

Maryland Pediatric Cancer Research Commission
Meeting #6 | October 9, 2025 | Time 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees

Members in Attendance:

Dana Christo
Michelle Urzynecok
Ruth Hoffman
Kathryn Ruble
Beth Siever
John Shern
Piotr Walczak
Curt Civil
Jeffrey Dome
Aziza Shad
Donald Small

Members Absent:

Elizabeth Kromm
Brigitte Widemann

Commission Staff:

Sadie Peters
Kate Natafagi

Additional Attendees:

Ken Lin Tai
Pansy Washington
Tyra Hudgens
Pamela Williams
Jody Sheely

1. Welcome, Agenda Review, and Roll Call

- a. The meeting was called to order at 3:03 p.m. by Co-chair Ruth Hoffman, who provided an overview of the agenda.
- b. Roll call was conducted. Ten members were present, representing a quorum.
- c. New member Michelle Urzynecok was introduced.
- d. Minutes from Meeting #5 were reviewed by the members. With no edits, Don Small moved to approve the minutes and Aziza Shad seconded the motion. The Commission approved the minutes unanimously.

2. Progress on Requests for Applications

The Commission reviewed the draft Request for Applications (RFA) for the Peer Review Organization (PRO). Ruth Hoffman led the discussion.

- a. Peer Review RFA Subcommittee Updates
 - Ruth Hoffman reported that the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Office of Communications was not in support of the Commission's proposed logo design. The MDH Office of Communications offered a logo that is more standard for MDH public-facing websites. Members expressed concern that the MDH logo includes elements resembling religious symbols. Sadie Peters explained that the logo is derived from the Maryland state flag and that MDH prefers no separate logo for the

Commission. However, she agreed to inquire whether an alternative MDH-approved option without cross imagery could be used.

- **Reviewer Eligibility:** Members discussed and agreed that reviewers retained by the PRO hired by the Commission should not be affiliated with institutions eligible to apply for funding under the RFA, regardless of their state of residence or employer. They should be experts in pediatric or general cancer research but not necessarily “nationally recognized” to avoid subjective interpretation.
- **Reviewer Conflict of Interest:** After discussion, the Commission members agreed that reviewers may not participate in or collaborate on applications submitted for funding under the RFA.
- **Lay Reviewer Participation:** Members discussed whether to include a lay representative (person with lived experience) in the proposal review process. The group reached consensus to include such individuals on the review panel, with the PRO determining the scope of their involvement and how many lay reviewers would be retained. The lay reviewers would not provide scores, but could offer comments reflecting patient or family perspectives.
- **Progress Reports:** The Commission agreed that progress reports should be limited to 1-2 pages and, where possible, reviewed by the original reviewers and returned to the MDH and the Commission within 45 days of PRO’s receipt of the reports from the reviewers.
- **Grant Volume and Review Capacity:** To minimize limitations on the number of submissions from eligible institutions, members recommended allowing for review of up to 26 applications, rather than the previously stated 20–22.
- **Future Steps:** The subcommittee will incorporate these revisions into the RFA and present the updated draft for full Commission approval at the next meeting.

b. Scientific Grant RFA Subcommittee Updates

The Commission then reviewed the draft RFA for the Scientific Grant. Curt Civin led the discussion.

- The Commission again discussed how many submissions would be accepted from any singular institution. Membership affirmed a cap of nine (9) submissions from each institution.

- No-Cost Extensions: The group discussed allowing no-cost extensions of up to one year beyond the two-year grant period to accommodate unforeseen delays. Members agreed that this flexibility should be noted clearly in the RFA and detailed in the award conditions.
- There was discussion about the definition of “pediatric” and with what population groups researchers could propose to work. Language in this Scientific Grant Application draft was revised to “birth through 19 years of age (inclusive)”.
- Sadie Peters offered that for the Applicant Eligibility section of the RFA, clarification was being sought from the MDH Procurement office about whether for-profit entities may apply.
- There was discussion that applicants’ budgets may support Maryland-based research, including patient enrollment in clinical trials and use of patient data.
- The Commission, in its discussion about its role in secondary reviews of applications, agreed that recusal processes will be used to manage conflicts of interest and that would be a major point of discussion in the next meeting.
- Institutional Limits and Principal Investigator (PI) Roles: The Commission discussed how to count multiple applications from investigators within the same institution. It was agreed that an investigator may serve as Contact PI on one application, and can participate as a co-investigator on additional applications.
- Subcontracts with Children’s National Hospital: The Commission confirmed that subcontracts may be permitted for Children’s National Hospital only when the research involves Maryland-based patients or sites. Ruth Hoffman affirmed that this aligns with legislative intent to benefit Maryland residents.
- The group discussed removing or modifying template language that does not apply to this grant (e.g., federal funding requirements, clinical trial restrictions). Staff agreed to convey these requests to the MDH Procurement office.
- The commission requested that MDH adjust the Conditions of Award section to ensure consistency and eliminate duplication with the main RFA content. Dr. Civil stated that the commission is awaiting MDH’s incorporation of the discussed revisions and resolution of outstanding

questions under departmental review. It was discussed that a revised version of the RFA could potentially be circulated to the Commission prior to the next meeting for final review and consideration.

