PCORI 2021 Improving Methods for Conducting Patient-Centered Outcomes Research (PCOR) Submission Instructions

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These instructions apply to the 2021 Funding Cycle for the Improving Methods for Conducting Patient-Centered Outcomes Research PCORI Funding Announcement. Funding announcements, templates, and other resources are available at pcori.org/apply.
About PCORI

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) was authorized by Congress in 2010 and reauthorized for an additional ten years in 2019 as a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. PCORI’s purpose, as defined by our authorizing legislation, is to help patients, caregivers, clinicians, policy makers, and other healthcare system stakeholders make better-informed health decisions by “advancing the quality and relevance of evidence about how to prevent, diagnose, treat, monitor, and manage diseases, disorders, and other health conditions” and by promoting the dissemination and uptake of this evidence.

PCORI is committed to transparency and a rigorous stakeholder-driven process that emphasizes patient engagement. PCORI uses a variety of forums and public comment periods to obtain public input to enhance its work. PCORI helps people make informed healthcare decisions and improves healthcare delivery and outcomes by producing and promoting high-integrity, evidence-based information that comes from research guided by patients and other stakeholders.

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**What Has Changed for 2021:**

**Standing 2021 Broad and Methods PFAs**

Starting with Cycle 1 2021, PCORI posted all submission materials for the Broad and Methods PFAs and opened PCORI Online for the Letter of Intent (LOI) phase of application submission at the start of the Cycle Year (i.e. Cycles 1-3 of any given year). In addition to the PFAs, the Submission Instructions, applicant templates and resources, and cycle deadlines were also posted on PCORI’s website and available in PCORI Online. Applicants may submit an LOI for any of the available cycles up until the LOI deadline for that cycle. PCORI will strive to make only necessary administrative updates to the Submission Instructions and applicant templates throughout the Cycle Year.

To maintain responsiveness to health research needs and stakeholder interests, PCORI may revise the details of a priority area, address policy changes, and add or remove Special Areas of Emphasis (SAEs) in a PFA. SAEs aim to encourage applications on a particular healthcare topic—not to restrict applications to only the SAEs. SAEs may include dedicated funds.

Announcement of any updates and any revised documents will be posted on PCORI’s website no later than **four weeks before each cycle’s LOI deadline**. PCORI will also clearly indicate on the PFA webpage if no changes have been made since the Cycle 1 posting.

**Piloting a Process for Application Deferrals**

Starting with Cycle 1 2021, PCORI began piloting a new application submission deferral process **for the Broad and Methods PFAs only**. Deferrals are available to applicants who submitted an LOI to the Broad or Methods PFAs and are invited to submit a full application. Applicants will be limited to two sequential deferrals, which may cross Cycle Years (e.g., an applicant who is invited to submit a full application for Cycle 2 may defer submission to Cycle 3, and then may potentially again request a deferral to Cycle 1.
To request a deferral, the Principal Investigator (PI) must email pfa@pcori.org prior to the application deadline, copying the institutional Administrative Official (AO). For a request to be granted, the deferral request must be submitted before the application deadline and the AO must be included in the request email. As noted above, applicants will be limited to two deferrals. Applicants will be notified of the status of their request within one business day of its receipt.

Under this pilot program, applicants will not need to re-upload their LOI or re-complete application fields for the next cycle to which they deferred within PCORI Online. Deferral requests received after the application deadline will be rejected and applicants will be encouraged to submit a new LOI for the next posted cycle.

Applicants proposing projects that fall under an SAE for a particular cycle should note that if they elect to defer their application submission to a later cycle, the SAEs might change (as stated above). However, for the Broad PFA, any changes to SAEs would not affect application responsiveness determinations.

In contrast, the Methods PFA requires that submissions address a specific programmatic priority area named in the PFA, and these might change from cycle to cycle within a Cycle Year. In addition, if program priority areas or guidance on such topics in a PFA are updated by PCORI, it is possible that a deferred application could be determined to be non-responsive based on the updated information at the time of final submission.
I. About These Instructions

This document provides key information to help researchers prepare for and respond to the Improving Methods for Conducting Patient-Centered Outcomes Research (PCOR) Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Funding Announcement (PFA).

These instructions should answer many questions applicants may have. The following resources are also available:

- See PCOR’s Applicant FAQs¹ for common questions about PCORI and the application process.
- Visit PCORI’s Help Center² for additional applicant resources.
  - PCORI will respond within two business days. However, we cannot guarantee that all questions will be addressed two business days prior to a Letter of Intent (LOI) or application deadline.
  - For Programmatic Inquiries: Contact the PCORI Helpdesk via email at sciencequestions@pcori.org, phone at 202-627-1884, or online at http://www.pcori.org/PFA/inquiry.
  - For Administrative, Financial, or Technical Inquiries: Contact the PCORI Helpdesk via email at pfa@pcori.org, or phone at 202-627-1885.

It is the applicant’s responsibility to submit the LOI and application on or before the deadline. Refer to PCORI’s Policy on Funding Application Submission.³

Administrative Considerations

To ensure a thorough and competitive review process, PCORI strictly enforces the formatting and administrative compliance guidelines outlined in the PFAs, FAQs, and Submission Instructions. Applicants that fail to submit the required documents may be rejected from the merit review process.

All rejection decisions made by the Contracts Management department are final. See Appendix 3: Administrative Actions.

Unless otherwise stated in the Submission Instructions, all materials submitted on behalf of an applicant organization are the property of that organization. PCORI will not share or publicize the contents of an organization’s application.

Funding Mechanism

PCORI utilizes a contract mechanism, not a grant mechanism, for its awards. PCORI funds projects that demonstrate the highest probability of being completed on time and within budget and of meeting all milestones and deliverables. Applicants must submit representative budgets and Research Plans that

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¹ Available at http://www.pcori.org/content/faqs-applicants/.
² Available at http://help.pcori.org/hc/en-us/.
³ Available at http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/how-apply/policy-submission-research-contract-applications/.
allow the project to conclude within the approved contract term.

As part of its active portfolio management, PCORI provides contractual and programmatic monitoring throughout the contract term period. Applicant institutions and the Administrative Officials (AOs) are advised to carefully review PCORI’s Standard Contract Template provided on the Awardee Resources page on the PCORI website.\footnote{Available at \url{http://www.pcori.org/sites/default/files/PCORI-PFA-Standard-Contract-for-Funded-Research-Projects.pdf/}.} Note that international awardees will be issued a contract in US dollars. Fluctuations in currency exchange rates will have no bearing on the contract value, nor will adjustments be made to accommodate losses or gains associated with such currency fluctuations.

**Award Funding Conditions**

At any time during the contract, PCORI reserves the right to discontinue funding for awardees that fail to meet the mutually agreed-upon milestones. Applicants’ proposed milestones will be finalized in contract negotiations and prior to execution. See PCORI’s Standard Contract Template for more information.

**II. Who Can Apply**

Applications may be submitted by any private-sector research organization, including any nonprofit or for-profit organization; any public-sector research organization, including any university or college hospital or healthcare system; any laboratory or manufacturer; or any unit of local, state, or federal government. The Internal Revenue Service must recognize all US applicant organizations. Organizations may submit multiple funding applications. Individuals are not permitted to apply. If you have questions about eligibility, contact pfa@pcori.org.

Nondomestic components of organizations based in the United States and foreign organizations may apply, as long as there is demonstrable benefit to the US healthcare system and US efforts in the area of patient-centered research can be shown clearly. However, PCORI’s general preference is that prime award be made to a US-based organization.

