Request for Proposals

For

Clinical Skills Assessment Pilot Project
ABOUT NCCPA:
Established as a 501(c)6 organization in the State of Georgia in 1975, NCCPA serves as the only certifying body for physician assistants in the U.S. The medical licensing authorities in all U.S. states and territories require NCCPA certification as one criterion for initial PA licensure. Twenty-three states require PAs to maintain NCCPA certification as a requirement for licensure renewal. NCCPA has earned accreditation from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The NCCPA is governed by a Board of Directors.

There are more than 92,000 certified PAs today, and NCCPA administers initial certification exams to approximately 6,300 new PAs each year and 12,000 recertifying PAs each year. Those exams are administered at PearsonVUE testing centers year-round throughout the U.S. and at a number of international locations.
1.0 Objective

The National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) seeks a qualified organization to conduct a performance-based examination that uses standardized patients (SPs) in a simulated clinical setting for the purposes of uniformly measuring the competencies required for effective physician assistant (PA) interactions.

2.0 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this pilot project is to develop a valid and reliable examination tool that can be used to assess PA clinical skills, compile performance data on such an exam, and analyze project outcomes to determine the importance of clinical skills evaluation of PAs. This information will be used to help inform the NCCPA Board of Directors in further decisions about the possible inclusion of clinical skills assessments as part of the certification program.

From its inception in 1975, NCCPA’s initial certification exam (PANCE) included a clinical skills component that was administered by PA educators at local educational programs until 1997. As the NCCPA transitioned to a computerized administration of PANCE, the clinical skills component was eliminated. As a result, assessing PA clinical skills was no longer included in the certification process, and the task of verifying clinical skills was relegated to PA educational programs.

In an effort to increase the number of PA competencies assessed by NCCPA’s certification program, and recognizing that some competencies may best be assessed through a performance exam, the NCCPA Board of Directors is reconsidering whether some type of clinical skills assessment should be included in the certification process. NCCPA conducted a feasibility study in late 2011 as a first step to determine the Board’s interest in gathering additional information on clinical skills assessments for PAs. Based on the findings of the feasibility study, the Board approved conducting a clinical skills pilot study as described in this proposal. For additional information about proposal submittal instructions, please see Appendix A.
3. Scope of Work

3.1. Examination Development

3.1.1. Blueprint Development for Clinical Skills Cases
During the feasibility study, the panel agreed that clinical skill competencies related to communication and interpersonal skills were critically important and should be the main focus of the assessment. However, other blueprint considerations that improve the case type diversity, such as cases based on differing organ systems, patient ages and genders, settings and types of conditions (acute and chronic) should be included.

The investigator will be responsible for determining the nature and types of data needed to develop the blueprint, as well as determining the study design and methodology required. The investigator will also be responsible for the administration of the blueprint panel meetings, including hosting and facilitation. NCCPA will identify the content experts who will serve on the panel. The investigator will provide reports detailing the methodology used, as well as the results of the data analyses and a discussion of the outcomes.

NCCPA will provide background data such as practice analysis reports, data on the PA population, information from the feasibility study, etc.

3.1.2. Scoring Instrument/Rating Scales Development
Once the blueprint has been developed, scoring instruments and rating scales targeted at identifying the minimal competence level of knowledge and skills of an undifferentiated PA entering clinical practice will be developed. All scoring instruments must be constructed in accordance with and conform to current professional standards, and should be constructed to maximize reliability and validity.

The investigator will use their knowledge of current and seminal research, existing scoring scales, and psychometric expertise to work with the panel of NCCPA subject matter experts to develop a novel instrument for scoring the pilot cases. The investigator will also be responsible for hosting and facilitating the meetings as well as handling administrative tasks associated with the meetings. NCCPA will identify the subject matter experts to serve on the panel for developing the scoring instruments and rating scales.

3.1.3. Case/Station Format Development
The cases that will be used for the pilot will be developed based on the examination blueprint. As previously noted, the feasibility study panel made recommendations about case development, and those recommendations should be considered in this pilot project. The cases may be new cases developed for NCCPA or cases that the investigator owns and will modify for NCCPA purposes. The proposal should include recommendations on the number of cases that should be administered to each PA in
the pilot and the total number of cases that should be developed for the pilot in order
to yield reliable measurement results. All cases developed or modified for the pilot will
be the property of NCCPA.

The investigator will be responsible for providing the expertise, methodology, and all
functions related to developing cases or reviewing and modifying existing cases if a
decision is made to use cases already developed. The investigator will be responsible
for hosting and facilitating the panel meetings as well as handling administrative tasks
associated with the meetings. NCCPA will identify the content experts to serve on the
panel.

