

NC TraCS Engagement Voucher Request for Applications

Engagement in research is the meaningful involvement of patients, caregivers, clinicians, and other healthcare partners throughout the entire research process — from planning the study, to conducting the study, to interpreting and disseminating study findings. This collaborative work leads to studies that are more relevant, useful, and reflective of patient and community needs.

Purpose

The NC TraCS Engagement Voucher Program aims to catalyze engaged clinical and translational research by providing funding to support the engagement of partners in research. These vouchers will provide up to \$5,000 to research teams proposing to engage partners **during the pre-award period*** to meaningfully inform the design and development of research questions and proposals.

The funds provided through this voucher program must be used to support engagement activities and to compensate partners for their time spent collaborating on these activities. Funded projects will ideally lead to the pursuit and obtainment of future funding for engaged research and/or scientific products such as abstracts or manuscripts.

**Applications for post-award engagement focused on developing or testing innovative or novel approaches (e.g., comparative methods, evaluation) that contribute to the evidence base related to the impact of engagement in research may also be considered. This should be discussed with PaCER staff prior to submission.*

Required consultation

All applicants are required to have a consultation with the [NC TraCS Patient and Community Engagement in Research \(PaCER\) Program](#) prior to submitting a voucher application to ensure that their proposal is within the scope of the funding mechanism and to gauge appropriateness and feasibility. For those Principal Investigators (PIs) expecting to contract with NC TraCS Engaged Research Services, please check with our staff to determine service availability for your project.

Principal Investigator eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Principal Investigator (PI), applicants must be affiliated with University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), North Carolina State University (NC State) or North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (N.C. A&T) in one of the following ways:

- Permanent faculty or non-faculty EHRA staff
- Postdoctoral trainee, medical resident, clinical fellow, or graduate student who anticipates *being at UNC for at least 16 months* after submitting a voucher application.
 - *All students and trainees applying for the voucher are required to have a faculty mentor who will complete the Mentor Responsibility Agreement.* This mentor assumes responsibility for completion of the proposed work should the student awardee leave UNC-Chapel Hill/NC State/N.C. A&T without fulfilling the voucher requirements.
- Community partners *who are actively partnering with research teams at UNC-Chapel Hill, NC State or N.C. A&T.* A community partner can be an individual or organization within a community who may fairly represent community interests, needs, and/or concerns because they are both knowledgeable about and empowered to represent that community.



- *Community partners applying for the voucher are required to have a faculty partner who will complete the Faculty Partner Responsibility Agreement. This faculty partner takes full responsibility for completion of the proposed work should the awardee be unable to fulfill the Engagement Program Voucher requirements.*

Note: *Priority will be given to early career PIs or to emerging community-engaged researchers who are seeking to fund new approaches to engagement.*

Co-PIs are allowed, although one person must be identified as the main contact with primary responsibility for the engagement project.

Funding

Vouchers will be awarded for up to \$5,000. However, PIs can request a larger award if they can justify the need for more funds to successfully complete the proposed work. Such requests must be discussed with PaCER staff *prior to voucher submission*. If justified, the additional funding request will be reviewed along with the application and funding decisions will be made accordingly. All applications will undergo a budgetary review at the time of submission to ensure that proposed expenses are allowable. Voucher budgets are to cover up to 12 months of expenditures, with the budget start date to be agreed upon by the awardee PI and program staff.

Funds can be used to support a variety of engagement-related expenses. A non-exhaustive list is below. As mentioned above, applicants are required to consult with a PaCER staff member prior to submission – during that time, intended expenses can be discussed to determine appropriateness for this funding mechanism.

Voucher funds may be used to:

- Compensate community/patient partners or organizations for advising research approaches (e.g. via individual consultation, advisory board membership, feedback session, conferences or retreats, etc.). We recommend an hourly compensation rate of \$68/hour.
- Compensate NC TraCS Latine Community Review Board (CRB) members for material review and linguistic/cultural adaptation of research protocols/materials. [Request a consultation](#) with the TraCS Inclusive Science Program for current CRB member compensation rates.
- Support interpretation/translation services to facilitate communication with community/patient partners.
- Support miscellaneous costs associated with engagement (e.g. travel and mileage reimbursement, food for in-person meetings, childcare, related supplies.)
- Contract with [NC TraCS Engaged Research Services](#). This includes contracting with NC TraCS staff to support the design and implementation of Community Feedback Sessions, Latine CRB review, advisory board development, charettes, and meeting facilitation. *As of July 2024, billable services are charged at a rate of \$70/hour for services provided during business hours (M-F 8am-5pm) and \$95/hour for services provided after business hours (rates subject to change annually). Before billable work can begin, NC TraCS requires a Memorandum of Understanding specifying the agreed-upon scope of work, timeline, and billing/invoicing.*

For additional information and guidance on compensation, see the [Engagement Voucher Start Up Procedures \(pdf\)](#).

