



**American Board
of Medical Specialties**

Higher standards. Better care.®

American Board of Medical Specialties Research Education Foundation Grants 2024–2025 Request for Proposals

Objectives

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) seeks to develop a research program to support its core mission of “serving the public and the medical profession by improving the quality of health care through setting professional standards for lifelong certification in partnership with Member Boards.”

The core action of applied research is to collect relevant data in sufficient measure to generate meaningful insights that can result in mission-relevant action. In this case, ABMS seeks original research that provides insight into the process of achieving and maintaining the competency standards for certification by any or all the 24 ABMS Member Boards. This original research will eventually inform improvements in the structures, processes, and outcomes of certification.

Grants from the ABMS Research and Education Foundation (REF), funded by ABMS, support investigator-driven proposals under the broad umbrella of the ABMS mission described above. ABMS seeks to fund original research projects submitted directly by independent investigators.

Funding

The ABMS Board of Directors has allocated \$300,000, which will be disbursed for grants of up to \$75K, allocated for maximum overall impact of the program.

The funds will be disbursed in two installments: 75 percent at the beginning of the project and 25 percent at project completion and receipt of ABMS’ final report. The funding period is up to two years.

Topics

The topics of study can range from personal attributes (*e.g.*, of certification candidates or diplomates¹) to features of programs/organizations (*e.g.*, an ABMS Member Board, a residency program) to broader ideas (*e.g.*, professionalism, competence, diagnostic excellence, or linking to outcomes).

¹ A diplomate is a physician or specialist who is board certified by one or more of the 24 ABMS Member Boards for demonstrated knowledge in a particular medical specialty or subspecialty.

A recent JAMA Perspective ([American Board of Medical Specialties and new standards for continuing certification](#)) describes the evolution of ABMS Standards for Continuing Certification and raises key researchable issues. Additional research priorities include but are not limited to certification’s impact on public health and health care disparities; alignment of certification with the emerging health care delivery environment; assessing and improving equity in assessment; and integrating competency-based education into initial and continuing certification programs, especially for professionalism, communication, systems-based practice, and practice-based learning and improvement.

If the topic you would like to address is not on this list and yet you feel it would be aligned with the mission of ABMS REF, please email REF-grants@abms.org to discuss.

Eligibility

The ABMS REF welcomes applications from health systems, universities, or other organizations with missions that intersect meaningfully with the ABMS mission. The principal investigator’s primary position must be at a United States institution. Current and former ABMS Visiting Scholars are encouraged to apply.

The principal investigator must not be affiliated with ABMS, which means they satisfy the following criteria:

- They or a family member do not receive compensation, benefits, or any form of remuneration from ABMS or an ABMS Member Board.
- They work for an organization that is not affiliated with ABMS or ABMS Member Boards, as grant funds are paid to the unaffiliated organization.

ABMS Member Boards may apply for funding only in collaboration with a principal investigator who is not ABMS-affiliated.

If you have any questions about eligibility, please email REF-grants@abms.org to discuss.

Important Dates

Event	Date
Application Period Opens	Monday, November 11, 2024
Informational Webinar	Wednesday, December 4, 2024
LOI Submission Deadline	Friday, January 31, 2025
LOI Notifications	Friday, February 28, 2025
Full Proposal Submission Deadline	Friday, May 2, 2025
Full Proposal Notifications	Friday, June 20, 2025
Grant Start Date	Monday, September 1, 2025
End of Grant Period	Wednesday, June 30, 2027

Application Process

There are two phases to the application process. First, applicants should submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). From that pool, the Adjudication Committee will select applications eligible to submit a Full Proposal for consideration.

