

## FCDO Research Commissioning Centre Evidence Use in Policymaking

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Please note: Until the call for expressions of interest is issued, all information is indicative only and may change before the final tender is published.**

### Research design and scope

#### What do you mean by ‘evidence’ and ‘research’?

We distinguish evidence from other types of information in that evidence (i) substantiates or disproves a specific proposition and (ii) is appropriate in terms of quantity and quality for addressing the question or need at hand.<sup>1</sup>

We are specifically interested in the use of evidence generated from research, by which we mean a systematic investigative process employed to increase or revise current knowledge. This could range from conceptual and theoretical research to impact evaluations and systematic reviews.

Strand 2 aims to understand the range of influences on policy decision-making, including research evidence but also other types of information on which policymakers may draw. This could extend to government statistical, survey and administrative data; perspectives from citizens and other key interest holders; tacit knowledge from experts and other inputs. We welcome studies that explore how policymakers conceive of evidence and whether there is shared understanding of what it comprises.

In Strand 3, many of the institutions or interventions we are interested in will be seeking to enhance the use of research evidence, but may also promote other types of evidence that can inform decision-making. Evaluations can therefore helpfully enhance understanding of this wider set of activities, but interventions should have increasing the use of research evidence in decision-making as a central focus.

#### What is to the main thematic or sector focus?

For Strand 2, we anticipate that studies should focus on economic policy or reform areas that are of national importance for economic growth. Examples include, but are not limited to, energy systems, high-volume transport, industrial policy, labour markets, and trade policy.

For Strand 3 we encourage studies that focus on economic policy or reform areas that are of national importance for economic growth, but as the objective of the research is to increase empirical knowledge on how to influence the use of evidence in policy decision-making, we welcome proposals in any sector or policy area.

#### **Considering economic growth, does this only include policies like tax reform, privatisation, etc., or policies that can also enhance human capital growth, like skilling, etc.?**

One motivation for this programme of research is to generate evidence in a policy area – economic development – that is relatively under-researched relative to other sectors such as health or primary education. Recognising that aspects of human capital growth are important for

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<sup>1</sup> See [Glandon, Kelly and Gaarder \(2024\)](#).

national economic growth, studies focused on jobs and the labour market – for example, skills training, skills certification, labour market matching – would be considered in scope.

**Would you consider studies that were not retrospective but tracking a current policy and implementation process?**

We suggest a retrospective study design in order to accelerate research timelines and ensure that the learning to be gained from a policy example is fully formed. However, we recognise that policy processes in the sphere of economic development are rarely single, discrete events, but often comprise multiple phases of reform or a series of decisions that get made over time. Studies that examine distinct periods or clear decision points within a wider reform process, including an ongoing one, could therefore be considered if underpinned by a compelling rationale.

**Is there an appetite for other methods than those covered in your presentation such as ethnography?**

The examples presented are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. We are open to any study design and methods that appropriately answer relevant research question(s) and align with the terms of reference.

**Are there specific outcomes of interest that are preferred within the indicated research questions?**

As part of Strand 1, we are currently conducting a review and appraisal of measures that have been used to assess evidence use and the factors that facilitate it. We will share the output of this review with prospective applicants to support with proposals. For impact evaluations, preference is for observable policy impact as the primary outcome, with additional proximal outcomes (e.g., institutional change, policymaker attitudes, beliefs) to understand the causal chain and wider evidence system. We also welcome studies that examine the relationship between evidence-informed policymaking and downstream socio-economic outcomes.

Please note that impact evaluations are expected to include a mixed-method process evaluation to understand intervention implementation and important mediators or moderators of intervention impact.

**Will you be prioritising cross-national proposals / international collaborations?**

Proposals in Strand 2 can take a comparative or single-country approach, with the objective of drawing actionable learning on the factors or levers that enabled the use of evidence in government decision-making. Proposals in Strand 3 would be expected to evaluate a single intervention. Proposals will be scored on the research team's expertise and should demonstrate in-depth understanding of the policymaking context where the research takes place, as well as methodological expertise appropriate to the study design and organisational capacity to conduct the research. Proposals can come from single-country research teams or international collaborations as appropriate.

**What is the geographic focus of the call?**

We invite proposals for research conducted in low- and lower-middle income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. There are no specific target countries within these regions, but decisions at shortlisting stage may include a consideration of geographic distribution to maximise learning across the research portfolio.

**Will countries in the Middle East be included in the target countries in this call or future calls?**

There are no current plans to include countries in the Middle East in this call or future calls.