3.2. Exam Administration

3.2.1. Training Standardized Patients
The investigator will be responsible for all activities associated with recruiting, hiring,
and training standardized patients in accordance with the specifications detailed in the
cases and the scoring tools developed for the pilot. As part of the hiring process, the
institution will ensure the standardized patients have signed a waiver assuring the
confidentiality and security of the project and the examination materials.

3.2.2. Training Raters/Scorers
The investigators will provide guidance on the rater and examiner qualities and/or
characteristics that are important for this project. The investigator will also be
responsible for all functions associated with developing and conducting the training
sessions, including related administrative tasks, hosting the meetings, and facilitating
the meetings. Based on the investigator’s recommendations, NCCPA will recruit and
select PA and physician raters and provide the contact information to the investigator.

3.2.3. Developing Candidate Materials
The investigator will work with NCCPA’s panel of content experts to develop
informational materials that will be provided to candidates and PA programs to explain
detailed information on the case blueprints, how the cases will be administered, the
scoring process, etc. A policies and procedures document will be developed for the
pilot, and all participants will be required to sign the document prior to participating in
the project. The investigator will provide recommendations on the information
provided to candidates in the pilot as well as information that would be provided to
actual candidates in a live exam.

3.2.4. Selecting PA students to Participate in the Pilot
The investigator will provide recommendations regarding the qualities and/or
characteristics to consider when identifying the PA students to participate in the pilot
(i.e., type of PA program, length of curriculum, age, gender, type of clinical skills
assessment tools used in the PA program, geographic location, etc.) and the number of
students needed for the pilot to have a sample size sufficient to produce valid and reliable results.

NCCPA will identify the students to participate in the pilot and will provide the investigator with the contact information for the students selected. The investigator will be responsible for communicating with the students to schedule the exam time, provide travel information, requirements of the exam, what to expect on the exam date, etc.

3.2.5. Administering the Exam
The investigator will be responsible for providing the facilities and all staffing required for administering the pilot in a secure, standardized manner. Video and audio recordings will be made of all sessions of the cases administered. The investigator will work with NCCPA to establish the dates and locations for the exam administrations.

3.2.6. Post Exam Survey
The investigator will work with NCCPA to develop and administer a post exam survey that will be administered to the PA students participating in the pilot study to gather information from the students’ perspective. The survey results and analyses will be included with the final report of the pilot.

3.3. Post Administration
3.3.1. Scoring Analysis
The investigator will determine the most appropriate psychometric methods to be used for analyzing the results of the pilot and exam scores scales. The analysis should, at a minimum, include an evaluation of scores from raters and standardized patients to determine any differences or effects, evaluation of leniency/stringency, scoring distributions by patient, and inter-rater reliabilities as appropriate.

3.3.2. Standard Setting
The investigator will provide recommendations on the most appropriate methods for conducting a standard setting study. Although the pilot study may not require a full standard setting study to be conducted, it will be important to have information on how the exercise would be conducted and how the pilot results may look if a standard was applied. NCCPA will be responsible for recruiting any content experts needed for conducting the standard setting.

3.3.3. Score Reporting
The investigator will provide recommendations regarding the information that should be provided to candidates and PA programs from the pilot, as well as the format and content for score reports that would be utilized in a live administration.
3.4. Additional Requirements

3.4.1. Quality Assurance/Security

The investigator will provide NCCPA with information on the quality assurance and security methods that are incorporated into developing the pilot materials; training the SPs, examiners and raters; scheduling the sessions; administering the exams; scoring the exams; performing the analysis; etc.

3.4.2. Reports

The investigator will provide NCCPA with monthly status reports that outline the accomplishments during the previous month and the financial allocations to date.

The investigator will provide a final report on the pilot program, including a complete description of the project, the methodologies used for developing the cases and scoring tools, the methodologies used for conducting analyses, the participants, the results, and recommendations about potential next steps for NCCPA to consider regarding the clinical skills assessments.

NCCPA will establish a secure method for exchanging electronic files with the investigator.

3.4.3 Insurance and Liability

Investigator must have a level of insurance and liability coverage appropriate for the scope of this project. Details on the coverage and insurance carrier must be provided in the proposal.

4. Investigator Submittals

Investigators should submit all responses (including a letter of intent, queries about the RFP (if any) and a proposal) in electronic format to NCCPA, attention Sheila Mauldin, at the following email address: sheilam@nccpa.net in accordance with the schedule outlined on the final page of this RFP.

Responses to inquiries regarding the RFP will be compiled and disseminated to all investigators who have submitted a letter of intent as outlined in that same schedule.

5. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

NCCPA will evaluate all proposals using the following criteria:

- Strength of proposed methodology
- The proposed project fit with the scope and needs of the project
- Organizational and investigator expertise and resources available for the project
- Feasibility of methodology and timeline
Following review of the submitted materials, one or more organizations may be asked to present to NCCPA. All costs associated with responding to the RFP, including any travel expenses incurred, are the responsibility of the responder.

