

FSPHP Research Policy and Guidelines for Investigators

April 25, 2012

(The Policy document includes the “Notes” section; the Guidelines that would be available to non-FSPHP investigators would not include the “Notes” section)

Introduction:

The Research Committee of the Federation of State Physician Health Programs (FSPHP) developed guidelines for investigators interested in working with physician health programs (PHP's), individually or in multisite work, or data generated by the PHP's, in order to inform prospective investigators, standardize the procedure, and facilitate the process. We hope that any investigators seeking the endorsement of the FSPHP will find these guidelines helpful. The guidelines are meant to encourage research in the field of physician health, and should not be conceptualized as constraining the process beyond assuring the competence of researchers, the scientific value of the prospective research for the field, and the collaborative nature of the work.

Guidelines:

1. Evaluation of Proposed Researchers

The primary concern in vetting researchers is their track record of sound scientific work. Their publications will be reviewed by the research committee of the FSPHP. Their history of successful grant funding and their stature as scientists is considered important, though more junior researchers, especially if collaborating with those more senior, would also be considered. Previous research in the field of physician health or previous research with PHP's is potentially a positive element but is considered less important and non-essential.

2. Evaluation of Proposed Research - Subject

Key in evaluating proposed research is the value and importance of the project and research questions to the field of physician health and/or to the FSPHP. Because individual PHP's have limited resources – time, personnel, money – for conducting or participating in research, the FSPHP has a responsibility to make sure that the research subject is sufficiently important to the field to before individual PHP's commit those resources.

3. Evaluation of Proposed Research – Methodology

The research committee's approach to evaluating the methodology of proposed research will vary with the proposal. For instance, in cases of research associated with a grant application to a major research-funding institution (e.g. one of the National Institutes), the committee may choose to leave the methodology evaluation to that institution. In other situations, the point-person of the research committee will appoint an ad hoc subcommittee to review the methodology. It is anticipated that the membership of the subcommittee will be determined by the member's expertise; research

committee members, research committee consultants and other FSPHP members will be considered for a given subcommittee.

4. Collaboration

A collaborative relationship between the FSPHP, especially members of the research committee, and researchers in a proposed project is considered important, and essential in many cases. Evidence of collaborative spirit or intention may include early involvement of the FSPHP research committee on the part of the researchers. We encourage researchers to include the FSPHP in early discussions of the project, its importance, design, and practicality. Early collaboration with the federation will benefit researchers by providing the PHP perspective on the issues to be researched, which could help in proposal development. Prospective investigators should feel free to contact and discuss the project when it is still in the embryonic phase, without feeling compelled to outline a formal proposal or to know the answers to questions that may be asked in formal review. To this end, the chairpersons of the research committee would welcome preliminary discussions and may refer interested researchers to members who have experience or expertise that could prove helpful. For each research project that goes forward, that is, is endorsed by the FSPHP, involves one or more PHP's, and is funded, the research committee will designate a point person to liaison with the researchers during the course of the research and in the writing of papers based on the work. Matters pertaining to the review and authorship of papers for publication are considered collaborative issues.

5. Other Structural Matters

The extent to which proposed research will provide some funding for personnel to conduct the work at the PHP level is considered important. A document that defines the relationship between the FSPHP and the researchers may be required. It is anticipated that when a project receives the endorsement of the research committee of the FSPHP, the proposal will then be presented to the Board of Directors of the FSPHP for approval. If approved, the Board or its designee (e.g., the research committee) will communicate with member states of the FSPHP concerning its endorsement and will encourage individual PHP's to participate in the project.

6. Other Matters

The research committee does not believe that these guidelines will cover every scenario in which researchers will ask for help from the FSPHP. For instance, researchers might wish the FSPHP to endorse a project for the sake of a grant proposal but not want FSPHP or PHP participation in the work itself. The research committee will evaluate each situation individually but will utilize the principles articulated in this document.

7. First step for interested investigators: Contact one of the co-chairs of the Research Committee of the FSPHP to begin discussion of your research idea and background. Further steps will be developed and discussed at that time.