American Board of Medical Specialties
Research and Education Foundation Grants 2027–2029

Request for Proposals

Objectives

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) seeks to develop a research program to support its core mission to "improve healthcare through high standards for physician board certification."

The core action of applied research is to collect relevant data in sufficient measure to generate meaningful insights. In this case, ABMS seeks original research that provides a greater understanding of the process of achieving and maintaining the competency standards for certification by any or all of the 24 ABMS certifying boards, called 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 independent investigator-driven proposals under the broad umbrella of the ABMS mission described above.

Application Process

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

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 diplomates[1]) 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), but the project must address the certification of physicians.

A JAMA Perspective, "American Board of Medical Specialties and new standards for continuing certification," describes the evolution of the 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 healthcare disparities; alignment of certification with the emerging health care delivery environment; assessing and improving equity in assessment; impact of technology on certification processes; 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, but you feel it would be aligned with the mission of the ABMS REF, please contact the ABMS REF to discuss your potential study.

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 (PI's) primary position must be at a United States institution. Current and former ABMS Scholars are encouraged to apply.

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

- Neither they nor any family member receives compensation, benefits, or any form of remuneration from ABMS or an ABMS Member Board.
- They do not work for an organization that is affiliated with ABMS or the ABMS Member Boards; grant funds are paid to the unaffiliated organization.

ABMS Member Boards may apply for funding only in collaboration with a PI who is not ABMS-affiliated and who has independent decision-making authority over the project. Investigators who are affiliated with medical societies or other organizations are eligible in most cases. To confirm eligibility, please contact the ABMS REF.

[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.

Important Dates

Event	Date
Application Period Opens	November 16, 2026
Informational Webinar	December 11, 2026, 3:00 – 4:00 pm (ET)
LOI Submission Deadline	January 29, 2027, 11:59 pm (ET)
LOI Notifications	February 26, 2027
Full Proposal Submission Deadline	May 3, 2027, 11:59 pm (ET)
Full Proposal Notifications	June 18, 2027
Start of Grant Period	August 31, 2027
End of Grant Period	August 31, 2029

