

North Carolina TraCS Institute Pilot Grant Program \$2K Stakeholder Engagement Voucher Instructions

Due to uncertainty around COVID-19, a new application section asks applicants to specifically discuss the feasibility of their timeline and their ability to complete the work under the current [restrictions](#) on research activities at UNC and state orders related to social distancing.

Purpose

Health research stakeholder engagement brings together investigators with health stakeholders working collaboratively to advance translational research capacity informed by stakeholder partners. Equitable stakeholder engagement partnerships demonstrate sustainability, stakeholder capacity building, and clear mechanisms for stakeholders to inform the development of hypotheses, research design, dissemination strategies, and/or approaches to engaging with communities. NC TraCS provides vouchers in the amount of \$2,000 to compensate health research stakeholders for their time in collaborating on translational research studies as well as to cover other costs associated with stakeholder engagement.

Proposal Requirements

When preparing the stakeholder engagement voucher application, investigators must include strategies for achieving the following goals of equitable stakeholder engagement:

- **Involvement** – Is there evidence of active & meaningful engagement among researchers and stakeholder partners to formulate questions, identify outcomes, conduct the study, disseminate results, and/or plan future studies? In other words, is there room for change in the study based on stakeholder engagement? Is the frequency and level of stakeholder involvement sufficient? Are stakeholder roles & decision-making authority described clearly?
- **Priority** - Does the proposal address a North Carolina health issue or research topic relevant to the community of interest and identified by that community? For a list of identified North Carolina health priorities, see the NC Health Priorities Summary Report, available at <https://tracs.unc.edu/index.php/services/engagement>. In addition, the translational significance for North Carolina of the research or proposed research being supported by the stakeholder engagement project should be clear within the proposal.
- **Appropriateness** - Is the stakeholder engagement plan appropriate for the associated research study? Does the stakeholder engagement plan include the right people (e.g., researchers, patients, caregivers, clinicians, policymakers & other stakeholders) to ensure its success?
- **Feasibility** – Is there a clear plan for identifying and recruiting stakeholders? Has the investigator developed relationships with identified stakeholders? Can the activities be completed within the 12 month deadline? Are stakeholder conditions for participation considered (e.g., location, compensation, time, childcare, etc.)?
- **Capacity building for stakeholders** – Will training or capacity building opportunities be available to stakeholders participating in this stakeholder engagement project?
- **Sustainability of stakeholder partnership** – Are there plans for sustaining the partnership’s work beyond the funding period? How will the researchers ensure sustainability?

Is My Project a Pilot Study or a Stakeholder Engagement Project?

Both pilot studies and stakeholder engagement projects can be used to learn about patient and community perspectives on a study topic or a research design. However, there are some key differences. Seeking the perspectives of patients, providers, caregivers or community members (stakeholders in the health topic) does not automatically mean the activity is a stakeholder engagement project.

The criteria below can be used to help you decide whether it is most appropriate to submit a proposal for a \$2K Pilot Award or a \$2K Stakeholder Engagement Voucher. We encourage you to request a consultation with the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Program to further discuss the appropriateness of applying for a \$2K Stakeholder Engagement Voucher to support your project.

Indicators your project may be a pilot study

- Researchers conduct surveys, interviews, or focus groups to learn about the perspectives of those affected by the health topic
- Engagement activities produce data (e.g., survey responses or qualitative data) that researchers analyze or use to make decisions
- Participants receive incentives for their involvement (e.g., gift card)
- Researchers engage with each participant only for the time needed to collect data
- Also: proposals where budget will support hiring community-based research assistants to conduct specific aspects of the study (e.g., to collect data)

Indicators your project may be a stakeholder engagement project

- Researchers have meetings and conversations with those affected by the health topic to learn about their perspectives
- Engagement activities inform research questions, study design, data collection methods, analyses, or dissemination of findings
- Researchers partner with stakeholders to design and conduct a study (i.e., stakeholders influence *how* study is conducted; stakeholders and researchers collaborate to make decisions about the study)
- Stakeholders are compensated for their time and expertise (e.g., as an independent contractor)
- Researchers engage with stakeholders on multiple occasions over a period of time

Due to uncertainty around COVID-19, a new application section asks applicants to specifically discuss the feasibility of their timeline and their ability to complete the work under the current restrictions on research activities at UNC (see UNC website: [“Updated Guidance for Research Activities in response to COVID-19”](#)) and state orders related to social distancing. Applicants should assure reviewers that the proposed work is allowable and achievable under the current restrictions. This is a new and important review criterion.

Required Consultation

A consultation with the [NC TraCS Community and Stakeholder Engagement Program](#) is required before submitting. During this consultation, Community and Stakeholder Engagement Program staff can help applicants gauge the appropriateness of a proposal and budget.

