

## 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 and technical assistance to support the engagement of partners in research. These vouchers will provide *up to \$3,000 in funding* as well as *in-kind staff support* to research teams proposing to engage partners in **1) projects that advance the science of engagement\*** and/or **2) 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, including compensating 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.

Furthermore, in-kind staff support will be provided by NC TraCS' Engaged Research Services to support project engagement activities. Applicants must propose clearly defined collaboration with one or more of these services, and must coordinate with relevant NC TraCS staff prior to proposal submission to define scope and ensure alignment with service offerings and capacity. Further details are included below.

\*The **science of engagement** is defined as the development and testing of innovative approaches to build evidence on the impact of engagement in research. This includes the development or testing of measures to capture the structure, process, or outcomes of engagement in research; the development or testing of engagement methods to determine the most effective approaches for engagement; and exploration of how effective methods should be adapted or resourced for different contexts. To learn more:

- Watch the NC TraCS webinar titled "[Exploring the Science of Engagement: Insights and Resources to Help Grow and Fund Your Research Ideas](#)". This discussion was hosted in December 2025, and provides definitions, resources, and examples of 'science of engagement' projects.
- Visit the [Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute's \(PCORI\) website](#) to learn more about how they define the Science of Engagement and explore their supplemental resources and larger-scale funding opportunities. *Note: Cycle 3 of PCORI's SoE Award is currently open (LOIs due September 8, 2026; Applications due January 12, 2027). We encourage applications to the NC TraCS Engagement Voucher Program that support the development of PCORI SoE awards working toward this deadline.*

## 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. Prior to proposal submission, applicants are also required to consult with the NC TraCS program from which they will receive in-kind services in order to collaboratively determine an appropriate scope of work. Applications that have not completed the required consultations will not be eligible for funding.

## Principal Investigator eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Principal Investigator (PI), applicants must be affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill), 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 \$3,000**. 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 participation, conference or retreat attendance, etc.). We recommend an hourly compensation rate of \$80/hour.
  - Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with NC TraCS community partners via the NC TraCS [Multilingual Community Review Board \(MCRB\)](#) and [Community and Patient Advisory Board](#). Compensation rates for these partners are dictated by NC TraCS.
- 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).

## In-Kind Support from NC TraCS

NC TraCS offers a suite of contracted engagement services to support teams as they collaborate with community and patient partners. Voucher applicants are required to propose collaboration with one or more of these services, which will be provided in-kind at no cost to the project team.

Eligible services offered through the NC TraCS PaCER Program include those listed below. Other PaCER services may be eligible if directly connected to the project's engagement aims and should be discussed with PaCER staff. To learn more, visit: [tracs.unc.edu/services/engagement/engagement-services](https://tracs.unc.edu/services/engagement/engagement-services).

- *Community Feedback Sessions*
- *Engagement Meeting Facilitation*
- *Data Parties*
- *Engagement Coaching*
- *Patient Partner Training Delivery*

Eligible services offered through the NC TraCS ADAPT Program include collaboration with their *Multilingual Community Review Board* to support Spanish-language material review and linguistic/cultural adaptation of research protocols/materials. Other ADAPT services may be eligible if directly connected to the project's multilingual engagement aims and should be discussed with ADAPT staff. To learn more, visit: [tracs.unc.edu/adapt](https://tracs.unc.edu/adapt).

If selected for funding, before work can begin, NC TraCS will require a Memorandum of Understanding specifying the agreed-upon scope of work and timeline.

## 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 the awardee's primary department. At the start of the voucher award period, NC TraCS will coordinate with the awardee to transfer funds accordingly. If funds remain at the end of the voucher award period, they must be transferred back to NC TraCS. NC TraCS may periodically ask for updates on fund expenditures.

## 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 [grantinterface.com](http://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 document](#) for further details about the engagement voucher program.

Funding decisions will be announced within 45-60 days of the application due date. Every applicant will be notified by email whether 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.
  - The scope of work for in-kind services aligns with project goals and is feasible within the proposed timeframe.
  - A clear plan exists 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:

- **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.
- **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 [nciom.org/healthy-north-carolina-2030](https://nciom.org/healthy-north-carolina-2030)*
  - Demonstration of how the study and/or its engagement approaches have the potential to improve health equity for populations experiencing related health disparities.
- **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.

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