Pfizer Quality Improvement Request for Proposals

Competitive Grant Program – using Expert Review Panel

Improving the Quality and Standardization of Pneumococcal Diagnostic Pathways in Pediatric and Adult Populations

Overview

Streptococcus pneumoniae remains a major cause of respiratory infections, and its epidemiology continues to evolve due to serotype replacement, possible re-emergence of serotypes not controlled by indirect protection, and population aging. Suboptimal IPD surveillance in Italy likely underestimates disease burden yet reported incidence nearly doubled between 2022 and 2024.

This initiative addresses a clear diagnostic performance gap by supporting quality improvement initiatives designed to optimize and standardize microbiological diagnostic pathways for pneumococcal disease.

Consistent with Quality Improvement principles, projects should focus on implementation of evidence-based practices, optimization of diagnostic processes, improvement of data quality and completeness, and enhancement of collaboration between clinicians and laboratories in routine care settings.

Geographic Scope

Italy

Project Types and Area of Interest

This RFP seeks grant applications to improve the quality, standardization, and diagnostic yield of microbiological pathways for Streptococcus pneumoniae, thereby increasing the completeness and reliability of serotype surveillance data.

Areas of interest include, but are not limited to:

a. Standardization of diagnostic pathways

The primary objective of supported projects must be improvement of diagnostic processes, diagnostic performance, data capture, or implementation of best practices within participating institutions.

- Implementation and monitoring of standardized diagnostic bundles based on existing evidence and institutional best practices, including culture-based, antigen-based, and molecular diagnostic approaches where available.
- Optimization of sample management, including improved sample collection timing, standardized transport and storage procedures, and improvement of specimen management processes within routine clinical practice.

b. Integration of advanced diagnostics within routine clinical practice

- Improvement of data capture, completeness, and integration processes to support local surveillance and quality monitoring activities.
- Implementation and optimization of urinary antigen and serotype-specific tests already available for routine clinical use.

c. Education and training

- Training on diagnostic appropriateness and sample handling.
- Strengthening clinician/laboratory collaboration.

d. Data integration

- Improvement of data capture, completeness, integration, and quality assurance processes to support ongoin institutional quality improvement and public health reporting activities.

Key Milestones

Funding Range and Project Length

Individual projects requesting up to **EUR 50,000.00** will be considered.

Maximum project length is 2 years.

I. Eligibility

Geographic Scope/Location of Project:

- Italy

Applicant Eligibility Criteria

- The institution and Principal Investigator (PI) must be based in one of the eligible countries noted above.
- The following public bodies may apply to hospitals, ASL, universities, IRCCS or accredited private clinics.
- Only organizations are eligible to receive grants, not individuals or medical practice groups (i.e., an independent group of physicians not affiliated with a hospital, academic institution, or professional society).
- Collaborations within institutions (e.g., between departments and/or inter-professional), as well as between different institutions / organizations / associations, are encouraged. Please note that all partners must have a relevant role and the requesting organization must have a key role in the project.
- The applicant must be the Project Lead/Principal Investigator (PI) or an authorized designee of such individual (e.g., Project Lead/PI's grant/research coordinator).
- The Project Lead/PI must be an employee or contractor of the requesting organization.
- Requesting organization must be legally able to receive award funding directly from Pfizer LLC. We strongly recommend that applicants confirm this with their organization or institution prior to submitting an application. Grants awarded to organizations that are subsequently found to be unable to accept funding directly from Pfizer LLC may be subject to rescission.

II. Requirements

Primary Area of Interest:

- VAV – Pneumococcal - QI

Specific Area of Interest for this RFP:

It is not our intent to support clinical research projects. Projects evaluating the efficacy of therapeutic or diagnostic agents will not be considered.

Despite existing national surveillance systems, the completeness and reliability of serotype-specific data remain limited locally and nationally. This gap is driven by variability in microbiological diagnostic practices, inconsistent use of diagnostic tools, limited adoption of advanced diagnostics, and suboptimal sample collection, handling, and processing.