A prime award contract to a non-US-based organization should be carefully justified and preferably include a key US-based organization and co–Principal Investigator (PI) as a subcontractor. In assessing whether a research award can be made to a non-US organization as a prime contractor or subcontractor, or whether the research can be conducted outside the United States, PCORI will carefully review and consider the following factors:

- The research funded by PCORI must result in findings that are relevant and useful to US patients and healthcare decision makers.
- The proposed project must demonstrate that essential scientific needs will be met by conducting the study outside the United States or having the study conducted by non-US research organizations.
- The proposed study must demonstrate meaningful effort and involvement of US organizations and investigators with pertinent expertise and experience to contribute to the project.
engagement plan for the proposed study should also adequately and sufficiently include US patients and stakeholders and have clear relevance to the US healthcare system.

Note: In general, a PI can submit only one LOI per PFA. However, because PCORI’s Broad PFA included funding opportunities across the four distinct PCORI National Research Priorities, it is permissible for a PI to submit multiple LOIs under different national research priority areas. The research topics and projects must be distinct and responsive to the specific respective national research priority areas, as outlined in the PFA. Moreover, an individual listed as a PI on one LOI may be listed as and serve in another role (e.g., co-PI, co-investigator, consultant) on other LOIs within the same PFA during the same cycle. A PI may submit multiple LOIs to different program PFAs in a cycle, but the PI must ensure that the research topics and projects are not similar. If a PI submits an LOI to multiple program PFAs, LOIs that exhibit scientific overlap or that appear to be duplicate submissions will be disqualified. PCORI will contact the PI and with the opportunity to choose which PFA he or she would like to apply to. This applies to single- and dual-PI submissions.

III. How to Apply

Applying for PCORI funding is a two-stage process. To submit an LOI and application (if invited), including all required documents, follow the instructions provided in this document and in PCORI Online. All documents must be submitted through PCORI Online.

Step 1: Register

To apply for PCORI funding, an applicant (PI or PI designee) must register in PCORI Online. To submit an LOI or application or to register your organization in PCORI Online, you need a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and an Employer Identification Number (EIN). You can apply for a DUNS number and an EIN, if applicable. To register, you must provide a name, an email address, a password, and a security question and answer. Once signed in, you will be directed to the home screen. Click on the Research Awards tile to apply for funding. PCORI strongly recommends that only the PI create the LOI/application record, because whomever creates the record will have permanent access to it in PCORI Online.

Step 2: Submit a Letter of Intent

An LOI is required for new and resubmitted applications. To submit an LOI, log in to PCORI Online, complete the required LOI fields, and upload the completed PFA-specific LOI Template into the system.

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5 Available at https://pcori.force.com/engagement.
PIs can download the LOI Template from the PFA page in the PCORI Funding Opportunities web page. For formatting instructions, reference Step 4.

For detailed instructions on how to navigate the system, reference PCORI Online: Pre-Award User Guide for Research Awards.8

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**Step 3: Begin Application Process**

PCORI will notify applicants by the date specified within the PFA as to whether they have been invited to submit an application.

The application consists of multiple sections in PCORI Online, all of which you must complete before submission. Log in to PCORI Online to view the full list of questions.

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**Step 4: Format and Complete Required Templates**

Required templates are on the PCORI Funding Opportunities9 web page. Find the PFA to which you are applying and download the correct PFA-specific templates, because they vary among PFAs and cycles. Keep the following in mind:

- Do not reorganize sections within the templates.
- Do not alter the templates’ main header questions within your submission.
- You may delete instructional text.
- Adherence to font size, type density, line spacing, and text color requirements is necessary to ensure readability and fairness.

**You must format all required documents as follows:**

- **Header:** Include the PI’s full name in the top-left corner of every page.
- **Font:** Use Calibri size 11 font for body text and size 8 font for figures, tables, and captions.
- **Type Density:** Use no more than 15 characters per linear inch (including characters and spaces).
- **Line Spacing:** Use single spacing. Use no more than six lines per vertical inch.
- **Text Color:** No restriction. Though not required, black or other high-contrast colors are recommended since they print well and are legible to the largest audience.
- **Margins:** Use at least half-inch margins. The header may fall within the top margin, but the body text may not begin closer than a half-inch from the edge of the page.

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8 Available at http://www.pcori.org/sites/default/files/PCORI-Online-Pre-Award-User-Guide.pdf.
9 Available at http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/.
• **Page Numbers:** Number each page consecutively for each PDF upload. Begin each section of an uploaded document with page 1.

• **Page Limit:** This varies based on the document.

• **File Name Format:** This varies based on the document. Applicants must adhere to the file naming standards noted in the Submission Checklist.

• **References:** PCORI suggests including all references as in-text citations using American Medical Association (AMA) citation style, but other citation styles are acceptable.

Legibility is of paramount importance. Applications that include attachments that do not conform to the minimum requirements listed above may be withdrawn from consideration.

### Step 5: Upload Required Documents

Follow the Submission Checklist. Upload required documents to PCORI Online in the correct order and required file name format. When instructed, use Adobe Acrobat Professional\(^{10}\) to combine documents into a single PDF file for upload.

Avoid scanning text documents to produce the required PDFs. It is best to produce documents using your word-processing software and then convert the documents to PDF. Scanning paper documents may hamper automated processing of your submission for review, analysis, and reporting, as well as the legibility of the file.

Though it may be necessary to letters of support or other signed documents on business letterhead, this is not an acceptable file format for most submission templates. Applicants must follow the detailed file name format and file upload type described in the Submission Checklist.

Within the Templates & Uploads tab, click “Choose file” to select a file from your computer, and click “Upload.” For detailed instructions, refer to the Templates & Uploads section of the PCORI Online: Pre-Award User Guide for Research Award.

### Step 6: Submit for Authorization

Once you have completed and uploaded all required information, select “Review & Submit,” and then select “Submit” to forward the application to your AO to authorize and submit. The AO must approve and submit the final application for official submission to PCORI before the 5 pm (ET) deadline. **PCORI Online will email the AO, but the PI should notify the AO when the application is ready for review, AO approval, and submission.** The PI and the AO may not be the same individual. Both the AO and the PI will receive an email confirming that PCORI has received the application.

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\(^{10}\) See adobe.com for more information on Adobe Acrobat Professional.
IV. When to Apply

Deadlines for each funding cycle are noted in the PCORI Funding Opportunities web page and in the PFA. System or technical issues with PCORI Online that affect the on-time submission of an application must be reported to PCORI before the specified deadline. Problems with computer systems at the applicant’s organization or failure to follow instructions in PCORI Online, in the PCORI Submission Instructions, or in PFAs are not valid issues warranting consideration of a deadline extension. See PCORI’s Policy on Submission of Research Contract Applications for complete information.

V. What to Include

Note: Only applicants selected to submit an application may begin the application process. You will be notified by the date specified in the PFA regarding whether PCORI has invited you to submit an application.

Applicants are encouraged to review this entire section. Print and complete the Submission Checklist to ensure that the LOI and application are submitted correctly. Download all required templates from the PCORI Funding Opportunities web page.

Letter of Intent

You must submit an LOI before you complete your application. Enter the information in the required fields in PCORI Online.

Download and complete the PFA-specific LOI Template from the PCORI Funding Opportunities web page. Statements in gray italics provide instructions. Replace the gray italics and any instructional text with your responses, but retain the bold headings and question numbers. Note that any additional template modifications will result in the disqualification of your LOI.

The content included in this template will be used as the primary source of information for PCORI’s competitive screening process. Focus on including only critical information, as space is limited to two pages. Provide a description that allows the scientific community to understand the project, including the aims and study design, without reviewing the full application. The two-page limit does not include references. PCORI suggests including all references as in-text citations using AMA style, but other citation styles are accepted. (Note: All LOI Templates must follow the formatting guidelines provided in Step 4.) Do not include supplemental materials (e.g., supporting journal articles, Letters of Support) or additional information not requested in the template (e.g., responses to reviewer comments, Resubmission Letters).

