REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Grants Program for Research & Development of Covid-19 Treatments

PR-ACTD Grant

Accelerating Covid-19 Treatments and Drug Development Grant

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Program Overview

Background

Since March of 2020, Puerto Rico, like most jurisdictions in the United States and countries around the world, has experienced an unprecedented emergency caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19") pandemic. To slow the spread of the disease and ensure stability of its healthcare system, the Government of Puerto Rico has implemented measures to address the emergency.

On March 12, 2020, the Government of Puerto Rico issued Administrative Bulletin OE-2020-020 through, which formally declared a state of emergency due to the imminent impact of the coronavirus in Puerto Rico. During the state of emergency, Puerto Rico suffered great loss of life and severe economic hardships which have impacted a Commonwealth still reeling from natural disasters. Puerto Rico lost over 2,500 citizens, tourism dwindled with hotel registrations falling 95% from February to April 2020, and ~460,000 residents of Puerto Rico experienced unemployment, twice the previous number of unemployed individuals. Despite these hardships, Puerto Rico persevered, and with over 2,600,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines administered, Puerto Rico is positioned to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help Puerto Rico emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ("ARP Act"), and the President signed it into law on March 11, 2021. To assist state governments with addressing the lingering public health emergency while targeting areas and industries in needs of economic development, the ARP Act established the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, which provides $350 billion in direct assistance to states, territories, counties, metropolitan cities, tribal governments, and non-entitlement units of local governments. As part of the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, Puerto Rico received $2.47 billion under the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund ("CSFRF").

To ensure the expeditious processing of apportioned funds from the CARES Act, the Government of Puerto Rico established the Disbursement Oversight Committee,

consisting of the Secretary of the Department of the Treasury, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OGP), and the Executive Director of the Puerto Rico Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority (AAFAF). The Committee was created on May 15, 2020, by means of Executive Order No. 2020-040, and on May 7, 2021, by means of Executive Order No. 2021-034, the Governor of Puerto Rico extended the Committee's oversight to include CSFRF.

Program Description

Given the stage of the pandemic, Puerto Rico has identified an opportunity of accelerating the development of new medications and treatments for COVID-19. This will also be an opportunity to further stimulate the Life Science economic sector in Puerto Rico, promoting drug and product discovery with research and development programs, such as this one. This will be a grants program for research and development projects for the development of new treatments and / or drugs to treat COVID-19. The projects evaluated can be either academic projects or projects performed by companies. All will be evaluated and scored based on public health impact and its economic development potential.

Disbursement of Program funds will be subject to the strictest standards to ensure compliance with federal regulations and best practices. Therefore, each request for disbursement will be duly documented and subject to control and audit.

The Program will be administered by the Coronavirus Relief Fund Disbursement Oversight Committee (Committee) in conjunction with the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce (PR-DEDC), and the Puerto Rico Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority (AAFAF).

Points of Contact

The Puerto Rico Science Technology and Research Trust (the Trust)'s Research Grants Program will manage the grant proposal cycle of this RFP.

For questions about the RFP process, contact the Grants Advisory Team only through practd@ddec.pr.gov. Answers will be provided in 48-72 hours.

Eligible Applicants

Proposals are solicited from the following eligible organizations duly incorporated in Puerto Rico according to the laws of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico:

- Public/State Controlled Institutions of Higher Education
- Private Institutions of Higher Education
- Nonprofits with 501(c)(3) IRS Status (Other than Institutions of Higher Education
- For-Profit Organizations including Small Business, Start-ups and other For-Profit Organizations established and operating in Puerto Rico

**Natural persons are not eligible to submit proposals. **

Although collaborations with entities outside of Puerto Rico and abroad are allowable, funding will be awarded to entities duly established in Puerto Rico for work done primarily and for the benefit of Puerto Rico.

Eligible Individuals Principal Investigator (PI)

Any individual with the combination of skills, knowledge, resources, and support required to carry out the proposed research as the PIs is encouraged to work with his/her eligible organization to develop and apply for funding. As stated before, natural persons are not eligible to apply for support.

Required Criteria and Registrations for Applicant Organizations

Eligible applicants must meet the following criteria:

- The eligible organizations that apply must be operating in Puerto Rico and all the Research and Development (R&D) and/or manufacturing activities must be performed in Puerto Rico. If co-developments are happening with non-Puerto Rico entities, the applicant must submit proof that 50% or more of the activities are happening in Puerto Rico.

- Businesses must have at least one year of operation.

