

ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH POLICY AND SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND UNICEF
REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTENT

THIS CALL

The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research in collaboration with UNICEF, is soliciting letters of intent for research that seeks to enable the effective implementation of proven measures to improve maternal, newborn and child health. **Grants of up to US dollars 100,000 will be available to support research studies of 12 months in duration.**

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The Principal Investigator must be an implementer in a **low or middle income country**¹—an individual directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of health interventions for maternal, newborn and child health. **Program Managers, District Health Officers, Practitioners, and front line health workers are typical examples of such individuals.** This condition **must** be met for the proposal to be eligible for funding. Additionally, the research team is encouraged to collaborate with researchers from an academic institution or research institute based in the study country. See pg. 4 for more details on eligibility criteria.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Letters of intent will be judged on the potential of the research to make a difference in the delivery of services for the improvement of maternal, newborn and child health. Other criteria that will be taken into account include value for money, institutional capacity, as well as ensuring diversity in terms of issues addressed by the research.

DEADLINES

The deadline for the submission of a two page letter of intent is **22nd February 2014**. Invited full proposal submissions will be due on **22nd April 2014**.

HOW TO APPLY

All submissions must be made **online** through the Implementation Research Platform proposal submission site at <http://www.implementationresearchplatform.org/call-for-proposals/>.

¹ http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups#High_income

THIS CALL

In spite of proven solutions and increased support at national and international levels there exists a staggering burden of avoidable maternal and child morbidity and mortality with unacceptably slow progress on improvements in health outcomes. Effective implementation of known interventions could prevent a large proportion of the estimated 6.6 million under-five child deaths and 287,000 maternal deaths each year, largely in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa which account for 75% of these deaths.

The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research in collaboration with UNICEF is soliciting letters of intent for research that seeks to enable the **effective implementation of proven measures to improve maternal, newborn and child health**. Given the one year duration of the projects, research funded under this call would be expected to focus on the generation of new strategies and knowledge which enable the **more effective implementation of existing programs**. Researchers are not expected to design or implement new interventions to improve maternal, newborn and child health; this is beyond the scope of this call.

Implementers of health programs and interventions in low or middle income countries are the main target audience for this call. The practical orientation of the field of implementation research, and the kinds of questions it asks, makes it necessary for implementers to have a central role in the conceptualization, design and analysis of Implementation Research projects. While researchers are often needed to provide their skills in research methods for the conduct of high quality studies, most often, it is the person working in the field, as opposed to the academic who asks the most important questions related to implementation. To ensure that these questions are heard and the research undertaken is directed to answer them as opposed to topics that are of interest mainly to academic researchers, this call requires the Principal Investigator to be an implementer of health interventions for maternal, newborn and child health.

Some examples of potential research topics include:

- Evaluation of modalities for supervision, training, skill performance enhancement and capacity building of health care providers to deliver interventions related to the reduction of maternal and/or child mortality

- Identification of ways to scale up existing interventions to achieve reductions in maternal and/or child mortality
- Identification of barriers and enabling factors in the scale up of programs for the reduction of maternal and/or child mortality

Grants for research studies of 12 months will be of **up to** US dollars 100,000 depending on the scope and focus of the study as well as the study setting. Through this call it is aimed to:

- Enhance knowledge creation to inform better implementation of existent programs;
- Strengthen the capacity of decision-makers to generate and use research to address implementation problems that they face in the field.

In line with these aims, selected teams will be given active training by expert facilitators organized through WHO and UNICEF to further develop their ideas using appropriate Implementation Research methods.

WHAT IS IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH?

Despite abundant evidence on the efficacy of affordable, life-saving interventions, there is little understanding of how to deliver these interventions effectively in diverse settings and within the wide range of existing health systems. Research is needed to shine light on the often bumpy interface between what can be achieved in theory and what actually happens in practice. Implementation Research aims to do this, by understanding not only what is and isn't working, but how and why implementation is going right or wrong, and testing approaches to improve it.

Implementation Research is a broad field that can address any aspect of implementation, including factors that influence implementation, the implementation process or implementation outcomes. It includes many types of studies using a wide range of approaches including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Implementation Research's main focus on finding actionable solutions to real problems faced by health systems requires it to pay special attention to context, since implementation issues often arise as a result of contextual factors that policy-makers and health system managers may not even have considered. In addition, Implementation Research involves a variety of stakeholders at each stage of the research process, including program managers, front line

health workers and decision-makers who are at many times the source of the most important and pertinent questions. The emphasis on locally relevant research involving practitioners and grounded within the routine functioning of the health system enables Implementation Research to provide unique insights on why a particular intervention succeeds or not in achieving its goals in a particular instance.

For more information on Implementation Research, please refer to **'Implementation Research in Health: A Practical Guide'**, available at: <http://www.implementationresearchplatform.org/>

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- The Principal Investigator must be an individual in a **low or middle income country** directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of health interventions for maternal, newborn and child health. **Program Managers, District Health Officers, front line health workers are typical examples of such individuals.** Please note that **this condition must be met** for the proposal to be eligible for funding.
- Implementers, particularly if they are not trained in research methods, are encouraged to collaborate with researchers from an academic institution or research institute based in the study country.

