



# NEXT LEVEL GRANTSMANSHIP

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Colorado Foundation for Public Health & the Environment

# Objectives

- Recognize common reasons for proposal rejection
- Understand the basics of scientific writing
- Identify PCORI funding opportunities that may be appropriate for your partnership
- Describe common Letter of Intent (LOI) components and the LOI review process



# PROPOSAL REJECTION

# Common Reasons for Proposal Rejection

- Logical inconsistencies
- Project feasibility not convincing or the proposal is overly ambitious
- Significance is not clear
- Innovation
- The aims are interdependent
- Investigator lacks sufficient expertise
- Proposal is difficult to read
- Oversimplifying the problem at hand
- Incorrect nomenclature, sloppy formatting, spelling and grammatical errors, etc.
- Did not follow proposal instructions



# SCIENTIFIC WRITING

# Basic Rules for Individual Words

1. Write with the reader in mind
2. Use precise words
3. Use simple words
4. Omit unnecessary words and phrases
5. Avoid too many abbreviations

# Basic Rules for Technical Style

1. Use the active voice
2. Use past tense for observations and specific conclusions
3. Use present tense for general rules and established knowledge
4. Write short sentences. Aim for one main idea in a sentence
5. Use clear pronouns
6. Avoid errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar



# PROPOSAL WRITING

# Preliminary Steps to Writing a Proposal

1. Research targeted funders
2. Consult funding agencies
3. *(if applicable)* Write a Letter of Intent
4. Obtain and strictly follow the proposal guidelines

# Letters of Intent (LOIs)

- An LOI refers to a Letter of Intent, also known as a Letter of Interest or a Letter of Inquiry
- LOIs are non-legally binding documents that serve to express your interest in a particular funding opportunity. They can also function to introduce you and your organization to a funding organization
- The main purpose of an LOI is to allow for the funding organization to determine if there is a good match between what you are proposing to do and what they are looking to fund. If they determine there is a good match, they will invite you to submit a full application
- Funding organizations also use LOIs to get a sense of how many applications they are going to receive in order to plan the review process
- LOIs should be brief and concise (1-3 pages) while also including all the critical information necessary to make your case to the funding organizations

# LOI Writing Guidelines

- Scrutinize every sentence for detail, clarity, and conciseness
- Follow the funder's guidelines EXACTLY
- Adjust the level of writing to the review board
- Clearly identify the overall objective
- Describe the project's leadership and their expertise
- State what the funding will be used for
- End the LOI with a broad impact statement

# LOI Components

LOI requirements are going to differ from funder to funder and from announcement to announcement. In general, each LOI will need to contain the following information

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Who are you?                           | Qualifications that make you/your partnership organization well-equipped to successfully execute the proposed work   |
| What are you going to do?              | Explain your proposed project, including all relevant background information, the identified problem, your proposed solution, methodology, timelines, etc.                     |
| How does this improve things?          | Opportunity for you to express how your study addresses a critical knowledge gap, what the greater impact of your study could be, and possible future implications             |
| How much is it going to cost?          | Brief overview of proposed budget  |
| Why is this a good fit for the funder? | Make the case for why your proposed project is the perfect match for their funding opportunity. This element should be incorporated throughout the LOI and clear to the funder |



# PCORI LOI REVIEW

# PCORI Funding Opportunities

- PCORI has historically offered three cycles of funding competition each year, with the number of specific topics varying across the cycles.
- PCORI funding topics include:
  - Addressing Disparities
  - Assessment of Prevention Diagnosis and Treatment Options
  - Communication and Dissemination Research
  - Improving Health Care Systems
  - Improving Methods for Conducting PCOR
  - Pragmatic Clinical Studies to Evaluate Patient-Centered Outcomes

<http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities>

# PCORI LOI Templates

- For each funding opportunity, there is a unique LOI template that contains a series of questions designed to gauge whether your proposed project is a good fit for that specific funding topic
- While the comparison of each template is different, there are several important components that are shared across templates

| PCORI LOI Component   | Basic LOI Component  | Overview  |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Specific Aims</b><br><i>Also referred to as Objectives</i>                           | What are you going to do? Why is this a good fit for the funder? | This is where you explain exactly what you set out to do in your CER project. Specific Aims should be clear, concise, and most importantly, quickly excite the reviewers about your proposal. |
| <b>Gap Analysis</b><br><i>Also referred to as Background, Evidence Gap</i>              | How does this improve things?                                    | The Gap Analysis section allows you to set the stage for why your study is going to provide novel information that addresses a critical problem.  |
| <b>Decisional Dilemma</b><br><i>Also referred to as Decisional Uncertainty Decision</i> | How does this improve things?                                    | This section requires you to describe the specific clinical decision or treatment choice confronted by a decision maker in regards to the issue addressed by your proposal.                   |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Study Design</b><br><i>Also referred to as Methods</i>                                      | What are you going to do?  | This section is the roadmap, the manual, the blueprint of your whole project. Here you need to convince reviewers that you have a reasonable and feasible plan to go from the identified problem to the proposed solution.                                |
| <b>Comparators</b>   | What are you going to do?  | Here you will need to describe the list of comparators that you will be testing in your study. You will need to be able to describe the evidence of efficacy for each comparator and an estimate for how frequently each is used in the clinical setting. |
| <b>Outcomes</b><br><i>Also referred to as Anticipated Impact</i>                               | How does this improve things? Why is this a good fit for the funder? | This is the section where you describe what the end results will be after your study. You will need to describe primary outcomes, secondary outcomes (if applicable), and the methods used to measure and validate these outcomes.                        |
| <b>Sample Size</b><br><i>Also referred to as Power Calculations</i>                            | What are you going to do?  | This is a very specific section that describes the statistical methodology that determines how many study participants you plan to include in order to collect enough data to be confident in your conclusions.   |
| <b>Duration and Total Costs</b><br><i>Also referred to as Duration of Study, Cost of Study</i> | What are you going to do? How much is it going to cost?              | Here is where you describe the feasible timeline of your proposed study and the associated costs.   |
| <b>Engagement</b>  | What are you going to do? Why is this a good fit for the funder?     | Arguably, this is the core of all PCORI proposals. This is the section where you describe how researchers, patients, and stakeholders are involved in planning, conducting, and disseminating the study.  |

# After Submission

- After submission, PCORI will perform an administrative review to make sure there were no errors during the submission process
- The next review involves a small number of PCORI Program Officers (typically 2) who will review the content of your LOI. They are especially looking for:
  - Is the proposed topic **appropriate** to the funding announcement? In other words, is this a good match?
  - Does the proposed study **complement** the current funded portfolio? This is especially important because if they have previously funded a study similar to the one you are proposing, it is unlikely that they are going to be able to make a similar investment again.
  - Is your proposal **scientifically sound**? This is a general assessment as the Program Officers are not likely to be experts in your field. However, they will be able to assess whether you are proposing an appropriate CER question and if the study design is feasible.

- As you write your LOI, it is highly important to **keep your target audience in mind** as you build the content. While you want to present a well-crafted and articulate LOI, it is important to keep it accessible to someone who is knowledgeable of your topic but not necessarily an expert.
- In order to maximize your chances to advance through LOI review, it is highly encouraged to **contact your PCORI Program Officer** prior to constructing your LOI. Through these conversations, you can gauge whether your proposed study would be a good match for the funding program as well as whether or not it fits within the funding portfolio.
- [sciencequestions@pcori.org](mailto:sciencequestions@pcori.org)



QUESTIONS?