- The following documents will be requested during the contract processing of selected grantees:

    - No debt Certifications of the Government of Puerto Rico
        - Treasury
            - Merchant Registration
            - No tax debt
            - Tax return submission certificate for five years
            - Sales and use tax debt
            - Sales and use tax debt submission
        - Labor Department
            - Debt Certificate Labor Department
            - Debt Certificate Unemployment Insurance
            - Debt Certificate Disability insurance and driver insurance

- Eligible PIs from Institutions of Higher Education must have a faculty appointment. PIs from Nonprofits with 501(c)(3) IRS Status (Other than Institutions of Higher Education or For-Profit Organizations must have a full-time appointment with the institution. In any case, an Organizational Letter of Support, must be submitted from the PIs organization indicating institutional commitment for the project.

- Eligible PIs and other Senior/Key Personnel must have a registered profile in the Trust's collaboration database BEACON platform here. BEACON is a centralized platform that collects, displays, analyzes, and reports all the academic activity on the island.

- Eligible applicant organizations must commit to abiding by the Program's terms and conditions. In case of a determination of non-compliance with it with any of the Program eligibility requirements or if the Program funds were not spent on eligible expenses by December 31, 2024, the institution or organization must return the Program funds disbursed.

Eligible Funding Research Opportunity (EFRO)

This EFRO invites applications to conduct **research and development**, **preclinical research (including animal trials)**, or **clinical trial protocols** to be finalized and executed rapidly for

the identification of novel, safe and effective treatments and/or preventive strategies for SARS-CoV-2 infection including research to improve our understanding of and develop strategies to prevent and treat the post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC) or Long COVID.

For clinical trial interventions, subjects must be over 18 years of age. Approaches should facilitate swift improvement, development, and adaptation as more is understood about PASC and its potential influence on public health. Primary trials will concentrate on interventions that have demonstrated potential and assurance in other recovery perspectives and on existing hypotheses regarding pathogenesis. Adequate interventions could involve, but are not limited to, non-pharmacologic (e.g., integrative approaches and complementary), devices (e.g., neuromodulators, stimulators), registration and non-registration pharmacologic (e.g., immunomodulators, anti-viral, other drugs, and biologics), as well as lifestyle and behavioral health intervention strategies (e.g., cardiopulmonary rehabilitation, cognitive behavioral therapy, neurocognitive). Interventions may well consist of those leveraging treatments for which an evidence base already exists for addressing other relevant conditions (e.g., repurposing of drugs). The organization performing clinical trials should only perform them on individuals over 18.

In any case, prospective PIs are encouraged to contact the Trust with specific questions regarding this EFOA in time.

Award and Funding Information

- Funding Mechanism: Awards Agreements will be processed through the PR-DEDC.
- Funding per Award: Under this solicitation, proposals may be submitted for funding up to $250,000 for academia and $1,000.000 for industry, including direct and indirect costs. The grant amount will be determined by the PR-DEDC committee, based on the amount requested, scoring and number of applicants.
- Project Period: Funding awards are expected to be issued during the period of July/August 2023 for proposals submitted under this solicitation. Funds must be spent on eligible expenses by December 31, 2024.

- No-cost Extensions (NCE) – Extension of the end date of the project will not be allowed.

- Matching Requirements: Matching is not required but is highly encouraged. Matching may be in the form of cash and/or relevant in-kind contributions.

Allowable Costs

The following costs are eligible to conduct research and development efforts pertaining to an Eligible Activity as described above:

Direct Costs:

- Personnel Costs: salaries of key personnel to conduct the work as presented in the proposal.

- Fringe benefits: only those required by law: social security, federal and state unemployment, state disability, etc.

- Consultant Fees: Fees for consulting services or any other type of remuneration paid to technical advisors consulted with regard to research and development.

- Materials and supplies: Item of property other than equipment, costing less than $5,000 each.

- Equipment, item of property that has an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more and an expected service life of more than one year. Equipment purchase must be essential for the project and must be fully justified.

- Capital expenses: acquisition or construction of facilities needed strictly to perform the project. Equipment to amplify the research capacity.

- Out-of-Jurisdiction-Travel: Only if necessary for the completion of the work proposed. Must be fully justified and itemized by destination and cost. Can include travel-related costs for transportation, lodging, and meals. Allowance for air travel normally will not exceed the cost of round-trip, economy airfares. All travel must be pre-approved by the Trust. Travel should not exceed $5,000 per award. Travel in Puerto Rico (including mileage, meals, lodging) is not allowed.

- Subaward: to engage a third-party organization, when needed, to perform a scientific or programmatic portion of the sponsored project. Must be less than 50% of the costs for the entire grant.

