

## PERSIAN Cohort Peer Review Process and Principles

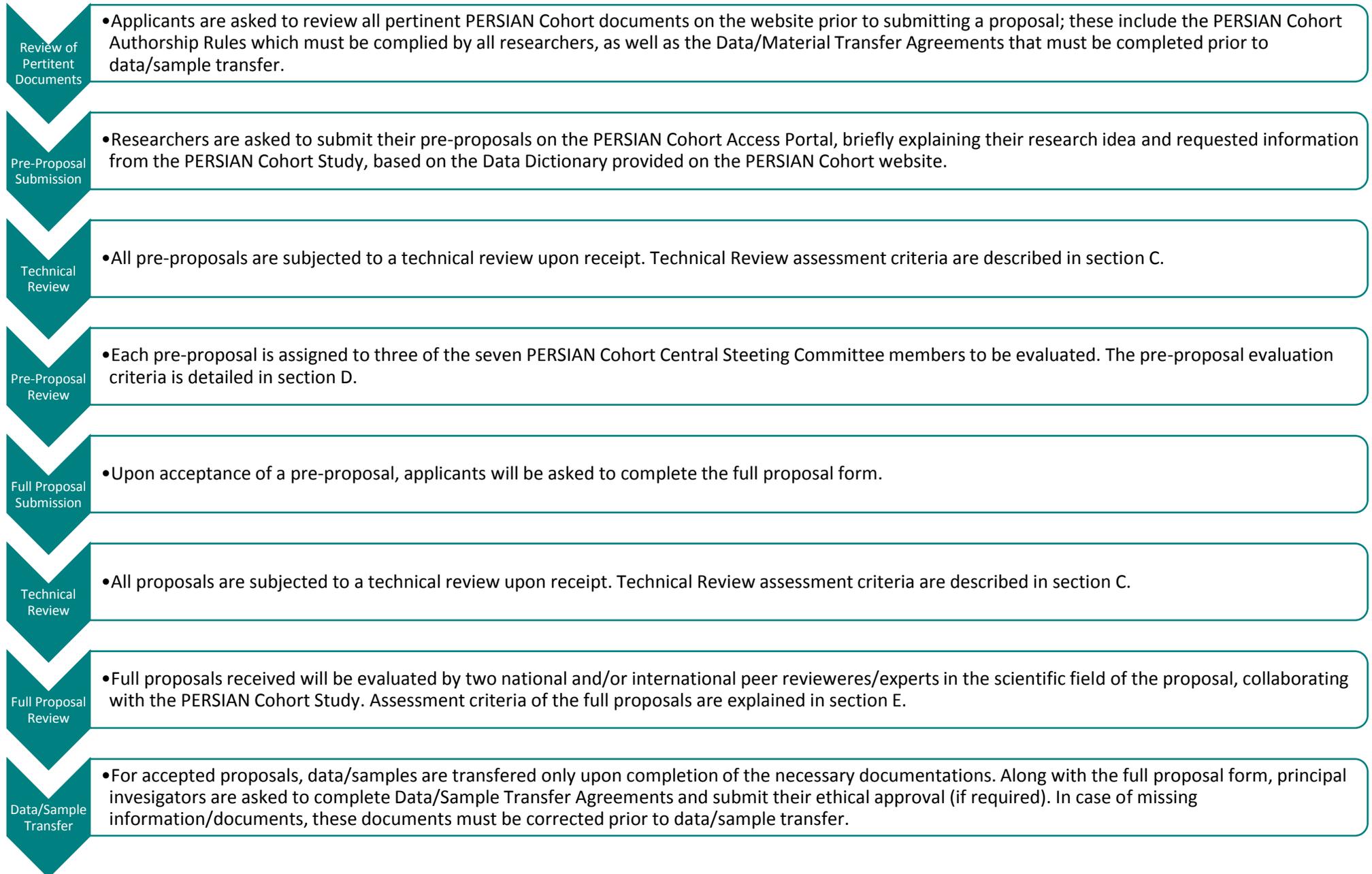
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### A. Statement of Principles of the PERSIAN Cohort Study Peer Review Process

- **Transparency**—the assessment criteria and peer review process of the PERSIAN Cohort Study are transparent and are published online for consideration prior to proposal submission.
- **Expert Assessment**—expert national and international peer reviewers in the scientific field of the proposal will assess each submission. Reviewers pledge to confidentiality and declare any conflicting interest prior to gaining access to proposals.
- **Confidentiality**—all proposals are treated in confidence by reviewers and all individuals involved in the review process.
- **Fairness**—proposals are assessed fairly based on their merit and scientific content. The peer review process will be unbiased, not influenced by gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, social or economic conditions of the applicant.
- **Conflicting Interests**—reviewers who may find to be directly or indirectly associated with a proposal or those who may have interests affecting the neutrality of their evaluation are asked to decline the proposal review
- **Right to reply**—principal investigators (PI) have the right to reply to scientific evaluations, and will have the opportunity to respond to, correct or provide additional information based on reviewer comments.
- **Integrity and ethical issues**—Ethics and integrity are the highest principles in the entire peer review process and their preservation is the responsibility of all persons involved in the proposal evaluation.

## B. PERSIAN Cohort Proposal Submission and Peer Review Process

An overview of the proposal submission and peer review process is provided in diagram 1, followed by details of each section as needed. All notifications regarding the review process will be made via the email provided by the PI, and through messages sent in his/her portal inbox.



