RESEARCH TO SUPPORT COVID-19 RESPONSE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MARCH 2020

Below are some of the most common questions asked concerning this Call for Proposals. Please check this list of questions before contacting us with your query. This document will be updated on a regular basis to include new questions as they arise. The questions are grouped into the following topics:

GENERAL

1. **Why was it decided to launch a Call related to the current COVID-19 response in humanitarian settings?**

   WHO declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. There are reported cases in most countries hosting refugee and IDP populations. Refugees, IDPs and conflict-affected people in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 and the anticipated knock-on impacts on delivery of health and other essential services.

   Based on WHO guidance, IASC has issued Guidance for scaling up the COVID-19 response in camps and camp-like settings, highlighting inclusion, protection, and readiness. Adaptations are needed to enable responding agencies and health service providers to deliver the best possible care to the most vulnerable.

   Rapid research that will generate evidence to directly support the response to COVID-19 in humanitarian settings will be a critical contribution.

2. **What are you looking for in a successful application?**

   Applications will need to clearly demonstrate that there is a **need** for the proposed research, that the research is **feasible**, and that it will contribute to supporting the COVID-19 response in humanitarian settings.

Research must target:

- Refugees or IDPs in camps or urban humanitarian settings in LMICs, or conflict-affected people in humanitarian settings in LMICs
- health systems and health care workers supporting the COVID-19 response in humanitarian settings in LMICs

Primary data collection and secondary data analysis will be considered

The potential for real-time impact of research findings in the COVID-19 response must be **clearly demonstrated** in the proposal.

Research methodologies must be **rigorous** and might need to be adapted or innovative to address ethical challenges and those related to travel/movement restrictions, and to enable rapid research to be conducted.

The assessment criteria applied by the Funding Committee are set out in Q. 38. Applications are scored against these criteria, and the Funding Committee will recommend to the donor which of the strongest proposals should be funded.

SCOPE OF FUNDING

3. What is the thematic scope of this call?

The scope of the call covers research that will strengthen the evidence base on how to improve public health outcomes by directly informing **the response to the current COVID-19 outbreak**. Examples of research themes that are eligible in this call are provided in the Call Guidelines.

4. Are there research topics that are ineligible?

Yes. **We will not fund vaccine and therapeutic research and development of diagnostics.**

5. Are there restrictions on where I can conduct research?

Yes. Research can take place in humanitarian settings in LMICs (as defined by the list of countries featured in the Development Assistant Committee (DAC) list of ODA recipients) or can be desk-based. Desk-based research must have direct applicability to the COVID-19 response in humanitarian settings in LMICs.

6. Will we consider applications for research that may be best conducted in non-humanitarian settings in LMICs, but that would have an application in humanitarian settings?

No. This Call will only fund research taking place in humanitarian settings.

7. **Can I apply to undertake research related to COVID-19 outbreak(s) in a country/context where there are currently no reported cases of COVID-19?**

   Yes. We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, and that multiple contexts are anticipated to have cases and/or need to undertake preparedness activities.

8. **How long can research activities take?**

   Our priority is to fund rapid research that will directly inform the response to COVID-19 in LMIC humanitarian settings. We anticipate that a majority of proposals will be for short-term research conducted over the next few months. However, funding can be provided for research which takes place over an extended period if applicants can justify the value of this research to inform responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. Research uptake activities are expected to take place in real-time during the grant period.

9. **Would secondary data collection projects be considered, or do proposals have to involve primary data collection?**

   Yes, secondary data collection will be considered.

10. **Will you fund systematic reviews?**

    No. This Call will not fund systematic reviews.

11. **What kind of organisation can apply as the lead applicant?**

    The lead applicant may be a research institution, a non-profit institution or NGO, a UN agency, or a public or government institution. It must be legally registered in the country in which it is based. Individuals or for-profit organisations cannot be lead applicants.