To submit an LOI, save the completed PFA-specific LOI as a PDF. Label your LOI file using the following nomenclature: “PI LastName_(five-digit LOI number)_LOI.pdf.” PCORI Online will automatically generate an LOI number, which will be visible at the top of the web page once you save the LOI. Click “Review & Submit” to review your submission, and then click “Submit.” Navigate back to the LOI and Application

11 Available at http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/how-apply/policy-submission-research-contract-applications/
12 Available at http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/.
dashboard in PCORI Online, where you can see your LOI number and track your status. Once your LOI is submitted, you cannot edit it.

If program staff determine that the LOI is a better fit for another program, they may transfer the LOI to that program. If that program is interested in inviting the applicant to submit an application, PCORI will notify the applicant and obtain his or her approval to switch programs. PCORI will not invite an applicant to submit an application if the applicant’s LOI does not meet program areas of interest or if it substantially overlaps with existing projects in the portfolio. Applicants will receive an email notification accepting or declining their LOI. See the PFA for more information about LOI review.

**Resubmission Policy**

An applicant may resubmit an application that was not funded but that did complete PCORI’s merit review process (i.e., the applicant received a summary statement). PCORI does not limit the number of times an applicant may resubmit.

If a full application was deemed nonresponsive and did not progress through the full merit review process, it is considered a new submission and requires submission of an LOI. Submitting the same application to a different program’s PFA is also considered a new submission. Each program’s PFA has different requirements; therefore, applicants should carefully review the program-specific PFA to which they are applying.

**PI and Contact Information**

PCORI refers to three specific roles with particular responsibilities. Keep the following in mind as you complete this section:

**Principal Investigator**

A. Description

- The PI is responsible for the project’s engagement, scientific and technical aspects, and peer review–related activities.
- The Contact PI’s institution must be the primary institution for the award.
- PIs can participate in other applications (from the same or another organization) in the same or a different role, such as co-investigator or consultant. Refer to the [Who Can Apply](#) section for specific instructions.
- If electing to submit an application with two PIs, you must designate one individual as the Contact PI. The Contact PI is responsible for submitting the application and will serve as PCORI’s primary point of contact for all communication. **No more than two PIs can be named on an application.**

B. Activities
• The PI (or PIs) assumes responsibility and accountability for research execution, compliance, and organizational conduct.

• If applicable, the Contact PI is responsible for submitting the application, submitting all progress reports, and serving as PCORI’s programmatic and administrative contact. PCORI will send all communication to the Contact PI, and it is his or her responsibility to share PCORI communications with the second PI.

• The PI (or PIs) manages day-to-day project operations.

• The PI (or PIs) acts as the organization’s lead research representative.

Administrative Official

A. Description

• The AO is responsible for matters related to the award and administration of the contract.

• The AO cannot be the PI.

• The AO’s signature certifies that the organization will be accountable for appropriately using the awarded funds and for performing the PCORI-supported project.

B. Activities

• The AO manages contract activation, modifications, and additional required administrative matters.

• The AO certifies contract compliance of all applicable assurances and certifications referenced in the application.

Financial Official (FO)

A. Description

• The FO is responsible for all required financial reporting.

B. Activities

• The FO completes and certifies expenditure reports on behalf of the organization.

• The FO accounts for contract funds and submits invoices and payment details.

Key Personnel

PCORI identifies key personnel as any individual who is critical to the project’s scientific development and execution in a measurable way and whose absence from the project would affect the likelihood of success.

Note the following:

• Applications can include up to two PIs.

• PIs can serve in other roles (e.g., dual-PI, co-PI, co-investigator, consultant) on other
• If applicable, applicants must explain the rationale for including two PIs in the Leadership Plan Template.

• Consultants and personnel from collaborating organizations may be included as key personnel if they meet the definition. See PCORI’s Glossary for definitions of consultant and subcontractor.

• Applicants should identify patient and other stakeholder partners, whether individuals or organizations, if known. If all partners have not been confirmed by the time of application, then applicants, if funded, must submit updated partner information to PCORI as part of the Updated Engagement Plan milestone per Appendix 1. (Note: Patient and stakeholder partners will be publicly listed on the PCORI website and may be included on public communications. In providing the names of partners, applicants acknowledge that partners have consented to the disclosure of their names to PCORI and to making their names publicly available. If a patient or other stakeholder partner chooses to remain anonymous, contact pfa@pcori.org for guidance.)

• After merit review, PCORI may request current, pending, and other support documentation from all key personnel. This material must be submitted prior to award.

• If funding is awarded, the addition or replacement of key personnel listed in the submitted application requires PCORI’s approval during contract negotiation and post–contract execution.

VI. Application Requirements

The following sections are applicable only if PCORI invites you to submit an application. You are invited to submit an application based on the information provided in the LOI. Any changes to the following require PCORI’s approval:

• PI (Contact PI and second PI)
• Institution
• Study design
• Research question(s)
• Specific aims
• Comparators

If you need to change any of this information or have any questions, email pfa@pcori.org.

PI and Contact Information

Review the information transferred from your LOI, and update as needed.

Project Information

Enter the following information directly into PCORI Online.

Technical Abstract

Provide a Technical Abstract within PCORI Online that summarizes your Research Strategy. The abstract must include the following sections:
• **Background and Significance:** State the methodological gap the research is designed to address. Describe how the proposed research will advance methods for patient-centered outcomes research/comparative clinical effectiveness research (PCOR/CER) and the importance of this research to the relevant stakeholders (e.g., patients, clinicians, policy makers).

• **Objectives:** Describe the research objective(s) and list the specific aims that will address the identified methodological gap.

• **Study Design or Approach:** Describe in detail the methodological work that is planned for each of the specific aims and the ways in which it addresses the identified methodological gap. Include, as applicable, the following elements:
  o Study design
  o Study population and sample size
  o Primary data collection methods
  o Data sources and data sets
  o Analytic methods
  o Evaluative framework (including choice of methodological comparators)

• **Outcomes (Projected) and Anticipated Impact:** Identify and explain the specific anticipated contributions and applications of the methodological advancement to PCOR/CER, as well as the patients and/or other stakeholders who will benefit from it.

• **Study Design:** Please fill in the study details in each section, referring to the guidance provided.
  o **Goal:** Describe the study aims.
  o **Approach:** Describe the overall approach (e.g., use of a data set, modeling, mixed methods, multiple stages, whatever best fits).

For examples of completed study design tables, see the following:

• [Improving Learning Healthcare Systems Using Randomization Methods](#)
• [Developing New Methods to Conduct Stepped-Wedge Studies](#)

**Public Abstract**

Provide a description of your project, written in lay language that the general public will understand. Describe the following:

• The methodological problem your project seeks to solve, including how the problem is currently addressed, what is lacking in existing methods, and how the proposed solution may improve on these methods

• The study designs, data sets, or research settings for which the proposed new methods or solutions could be applied

• The study aims and each step you will take to address these aims

• How you will test your solution, such as with simulated or historic data (Use plain language to describe statistical processes and clearly define all technical terms.)

• Planned outputs of your project, such as software or recommendations for other researchers
• Who will be able to use the results of this project, and how

• Stakeholder engagement: What types of stakeholders are represented, and in what ways are they involved in the study

If your project is approved for funding, the PCOR Translation Center will edit your summary to ensure it is consistent with PCORI style. The final version will be sent to you for sign-off.