### C. Technical Review Criteria

All pre/full proposals are technically reviewed prior to being sent to peer reviewer. In this assessment, pre/full proposals are reviewed for:

- a. **Completeness**—all sections in the pre/ full proposal forms must be completed by applicants with the exception of the following
  - i. Co-investigators: although it is highly encouraged that a team of investigators complete proposals, in cases where the PI has adequate expertise to complete the proposed project, the co-investigators section may be left incomplete.
  - ii. Funding: given that not all proposals will require funding, this section may also be left incomplete.
- b. **English Language**—all pre/full proposals submitted must be written in English. Language assessments are performed by a native English speaker; proposals sent in other languages as well as those with incomprehensible English writing will not meet the requirements of the technical review.
- c. **Data/Sample Request**—pre/full proposals requesting data not included in the PERSIAN Cohort Data Dictionary or samples not stored in the PERSIAN Cohort Biobank will not meet the requirements of the technical review.
- d. **Repetitive Proposal**—Research ideas that have been performed before in the PERSIAN Cohort will not be further reviewed. Applicants may search the **Ongoing Projects** section of the website prior to submitting their pre-proposal to avoid repetitive submissions.

### D. Pre-Proposal Review Criteria

Pre-Proposals will be evaluated by three members of the PERSIAN Cohort Central Scientific Steering Committee (CSSC). Members of the PERSIAN Cohort CSSC include the executive director of PERSIAN Cohort, two central committee consultants, as well as four PIs from cohort sites, elected by other cohort center PIs for a two-year CSSC membership. Each pre-proposal will be evaluated on:

- a. Novelty in concept OR methodology OR intervention/instrument
- b. Importance of the study in regards to national or international health concerns
- c. Potential of the proposal to improve research area
- d. Compatibility with the PERSIAN Cohort Study—whether data/samples requested are available in the database, or if new data collection/interventions are possible to perform in the cohort setting.

Pre-proposals are only accepted or rejected. If a pre-proposal is rejected for reasons that can be resolved, authors may re-submit their revised pre-proposal at any time.

### E. Full Proposal Review Criteria

Full proposals will be evaluated by two independent national and/or international experts from a pre-determined list of experts in various scientific fields, collaborating with the PERSIAN Cohort Study. The list includes experts in various defined fields of research. Each field of research also includes a senior scientist whose expert opinion will be used when consensus is not reached by reviewers. Each proposal will be evaluated on:

- a. PI/research team qualifications and expertise to perform the study—Adequate expertise is defined as having at least one previous publication related to the proposed study, in a journal with an impact factor greater than 2.5 (by the PI or members of the team) and having all necessary specialties included in the research team (i.e. methodologist, clinical specialist, statistician, etc).
- b. Significance of the proposed idea—an explanation of the existing knowledge as well as knowledge gaps should be explained

- c. Novelty in concept OR methodology OR intervention/instrument
- d. Complete and clear explanation of specific aims, study outcomes
- e. Research methodology adequacy to meet study aims (design, sample size calculation, subject recruitment, study variables, data collection/instruments, interventions, and analysis)
- f. Study limitations and adequate solutions
- g. Feasibility of the research—with respect to the planned time, objectives, intended results and resources available

A decision guide is provided to reviewers based on the score obtained by the proposal, and reviewers are encouraged, but not obligated to decide based on the options corresponding to the score obtained. In case the decision differs from the score obtained, reviewers are asked to explain their reasoning. The scoring system is as follows:

- Accept as is—Ready for data/sample transfer (Score >90%)
- Accept with minor revisions (Score 70-90%)
- Reconsider after major revisions (30-69%)
- Reject (Score <30%)

If a consensus is not reached by the expert reviewers, a third, senior scientist in the field of research will decide on the proposal.

- Mentorship of Young Researchers—having adequate qualifications in the field of the proposed idea by the PI and his/her team is one of the most important assessment criteria of full proposals. Given that one of the aims of the PERSIAN Cohort Study is empowering medical universities across the country with the adequate infrastructure and guidance to perform high quality research, if a proposal with a unique idea is received, in which the research team does not have adequate expertise, they will be introduced to an expert to mentor them in the process. The mentor will serve as the senior/corresponding author of publications.
- Similar/Merge able Projects—to provide maximum involvement of PERSIAN Cohort researchers as well as to encourage team work among PERSIAN Cohort Centers, if similar pre-proposals are received at the same time, PIs of those proposals will be contacted and encouraged to work together on the proposed idea, through a Memorandum of Understanding between their corresponding universities. If an agreement is reached, they can submit one full proposal, and if not, full proposals sent separately by PIs will be evaluated separately and the proposal with the highest score based on the scoring system explained above, will be accepted.

#### F. Codes of Conduct

All persons involved in the PERSIAN Cohort Peer Review Process must respect the principles of confidentiality, integrity, fairness and conflict of interest. It is expected that the tasks entrusted to them are completed responsibly, respecting the highest ethical and professional standards of their profession, not constituting or representing the interests of the institution where they are employed, nor any other organization.

- All persons involved in the evaluation procedure should equally treat all project proposals, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, social or economic conditions of the applicant.
  - a. All persons involved in the peer review process oblige to respect the confidentiality of the information they come in contact with, not discussing the information with third parties, or disclosing them publicly.
  - b. Reviewers must not directly communicate with applicants and all correspondence must be made through the PERSIAN Cohort Access Portal
  - c. In case reviewers find out they are directly or indirectly associated with a proposal or have interest affecting the neutrality of their evaluation, they must decline the review as soon as they become aware of the conflict. Declining a review is made available in every step of the review process.