12. **Does the study team need to include a humanitarian organisation?**

    Applications which propose to undertake primary data collection within a humanitarian setting in a LMIC must demonstrate inclusion of a humanitarian operational partner to ensure relevance of the research question and access to study location(s). For all studies, we strongly encourage International Organisations and humanitarian practitioner organisation(s) being included at some level of engagement to ensure **rapid utilisation of findings** to inform the COVID-19 response. Humanitarian organisations can include national or international NGOs or civil society organisations, UN agencies, and/or a public or government institution.

13. **Does the study team need to include an academic institution?**

    Study teams must include research expertise required to deliver high quality and rigorous research findings. Inclusion in the research team of an academic from a **research institution** (national and/or international) is strongly encouraged. The Principal Investigator (PI) must be able to demonstrate experience of undertaking previous research in similar contexts, and a track record of publishing findings in peer-reviewed journals. Post-doctoral candidates will not be considered eligible as PI.

14. Does the study team need to demonstrate additional measures to respond to the challenges of conducting research during the global COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. Applications will need to demonstrate how the proposed research is feasible in the context of travel and movement restrictions, and how rapid research can be conducted. Where research is proposed to take place directly with COVID-19-affected populations, the study must show evidence of a risk mitigation plan that will be adhered to and updated during the research period. This plan must consider how research activities will be conducted in a safe and ethical manner, for example how social distancing measures will be respected and how the privacy of research participants will be maintained in such contexts.

15. What are you looking for in terms of research uptake?

For this Call, it is expected that grantees will develop appropriate stakeholder engagement and communications plans to ensure that research findings will directly inform the current COVID-19 response, preferably in 'real time'. Applications must summarise these plans, naming which stakeholders will be engaged in the research, what activities will be undertaken to increase uptake of the research by these stakeholders, and what outcomes are expected as a result, during the course of the grant. **Activities** to increase uptake should be tailored for specific audiences. Examples include: production of open-access resources or short research summaries targeted at practitioners; translation of materials into relevant languages; active and targeted engagement with key stakeholders through briefings, workshops, webinars, etc. The **outcomes** of these activities should be changes to knowledge, behaviour, capacities or attitudes of target humanitarian stakeholders, which will directly lead to benefits for populations affected by COVID-19. General guidance is provided to applicants in the R2HC Research Uptake Guidance Note.

Proposals that do not include a clear description of how the research findings will be shared and utilised to inform the COVID-19 response will not be considered.

16. Will the research findings need to be published in a peer-reviewed journal?

Yes, there is an expectation that research funded through this Call will result in at least one peer-reviewed publication.

17. Will you fund the cost of interventions that are the subject of the research?

No, funds are not able to cover the cost of interventions.

18. Is there a minimum or maximum limit to the amount of funds that can be requested?

No. There is no limit to the amount of resources that can be applied for.

19. What types of cost will you cover?

Applicants may request support for personnel costs, travel costs, costs related to data collection and analysis, reasonable equipment costs, and other items, so as to cover the full research costs in the relevant setting. We will not pay for the costs of interventions.

20. Should money be included in the budget for the uptake and dissemination of research findings?

If there are costs associated with dissemination and uptake of research findings these should be included in the budget.

21. Will you pay overheads and is there a limit?

Where the lead applicant has no alternative source of funding for administrative management of the grant, applicants may request funds to cover these costs. Elrha allows organisations to request up to 10% of the project costs as organisational management costs. To be considered, these will need to be fully justified.

22. Will you cover additional costs if there is a currency exchange loss before or during the project?

No. We are unable to cover the costs of any currency exchange loss. The responsibility for managing exchange loss (and gain) lies with grantees, as is noted in the Grant Agreement. Resources cannot be allocated within a budget as a 'contingency' for currency exchange loss.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND ELIGIBILITY

23. Can I submit my application in any language?

No. Applications must be submitted in English. However, funds are available for translating documents from French into English if proposals are prepared in French.

24. Can a researcher or an organisation submit more than one application?

A PI and/or research team can only submit one application to this Call, although an organisation can submit more than one proposal if different study team members are involved. Due to the competitive nature of the call we strongly encourage organisations to only submit applications of the highest quality.

25. Do I need to be registered in the UK to be able to apply?

No, applicants can come from any part of the world.