For examples of completed public abstracts, see the following:

• Making Case-Control Studies More Reliable for Comparing Treatment Outcomes
• Developing Methods for Record Linkage that Protect Patient Privacy

Milestones Template

Applicants must complete the Milestones Template and upload it as an Excel file, not as a PDF, in PCORI Online, in the designated upload field. Follow the instructions in the template and complete all required sections. For the milestones provided in the template, based on Milestone—Deliverable Name (Column B) and Description (Column C), applicants must provide the Due Date (Column D). Consider the guidance information in Column E as you determine the Due Date, which can be any day of the week. Applicants should insert rows for additional milestones, when and where appropriate as they would correspond to the timing of the milestone.

Milestones are concrete, specific events or accomplishments that are documented by deliverables, are associated with a timeline, and must include project objectives that will be accomplished at specific times during the proposed project. PCORI encourages applicants to provide three to six milestones per six-month reporting period, though there is no minimum or maximum. Each reporting period should include the major milestones reflecting the research activities and only those activities that the PCORI contract supports. Some examples of milestones include reaching specific patient accrual targets, developing a survey, commencing the intervention, and establishing project-specific databases. See Appendix 1: Example Milestones for a more complete list.

As part of Merit Review Criterion 3, Scientific merit (research design, analysis, and outcomes), reviewers evaluate the submitted milestone schedule to assess the feasibility of the study plan.

If your application is funded, interim and final deliverables will be negotiated and included in your research contract. Note that PCORI reserves the right to request additional deliverables during the life of the project.

Budget

Complete all required sections in PCORI Online, including the Peer-Review Budget section, and upload the Subcontractor Detailed Budget Template for each subcontractor and the Budget Justification Template to PCORI Online in their designated fields.

Co-Funding

PCORI partners with various other research organizations to leverage additional funds for some of its
programs. If you currently have a funded project and would like to seek PCORI funding to add to the study a new aim that advances PCORI funding objectives, you may submit an application. We recommend that you speak with a Program Officer in advance of your submission.

**Detailed Research Project Budget for Each Year of the Research Project Period**

For each program year, complete a Detailed Budget entered in PCORI Online for the prime institution proposed in your application. For example, if your study lasts two years, the prime institution must complete a Detailed Budget for Year 1 and for Year 2. You must enter all personnel information in the Project Personnel tab that corresponds to that year in the Budget tab. The applicant may add additional rows for personnel as needed. Following the example of a two-year study, applicants may delete the unused Years 3 through 5 Detailed Budget tabs. However, applicants may not add additional years. Each PFA states the maximum project periods. Note the following:

A. Personnel Costs

- Personnel costs include the base salary for each scientific and technical staff member, employee patient or stakeholder partner, or other personnel on your project who are or are not accounted for in Section B: Consultant Costs. Provide a clear distinction between individuals who are key personnel and those considered “other” personnel.

- PCORI will reimburse personnel costs that are consistent with and do not exceed what the applicant would normally pay under its own policy. PCORI may request salary verification during the contract activation process. Such compensation may include salaries and fringe benefits. See [Appendix 2: Allowable and Unallowable Costs](#) for more information.

- Salaries include wages earned by an employee, and fringe benefits may include insurance and retirement plans. Provide documentation to support the fringe benefits within the Budget Justification Template.

- Level of Effort: Personnel who contribute to a PCORI-funded research project must monitor their total percentage of effort across all active funding, so that it does not exceed 100 percent. Before submitting the application to PCORI, the AO must certify that individual personnel will not exceed 100 percent effort if funded. You must report effort by the percentage of time over the course of the project year. If you are not requesting salary support, use $0 for the base salary.

- All personnel who dedicate effort to the project must be listed on the Personnel Budget with their level of effort, even if they are not requesting salary support. List the base salary for each person in the Budget Justification and the Detailed Budget Templates. Describe the individual’s specific functions in the Budget Justification Template. Explain how the role supports the project aims and note any overlap in job functions.

- Salary Cap: The PCORI base salary cap for personnel is $200,000 annualized per individual, per year, excluding fringe benefits. An individual who earns less than $200,000 must use his or her actual base salary to calculate personnel costs. An individual with a full-time employee base salary of more than $200,000 must use $200,000 as the base salary rate in determining the
amount of salary and time to charge to the project.

- Inflation/cost of living adjustments may be assessed only on base salaries less than the $200,000 salary cap.

- Fringe Benefits: These costs are calculated based on the institution’s own policy. In the Budget Justification Template upload, applicants must provide a verification of the fringe benefit rate policy for the prime organization.

**Note:** Personnel costs must account for the level of effort required to initiate and complete the mandated Peer-Review Process. See the [Detailed Peer-Review Budget for Peer Review–Related Costs](https://example.com) section for additional instructions.

### B. Consultant Costs

- Consultant costs apply to those individuals who are not employees of the applicant organization or under a subcontract agreement as members of the contracted staff.

- Payments to nonemployee patient and stakeholder representatives must be included in the budget as consultant costs.

- Provide the total cost of the consultant(s), as well as the name(s), expected number of hours, and hourly rate.

- Include the daily consultant fee, nature of the consulting effort, and reasons that the proposed project requires consultants. Note any overlap in duties with personnel.

- Consultant costs must be reasonable and justified within the Budget Justification.

- Include Letters of Support from each consultant, verifying the work to be performed and how the negotiated rate was established. See the [Letters of Support section](https://example.com) for more detailed information.

### C. Supply Costs

- Supplies must be directly allocable and allowable to the proposed project, and not be part of general or administrative use. Supplies are consumable items that are used on a regular basis or other tangible items that do not meet the definition of *equipment*. Include the category of supplies needed and the cost for each item.

- Tangible items with per-unit costs of $5,000 or more are considered equipment and cannot be accounted for under this category.

- Indicate general categories such as mailings, printing, lab, and equipment with less than $5,000 per-unit costs. Provide detailed explanations in the Budget Justification for all costs exceeding $1,000.

- For all supply costs, provide computations for how you arrived at the specific number.
Note: PCORI considers computers, tablets, docking stations, mobile data and protection plans, laboratory and office furnishings, and software to be general office supplies that are not allowable as direct-cost charges. If these items are proposed as essential for performing the research project, the following must be provided in the Budget Justification:

- Detailed explanation of why purchasing these items is necessary to complete the proposed research project
- Statement verifying that the requested items are not currently available for the PI’s use
- Statement assuring that the items will be purchased in accordance with applicable cost principles
- Items purchased under PCORI-funded projects are not to be used as incentives to recruit or retain graduate students or any other project personnel.

D. Travel Costs

- Travel may include any domestic or international travel by project personnel or consultants directly related to and necessary for the project and within the limits explained below. PCORI uses the Federal Travel Regulations guidelines for per diem and other reimbursements.
- Travel should be devoted to programmatic activities necessary to conduct the project, such as focus groups, project team meetings, or data collection. Requests for travel to present at conferences or symposiums related to the topical areas of the project may also be included, but they should be limited in number and strongly justified. PCORI closely reviews all travel costs to ensure they are reasonable.
- Travel costs must be itemized per trip and must include the number of trips and a brief description of each one, including the number of people traveling and dates or duration of the stays.
- Airline or rail costs cannot exceed the customary standard commercial fare (coach or equivalent), or the lowest commercial discount fare. PCORI will not compensate upgrades.
- In the Budget Justification Template, applicants must provide additional detail to explain the basis for the costs listed and describe how the travel is directly related to the proposed research project and necessary for achieving programmatic objectives.