3. **Regulations Requirements**

Sadie Peters and Kate Natafgi presented an overview of the draft regulations required to establish and administer the Maryland Pediatric Cancer Fund. Members were reminded that the regulations are mandated by statute and will guide future rulemaking and grant processes. Dr. Peters emphasized that while much of the regulatory text has been developed, Commission input is needed before posting for public comment and formal promulgation.

Kate Natafgi provided a brief orientation to the legal hierarchy, explaining how regulations implement statutes and precede detailed agency rules, and reviewed the draft regulation's structure and content areas, including purpose, scope, and payment terms.

- Definition of "State-Based Childhood Cancer Organization": The Commission reviewed proposed language defining a "state-based childhood cancer organization" for purposes of a promotional grant authorized under statute. Members discussed whether "headquartered in Maryland" accurately reflected legislative intent and agreed that "state-based" should not be interpreted as limiting an organization's work exclusively to Maryland. The proposed definition was accepted without objection.
- Recusal and Oversight Provisions: Members reviewed draft language referencing the Maryland Ethics Law as the basis for Commission member recusal procedures when considering grant applications. The proposed language would read "The Commission shall ensure participation recusal is conducted in accordance with the Maryland ethics laws." No objections were raised. The Commission also agreed that oversight standards for grant awards must be formally documented.
- Eligibility for Research Grants: The Commission discussed proposed eligibility language specifying that applicants must conduct research in Maryland, comply with applicable Maryland laws, and have the legal capacity to manage grant funds. Members recommended simplifying the language to remove redundancy and overly specific references to Institutional Review Board approval. There was consensus for this suggestion.

Further discussion addressed the definition of "educational institution" and the eligibility of individual physicians. Members noted that while statute explicitly lists "physicians," independent investigators affiliated with Maryland institutions may also apply. The Commission agreed to clarify this section to ensure

consistency with statutory language while minimizing duplicative applications outside of institutional submissions. Suggestions were made to use “investigators” or “individuals” in explanatory sections and to move certain examples (e.g., commercial entities) under “other organizations.”

- **Grant Duration and Funding Limits:** Members debated proposed language limiting grant applications to two years of funding. Several members suggested removing the restriction to preserve flexibility for future grant cycles. MDH staff agreed to revisit this with the MDH Procurement office.
- **Review and Approval Process:** Proposed regulatory language outlining the grant review process was presented. The Commission supported language allowing either a Commission-appointed review committee or an external peer review contractor to assess applications and recommend awards. MDH staff affirmed that MDH must retain final authority for funding decisions.
- **Progress Reports and Extensions:** The Commission agreed to simplify the reporting requirement to state that “progress reports will be required,” with specific timelines to be determined. Members also supported allowing the Department to approve no-cost extensions of up to one year, consistent with prior discussion.
- **Publications and Acknowledgments:** Proposed language was reviewed requiring grantees to acknowledge funding support “from the Maryland Pediatric Cancer Fund” in any published research. MDH staff will confirm the correct naming convention for consistency with statute.
- **Recusal Guidelines:** Dr. Peters noted the need to develop formal written disclosure and recusal guidelines for Commission members. This topic will be addressed in a future meeting, with assistance from MDH ethics staff.
- **Clarified definitions:**
 - “State-based childhood organization” does not limit grants to organizations that only conduct promotional activities in the state of Maryland.
 - “Promotional grant” definition reviewed.

4. Membership Updates

a. New staggered terms

- The Governor’s Appointments Office is issuing corrected appointment letters to bring the group into compliance. Those with expired terms will receive re-appointment letters with the expectation of service until reappointed.

5. **Next Steps**

- a. Scheduling: Kate Natafagi will distribute a Doodle poll for a December meeting and begin scheduling monthly meetings for 2026.
- b. Subcommittee Meetings: Two per subcommittee are to be scheduled.
- c. Regulation Drafting: There will be ongoing review by MDH staff.

6. **Public Comment**

No members of the public were present and there was no public comment.

7. **Adjournment**

As all business was concluded, Curt Civil asked for a motion to adjourn. Jeffrey Dome moved that the meeting be adjourned. Don Small seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at: 4:59 p.m.