

Morgantown, W.Va. Small Business Apis Creative Secures NIH Grant to Help Diversify the U.S. Biomedical Workforce

W.Va. Woman-Owned Firm Replicating Proven Training Model

MORGANTOWN, W.VA., UNITED STATES, October 24, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Apis Creative, a small, woman-owned creative services agency in Morgantown, W.Va., was recently awarded a \$259,610 Phase I Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The funding will be used to develop a digital platform for training research universities and communities to establish and operate youth-development programs in health sciences and medical professions based on West Virginia's highly successful Health Sciences and Technology Academy (HSTA).

Bethany Hornbeck, Apis Creative's President and CEO, said, "Shortages in health professions across the board demand our immediate attention, and this grant will help create HSTA-modeled programs that will train and prepare our next generation of physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and others. We have been

working on this workforce diversity initiative for almost nine years and, with NIGMS support, our team is prepared to meet and exceed our project goals." Hornbeck, a WVU graduate, said the NIGMS SBIR Phase II grants that lie ahead may offer more funding and opportunity for this



A 10th grader in the W.Va. Health Sciences and Technology Academy (HSTA) examines a water sample for contaminants at West Virginia State University. Each year, HSTA students attend summer camps on university campuses across the state to learn research tec



Apis Creative Logo



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*Bethany Hornbeck, Apis
Creative President and CEO*

initiative.

The NIH-Wide Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2021-2025 states, “NIH will further enhance the science of tomorrow by continuing its efforts to build a next generation of researchers that better reflects the rich, creative diversity of our great nation.” The strategic plan further emphasizes that “promoting the recruitment, retention, and advancement of scientists from underserved groups will...have a significant influence on workforce development and will provide opportunities for individual scientists to achieve their full potential, thereby improving research on minority health and reducing health disparities.”

HSTA was founded at West Virginia University (WVU) in 1994. It quickly grew into one of the most successful STEM education programs in the U.S. with the bipartisan support of the West Virginia State Legislature as well as U.S. Senators Joe Manchin, Shelley Moore Capito and their predecessors. WVU, Marshall University, West Virginia State University, Glenville State University and other Mountain State universities contribute to HSTA youth programming, as do high schools and communities in the 27 W.Va. counties HSTA serves. Since its inception, HSTA has graduated 3,318 students from its program and outcomes are overwhelmingly positive for those students.

Between 1994 and 2019:

- 99% matriculated to college compared with general-population rates of 69.7% nationally and 54.7% in W.Va.
- 86% of program graduates obtained a four-year degree or higher versus 48.2% of the general population of entering freshman in W.Va. and 57.7% in the U.S. Additionally, only 19.2% of entering freshmen from underrepresented minority populations and 22.4% of low-income entering freshmen in W.Va. completed their degrees.
- 57% pursued biomedical and other STEM degrees compared to less than 30% nationally and in W.Va.
- 85% remained in W.Va. post-graduation, contributing professionally to communities that invested in them.

In 2020, Apis Creative entered into a commercialization agreement with WVU to make HSTA-based programs available to young people across the nation. Through its HSTA Hatch initiative, Apis has assisted The University of Alabama (UA) in founding NIGMS Science Education Partnership Award-funded HSTA-Alabama (HSTA-AL), the first full replication of the HSTA program in the nation. Apis has also provided services to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences' Pathways Academy to evaluate outcomes of its RAMP-UP program for high school

students.

“The Apis Creative team jump-started the HSTA-AL initiative by providing online and in-person resources from a nearly 30-year-old successful youth development program,” said Dr. Robin Bartlett, HSTA-AL director, and Associate Dean of Research for the UA Capstone College of Nursing. “It would take us many years to bring this type of program to fruition, but we have done it in less than three. Through our continued partnership with Apis’s HSTA Hatch team, we will be able to make a meaningful difference in recruiting, retaining and graduating diverse nursing and other biomedical professionals in the very near future.”

Now Apis has won federal SBIR funding from NIH/NIGMS to further expand its reach. Led by Hornbeck and her team, the HSTA Joint Governing Board, WVU, and other partners will develop an online training and evaluation platform universities and communities can use to found additional new HSTA programs outside the Mountain State. The platform will reduce capital costs and create a hub for HSTA organizations across the nation to share their knowledge and experience and strengthen their programs over time.

Deliverables for the HSTA Hatch system during the six-month grant include:

- Standardize HSTA strategy and knowledge transfer based on existing processes and materials
- Be made available online via internet and application portals for on-demand learning
- Include self-directed learning using modular training embedded in a gaming-based learning environment
- Provide consulting and peer coaching in distance group settings with on-demand features
- Provide limited in-person sessions delivered through the HSTA Hatch online platform
- Collect data through secure online portals linked to allow cross-program analyses to predict STEM success

It is anticipated that the training and assessment products resulting from this effort will significantly reduce the time required to establish and refine local programs that realize successes in recruiting and retaining biomedical researchers, healthcare providers, and other STEM professionals comparable to those achieved by WV HSTA.

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Apis Creative is a full-service creative agency that also specializes in curriculum development, online training, and evaluation services for STEM education initiatives like HSTA Hatch. More about the company is at <https://www.apiscreative.com/>

To learn more about this project -- HSTA Hatch -- or the HSTA program, contact Bethany Hornbeck at bhornbeck@apiscreative.com or 844-234-2899.

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