E. Other Expenses

- Use this section to include direct costs that cannot be accounted for in other budget categories. For example, these costs may include computer core services, data warehousing, participant incentives, return of results to study participants, publication costs, illustration costs, and non-consulting service contracts (when applicable).
- In the space provided, include a detailed explanation in the Budget Justification for items that exceed $1,000. Applicants must provide additional detail for each of these costs.

F. Equipment Costs
• Equipment costs include those for tangible items that have a per-unit cost of $5,000 or more and a useful life greater than one year.

• Include with the **Budget Justification** up to three quotes for each item of proposed equipment.

• Costs must be reasonable and necessary for the project.

G. Subcontractor Costs

• This category includes all consortium and contractual costs. The prime awardee must issue a subcontract agreement to a collaborator if these criteria are met:
  
  o The subcontractor personnel’s effort on the project is calculated as part of his or her “professional time” for his or her employer organization.

  o The subcontractor will be using significant resources (e.g., office space, supplies, computer, personnel) at his or her own organization when working on the PCORI-funded project.

• State in the **Budget Justification** why each subcontractor was selected. Provide detail on the subcontractor’s specific role and the aim or deliverable he or she will be supporting on the project.

• Subcontractors must adhere to all PCORI budget guidelines, including allowable and unallowable costs.

H. Indirect Costs

• PCORI limits the total indirect costs to 40 percent of personnel, consultant costs, travel, supplies, and other expenses and on the first $25,000 of each subcontract.

• Applicants that do not have a federally negotiated or independently audited indirect cost rate may assess up to 10 percent indirect costs, to be noted in the Budget Justification.

• Foreign applicants are eligible for no more than 10 percent indirect costs.

• A copy of the prime applicant’s federally negotiated or independently audited indirect cost rate letter must be submitted with the application. Include these copies in a single file with the Budget Justification.

• If your application is funded, the indirect cost rate submitted at the time of application is what PCORI will utilize during contract negotiations. If a change in the indirect cost rate occurs after a project is executed, and the awardee wishes to charge a different rate, the awardee must contact its PCORI Contract Administrator and provide a copy of the new federally negotiated rate or independently audited rate. PCORI may allow a change in the rate charged, but the awardee will need to reallocate within its existing, approved budget. PCORI will not allow additional funds to offset any increases in indirect costs and the rate increase cannot result in a reduction in scope of the approved project.

• While consortium indirect costs must be noted in the prime applicant’s direct cost budget,
consortium indirect costs are not included in the applicant’s direct cost budget cap.

I. Engagement Costs

- The budget should account for patient and other stakeholder partner (individual and organizational) compensation. For additional guidance, review PCORI’s Compensation Framework.

- Awardees should also consider the costs of patient and other stakeholder expenses, project staff, engagement events and meetings, and incorporating partner feedback. For additional guidance, review PCORI’s Budgeting for Engagement Activities document.

Detailed Peer-Review Budget for Peer Review–Related Costs

PCORI has a legislative mandate to ensure the scientific integrity of the primary research it supports and to make study findings widely available and useful to patients, clinicians, and the general public within a specific timeframe. Accordingly, the PCORI Board of Governors adopted the Process for Peer Review of Primary Research and Public Release of Research Findings. 13

The detailed Peer-Review Budget must include costs related to the development and revision of the Draft Final Research Report (DFRR), as part of PCORI’s Peer-Review Process. The Peer-Review Budget will be completed in PCORI Online and the Subcontractor Detailed Budget Template, as needed. Note that the Total Budget will include the Peer-Review Budget and the Research Project Budget when determining compliance with the Maximum Project Budget in the PFA.

- The DFRR is expected to be submitted three months after completion of the milestone for Completion of Data Analysis for All Study Aims and expected to have finished the Peer-Review Process and be accepted by PCORI within six to 12 months of submission (following necessary revisions).

- Costs associated with the Peer-Review Process are limited to personnel, consultants, and subcontractors, who will be assisting the PI in development of the DFRR and responding to any requested revisions as part of the external review.

- A Budget Justification must be included for the Peer-Review Budget. The PI must dedicate measurable effort in support of the Peer-Review Process. Applicants must identify the peer-review support staff role within the budget at the time of submission.

- The Budget Summary must include the Peer-Review Budget.

Budget Summary for Entire Project

A Budget Summary for Entire Project for the prime applicant is created within PCORI Online when the budget is entered into the system. Review this information prior to submission. See Appendix 2: Allowable and Unallowable Costs to review acceptable and unacceptable uses of PCORI funding.

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Subcontractor Detailed Budget Template

Complete the Subcontractor Detailed Budget Template for each subcontractor organization, then combine the files into a single PDF file and upload it to PCORI Online in the designated field. For each project year, complete a Detailed Budget for each subcontractor organization proposed in your application. All personnel information must be entered in the Personnel tab corresponding to that year in this template. Add additional rows for personnel as needed.

Budget Justification Template

Complete a Budget Justification Template for the prime applicant and each subcontracted organization for the entire Research Project Budget and Peer-Review Budget for all research- and peer review-related costs. Provide sufficient detail to explain the basis for costs, the reason the costs are necessary to the project, and the reason for major cost variances. Include information about budgeting for engagement, including financial compensation of patient and other stakeholder partners; costs of patient and other stakeholder expenses, project staff, engagement events and meetings, and incorporating partner feedback; and costs associated with the return of aggregate study results to study participants. Note that some projects employ or assign an individual responsible for coordinating or managing all project-related patient and other stakeholder engagement. This person should be listed as full-time equivalent under personnel, consultant, or subcontractor costs. Explain the basis for travel costs, and describe how the travel is related to the proposed research and necessary for achieving programmatic objectives.

Describe the specific role and tasks each research team member will perform, along with the impact on the Project Plan. PCORI will evaluate each member’s contribution as listed in the Budget Justification, to validate meaningful contributions and assess whether overlap in responsibilities occurs. Provide a clear distinction between individuals who should be classified as key personnel and those who should be classified as “other” personnel.

Specify any other sources of funding, currently available or anticipated, to support the proposed research project. Include funding amounts and when the funding will be available. Use continuation pages as needed.
Note: PCORI will not fund a project that is already funded through another funding entity. By submitting the application to PCORI, the AO is certifying that no overlap in funding exists at the time of submission. Prior to receiving a PCORI contract, awardees must disclose all current and pending support.

Research Plan Template

Complete all required sections in the Research Plan Template and upload it as a single PDF to PCORI Online. The Research Plan includes the Research Strategy, Research Team and Environment, Dissemination and Implementation Potential, Return of Aggregate Study Results, Protection of Human Subjects, Consortium Contractual Arrangements, References Cited, and an optional Appendix.

Research Strategy

In this component of the Research Plan (up to 12 pages), applicants must describe their Research Strategy and work plan in detail, and demonstrate how the proposed study responds to this PFA. The Research Strategy includes the following sections: (A) Specific Aims, (B) Background, (C) Significance, (D) Study Design or Approach, and (E) Engagement Plan.

In addition to following the instructions in the Research Plan Template, applicants should ensure that the Research Plan addresses the following points:

- **Adhering to the PCORI Methodology Standards:** Applicants should provide sufficient information to allow reviewers and PCORI staff to determine whether the proposed research adheres to the relevant standards, and then complete the Methodology Standards Checklist to help reviewers quickly identify where information related to adherence is located within the Research Strategy. Additional best practices, including guidelines for conducting clinical trials developed by other organizations, must be addressed in the application.

- **Leveraging Existing Resources:** Applicants proposing to use an existing research network infrastructure (e.g., PCORnet, the National Patient-Centered Clinical Research Network),
research consortia, or related data resources (e.g., electronic medical records data from healthcare delivery systems or administrative claims data from public or commercial insurers) should address this with sufficient specificity in the Research Plan, as appropriate. Applicants should also refer to the PCORI Methodology Standards for Data Networks as Research-Facilitating Structures.

