

# CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF AN AACN PARTNERSHIP



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**V**ERY FEW INITIATIVES/PROJECTS continue after their initial funding is completed. There are many reasons for this: The funder's goal was to provide seed money only and not sustain it; the project was intended to exist only

for a short time; the absence of organizational commitment to continue the project after the initial funding and the lack of other funders to sustain the work. Despite historical examples of many projects not continuing beyond their initial funding for various reasons, some projects do have the opportunity to not only be sustainable but also to continue to thrive. One such example is described here with a description of strategies that may serve as a model for others.

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The End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC), which is a partnership between the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and City of Hope National Medical Center, received funding in 2000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to develop a nursing curriculum to educate nursing faculty and practicing nurses with the goal of improving care to those with serious illness. Fifteen years later, this project continues and, each year, provides train-the-trainer courses to over 1,350 people around the world. Since its inception, ELNEC has created curricula for specialty areas such as oncology, critical care, pediatrics, geriatrics, and hospice. ELNEC curricula also has been developed for precise institutions, such as public hospitals and Veterans Administration Medical Centers, and for key nursing faculty who teach in associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral nursing programs. From January 2001, when the first national ELNEC train-the-trainer course was held, through November 2015, over 20,500 nurses and other members of the interprofessional team have attended 1 of 181 train-the-trainer courses. These trainers attend a 2-day course, taught by national palliative care nursing experts, and are given PowerPoint slides, case studies, communication vignettes, updated reference lists, and supplemental teaching materials so that they can return to their institutions and educate their colleagues. ELNEC has been presented in 88 countries, and the curriculum is translated into eight languages (Albanian, Chinese, German, Japanese, Korean, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish).

ELNEC trainers host professional development seminars for practicing nurses, incorporate ELNEC content into nursing curriculum, provide regional training sessions to expand ELNEC's reach into rural and underserved communities, present ELNEC at national and international conferences, coordinate community partnerships, and improve the quality of nursing care in other innovative ways. It is estimated that since its inception, ELNEC trainers have returned to their institutions and communities and have trained over 600,000 nurses and other health care providers.

Today, funders continue to provide support to maintain the ELNEC project. Beyond the initial grant from RWJF, additional funding has been received from AACN; U.S. Cancer Pain Committee; the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and Open Society Institute; the Aetna, Archstone, Oncology Nursing, California HealthCare, Milbank, and Cambia Health Foundations; and the Department of Veterans Affairs (Table 1).

### **Lessons Learned in Sustaining This Work**

Over the last 15 years, the ELNEC team has learned many valuable lessons in applying for grants and in keeping this work fresh, innovative, and on the front lines of practice, education, research, and advocacy. Numerous grants have been written to continue this project, and some requests have been denied. Potential funders may not prioritize the necessity of this work, or they may not fund training programs. However, a commitment and passion

for the work has allowed the ELNEC investigators to think creatively about how to explore other ways to promote the project. Below are some simple, yet important, lessons learned by the ELNEC project on how to sustain the work after the initial funding is over:

- RWJF provided funding to develop the ELNEC-Core curriculum and to hold five train-the-trainer courses across the United States. Although grateful for the 500 nurses who attended these first five courses and proud of the fact that they returned to their institutions and communities and trained approximately 15,000 colleagues, the ELNEC team believed that there was still so much more work that needed to be done. A vision for the full potential of a project is invaluable.
- Work with a team of others with your same vision, passion, and goals. This is not a time to “go-it-alone.” ELNEC has benefitted by forming a cohesive team of investigators from AACN and City of Hope National Medical Center and a very dedicated faculty. Fifteen years later, many of the original faculty continue to teach national/international courses.
- Be very clear and detailed in your proposal aims. The potential funder is unable to read your mind or between-the-lines, so be very concise in your plan. For example, the ELNEC Project team has always believed that palliative care is important. Yet, we have known that palliative care can never be provided and improved unless people are educated first. People cannot practice what they do not know. Thus, in every grant proposal, we outlined explicitly the importance of palliative nursing education, which in turn will promote better palliative care.
- Be fully aware of trends in practice and societal needs since you wrote your last grant. Be up-to-date and visionary. For example, when schools of nursing across America were offering the doctor of nursing practice (DNP) degree, the ELNEC co-investigators were current on what the trends and literature were saying—there are ever-growing shortages in the physician work force, people are living longer, chronic illness is increasing, the Affordable Care Act is putting millions more people into the health care system, and the number of cancer survivors who need continued surveillance is climbing. Who will care for all of these patients? The vision was to educate the faculty teaching in DNP programs and practicing DNPs in palliative care, who would be the future primary care providers in many parts of the United States.
- Although it is exhausting, do not give up on writing grants. Write them constantly.
- Seek diverse sources of funding. ELNEC has a relationship with an on-line learning system, Relias Learning, which has enabled us to provide extensive on-line training and to generate royalty income from this partnership that is reinvested.

