

WORLD ALLIANCE
for
PATIENT SAFETY
ALLIANCE MONDIALE POUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES PATIENTS

SMALL RESEARCH GRANTS FOR PATIENT SAFETY

A resource for reviewers

This resource is intended to assist members of the review panel to assess the applications submitted for the World Health Organization's (WHO) World Alliance for Patient Safety small research grants.

The information contained here is organized into two parts. Part one provides an overview of the initiative including objectives, eligibility criteria and the overall application and submission processes. Part two provides specific information relating to the selection criteria and the assessment processes.

More information is available via <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/research/grants/en/>.

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WHO Acknowledges the WHO Collaborating Centre Catalan Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Research (CAHTA), Spain, for sharing the conceptual framework and the materials for the development of the review guidelines and assessment criteria.

Part 1. Overview

1.1 Objectives

Small Research Grants for Patient Safety is a new initiative of the World Alliance for Patient Safety. It aims to stimulate research studies on patient safety priority areas by providing seed funding for small research projects. It will also promote networking and collaboration, and raise awareness of patient safety issues among researchers and policy-makers. Specific objectives include:

- To increase patient safety research activities by providing seed funding for well-defined, well-designed projects whose objectives are achievable within 12-18 months.
- To contribute to local capacity-building on patient safety research by supporting early- to mid-career researchers in developing or transitional countries as lead investigators.
- To promote patient safety by encouraging dissemination of research findings.

1.2 The focus of the grants

The grants will target institutions that are interested in conducting research on patient safety. To be eligible, researchers must be employed or affiliated with a recognized institution, which will serve as the hosting institution and legal entity for the contractual arrangements with WHO. Each grant is cash-limited and there is no scope for increasing the level of grant awarded. The fund is intended to support operational costs and not to pay the salaries of the investigators.

Eligibility

- The grants are intended for well-designed, well-defined research projects, which can be completed within 12-18 months.
- Research projects are encouraged in all methodological and clinical disciplines that address patient safety.
- Proposed studies may be conducted in any health-care setting, including hospitals, primary care, ambulatory care, community care and home care. Research studies to be conducted in developing countries and countries with economies in transition are particularly encouraged.
- Researchers at all stages of their careers are eligible to apply, although submissions from young researchers are especially encouraged.
- Researchers must be affiliated with a recognized institution located in the country where the research project will be conducted.
- Collaboration is strongly encouraged, both among institutions and between countries.
- Multi-disciplinary research teams with an appropriate mix of expertise, including clinicians, practitioners or policy-makers are strongly encouraged to apply.

1.3 Peer review process and the review panel

The Small Research Grants for Patient Safety will be awarded on a competitive basis through a public call for submissions and an objective peer review process. This is to ensure a fair, equitable and transparent assessment of their scientific and technical merit. The Research Programme of the World Alliance for Patient Safety will coordinate the peer review process, which will be conducted by members of the review panel.

The review panel will consist of international experts and experienced researchers in varying disciplines from different countries around the world, covering all WHO regions. Each reviewer is expected to review 2-4 applications per year with an expected turnaround of four to six weeks. Attempts will be made to match proposals with the reviewer's areas of interest or expertise.

The Research Programme will provide technical support through regular communication, including teleconferencing and a web-based discussion network. Selected details of the reviewers, including name, main affiliated institution, country of nationality and areas of interest or expertise will be made available on the Alliance's website. Conflict of interest will be declared.

1.4 Selection criteria and process

The selection process incorporated in this initiative is based in part on the conceptual framework and the assessment criteria of the WHO Collaborating Centre Catalan Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Research (CAHTA), Spain¹. The process consists of three steps: 1) screening of applications 2) peer-review assessment 3) ethics clearance by the WHO Ethics Review Committee.

1.4.1 Screening of applications

Initial screening of applications will be conducted by staff of the Alliance to ensure eligibility, completeness and accuracy of the information provided. Grant applications considered appropriate will be forwarded for peer-review assessment. To ensure confidentiality and impartiality, each application will be assigned an identification number. The identity of researchers and their affiliated institution(s) will be detached from the applications.