Grant Application Cycle

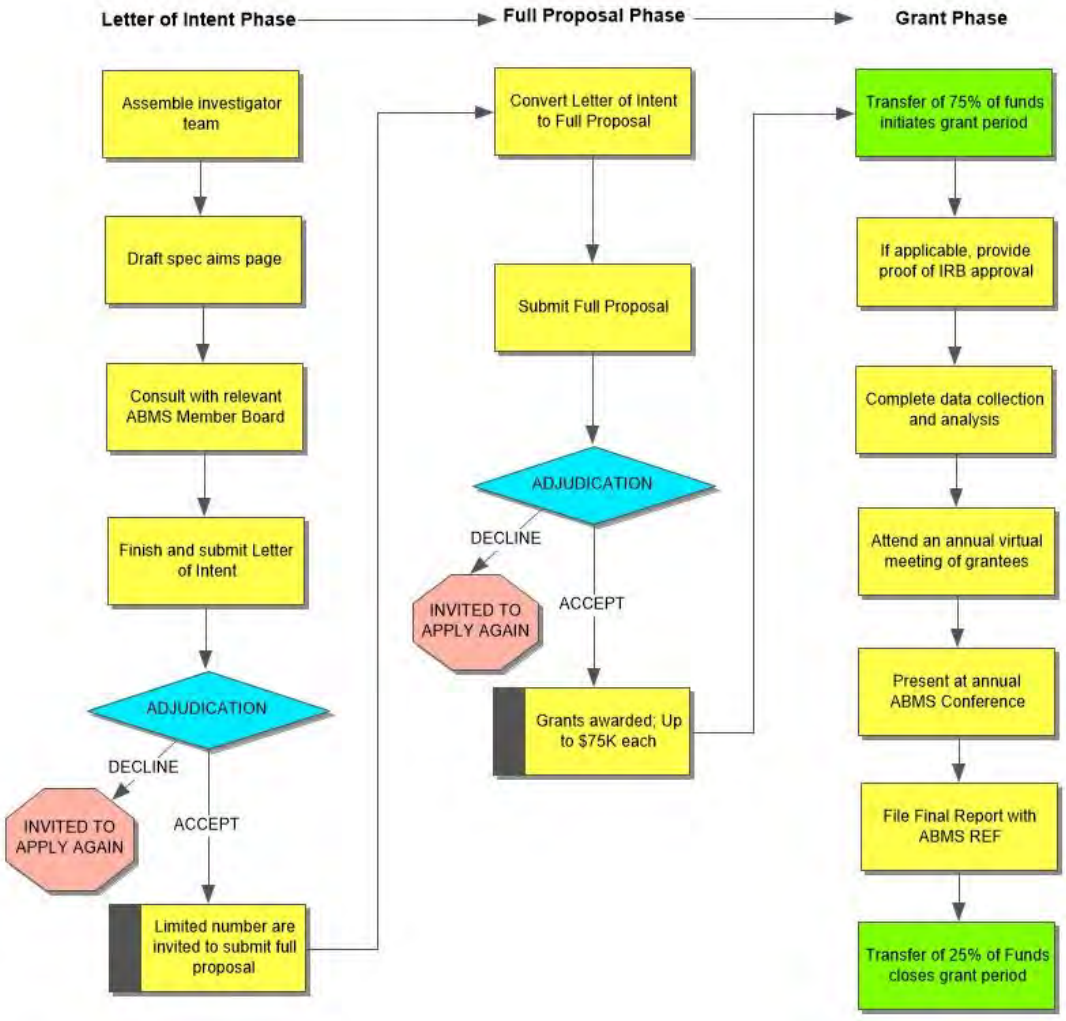


Figure 1. Detailed diagram of activities and milestones in grant application process.

Member Board Contact

The ABMS REF grant aims to stimulate research collaborations with and among the ABMS 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 groundbreaking 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 through a web portal. In addition to the documents described below, PIs must complete the following questionnaires: background and demographics, professional practice survey, and Member Board consultation.

PIs will also be required to submit a 350-word 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, and single-spaced. The document header should include PI's first and last name. The LOI must include the following headings:

- Upload: LOI
    - Combine the Main Body and Additional Pages into a single PDF **— do not use the portfolio option in Adobe**

    - 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 **(See individual section page limits below)**
        - Required
            - References **(1 page maximum)**
            - Biosketches for all investigators **(3 to 5 pages each)**
                - NIH Format
        - Optional
            - Graphics **(1 page maximum)**

Phase 2: Full Proposal

The Full Proposal will also be submitted through a web portal. Please note that an institutional signature is not required at this stage. The Full Proposal should be formatted using 11-point font, 1-inch margins, and single-spaced. The document header should include the PI's first and last name. The proposal must include the following headings:

- Upload 1: Full Proposal
    - Combine Main Body, Supporting Materials and Supplemental Materials into a single PDF **— do not use the portfolio option in Adobe**

    - 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 and/or Additional Tables **(2 pages maximum)** - OPTIONAL*

- Supplemental Materials **(no page limit)**
  - Biosketches for All Investigators - REQUIRED
    - **3 to 5 pages each**
    - NIH Format
  - *Copy of Research Instruments, if any - OPTIONAL*
    - *e.g.*, Interview Guide
  - *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%

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. PIs should outline this relevance in the "Significance" portion of the Abstract (see the Application Formats section above).

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 an informal report (form provided by ABMS) midway through project timeline
- Submit a final report (template provided by ABMS) within 60 days of project end date
- At conclusion of project, present findings at the annual ABMS Conference in September
- Submit findings for peer-reviewed publication in a timely fashion and inform the REF either through the final report or via email

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 experience will be achieved through a judicious number of grantee interactions with each other, with ABMS Member Boards, and with current ABMS Scholars Program participants.

Appendix A.

