

# 6<sup>TH</sup> CALL FOR PROPOSALS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## JUNE 2018

Below are some of the most common questions asked concerning the R2HC Calls for Proposals. Please check this list of questions before contacting the R2HC programme with your query. This document will be updated to include new questions as they arise. The questions are grouped into the following topics:

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## WHAT IS R2HC LOOKING FOR?

### a) General overview

#### 1. What are you looking for in a successful application?

**At Expression of Interest (Eoi) stage the following criteria are reviewed: scope, potential impact, methodology, feasibility and partnerships. Applicants submitting the strongest Eois are invited to develop Full Proposals.**

The assessment criteria applied by the Funding Committee for reviewing Full Proposals are set out at the end of this document (Question 47.), alongside guidance for what should be included in a funding application (Question 37.). Applications are scored against certain criteria and then the Funding Committee takes a decision on which are of sufficient quality to be recommended for funding. In previous Calls the strongest applications addressed an identified evidence gap; demonstrated potential to impact humanitarian policy and/or practice; and presented clear research questions, robust research methodologies, and strong research partnerships.

#### 2. What do you mean by 'high research quality'? Surely this will vary depending on the context and the research question.

The quality of the methodology will be examined by the independent expert members of the Funding Committee as part of the assessment of proposals. Proposals based on methodological approaches that do not meet the standards required to be published in a peer-review journal will not be funded.

For the previous Call 5, the R2HC programme ran a webinar where guidance was provided on the research methodology section of proposals, based on R2HC experience thus far. This can be found [here](#) on the R2HC website – Research Methods and Partnerships webinar. Additionally, various checklists are available on the internet which outline what should be included in the protocol design for research proposals, or to guide audiences when assessing the quality of published papers. Examples include:

- [NICE – for qualitative studies](#)
- [Specialist Unit for Review Evidence \(SURE\) at Cardiff University – for randomised controlled trials and other experimental studies](#)

R2HC has funded research projects which use a broad variety of research methodologies including RCTs, qualitative, mixed methods and experimental. A brief profile of the R2HC projects can be found on the [R2HC website](#).

#### 3. The encouraged focus of the 6<sup>th</sup> Call is evaluation of interventions focused on health system strengthening in fragile states and protracted crises. What exactly are you looking for here?

Health systems are weakened in fragile contexts or countries affected by protracted crises. For the purpose of this Call, fragile states are defined as those where there is a lack of legitimacy and/or authority of government resulting in reduced capacity and a failure to provide services.

We are encouraging research proposals which seek to investigate health systems, and interventions or approaches which aim to strengthen them, in such contexts. This could relate to health care delivery, financing, capacity building, health system resilience or related topics.

Proposals investigating health systems in countries which are fragile and also experiencing humanitarian crises, such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Yemen, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, will be eligible. Proposals must address a humanitarian crisis context.

Whilst proposals are encouraged in the above-mentioned field, applications will be assessed on individual merit alongside other proposals and will not be given favourable status during the review period.

#### **4. How do you define ‘humanitarian crisis’?**

We do not propose a specific definition of ‘humanitarian crisis’ beyond what is included in the Call Guidelines document ([available here](#)) – natural disasters, conflicts, or complex emergencies – but we are looking for proposals that match the objectives of the R2HC programme. We recognise that humanitarian crises come in various forms and occur over a range of timescales.

#### **5. Where can I find more information on the grants funded in the earlier R2HC Calls?**

Further details of these grants are available via the [R2HC website](#).

### *b) Types of research supported*

#### **6. Will the R2HC consider applications for research that may be best conducted in non-humanitarian settings, but that would have an application in humanitarian settings?**

Yes, such applications will be considered. In these cases it will be particularly important to demonstrate that the outcomes of the research would have validity as well as applicability in a humanitarian context.

#### **7. Would secondary data collection projects be considered, or do they have to involve primary data collection?**

Yes, secondary data collection projects will be considered.

#### **8. Will the R2HC fund systematic reviews?**

No. There are other funding mechanisms that are better positioned to fund this kind of work.