Indirect Costs:

Indirect Costs: costs that are not readily identifiable with a particular cost objective (e.g., direct organizational activity or project), but nevertheless are necessary for the general operation of an organization. Indirect costs include salary and related expenses of individuals working in accounting, personnel, purchasing functions, rent, depreciation and utilities. Indirect costs are limited to a rate of **20%** out of the total funding awarded.

The following costs are not eligible:

- Unreasonable costs based on the proposed scope of work. All costs must be fully justified.
- Costs incurred pre-award, including proposal preparation costs;
- Maternity or sick leave expenses;
- Redundancy or other terminations costs;
- Contingency costs;
- Hospitality and entertainment costs;
- Journal subscription costs; and
- Relocation expenses.
- Travel in Puerto Rico, including mileage, meals and lodging.
- Direct or indirect support for any lobbying effort or for contribution to the political campaign of any candidate or for contribution to any political party or similar organization.

Info Sessions

The Trust along PR-DEDC will be holding a few briefings for those interested in submitting a proposal. These sessions will provide an overview of the submission and evaluation

process as well as a forum for getting potential applicants' questions answered. Specific sessions' dates will be announced through www.prsciencetrust.org, and social media.

Application Process

The PR-ACTD Grant RFP application process consists of two phases: Partial Application and Full Proposal.

Applications will be received only through our Grants application platform available at https://webportalapp.com/sp/pr-actd_grant

No other forms of submissions (including .pdf or MSWord documents, etc.) will be accepted.

User Profile

In order to gain access to the application forms the applicant must first register by creating a user profile. Information on the User Profile will be used as a statistical metric and will not be used as an evaluation criteria. The Principal Investigator must submit both the Partial Application and the Full proposal. The user profile must provide information about the PI as well as the contact information for the Institution's Research and Development Administrator.

Partial Application

Interested applicants must first submit a Partial Application. The applicant will have the option to apply under one of the following categories: **Lab research and development (academic or industrial), Pre-clinical research and Clinical Trials**. Partial Applications must provide the following information:

- **Abstract (1,500 characters with spaces):** A brief technical summary including project background, significance, main objectives and expected outcomes. The abstract of awarded proposals will be published on the Trust website.
- **Description of Current Grants and available funding**
- **Principal Investigator, Additional Key Personnel and/or Collaborators**

Once the applicants submit the Partial Application, they will have access to the Full Proposal.

Full Proposals

Proposal Format

Proposals must be submitted using the Grants application platform available through the Trust website. Key personnel curriculum vitae documents, support letters, figures, and bibliography (see *Proposal Content* section) should be included as attachments through the same application platform.

Confidential Information

The Trust discourages the inclusion of confidential/proprietary information as part of the proposal. Patentable ideas, trade secrets, privileged or confidential commercial or financial information, disclosure of which may harm the applicant, should be included in applications only when such information is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project.

If the application includes such information, clearly mark each line or paragraph on the pages containing the proprietary/privileged information with a legend similar to: "The following contains proprietary/privileged information that (name of applicant) requests not be released to persons outside the Trust, except for purposes of review and evaluation."

Proposal Content

The following information will be requested during proposal submission:

- **Title**: include project title, proposing institution, name and contact email of principal investigator.

- **Executive Summary** (3,500 characters with spaces): Include an overall technical project description at a level that will be accessible to a technically competent non-specialist. Include a summary of project length, cost, key performance milestones, and deliverables. Proposer should identify the novelty/originality in their proposal, (whether technical, market-focus, or both).

- **Research/Technology Background** (3,500 characters with spaces): Explain the technology and/or scientific advancement. The technology and/or proposed scientific advancement should be placed in a state-of-the-art context of similar, related, and competing efforts being carried out

worldwide. How is the technology/discovery novel and unique? Include a brief discussion of why this funding mechanism is particularly adequate for the idea (as opposed to funding from other agencies or other funding mechanisms).

- **Preliminary Data** (7,000 characters with spaces): What has the proposer accomplished to date in terms of research, development and/or commercialization efforts? Describe how preliminary data supports the hypothesis to be tested and the feasibility of the project.

- **Statement of Work (SOW) - Aims, milestones and timeline** (10,500 characters with spaces): Include an overall project plan that includes a Statement of Work with task descriptions, quarterly technical performance milestones, and specific final program aims. The inclusion of timelines or Gantt charts is highly encouraged. How will success on the project be measured? Proposals should clearly state the expected duration of the project and a rationale for it.