Table of ABMS Member Board Research Contacts

(Last Updated January 6, 2026)

ABMS 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	Michael Gottlieb Yachana Bhakta	mgottlieb@abem.org Ybhakta@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	Stacie Miller	Smiller@abmgg.org
Neurological Surgery	Marjorie Wang	marjoriewang@abns.org
Nuclear Medicine	Maria Watts	mwatts@abnm.org
Obstetrics and Gynecology	Anthony Sparks	asparks@abog.org
Ophthalmology	ABMS REF	REF-grants@abms.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	bhouck@theabr.org
Surgery	Carol Barry	cbarry@absurgery.org
Thoracic Surgery	Beth Winer	Bwiner@abts.org
Urology	Lindsay Franklin	lindsay@abu.org

Appendix B.

Frequently Asked Questions

Project Scope and Requirements

Q: Does the grant program treat program evaluation and research differently?

A: Yes. Research and program evaluation are both structured ways to study something, but they have different goals. Research is meant to create new knowledge that applies broadly, while program evaluation looks at how well a specific program or policy works, usually to improve it locally. The ABMS REF grant program supports both but prefers evaluations that offer insights beyond just the local setting.

Q: Will investigators be able to access ABMS or Member Board data?

A: Possibly. Access to ABMS and Member Board data is determined on a case-by-case basis and governed by institutional Data Use Agreements. Investigators are encouraged to consult with relevant boards early in the process to explore data-sharing opportunities. If access to Member Board data is essential for the proposed research, approval must be obtained before submitting the grant application—or at minimum, before funds are distributed if the grant is awarded.

Q: Are certain research methods preferred by the ABMS REF?

A: No specific methods are preferred. The emphasis is on the strength of the research question and the appropriateness of the methods used to address it. The REF anticipates a diverse portfolio of methodologies and assembles its adjudication committee accordingly.

Eligibility and Roles

Q: Can an individual serve as a Principal Investigator (PI) if they previously received a grant from an ABMS Member Board?

A: Yes, individuals who previously received funding from an ABMS Member Board are eligible to serve as PIs for ABMS REF grants; there are no permanent exclusions based on past award status. As long as the applicant meets the current eligibility criteria, they may apply and be considered for funding.

Q: Why does the ABMS REF prioritize research from independent investigators?

A: The ABMS REF promotes independent research to ensure trust and objectivity in findings. This approach stems from the recommendations of the ABMS "Vision for the Future Commission," which emphasized the importance of unbiased research in evaluating the value of continuing certification. Independent investigators — those unaffiliated with ABMS or its Member Boards — are seen as best positioned to conduct impartial studies that can inform certification practices.

Q: Does affiliation with an institution connected to an ABMS Member Board affect PI eligibility?

A: It depends. If the PI is a paid employee or holds a funded role within an ABMS Member Board or a directly affiliated organization, they are not considered independent and may be ineligible. The REF seeks to avoid any appearance of bias and encourages applications from investigators who are structurally independent from ABMS and its Member Boards.

Q: Can a grant application include multiple Principal Investigators (multi-PI)?

A: Yes. Multi-PI applications are allowed, provided the roles and responsibilities of each investigator are clearly defined. The application should explain how accountability will be maintained, especially in the event that one investigator leaves the institution. A history of collaboration among the investigators can strengthen the proposal.

Budget and Funding

Q: Are there salary caps for investigators?

A: The ABMS REF does not impose a fixed salary cap. However, the proposed budget should be reasonable and justified within the overall grant request. Budget details will be reviewed during the contracting phase. For specific concerns, applicants are encouraged to contact the ABMS REF.

Q: Are indirect costs reimbursed?

A: Yes. The grant program allows up to 10% of the total budget to be allocated for indirect costs related to institutional grant administration. For example, a $75,000 grant may include $68,000 in direct costs and $6,800 in indirect costs.

Q: Can grant funds be used to develop commercial products or services?

A: No. The ABMS REF grant program is intended to support research aligned with the ABMS mission — not product development. While successful research may eventually inform educational applications, the grant itself should not be used to create commercial offerings.