Grants now open to train LIS professionals and users in developing countries on how to use Research4Life

BY LENNY RHINE | MARCH 22, 2016

During the past decade, I have had the privilege of conducting 60-plus workshops in 35 countries to teach individuals in developing countries how to access Research4Life resources. As the key advocate behind Librarians without Borders® (LWB), I have had wonderful experiences working with information professionals, lecturers, physicians, researchers and students from universities, research centers, ministries of health and non-governmental organizations.

Since 2007, I have been the coordinator of the LWB E-library Training Initiative sponsored by the Medical Library Association (MLA) and funded by the Elsevier Foundation (elsevierfoundation.org). In December, MLA announced the expansion of this initiative, including the new MLA HINARI/Research4Life Grant (mlanet.org/p/cm/lid/fid=949) that focuses on training activities for the Research4Life programs. This expansion reflects a decade-long commitment of Elsevier and the Elsevier Foundation to fund MLA/LWB for a cumulative commitment of US $409,000 to provide essential training to boost Research4Life usage in developing countries.

I would like to urge those eligible to apply for the training grants. Thanks to generous funding by the Elsevier Foundation, MLA will be able to offer grants for the next three years. The funded projects will center on training for Research4Life’s health program (HINARI) and developing additional instructors.

About Research4Life

The goal of Research4Life is to reduce the knowledge gap between high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries by providing free or low-cost access to critical scientific research.
Research4Life (research4life.org) is a public-private partnership of the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Cornell University and Yale University, the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers and over 200 international scientific publishers. Its goal is to reduce the knowledge gap between high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries by providing free or low-cost access to critical scientific research. This potentially will increase the volume of publishing from these countries with research outcomes that could have a positive impact on a large percentage of the world’s population.

The four Research4Life programs include Research in Health (HINARI), Research in Agriculture (AGORA), Research in the Environment (OARE) and Research for Development and Innovation (ARDI). Since 2002, the programs have provided researchers at more than 8,000 institutions in more than 100 low- and middle-income countries with free or low-cost online access to up to 68,000 leading journals and books in the fields of health, agriculture, environment and applied sciences.

Grant submission process

The deadline to submit proposals is June 13, 2016. Individuals or organizations can apply. Find details and apply online. (mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=949)

The MLA will award the first round of grants by approximately June 30, with additional grants in 2017 and 2018. The Elsevier Foundation will fund between three and five projects at $1,500 to $6,000 each.

Examples of projects include:

- Organizing a HINARI/Research4Life workshop at a registered institution where the applicant is employed
- Conducting a workshop at a registered institution where the applicant/organization has ties (for individuals in developed countries)
- Organizing and teaching Research4Life distance-learning courses
- Organizing a regional US-based workshop for information specialists interested in HINARI/Research4Life activities and/or researchers, faculty or students from institutions that have linkages with Research4Life registered organizations
- Creating a new distance-learning training module or course
- Increasing mechanisms for promoting HINARI and Research4Life programs and their training resources
- Developing tools to measure outcomes of training activities

For further information, contact Maria Lopez, MLA’s grants coordinator (lopez@mail.mlahq.org).

Positive outcomes and challenges beyond access

Many workshops participants are practicing physicians who cancel clinics so they can learn useful skills for accessing research and clinical information. When they complete the exercises that involve searching databases (particularly PubMed in HINARI workshops), I tell them to enter “searches of interest to you.”

Quite often, the participants will complete a search, open an article and start reading instead of continuing onto the next assignment. Apparently, they have already found useful information, perhaps on a topic that they have been concerned about for years. I just smile to myself, knowing that they understand the value of the material and will be regular users of the HINARI resources.

There have also been sad post-workshop outcomes. I conducted a workshop in a country that now is in the middle of a civil conflict. Initially, the participants had numerous positive outcomes, but many now live in cities without basic resources such as food, water and electricity. I also communicate with colleagues living in places where there have been natural disasters, which can result in many of the same shortages and impediments.

In the end, though, I am more heartened than dismayed. I am impressed by the knowledge and ability of the participants, and amazed by the resilience of people and the desire of individuals and organizations to effect positive change.