- **Engaging with Patients and Other Stakeholders:** Applicants should describe how they will work with patients and other stakeholders in their study and the added value these individuals’ experience and expertise will bring. In this section, applicants should identify the types of stakeholders that will be engaged as research partners; the rationale for selection, including how the stakeholders represent the diversity of the individuals affected by the problems this study addresses; and the scope of the stakeholders’ involvement. Include the names of patient and other stakeholder partners and their organizations if known at the time of application. If unknown, applicants should describe a plan for identifying and selecting research partners. Funded studies will be required to submit a full roster and detailed Updated Engagement Plan at six months after contract execution. PCORI recognizes that patient engagement may not be appropriate in all cases, especially in highly technical methods projects. Please keep in mind that, in cases in which it may not be appropriate to engage patients in the methodological research process, it may still be important to engage other stakeholders (e.g., data architects, clinicians, domain experts, health services researchers with areas of expertise different from those of research team members, policy makers). Investigators must provide a justification if they believe that it is not appropriate to engage any patient or other stakeholders in a proposed research project.14

**Research Team and Environment**

Within the Research Team and Environment component (up to two pages), applicants must describe the research team’s capabilities to accomplish the goals of the proposed research project and the appropriateness of the research environment to conduct the study. Applicants must also describe the following:

- How and why those research sites were selected
- How they tie back to the research project
- The resources, facilities, support, and collaborations available to ensure the project’s success
- If multiple sites are involved, prior experience that demonstrates the likelihood of the sites working together successfully (e.g., past data sharing, Institutional Review Board [IRB] reciprocity, or other factors) to facilitate efficient conduct of the study
- Ways in which the project will benefit from the research environment’s unique features or from

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community involvement

- How sites will work together to ensure that milestones are achieved
- Institutional and community investment in the success of the research, such as the availability of organized peer groups
- Logistical support, such as administrative management and oversight, and best practices training
- Financial support, such as protected time for research with salary support
- Access to and support of patient groups

Provide all key personnel, professional and partner profiles/biosketches, and detailed site descriptions within the PI Template, Key Personnel Template, and Project/Performance Site(s) and Resources Template as a separate PDF upload.

Dissemination and Implementation Potential

In this component (up to one page), applicants should describe specific opportunities as well as possible barriers to disseminating and implementing their work in other settings. This section should address any study limitations that could affect the usability of findings (e.g., propriety issues, applicability, scalability, appropriate settings of care).

PCORI does not support awardees budgeting efforts or resources for the conduct of dissemination and implementation work at this juncture. For projects that produce important findings, PCORI will consider subsequent applications for funding to support dissemination and implementation efforts through separate PFAs and other mechanisms.

Note: PCORI encourages researchers to submit documentation of any implementation agreement with the sponsoring organization that confirms the organization will implement successful interventions on a large scale. PCORI will view this agreement as a positive factor during merit review. Include this with the Letters of Support PDF as the last item.

Return of Aggregate Study Results

In this component (up to one page), applicants should describe how, as awardees, they plan to communicate the aggregate findings from their research to the participants who were enrolled in the study. Note that the proposed activity should return aggregate study results (i.e., the overall study findings) to the study participants, and not individual results (i.e., participant-specific data, such as genetic or imaging results). Results return may be accomplished by sharing the lay language “Results Summary” that PCORI posts to its website upon completion of the research project, or by distributing a similar summary. Applicants may propose to distribute the study results to study participants by email, mail, newsletter, or other approaches.

In the Detailed Budget tab in PCORI Online and in the Budget Justification Template, applicants should specify the costs associated with this return of results to study participants. Studies with fewer than 5,000 participants may budget up to $2,500. If this amount does not suffice for studies that need to
return results to a larger number of participants, applicants may propose a larger amount with justification. Please note that the costs associated with the return of results must be included as part of the Total Budget (in PCORI Online) when determining compliance with the Maximum Project Budget in the PFA.

Applicants should consider whether they will need to obtain IRB approval ahead of the study in order to recontact participants at its conclusion. In addition, awardees should make all efforts to ensure that returning results is in accordance with their institution’s and/or state’s guidelines and laws.

Studies may be exempt from this provision if a return of results is not possible. For example, this provision does not apply to studies that use secondary data or those that use anonymous participants. If applicable, applicants’ response to this section should address why the return of results is not feasible.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

In this component (up to five pages), describe the protection of human subjects involved in your research. PCORI follows the Federal Regulation for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR part 46), including the Common Rule. For more detailed information, see Section 5, “Human Subjects Research Policy,” from the Supplemental Grant Application Instructions for All Competing Applications and Progress Reports, which was issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Refer to the Required Education of Key Personnel on the Protection of Human Subject Participants requirement as you complete this section.

**Consortium Contractual Arrangements**

In this component (up to five pages), describe the proposed research projects that subcontracted organizations will perform. Explain the strengths that these partners bring to the overall project to ensure successful submission of contract deliverables in accordance with the milestone schedule.

Keep the following in mind as you complete this section:

- The prime applicant is responsible for the project and must adhere to the contract’s terms and conditions. The prime applicant must negotiate his or her subcontracts accordingly.
- Signed subcontract agreements are not required at the time of application submission to PCORI.
- Submitting an application to PCORI signifies that programmatic and administrative personnel from your organization and from all proposed subcontract organizations involved in the project are aware of your organization’s subcontract agreement policy and are prepared to establish the necessary interorganizational agreement(s) consistent with that policy.
- If applicable, include subcontract personnel under key personnel.
- Include budget information for subcontracted organizations in the Detailed Budget, Budget Summary for Entire Project, and Budget Justification.

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References Cited

This component (up to 10 pages) is included in the Research Plan Template. Throughout the Research Plan, applicants should use in-text citations to reference published materials. In this section, list the full bibliographical citation for each reference. Each reference must include the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), the article title and journal or book title, the volume number, the page numbers, and the year of publication. Include only bibliographic citations. PCORI suggests following AMA style when providing citations for source materials used to prepare any section of the application, but other citation styles are acceptable. Citations that are publicly available in a free online format may include URLs or PubMed ID numbers along with the full reference. Limit references to relevant and current literature. Be concise and select only those literature references pertinent to the proposed research, so that you do not exceed the 10-page limit. Reference websites in the standard URL format (i.e., http://www.pcori.org) along with the date on which the link was last accessed.

Appendix (optional)

This component (up to 10 pages) is included in the Research Plan Template. Applicants may provide additional materials to support the proposed study (e.g., survey instruments and interview guides). Note that reviewers are not required to review this section during merit review.

Methodology Standards Checklist

Applicants must complete the PCORI Methodology Standards Checklist and upload it as an Excel file to PCORI Online in the designated upload field. Applicants must complete Column D of the checklist, using the drop-down menu options to indicate whether each PCORI Methodology Standard applies to their proposed research. Applicants must complete the subsequent columns, as appropriate, following the instructions in the checklist. If the standard applies, in Column E provide the page number(s) of your Research Plan where the text illustrates how you addressed the standard. Last, in Column F, indicate whether your study may deviate from the standard and provide a rationale. Indicate “Not Applicable (N/A)” if particular standards are not applicable to your study. Refer to the PCORI Methodology Report for explanations of the standards.

Project Team

Applicants must assemble a team that is suited to complete the work. Applications must demonstrate that the study team’s experience, leadership approach, governance, and organizational structure are appropriate for the project and will aid in successfully achieving the project goals.

