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Enhancing capacity to apply research evidence in policy making

Call for Expressions of Interest, from teams based in low income countries

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1. Introduction

The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (HPSR) is an international collaboration, based in WHO Geneva, that aims to promote the generation and use of health policy and systems research as a means to improve the health systems of developing countries. For more information please visit: www.who.int/alliance-hpsr

The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending over £600 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing. www.wellcome.ac.uk

Based on its remit to support a broad range of innovative biomedical research, the Wellcome Trust is responsive to the importance of using health research evidence in policy-making and is committed to enhance capacity to facilitate this use. This joint call for proposals with the Alliance HPSR aims to expand the Wellcome Trust's portfolio of funding in this area.

One of the core objectives of the Alliance HPSR is to facilitate the development of capacity for the generation, dissemination and use of health policy and systems research knowledge. The Alliance's Biennial Review (Sound Choices: Enhancing Capacity for Evidence-informed Health Policy) (downloadable from: www.who.int/alliance-hpsr) presents two key messages that motivate this Call:

- Strategies to enhance capacity among policy makers and civil society representatives to employ evidence in policy development and policy dialogues have been very much neglected. Investment and innovation in this area are sorely needed.
- The evidence base regarding which strategies are effective in enhancing capacity is very limited. New strategies to promote capacity must be properly evaluated.

This Call focuses on the **development, implementation and evaluation of innovative approaches to enhance capacity of developing country policy-makers and civil society representatives to employ health policy and systems research evidence in policy making**. The overall objectives of this Call are to:

- i. Develop and implement innovative interventions that enhance policy maker capacity and/or civil society capacity to employ health policy and systems research evidence in policy making and policy dialogue;
- ii. Conduct rigorous evaluations of the strategies employed.

All proposals must address both of these objectives, and involve an evaluative element.

In the first instance interested parties are requested to submit brief expressions of interest (please see the application template below for the format of requested expressions of interest). These expressions of interest will be technically reviewed and up to six small grants of up to US\$15,000 will be awarded to the most promising proposals from teams based in low income countries, to enable the applicants to develop their expression of

interests into full blown proposals. The Alliance HPSR and the Wellcome Trust will then fund the most promising of these proposals.

A total of US\$1,000,000 is available to support both the small development grants and the proposals themselves.

Please note that this Call is only for teams based in **low income countries**.

2. Health policy makers and the use of research evidence in policy

Policy-making is a complex, non-linear, incremental and messy process. Many factors influence policy-making including context (political election cycles, the state of the government's finances, etc.), and the ideologies and values of policy makers themselves. Even the term "policy-maker" is not necessarily clear, policy makers may include politicians, civil servants, political advisors, and health system managers - they may sit in Ministries of Health, other central government departments, local government, parliamentary and executive bodies, and national health services. Moreover, it is increasingly recognized that multiple stakeholders, and not just policy-makers, are likely to influence the policy process. In particular, civil society organizations, such as advocacy and interest groups and the media, can also be critical in influencing policy.

Information and evidence is just one among multiple influences upon policy. Moreover, in the age of the internet there is often a bewildering array of different types of information available, from rigorous research studies to 'expert' opinions (Bowen & Zwi 2005). Research itself will be of varying degrees of rigour and quality. For policy-makers who may not be schooled in research it can be challenging to determine what research to trust. In addition, research results, particularly in the field of HPSR, are often complex and nuanced. Rarely is there clear evidence that a particular policy or strategy is effective under all conditions. Policy-makers in low- and middle-income countries in particular will often have to draw upon research findings from elsewhere, and thus face complex questions regarding the transferability of conclusions from one setting to another.

For all these reasons, evidence may be challenged. Significant capacities are therefore required by both policy-makers and civil society representative to ensure that research evidence is applied in the policy process.

Strategies to promote the application of research knowledge to policy and decision making, can be divided into those that¹:-

- Promote researcher push of evidence
- Promote policy maker pull of evidence

¹ Lavis J. et al (2006) Assessing country level efforts to link research to action World Health Bulletin 84: 620-628.

- Promote exchange between policy makers and researchers from the point of problem definition, all the way through to evaluation of new policies.

This call focuses in particular on the last two options, that is promoting capacity for policy maker pull, and for exchange.