1.4.2 Peer-review assessment

The peer-review assessment will be conducted by the review panel. Each application will be reviewed by at least two reviewers. To enhance an objective and consistent assessment, the reviewers will be asked to evaluate the applications against specific assessment criteria, using designated forms (see Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 for more details).

The peer review assessment will comprise two phases. Phase one is the blind assessment of scientific merits and the policy relevance of the proposal, as well as the project management plan. The reviewers will use the form ***Phase 1: Assessment of scientific merits, policy relevance and project management***, to provide an objective score to each of the questions in the form.

The reviewers will also be able to indicate their overall appraisal and recommendations for funding. After the review is complete, staff of the Research Programme will average the scores and rank the proposals accordingly.

¹ <http://www10.gencat.net/catsalut/eng/index.htm>

Non-selected applications

Proposals that are not recommended for funding, or that require major modifications will not be given further consideration. Staff of the Research Programme will communicate the review outcome to unsuccessful applicants with the suggestions from the reviewers, if applicable. If there are large discrepancies in opinion among the reviewers, an additional reviewer will be called to submit an independent appraisal. A teleconference may be convened to adjudicate and reach a consensus regarding the application.

Selected applications

Applications with high average scores and with positive recommendations from the reviewers will be selected for Phase two assessment. The proposals that succeed in "Phase one" will be re-assessed by the same reviewers, using the form "*Phase 2: Assessment of the capacity and ability of the research team*". At this stage, the identity of the investigators and their affiliated institutions will be provided to the reviewers to facilitate assessment of the capacity and ability of the investigative team and their institutions. The purpose will be to ensure that the team has the necessary skills, experience and institutional support to complete the project.

Proposals with positive recommendations from the reviewers will be ranked again based on the newly obtained scores. Staff of the Research Programme will communicate the outcome to unsuccessful applicants. A reconciliation process will be put in place to reach consensus in the case of discrepancies among reviewers.

Between 20 and 30 proposals with the highest final scores will be selected for consideration. Staff of the Research Programme will communicate with the successful applicants and negotiate the agreed awards according to the proposed budget and availability of funding, taking into account the recommendations of the reviewers. The successful applications and the review panel will be informed of the final decision.

1.4.3 Ethical Clearance

The final step will involve ethical clearance by the WHO Ethics Review Committee (ERC). All applications funded through this initiative will need to obtain approval from the WHO Ethics Review Committee. The Research Programme will work with the successful research teams and with the ERC to facilitate this process prior to the adjudication of the grants.

1.5 Conflict of interest

To facilitate the objective review of applications, the Research Secretariat will remove any information that may identify the investigators and/or corresponding institutions from the grant proposals prior to delivering them to the reviewers for assessment under "Phase one". This is an attempt to minimize the bias and conflict of interest among members of the review panel. If, however, a reviewer becomes aware of the identity of the authors and/or of hosting institutions, s/he will be asked to contact staff of the Alliance and declare any possible conflict of interest or, if necessary, to excuse themselves from reviewing that particular proposal.

1.6 Can reviewers apply for a grant?

Membership of the review panel does not disqualify one from applying for a grant. Reviewers may apply for a small research grant either as a principal investigator or a co-investigator, provided that their application meets the grant eligibility criteria and conditions of grant. Reviewers who decide to apply for grants must contact staff of the Alliance to disclose the details of the particular projects. Reviewers must not reveal the details of their applications to other members of the review panel to avoid any possibility of bias.

1.7 Technical support

Reviewers will be supported and facilitated by the designated WHO Technical Officer who manages and coordinates this programme. A web-based communication network (community of practice) will be set up to facilitate discussion and information exchange. Teleconferences will also be arranged as required. All information

relevant to this initiative will be available via <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/research/grants/en/>. For more information and/or support please contact: Ms Nittita Prasopa-Plaizier, Small Research Grants Manager, on: pssmallgrants@who.int.

