

Evaluation Brief

Northern New England Clinical & Translational Research Network

A Summary of the Northern New England Clinical and Translational Research Network's Registration and Needs Assessment Activities (Year One)

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BACKGROUND

The Northern New England Clinical and Translational Research Network (NNE-CTR) was established in July, 2017 by a five-year grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences' Institutional Development Award (IDeA) program. Currently, there are 11 funded IDeA Clinical and Translational Research (CTR) networks throughout the country.

The NNE-CTR includes three New England states and is based on a partnership among Maine Medical Center, the University of Vermont and the University of Southern Maine.

NNE-CTR Goal

The overarching goal of the NNE-CTR is to enhance the region's research infrastructure and capacity to conduct clinical and translational studies that support improved health outcomes for residents of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Organizational Structure

NNE-CTR activities are coordinated within and between Core organizational units. The Administrative Core provides overall leadership and direction, with the support of six additional Cores designed to achieve the NNE-CTR's infrastructure development and research aims:

- Clinical Research Design, Epidemiology and Biostatistics Core
- Professional Development Core
- Translational Research Technologies Core
- Rural Health Research and Delivery Core
- Pilot Projects Core
- Tracking and Evaluation Core

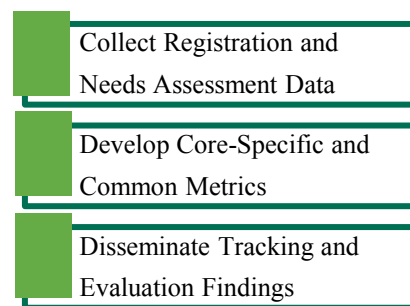
EVALUATION APPROACH

The Tracking and Evaluation Core (TEC) of the NNE-CTR is housed within the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine. The TEC is responsible for:

- Designing systems to track the network's activities,
- Reporting on the progress, outcomes and overall value of the NNE-CTR, and
- Disseminating the findings to diverse audiences.

As seen in figure 1, TEC efforts in year one have focused on three key tasks.

FIGURE 1. EVALUATION TASKS: YEAR ONE



Purpose of the Evaluation Brief

A key feature of the evaluation in year one was the development of a combined registration form and needs assessment survey. This evaluation brief summarizes the registration and needs assessment findings and addresses the following evaluation questions:

1. What are the characteristics and research experience of NNE-CTR registrants?
2. What are the reported research interests, barriers and needs of registrants?

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Survey items were developed in collaboration with the Cores and based on a review of the literature. The survey captured basic demographic and organizational information about each participant as well as items assessing:

- Training interests, needs, and priorities
- Research interests and barriers
- Preferred format/setting for training
- Mentoring needs and opportunities
- Laboratory technology needs, and
- Research support funding needs.

The survey was administered via REDCap, a secure web application for creating and managing online questionnaires and databases.

Email invitations with an embedded survey link were sent to researchers via multiple distribution lists. The link was also posted to the NNE-CTR website. The findings provided below reflect data collected through March, 2018.

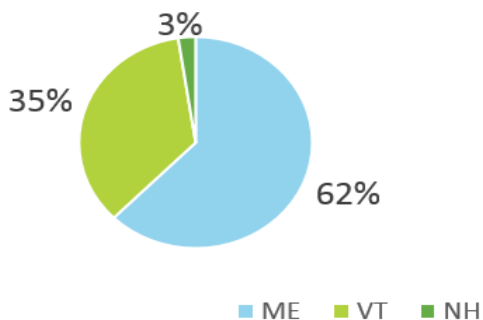
RESULTS

Registration and needs assessment survey results were collected from 125 researchers. This initial group of registrants tended to be experienced researchers from Maine and interested in mentoring other researchers. They reported a variety of research support needs and interests.

Registrant Characteristics

Respondents were primarily from Maine (Chart 1), and 17% of respondents indicated working in a rural clinical setting. Nearly all (94%) of survey participants reported holding a doctoral degree and most (89%) received their highest degree more than five years ago.