#### **9. Will the R2HC fund laboratory-based or clinical trials, or the development of diagnostics?**

No, the R2HC does not fund such research.

#### **10. Would research on improved public health tools such as diagnostic measures, monitoring indicators or evaluation approaches be eligible for funding?**

Yes, provided that these are applied in the context of a humanitarian crisis and that a concrete link to improved public health outcomes is demonstrated.

#### **11. Will the R2HC fund research related to the refugee crisis in Europe?**

The R2HC is only able to fund research in countries featured in the [Development Assistant Committee \(DAC\) list of ODA recipients](#). This means that while we can fund research in countries such as Turkey and FYR Macedonia, we are not able to do so in others, such as Greece.

*c) Eligibility – who and what R2HC will fund*

**12. I applied unsuccessfully to an earlier R2HC Call for Proposals. Can I re-apply?**

Yes. If you were **shortlisted** for a Full Proposal in an earlier Call, there is an additional form to complete which allows you to explain the changes made to your proposal (available in our online application platform –the Common Grant Application). Resubmitted applications are required to address any feedback that was provided by the Funding Committee. Addressing earlier feedback does not guarantee that the proposal will be accepted as resubmissions are considered on merit alongside all other proposals and are not granted favourable status.

If your application was not shortlisted, you can still reapply, and we would encourage you to ensure that your revised application emphasises the changes made in response to any feedback received at Expression of Interest stage.

**13. What kind of organisation can apply as the lead applicant?**

The lead applicant may be a research institution, a non-profit institution or NGO, a UN agency, or a public or government institution (including a military organisation of the state). It must be legally registered in the country in which it is based. Individuals or for-profit organisations cannot be the lead applicant.

**14. Do I need to be registered in the UK to be able to apply?**

No, applicants can come from any part of the world.

**15. Will you fund the cost of interventions that are the subject of the research?**

We will not generally pay for the costs of interventions, except in limited cases where a small trial pilot is needed. If the proposed research is linked to continuation of a specific intervention over the research period, evidence must be provided in the proposal that (other) funds are available to cover such costs. If in doubt please email [r2hc@elrha.org](mailto:r2hc@elrha.org) for clarification.

**16. Will you provide funds to support existing research projects?**

Applicants with existing funded research projects that are aligned with the R2HC objectives and criteria may apply for additional funding from the R2HC in order to expand an element of the current research.

The application will need to clearly describe the existing initiative and additional funds requested, as well as the additional research outputs that will be attributable to the R2HC funds.

**17. Can my organisation submit more than one Expression of Interest?**

Yes. We regularly receive applications from different faculties or departments in the same academic institution, or from different 'branches' of the same humanitarian organisation. Each proposal is considered on its own merit.

**18. As a researcher, can my name be included in more than one Expression of Interest?**

Yes, you can be included as part of one or more research teams, and in different capacities. However, if you are named as Principal Investigator in more than one proposal, and were invited to develop Full Proposals in relation to each Expression of Interest, if more than one proposal was ranked highly and recommended for funding only one would be funded.

*d) Grants available*

**19. What is the 'rapid trigger' funding stream and how do I apply for this type of grant?**

Rapid trigger grants are for research during the acute phase of a humanitarian crisis *that has not yet occurred*.

Some applicants already know where they wish to do their research in a current or ongoing crisis setting, and would be able to begin research as soon as funding is secured and the preparatory work done. Our core grants funding stream is available for this. However, in other cases applicants will wish to conduct research in the acute phase of a *future* crisis. In such a case, the research would not start until a relevant crisis occurs. With rapid trigger grants, the R2HC can 'pre-approve' grants, and rapidly disburse funding only if, or when, the crisis occurs. With rapid trigger grants, initial funds can be made available for preparatory work before the event takes place.