Applicants will complete and upload two separate key personnel files:

- PI Template (includes Dual-PI information and Leadership Plan, if applicable)
- Key Personnel Template (includes all other key personnel on project, including co-investigators, consultants, or other significant contributors)

For each person listed as key personnel (including PI, dual-PI, co-investigator, consultant, or other
significant contributors, as noted in the sections below), complete a Profile/Biosketch section (up to five pages per individual). Note that you may submit the most recently posted National Institutes of Health (NIH)-formatted biosketch in lieu of a PCORI-formatted biosketch. Patient and stakeholder partners serving as key personnel may choose to complete the Patient and Stakeholder Partner Profile/Biosketch form in lieu of the Professional Profile/Biosketch.

**PI Template**

Applicants must complete the **PI Template** for the lead researcher(s). Depending on the nature of the proposed study, a collaborative and multidisciplinary team might be required. PCORI permits applicants to name a **maximum of two** PIs within an application. The PIs may be from the same or different institutions. Each PI is accountable and responsible for the conduct of the award and for ensuring that all awarded milestones, deliverables, and reports are completed in accordance with the award terms and conditions.

If proposing a dual-PI application, you must designate one as the Contact PI. The Contact PI must be employed by the applicant institution and listed first within the application. Although PCORI will recognize both PIs, the Contact PI is responsible for submitting the application and for communications between the PIs and PCORI, including coordinating meetings with PCORI staff.

Complete a Profile/Biosketch (up to five pages per individual) for the PIs, and as appropriate the dual-PI. Combine the profile/biosketches and into a single PDF file. The Contact PI profile/biosketch should be the first item in this upload. If applicable, attach the Leadership Plan to this file as the last item in this upload. Upload the file to the designated field in PCORI Online.

**Leadership Plan (Required if Proposing a Dual-PI Application)**

Applicants proposing a dual-PI application, must include a **Leadership Plan** (up to five pages). The Leadership Plan must (1) describe the governance and organizational structure of the leadership team and the research project; (2) delineate the administrative, technical, scientific, and engagement responsibilities for each PI and the rationale for submitting a dual-PI application; (3) discuss communication plans and the process for making decisions on scientific and engagement direction; and (4) describe the procedure for resolving conflicts.

**Note:** Only the Contact PI may submit the application to PCORI.

**Key Personnel Template**

The **Key Personnel Template** should include all biosketches/profiles for the remaining study team members identified as key personnel. Complete a Profile/Biosketch section (up to five pages per individual) for each person listed as key personnel, copying the tables provided as needed. At a minimum, each profile must include the person’s name, title, and degree(s). PCORI is especially interested to learn how each individual’s previous experience, past performance, and training in the field of PCOR has prepared him or her to conduct this research. You must also describe the backgrounds, relevant experiences, and roles of patient and stakeholder partners.
**Project/Performance Site(s) and Resources Template**

The **Project/Performance Site(s) and Resources Template** may not exceed 15 pages. Demonstrate in detail that the proposed facilities have the appropriate resources required to conduct the project as planned, within budget, and on time.

Applicants must provide a description of the facilities they will use during the project, including capacity, capability, characteristics, proximity, and extent of availability to the project.

**Letters of Support**

Save all Letters of Support as a single PDF file and upload it to PCORI Online, using the [Letters of Support Table](#) as the first page of the file. Follow the guidance below and in the table template to enable easy reference for merit reviewers and PCORI staff. Reviewers are asked to consider the Letters of Support as outlined in the template and in this guidance. Failure to assemble the letters properly may result in the reviewers missing key information. If this occurs, PCORI will not send the application for re-review because it will be deemed an error in application assembly, not an error in review.

All Letters of Support must be addressed to the PI and demonstrate the commitment of key personnel and supporting organizations (e.g., dual-PI, co-PI, co-investigators, consultants, patient and stakeholder partners, stakeholder organizations) to the proposed project. Letters of Support are not required for personnel who are not contributing in a substantive, measurable way to the project’s scientific development or execution. Letters of Support must reflect clearly the involvement and material contribution to be provided by the signatory parties and are meant to confirm the commitment of collaboration.

PCORI may contact any individuals or organizations included in the Letters of Support with questions or to confirm support as described in the letters.

Letters of Support must be organized as follows:

- **Letters of Organizational Support**: Provide a letter (or letters, if applicable), signed by the department chair or appropriate organizational official, that confirms the institutional support of the proposed project; space to conduct the research; equipment; and other resources available for the project, including staff. PCORI also strongly encourages you to provide a letter from the department or organization leadership affirming support to disseminate research findings that are appropriate and warranted for implementation.

- **Letters of Collaboration**: Provide a signed letter from each collaborating individual or organization that will demonstrate the PI has the support or resources necessary for the proposed work. Letters of Support from patient and stakeholder partners must describe clearly the origin of the study topic and the role of the partners in defining the question, comparators, goals and outcomes, and so on. PCORI also strongly encourages letters from patient or stakeholder partners or partnering organizations affirming support to disseminate and implement research findings that are germane and warranted for implementation. Include for each consultant a Letter of Support verifying the work to be performed and the negotiated rate.
• **Letters Confirming Access to Patient Populations, Data Sets, or Additional Resources:** If the proposed Research Plan involves access to patient populations, data sets, or additional resources, include a Letter of Support that confirms such access, signed by the individual with approval authority. If access cannot be confirmed at the time of contract negotiation, PCORI reserves the right to withhold funding until the PI has demonstrated support for and access to the relevant population(s) and/or resources.

List all letters in the table (adding rows as needed), and include the page number on which each letter can be found in the single PDF file.

**Resubmission Letter**

An applicant may resubmit an application that was not funded but that did complete PCORI's merit review process (i.e., the applicant received a summary statement). See the Resubmission Policy for more information.

Resubmitted applications require completion and submission of a one-page Resubmission Letter. The Resubmission Letter provides an opportunity for applicants to give a high-level overview of how the application has been strengthened in its scientific merit and responsiveness to the current PFA. Simply responding to previous reviewers’ concerns is not sufficient; the application must be programmatically responsive and demonstrate methodological rigor and patient-centeredness. The Resubmission Letter will inform the merit reviewers’ understanding of the ways in which the applicant has made efforts to strengthen the application, and reviewers will evaluate the application based on its responsiveness to the PFA and the merit review criteria.

Applicants that previously submitted a dual-PI application and are now proposing a single-PI application, or that wish to make a change in the previous PI team, must address the rationale for the change within the Resubmission Letter.

PCORI evaluates all applications using the same merit review criteria found in the program-specific PFA.
Appendix 1: Example Milestones

Milestones are significant events, deliverables, tasks, or outcomes that occur over the course of each project and signify study progress. The completion of each milestone is intended to mark progress toward the project goals and to ensure that the project is on schedule and likely to be completed within the contract period. As part of Merit Review Criterion 3, reviewers evaluate the submitted milestone schedule to assess the feasibility of the study plan.

The following are examples of milestones and deliverables to be submitted to PCORI. You may reference this list as you complete this section of your application.

Required:

- Awardees must submit a PCORI Progress Report in PCORI Online at least every six months.
- A final progress report is due at the end of the period of performance.

Within first six to nine months of an executed contract:

- Develop, finalize, and submit a copy of the IRB-approved study protocol in accordance with the PCORI Methodology Standards.
- Submit IRB approval in PCORI Online (continuing approval submitted annually).
- Select and register the project at the site most appropriate for the study design (ClinicalTrials.gov, RoPR, or other as approved by PCORI before the study start date), if applicable. This must occur prior to initiation of recruitment.
- Submit an updated recruitment plan. This must occur prior to initiation of recruitment. Elements in the recruitment plan should, at a minimum, include the following: timeline; total target sample size for primary analysis; name and number of study sites; historical patient volume and estimated eligible number across study sites; estimated yield/consent; estimated loss to follow-up/attrition or cross-over (as applicable); and estimated monthly enrollment.

