Peer Review Management Services of PCORI-Funded Research Results

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

RFI # PCO-Peer Review Management

July 7, 2020

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About PCORI

In 2010, Congress authorized the establishment of PCORI as an independent nonprofit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia. The authorizing law establishes PCORI’s purpose, significant parts of its governance structure (including the appointment of PCORI’s Board of Governors and Methodology Committee), and outlines key responsibilities and requirements of PCORI. The authorizing law was amended in legislation that was signed into law on December 20, 2019. PCORI is charged with helping patients, clinicians, purchasers, and policy makers 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.” It does this by funding research guided by patients, caregivers, and the broader healthcare community, which results in high-integrity, evidence-based information.

PCORI’s strong patient-centered orientation directs attention to individual and system differences that may influence research strategies and outcomes. PCORI is charged with producing useful, relevant clinical evidence through the funding of new research and the analysis and synthesis of existing research.

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.
Purpose

This notice is for market research only to inform decisions regarding the development of strategies for Peer Review Management Services of PCORI-Funded Research Results. PCORI is specifically interested in determining the types of organizations available in the marketplace that provide these services.

This Request for Information (RFI) should not be construed as an intent, commitment, or promise to acquire services or solutions offered. PCORI will use information submitted by respondents at its own discretion and will not necessarily provide comments to respondents. PCORI will not reimburse RFI respondents for any expenses associated with responding to this RFI, though PCORI sincerely appreciates respondents’ efforts and input.

Background

PCORI issues this RFI to better understand industry capabilities to provide services regarding peer review of PCORI-funded research to ensure scientific integrity. Respondents may be vendors or teams/consortia of vendors; PCORI respectfully requests that teams/consortia identify a lead in their response.

PCORI funds research that can help patients, caregivers, clinicians, and other healthcare decision makers make better-informed decisions by providing transparent, complete, and trustworthy research results. A key tool PCORI uses in dissemination of these research results is peer review of PCORI-funded research once studies are complete, and posting of the peer-reviewed, detailed final research reports on PCORI’s website. PCORI established this model of peer review based on the legal mandate that all PCORI-funded research be peer reviewed and be publicly available on its website.

The initial approach to peer review was broadly defined in 2015 and included a requirement for each research study to culminate in a draft final research report (DFRR), describing the PCORI-funded research and loosely structured like a peer-reviewed journal article. Peer reviewers, identified as including subject matter experts, methodologists, and patients or stakeholders, would review the DFRRs for scientific integrity, adherence to PCORI’s Methodology Standards, and relevance and usefulness for patients, caregivers, and stakeholders.

PCORI’s current business strategy is to outsource the peer review functions needed to evaluate the DFRR and prepare the final research report (FRR). This may include the hiring and management of expert associate editors to manage the individual reviews and the development of a pool of peer reviewers, including nonscientists representing stakeholders in the healthcare community, who critique the DFRRs.

PCORI’s goal is to complete the high-quality, expert peer review efficiently in order to disseminate results quickly to healthcare decision makers. The peer review process, with a throughput of five to seven DFRRs arriving each month, should be completed for each project within a six-month timeline, with first peer review comments being submitted not later than 60 days following receipt of the DFRR. Factors contributing to the complexity of peer review include high variability in the quality of DFRRs received, the necessity of maintaining engagement of principal investigators through the process, the development and maintenance of a team of expert associate editors, the development and management of a reviewer pool
that includes patients and other stakeholders, and preparation of FRRs for public posting online (see Peer Review Process).

PCORI wishes to explore options to achieve the goals of its peer review program. Responses to this RFI may inform a potential future PCORI Request for Proposals from vendors wishing to provide peer review services to PCORI. PCORI finds several conditions necessary in a successful peer review program:

- **Project Leadership:** Demonstrated substantial editorial experience in a relevant scientific area, as well as demonstrated program management expertise to maintain an efficient business process
- **Associate Editors:** Experts in comparative clinical effectiveness and health services research methods who are also experienced reviewers
- **Staffing:** Personnel experienced in scientific journal peer review and production
- **Capacity:** Ability to manage high-quality peer review for five to seven draft final research reports (15,000 words plus appendices) per month; 60 days from submission to first decision letter; six months to complete peer review
- **Resources:** Access to, or demonstrated ability to develop quickly and efficiently, a large reviewer pool of subject matter experts, methodologists, patients, and other stakeholders; availability of and/or expertise using appropriate information technology to manage peer review, reviewer recruitment and training, and data security

PCORI seeks information regarding potential vendors’ experience working under the direction of a contracting entity in providing the infrastructure and support necessary to conduct peer review professional services including but not limited to the following:

- Managing the research report or manuscript submission and review system
- Procuring the necessary scientific expertise in their editorial staff (including via subcontractors, if necessary) to provide high-quality reviews to PCORI investigators regarding their final research reports
- Conducting continuous quality improvement activities to help identify ways to make peer review run more effectively and efficiently

PCORI would find it helpful for respondents to present documentation of expertise and available staff in these areas. Respondents are encouraged to think broadly about how to best achieve the desired services.
**Information Requested**

PCORI requests information to demonstrate the vendor’s capability and capacity to conduct high-quality peer review of scientific reports in a timely manner.

