



IBD QORUS HEALTH EQUITY REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA) Pfizer – Crohn's & Colitis Foundation Collaboration

Overview and Goal: [IBD Qorus](#) is a nationwide quality-of-care program designed to drive improved care and health outcomes for adults with Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD). Sites participating in IBD Qorus track care performance to identify and implement practices that keep patients out of the emergency room and in remission. The intent of this RFA is to build a small cohort of IBD centers, made up of new and/or existing Qorus sites, to collectively determine resources, platforms and practices that help these sites be more successful in reaching and providing quality care to racially and ethnically diverse populations. The learnings from this cohort of IBD Centers will be used to guide the future onboarding of new Qorus sites who care for patients often underrepresented in medical research and quality improvement efforts.

Background: Studies show that health disparities exist for diverse racial and ethnic populations diagnosed with IBD, including delayed diagnosis, lack of access to specialists and treatments, more frequent hospitalizations and visits to the emergency room, and complications related to their disease. To reduce health disparities and more successfully achieve health equity, it is essential that we address patient access to, and utilization of, healthcare services. The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation's (the Foundation) IBD Qorus Collaborative is primed to evaluate these barriers as well as identify and test solutions to improve access to high quality care for racial and ethnic minorities living with IBD.

Need: Patients enrolled in IBD Qorus are not fully representative of those affected by these diseases. To more fully understand the racial and ethnic make-up of the program and barriers that hinder greater representation, the Qorus team conducted a needs assessment in 2022, which revealed the following:

1. Under-represented in Black, Hispanic, and Asian patient populations when compared to national IBD averages.
2. More culturally aware materials / resources are needed to help engage diverse patient groups.

The results affirmed that greater efforts need to be taken to improve the lack of representation and engagement in Black, Hispanic, and Asian IBD patient populations, and in collaboration with Pfizer, the Foundation aims to engage a cohort of IBD Centers to address how to reach these patient population more effectively through IBD Qorus.

RFA Scope: The Foundation and Pfizer in partnership will release a RFA to canvass GI institutions in the US interested in improving IBD quality of care for the diverse groups of patients they serve.

Four to five sites will be selected to form a cohort – ideally a mix of institutions new/naïve to Qorus and existing Qorus sites – wherein the sites will share what existing challenges have prevented them from fully engaging and enrolling patients into the program (existing site) and/or providing optimal treatment to the patients under their care (new site).

The sites may utilize the funding to cover their team time and travel during the project period. In addition, resources provided by the Foundation that include project/facilitator leads, education materials, data collection tools, access to Qorus physician mentors, will be available and provided to the selected sites in support of these project efforts.

Geographic Scope: Nationwide – United States

Expectations for Selected Sites: The Foundation will oversee the project's progression, which will be divided into two Phases, detailed below. Interested sites will be agreeing to fully engage and participate in both Phases.

Phase I: Understanding Gaps and Identifying Resource Needs

- This Phase will begin with an in-person kick off meeting, where the selected cohort of sites will detail key challenges faced when trying to reach and/or provide care to diverse patient populations. Ample time for brainstorming will be included in this meeting to elucidate resources and other needs that would help sites better perform in IBD Qorus, approach patients to participate in a program like IBD Qorus, retain and engage patients, and in general better meet the needs of IBD patients they care for at their centers.

- A series of monthly calls will be created for the cohort of sites to routinely meet and continue to apply the insights and learnings shared at the kick-off meeting to further develop resources and other materials to be tested in practice. The monthly calls will allow time for continuous iteration of the prospective resources, and to engender a sense of collaboration amongst participating sites to promote learnings between one another.

Phase II: Build of the Resources and Rollout

- Time in this Phase will be devoted to first building the specific resources and materials that were previously identified in Phase I; second, allow time for the participating sites to use the resources in practice with patients and to gather feedback and input; and third, give necessary time to evaluate the effectiveness of the resources.
- Monthly calls will continue throughout this Phase to enable the cohort team members to share testing progress, learnings to date, feedback gathered from patients, and ideas for improvement. The Foundation team will be present to facilitate these calls and to take lead on refining the resources based on input gathered.
- In-person meetings will be coordinated by the Foundation team during this Phase to allow ample time for sharing, iteration, and brainstorming. An in-person meeting will be held near the end of the project period to focus on dissemination of results – including but not limited to, manuscript/publication, conference presentations, website content creation – as well as how best to apply the refined resources and materials for future use in IBD Qorus sites that care for underrepresented patient populations.

Interested sites must commit to joining IBD Qorus, executing the necessary contracts (contract with Pfizer to receive award funding and contract with the Foundation to join IBD Qorus), receive necessary regulatory approval (IRBs), and participating in the health equity project over a 24-month long period.