Remainder of contract:

- Methodological research deliverables and findings, including, but not limited to, the following:
  - Instruments and frameworks
  - Summaries of completed primary methodological activities
  - Manuscripts
- Primary Completion Date (if applicable):
  - This follows the NIH definition pertaining to the primary outcome. The NIH definition of Primary Completion Date is the date when the final subject was examined or received an intervention for the purposes of final collection of data for the primary outcome. This milestone should be relocated so that it falls chronologically based on when the study expects to complete data collection for the primary aim. This date must precede the estimated submission date of the DFRR.
  - An estimated Primary Completion Date must be provided when registering the study in ClinicalTrials.gov. For studies that are not clinical trials or non-prospective observational...
studies registered on ClinicalTrials.gov, the Awardee and PCORI shall agree on a Primary Completion Date as a milestone that precedes the agreed-upon date to submit a DFRR.

- **Completion of Data Collection for All Study Aims (if applicable)**
  - Completion of Data Collection milestone should ideally occur before completion of this milestone; however, both milestones may be completed on the same date.

- **Completion of Data Analysis for All Study Aims (if applicable)**
  - Completion of this milestone must occur on or before the date of submission of the Final Progress Report. It should be scheduled to be due three months prior to submission of the DFRR.

- **Results submitted to ClinicalTrials.gov or applicable database:**
  - Awardees must ensure results are submitted to ClinicalTrials.gov or another database.
  - Submission should occur no later than 12 months after the Primary Completion Date for applicable studies. However, PCORI encourages and recommends the first submission to ClinicalTrials.gov occur within six months of the Primary Completion Date, as applicable.
  - For ClinicalTrials.gov, the generated tables are a required section in the DFRR. Results must be submitted to ClinicalTrials.gov no later than submission of the DFRR.

- **Last Submission of Results to ClinicalTrials.gov (if applicable)**
  - The specific timing of multiple milestones for submissions to ClinicalTrials.gov may vary, depending on the number of study aims (e.g., some milestones may occur after the milestones for Completion of Data Collection for All Study Aims and Completion of Data Analyses for All Study Aims). The complete and final submission of results to ClinicalTrials.gov must appear one month before the DFRR Submission milestone.

- **DFRR submission**
  - This date should be three to four months after completion of Data Analysis for All Study Aims milestone. Submit DFRR according to these instructions.

- **DFRR revisions:**
  - This date should be six months after "DFRR Submission". Upon receipt of written summary, and as applicable, the PI will make revisions and submit a revised DFRR and disposition of comments table for acceptance in accordance with PCORI policy and processes.

If awarded, a contractual milestone schedule will be negotiated and finalized with the PCORI project team. Additional reporting, such as monthly enrollment updates, may be required.
Appendix 2: Allowable and Unallowable Costs

Acceptable uses of PCORI research contract funds are those that directly support the proposed research project, including collecting and analyzing data and obtaining relevant data sets. Because PCORI primarily funds comparative clinical effectiveness research, the research projects generally involve the comparison of clinical interventions or strategies that are considered to be accepted standard of care and are not experimental or investigational. As a result, when developing a proposed Detailed Budget, applicants must think carefully about which costs derive from, and directly support, the research project, as opposed to those costs that would otherwise be incurred in the course of providing the clinical care as well as the health-related costs around which the research project is organized.

Allowable costs (i.e., those that can be included in a proposed Detailed Budget when applying for a PCORI Funding Award and charged to the award) may include the following costs that derive from and directly support the research project:

- Salaries and fringe benefits for study investigators and other research project staff (including engaged patient and other stakeholder research study partners) related to their percentage of effort on conducting the research project (Such costs may not include personnel who deliver patient care as a component of their participation in the research project.)
- Consultant fees
- Travel for mandatory investigator meetings
- Travel that is necessary for conducting the research project
- Supplies
- Equipment
- Subcontracts
- Expenses related to conducting engagement activities with patients and other stakeholders
- Other direct research expenses
- Indirect costs

A funding applicant must specifically request costs related to conducting the research project through itemization on the Detailed Budget. PCORI will consider this request in the course of making an award. The following principles and requirements generally apply to PCORI’s evaluation of the proposed budget and determination of allowable costs and should guide applicants in preparing their Detailed Budget:

- Typically, IRB fees are included in an organization’s indirect cost pool. However, PCORI will allow this expense as a direct cost if the costs are not included as part of the indirect cost rate. By submitting the application, the PI and AO certify that their institution treats IRB fees as direct costs, and that the fee is allocable to the study. IRB fees are subject to audit.
- In general, PCORI will not cover costs for study interventions that constitute the procedures, treatments, interventions, or other standard clinical care (“patient care”) that are being
proposed for comparison in the research project ("patient care costs"). The host healthcare delivery system, third-party payer, product manufacturer, developer of the intervention, or other interested party must cover the patient care costs.

- The willingness of one or more stakeholder groups to cover patient care costs incurred during the research project, even when one of the comparators is not currently directly covered by insurance, will be taken as a strong endorsement of the research project by the stakeholder group. Such commitments also indicate that the stakeholder groups will use the research study’s findings. (Such support by a stakeholder group must be discussed in the application.)

- Except for specific permission in exceptional circumstances, PCORI will not cover patient care costs.

- PCORI may consider coverage of the co-payment or co-insurance costs of participating study subjects when necessary to preserve blinding in a study or to ensure access to the study for vulnerable populations.

- PCORI will generally cover costs for ancillary tasks necessary to implement or monitor patient care as part of conducting the research project. Examples include costs for obtaining informed consent to participate in the research project, collecting data pursuant to the research protocol, or collecting and monitoring study subject data that would not normally be performed in the course of patients receiving the patient care evaluated in the research project.

PCORI will review all proposed costs. Costs must be deemed allowable, allocable, and directly necessary for the successful execution of the proposed research project. A notification of pending award is subject to budgetary review and successful contract negotiation. The actual award amount may vary. For more information, see PCORI Cost Principles.
PCORI considers computers, tablets, docking stations, mobile data and protection plans, laboratory and office furnishings, and software to be general office supplies that are not allowable as direct-cost charges.

PCORI’s authorizing law was amended by reauthorization legislation in 2019 to include a new mandate to consider, as appropriate, the full range of clinical and patient-centered outcomes data relevant to patients and stakeholders. The reauthorizing language clarifies that, in addition to the relevant health outcomes and clinical effectiveness, relevant outcomes included within PCORI-funded projects may include the potential cost burdens and economic impacts of the utilization of medical treatments, items, and services when relevant to patients and caregivers or to other stakeholders. The parameters for appropriately including such outcomes are further described in the Principles for Consideration of the Full Range of Outcomes Data.
Appendix 3: Administrative Actions

Applicants that fail to submit required documents or adhere to administrative requirements may be rejected from the merit review process. The chart below explains the reasons for rejection, modification, and appended requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Automatic Rejection</th>
<th>Modification by PCORI</th>
<th>Appended upon PCORI’s Request*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An application or LOI will be automatically rejected if any of the following apply:</td>
<td>PCORI will modify an application by removing all pages that exceed stated limits.</td>
<td>Unless an application is automatically rejected or modified, PCORI may request that the applicant submit missing documents or correct noncompliant ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exceeds the specified period of performance outlined in the PFA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exceeds the maximum budget specified in the PFA</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Has adjusted margins or font size (LOI)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does not include or has an incomplete Research Strategy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*PCORI will not accept requested documents submitted more than one business day after initial request.