6. Rules Regarding Contact
During the proposal period, no responding organization or any person acting on behalf of a responding organization may contact the NCCPA Board of Directors, any individual director, NCCPA contractor, or NCCPA staff member, other than the contact person specified in Section 4, and any contact must be made via email. No responding organization may, at any time, attempt to influence the evaluation other than by a properly submitted response to this RFP or to a formal request for information or presentation.

Violation of these rules of contact constitutes grounds to reject the proposal of any offender.

7. Ownership of Materials and Intellectual Property Rights
NCCPA retains the ownership and rites to all design concepts, materials developed, and data gathered as part of this pilot project.

8. Rights Reserved
This RFP does not obligate NCCPA to complete the RFP process. NCCPA reserves the right to amend any segment of the RFP prior to the announcement of a selected organization. In case of such amendment, all respondents will be afforded the opportunity to revise their proposals to accommodate the RFP amendment. NCCPA also reserves the right to remove one or more of the services from consideration for this contract should the evaluation show that it is in NCCPA’s best interest to do so. NCCPA also may, at its discretion, issue a separate contract for any service or groups of services included in this RFP. NCCPA may negotiate additional provisions to the contract awarded under this RFP.
Appendix A

Proposal Instructions

A. Investigator Communication

For the purposes of this RFP, the term “investigators” is used to identify the RFP respondent.

a. Inquiries

All inquiries concerning this RFP should be directed to:

Sheila Mauldin
NCCPA
12000 Findley Road, #100
Johns Creek, GA  30097
Email: sheilam@nccpa.net

b. RFP Modifications

If additions, deletions, clarifications, or other modifications to this document become necessary, such changes will be communicated on NCCPA’s web site where the proposal is posted and disseminated to investigators who have submitted a letter of intent.

B. Letter of Intent

Organizations that intend to submit a proposal for this project must provide NCCPA with a letter of intent by September 13, 2013.

C. Proposal Format

a. Proposal Format and Contents

Successful investigators will submit their proposals using the following format:

i. Cover Letter – A cover letter on letterhead, signed by both the principal investigator and a senior institutional official, must certify the accuracy of the information submitted and support the principal investigator’s ability to perform the work described in the RFP submission. The cover letter should include names of individuals authorized to negotiate with NCCPA.

ii. Executive Summary – An executive summary outlining the proposal should not exceed two pages.

iii. Key Proposal Elements – Include the rationale, project aims, methodology, work plan, measurable outcomes/deliverables and project assessment plan that will facilitate accomplishment of the statement of purpose and scope of work.
This section must be 30 pages or less in length. Successful projects will address the scope of work elements in Section 3, in detail.

iv. **Investigators, Personnel, and Subcontractors** – List the names and qualifications of investigators, co-investigators, key personnel, and subcontractors who will be involved in this project, and provide information on their qualifications and experience as related to this project. Also include their overall time commitment and describe the activities they will perform. Do not exceed more than one page per person. The duration of the services of each consultant or subcontractor must be indicated in the Schedule and Milestones, and a separate budget sheet for each subcontractor/vendor must be included with the budget.

v. **Equipment and Facilities** – Include a description of equipment and facilities that will be used to implement this project. This contract will not pay for remodeling of facilities but may pay for pertinent equipment purchases, as approved by NCCPA and as detailed in the proposal.

vi. **Schedule and Milestones** – This project must be completed within two years of executing the contract. Provide the schedule and milestones based on the time that will need to be allocated for each step, indicating any steps that could be conducted simultaneously. Please provide an indication of when your organization would be available to start the project. At the end of each month, the principal investigator will be responsible for submitting a progress report outlining the milestones, project results and accounting of funds spent.

vii. **Budget** – The project has an approved budget not to exceed $200,000. Provide a detailed budget that lists the costs associated with developing the blueprint, developing the cases and scoring tools (including training the PA and physician examiners/raters), administering the exam (including all costs associated with training and paying the standardized patients, facilities used, all personnel costs, etc.), conducting all analyses, and providing the final report.

Travel expenses and honoraria for NCCPA panel members, staff, and PA students participating in the pilot will be the responsibility of NCCPA. NCCPA is not responsible for any travel expenses incurred on behalf of the investigator, its personnel, or subcontractors.
D. Schedule

The following schedule may be changed if necessary. If the schedule changes, affected responders will be notified by email, and changes will be posted on the website where the proposal was issued. In no event will the dates listed below change to earlier dates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFP issuance date:</td>
<td>August 15, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter of Intent due:</td>
<td>September 13, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written questions from respondents must be received by:</td>
<td>September 20, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answers to written questions will be disseminated on:</td>
<td>September 27, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposals due:</td>
<td>October 11, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finalist notified:</td>
<td>October 25, 2013</td>
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