

American Association for Cancer Education (AACE)

Post-Project Grant Report Research, Education, Advocacy, and Direct Service (READS Grants Program)

Project Title: Focus groups in India about role of education/training on cancer prevention uptake

Principal Investigators: Shine Chang, PhD

The primary tangible output proposed for the project – the collection and analysis of qualitative data through focus groups and interviews – has been completed, fulfilling the core scientific objective despite delays associated with national-level research approval processes. Although one planned project goal remains in progress in part due to shifts in federal funding priorities, the completed components have generated a robust dataset from which preparation of manuscripts and abstracts for conference dissemination are underway.

The project also produced several additional outcomes beyond the original scope. These include strengthened institutional partnerships, improved understanding of cross-national administrative processes, and the development of more efficient strategies for navigating international regulatory requirements. These unanticipated gains are expected to enhance the feasibility and effectiveness of future collaborative research efforts with institutes in India but also with other international organizations as well.

The project highlighted several operational and administrative considerations that are especially relevant for international, multi-institutional collaborations.

- **International regulatory processes can introduce substantial delays.** Even when collaborators are experienced with approval pathways, timelines may extend beyond initial expectations. Direct engagement proved valuable; for example, Dr. Surendra Shastri's in-person visits to meet Dr. Sharmila Pimple, the PI at Tata Memorial Hospital, helped resolve bottlenecks and facilitate progress.
- **Close coordination with administrative staff is essential.** Timely communication within and across institutions was critical, particularly when differing administrative norms or cultural practices slowed decision-making. Investigators benefited from understanding when to escalate issues to higher-level authorities while maintaining a professional, collaborative approach focused on shared project goals.
- **Document-handling requirements varied significantly across institutions.** Our partners in India required original hard-copy signatures for all official documents, which necessitated international shipping and added both cost and delay. The

inability to use verified electronic signatures was unexpected and should be anticipated in future collaborations.

- **Administrative burden can outweigh the value of small awards.** The total funding amount was ultimately disproportionate to the administrative effort required, particularly given the multi-year delays in obtaining approval to begin data collection. Annual renewals over nearly five years created additional workload. Based on this experience, small awards of this scale may not be practical unless project activities can be completed within the original one-year period. That said, the initial prestige of being recognized with the award was able to help coalesce interest and enthusiasm for the project and engagement of research teams at both institutions, which was highly valuable.
- **Collaborator engagement remained strong once approvals were secured.** Despite early challenges, the Tata Memorial Hospital team demonstrated excellent responsiveness and efficiency once the project was authorized to proceed, underscoring the value of the partnership.