



Introducing the PCOR-EM

A Validated Tool for Measuring Engagement

There is a science to engagement! Collective Insight, in partnership with the LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass-Boston and Boston College Connell School of Nursing, validated a measurement tool to prove just that.

Why Measure Engagement?

Meaningful community engagement is widely recognized as essential to designing research that is relevant, equitable, and responsive to community needs. As a result, funders, policymakers, and research institutions increasingly expect researchers to integrate engagement throughout their work.

Despite this growing emphasis, the field has lacked validated tools to measure the quality of engagement and to understand how engagement methods influence research outcomes. From December 2023 to February 2026, Collective Insight partnered with UMASS Boston and Boston College to implement Measurement Matters (SOE-2022C2-28570), a first of its kind Science of Engagement award funded by Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). This award addresses this measurement gap by creating the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Engagement Measure (or PCOR-EM for short).

What is the PCOR-EM?

The PCOR-EM is a validated 19-item survey tool designed to measure research teams' engagement activities.

Developed with 20 expert partners, including engaged researchers, patient and community partners, and engagement facilitators, this survey moves beyond oversimplified metrics such as the number of meetings held. Instead, it measures the quality of engagement practices across seven domains that reflect meaningful collaboration between researchers and community partners.



How Did We Get Here?

PCOR-EM Development

- Conducted a literature scan, consensus methods, focus groups, and cognitive testing with national and international engagement experts
- Established a shared definition of engagement and validated seven domains of meaningful engagement
- Developed a 30-item PCOR-EM to test and determine strongest items to keep

National Pilot

- Launched a survey pilot reaching 300 respondents who implement engagement, including researchers, community partners, and engagement coordinators

PCOR-EM Validation

- Collaborated with partners to analyze pilot results through regular analysis meetings
- Confirmed that the PCOR-EM reliably measures a single underlying construct of engagement
- Shortened the survey into a validated 19-item measure by keeping the items that tested the best
- Found that higher PCOR-EM scores correlated with higher engagement outcomes

The results show that the PCOR-EM can distinguish meaningful differences in engagement practices across research projects and provides early evidence that stronger engagement practices are linked with stronger engagement outcomes.

Practicing the Science of Engagement

The Measurement Matters project was shaped by the expertise of 20 engagement partners from the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., including researchers, patient and community partners, and engagement facilitators.

During PCOR-EM development, partners contributed through a Steering Committee, Pilot Partner Subcommittee, and as expert advisors. Together, they informed each phase of the project. We hosted weekly analysis “office hours” to work directly with community partners on interpreting results and shaping decisions. We also organized three Engagement Summits to validate findings and identify next steps.

Partners noted that meaningful engagement was supported through small but intentional practices, including:

- Multiple types of communication
- Staff time and budget dedicated to engagement
- Consistently sharing resources across multiple platforms
- Ensuring flexible ways for partners to contribute

Thank you to our partners for their tremendous investment and ongoing support!

The PCOR-EM

Breaking It Down

Who is the PCOR-EM for?

The PCOR-EM was piloted by 300 engaged researchers, patient and community partners, and engagement staff. The only requirement was that respondents be highly knowledgeable of how engagement was occurring within a research project.



What Does the PCOR-EM Ask About?

The PCOR-EM includes 19 questions that span the 7 domains of meaningful engagement. It asks questions such as:

- Are patient/community partners engaged in the design of research questions?
- Do patients/community partners have more than one way to access engagement meetings?
- Do researchers have access to training or mentoring on topics to enhance the engagement process ?



What Kinds of Results are Positively Correlated with Higher Scores on the PCOR-EM?

The PCOR-EM pilot package included the modified REST tool. We found that respondents that scored well on the PCOR-EM were likely to score high on the REST, which includes items like:

- Partners leading the research focus on problems important to the community.
- Partners leading the research ensure all partners agree on the timeline for making shared decisions about the project.

We also included additional outcomes questions, such as:

- The project led to additional funding
- Research methods changed based on learnings from engagement



Interested in using the PCOR-EM or learning more about science-backed strategies for engagement?

Contact Collective Insight at sophia@collectinsight.com
to learn more about our services!

What's Next?

The PCOR-EM opens new opportunities to understand how engagement works and how it influences research outcomes.

Our team will continue testing the PCOR-EM with larger and more diverse samples while exploring how engagement practices influence research quality, relevance, and impact.

Where to find this work? [Check our website to find reports](#)

Stay Tuned: Our team is collaborating with our partners to publish our findings widely. Look out for the latest version of the PCOR-EM on our website!

WE'RE HEADED TO ATLANTA!



Collective Insight's Sophia Webber and Janet Sasser, an Older Adult Research Advisor for Collective Insight, will present at the American Society on Aging's 2026 On Aging Conference in Atlanta.

Their roundtable will explore the process of engaging older adults to inform aging research as well as their co-research partnership to conduct analysis and report their findings.

Hope to see you there!



"Lifelong Learning: Engaging Older Adults in Research and Beyond"

***Wednesday, April 22
2:30-3:30 pm EST***

