



**The Society  
of Thoracic  
Surgeons**

## **Task Force on Funded Research (TFR) Program Processes and Procedures**

### **Overview and Purpose**

The STS Task Force on Funded Research (TFR) includes surgeon members from all major cardiothoracic surgery disciplines. The TFR works closely with the STS Research Center to consider and review a variety of research projects and proposals that would utilize data in one of the four STS National Database component registries—Adult Cardiac Surgery Database (ACSD), General Thoracic Surgery Database (GTSD), Congenital Heart Surgery Database (CHSD), and Intermacs Database. The TFR Program is one of three major research avenues for investigators. The other two are the [Access & Publications Program](#) and the [Participant User File Program](#).

One primary focus of the TFR Program is to facilitate linkage of STS National Database data to an external source of data (e.g., Medicare data to examine longitudinal outcomes in Database patients). The Task Force also assists with applications to obtain extramural funding and collaborates with investigators to develop grant applications (e.g., with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) for research using Database data.

Additionally, the Task Force considers, conditionally approves, and facilitates investigator-led research funded by institutions, industry, or the investigators themselves.

### **Application Process**

To avoid issues with scientific overlap, investigators are highly encouraged to review the [list of active STS research proposals](#) and [list of recently published STS research studies](#) for the intended registry before submitting a TFR Program application. Investigators also may consult with STS Research Center staff about their proposal topic/aims, if necessary. These steps are meant to avoid wasted effort on a proposal that would overlap with previously approved STS research.

Investigators can complete the online [TFR Program application form](#) at any time. Applications are received and processed on a rolling basis.

## TFR Program Process

After an application is submitted:

- **Phase I – Proposal Review**
  - The proposal is reviewed for accuracy and completeness. If no issues exist, two primary TFR reviewers are assigned to provide scientific review.
  - TFR reviewers score proposals according to the scientific novelty and merit of the proposed research, the feasibility of the research, and the impact of the proposal on current practice.
  - The principal investigator (PI) presents his/her proposal, with assigned reviewers as primary discussants, during a TFR review call.
  - The Task Force will confer independently and reach a decision.
  - In a timely manner, the Research Center Staff will convey one of two possible decisions:
    - **Proposal Not Approved**: The PI will receive a decision letter with comments explaining the negative outcome.
    - **Proposal Conditionally Approved**: The PI will receive a letter of approval outlining next steps for processing (see Phase II).
- **Phase II – Budget Development**
  - If the PI is seeking external funding, he/she should inform the STS Research Center of the extramural agency(ies) or industry organization(s) to whom the grant application or proposal will be submitted. Details of the funding opportunity(ies) also should be forwarded to STS Research Center staff.
  - The STS Research Center will work with the PI to develop and approve a budget. In the event that an STS Data Analytics Center (DAC) will be part of a grant submission, STS Research Center staff will work with the DAC to prepare a DAC-specific budget. If other institutions are included in the grant application as part of a subcontract, STS Research Center will work with these institutions to obtain their respective budgets.
  - Once the budgets are prepared, the STS Research Center will present these information to the PI for final budget approval.
- **Phase III – STS Leadership Review and Approval**
  - The Research Center will prepare and present the project to STS leadership for final approval.
- **Phase IV – Grant Submission and/or Contracting**
  - If approved by STS leadership, the project proceeds to contracting (if a funding source is available) or grant application submission, if the PI is seeking extramural funding.

## Abstract and Manuscript Submission and Review Process

The Task Force must review and approve all TFR Program-related abstracts and manuscripts prior to both presentation and publication. It is critically important to move research questions from abstract to manuscript in a timely manner, and all materials should be submitted to the STS Research Center for Task Force approval as quickly as possible.

It also is strongly recommended that TFR Program abstracts and manuscripts be submitted for presentation at STS educational program (e.g., the STS Annual Meeting) and *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, respectively.

The Task Force needs **at least 3 weeks** to review abstracts intended for presentation at a scientific conference. If the voting majority of the TFR approves the abstract, the requestor is granted approval to move forward with his/her submission. If the voting majority denies approval of the abstract, the requestor is granted up to 4 weeks to make modifications to his/her work and resubmit it for review.

A manuscript draft also must be provided to the TFR for review **no later than 12 weeks** after an abstract is presented at a scientific conference. If the voting majority of the TFR approves the manuscript, the requestor is granted approval to move forward with his/her submission. If the voting majority denies approval of the manuscript, the requestor is granted up to 4 weeks to make modifications to his/her work and resubmit it for review.

[Contact the STS Research Center](#) if you have additional questions.