The Alliance Biennial Review highlights the absolute lack of information from countries about what are the key constraints upon health policy maker capacity to apply evidence in policy making. The Canadian Health Services Research Foundation has developed a self-assessment tool that can be used by policy-making organizations to assess their capacities across four dimensions:

- Research acquisition:** ability to define a specific question, commission research or search for literature and obtain relevant research evidence
- Research assessment:** ability to assess the quality and potential applicability of research evidence, use critical appraisal techniques and tools and consider the applicability of research findings to your own context
- Adaptation of the format of research:** ability to synthesize research findings with other information, and present findings in a way that senior policy makers will read and understand?
- Application of research to decision making:** evaluate the feasibility of different policy options based upon research evidence and other factors.

Unfortunately such assessment tools have rarely been applied in low income countries.

Further resources on the use of evidence in policy making include:-

- The Canadian Health Services Research Foundation:
http://www.chsrf.ca/home_e.php
- Research and Policy in Development (RAPID), Overseas Development Institute, UK: <http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/>
- The Collaborative Training Programme (CTP) Resource Modules:
<http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/resources>

3. Possible Activities to be Conducted under the Call

Activities conducted under this grant programme could target a range of different policy-makers and civil society representatives. Grants could focus on national or possibly on sub-national (eg. state) policy makers, and could be implemented in one or several countries.

The grant programme is **not** intended to address capacity of clinicians to use evidence in clinical decision making, Further, applications should focus primarily on the use of health policy and systems research, defined broadly as the production of new knowledge

to improve how societies organize themselves to achieve health goals².

3.1 Interventions to enhance capacity to use evidence in policy making

Table 1 below provides a list of illustrative interventions that could be used to enhance capacity to use evidence in policy making. While the interventions in the table provide a number of ideas for possible strategies that proposals could focus on, the Alliance is keen to get new ideas about how to approach this issue and welcomes proposals for alternative types of strategies. As the table suggests, a broad range of strategies could be considered for funding under this grant programme, from training for individual policy makers or civil society representatives, to fellowship programmes, or strategies that aim to change incentive structures for policy makers. Applicants can choose to employ one or more of these interventions.

There is typically a high degree of turn-over among policy-makers, proposals that focus on developing the skills of individual policy-makers therefore need to demonstrate how the proposed individual capacity development will strengthen institutional capacity, and will be sustainable. Proposals that focus on the development and testing of training materials should aim to produce materials that can be widely adopted at the end of the project.

Table 1 - Possible illustrative strategies to enhance capacity to use evidence in policy-making

Area of intervention	Types of interventions
Strengthen individual staff skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide training and/or mentoring in use of acquisition, assessment, adaptation and application of research evidence, e.g. training in the commissioning of research studies or the interpretation of systematic reviews. - Fellowship schemes that enable policy makers to take leave to spend time in research environments.
Strengthen institutional incentives to employ evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create stronger incentives for evidence use (e.g. through integrating this dimension into recruitment policies, performance assessments, and staff appraisals). - Integrate modules on use of evidence into leadership training courses for policy makers. - Recognition awards - providing financial or in-kind

² For more information about how the Alliance defines health policy and systems research see Bennett (2007) What is Health Policy and Systems Research and why does it matter? Available at: http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/resources/AllBriefNote1_5.pdf

Area of intervention	Types of interventions
	prizes to policy makers that have shown outstanding performance in applying evidence to policy.
Enhance access to evidence	- Improve access to research resources for policy makers through the launch of websites dedicated to evidence for policy making, development of low-cost databases of research evidence etc.
Promote mechanisms that bring technical expertise into government	- Promote the establishment and support the functioning of special commissions or technical advisory groups.
Establish institutional mechanisms that promote exchange between research and policy worlds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revolving door mechanisms whereby policy-makers spend time in research organizations and think tanks. - ‘Shadowing’ and job swaps. - Internships whereby young researchers spend time supporting the work of parliamentarians or senior policy makers. - Establishment of databases of local researchers and their interests which policy makers could draw upon when seeking evidence.
Establish norms and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support legislation that requires publication of evidence base for new policies. - Mandate evaluation of new social and health programmes. - Integrate operational research and evaluation into existing processes and programmes.

Source: adapted from Alliance HPSR (2007) Sound Choices: Enhancing capacity for evidence-informed health policy. WHO, Geneva.