These factors reduce diagnostic yield and limit accurate characterization and monitoring of circulating pneumococcal serotypes. Consistent with Quality Improvement principles, this RFP aims to improve clinical and laboratory practices, enhance service delivery, improve educational programs.

Applicants should define measurable process and/or quality indicators that will be monitored before and after implementation. Examples include diagnostic yield, completeness of serotype data, adherence to diagnostic pathways, timeliness of specimen processing, quality of sample collection, or similar operational quality measures.

It is our intent to support projects that focus on improving diagnostic pathways related to pneumococcal diseases in whole population, including but not limited to:

- **Baseline assessment of existing diagnostic pathways and practices** for suspected pneumococcal invasive and non-invasive disease, with the objective of identifying operational gaps and opportunities for quality improvement.
- **Implementation and monitoring of standardized diagnostic pathways** based on existing evidence, established guidelines, and institutional best practices, including culture-based diagnostics, antigen-based methods, and molecular techniques already available for routine clinical use.
- **Optimization of pre-analytical and sample management processes**, including appropriate timing of sample collection, sample handling, transport, storage, and specimen management procedures within routine clinical practice.
- **Implementation and optimization of urinary antigen testing and serotype-specific diagnostic methods already available for routine clinical use**, with the aim of improving diagnostic performance and completeness of microbiological characterization.
- **Improvement of data capture, completeness, integration, quality assurance, and accessibility**, including initiatives designed to strengthen institutional quality monitoring, diagnostic performance assessment, and public health reporting processes.
- **Review and optimization of diagnostic performance indicators**, including monitoring of microbiological confirmation rates, completeness of serotype information, adherence to diagnostic pathways, timeliness of specimen processing, and other operational quality metrics.
- **Development and implementation of educational and training initiatives** focused on diagnostic appropriateness, selection of microbiological tests, sample collection procedures, specimen handling, storage requirements, and reduction of pre-analytical errors.
- **Strengthening collaboration between clinicians, microbiologists, laboratories, and other relevant healthcare stakeholders** to support standardization and continuous improvement of diagnostic practices.
- **Development and dissemination of standard operating procedures (SOPs), diagnostic algorithms, clinical workflows, toolkits, pocket guides, and other implementation resources** that support adoption of evidence-based diagnostic practices.

Expected Approximate Monetary Range of Grant Applications

IMPORTANT: Grants will be distributed following a fully executed agreement and submission of Final Protocol, Documentation of IRB/IEC Approval, Regulatory Approval (if applicable), Exemption or Waiver.

- Individual projects requesting **up to EUR 50,000.00** will be considered. The estimated total available budget related to this RFP is EUR 300,000.00 (for 2 years of study).

- Award amounts include direct costs, institutional overhead costs (capped at 28% per Pfizer policy), and indirect costs.
- The amount of the grant Pfizer will be prepared to fund any project will depend upon the expert review panel's evaluation of the proposal and costs involved and will be stated clearly in the grant agreement.

Key Dates:

IMPORTANT: Advise applications submitted after the due date will not be reviewed.

*Please note the deadline is 23:59 Eastern Standard Time (e.g., New York, GMT -5)

*Please note that, as we are approaching a system transition, the Grant Management System will not be available from 27 July to 16 August 2026.

How to Submit:

IMPORTANT: Please read this section carefully since applications submitted following these instructions will not be accepted and will be cancelled.

- Please go to www.cybergrants.com/pfizer/QI and sign in.
  - Note: there are individual portals for each grant application type. Please be sure to use the URL above.
  - First-time users should click "Create your password".
- Click the "**Start A New Quality Improvement Grant Application**" button.
- Requirements for submission:
  - Complete all required sections of the online application
  - **IMPORTANT:** Upload proposal (see Appendix) in the Proposal/Protocol field.
- In the application:
  - For the question "**Competitive Grant?**" select "**Yes**"
  - Select the following Primary Area of Interest: **VAV – Pneumococcal - QI**
  - Select the following Competitive Grant Program Name: **2026 Vac Italy Pneumococcal RES**

Questions:

