

PS-OC U54 ([PAR-14-169](#)) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Updated 09/24/15

ASSIST - Application Submission System & Interface for Submission Tracking

You are strongly encouraged to upload and test your application in ASSIST at least FIVE days prior to the application deadline. This will allow time to correct any formatting or technical errors. Once the deadline passes (5:00 PM local time on November 25th) you will no longer be able to access your application to correct errors.

- ASSIST can be accessed here: <https://public.era.nih.gov/assist/public/login.do>
- Familiarize yourself with ASSIST early.
- Pay attention to the order of the application components to save time and reduce errors.
- ASSIST Resources
 - Instructional Webinar: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/webinar_docs/webinar_20130813.htm
 - Online Help: <http://era.nih.gov/erahelp/ASSIST/Default.htm>
- Problems accessing or using ASSIST should be directed to the eRA Commons Help Desk: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/ElectronicReceipt/support.htm>

PD/PI Questions

Q: Is there a required effort level for the PS-OC PD(s)/PI(s)?

A: Yes. Each PD/PI must each commit and maintain through the life of the award a minimum of 1.2 calendar months (CM) of effort. The PD/PI effort may be an aggregate of efforts in different components of the Center. Additionally, each Project and Core lead must commit and maintain through the life of the award a minimum of 0.6 calendar months (CM) of effort. Make sure to distinguish effort level (time) from salary.

Q: Does the multi-PD/PI plan need to address all of the faculty and coordination during the project or should it focus on the PD/PIs?

A: The major focus of the multi-PD/PI plan should be the PDs/PIs and how they will share responsibility of leading a project (*i.e.*, a leadership plan). The collaborators could be mentioned in terms of how the PDs/PIs will plan to coordinate their contribution to the project.

Q: Does the PS-OC PD/PI have to be a physical scientist?

A: If there is a single PD/PI, the PD/PI must be a physical scientist. If there are multiple PDs/PIs, the contact PD/PI must be a physical scientist.

Q: What is the definition of physical scientist for the purposes of this funding opportunity?

A: Physical scientist is defined loosely and broadly for this funding opportunity. Disciplines can include engineering, chemistry, computer sciences, materials sciences, mathematics, physics, or other related fields. Physical scientists should have expertise in at least one of these areas. Expertise can be established through training and/or a body of work that demonstrates impact in the field.

Collaboration Questions

Q: The PS-OCs are bringing together people with diverse expertise. Is it a requirement for everyone to have published together?

A: There is no requirement that everyone on the team has previously published together. However, it will likely be considered a strength if at least some members of the team have previously published together.

Q: Are NIH intramural investigators allowed to participate as Center personnel or collaborators?

A: NIH intramural investigators may participate as Center personnel or collaborators but they cannot receive funds from the PS-OC FOA.

Q: How can people participate in the Physical Sciences-Oncology Network if they are not funded through a PS-OC or Physical Sciences-Oncology Project (PS-OP)?

A: Connect with investigators from the Network that are potential collaborators. For example, many PS-OCs advertise their annual symposiums and Pilot Project funding opportunities on their Center websites which can be found on the [PS-ON website](#).

Q: What are the limits on foreign components and collaborations?

A: The PI and submitting institution must be within the United States but there can be a foreign component. The domestic grantee must demonstrate that they are doing a substantial portion of the work and leading the overall research effort.

Q: When listing potential collaborations, should we identify specific investigators that we would want to work together with on a project?

A: Try to avoid this, as it could create potential conflicts of interest. Instead, list strategies for the type of expertise you would utilize for creating collaborations that would tie into your research projects.

Q: Are multiple institutions allowed for the PS-OCs?

A: Yes multiple institutions are allowed. If including multiple institutions will create challenges in areas such as communication or sharing of biospecimens, these issues should be addressed in the application.

Center Advisory Committee (CAC) Questions

Q: Should we identify the members of the CAC?

A: The first four CAC members (the PD/PI (contact PD/PI for applications with multiple PDs/Pis), one additional physical scientist, and two cancer researchers) should be identified. The NCI Project Scientist will be named after award. External scientific advisors **should not be identified** to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest. Instead, applicants should describe the types of expertise external advisors will have.

Q: Can Center Advisory Committee (CAC) members be from outside the Center?

A: The CAC will consist of **key Center personnel** and NCI program staff. The five voting members of the CAC should include four key Center personnel (the PD/PI (contact PD/PI for applications with multiple PDs/Pis), one additional physical scientist, and two cancer researchers) and one voting NCI Project Scientist (to be named after award). Additionally, the CAC should include non-voting external scientific advisors. The external advisors should be drawn from experts outside of the Center and be selected to encompass the expertise necessary to provide appropriate guidance to the Center. External advisors **should not be identified** in the application to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest. Instead, applicants should describe the types of expertise external advisors will have.