Please note that this Call for letters of intent is focused on strategies to enhance capacity to apply evidence to policy and is **not designed to support the dissemination of, or encourage the use of evidence from a particular research study.**

3.2 Evaluation of activities to enhance capacity to employ evidence in policy making

All proposals should involve a rigorous evaluation element designed to assess the impact of the intervention on capacity to employ health policy and systems research evidence in health policy-making. The appropriate evaluation design will depend upon the nature of the capacity-enhancement intervention selected. Accordingly, at the expressions of interest stage, it is not essential that detailed evaluation proposals are included. Teams submitting expressions of interest should note their commitment to conducting such an evaluation, ensure that the necessary skills to conduct such an evaluation are available to the team, and present any preliminary ideas that they may have regarding evaluation design.

4. Technical support and award process

The Alliance HPSR is an "engaged funder" and is particularly concerned about ensuring the technical quality of work conducted through its grants programmes. The Alliance therefore will work closely with grantees to support their work, promote opportunities for South-to-South learning through workshops and online fora, and if appropriate, identify technical support to assist grantees in their efforts.

In the first instance therefore, we are requesting applicants to submit brief expressions of interest. Up to ten of these expressions of interest will be accepted for further support and small grants of up to USD15,000 each will be granted for proposal development. These small grants are intended to support:-

- On-the-ground assessment of existing policy maker capacities and needs which will inform the further development of interventions. The Alliance HPSR, based upon the Alliance Biennial Review, and other available tools, intends to provide successful applicants with relevant tools to conduct such an assessment.
- The development of detailed proposals that describe precisely the interventions to be adopted.
- The development of evaluation designs for the selected interventions.

At the end of the proposal development stage, the recipients of the small grants will be asked to submit full-blown proposals which will be technically reviewed and a selection committee composed of representatives from both the Alliance's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee and the Wellcome Trust's Funding Committees will select proposals for full funding.

5. Eligibility to apply for the Call

All teams bidding for this grant (in the re-issued Call) must be **based in a low income country**³, although up to 20% of the grant can be used to support the involvement of participants from middle or high income countries.

As these grants aim to enhance capacity in the use of evidence in policy making, **policy makers and/or civil society representatives must form part of the proposing team**, and it is anticipated that in most instances policy makers and/or civil society representatives would lead the proposing team. Teams composed of different organizations and actors (such as policy-makers, civil society representatives, knowledge brokers, and researchers) are welcome to apply.

Teams submitting expressions of interest should demonstrate:

³ For the World Bank definition of low income countries that are eligible for funding under this call, please see:
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20421402~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html#Low_income

- Engagement and commitment of policy makers and/or civil society representatives to the proposal
- Expertise in health policy and systems research
- Awareness of possible strategies to promote capacity for research use in policy making.

6. Evaluation Process and Criteria

Expressions of interest will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Overall understanding of the nature of the call, and local capacity development needs with respect to enhancing the use of evidence in policy making (20%)
- Soundness, innovativeness and likely impact of interventions identified (20%)
- Organizational capabilities (20%)
- Commitment of policy makers to the project (10%)
- Appropriateness of budget (both for development grant and overall proposal) (10%)

7. Selection Process

Please direct all questions concerning this call for proposals, by email, to the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (alliancehpsr@who.int). The Alliance will post responses to these questions on its website for all potential bidders to read.

All applications must be submitted to the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, by email, and must be received by 16 January 2009. In the header of the email please put "Proposal: Capacity to Apply Research". The Alliance will notify all applicants of receipt of their application.

Letters of intent will be independently reviewed by two technical experts.

A small committee composed of members of the Alliance's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee and representatives of the Wellcome Trust's Funding Committees will make the final selection of grant recipients, based largely upon the scores awarded to the proposals..

Successful (and unsuccessful) applicants will be notified during March 2009.

