REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Contract type: Agreement for Performance of Work (APW)
Issue Date: 16 January 2015
Closing Date/Time: 6 February 2015 23:59 GMT

Request for proposal: Scoping review on the ‘ethical review of health policy and systems research (HPSR)’

1. Background

Currently available ethical guidelines for the conduct of research focus on traditional health research, biomedical research and epidemiological research. While the principles for the ethical conduct of health systems research are not different, how those principles are interpreted, and applied can be quite different, and researchers and research ethics committees world-wide are struggling with these issues. This has also been evidenced through the discussions that the WHO Research Ethics Review Committee has had on proposals that are submitted by the Alliance for Health Systems Research and Policy. The discussion often focuses on issues such as: whether a given project should be considered health research or practice; what sort of risks the ERC reviews – risks to individuals, or to populations; risks to patients or to health care providers, or policy makers; whether minor risks to large populations raise the same level of concerns as minor risks to a small group of individuals; who the research participant is in these cases and who should be asked for consent; and whether consent could be waived in certain situations even if a research intervention on participants is planned. Besides, HSR by definition uses a multi-disciplinary approach including the social sciences, and is strongly influenced by historical, social and cultural contexts, and the economic and political background. It seems implicit that the ethical implications in such a scenario must differ from those that are relevant for biomedical research. However, no guidance currently exists on the ethical issues relevant for the conduct of HSR.

As a public health agency that is focusing in the coming years on universal health coverage including equitable access to medicines, WHO is increasingly supporting Member States to conduct HSR to provide evidence for implementing changes to the way that health is delivered and health systems are strengthened (http://www.who.int/whr/2013/report/en/). Health systems in LMICs face the challenges of substantial socioeconomic and health inequalities, rapid globalisation and evolving disease burdens. Research that informs the delivery of evidence-based interventions for structural changes to health systems in LMICs, and provides evidence that is of direct relevance to decision makers and users in the field, necessarily raises many ethical challenges both for the communities and populations that are involved in research, and for the health system and health professionals that are being researched upon.
2. Objectives of the work

The Alliance HPSR in collaboration with the Global Health Ethics Unit invites proposals for the conduct of a scoping review on ethical review of health policy and systems research (HPSR).

The objective of the review is to synthesize and assess:

i) The literature on ethical considerations regarding health policy and systems research;

ii) The literature on the review of HPSR proposals by Institutional Review Boards/Ethics Review Committees (IRB/ERB);

iii) Existing guidance on the ethical review of HPSR and other related research areas

The review shall:

- highlight areas of (relative) consensus and of controversy in relation to the ethics of HPSR and gaps;
- integrate a number of case vignettes available in the literature that illustrate core ethics and/or review issues related to HPSR studies;
- provide an overview of potential issues that a guidance document on the ethical review of HPSR studies would need to address.

The review will be used to inform a consultation with key stakeholders in this area that will take place in July 2015, with the objective of developing guidance on ethical standards for health policy and systems research. The deliverable produced as a result of this work will constitute the main background document to inform the consultation of experts in the field.

For the purpose of this call, we understand a scoping review as an iterative process whereby existing literature is identified, examined and conceptually mapped, and knowledge gaps are identified. For the purpose of this work, a scoping review involves the synthesis and analysis of a broad range of research and non-research material to provide greater conceptual clarity about a specific topic or field of evidence.

3. Methods

The scoping review should include the following key phases:

1) Identifying the research question(s)
2) Identifying relevant documents
3) Study selection
4) Charting the data
5) Collating, summarizing and reporting the results

For the scoping review, literature can be sourced through a variety of approaches including the screening of bibliographic databases, scanning the websites of institutions active in the field, contacting experts, and hand-searching retrieved documentation. Evidence retrieved should be narratively assessed, and in particular, due consideration should be given to the review/assessment criteria for HPSR proposals used by institutional review boards/ethics review committees.

4. Definition of Health Policy & Systems Research

Health policy and systems research (including implementation research) is defined as a field that seeks to understand and improve how societies organise themselves in achieving collective
health goals, and how different actors interact in the policy and implementation processes to contribute to policy outcomes. By nature, it is interdisciplinary, a blend of economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, public health and epidemiology that together draw a comprehensive picture of how health systems respond and adapt to health policies, and how health policies can shape – and be shaped by health systems and the broader determinants of health.

This definition also highlights its key characteristics. Health policy and systems research:

- is a multi-disciplinary research field, distinguished by the issues and questions addressed through the research rather than by a particular disciplinary base or set of methods;
- includes research that focuses on health services as well as on the promotion of health in general;
- includes concern for global and international issues as well as national and sub-national issues, as global forces and agencies have important influences over health systems in low- and middle-income countries;
- encompasses research on or of policy, which means that it is concerned with how policies are developed and implemented and the influence that policy actors have over policy outcomes – it addresses the politics of health systems and health system strengthening;
- promotes work that explicitly seeks to influence policy, that is, research for policy.

5. Deliverables

A report highlighting areas of consensus and controversy in relation to the ethics of HPSR and gaps, as well as providing an overview of potential issues that a guidance document on the ethical review of HPSR studies would need to address, should be submitted as the final deliverable for this work. The report should integrate a number of case vignettes available in the literature that illustrate core ethics and specifically address issues related to the ethical review/appraisal of HPSR proposals.

An outline shall be provided by April 15, and a draft report submitted by May 15. The final report is due by June 15, 2015.

The Global Health Ethics Unit, the Alliance staff and will periodically review progress on the drafts and provide feedback to the bidder. The payments will be linked to satisfactory completion of the deliverables.