Requirements for funded vouchers

Evaluation and tracking

Once funded, NC TraCS requires that the PI provide an interim (at ~6 months) and final report to monitor progress of the award. PIs will ask their partners to respond to an evaluation request about their experience with the engagement activities supported by the voucher. Once the award is completed, PIs are expected to respond to follow-up inquiries to communicate future outcomes resulting from the voucher.

IRB

Full protocol Institutional Review Board ([IRB](#)) submission is usually not required for engagement activities. However, funded proposals will be required to have a Not Human Subjects Research (NHSR) determination from the UNC IRB for the engagement activities planned before voucher activities can begin. The request must be made through [IRBIS](#) (the online application for IRB approvals for Human Subjects Research) using the NHSR form. If the application is focused on developing or testing innovative or novel approaches (e.g., comparative methods, evaluation) that contribute to the evidence base related to the impact of engagement in research, full protocol IRB submission will likely be required.

Funding disbursement

Financial administration of the engagement voucher will be handled by NC TraCS. PIs will submit organizational and/or individual partner invoices to NC TraCS for the agreed upon compensation. Generally, individual partners must be compensated as Community Collaborators, and organizations as Vendors. For questions about funding disbursement, email engagement.nctracs@unc.edu

Application procedure

For current engagement voucher deadlines, visit the program webpage [here](#). The application is available to complete using the online system called Foundant accessed at www.grantinterface.com. After creating an account, click “Apply”, then search on “Voucher” to find this funding opportunity within the online application system. A copy of the application is also available for downloading. Review the [FAQ](#) for further details about the engagement voucher program.

Funding decisions will be announced within 30-45 days of the application due date. Every applicant will be notified by email whether or not their application is selected for funding, and all applicants, funded or not, will receive written reviews.

If resubmitting a proposal previously submitted to NC TraCS, applicants must provide a summary detailing amendments and improvements to the original proposal. Applicants are limited to one resubmission per proposal (i.e., an original submission and one resubmission).

Review considerations & process

Voucher applications will be reviewed by NC TraCS staff and community partners. Applications must demonstrate the following factors:

- **Meaningful engagement**
 - Active and meaningful engagement between researchers and partners to collaboratively design/refine questions, identify outcomes, conduct the study, disseminate results, and/or plan future studies.
 - Clarity in expected partner roles and contributions (this may be further defined with partners later) including the communication flow between partners and the study team, and partner involvement in decision-making.
- **Appropriateness**
 - Involvement of partners (e.g., patients, caregivers, clinicians, policymakers, researchers, and other groups) to ensure representative input from population(s) of interest or those impacted by the research.
 - A frequency and [level of engagement](#) that is appropriate for the research goals, study team experience/skills with engagement, and partner needs.

- **Feasibility**
 - The budget proposal can reasonably support the planned engagement activities.
 - A clear plan for identifying and recruiting partners.
 - The PI or study team has developed relationships with identified partners or has existing ties with the community of interest.
 - Support for partner participation has been considered and budgeted (e.g., location, compensation, staff time, childcare, etc.)
 - The activities described can be completed within the 12-month voucher deadline.
- **Impact**
 - The potential of the voucher-funded engagement activities to significantly impact and add value to ongoing or future research projects, activities, or agendas.
 - The project's potential to lead to future funding for engaged research and/or scientific products like abstracts or manuscripts.

In addition to addressing the required criteria above, favorably reviewed voucher applications will also address the additional factors listed below:

- **Priority**
 - A focus on North Carolina health priorities (as identified in county and state health assessments), research topics relevant to the community of interest, or a research question identified by a partner group (including communities, patients, caregivers, clinicians, etc.).
 - *For a set of public health indicators and targets for the state over the next decade, see the Healthy NC 2030, available at <https://nciom.org/healthy-north-carolina-2030/>*
- **Capacity building for partners**
 - Training or opportunities for growth are available to partners participating in this engagement project.
- **Sustainability of partnership**
 - Plans to continue the partnership formed under this award or to engage partners in future work are outlined.
 - Strategies for ensuring sustainability are considered.
- **Contributions to the science of engagement**
 - Planned engagement activities are focused on innovative or novel approaches (e.g., comparative methods, evaluation) that contribute to the evidence base related to the impact of engagement in research or the [science of engagement](#).
 - Potential for engagement activities to lead to additional funding for engaged research and/or scientific products (abstracts, manuscripts) related to the science of engagement.

Questions concerning applications may be submitted via email to the NC TraCS PaCER Program at: engagement.nctracs@unc.edu.