PI Eligibility

Eligible to apply as principal investigators (PIs) are:

- UNC-CH researchers whose appointments allow them to serve as PI on externally sponsored research projects. In practice, this restricts UNC-CH eligibility to permanent faculty, non-faculty researchers,

postdoctoral trainees, medical residents, clinical fellows, and doctoral students. All trainees applying for the \$2K voucher are required to have a faculty mentor who will complete the Mentor Responsibility Agreement.

- Faculty members of NC TraCS Institute-affiliated institutions.

Co-PIs are allowed, although one person must be identified as the main contact with primary responsibility for the stakeholder engagement project. SPA and EHRA non-faculty staff are not eligible to apply as PIs.

Please note that PIs are not able to apply for a \$2K health research stakeholder voucher and the \$2K pilot grant program for the same project at the same time.

Funding

Each award will provide a \$2,000 voucher to cover costs associated with health research stakeholder collaborations with researchers. Grant budgets are to cover up to 12 months of expenditures. NC TraCS expects that all funds will be expended by the end of the grant period. TraCS Community and Stakeholder Engagement Program staff will work closely with investigators throughout the grant period to monitor progress and, where necessary, provide mentoring. TraCS will expect the PI to provide an interim and final report on the outcomes of the \$2K voucher and whether or not the \$2K voucher contributed to new external funding.

Eligible Uses of the \$2K Voucher

Investigators may utilize the funds to compensate health research stakeholders or to cover costs associated with the stakeholder engagement project, such as meeting space, travel, food, and childcare. Research stakeholders may be compensated for a variety of activities, including the development, review, and dissemination of research materials, organizing community outreach activities, developing community liaisons to support research activities, and the design of recruitment and retention strategies for populations underrepresented in health research.

Financial administration of the Health Research Stakeholder Engagement \$2K voucher may be handled by the researcher's department or by NC TraCS. Community and Stakeholder Engagement staff can help voucher recipients determine the most feasible option. Organizational and individual stakeholders will invoice the department or NC TraCS for the agreed upon compensation. Generally, individual stakeholders must be compensated as independent contractors, and organizations as vendors. Note that it may be difficult to compensate state employees as research stakeholders. For additional information and guidance on compensation, see the Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines available at <https://tracs.unc.edu/index.php/services/engagement>.

IRB documentation

Full protocol and IRB submission are usually not required for proposals that are for grant preparation or for the dissemination of results. This determination can be made post-review. Proof of IRB approval will be required for proposals for health research stakeholder engagement activities to be conducted while participants are actively enrolled.

Review criteria

A review committee will examine each proposal. The translational research project will be reviewed for significance to human health, translational attributes, and soundness of methods. The stakeholder engagement project will be reviewed for significance of stakeholder involvement, priority of topic area, appropriateness of

methods, capacity building opportunities for stakeholders, sustainability of the partnership, and feasibility of the project goals being accomplished within the COVID-19 restrictions. If resubmitting a proposal previously submitted to NC TraCS, please provide a summary detailing amendments and improvements to the original proposal. Applicants are limited to *two submissions per proposal (i.e., (an original submission and one resubmission))*. *This rule applies even if the application is resubmitted under another pilot mechanism (i.e., as a \$2K- or \$5-50K pilot application)*. *At this point, an application may only be resubmitted if the investigator has utilized TraCS resources to substantially amend and improve the proposal, as certified by Community and Stakeholder Engagement Program staff.* “

Application procedure

Application deadlines are monthly. The application is available to complete online [here](#). Notification of awards will be made generally within 5 weeks of the due date. Every applicant will be notified by email whether or not their application is selected for funding. Whether funded or not, all applicants will receive written reviews.

Tips for writing a successful application

- **Section 1:** The translational research study – Describe the research study for which health research stakeholder engagement is sought. The reviewers are drawn from a wide range of scientific disciplines. Therefore, avoid (or define) technical jargon or specialized abbreviations or acronyms. Pitch your narrative toward a more general audience than you might for an NIH Study Section.
- **Section 2:** The Stakeholder Engagement Project – Describe your proposed health research stakeholder engagement strategies and how health research stakeholder engagement will improve the grant application or research project described in section 1. Address timelines and feasibility. You may be confident that you can complete your work within 12 months, but the reviewers don’t know that. Address how long it will take to plan and implement your health research stakeholder engagement project and follow up activities. Explain how researchers have identified stakeholders so that reviewers will know what skills and expertise they will bring to the research study. If stakeholders have not been identified, provide strategies for stakeholder recruitment.
- **Budget** – The budget categories should match the activities proposed. The maximum allowable voucher is \$2,000, to be expended over a maximum of 12 months. If your health research stakeholder engagement plan requires more than this amount, describe a specific source for the extra funds.

Questions concerning applications may be submitted by investigators via email to the NC TraCS Community and Stakeholder Engagement Program at: engagement.nctracs@unc.edu.