Timeline

Activity	Due Date
Formal launch of the initiative	24 June 2008
Call for proposals	1 July 2008
Closing date for applications	30 September 2008
Peer review of proposals	October - November 2008
Communication of the peer review outcomes	December 2008
Applications reviewed by the WHO Ethics Review Committee	January - March 2009
Research projects commence	April - May 2009
Mid-term report due (6 months after project commencement)	November 2009
Final report due (two months after project completion)	July - December 2010

Part II: Instructions for proposals assessment

Members of the review panel will be engaged to conduct the assessment of: 1) the scientific merit, policy relevance and project management plan, and 2) the ability and capacity of the project team.

2.1 Assessment of scientific merit, policy relevance and project management plan

This step is to assess whether the proposed study is scientifically valid, appropriate and feasible. It is intended that the review at this stage be independent and anonymous to ensure an unbiased assessment of their scientific and technical merit. If any reviewers become aware of the identity of the investigators and/or their affiliated institutions, they need to contact staff of the Research Programme immediately to discuss appropriate actions.

For this step, the reviewers will assess the proposals using the criteria outlined in the Form *"Phase 1: Assessment of scientific merits, policy relevance and project management plan"*. The form is organized into four sections A,B,C and D. Sections A, B and C consist of questions with four choices of answers, from 1 to 4, where 4 represents the greatest merit.

1 = Poor/Poorly, 2 = Adequate/Adequately,
3 = Good/Well 4 = Very good/Very well

For the assessment to be helpful, please assign a score by ticking an appropriate box for every question. If the questions are not applicable, please assign and indication N/A (not applicable).

Section A

This is to assess whether the conceptual framework, design, methods and data analyses are adequately developed, integrated and appropriate to answer the research questions.

Question 1 aims to assess the responsiveness of

the research question to the call for applications, i.e. to assess whether the research question corresponds to one of the WHO identified priority areas, especially, those that focus on identifying and developing affordable local solutions and those aiming at evaluating effectiveness of solutions. Box 1 shows the list of global research priority areas identified by the WHO World Alliance for Patient Safety. Priorities identified at local level with appropriate justification will also be considered.

Question 2. This question assesses whether the objectives outlined in the application form correspond to the research question and whether these are described adequately.

Question 3 evaluates the design of the study, which is important to determine whether is objectives can be achieved. The reviewer should indicate whether the design of the study is appropriate to the stated objectives, project timeline and estimated budget.

Question 4 asks about the overall knowledge and understanding of the investigators based on the information presented in the proposals. Are the applicants knowledgeable about the topic? Do they acknowledge potential problem area and consider alternative tactics or ways to minimize them?

Questions 5 - 7 assess whether the study population is appropriate and whether the sample size is adequate, correctly calculated and adequately described, to ensure that the research questions and the objectives can be met.

Questions 8 -10 reflect whether the applicants adequately define and describe the study's independent and dependent variables and key concepts.

Questions 11 - 13 assess whether the applicants appropriately and adequately describe the data collection mechanisms and tools that will be used and methods they will implement, to minimize biases in the study design.

Box 1. Global research priorities of the World Alliance for Patient Safety

- Identification, design and testing of locally effective and affordable solutions
- Assessment of cost-effectiveness of risk-reducing strategies
- Counterfeit and substandard drugs
- Inadequate competencies, training and skills
- Maternal and newborn care
- Health care-associated infections
- Extent and nature of the problem of patient safety
- Lack of appropriate knowledge and its transfer
- Injection practices
- Blood products and blood practices
- Lack of communication and coordination
- Poor safety culture and blame-oriented processes
- Latent organizational failures
- Development of better safety indicators
- Devices and procedures that include human factors considerations
- Health information technology and information systems
- Patients' role in shaping the research agenda
- Adverse drug events and medication errors

Section B

This section assesses whether the research question(s) and the objectives have relevance from a policy, organizational or clinical point of view. Does this study address an important problem? Would the scientific knowledge, clinical practice, or health care and services be advanced by conducting the study? It is important to evaluate the project plan, for examples, whether the timeline is realistic and whether the proposed budget is reasonable. The applicants must also illustrate how they will disseminate the study results and share information with the wider community.