Enhancing Capacity to Apply Research Evidence in Policy Making

Expression of Interest

THIS FORM SHOULD BE SUBMITTED BY E-MAIL TO

alliancehpsr@who.int

PART I. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Selected information from this box (1.1-1.5) may be released to the general public if this letter of intent is selected for funding		
1.1 Name of Team leader and institutional affiliation:		
Title:!!!!	Surname:!!!!	First name:!!!!
Name of Department and Institution (30 words maximum)!!!!		
Full postal address of team leader to be used for correspondence (170 words maximum):!!!!		
Telephone:!!!!	Fax:!!!!	
E-mail:!!!!	E-mail 2:!!!!	
1.2 Title of project: (30 words maximum) ID Number: !!! [LEAVE BLANK] !!!!		
1.3 Summary: (120 words maximum) !!!!		
1.4 Has your institution ever received a grant from a funding body before? !!! If yes, please provide the grant making institution, project title, dates and value of the grant, for the last three grants awarded. a.!!!! b.!!!! c.!!!!		

PART II

STRUCTURE OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Expressions of Interest should be **no more than 10 pages** in length, plus annexes.

1. Technical Proposal (*approximately 5 pages*)

1.1 Briefly describe the current situation in terms of use of evidence in policy making in the country/countries. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of policy making structures in evidence use, and identify any particular capacities required to strengthen the use of evidence in policy making. Describe the nature of available evidence on this issue and the basis for your judgements.

1.2 Present the interventions/strategies that you are interested in developing and implementing and the target group for these interventions (whether they are policy-makers and/or civil society representatives and in what type of organizations they work). For the expression of interest it is quite acceptable to present a range of different strategies that are being considered for implementation. If this is the case describe what additional information is needed to help you to choose between competing strategies. Describe why you are interested in pursuing these strategies, how they fit the context and capacity constraints described above and what you know about their effectiveness.

1.3 Briefly outline the evaluation design and approach that you would employ.

1.4 Describe the anticipated outcomes and products of the proposed programme of work. If the work includes the development of training materials then describe how you anticipate these training materials would be used in the long term. Assess the sustainability of the interventions that would be supported under the grant programme, once Alliance HPSR support ends.

1.5 Describe what work would be undertaken during the preparatory stage of the grant. What special assessments, consultations with policy makers, further research on interventions would you anticipate making?

2. Technical Capabilities (*approximately 2 pages*)

Provide a brief description of the capacity of the organization submitting the proposal, particularly as it pertains to policy-making and the use of evidence. Describe the status and nature of the applicant organization.

If the application is a joint one between more than one organization then please briefly describe the organizational capabilities of all organizations involved and what role each organization will play.

Identify key staff who will lead the project and explain what role each of the core team members will play. In the Annex provide a summary CV for all key staff included in the proposal.

3. Organizational Commitment

(approximately 1 page)

Describe the commitment on the part of the policy-makers and/or civil society representatives who will be involved (or targeted) in this project in participating in the project. If appropriate append letters from key stakeholders that demonstrate their commitment to the project.

4. Budget

(approximately 1 page)

Please use the format below to present your Budget for the first phase of work (ie. the small grant that would enable you to develop these ideas further). Please present this budget in USD.

In addition to completing the budget table below for the development phase of the grant, please give an indication of what you anticipate the total project cost (development, implementation and evaluation of interventions) will be and its duration (number of months/years). Please give a very approximate breakdown of the project budget between personnel and other costs.

If there are possibilities of leveraging additional resources (eg. through existing grants) then please describe these.

	Name (if known)	Position	% time devoted to project	Amount USD
1. Personnel	a. b. c. d.			
Total Personnel				
	Please enter details of items to be purchased and unit cost here			
2. Services & Supplies				
Total Services & supplies				
3. Equipment				
Total equipment				
4. Local Travel				
Total local travel				
5. International travel				
Total international travel				

6. Other expenditures		
	Total other expenditures	
	GRAND TOTAL	

Notes on budget

1. For personnel, indicate for each individual staff person proposed the percentage of time they would devote to the project. The budget requested should reflect salary multiplied by the amount of time spent on the project. Justify personnel salaries in relation to institutional remuneration policies.
2. For services and supplies, include telephone, fax, internet hook up, photocopying, office supplies etc. Itemize budget for each individual service or type of supplies.
3. For equipment, indicate needs for computers, printers etc.
4. For local travel, enter details for local air tickets, hotel costs, per diem within the country.
5. For international travel, enter details of international air tickets, hotel costs, per diems for international travel.
6. For other expenditures, include space rental, clerical and other administrative costs. Note that the Alliance HPSR will support institutional overheads up to 15%.