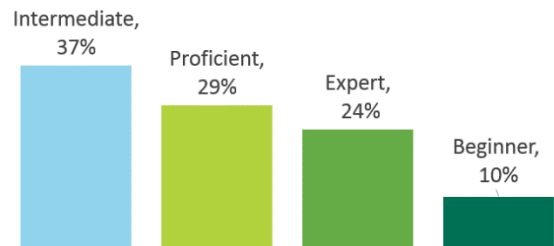
CHART 1. STATE IN WHICH PRIMARY WORKPLACE IS LOCATED (N=125)



Research Experience

Over half (56%) of registrants reported being engaged in research for ten or more years, only 17% had been engaged in research for three or fewer years. As seen in Chart 2, over half (53%) of registrants classified themselves as “proficient” or “expert” researchers.

CHART 2. SELF-REPORTED RATING OF RESEARCH SKILLS (N=125)



As seen in Chart 3, over half of all respondents reported participating in a range of research activities. Nearly all registrants (94%) reported participating in a research project and nearly six in 10 indicated receiving external research funding. Of those funded, about a third (30%) received NIH funding, of which 15% received R01 funding.

CHART 3. SELF-REPORTED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES (N=125)



Research Interests

Registrants were asked to rate their interest in key areas of research. Most respondents indicated being “very” or “somewhat interested” in study design, epidemiology and biostatistics, communication, research management, research domain expertise, research technologies, and research conduct.

Research Barriers

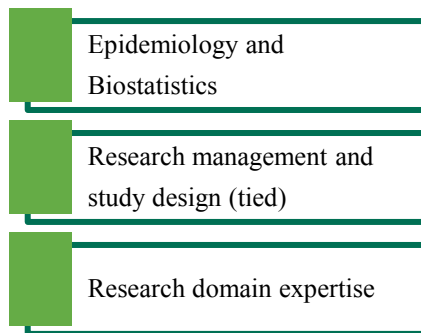
Registrants identified a number of research barriers. The top barriers included:

- Lack of funding (58%)
- Lack of time (58%)
- Inadequate institutional support (33%)
- Inadequate administrative support (26%)
- Inadequate data/analytic capability (24%)
- Inadequate compensation (20%)

Research Needs

Registrants were asked to identify priorities for professional development. As shown in Figure 2, the top training priorities were epidemiology and biostatistics, research management, study design, and research domain expertise.

FIGURE 2. TOP THREE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

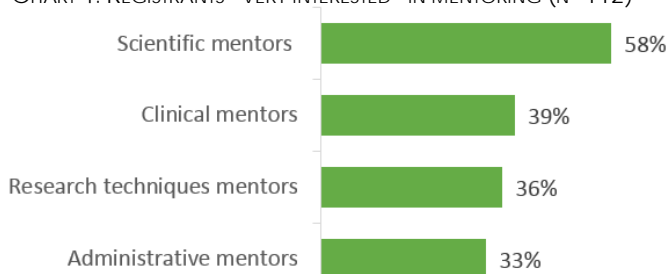


Registrants with three or fewer years of research experience reported somewhat different priorities. This group expressed particular interest in training opportunities related to study design; epidemiology and biostatistics; and research management.

Mentorship

Over half (59%) of participants indicated they are willing to serve as a research mentor. Interest in *receiving* mentoring varied by type. Overall, 58% of respondents indicated being “very interested” in working with a scientific mentor (Chart 4)

CHART 4. REGISTRANTS “VERY INTERESTED” IN MENTORING (N=112)



LIMITATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The NNE-CTR’s registration and needs assessment survey has provided important preliminary data on the characteristics, research training needs and interests of new participants. While efforts were made to recruit a diverse group of researchers throughout northern New England, the initial group of registrants largely reflects experienced researchers in Maine. Notably, researchers who have received NNE-CTR services are not required to register. Efforts are underway to encourage broad participation and to expand the reach of the survey throughout the region.

By all accounts, this initial round of data represents a group of experienced investigators that have received external funding and are interested in participating in the NNE-CTR. Based on these early findings, next steps include:

- Expanding survey recruitment efforts to target junior investigators,
- Conducting additional analyses of survey data to identify needs based on level of research experience,
- Matching mentors and mentees based on reported interests,
- Offering new professional development opportunities aligned with the reported needs and interests,
- Providing ongoing technical assistance through the NNE-CTR Research Catalysts.

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation brief summarizes early efforts to recruit NNE-CTR registrants and to assess their characteristics, research needs and interests. A broader dissemination of the survey and the use of results to inform network activities will help ensure the network is responsive to investigator needs. The expansion of research infrastructure should facilitate an increase in the speed of research translation into clinical practice in northern New England.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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