26. Do I have to use the online application system?

Yes. Applications must be submitted through the Common Grant Application system through the link provided in the Call Guidelines. If you have technical difficulties with the online application system, please make sure you have read all the instructions and watched the video available on the site. If you cannot find the answer to your question, please email r2hc@elrha.org.

27. What is the timeline and process for deciding if the application is successful?

Applications will be reviewed in rounds during this period. The following **deadlines** for applications to be submitted to each round are:

- Round 1: 18.00 (GMT+1) on 13 April 2020
- Round 2: 18.00 (GMT+1) on 20 April 2020
- Round 3: 18.00 (GMT+1) on 4 May 2020

Further rounds may be added in due course.

All applications will initially be screened for eligibility. We aim to inform all applicants within 48 hours of the Call round deadline closing whether the proposal has been short-listed for technical and Funding Committee review.

Short-listed proposals will be reviewed by at least one technical expert reviewer and by Funding Committee members. The Funding Committee Chair will make a recommendation to the donors on which proposals to fund. We aim to inform successful applicants that they have been approved for funding on a rolling basis. We aim to provide a funding decision to applicants within two weeks of the round deadline. We anticipate being able to provide shortlisted applicants with a **funding decision** by/on the following dates:

- Round 1: end of 27 April 2020
- Round 2: end of 4 May 2020
- Round 3: end of 18 May 2020

Contracting will be subject to due diligence checks and signing of contracts.

28. If my application is successful when can I start the research activities?

Research must start as soon as possible so the findings inform the current response. Ideally this will be as soon as contracts have been signed, or sooner if feasible. Applicants wishing to conduct research later on in the year will not be eligible.

Applicants must submit a realistic timeline for the start of research activities in their proposals. This should take into consideration: your ability to start activities on receipt of a Letter of Award, but prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement (see below); the time required to secure necessary ethical approvals; the availability of your study team members and time required to employ any additional study team members.

We expect to inform successful applicants that their proposal has been accepted for funding on a rolling basis. The final approval will be subject to due diligence checks and the Grant Agreement being signed. Once the Grant Agreement is signed the first grant payment will be made.

However, successful applicants will be able to start activities sooner than this **if their institutions are able to underwrite the cost of the research between the formal approval of the grant application and the signing of the Grant Agreement**. The project start date would then be back-dated to reflect the actual date of the commencement of the research, provided all costs incurred were in line with the approved budget.

One of the common delays in finalising grant contracts is securing the agreement of applicant's institutions for the Grant Agreement. Applicants must share these with their legal departments at the earliest opportunity to ensure rapid approval of the Grant Agreement if your application is successful.

29. What are the fast track processes associated with the responsive mechanism?

- There will be no expression of interest phase; the full proposal template is a modified version of the one used during annual calls.
- The application window will initially be open for 5 weeks, and applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.
- Proposals will be reviewed by at least one technical expert, plus Funding Committee members; reviews will be turned around quickly.
- The Grant Agreement is non-negotiable and must be shared with Legal Departments at application stage so as to expedite swift approval once specific details are added.
- Successful applicants will be asked to supply the required due diligence documents to us within a rapid timescale, so that due diligence and budget reviews can be conducted with a view to rapid contracting. Applicants should review the documents listed on page 3 of the Due Diligence and Contracting FAQs prior to proposal submission and start collating these in advance of a funding decision, so you are ready to share these when requested.
- Successful applicants who want to start their research before the Grant Agreement has been signed will be able to do so, *provided that their institution is willing to bear all associated costs during the interim period and in case of the Grant Agreement not being signed.*
- It is anticipated that successful applicants will be informed within 2 weeks of the application round deadline.

30. Will I need to submit an Expression of Interest for this Call?

No. There is no Expression of Interest stage in this Call, only a shortened version of the annual Call full proposal template.

31. Will you be offering Seed Funding for applicants to the Call?

No. Seed Funding will not be available for this Call.

32. Will successful applicants be able to negotiate on the Grant Agreement?

No. The Grant Agreement is non-negotiable. A copy can be found here.