Grant Application Cycle

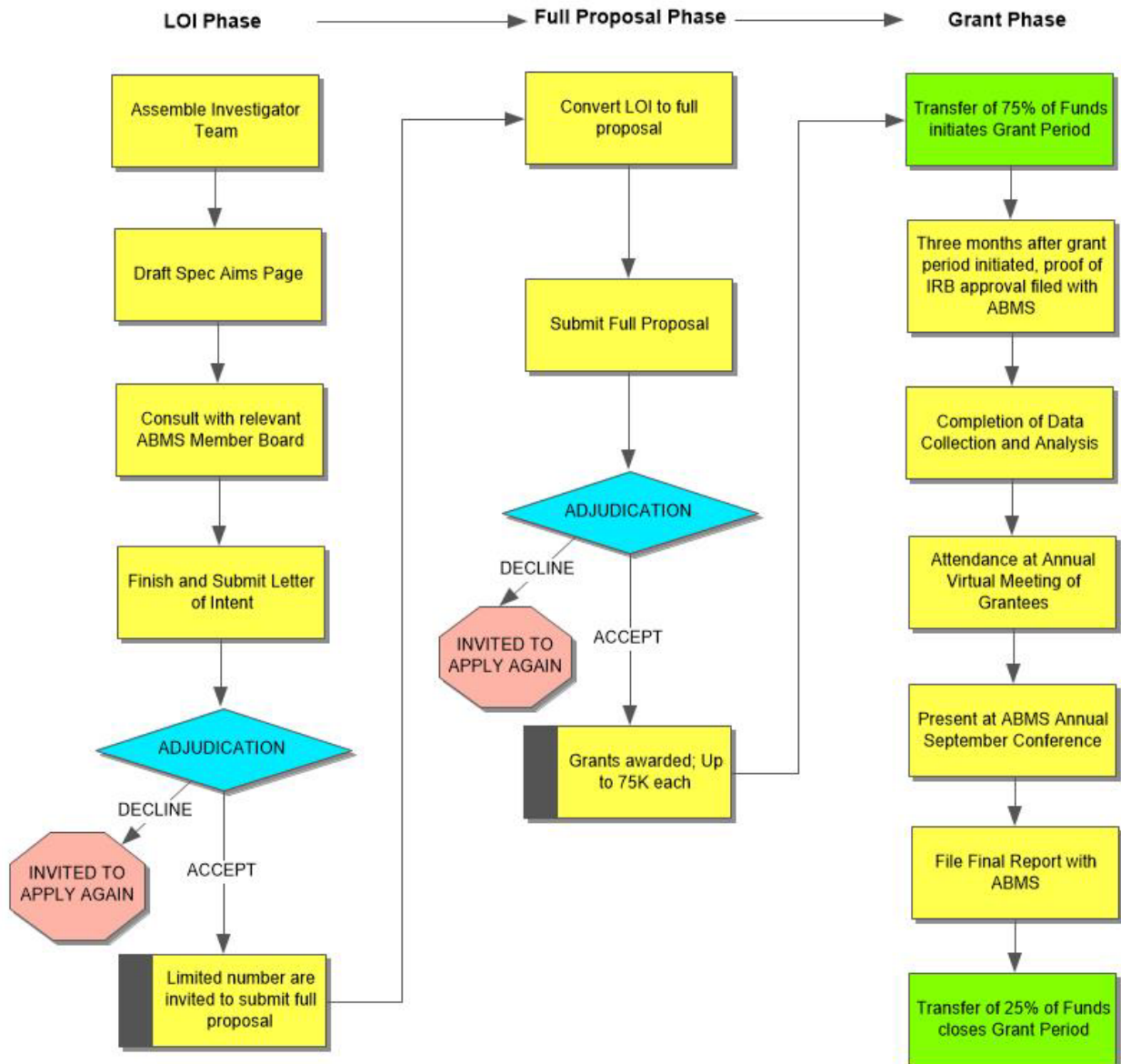


Figure 1. Detailed diagram of activities and milestones in grant application process.

Adjudication

The applications will be peer-reviewed by an advisory group of senior researchers drawn from the broader health professions education research community and will have patient representation. Conflict of interest will be managed to ensure unbiased adjudication.

Applications will be reviewed and assessed according to the following areas:

- Relevance to the ABMS mission
- Novelty and importance of the research conceptualization and question
- Research methods
- Research team
- Potential significance

Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate relevance to more than one of the ABMS Member Boards. Applicants should outline this relevance in the "Significance" portion of the Abstract (see the Application Formats section below).

Member Board Contact

The ABMS REF grant aims to stimulate research collaborations with and among the Member Boards. At the LOI stage, the investigators should notify a representative from the most relevant ABMS Member Board(s) of their intended proposal. See Appendix A for a list of representatives. Projects that are relevant to more than one Member Board are encouraged. The investigators can incorporate feedback from this conversation into the LOI at their discretion.