- If you encounter any technical difficulties with the website, please click here or the "Technical Questions" link at the bottom of the page in cybergrants.
- Please click here to view "Frequently Asked Questions" regarding the Competitive Grant Program.
- If you have questions regarding this RFP, please direct them in writing to the Grant Officer, Nicola Fenderico (Nicola.Fenderico@Pfizer.com), with the subject line "Pneumococcal Disease Surveillance in Italy: Serotypes, Genotypes, and Antibiotic Susceptibility in Children and Adults"

Review and Approval Process

- Grant requests received in response to a specific RFP are reviewed by an expert review panel (ERP) to make final grant decisions.
- The panels are comprised of professionals from the medical community with advanced degrees and expertise in particular clinical areas, or specific needs of a geographic region/learner group, or expertise in research, continuing professional development or quality improvement.

Mechanism by which Applicants will be Notified:

- All applicants will be notified via email by the dates noted above.
- Applicants may be asked for additional clarification during the review period.

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 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 submitting an application.
- Except where prohibited by applicable law and, in any case, subject to review by Pfizer Legal, payment of grant funding may only be paid to the grantee organization.
- This RFP is supported by Pfizer International LLC and, if approved, the payment will be issued by a Pfizer US based legal entity.

About Pfizer Grants

Pfizer supports the global healthcare community's independent initiatives (e.g., research, quality improvement or education) to improve patient outcomes in areas of unmet medical need that are aligned with Pfizer's medical and/or scientific strategies.

Pfizer's competitive grant program involves a publicly posted general Request for Proposal (RFP) that provides detail regarding a general area of interest, sets timelines for review and approval, and uses an expert review panel (ERP) to make final grant decisions. Organizations are invited to submit an application addressing the research gaps as outlined in the specific RFP.

For all quality improvement grants, the grant requester (and ultimately the grantee) is responsible for the design, implementation, and conduct of the independent initiative supported by the grant. Pfizer

must not be involved in any aspect of project development, nor the conduct or monitoring of the quality improvement program.

About QI Grants

Quality improvement (QI) projects are systematic, data-guided, sustainable activities designed to bring about immediate, positive changes in the delivery of healthcare in particular setting (1,2). Quality improvement seeks to standardize structure and processes to reduce variation, achieve predictable results, and improve outcomes for patients, healthcare systems, and organizations. Structure includes things like technology, culture, leadership, and physical capital. Process includes knowledge of capital (e.g., standard operating procedures) or human capital (e.g., education and training) (3).

QI projects systematically apply what is already known into the local practice, intended to quickly improve patient care within a specific setting. The goal of QI projects is to close a gap in performance at a specific health care system. The "performance" is a standard in health care that is not efficiently/appropriately/consistently done (4). For these reasons, QI focuses on translating existing knowledge into programs or practices to immediately improve the quality of services to individuals and populations within a local institution or setting (5). The risk of participation in QI is the same as the risk of receiving standard clinical care (6) since the standard of care remains the same for all patients.

In contrast, research projects use a systematic approach to discover something that is unknown. Research projects add new knowledge to what was previously unknown in literature through testing a hypothesis or a scientific question (4). Research aims to generate knowledge with broad applications, often through controlled studies. The subjects may or may not benefit directly from the knowledge gained. Research studies aim to evaluate an innovation, study something new, or analyze a process not yet rigorously studied (6).

References

1. Baily MA, et al., Hastings Cent Rep, 2006.
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3. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Page Last Modified: 09/10/2024.
4. Jackson C, Research Quality Manager, Office of Research and Scholarship University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Nursing.
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7. Camilli, R.; Giancristofaro, S.; Boros, S.; Bellini, B.; D'Ambrosio, F.; Urciuoli, R.; Del Grosso, M.; Pantosti, A.; Palamara, A.T.; D'Ancona, F. Invasive Pneumococcal Diseases Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy (2018–2023) Microorganisms 2025, 13, 2734. https://doi.org/10.3390/microorganisms13122734
8. CDC. Pneumococcal Disease Surveillance and Trends | Pneumococcal | CDC.
9. Desson, Z.; Levi, J.; Margheri, F. Uncovering the health system burden of pneumococcal infections in adult and elderly populations. European Journal of Public Health, Volume 34, Issue Supplement_3, November 2024, ckae144.1915. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckae144.1915
10. ECDC. Invasive Pneumococcal Disease – Surveillance and Disease Data 2026a 2026.

11. Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS). Surveillance of Invasive Bacterial Diseases in Italy.
12. Massaro, E.; Gabutti, G. Pneumococcal Vaccination of Adults in Italy: What Strategies? J Prev Med Hyg 2025;66:E345–E357. https://doi.org/10.15167/2421-4248/jpmh2025.66.3.375
13. Monali, R. et al. Epidemiology & Infection, 2020.

Appendix

IMPORTANT: RFP Submission Requirements

Applications will be accepted via the online portal listed in the How to Submit section. Project Proposals/Protocols should be single-spaced using Calibri 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Note there is a 15-page limit exclusive of references. When uploading your Full Proposal please ensure it addresses the following sections:

Goals and Objectives

- Briefly state the overall goal of the project. Also describe how this goal aligns with the focus of the RFP and the goals of the applicant organization(s).
- List the overall objectives you plan to meet with your project both in terms of learning and expected outcomes. Objectives should describe the target population as well as the outcomes you expect to achieve because of conducting the project.

Assessment of Need for the Project

- Please include a quantitative baseline data summary, initial metrics (e.g., quality measures), or a project starting point (please cite data on gap analyses or relevant patient-level data that informs the stated objectives) in your target area. Describe the source and method used to collect data. Describe how the data was analyzed to determine that a gap existed. If a full analysis has not yet been conducted, please include a description of your plan to obtain this information.

Target Audience

- Describe the primary audience(s) targeted for this project. Also indicate whom you believe will directly benefit from the project outcomes. Describe the overall population size as well as the size of your sample population

Project Design and Methods

- Describe the planned project and the way it addresses the established need.
- If your methods include educational activities, please describe succinctly the topic(s) and format of those activities.

Innovation

- Explain what measures you have taken to assure that this project idea is original and does not duplicate other projects or materials already developed.
- Describe how this project builds upon existing work, pilot projects, or ongoing projects developed either by your institution or other institutions related to this project.

Evaluation and Outcomes

- In terms of the metrics used for the needs assessment, describe how you will determine if the practice gap was addressed for the target group. Describe how you expect to collect and analyze the data.
- Quantify the amount of change expected from this project in terms of your target audience.
- Describe how the project outcomes will be broadly disseminated.

Anticipated Project Timeline

- Provide an anticipated timeline for your project including project start/end dates.

Additional Information

- If there is any additional information you feel Pfizer should be aware of concerning the importance of this project, please summarize here.

Organization Detail

- Describe the attributes of the institutions / organizations / associations that will support and facilitate the execution of the project and the leadership of the proposed project. Articulate the specific role of each partner in the proposed project.

Budget Detail

- The budget amount requested must be in **Euro (EUR).**
- While estimating your budget please keep the following items in mind:
- General organizational running costs such as legal fees, insurance, heating, and lighting etc. should be included in an Institutional Overhead (if required). These costs are not specific to a grant request and therefore, should not appear as line items in budgets. However, costs that are specific to the study (e.g., some countries require insurance to be taken out on a per-study basis for clinical research) would be acceptable to be included as line items.
- The inclusion of these costs cannot cause the amount requested to exceed the budget limit set forth in the RFP.
- Pfizer does not provide funding for capital purchases (infrastructure expenses such as equipment, purchases of software or software licenses, technology or bricks and mortar). Equipment hire/leasing is acceptable and may be included in project budget.
- It should be noted that grants awarded through Pfizer cannot be used to purchase Pfizer therapeutic agents (prescription or non-prescription).
- Pfizer maintains a company-wide, maximum allowed overhead rate of 28% for independent studies and projects. Please click here for details.

Required Documents

- Project Plan or Proposal