THE ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH POLICY & SYSTEMS RESEARCH (AHPSR), UNICEF AND GAVI
REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTENT

IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH TO ADDRESS PRIORITY IMMUNIZATION ISSUES

The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, UNICEF and GAVI are soliciting letters of intent for research that seeks to enable the effective implementation of immunization programmes within health systems in priority countries. Grants of US dollars 70,000 – 100,000 will be available to support research studies of up to 12 months in duration.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
Implementers working with researchers are eligible to submit proposals in response to this call. The Principal Investigator must be an implementer—an individual directly involved in the implementation of immunization programmes in a health system in a programme country (see below for list of countries). Programme managers, district health officers, non-governmental providers, public or private practitioners, and front line health workers are typical examples of such individuals. Additionally, the research team must include at least one researcher affiliated with an academic or research institution based in the study country. Please note that both these conditions must be met for the proposal to be eligible for funding.

SELECTION CRITERIA
Letters of intent will be judged on the potential of the research to make a difference in the delivery of immunization programmes. 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 15 March 2015. Invited full proposal submissions will be due on 15 May 2015.

HOW TO APPLY
All submissions must be made online through the AHPSR proposal submission website: http://www.ahpsrproposalsubmission.org.

THIS CALL
In spite of proven solutions and increased support at national and international levels there exists a staggering burden of avoidable child morbidity and mortality with unacceptably slow progress on improvements in health outcomes. Improved implementation within health systems of immunization programmes could prevent a significant proportion of the estimated 6.3 million under-five child 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, together with UNICEF and GAVI, are soliciting letters of intent for research that seeks to enable the effective implementation of immunization programmes within health systems. Research funded under this call is expected to
focus on the generation of new strategies and knowledge that will enable more effective implementation of existing immunization programmes within health systems. Proposals to develop and test new interventions will not be funded under this call.

Implementers of immunization programs in priority 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 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. Potential research areas of specific interest for this call include (but are not limited to):

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Potential Research Areas</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Health and immunization systems</strong></td>
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<td>- Specific barriers to immunization among children and/or their carers not reached by immunization services</td>
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<td>- The use of evidence-based information to support vaccine policy-making</td>
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<td>- Health workforce issues</td>
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<td>- Integration between immunization and other health within the health system</td>
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<td><strong>Demand and vaccine hesitancy</strong></td>
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<td>- Community engagement in demand generation for vaccines</td>
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<td>- Perceptions about vaccine effectiveness and safety</td>
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<td>- Strategies to address vaccine hesitancy</td>
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<td><strong>Vaccination and coverage</strong></td>
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<td>- Strategies for reducing missed opportunities and drop-out-rates</td>
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<td>- Measures to supplement routine EPI in capturing children at risk for non-vaccination and/or poor compliance</td>
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<td>- Adapting/tailoring vaccination services to increase coverage of unreached and/or specific populations</td>
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<td>- Use of Health and Immunization Cards as cost-effective monitoring tools to track service delivery, improve vaccination coverage, and as communication tools</td>
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<td><strong>Programme management, monitoring and evaluation strategies</strong></td>
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<td>- Use of ICT technologies and their impact on improving the quality of immunization programmes and vaccination coverage</td>
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<td>- Strategies and tools to improve data quality and strengthen routine immunization data systems</td>
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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. Additional funding from other sources should be sought if the budget is anticipated to exceed this amount. Through this call it is aimed to:

- Enhance knowledge creation to inform better implementation of existent programmes;
- Strengthen the capacity of decision-makers (implementers) to use research as a means of addressing implementation problems that they face in the field.

In line with these aims, selected teams will be provided active training by expert facilitators organized through the AHPSR 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 specific setting.

For more information on Implementation Research, please refer to:

*Implementation Research in Health: A Practical Guide*
LETTER OF INTENT SUBMISSION DETAILS

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
Implementers, including practitioners and policy-makers working with researchers are eligible to submit proposals in response to this call subject to the following criteria:

- The Principal Investigator must be an individual directly involved in the implementation of health interventions in a country with a high rate of child mortality and/or low immunization coverage (please see below for list of eligible countries for this research call). Programme managers, district health officers, front line health workers are typical examples of such individuals.

- Additionally, the research team must include at least one researcher affiliated with an academic or research institution based in the study country.

Please note that both these conditions must be met for the proposal to be eligible for funding.

Additionally the team should include individuals with:

- A variety of technical expertise (e.g. sociology, policy, epidemiology, management sciences) relevant to the proposed study.

- A mix of roles and responsibilities within the country’s health system, i.e., policy-makers, implementers, front line health workers and program managers.

Individuals from high-income countries are not eligible to apply as principle investigators. Collaborations between organizations based in countries with high child mortality 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.

ELIGIBLE COUNTRIES

Afghanistan
Angola
Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Cote d’Ivoire
Democratic Republic of Congo
Ethiopia
Guinea
Haiti
India
Indonesia
Kenya
Liberia
Madagascar
Mauritania
Mozambique
Nigeria
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Somalia
South Sudan
Timor Leste
Uganda
Vietnam
HOW TO APPLY
All submissions must be made online through AHPSR proposal submission website at [http://www.ahpsrproposalsubmission.org](http://www.ahpsrproposalsubmission.org). Hard copies and emails of submissions will NOT be accepted. All submissions must be written in English or French.

- Applicants must submit an initial two page letter of intent by **15 March 2015**. 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 immunization 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 Research Partner(s).
  - 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 immunization programmes and services within health systems. 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 15 April 2015.** 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 15 May 2015.**

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 immunization coverage.
- 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 **15 June 2015**.

- Selected teams will be invited to a Protocol Development Workshop in **mid-August 2015** 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 September 2015**.

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**FOCAL POINTS**

Dr. Nhan Tran, Manager  
Alliance for Health Policy & Systems Research  
World Health Organization

Dr. Kumanan Rasanathan, Senior Health Specialist  
Knowledge Management and Implementation Research Unit  
Health Section  
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**TIMELINE**

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<td>Research Call Launched</td>
<td>3 February 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for Letter of Intent Submission</td>
<td>15 March 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notification of invitation for full proposal submission</td>
<td>15 April 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for Full Proposal Submission</td>
<td>15 May 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notification of Funding Decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protocol Development Workshop</td>
<td>Mid-August 2015</td>
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<td>Final protocols &amp; start of studies</td>
<td>First week September 2015</td>
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