Section C

This section contains open-ended questions regarding the overall proposal, including its strengths and weaknesses. Please also comment on whether there are any potential ethical issues and how they are addressed. Where the study includes human subjects, does the project adequately describe: risks to subjects and approaches for protection? Is the process to obtain informed consent appropriate and adequate?

Section D

This concerns the overall recommendation of whether the proposal should be considered for funding or how it should be improved.

2.2 Project management and capacity

This is to assess whether the investigators are suitably qualified, whether the project team has sufficient skills and expertise to carry out and complete the project and whether the hosting organization is supportive of the project and has sufficient facilities and resources.

At this stage, the reviewers will be using the criteria outlined in form "*Phase 2: Assessment of the capacity and the ability of the research team*".

All applications should demonstrate a competent team and a project management structure that is necessary and sufficient to successfully implement the project. Members of the team should have their roles, their relationships and collective responsibility well described.

It is important to assess whether the team is multidisciplinary in its composition and whether the research approach is collaborative.

Value for money is a criterion for consideration, though it is difficult to assess. The panel reviewers will be asked to indicate whether they feel the budget is appropriate for the proposed study.

Attachment 1



SMALL RESEARCH GRANTS FOR PATIENT SAFETY

Phase 1: Assessment of scientific merits, policy relevance and project management

Applications for the Small Research Grants for Patient Safety are evaluated on a competitive basis. It is expected that the review process will be as objective and equitable as possible.

The peer review assessment comprises two phases. Phase-1 is a blinded evaluation that assesses the scientific merits and the policy relevance of the proposal. Phase-2 examines the capacity and adequacy of the research team to undertake the proposed research study.

This form is for Phase 1 of the peer review assessment. Please review the grant application and assign an appropriate score to each question. Should you require more information, please contact Nittita Prasopa-Plaizier, Small Research Grants Manager on pssmallgrants@who.int.

Each proposal will be reviewed by at least two independent reviewers. Their scores will be averaged and reconciled if there is a substantive discrepancy in the ratings.

It is intended that the review at this stage be independent and anonymous to ensure a fair, equitable, and transparent assessment of their scientific and technical merit. If you become aware of the identity of the investigators and/or their affiliated institutions, please contact us at your earliest convenience to discuss appropriate actions.

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Section A: Assessment of the scientific merits of the study.				
<i>(Following your review of the proposal, please assign a score, by ticking the appropriate box corresponding to score from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates the most suitable. Please tick all the questions and assign only 1 score for each question.)</i>				
1 = Poor/Poorly 2 = Adequate/ Adequately 3 = Good / Well 4 = Very good / Very well				
1. How does the topic proposed in the grant application fits with the call for proposals, i.e., whether it responds to a priority area. <i>(For information, please consult the list of priority areas in the Small research grants for patient safety: a resource for reviewers)</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do the research questions address adequately the objectives of the project? <i>(Assess whether the objectives and research questions are described adequately. The specific objectives should be precise and measurable)</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is the design of the study appropriate and address adequately the objectives of the project?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do the investigators demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the subject proposed for the study?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Is the study population suitable / adequate? <i>(Assess whether the study population is representative of the population to which the study results will apply. Assess whether there are selection biases that may hamper inferences from the study results)</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Is the sample size adequate and justified? <i>(Assess whether there is adequate consideration of the sample size, whether the calculations are appropriate, and whether researchers have taken into consideration loss-to-follow up, non-response etc.)</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Are the sampling methods, the exclusion and inclusion criteria clearly and sufficiently explained?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are the main study variables clearly defined and adequately explained? <i>(Assess whether the independent and dependent variables are clearly described, including definitions, data collection mechanisms, and measures.)</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Are other study variables clearly defined?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
10. Are the instruments/ tools for data collection suitable and sufficient for the study objectives?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Section A: Assessment of the scientific merits of the study.