Center Pilot Project Questions

Q: Does each Center need to have multiple Pilot Projects?

A: Centers will have control over the way they use and allocate Center Pilot Project funds. Centers will have flexibility to define their priorities and their own processes for soliciting and reviewing Center Pilot Projects. For example, in a given year a Center could allot \$100K DC on a single pilot project or allot that amount over several smaller projects (*e.g.*, five \$20K pilot projects).

Q: With regard to Center Pilot Projects: should we identify specific potential projects or collaborators in the application?

A: Specific potential projects could be included, but specific collaborators should not be identified as it could create conflicts of interest. The application should also describe strategies for utilizing the Pilot Projects. For example, Pilot Projects might be geared specifically to testing high-risk, high-reward ideas. Alternatively, Pilot Projects might be geared to developing new technologies. Pilot Projects might also be used as seed funding to develop a larger project that could replace a completed or faltering Research Project within the Center. The application can also include processes for soliciting and reviewing Pilot Project proposals.

Q: Do individual Centers/applications need to designate a portion of the budget for Pilot Project funds?

A: Yes. A portion of the budget for each Center will be committed for Pilot Projects; this amount is fixed at \$100K direct costs (DC) per year. Pilot Project descriptions should not name specific potential collaborating investigators or institutions.

Trans-Network Project Questions

Q: How should potential Trans-Network Project collaborations be described when the Centers have not been established yet?

A: You do not need to describe specific potential Trans-Network Projects or specific Centers that you might collaborate with. Instead, describe expertise from your Center that may allow other Centers to test new ideas and/or describe synergistic expertise or approaches that you would utilize from other hypothetical Centers in establishing future Trans-Network projects. In the Overall Component you should briefly describe strategies to integrate the Trans-Network projects within the Center and in the Administrative Core briefly describe strategies to solicit and develop Trans-Network Projects in conjunction with the PS-ON Steering Committee. Trans-Network Project descriptions should not name specific potential collaborating investigators or institutions.

Q: Do individual Centers/applications need to designate a portion of the budget for Trans-Network Project funds?

A: Yes. A portion of the budget for each Center will be committed for Trans-Network Projects; this amount is fixed at \$100K direct costs (DC) per year. Use and allocation of these funds will be decided by the Physical Sciences-Oncology Network (PS-ON) Steering Committee.

Shared Resource Cores Questions

Q: With regard to core availability and training for investigators from other PS-OCs: when written into the application, should this be hypothetical since the other PS-OCs have not yet been established?

A: Yes, any description of plans to make cores available to other Centers will have to be general since the other Centers are not yet established. However, if applicable, more specific plans for training internal Center members to utilize the core technologies may be included.

Budget Questions

Q: What are the required budget allocations for Trans-Network Projects, Center Pilot Projects, and the Education & Outreach Unit?

A: The required budget allocations are:

- *Trans-Network Projects* – \$100K/year direct costs (DC) – These funds are restricted for use in supporting collaborations across the Physical Sciences-Oncology Network (PS-ON). Use and allocation of these funds will be decided by the PS-ON Steering Committee

- *Center Pilot Projects* – minimum of \$100K/year DC – These funds are restricted for use in supporting Center Pilot Projects. Individual Centers will have control over the way they use and allocate these funds with concurrence from the NCI Program Director.
- *Education & Outreach Unit* – minimum of \$100K/year DC – These funds are restricted for use in supporting Education and Outreach activities. Individual Centers will have control over the way they use and allocate these funds with concurrence from the NCI Program Director.

LOI Questions

Q: Are letters of intent (LOI) required?

A: No, letters of intent are optional. However, they are helpful for NIH/NCI staff when determining the appropriate review expertise needed to evaluate the applications.

Q: What should be included in the letters of intent (LOI)?

A: The LOI is an informal and brief message that can be sent in the body of an email or as an email attachment. LOI must include: **(1)** descriptive title of proposed activity; **(2)** name(s), address(es), and telephone number(s) of the PD(s)/PI(s) **(3)** names of other key personnel; **(4)** participating institution(s); and **(5)** number and title of this funding opportunity. Additional recommended elements are: **(1)** a brief description of PS-OC organizing framework (3-5 sentences); **(2)** relevant expertise; and **(3)** keywords.

Application Focus and Content Questions

Q: Are the PS-OCs restricted to cancer problems and questions?

A: Yes, all PS-OCs should be addressing important questions in cancer biology or oncology using physical sciences perspectives and approaches.

Q: Are studies utilizing clinical data allowed?

A: Yes.

Q: Do the PS-OCs have to focus on translational research?

A: No. The PS-OCs can use physical sciences approaches and perspectives to address any important cancer research question from understanding basic cancer biology to more applied research. The Centers funded in Phase I of the program and funded to date in Phase II span a variety of research from basic fundamental cancer biology to more applied cancer research.