- **Project Management and External Collaborators** (7,000 characters with spaces): Provide a brief summary of the project team members, including their relevant skills and time commitment to the proposed project. If the project is to be conducted in collaboration with a third party entity (e.g. a collaboration with academia, other private entity, etc.) please provide information about the third party entity and their expected scope of work. If specific consultants will be critical for the project's success, please also include a summary of their role and include their CV in the appendix.

- **Resources and Environment** (3,500 characters with spaces): Describe the resources (e.g. equipment and facilities) that will be used to conduct the proposed work and how these contribute to the probability of success. If resources are to be accessed from third-party collaborators, provide evidence of third party's support to the project.

- **Budget and Budget Narrative** (10,500 characters with spaces): Itemize and justify all proposed direct costs for personnel, materials, equipment, travel, subcontractors, consultants, and/or suppliers, and facilities.

- **Intellectual Property** (3,500 characters with spaces): If appropriate, include a description of the intellectual property (IP) landscape for the technology or innovation. How does the applicant plan to protect any IP resulting from this project? Describe any IP obtained at present and/or any IP that is planned on being sought and protected prospectively.

- **Plan for future funding** (7,000 characters with spaces): Please describe the plan for submission of R&D proposal(s) after the end of this award.

- **Commercialization** (7,000 characters with spaces): If applicable, provide a clear and concise description of the proposed technology's market potential and the planned path to commercialization. The description needs to, at a minimum, address the following basic questions:

    - Who will be doing the commercialization?
    - What is the projected time for commercialization?
    - How will the plan be carried out?
    - How much (in round numbers) will the commercialization cost?
    - What are the initial target markets and their approximate size?
    - Who are your initial customers and what value does the technology provide to them?
    - What is the competitive advantage that will help your product succeed?

  The potential economic development impact (e.g. company collaborations, startups, spinouts, new or enhanced product offerings, job creation, licensing opportunities, etc.) and any related special circumstances should be clearly described.

Proposals under the category **Pre-Clinical Research,** must also include the following

information:

- **Pre-Clinical Type:** In Vitro, In Vivo or both. For In Vitro, applicants must specify if human tissue samples are being analyzed and which types. For In Vivo, the applicant must specify the Animal Type to be studied.

- Animal studies are contingent of IACUC protocol approval.

Proposals under the category **Clinical Trials,** must also include the following information:

- The application must establish a multidisciplinary team of appropriate personnel at the contributing institution(s) to facilitate the rapid implementation of all aspects of the clinical trials, including recruitment and follow-up of participants, and design/implementation of the trial protocol.

- A detailed description of the clinical protocol including:

    - If available, a detailed description and rationale for the research hypothesis(es), background, and pilot data.

    - For drug/device trials, discuss in detail the regulatory requirements and status, if not already approved, what regulatory pathway will be sought, details on how the drug/device will be obtained, and any special considerations for distribution. Time to obtain should be incorporated into the timeline for the trial start-up.

    - A comprehensive description of the intervention with justification for its assortment and involving dosing and route of administration for drugs and exposure and parameters of utilization for devices.

    - Make available safety profile as appropriate, availability of drug or device, and feasibility of implementation in various settings.

- The reasoning for the selected trial model and a rationale for why the recommended study population is the most suitable group to answer the research matter(s).

- Inclusion and exclusion criteria, including criteria for identifying the chosen study population(s).

- Incorporate info concerning trial design, the number and diversity of participants, and the types of interventions investigated.

- Comparator group(s), including rationale/evidence basis for selection.

- Primary and secondary endpoints selection, including analysis and justification.

- An explanation and rationalization of the laboratory evaluations (as appropriate).

- Strategies to apply and monitor Good Laboratory Practices (GLP) and Good Clinical Practices (GCP), as appropriate, must be provided.

- The reasoning for all assessments as well as clinical, laboratory, physiological, behavioral, patient-centered, or other outcomes addressing the primary and secondary research questions; a description of the use of patient-reported outcomes as well as non-traditional data collection approaches (e.g., telephone, mobile devices, or web-based systems).

- A discussion of significant anticipated challenges and potential pitfalls in implementing and conducting the investigation and how they will be tackled.

- Monitoring plan, including safety mitigation and monitoring and

adverse event identification, monitoring, and reporting.

