Provocative Questions RFA

Ed Harlow

CTAC Meeting
November 9, 2011
Honoring the Question

If you don't ask, you don't get.

Mahatma Gandhi

A prudent question is one-half of wisdom.

Francis Bacon

If you do not know how to ask the right question, you discover nothing.

W. Edwards Deming
Honoring the Scientific Question

Examples of its use:

- Organize our daily work in lab, clinic, community
- Basis of scientific rigor
- Set scientific direction
Honoring the Scientific Question

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• Organize our daily work in lab, clinic, community
• Basis of scientific rigor
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PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS

• Challenge NCI’s scientific community to ask and frame important but non-obvious questions

• Stimulate NCI’s research communities to use laboratory, clinical, and population research in especially effective and imaginative ways.

• The proposals should:
  – Build on specific advances in our understanding of cancer and cancer control
  – Address broad issues in the biology of cancer that have proven difficult to resolve
  – Take into consideration the likelihood of progress in the foreseeable future (e.g., 5 to 10 years)
  – Address ways to overcome obstacles to answering the question
THE PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS RFA

An experiment... Develop good questions?

• Oct ’10 Workshop asks whether useful questions can be identified (and was the process fun)?
THE PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS RFA

An experiment... Develop good questions?

An experiment... Questions reach top level?

- Feb ’11 Workshops build collection of high quality questions in population, clinical, and basic science
- July and Aug ’11 West Coast workshops determine how rich is the question building exercise
- Aug ‘11 Trainees’ workshop extends experience net
- Throughout, community adds and comments on questions through the web
THE PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS RFA

An experiment... Ask good questions?

An experiment... Questions reach top level?

An experiment... Expand research portfolio?

• RFA based on 24 Provocative Questions
• Broad spectrum of questions
• Portfolio review to determine current work in area
• Closes Nov 14, 2011
• Careful review process focused on best ideas
**THE PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS RFA**

An experiment... Ask good questions?

An experiment... Questions reach top level?

An experiment... Expand research portfolio?

An experiment... Repeat?

• How creative and powerful is the response?
What is the "Provocative Questions" Project?

The provocative questions project is intended to assemble a list of important but non-obvious questions that will stimulate the NCI’s research communities to use laboratory, clinical, and population sciences in especially effective and imaginative ways. The questions should not be simple restatements of long-term goals of the National Cancer Program, which are to improve the prevention, detection, diagnosis, and treatment of all forms of cancer. Instead they should:

- Build on specific advances in our understanding of cancer and cancer control;
- Address broad issues in the biology of cancer that have proven difficult to resolve;
- Take into consideration the likelihood of progress in the foreseeable future (e.g., 5 to 10 years); and
- Address ways to overcome obstacles to achieving long-term goals.
RFA, R21, R01, BUDGET

• RFA: To highlight research issues that are not well studied
  – To move research into these areas quickly and effectively

• R21 and R01: Well understood formats
  – R21: 2 years funding; R01: 4 years funding

• Budget: $15 million
  – Sufficient to generate community interest and make multiple awards
  – Total amount awarded will depend on the number of highly meritorious applications
REVIEW CRITERIA

• The 5 standard review criteria (Significance, PI, Innovation, Approach, and Environment)

• Applications may come from PI’s new to a field
  – strength of the applications judged in large part on the power of the ideas behind the proposed research
  – preliminary data unnecessary
  – track record in the field should not be weighed as heavily as in other reviews
PQ1. How does obesity contribute to cancer risk?

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![Graph showing relative risk of death for different types of cancer in men, with BMI categories indicated.]

Obesity Trends (BMI ≥30) Among U.S. Adults

PQ1. How does obesity contribute to cancer risk?

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, CDC
### PQ1. How does obesity contribute to cancer risk?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End Point</th>
<th>Surgery Group (N=7925)</th>
<th>Matched Subjects</th>
<th>Control Group (N=7925)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no.</td>
<td>no./10,000 person-yr</td>
<td>no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All causes of death</td>
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<td>37.6</td>
<td>321</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular disease</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other diseases</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>All non-disease causes</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Deaths that were caused by disease include all deaths minus those caused by accidents unrelated to drugs, poisonings of undetermined intent, suicides, and other non-disease deaths.*

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PQ5. Given the evidence that some drugs commonly and chronically used for other indications, such as an anti-inflammatory drug, can protect against cancer incidence and mortality, can we determine the mechanism by which any of these drugs work?

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PQ21. Given the appearance of resistance in response to cell killing therapies, can we extend survival by using approaches that keep tumors static?
PQ19. Why are some disseminated cancers cured by chemotherapy alone?
VALUE OF PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS PROJECT

• Highlights new research questions
• Engages the community in setting agenda
• Pushes research to new areas

Particularly important in tight budgetary times
  – Rebalances portfolio
  – Fights against conservative choices for both applicants and reviewers
SUMMARY

• Stimulate research in compelling, understudied areas

• Evaluation of success
  – Shorter term:
    • A plethora of exciting applications—reissuance
  – Intermediate term:
    • PI’s continue their studies through traditional grant mechanisms
  – Longer term
    • Answers to the questions
    • Better understanding of neoplasms
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    • If successful, how manage portfolio?
Heartfelt THANKS

Coordination: Maureen Johnson, Lisa Stevens

Portfolio Analysis: Samantha Finstad, Elizabeth Hsu, Margaret Ames and OSPA staff

Web Designers: Lisa Cole, Clint Malone

RFA Concept: Chris Seiman, Jan Woynarowski, Jerry Lee
We are all agreed that your theory is crazy. The question which divides us is whether it is crazy enough to have a chance of being correct. My own feeling is that it is not crazy enough.

Niels Bohr
I wish I had an answer to that because I'm tired of answering that question.

Yogi Berra