRIX clinical trials.
    - o Contribute to results synthesis and development of dissemination materials that report socio behavioral research findings (e.g., presentation, conference abstract, paper).

The D2D Sociobehavioral Research in Clinical Trials Scholar will be mentored by Dr. Cecilia Milford of CAPRISA and Dr. Liz Montgomery of RTI, with opportunities to engage regularly with the P2 research team from both institutions.

In addition to the proposed activities above, the D2D Scholars will:
- ● Work closely with the D2D team and attend regular weekly meetings
- ● Have the opportunity to participate in disseminating results through an internal webinar and a research brief (or equivalent).
- ● Be encouraged to present at a conference or publish in a journal, but this will be dependent on opportunities available.

III.   Key Dates

Summary of key dates:

Release of RFA	Monday, January 8, 2024 (8:00am PT, 5:00pm SAST, 6:00pm EAT)
Applications due	Monday, February 12, 2024 (8:00am PT, 5:00pm SAST, 6:00pm EAT)
Review and selection	February 12, 2024 – February 23, 2024
Applicants notified of decision	Early March 2024
Scholar onboarding and orientation; Contracting process	April 2024
Program start date	May 1, 2024
Program end date	December 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 work a week for 7 months
- Post graduate level training (Masters, PhD) in public health, epidemiology, social sciences, modeling, reproductive health, health systems research, or related subjects. A Bachelor's degree-holder with relevant experience will be considered.
- Previous experience in HIV prevention would be an advantage
- The ability to participate in ongoing monitoring and evaluation from D2D co-lead and CaSE program team
- 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. For example, this may take the form of 1-2 virtual 1-hour meetings per year.

V.   Award Information

One successful candidate will be selected for each scholar position..

This is a virtual program with potential opportunity to travel (e.g., in-person meetings). Scholars will remain with their current employer and will make arrangements with their home-institution to participate. An institutional letter of support will be requested from the home institution.

USAID MATRIX will cover program fees and stipend to support the Scholar during the course of the program. CaSE will provide funds to the home institution to cover the Scholar's salary for 10-15h/week for the course of the 8-month program while the Scholar remains employed at their home-institution. The Scholar's home institution is expected to provide workspace and to cover the Scholar's salary (25-30h/week) for the duration of the program.

This program will provide:
- Stipend to support the Scholar for the duration of the program provided to the Scholar's home institution
- Travel support as needed
- Mentorship from MATRIX-partner experts
- Connections to resources, support and professional networks

VI.   Application Components

To apply, applicants should go to the online CaSE Track 2 D2D Scholars 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 which should be on institutional letterhead with the name and contact information of your supervisor (1 page max, please see [suggested outline](#) in the [Application Handbook](#))
2. Applicants will then be asked to provide responses to the following questions. As you provide responses to the following questions, please ensure that you are responsive to the indicated word limit per question as responses exceeding the word count will not be reviewed.
   - What is your motivation for applying to this Fellowship? 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, D2D team, and USAID. Selection may be made on the basis of:
- Quality and depth of the responses received to the questions listed in the RFA and the letters of support
- Academic and/or professional record (qualifications, language preparation, accolades in the field, letters of support)

The Scholar will undergo monitoring and evaluation at beginning, mid-point and end of the program conducted by the CaSE Program Team to maintain participation in the program. This is to ensure that they are on track with their learning goals and activities.

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.