PCORI is requesting information about the infrastructure in place, or that can be quickly brought to scale, to conduct and manage peer review services:

1. A narrative of vendor capabilities and select case study or studies of projects related to peer review, including the types of peer review activities, areas of science, and types of reports. Literature, brochures, and/or capability summaries/statements that as a minimum identify the company’s capabilities and current solutions are permissible.
2. Lessons learned, potential challenges, and best practices in developing relationships with scientists who could serve as associate editors with appropriate expertise based on the respondent’s understanding of PCORI-funded research projects, including the respondent’s assessment of the size and scope of an appropriate associate editor pool for PCORI peer review.
3. The respondent’s current capabilities, or those it can quickly develop to scale, particularly the staff and infrastructure believed necessary to meet the workload needs for PCORI peer review. If significant subcontracting or teaming is anticipated in order to deliver the specified technical capability, the respondent should address the potential administrative and management structure of such arrangements.
4. Information on editorial data systems, data storage, and data transfer systems that PCORI should consider as necessary to demonstrate capability to maintain and share research and reviewer data with appropriate confidentiality and data security.
5. Innovations or technological advances that PCORI may wish to consider to increase its operational efficiency and execution across the peer review process.
6. Innovations or technological advances that PCORI may wish to consider to strengthen its scientific rigor across the peer review enterprise.
7. Any other information that the respondent feels would be valuable for PCORI to consider.

**Questions to Consider**

In conveying the information requested, please respond to the following specific questions, with examples where possible:

1. In what scientific areas have you conducted peer review? Have you worked in the area of medical research, especially clinical comparative effectiveness or health services research?
2. What is the typical timeline you follow for managing peer review from submission to completion?
3. How is your peer review group organized, and how are responsibilities usually divided? Where are your business components located? Do you anticipate conducting any part of the peer review process outside the United States?
4. What types of continuous quality improvement practices have you applied in the past?
5. What types of editing services can you provide (technical editing, copy editing, proofreading)? What
types of services can you provide for conversion of scientific reports to XML?

6. How large a database of reviewers do you currently have, and what are your practices for recruiting reviewers? How do you categorize or classify the expertise of your reviewers, such as methodologists, statisticians, subject matter experts, etc.? What about by clinical or methodological area of expertise?

7. Have you worked with nonscientific reviewers (i.e., laypeople such as patients and caregivers; individuals working in the field but not conducting research, such as insurers, clinicians, or hospital administrators)? If yes, please describe the capacity in which you have worked with nonscientific reviewers and your recruitment practices. If not, do you have experience engaging with the lay or professional public? (PCORI wishes to gain a sense of the peer review vendor community’s experience and preparedness to undertake this unique requirement of PCORI’s work.)

8. Are there any additional innovative technical and process-related improvements of which PCORI has not availed itself that merit consideration in response to this RFI?

**Required Information**

In the response, please provide a cover letter including the following:

- Number of years of corporate experience
- Business size
- Primary type of services provided
- Primary points of contact
- Address
- Telephone number
- Fax number
- Email address for point of contact

**Virtual Industry Day**

PCORI intends to host a Virtual Industry Day forum to discuss this RFI and the anticipated future acquisition of peer review support services. This industry day will be held on August 5, 2020, from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Eastern Time. Please reach out to rfp@pcori.org for details and registration information.

The Virtual Industry Day will provide interested companies with an overview of PCORI’s peer review program and an opportunity to gather more information prior to the potential issuance of a future solicitation. Prospective respondents will gain a better understanding of the objectives of this RFI. The Virtual Industry Day will also allow PCORI to hear about novel approaches to peer review management and specifically to the challenges described above.

**Submission Guidelines**

Interested organizations should submit responses to this RFI, **not to exceed 25 pages**, including all attachments, charts, etc. (single-spaced, 12-point font minimum). Brevity and structured format (such as bulleted items) are encouraged. All proprietary information should be marked as such; responses will be
held as confidential. PCORI will provide confirmation of response submission, but respondents will not receive individualized feedback.

Respondents are encouraged to think broadly about how they can best support or achieve the objectives described in the “Background” section above. Additional information on relevant matters or issues not raised in this RFI is welcomed. All information must be furnished in writing. All questions and inquiries must be in writing and emailed to rfp@pcori.org by August 19, 2020. Please reference RFI# PCO-Peer Review Management on all correspondence.

PCORI encourages participation, acknowledging that participation is completely voluntary. Respondents may choose to answer all or some of the questions above. Please note that this process is independent from any subsequent procurement processes, and participation in this RFI or lack thereof will have no bearing on any future procurement processes.

**Due Date**

Responses are due no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 18, 2020.