Q: How much preliminary data does a collaboration, specifically a new collaboration, need to show? Is independent data enough or do they need to show integrated data?

A: Collaborative preliminary data would be a strength. Alternatively, an application could demonstrate how the collaborative research would be more substantive than the individual research.

General Application Submission/Resubmission Questions

Q: Are resubmission applications allowed?

A: Yes, both resubmission (A1) and new submission applications are allowed.

Q: Will there be PS-OC receipt dates in 2016 or beyond?

A: There are currently no plans for future PS-OC receipt dates.

Q: Can existing Centers re-apply?

A: ALL submissions to PAR-14-169 will be Type 1 applications (no renewal Type 2 applications). Existing PS-OCs (Centers) are eligible to apply with a Type 1 application.

Q: What is the appropriate time to begin to have conversations with the NIH scientific/research contact(s) regarding plans to submit an application?

A: You may send an email inquiry regarding your plans to submit an application to the NIH scientific/research contact(s) anytime, either before or after the letter of intent (LOI) deadline. Since there are only 6 weeks from LOI deadline to the application receipt date, sending inquiries prior to the LOI deadline would be beneficial.

Q: How many applications are expected and how many Centers are likely to get funded?

A: We are unable to comment on the number of applications expected. Because this is a PAR and there are no funds set aside for the program, the number of funded Centers will be heavily dependent on the scores the applications receive. It is likely that the number of funded Centers will be less than the 12 Centers funded under RFA-CA-09-009.

Q: Will all of the PS-OC spots be filled prior to the third receipt date (November 25, 2015)? Can first time applicants in the third round be funded?

A: There is not a set number of slots for PS-OCs. Yes, first time applicants in the third round may be funded.

Q: If you submit a PS-OC application for the third receipt date (November 25, 2015) will there be an opportunity for resubmission?

A: There will be no resubmission option for applications submitted to the third receipt date.

Q: Can the same application be submitted to multiple FOAs?

A: In general, applications must be substantially/sufficiently different to be considered unique applications in order to be submitted to another FOA. For specific questions please inquire with the Scientific Contact(s) / Program Director(s) of the FOA(s) of interest.

Review Questions

Q: When assembling the special emphasis panel that will review the applications, how will members be identified? How much input will PS-OC Program staff have in determining members of the panel?

A: The major criteria for choosing special emphasis panel members will be based on individuals' expertise in a particular research area relevant to the applications and the lack of a conflict(s) of interest with the applicants. The NCI Scientific Review Officer (SRO) will use keywords from letters of intent and the content of the applications to convene a special emphasis panel that best represents the applications' research areas.

Q: Will the special emphasis panel be made up of a mix of experts in the physical sciences and cancer biology?

A: Yes. The special emphasis panel will include physical scientists and cancer researchers with relevant expertise according to the content the FOA (PAR-14-169) and the applications received.

Q: Do the same reviewers review an entire PS-OC or do different reviewers review individual components?

A: The details of the review process will be determined by the Scientific Review Officer (SRO). Each reviewer may evaluate the entire application, reviewers may review individual components, or a combination of both approaches may be used.

Q: Are there any criteria that distinguish successful from unsuccessful PS-OC applications?

A: Pay close attention to all of the review criteria described in the FOA and ensure that the application clearly addresses all of the questions that are presented.

Q: Will the "integration" review criteria be weighted differently from the other five standard review criteria?

A: No. All six review criteria receive the same consideration. However, please note that the overall impact score reflects the impact that the project is likely to have on the research field(s) involved, rather than being a calculation of the scores for each criterion.

Q: What is required for a PS-OC to be considered integrated?

A: Look closely at the description of the integration review criteria in the FOA and ensure that the application addresses all of the questions that are presented. In general, the application should describe a truly integrated “Center” rather than a collection of loosely related research projects and support services.

Q: Can IRB approval be submitted after the application receipt date but prior to review?

A: Yes, but it must be received a minimum of 30 days prior to review. See [NOT-OD-10-115](#) for additional details.

Q: Will there be enough time to decide whether or not to resubmit for the next submission date?

A: This will depend on the review date.

Q: How will NCI address past critiques from applicants that prior study sections included reviewers who were unenthusiastic about the potential impact of physical sciences on cancer research?

A: We ask that reviewers not bring external issues to the review and review each application in context of the requirements defined in the FOA (PAR-14-169).

Miscellaneous Questions

Q: What insight has NCI gleaned from the 2012 workshops regarding some of the successes and pitfalls of the first phase of the PS-OC program?

A: These workshops were primarily science-based on emerging themes within the program as opposed to focusing on the program infrastructure. Therefore we will not comment specifically on the success of the first phase of the program, but the design of the PS-OCs and Physical Sciences-Oncology Network (PS-ON) outlined in PAR-14-169 reflects the lessons learned (both positive and negative) from the first phase.