**Table I.** Overview of Funding for ELNEC, 2000–Present

Dates of funding/funder	Project goals/deliverables
2000–2004 RWJF*	Develop ELNEC-Core curriculum and provide five national train-the-trainer courses
2003–2007 NCI	Develop ELNEC-Oncology and provide four national train-the-trainer courses
2003–2007 NCI	Develop ELNEC-Graduate and provide four national train-the-trainer courses for faculty
2005–2006 Aetna Foundation*	Develop ELNEC-Pediatric Palliative Care curriculum and provide two national train-the-trainer courses
2006–2015 Open Society Foundation	Provide 12 ELNEC-International train-the-trainer courses throughout Eastern Europe
2007–2010 Archstone Foundation*	Develop ELNEC-Critical Care curriculum and provide four national train-the-trainer courses
2008–2010 California HealthCare Foundation*	Develop ELNEC-Geriatric curriculum and provide four national train-the-trainer courses
2009–2012 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs	Develop ELNEC-For Veterans and ELNEC-For Veterans Critical Care curriculum and provide six national train-the-trainer courses
2009 AACN	Translate ELNEC from English into Russian
2011–2013 California HealthCare Foundation	Develop ELNEC-For Public Hospitals and provide one train-the-trainer course and 2 years of monthly mentoring to 16 safety net hospitals across the state of California
2012 Milbank Foundation	Provide ELNEC-For Veterans train-the-trainer course at the AACN Baccalaureate Pre-Conference
2012–2014 Cambia Health Foundation	Develop ELNEC-APRN: Advanced Practice Registered Nurse curriculum and provide one national train-the-trainer course
2013–2014 Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation	Develop and teach a 2-year leadership curriculum for palliative care nurses in Eastern Europe
2013–2017 NCI	Develop <i>Integrating Palliative Oncology Care into DNP Education and Clinical Practice</i> curriculum and provide four national train-the-trainer courses
2013 AACN	Provide ELNEC-International train-the-trainer course in Kenya
2014 Oncology Nursing Foundation	Provide ELNEC-International train-the-trainer course in Panama and mentor six Panamanian nursing leaders for 1 year
2015–2016 Milbank Foundation	Disseminate scholarship funding for advanced practice geriatric nurses to attend ELNEC-APRN
2015–2016 U.S. Cancer Pain Committee	Disseminate scholarship funding for advanced practice nurses who work in rural/underserved communities to attend ELNEC-APRN
2015–2018 Cambia Health Foundation	Up-date the AACN <i>Peaceful Death</i> Document and create ELNEC-Core on-line for undergraduate nursing programs

- Be thoroughly committed to your proposal. If funded, you will be working on the project for several years. Do not request funding for any work that you are not passionately committed to do.
- If possible, develop a relationship with a potential funder before writing the grant. This is critical because it allows you to have a better understanding of the funding organization and also permits you numerous opportunities to share your work with them. This is extremely helpful as you write your proposal because you have a clear idea of what the funder is looking for and wanting to fund. As they review your proposal, they will remember your conversations and your commitment.
- Be aware that all funding is temporary and projects need to become sustainable. Several of the ELNEC curricula and projects have no continued external funding but are sustained by course registration fees.
- Recognize that today, many foundations are partnering to fund a particular project. As you develop relationships with potential funders, you will know if this is a possibility. This is particularly important when the cost of a project may exceed the usual funding of a single foundation.
- Many foundation boards want to know that they are not the sole funder in a given area.
- Be prepared to rewrite your proposal several times. Many funders may like your initial, organized plan, yet they might suggest you take another route. These multiple revisions can become exhausting and overwhelming at times. Consider this carefully and make sure that it does not compromise the purpose

of your original project idea. However, if you are committed to your proposal and are agreeable to requested edits, then be persistent and make the necessary changes. Several ELNEC proposals have been revised numerous times and are successful only after many months of collaboration with a funding source.

- Although you may believe that writing the grant proposal is the most difficult part of the entire process, remember that the real work starts once you receive the grant. Funders rightfully expect results and reports due to them on time. Funding sources realize that their resources are very limited compared to the needs, and they are required to hold grantees accountable.
- Publish your work. Funders love to see their names in peer-reviewed journals, outlining the great work

you have done and that they have supported. The ELNEC project has published more than 30 articles in professional peer-reviewed journals.

- Once you receive funding, keep the funder updated on your progress. Beyond the required quarterly or annual progress reports, take opportunities to communicate your progress and to keep funders informed.
- Last but certainly not least, do good. Potential funders want to support successful projects and investigators with integrity who are committed to promoting meaningful projects with measurable outcomes.

For more information about the ELNEC project, go to [www.aacn.nche.edu/ELNEC](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/ELNEC).

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