Applicants who wish to apply for a rapid trigger grant should complete the same application form as those applying for core grants, selecting the appropriate option when prompted on the application form. If successful at the Expression of Interest (Eoi) stage, applicants will then be invited to complete an application form tailored to a rapid trigger grant proposal. If the application is subsequently approved for funding, a discussion would follow with the R2HC programme team on the appropriate structuring of the disbursements to allow for the uncertain timing of the crisis.

More information on the rapid trigger funding stream can be found on the [R2HC website](#).

**20. I have a proposal concerning the evaluation of a new health intervention, product or tool. Should I apply to the R2HC or the Humanitarian Innovation Fund?**

Alongside the R2HC, Elrha also manages the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), which supports organisations and individuals to identify, nurture and share innovative and scalable solutions to the challenges facing effective humanitarian assistance (including health). Whereas the R2HC focuses on strengthening the evidence base for health interventions in humanitarian crises, the HIF focuses on the development process for innovations.

If you are unsure whether to apply for funding through the HIF or the R2HC, please contact us via [r2hc@elrha.org](mailto:r2hc@elrha.org) for further guidance.

## **21. How many grants do you plan to fund in this Call for Proposals?**

There is no target number. The number of grants approved for funding will depend on the size and quality of proposals received. To date, an average of 8 proposals have been funded through each Call. However, if a strong proposal was recommended for funding that required the full allocation available – £3.5 million – it is foreseeable that just one research project might be funded.

## **22. What was the success rate in previous calls?**

On average, we have received 80 eligible applications for each of the annual Calls, with approximately 30 applicants invited to develop Full Proposals. The average number of proposals approved for funding across all the annual calls has been 8.

## **WHAT INFORMATION DOES R2HC NEED?**

### *a) Budget*

## **23. Is there a maximum or minimum limit to the amount of funds that can be requested?**

No. Applicants are encouraged to request sufficient funds to complete the proposed research successfully. The Funding Committee will recognise that some worthwhile research can be done on a relatively small budget, whilst other research might require a higher level of resources. There is no upper or lower ceiling for budgets and it is possible that a single application could be awarded all the available funds if the proposal is seen as likely to have extremely high impact and to represent good value for money. Each Expression of Interest will be considered on its individual merit.

## **24. What types of cost will R2HC cover?**

Applicants may request support for personnel costs, travel costs, costs related to data collection and analysis, reasonable equipment costs, and other items so as to cover the full research costs in the relevant setting. The R2HC will not generally pay for the costs of interventions, except in limited cases where a small trial pilot is needed.

## **25. What costs are permissible in Year 3?**

The third year is provided to enable research uptake activities to take place. Funds can be used towards activities which influence humanitarian policy and practice, for example: the costs of attending or organising dissemination events; data visualisation; development and distribution of policy briefs; publication fees; and the employment of staff specifically working on activities related to the uptake of research findings. The third year cannot be used to support the research activities themselves, including costs associated with data collection and analysis, as these must be completed in the first 24 months of the grant period.

## **26. Will R2HC pay overheads and is there a limit?**

Where the lead applicant has no alternative source of funding for administrative management of the grant, applicants may request funds to cover these costs. The R2HC programme will allow organisations

to request up to 10% of the project costs as organisational management costs. To be considered, these will need to be fully justified. A detailed breakdown of such costs will not be needed at the Expression of Interest stage but will be required at the Full Proposal stage.

**27. Will R2HC cover additional costs if there is a currency exchange loss before or during the project?**

No. The R2HC is unable to cover the costs of any currency exchange loss. The responsibility for managing exchange loss (and gain) lies with grantees, as is noted in the Grant Agreement. A copy of the Grant Agreement will be published with the Call Guidelines. Resources cannot be allocated within a budget as a 'contingency' for currency exchange loss.

**28. There could be a variety of crisis scenarios that I might wish to research, as those crises have not yet occurred. How do I allow for this in my budget?**

For rapid trigger grant applications, where a variety of future crisis scenarios could trigger the research, the budget should set out the likely maximum costs of conducting the research.