Additionally the team should:

- Include individuals with a variety of technical expertise (e.g. health economics, policy, epidemiology) relevant to the proposed study.
- Be diverse in terms of gender composition, ensuring that women constitute at least 50% of the research team.
- Comprise of individuals having a mix of roles and responsibilities within the country's health system, i.e., policy-makers, implementers, front line health workers and programme managers.

Individuals from high-income countries are **not** eligible to apply as principle investigators. Collaborations between organizations based in LMICs and individuals and organizations in high-income countries are acceptable on the condition that **not** more than 25% of the total grant

value can go to individuals or organizations based in high-income countries. Applications from UN agencies including WHO or UNICEF will **not** be considered and though UN country or regional offices can be listed as collaborators they will **not** be entitled to receive any funding from the research grant.

HOW TO APPLY

All submissions must be made **online** through the Implementation Research Platform proposal submission site at <http://www.implementationresearchplatform.org/call-for-proposals/>. Hard copies and emails of submissions will **NOT** be accepted. **All submissions must be written in English.**

- Applicants must submit an initial letter of intent by **22nd February 2014**. This is a firm deadline. **Letters of intent received after the deadline will not be accepted or considered.**
- The letter of intent should:
 - Clearly state the problem or the barrier to successful implementation
 - Explain why overcoming this barrier is relevant to enabling the effective implementation of measures to improve maternal, newborn and child health within an existing health programme
 - Clearly spell out the proposed research including a brief description of proposed methods
 - Describe what the proposed research would achieve and how this achievement would be measured
 - Provide details of the research team including position and qualifications of the Principal Investigator and other team members.
 - Provide an estimate of the total funding requested for the project
- Letters of intent will be judged on the potential of the research to make a difference in the delivery of services for the improvement of maternal, newborn and child health. Other criteria that will be taken into account include value for money, institutional capacity, diversity of issues addressed by the research, and regional representativeness.
- **Successful applicants will be notified by 22nd March 2014.** Projects that are selected will be invited to develop their letters of intent into full proposals. **Full proposals of up to 5,000 words are due by 22nd April 2014.**

- All proposals will be assessed by an external committee of independent experts using the following criteria:
 - Relevance of the proposed research to the present call: Research objectives and questions should relate to implementation. Knowledge generated through the proposed research should enable the implementation of proven measures to improve MNCH.
 - Burden of MNCH in the study setting and the potential of the research to reduce this burden.
 - Feasibility of approaches proposed: This includes a) feasibility of methods proposed to address the research question within the intended time frame, and b) feasibility of research to produce results within the intended time frame that can be acted upon by the intended audiences.
 - Justification of methods and study design to address the primary research question.
 - Capacity of research team to implement the proposed study.
 - Appropriateness of budget and timing for proposed research activities and precision and clarity in budget proposal and justification.
- Research teams should submit these proposals based on an understanding that accepted proposals will undergo refinement at the Protocol Development Workshop (see below).
- Based on these criteria, proposals will be selected for funding. Funding decisions will be communicated to applicants by **22nd May 2014**.
- Selected teams will be invited to a Protocol Development Workshop in **early July 2014** where expert facilitators will provide technical assistance on further refining the proposals.

- Based on feedback obtained at the workshop research teams will be expected to develop their proposals further and have final proposals ready by the **first week of August 2014**.

Interested applicants will have an opportunity to participate in a teleconference during the week of 3rd-7th February 2014 where further questions about this call can be answered. Three teleconferences will be organized between the Geneva times of 0800 to 1800 hours to ensure that individuals from all countries are able to participate.

FOCAL POINTS:

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TIMELINE FOR CALL

EVENT	DATE (S)	COMMENT
Call Posted	22 nd January 2014	
Teleconferences	3 rd -7 th February 2014	Frequently Asked Questions will be posted on IRP Proposal Submission Site
Deadline for Submission of letter of intent	22 nd February 2014	IRP Proposal Submission Site
Review of letter of intent	22 nd February-22 nd March 2014	Review Committee composed of IRP and UNICEF
Notification of decision on letter of intent	22 nd March 2014	All successful applicants will be required to develop full proposals
Deadline for submission of full proposal	22 nd April 2014	IRP Proposal Submission Site
Review of full proposal	22 nd April-22 nd May 2014	Review Committee composed of external experts outside IRP
Notification of Successful Applicants	22 nd May 2014	All successful applicants will be invited to a protocol development workshop
Protocol Development Workshop	7 th -12 th July 2014	Location TBD. Based on feedback grantees will be expected to refine proposals further.
Submission of final proposal and signing of contracts	1 st August 2014	IRP Proposal Submission Site
Project Start Date	November 2014	
Project End Workshop	November 2015	