The optimal timing for the Member Board consultation is after the research team is assembled and draft research objectives are developed but before completing the LOI. At the full proposal stage, the Member Board may continue to play a consultative role. This arrangement allows full independence for the investigator to put forth novel and ground-breaking ideas while benefiting from the Member Board's deep experience with certification.

Application Formats

Phase 1: Letter of Intent

The LOI application materials will be submitted to a web portal. In addition to the documents described below, applicants must complete the following questionnaires: background and demographics, professional practice survey, and Member Board consultation.

You will also be required to submit a 350-page abstract task that includes the following subheadings:

- Introduction
- Setting
- Study Population
- Methods
- Significance

The LOI should be formatted using 11-point font, 1-inch margins, single-spaced, with the following headings:

- Upload: Letter of Intent (**Single PDF to include the items listed below**)
 - Main Body (**3 page maximum**)
 - Background and Conceptual Framing
 - On which literature are you building?
 - Research Question and Specific Aims
 - Methods
 - We encourage using the appropriate methods to answer the research question (e.g., observational and experimental designs, implementation science, qualitative research, quality improvement methodology).
 - Anticipated Outcomes
 - Tables (optional)
 - Additional Pages
 - Required
 - References (**1 page maximum**)
 - Biosketches for co-investigators (**3 to 5 pages each**)
 - Optional
 - Graphics (**1 page maximum**)

Phase 2: Full Proposal

The Full Proposal will also be submitted to a web portal. In addition to the documents described below, applicants will submit contact information to their institution's grants office. An institutional signature is not required.

The Full Proposal should be formatted using 11-point font, 1-inch margins, single-spaced, with the following headings:

- Upload 1: Full Proposal (**Single PDF to include the items listed below**)
 - Main Body (**10 page maximum**)
 - Background and Conceptual Framing
 - Research Question and Specific Aims
 - Methods
 - Anticipated outcomes
 - Teamwork plan
 - How will the team function?
 - Who will do what?
 - Describe any prior work.
 - Risk Mitigation Plan
 - What risks and difficulties do you anticipate?
 - How will you address them?
 - Tables - OPTIONAL

- Supporting Materials (**5 page maximum**)
 - Timeline (**1 page maximum**) - REQUIRED
 - How and when ethical review will be accomplished
 - References - REQUIRED
 - Graphics (**2 pages maximum**) - OPTIONAL
- Supplemental Materials (**No Page Limit**)
 - Biosketches for co-investigators - REQUIRED
 - 3 to 5 pages each
 - NIH Format
 - Copy of Research Instruments, if any (e.g., Interview Guide) - OPTIONAL
 - Letters of Support - OPTIONAL
 - Describe in-kind institutional contributions
 - Document access to research participants/data
- Upload 2: Budget (**No Page Limit**)
 - Include the name of the PI and the project title in the header.
 - Consider the following:
 - How will funds be allocated and used to propel the research?
 - What will you spend the funds on?
 - Budget justification

Note: Indirect costs can account for a maximum of 10%

Grant Recipient Responsibilities

At the onset, the grant recipient must submit proof of Internal Review Board approval (if necessary) within three months after the start of the grant. Additionally, the recipient must:

- Be a responsible steward of ABMS funding
- Be in full compliance with institutional ethics and conflict of interest procedures
- Attend a virtual meeting of grantees held annually
- Submit a final report to ABMS by the agreed upon deadline
- Present study findings at the annual ABMS Conference in September, following the end of the grant period
- Submit findings for peer-reviewed publication in a timely fashion

In addition to the research insights achieved by the individual grantees, another key objective of the grant program is to facilitate a community of research practice around the mechanism of certification. This community will be achieved through a judicious number of grantee interactions with each other, with ABMS Member Boards, and with current ABMS Visiting Scholars Program participants.