6. Requirements/Competencies

Bidders for this contract should demonstrate the following:

- Relevant experience related to evidence synthesis for health research, or health policy and systems research (desirable) in LMICs;
- Availability of an expert librarian with proven experience in developing search strategies tailored to health research, preferably HPSR;
- Publication record relevant to health research evidence synthesis (e.g. scoping reviews, rapid evidence assessment, systematic reviews).
7. Instructions to Bidders

Format and Content of the Bid

Bids should be not more than 5 pages and should include the following:

a) Motivation for applying: how this work fits with the bidder’s academic/professional background or interests;
b) Relevant background: Brief description of relevant experience in evidence synthesis for health research, as explained in section 5, above;
c) Methodology: Proposed methodological approach to carry out the work;
d) Short institutional profile(s) and profiles of anticipated team members, including the main bidder, this should include information on collaborators, if any;
e) Itemized budget;
f) Contact details of the bidder including email and telephone number.

Budget

The proposed budget should be based on the expected time, and resources necessary to carry out this scoping review. It should also be commensurate with the level of experience of the individual(s) who are carrying out this work and consistent with the costs of doing similar work in the country or region where the applicant(s) is based.

Joint proposal

Two or more entities may form a consortium and submit a joint proposal offering to jointly undertake the work. Such a proposal must be submitted in the name of one member of the consortium - hereinafter the “project leader”. The lead organization will be responsible for undertaking all negotiations and discussions with, and will be the main point of contact for WHO. The lead organization and each member of the consortium will be jointly responsible for the proper performance of the contract.

Communications during the Call Period

A prospective bidder requiring any clarification on technical, contractual or commercial matters may notify WHO via email at the following address no later than 3 working days prior to the closing date for the submission of offers.

Email for submissions of all queries: alliancehpsr@who.int
(use subject: WHO Bid Ref. Scoping review on the ‘ethical review of health policy and systems research)

The Alliance HPSR team at WHO will respond via email to any request for clarification of the call that it receives by the deadline indicated above. A consolidated document of the WHO’s response to all questions (including an explanation of the query but without identifying the source of enquiry) will be posted on the internet site where the bid itself is posted.

There shall be no individual presentation by or meeting with bidders until after the closing date. From the date of issue of this call to the final selection, contact with WHO officials concerning the call process shall not be permitted, other than through the submission of queries, unless a presentation or meeting is initiated by WHO, in accordance with the terms of this call.

Period of Validity of Proposals
The offer outlined in the proposal must be valid for a minimum period of 120 calendar days after the closing date. A proposal valid for a shorter period may be rejected by WHO. In exceptional circumstances, WHO may solicit the bidder’s consent to an extension of the period of validity. The request and the responses thereto shall be made in writing. Any bidder granting such an extension will not, however, be permitted to otherwise modify its proposal.

Closing Date for Submission of Proposals

Proposals must be received at WHO at the e-mail address: alliancehpsr@who.int (use subject: WHO Bid Ref. Scoping review on the ‘ethical review of health policy and systems research) no later than 6 February 2015 23:59 GMT.

WHO may, at its own discretion, extend this closing date for the submission of proposals by notifying all bidders thereof in writing. Any proposal received by WHO after the closing date for submission of proposals may be rejected.

Amendment of the Call

WHO may, at any time before the closing date, for any reason, whether on its own initiative or in response to a clarification requested by a (prospective) bidder, modify the call by written amendment. Amendments could, inter alia, include modification of the project scope or requirements, the project timeline expectations and/or extension of the closing date for submission.

All prospective bidders that have submitted a proposal with regard to the call will be notified in writing of all amendments to the call and will, where applicable, be invited to amend their proposal accordingly.

Clarification of Proposals

WHO may, at its discretion, ask any bidder for clarification of any part of its proposal. The request for clarification and the response shall be in writing. No change in price or substance of the proposal shall be sought, offered or permitted during this exchange.

8. Award of Contracts

Award Criteria

Contracts shall be awarded based on a combination of criteria including the bidder’s motivation statement, exposure to or experience of, working in the area of evidence synthesis, the content of the proposal in terms of comprehensiveness, and value for money.

However, WHO reserves the right to:

a) Award the contract to a bidder of its choice, even if its bid is not the lowest;

b) Award separate contracts for parts of the work, components or items, to one or more bidders of its choice, even if their bids are not the lowest;

c) Accept or reject any proposal, and to annul the solicitation process and reject all proposals at any time prior to award of contract, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders and without any obligation to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the grounds for WHO’s action;
d) Award the contract on the basis of the Organization's particular objectives to a bidder whose proposal is considered to be the most responsive to the Organization's needs and the activity concerned;

e) Not award any contract at all

WHO has the right to eliminate bids for technical or other reasons throughout the evaluation/selection process. WHO shall not in any way be obligated to reveal, or discuss with any bidder, how a proposal was assessed, or to provide any other information relative to the evaluation/selection process or to state the reasons for elimination to any bidder.

NOTE: WHO is acting in good faith by issuing this call. However, this document does not obligate WHO to contract for the performance of any work, nor for the supply of any products or services.

**WHO's Right to enter into Negotiations**

WHO reserves the right to enter into negotiations with one or more bidders of its choice, including but not limited to negotiation of the terms of the proposal(s), the price quoted in such proposal(s) and/or the deletion of certain parts of the work, components or items called for under this call.

**Signing of the Contract**

Within 30 days of receipt of the contract, the successful bidder shall sign and date the contract and return it to WHO according to the instructions provided at that time. If the bidder does not accept the contract terms without changes, then WHO has the right not to proceed with the selected bidder and instead contract with another bidder of its choice.