33. What happens if things change between submitting the proposal and finalising the grant award?

Although we anticipate finalising the grant award as quickly as possible, , we recognise that humanitarian contexts are characterised by uncertainty and change and will try to be as flexible as possible to accommodate any such changes.

34. Will I receive feedback on my application even if I am unsuccessful?

We will do our best to provide brief feedback to applicants, but this will depend on the volume of applications received.

35. How will the final list of grants be determined?

Each application will be assessed by our Funding Committee on its individual merit and according to the quality of the proposal. Recommendations will be made to the donors on which should be approved. The donors will have the final say on which proposals are funded, up to the limits of the available budget.

APPLICATION ASSESSMENT

36. What further guidance can you give based on the experience of the earlier Calls?

This Call is for short-term research to be undertaken during a specific crisis and is therefore different from our annual research calls. However, based on the experience of the applications received in earlier Calls, the following are key recommendations to potential applicants:

- Ensure that the proposal is within scope i.e. that it proposes research to support the COVID-19 response in humanitarian settings in LMICs.
- Ensure that the proposed research addresses a clear evidence gap and will have a significant impact on how responses to the outbreak are undertaken.
- Ensure that the proposed research addresses the local context in which research will take place and is informed by local partners (where relevant).
- Ensure that the research objective and research question are specific and precise.
- Ensure that the proposal explains clearly the nature of the intervention that is the subject of the study and any control/comparison group (where relevant).

- Ensure that the methodological approach is clearly specified and appropriate to address your research question.
- Ensure that the proposal is to undertake a research study and is not simply a programmatic evaluation or development of an intervention or product.
- Ensure that the research team reflects both research expertise as well as the ability to ensure operational feasibility and direct routes to uptake of findings within humanitarian organisations.
- Ensure that the Principal Investigator is able to demonstrate prior experience of leading similar research.

37. Who assesses the applications?

Each full proposal will be reviewed by an independent expert from a field corresponding to the proposed thematic focus of study. Taking these reviews into consideration, the final assessment of short-listed proposals will be conducted by an independent Funding Committee managed by Elrha.

The Funding Committee is comprised of a group of experts in humanitarian health, acting in an independent personal capacity, drawn from academic institutions, NGOs, governmental organisations and UN agencies.

38. What are the assessment criteria?

Applications will be assessed using a standard set of criteria. These include the following:

a. Impact
- How relevant is the research proposal to the stated aim of the call?
- To what extent does the research proposal demonstrate how it will strengthen the existing evidence base?
- How great is the potential for impact of the research through informing the current response?
- How well described is the foreseen pathways to uptake?

b. Soundness of methodology
- Is the research methodology clearly describe, and appropriate to the research objectives and the humanitarian context?
- Does the methodology take into account the need for baseline data and subsequent monitoring and evaluation?
- Does the methodology include an appropriate balance of quantitative and qualitative methods?

c. Operational feasibility
- How realistic is the proposal in terms of the timeframe, the budget and the operational challenges that are likely to be faced?
- Is the proposed configuration of roles and responsibilities of the various partners, including in-country partners, appropriate and credible?

- To what extent have the risks and challenges associated with implementing the proposed research been considered and addressed, particularly the security risks?
- Are ethical considerations adequately addressed?

d. Value for money

- How cost effective is the intervention in question (if relevant)?
- Does the budget appear reasonable for the proposed package of work, and do the costs represent good value for money?
- Given the likely impact of the research relative to the amount of funding requested, to what extent does the proposal represent overall value for money?

e. Strength of research partnership and team

- Is there evidence of direct involvement of an operational humanitarian organisation on the ground?
- Is there an academic institution or research methodologies expert associated with the proposed study?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of the research partners clear, proportionate and balanced?
- To what extent does the lead organisation and the Principal Investigator have the necessary experience and expertise to successfully lead the management and implementation of the research project?
- What is the overall strength of the research team in terms of relevant experience and expertise in this specific context?

OTHER

39. If you have further questions, please contact us at r2hc@elrha.org, putting "Query" in the Subject line.