RUPHI-CTSI Pilot Grant Program

Comparative Effectiveness Research

The RAND-University of Pittsburgh Health Institute (RUPHI) and the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) announce a program to promote Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER) through the initiation of CER-focused projects that involve active collaborations between health services researchers from RAND and from the University of Pittsburgh. The RUPHI-CTSI Comparative Effectiveness Research Pilot Grant Program provides grants of up to $30,000 to fund pilot research projects of one-year duration that may be used to test hypotheses or to provide preliminary data that will strengthen subsequent larger scale research applications. Specifically, one of the expected products of a funded CER project is the subsequent submission of a more substantive grant application to a federal agency, foundation, or equivalent organization that maintains the collaborative arrangements between RAND and the University of Pittsburgh that were established in the pilot project. Funds are available to support five CER awards.

According to the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, comparative effectiveness research is designed to inform health care decisions by providing evidence on the effectiveness, benefits, and harms of different treatment options. The evidence is generated from research studies that compare drugs, medical devices, tests, surgeries, or ways to deliver health care.

Generally, evidence of effectiveness is found in two ways. Researchers may look at all of the available evidence about the benefits and harms of each choice for different groups of people from existing clinical trials, clinical studies, and other research. This is known as a research review, because it is a systematic review of existing evidence. Alternatively, researchers may conduct studies that compare effectiveness of tests, treatments, procedures, or health care services.

Comparative effectiveness research requires the development, use, and expansion of a variety of data sources and methods to conduct timely and relevant research and to disseminate the results in a form that can quickly be put into use by clinicians, patients, policymakers, health plans and other stakeholders.

Eligibility:

To be eligible for a RUPHI-CTSI CER Pilot Grant, a project must involve collaboration between at least one University of Pittsburgh investigator and at least one RAND investigator. Priority will be given to those projects that allow junior investigators to develop research programs and research strengths. Senior investigators will be considered to be eligible if the proposed project clearly represents a significant change to the research focus of their established research programs. It will be up to the senior investigator to convince the reviewers that this is the case.

- Pilot research projects may be led by either a RAND or a University of Pittsburgh investigator. Investigators from both the University of Pittsburgh and RAND must have demonstrable and substantial roles in the project; assessment of these roles will be a component of the review of

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the application. University of Pittsburgh investigators must hold the rank of Assistant/Research Assistant Professor, Associate/Research Associate Professor, or Professor/Research Professor. Under extraordinary circumstances, an Instructor may be deemed eligible if it can be determined that he or she is clearly on a path to an independent position. (See below.) Questions about eligibility of University of Pittsburgh investigators should be directed to Dr. Michelle S. Broido, CTSI co-director (broidoms@pitt.edu) or to Dr. Wishwa Kapoor, RUPHI and CTSI co-director (kapoorwn@upmc.edu). Such eligibility questions must be resolved before submission of the application.

- One of the goals of the CER program is to help investigators new to this area of health services research obtain experience in the field. To ensure that this goal is met, one of the investigators must be established in a field of research that is relevant to the proposed work and, as such, be able to act as the mentor of the more junior investigator.

**Application Process:**

The application must contain the following in the order listed below:

- A cover page that includes the title of the proposed pilot project and the name, degree, academic title, primary departmental affiliation, and contact information (telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address) for both the University of Pittsburgh investigator and the RAND investigator.

- A one-page abstract summarizing the study goals, design, and methods (not to exceed 250 words).

- A description of the relevant backgrounds of both the University of Pittsburgh investigator and the RAND investigator (not to exceed 200 words per investigator). If the University of Pittsburgh applicant is an instructor, a letter from his or her department chair that documents the department's long-term commitment to the applicant in his or her role as an independent investigator must be provided. Additional letters of support, e.g., from a division chief, may be included. However, letters from division chiefs, research directors, or laboratory supervisors will not be accepted in lieu of a departmental chair’s letter of support. This letter should follow the background and significance section of the application and is not included in the page or word count.

- NIH biographical sketches (PHS 398 or SF424 format) and Other Support pages for both principal investigators. Such documents should also be provided for co-investigators. These documents are not needed for consultants. The personal statement in any given biographical sketch should be appropriate for the proposed project.

- A narrative proposal of the pilot project, including specific aims and research strategy (including: significance, innovation, and approach) (not to exceed 5 single-sided pages).

- A description of how preliminary data, if successfully obtained, will be used in a substantial grant application in the future, including a description of the overall aims and a broad overview of the methods of the future grant application (not to exceed 1 single-sided page).

- A budget page and budget justification; see below.