Appendix A. Table of Member Board Research Contacts

Member Board	Representative	Email Address
Allergy and Immunology	Michael Nelson	mnelson@abai.org
Anesthesiology	Susan Hibbard	susan.hibbard@theaba.org
Colon and Rectal Surgery	Thomas Read	Thomas.read@ufl.edu
Dermatology	Erik Stratman	stratman.erik@marshfieldclinic.org
Emergency Medicine	Chadd Kraus Lyndsay Tyler	ckraus@abem.org Ltyler@abem.org
Family Medicine	Dana Price Andrew Bazemore Robert Phillips	danaprice@theabfm.org abazemore@theabfm.org bphillips@theabfm.org
Internal Medicine	Rebecca Lipner	rlipner@abim.org
Medical Genetics and Genomics	Mimi Blitzer	mblitzer@abmagg.org
Neurological Surgery	Marjorie Wang	mwang@mcw.edu
Nuclear Medicine	Maria Watts	mwatts@abnm.org
Obstetrics and Gynecology	Anthony Sparks	asparks@abog.org
Ophthalmology	Sarah Schnabel	sschnabel@abop.org
Orthopaedic Surgery	Mona Sanei David Elstein	msaniei@abos.org delstein@abos.org
Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery	Brian Nussenbaum	bn@abohns.org
Pathology	Ty McCarthy	coo@abpath.org
Pediatrics	David Turner	dturner@abpeds.org
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation	Mikaela Raddatz	mraddatz@abpmr.org
Plastic Surgery	Keith Brandt	kbrandt@abps.org
Preventive Medicine	Clare Foreman	cforeman@theabpm.org
Psychiatry and Neurology	David Shin	dshin@abpn.org
Radiology	Brooke Houck	bhuck@theabr.org
Surgery	Andrew Jones	ajones@absurgery.org
Thoracic Surgery	Beth Winer	Bwiner@abts.org
Urology	Lindsay Franklin	lindsay@abu.org

Appendix B. Frequently Asked Questions

When prioritizing applications, does the grant program distinguish between “Program Evaluation” and “Research”?

Although similar in many aspects, program evaluation and research serve different purposes and follow different guidelines. Research, in the context of social sciences, is a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. It aims to establish facts, reach new conclusions, or discover and develop theories by analyzing patterns within a population or phenomenon. The main objective is to create new, generalizable knowledge that contributes to a broader understanding of some phenomenon or structure.

On the other hand, program evaluation is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions about specific projects, policies, and programs, particularly about their effectiveness and efficiency. In contrast to research, its primary goal is not to generalize findings to other populations or settings, but to improve the specific program under scrutiny. Evaluations are often used to guide local decision-making, policy formation, and program improvement.

From the point of view of the ABMS REF grant program, we will evaluate the degree to which a program evaluation is limited by its context-specificity in informing broader conclusions. A well-done program evaluation that convinces the reviewer that it can rise above the local context to make a significant contribution to existing scholarship will be well received.

Are particular research methods preferred?

No. The emphasis is on the research question and how the methods allow the investigators to answer the question. We anticipate a broad range of research methods in the grant portfolio and will have assembled the adjudication committee in consequence.

Are indirect costs reimbursed?

The grant program allows up to 10% indirect costs for institutional grant administration. This is to be included in the overall grant request, meaning that for a grant request of \$75,000 the investigator can provide a budget for ~\$68,000 direct costs and \$6800 indirect costs.

Will investigators have access to ABMS and ABMS Member Board Data?

Access to ABMS data will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Each of the individual boards also holds diplomate data. (A diplomate is a physician or medical specialist who is board certified by one or more of the 24 ABMS Member Boards for demonstrated knowledge in a particular medical specialty or subspecialty.) The intent of having investigator teams consult with individual boards is to explore collaborative opportunities for leveraging existing data in research initiatives.

Institutional Data Use Agreements govern the sharing of this data. ABMS Member Boards may have their own internal policies and processes regarding research using their data that require a separate approval process. If conducting the research is dependent on access to Member Board data, approvals from the board(s) should be obtained before submission of the grant application to ABMS. If not obtained before submission, approval from the Member Board(s) to have access to their data will be required before distribution of funds, if the grant is approved.

Can the research funds be used for the development of commercial products or services?

No. This program is intended to further research in support of the ABMS mission, and not for product development. A successful grant project outcome would support a research program that might eventually lead to successful educational applications.

Why is ABMS REF seeking research from “independent investigators”?

ABMS convened the “Vision for the Future Commission” to make recommendations for how we should move forward on continuing certification; the [final report](#) was released in 2019. One of the key recommendations was for the ABMS community to promote independent research on the value of continuing certification. Independence ensures trust in the findings of the research.