**How do you believe the research outputs will be accepted/ owned by governments and consequently that they will take action? How will the knowledge be exchanged and thus have value beyond being just a study?**

Scoping for this funding round has included consultations with senior economic policy officials in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to learn from their experience and understand if and how the current funding round could be useful. We strongly encourage applicants to build or draw on partnerships with policy officials in their project teams. The RCC could potentially facilitate introductions between prospective applicants and policy officials who have expressed an interest in this programme of work, for example from the Chief Economists of Government network.

Proposals will be explicitly assessed on their research uptake plans, which should include a credible approach to engaging government decision-makers in the findings, preferably through existing networks and embedded activities.

**What considerations are given to local evidence? How receptive is the call to homegrown interventions?**

The mechanisms through which evidence influences policy decision-making are likely to differ markedly across contexts. We welcome evaluations of locally developed and context-specific interventions, whether new or ongoing. Proposals should include a theory of change explaining how the intervention would be expected to influence evidence use in policy processes.

The RCC also strives to ensure representativeness in proposal review panels to ensure that locally-driven approaches are appropriately considered.

**Budgets and procurement**

**How many projects do you anticipate funding in each strand?**

The portfolio size will be determined by the strength and distribution of proposals across strands and FCDO budget review. We are currently estimate targets of 8-10 projects in Strand 2 and 16-20 projects in Strand 3.

**Is there a limit on the number of applications an organisation can submit? Can they apply for both strands?**

There are no restrictions on the number or distribution of proposals an organisation can submit, provided they demonstrate the appropriate expertise and capacity to carry out the project(s) if successful.

**If an organisation is not the primary bidder, can the organisation partner with multiple primary bidders?**

There are no restrictions on the number of bids on which an organisation can appear. The funding agreement would be with one single entity but they may have multiple downstream partners as part of the bid.

**Do permitted costs include taxes that the organisations are expected to pay in that country?**

If there are taxes included in gross staff salaries (these are often referred to as on-costs) these would be eligible but would typically form part of the staffing cost. Taxes for which exemptions apply or are reclaimable via other sources (for example through HMRC in the UK or an alternative funder) are not eligible and shouldn't be included in [NPAC](#).

**Will the funding call allow for purchase of selected hardware and software which could be used to support research on evidence use?**

If justified as a direct cost, yes.

**Is there a maximum for daily or monthly rate?**

There is no set cap, but we have an indicative cost card which has been used to assess value for money over different job roles and levels of experience/seniority. When proposals are scored on value for money, we will review the submitted budget against these benchmarks.

**Is there funding for proposal development for those invited to submit - especially if it is a consortium?**

We do not currently have funding to support proposal development.

**How does due diligence work when applying as a consortium?**

We encourage applications from consortia, particularly between researchers, implementers and/or government partners. The RCC would conduct due diligence on the lead organisation and would expect that organisation to be responsible for the due diligence of downstream partners.

**Commissioning process**

**Do you have any more detail on when in early 2025 we can expect the updated TORs to come out and EOIs to be due?**

Commissioning timelines are currently being finalised, contingent on the ongoing foundational work that will support the call as well as emerging feedback from early market engagement. We will provide updates through the mailing list for the funding call. To sign up for funding alerts, please see the Evidence on Evidence Use Programme on the RCC webpage and enter your details in the form: <https://www.3ieimpact.org/about/research-commissioning-center>

**Is the systematic review on what works to increase the use of evidence for policy decision-making done by 3ie or PACE? How does that feed into the other Strand 1 products that then inform Strands 2 and 3?**

The systematic review was led by the Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE) with 3ie/ RCC secretariat staff. It will feature and be a key resource for the pathfinding paper, and Strands 2 and 3 are directly informed by this work.

**Will the systematic review be published when (or at the same time as) the updated TORs and invitation for EOI submissions are published?**

The systematic review will be out soon. We will be publishing a pathfinding paper, which draws on the systematic review and wider scoping activities, alongside the call for expressions of interest.

**FCDO Research Commissioning Centre**

**Can you elaborate on the role of RCC consortium partners?**

The research call – and most of the work that is commissioned through the RCC – is open to all organisations, including existing members of the RCC consortium and partners that are not part

of the RCC. There are no underlying quotas for how projects should be allocated within and outside the RCC.

The primary role of the consortium is to provide expertise to shape and deliver research commissioned through the RCC. In this case, RCC secretariat staff and consortium partners are conducting some of the preliminary work that will inform the funding round, outputs from which will be made available to all applicants. RCC consortium members will also serve as peer reviewers for proposals – while managing conflicts of interest as necessary.

**How can an organisation become a consortium partner?**

We are in a process of targeted expansion of the consortium, but we are not anticipating expanding it significantly.

**How can I join the mailing list for funding alerts about this project?**

Please see the Evidence on Evidence Use Programme on the RCC website and enter your details in the form: <https://www.3ieimpact.org/about/research-commissioning-center>