**29. Is there a minimum amount that should be included in the budget for the uptake and dissemination of research findings?**

Yes. R2HC requires applicants to plan how research findings will reach a wide audience and impact on humanitarian practitioners and policy makers. R2HC requests applicants to dedicate around 10% of the project budget, or up to £20,000, for these activities.

*b) Research uptake*

**30. Will the R2HC programme allow additional time for the promotion of research findings?**

Yes. Following the 24 month research implementation phase, an additional period of up to 12 months is available – and actively encouraged – for research uptake activities. This additional time should be used to promote research findings within relevant stakeholder communities to ensure their uptake, with a view to improving humanitarian practice.

**31. What is the R2HC looking for in terms of research uptake?**

The overall aim of the R2HC programme is to improve humanitarian practice through increasing the public health evidence base, so the R2HC places great emphasis on the importance of research uptake. Guidance is provided to applicants in the [Research Uptake Guidance Note](#).

The Full Proposal application form requires inclusion of a research uptake plan, demonstrating that you have considered the different audiences the research findings will target and that you have plans for how the findings can be used to influence policy and practice, including the role of different members of the research team in research uptake activities. Activities could include (amongst others): holding dissemination events with affected local communities, service providers and/or national policy makers; presenting research findings at relevant regional or international conferences; conducting advocacy at relevant policy forums, with key stakeholder groups including national governments, and/or with other influential bodies such as the World Health Organisation; design and publication of products to

communicate research findings, such as manuals, briefing papers, guidance notes; publication fees for open access journals etc.

**32. Applicants must identify a focal point for research uptake activities within the research team. What are you looking for from this person?**

Each research study team should include an individual who has the skills, knowledge and experience to be able to develop and deliver a plan for the research findings to influence change in policy and practice within the humanitarian sector. The research uptake focal point could come from one of the agencies already involved in the research partnership, or from another organisation. The CV of this person should demonstrate relevant experience in research uptake and be uploaded along with the CVs of other research team members.

**33. How does the R2HC support research uptake?**

The R2HC programme is developing tools/guidance that will be able to support our grant partners to plan and undertake their research uptake and dissemination. We anticipate that we will be able to share these tools with successful applicants after funding decisions have been made, either during project Kick Off meetings or at other points during the course of the grant period. We will expect grant partners to use these tools during the course of their grant.

Periodically the R2HC will convene thematic Community of Practice meetings, or Research Forum, with the objective of enabling grantees to promote research uptake within the wider humanitarian research and practitioner communities. The R2HC also directly engages with the World Health Organisation, the humanitarian health clusters and other key stakeholders to promote the uptake of research funded through the programme. (Please read our [Research Uptake Guidance Note](#)).

**34. When should I start the uptake and dissemination activities?**

Grants are offered for a maximum duration of 36 months. We would encourage uptake and dissemination activities to be considered from the offset and span the full period for which you are requesting funding. All research activities must be completed within 24 months but uptake and dissemination activities may continue for a further 12 month period.

*c) Other/miscellaneous*

**35. Can I submit my application in any language?**

No. Applications must be submitted in English. In Calls 4 and 5, R2HC made available an arrangement which enabled Full Proposals to be prepared in French and costs for translation into English were refunded by R2HC. If you are interested in using this mechanism, please contact us by email at [r2hc@elrha.org](mailto:r2hc@elrha.org).

**36. Do I have to use the online application system?**

Yes. If you have technical difficulties with the online application system, please make sure you have read all the instructions and watched the video available on the platform (Common Grant Application). If you cannot find the answer to your question, please email [r2hc@elrha.org](mailto:r2hc@elrha.org).