Output and Impact: Results will inform and guide IBD practices in successfully reaching and providing quality care to racially and ethnically diverse populations. The Foundation team will package the learnings and best practices to share with sites. At the project's end, participating parties, along with the Foundation, and other interested members of the participating sites, will be expected to draft a manuscript that summarizes the purpose and results of this project.

***Available Funding:** Individual sites may request **up to \$125,000 in total costs** for a two-year period.

The amount of the award will depend upon the review panel's evaluation of the site application and the number of applications received in response to this RFA. Requested amounts should include direct costs and institutional overhead costs (capped at 28% per Pfizer policy).

Acceptable costs that may be requested include:

- Team member salaries, including PIs or research support staff. Salary requests cannot exceed the NIH cap.
- Administrative and/or operating costs relevant to start and continue participation (i.e., IRB approval, contracting and management).
- Patient incentives or honorariums for time and effort for participating in the Phases. Patient travel support to the Qorus learning sessions is also acceptable.
- Travel support for site team to attend the IBD Qorus learning sessions.

***Applicant Eligibility:** Applications will be accepted from US-based healthcare institutions that care for IBD patients.

- Institutions must be physically located in a disadvantaged community and/or provide care to primarily underserved or minority populations. *Evidence of this will be required in the application.*
- Institutions may already be part of the IBD Qorus program, recently joined, or completely new to IBD Qorus.
- Only organizations are eligible to receive grants, not individuals or physician-owned private-practice groups.
- The PI must be an employee or independent contractor of the requesting organization. Requesting organization must be legally able to receive award funding directly from Pfizer Inc.

***Application Process:** Submit a brief overview of your site inclusive of the following sections. The overview should be no more than 3 pages long and should be uploaded via the online portal listed in the “How to Submit” section below. Letters of Support do not count towards the 3-page maximum.

- 1. Assessment of Need:** Detail your site’s IBD patient population (volume) and types of diversity. Please reference the NIH definition of diversity: ‘populations that are nationally underrepresented in the biomedical, clinical, and behavioral and social.’ Describe how patients are approached and/or considered for research opportunities or other study participation and the various challenges or barriers experienced in this process.
- 2. Site Description:** Describe site geographic and care setting diversity (i.e., VA, community practice, academic).
- 3. Engagement Commitment:** Demonstrate evidence of your site’s commitment to fully participate throughout the project duration. Letters of support from administrators or patients are acceptable. Provide evidence that your site will be able to rely on a Central IRB (Advarra) and ability to execute contracts on time.
- 4. Budget and Justification:** Total amount needed and justification for each budget item requested.

Key Dates:

- Applications are due by **Thursday, April 25, 2024**, through the Pfizer grant portal (details below).
- Review meeting will take place in **mid-May** and award notifications will be emailed soon thereafter.
- Applicant decision notification date: **June 3, 2024**.
- The incubation period will run **June 3 - December 15, 2024**. All participating sites **MUST** complete IRB approval and contract execution by **December 15, 2024**. If this cannot be completed, the award will be in jeopardy.

How to Submit: The Pfizer grant system will be used for the management of the grant – submissions, award notice, progress reporting. Awardees will be notified via Pfizer grants system, and Pfizer will make direct payments to the applicants selected. Applications that do not follow these instructions will not be reviewed or accepted.

- Please go to: www.cybergrants.com/pfizer/QI and sign in. First-time users should click “Create your password.”
- Click the button: **Start a new Quality Improvement Application**.
- In the application:
 - For the question “Competitive Grant?” select Yes
 - Select the following Competitive Grant Program Name: 2024 I&I US IBD Qorus Health Equity QI
 - Select the following Primary Area of Interest: Gastroenterology - IBD (Inflammatory Bowel Disease) - QI
- Requirements for submission:
 - Complete all required sections of the online application and upload your project proposal.
 - For required sections: “Goals and Objectives”, “Assessment of Need for the Project”, “Target Audience”, “Project Design and Methods”, and “Innovations” – *INPUT ‘Not Applicable’ for these sections*.
- Click the “Technical Questions” link at the bottom of the page for any technical difficulties with the website.

Grant Agreements:

- If your grant is approved, your institution will be required to enter into a written grant agreement with Pfizer. Please click [here](#) to view the core terms of the agreement.
- Under Pfizer's competitive grant program, modifications to grant agreements will not be reviewed unless a genuine conflict exists as between applicable law and the terms of the relevant grant agreement. Applicant is encouraged to share the core terms with counsel for approval prior to applying.

Review and Approval Process: Review committee – comprised of Foundation leads, Qorus leadership and physicians, Pfizer Medical representative, patients – will meet to review applications and to make final decisions on which sites to fund. Applicants may be asked for additional clarification during the review period.

Questions: If you have questions regarding this RFP, please direct them to Alandra Weaver, Vice President Clinical Quality & Research Innovation at the Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation (aweaver@crohnscolitisfoundation.org) and Sue Lee, Grant Officer, Pfizer Global Medical Grants (Sue.Lee@Pfizer.com).