



# Anti-Colonialism in Global Health Grant Applications: A Single-Site, Participant-Observation-Based Assessment

PUBLISHED  
ABSTRACT

TERENCE M. HUGHES

BIBHAV ACHARYA

NANDINI CHOUDHURY

BIRAJ KARMACHARYA

KIM LIPMAN-WHITE

PRANIL PRADHAN

ANANT RAUT

PRAGYA RIMAL

SABITRI SAPKOTA

ARADHANA THAPA

KAREN WILSON

DUNCAN MARU

*\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*



## ABSTRACT

**Background/Rationale:** Anti-colonialism in global health aims to eliminate colonial power imbalances inherent in Western scholar-driven work. Central to anti-colonial global health are more equitable grant application processes, particularly within NIH's Fogarty International Center (FIC), a global arm of the largest public biomedical research funder.

**Hypothesis or Research Question:** How do NIH grant application processes drive/impede efforts to conduct anti-colonial global health research?

**Study Design/Methods:** While interning at a nonprofit focused on one South Asian country, I employed participant-observation approach working on two NIH grant applications. Participant-observation included participating in literature reviews, application writing, team meetings, and reflections, and observing team structure and meeting flow. Nonprofit identity, application contents, and country of study are anonymized to protect confidentiality.

**Results:** All meetings were conducted in English. The team defined application success as being awarded NIH funding. Team leaders demonstrated familiarity with NIH, either through receipt of prior funding, or past selection committee membership. I observed team leaders leverage these experiences to highlight factors believed to increase our likelihood for success. Team leaders focused on curating the application team before finalizing grant content, and sought team members satisfying two forms of expertise: subject-matter and geospatial-context. Observing individual roles and contributions, I determined that subject-matter expertise was typically filled by widely-cited scholars affiliated with US-based institutions with previous NIH funding; geospatial-context expertise was typically filled by scholars from the country of study, familiar with on-the-ground realities.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Terence M. Hughes**

Icahn School of Medicine  
at Mount Sinai, New York,  
NY 10029, US

[terence.hughes@icahn.mssm.edu](mailto:terence.hughes@icahn.mssm.edu)

## KEYWORDS:

global health; research  
funding; NIH; colonialism; anti-  
colonialism

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Hughes TM, Acharya B,  
Choudhury N, Karmacharya B,  
Lipman-White K, Pradhan P,  
Raut A, Rimal P, Sapkota S,  
Thapa A, Wilson K, Maru D.  
Anti-Colonialism in Global  
Health Grant Applications:  
A Single-Site, Participant-  
Observation-Based  
Assessment. *ISMMS Journal of  
Science and Medicine*. 2021;  
1(2): 5, pp. 1–2. DOI: [https://  
doi.org/10.29024/ijsm.51](https://doi.org/10.29024/ijsm.51)


**Conclusions/Future Plans:** Based on this single-site participant-observation study, NIH FIC grant processes simultaneously drive and impede anti-colonial efforts in funding applications. Prioritizing geospatial-context expertise serves as an anti-colonial force by strengthening cultural competence and increasing LMIC-based-scholar representation. Observed barriers to even broader LMIC-based-scholar representation include language and use of prior NIH funding receipt and publication count as proxies for subject-matter expertise.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

BA and DM are co-founders and advisors of the anonymized nonprofit organization discussed in this publication. NC and AR serve as advisors to the organization discussed. KLW, PR, SS and AT are employees of the organization discussed. TMH interned at the organization discussed, and received research funding from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Student Research Office.

## AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Terence M. Hughes, BA**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-2951-7455](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2951-7455)  
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US


**Bibhav Acharya, MD**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-8555-7785](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8555-7785)  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US;  
University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA 94143, US

**Nandini Choudhury, MPH**  
Arnhold Institute for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US;  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

**Biraj Karmacharya, PhD, MPH, MSc**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-7312-5758](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7312-5758)  
Kathmandu University, Dhulikhel 45200, Nepal

**Kim Lipman-White, MSc**  
Arnhold Institute for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US;  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

**Pranil Pradhan, MD, MBBS**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-0066-8583](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0066-8583)  
Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University, Nepal


**Anant Raut, MS**  [orcid.org/0000-0001-9512-9568](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9512-9568)  
Arnhold Institute for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US;  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

**Pragya Rimal, MA**  [orcid.org/0000-0003-4442-4609](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4442-4609)  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

**Sabitri Sapkota, PhD, MPH**  
Arnhold Institute for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US;  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

**Aradhana Thapa, MPH**  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

**Karen Wilson, MD, MPH**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-2703-7001](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2703-7001)  
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US

**Duncan Maru, MD, PhD**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-5923-6910](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5923-6910)  
Arnhold Institute for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY 10029, US;  
Possible Health, New York, NY 10005, US

### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Hughes TM, Acharya B, Choudhury N, Karmacharya B, Lipman-White K, Pradhan P, Raut A, Rimal P, Sapkota S, Thapa A, Wilson K, Maru D. Anti-Colonialism in Global Health Grant Applications: A Single-Site, Participant-Observation-Based Assessment. *ISMMS Journal of Science and Medicine*. 2021; 1(2): 5, pp. 1–2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29024/ijsm.51>

Submitted: 14 April 2021

Accepted: 14 April 2021

Published: 12 May 2021

### COPYRIGHT:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*ISMMS Journal of Science and Medicine* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Levy Library Press.