- A thorough Statistical analysis plan must be included discussing in detail:
  - Estimated needed sample size.
  - Effect size estimate
  - A discussion of event rates.
  - Contingency plans
  - A planned approach to statistical analysis, including interim futility analyses.
- The strategies for recruitment and retention as well as:
  - Recruitment and enrollment plan, including an estimate of the number and type of enrolling sites needed to execute the protocol.
  - Strategy for diverse enrollment, including information about the experience and strategic approaches for recruiting diverse research participants into clinical trials.
  - Ideas for consent, including innovative approaches to consent.
  - Strategies for participant follow-up procedures and data collection in compliance with the federal regulations in Section 801 of the Food and Drug Administration Amendments Act (FDAAA 801) as implemented by 42 CFR Part 11 (Final Rule).
  - Strategies to address potential participant co-enrollment in other trials and/or the observational cohort study.

Appendix Material (not included in within characters limit established for full proposals):

- **Key Personnel Curriculum Vitae** – (4 pages maximum per person, NIH bio-sketch format encouraged)

- **Support Letters** – Provide all appropriate letters of support, including any letters necessary to demonstrate the support of key consultants and collaborators included in the application. Also include, if applicable, letters from current and/or prospective customers or commercialization partner in support of the proposed project (these must be submitted on institution letterhead from authorized personnel). This section must also include a letter of institutional commitment from authorized personnel that acknowledges support for the application, describes any institutional support (e.g. resources, intellectual environment, administrative structures, etc.) available to the research team, and, if appropriate, includes information regarding matching funds or in-kind support for the application.

- **Figures** – Include only relevant figures mentioned in the text.

- **Bibliography,** as applicable.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposal review will be carried out according to the following criteria:

- **Approach and technical merit** - Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed?

- **Innovation** - Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions proposed?

- **Significance** - Does the project address an important problem, a critical barrier or a market need? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field? Does the proposed project have commercial potential to lead to a marketable product, process or service?

- **Investigator(s)** - Are the Proposers' and their teams' capability and experience commensurate and relevant to the proposed work and their ability to execute the proposed project and show meaningful results?

- **Environment and Collaboration** - Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangement? Projects that involve industry-academia collaborations leading to technology transfer and/or commercialization will be given additional consideration, as will projects that synergize with existing resources and enhance the research landscape in Puerto Rico.

- **Budget and Budget Justification** - Appropriateness of budget, project duration, and level of effort proposed. Although not required matching funds will be interpreted as a demonstration of the proposer's commitment to the project.

- **Viability of the Commercialization Plan (if applicable)**. Reviewers will be asked to evaluate each proposal on the quality of this section. This evaluation will include how well the proposer makes his/her case in terms

of: a) market potential, b) path to commercialization (who, when, how, how much) and, c) potential economic development impact (company collaborations, startups, spinouts, new or enhanced product offerings, job creation, licensing opportunities, etc.)

Site Visits

As part of the evaluation process, the Trust's Research Grants Program may conduct site visits to an applicant's institution. Before visiting an institution, the Trust will explain the reason for the visit, schedule a date, and provide a list of staff who will attend.

The expectation is to meet key staff and examine an institution's facilities, data, protocols, and accounting records in order to determine that an institution is suitable for funding before it can get a grant.

However, a site visit does not constitute an intent to award.

Selection Process

Award recommendation will be made by the Trust's Research Grants Program, based on the advice of an External Peer Review Committee (**EPRC**).The projects will be scored on a scorecard based on the above-mentioned criteria.

The EPRC will be comprised of experts in areas of relevance to the funding priorities of the RFP and appropriate to the topics covered by the applications. To ensure a fair and open competition, ERC members will not participate in the review and selection deliberations involving any situation that could create a clear conflict of interest. ERC members must sign a *Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement* and respect the confidentiality of the information provided in proposals.

Final grant funding approval, however, is bestowed upon the PR-DEDC. The PR-DEDC will form a multi-disciplinary selection committee led by the Deputy Secretary for Strategic Sectors. The selection committee will comprise individuals with expertise in the public health sector and research and development, both for industrial and academic purposes. The PR-DEDC reserves the right to: a) select for award all, some, or none of the proposals received and b) select portions of individual proposals for awards.

Scoring

The Trust utilizes a 9-point rating scale (1 = exceptional; 9 = poor), similar to the NIH's rating scale. Each reviewer assigned to an application evaluates the proposal's strengths and weaknesses within each review criteria and scores each separately. In addition, each reviewer to an application gives a preliminary overall impact score for that application. The preliminary scores are used to determine which applications will be discussed in full at the ERC meeting. For each application that is discussed, a final impact score is given by all eligible ERC members (i.e. without conflicts of interest), including the assigned reviewers. Each member's score reflects his/her evaluation of the overall impact that the project is likely to have based on the Trust priorities and requirements.