(Following your review of the proposal, please assign a score, by ticking the appropriate box corresponding to score from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates the most suitable. Please tick all the questions and assign only 1 score for each question.)

1 = Poor/Poorly 2 = Adequate/ Adequately 3 = Good / Well 4 = Very good / Very well

11. Are the potential biases in the study design identified and possible measures to address them offered?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
12. Are the proposed data analysis methods sufficient and/or suitable?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
13. Are the mechanisms proposed for quality control adequate?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Section B. Criteria for assessment of project management and policy relevance

(Following your review of the proposal, please assign a score, by ticking the appropriate box corresponding to score from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates the most suitable. Please tick all the questions and assign only 1 score for each question.)

1 = Poor/Poorly 2 = Adequate/ Adequately 3 = Good / Well 4 = Very good / Very well

14. Is the timeline of the project realistic/feasible?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
15. Are the work plan and the budget reasonable and do they correspond adequately to the number of personnel, study sites, study subjects?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
16. Are the plan for result dissemination / data sharing well-described and adequate?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
17. Do the primary results of the research, according to the study design, have any interesting/important social/clinical or organizational impact? <i>(consider the potential long term impact when the results are delivered / used. a). the production of new knowledge b). the development of new guidelines, methodology c). practical impact on clinical practice d) relevance to policy development e). improvement capacity of personnel/ researcher f). improvement of quality of care and patient safety)</i>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Section C. Additional Comments

18. What are the main strengths of the study?

19. What are the main weaknesses of the study?	
20. Are there any ethical issues that raise concern? If yes, please specify.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
21. Please indicate an alternative budget, if necessary.	
22. Additional comments you would like to add, if any.	

Section D. Global Assessment			
Overall, considering all the characteristics of the proposed study, what would be your opinion of the study?			
Recommended for funding <input type="checkbox"/>	Recommended for funding with reservation <input type="checkbox"/>	In doubt <input type="checkbox"/>	Not recommended for funding <input type="checkbox"/>

Attachment 2



SMALL RESEARCH GRANTS FOR PATIENT SAFETY

Phase 2: Assessment of the capacity and sufficiency of the research team

Applications for the Small Research Grants for Patient Safety are evaluated on a competitive basis. It is expected that the review process will be as objective and equitable as possible.

The peer review assessment comprises two phases. Phase-1 is a blinded evaluation that assesses the scientific merits and the policy relevance of the proposal. Phase-2 examines the capacity and adequacy of the research team to undertake the proposed research study.

This form is for Phase 2 of the peer review assessment. It evaluates the investigators capacity in relation to the conduct and management of the project. At this stage the identity of the investigators and/or their affiliated institutions will be revealed to help you to assess their qualifications and experience.

Please review the grant application and assign an appropriate score to each question. Should you require more information, please contact Nittita Prasopa-Plaizier, Small Research Grants Manager, on pssmallgrants@who.int.

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Better Knowledge for Safer Care

Section A: Assessment of the adequacy and sufficiency of the research team				
<i>Following your review of the proposal, please assign a score, by ticking the appropriate box corresponding to score from 1 to 4, where 4 indicating the most suitable. Please tick all the questions and assign only 1 score per for each question.</i>				
<i>1 = Poor/Poorly 2 = Adequate/Adequately 3 = Good/Well 4 = Very good/Very well</i>				
1. According to the proposal submitted, are the investigators qualified and sufficiently skilled and experienced (based on evidence of publications, qualifications, training) that will ensure the success of the project?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are the roles of the key members of the project team well defined and their time and resources sufficiently allocated?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is the project team multidisciplinary?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Section B. Additional Comments			
Additional comments you would like to add, if any.			
Section C. Global Assessment			
Overall, considering all the characteristics of the proposed study, what would be your opinion of the study?			
Recommended for funding <input type="checkbox"/>	Recommended for funding with reservation <input type="checkbox"/>	In doubt <input type="checkbox"/>	Not recommended for funding <input type="checkbox"/>