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HHMI Grants Connect Research Institutions with Local Schools

A \$22.5 million initiative announced by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute aims to close the gap between research institutions and their local communities by supporting educational programs intended to stimulate an interest in science, particularly among young students.

The institutions receiving the grants include medical schools, hospitals, research institutions, a school of dentistry and a school of veterinary medicine. Fifteen of these institutions are first-time recipients of a grant from HHMI's precollege program. Each grantee has developed individualized programs and activities to enhance the understanding and appreciation of science within its community. Their outreach efforts are aimed at students from kindergarten to 12th grade, as well as teachers, families, and other community members.

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The grants range from \$529,308 to \$750,000 and will be distributed over a five-year period to support new programs or ongoing activities with a demonstrated record of success in stimulating interest in science.

Many of the grantees will aim to improve science education by enhancing teachers' knowledge of scientific concepts and how science is done. These programs will help teachers develop hands-on, inquiry-based activities that they can share with their students. Other projects will target students directly, teaching them to how to think like scientists. And some will enhance parents' and other community members' understanding of scientific concepts, thereby strengthening the support available to foster the interest of the children.

Together, the grants are expected to help broaden access to science across diverse populations. "Many of these institutions are reaching out to traditionally underserved populations," said Jill Conley, director of HHMI's precollege science education program. "They are also engaging girls in science at a particularly critical time in their educational development."

A total of 297 institutions were invited to submit proposals for the outreach grants through a competition announced last year. In September 2006, 127 proposals arrived at HHMI from institutions representing 42 states, which were reviewed by a panel of leading scientists and educators.

The largest privately funded education initiative of its kind in the United States, HHMI's grants program is enhancing science education for students at all levels, from the earliest grades through advanced training. Since 1988 HHMI has awarded approximately \$1.5 billion in grants. Ten of this year's awardees received a grant from HHMI during the Institute's community outreach grant competition in 2003.