The application must be clear, readily legible, and conform to the following three requirements: 1) the font must be 11-point; 2) margins, in all directions, must be at least ½ inch; 3) text in figures, charts, tables, figure legends, and footnotes may be smaller in size but must be in black ink and readily legible. If these are not legible, there may be a negative impact on the evaluation of the application. Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is necessary for several reasons. No applicant should have the advantage, by using small type, of providing more text in his or her application. Small type may also make it difficult for reviewers to read the application.
Budget:

 Funds may be used to cover investigator effort on the pilot project, supplies, subject honoraria, or for other purposes related directly to the conduct of the research. The monies awarded will support direct costs only; no indirect support will be provided. Mentors who are not named principal investigators may not receive funding from this program. Requests for travel support and computers must be explicitly justified in the context of the proposed research, and such requests may be denied.

All awards will be co-funded by the RAND-University of Pittsburgh Health Institute (RUPHI) and the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI). Please note that the source of funds provided by the CTSI is the Clinical and Translational Science Award (http://www.ctsaweb.org/), provided by the National Center for Research Resources, National Institutes of Health. Thus, any salary support provided using CTSI funds must reflect federal fringe benefit rates. Because awards will be co-funded between CTSI and RUPHI, investigators should be prepared to make minor adjustments to project budgets if an award is made. These adjustments will be made through discussions with appropriate CTSI and RUPHI administrators.

Submission, Review, and Award:

Applications are to be submitted electronically in pdf format to Ms. Diane Vaughn, dianev@rand.org. The e-mail message containing the pdf attachment should be copied to Ms. Melissa Penkrot, mam266@pitt.edu. Within one week of receipt of the electronic application, Ms. Vaughn will send an e-mail message acknowledging receipt. Investigators should contact Ms. Vaughn if such messages are not received.

Applications must be received by 5:00 pm on March 15, 2011. No exceptions will be made to this deadline.

Applications will be reviewed by the RUPHI-CTSI CER Review Committee, and the recommendations of this committee will be carefully considered by the RUPHI and CTSI leadership in determining which applications will receive awards. All budget items must be explicitly justified and will be reviewed by the Committee; see budget information, above. As noted, applications involving junior investigators or investigators who are changing their research interests to comparative effectiveness research are of high priority to the program.

It is anticipated that all projects responsive to this solicitation will require IRB approval. University of Pittsburgh investigators will need approval from the University of Pittsburgh IRB, and RAND investigators will need approval from the RAND IRB. Please note that no project funds can be expended until such approvals are in place. Approved protocols need not be submitted as part of the application. However, in order to minimize the time delay between approval of a project and release of funds, applicants are encouraged to prepare protocol submissions in advance of notification that an award is pending so that the protocols can be submitted for approval immediately upon such notification. University of Pittsburgh investigators are encouraged to request assistance with IRB protocol submission from the CTSI regulatory core through the CTSI Service Request System (http://www.ctsi2.pitt.edu/ServiceRequest/index.aspx) or by contacting the CTSI Regulatory Compliance Facilitator, Shannon Valenti (slv25@pitt.edu). Protocol submissions should indicate that funds to support the project have been requested from the RUPHI CTSI Comparative Effectiveness Research Pilot Program, supported by the CTSI Pilot and Collaborative Translational and Clinical Studies Core. RAND investigators should follow all standard procedures related to human subjects as set forth by the RAND Human Subjects Protection Committee (HSPC). RAND HSPC Forms A and B should be completed as soon as possible. For questions or assistance with RAND protocols, please contact Melony Sobero (msorbero@rand.org).

All applicants will be encouraged to attend or participate in: the weekly Health Services Research Seminar sponsored by the Center for Research on Health Care (CRHC), the Center for Health Equity and Promotion (CHERP), and RAND; the monthly RAND Health Brownbag Seminar Series; and the bimonthly CRHC Research Development Seminar (RDS). A RUPHI-CTSI luncheon to be held mid-way through the funding year, and applicants who receive awards from the RUPHI-CTSI CER pilot program...
will be expected to present progress reports on their projects at that luncheon. Please see the RUPHI web site for more information on RUPHI and the RUPHI-CTSI pilot grant program http://www.ruphi.pitt.edu/.

**RFA Release Date:** November 15, 2010  
**Proposal Due Date:** March 15, 2011  
**Project Start date:** July 1, 2011, pending IRB approval

**Questions Regarding the Program:**  
Scientific and other questions can be addressed to RUPHI Associate Director, Deborah Seltzer (seltzer@pitt.edu).