*d) Further guidance for applicants*

**37. What further guidance can you give based on the experience of the earlier Calls?**

Based on the experience of the applications received in earlier Calls, the following recommendations are put forward to potential applicants for the 6<sup>th</sup> Call:

- Ensure that the proposal is within scope i.e. that it concerns research on public health in a humanitarian crisis.
- Ensure that the proposed research addresses a clear evidence gap.
- Ensure that the research objective is specific and precise.
- Ensure that the proposal explains clearly the nature of the intervention that is the subject of the study (where relevant).
- Ensure that the methodological approach is clearly specified and appropriate to address your research question.
- Ensure that the research could only be undertaken in a humanitarian setting rather than a non-humanitarian setting or laboratory.
- Ensure that the research is designed in such a way that the outcome could be applied in other humanitarian contexts beyond the specific context of the study.
- Ensure that the proposal is to undertake a research study, and is not simply a programmatic evaluation or development of an intervention or product.
- Ensure that the partnership requirements are fulfilled i.e. that at least one academic institution and one humanitarian organisation will be involved in the research.
- Ensure that the partnership includes organisations or individuals with sufficient experience and in-country networks to feasibly undertake the proposed research activities.
- Ensure that the Principal Investigator demonstrates prior experience of leading similar research.
- Ensure that there is a clearly described research uptake plan that states how the research team will endeavour to influence humanitarian policy and practice once the research has been completed.

## WHAT SUPPORT DOES R2HC PROVIDE TO APPLICANTS?

*a) Seed funding*

**38. What is seed funding?**

R2HC offers a seed fund grant of up to £10,000 to applicants invited to submit Full Proposals. These funds are intended to support research partnerships during the development of the more detailed Full Proposal, prior to its submission. More information on seed funding can be found on our [website](#).

**39. Who can apply for seed funding?**

When submitting an Expression of Interest, any research team is eligible to apply for seed funding to strengthen their partnership and further develop their proposal.

## b) Partnerships

### 40. In what ways does the R2HC support research partnerships?

Applicants can request a one-day partnership workshop, facilitated by the R2HC Partnerships Manager, when applying for seed funding. This facilitated workshop focuses on building and strengthening relationships within the research team, providing facilitated discussion on roles and responsibilities, and ensuring common understandings and expectations of the proposed research by all team members. All shortlisted applicants will also be offered a partnership strengthening resource with suggested activities and sessions to use when meeting as a research team, to help develop their partnership and think through important partnership dynamics prior to full submission. A recommended list of reading is available [here](#). The R2HC Partnerships Manager will also be able to support research teams remotely on any specific partnership issues or areas of advice that would be helpful as applicants work to strengthen their partnership.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT TO OUR APPLICATION?

### 41. What happens to my Expression of Interest once I've submitted it?

You will receive an email confirming receipt. Applicants invited to submit Full Proposals will be informed of the outcome of the shortlisting process by 10 September 2018. We will endeavour to contact all unsuccessful applicants as soon as possible after this date.

### 42. Will I receive feedback on my application even if I am not selected to go forward to the Full Proposals stage?

We will do our best to provide brief feedback to applicants on the strengths and weaknesses of each Expression of Interest.

### 43. What happens if things change between submitting the Expression of Interest and finalising the grant?

We recognise that humanitarian contexts are characterised by uncertainty and change, and will try to be as flexible as possible to accommodate any such changes.

### 44. The Call Guidelines refers to a rebuttal stage. What is this and what will I need to do?

R2HC has introduced a rebuttal period into the review stage of the application process. This will provide an opportunity for applicants to respond to comments or questions raised by technical experts during their reviews. You will be provided with one week to provide clarifications. Your full proposal, the technical reviews, and your rebuttal response will then all be reviewed by Funding Committee members.

It will not be possible for you to amend your proposal in any way, just to provide additional information or clarifications. The rebuttal period is expected to be in early January 2019.

### 45. How will the final list of grants be determined?

Each application will be assessed on individual merit. There will not be a system of quotas for different sectors, geographical regions, or any other category including 'encouraged' thematic areas. The Funding

Committee will be using a standardised scoring system to assess the quality of the proposals. The highest quality proposals will be funded up to the limits of the R2HC budget.

#### 46. Who assesses the applications?

Each Full Proposal will be reviewed by two independent experts from fields corresponding to the proposed thematic focus of study. Taking these reviews into consideration, the final assessment of research proposals will be conducted by the independent Funding Committee managed by Elrha.

The Funding Committee is comprised of experts in humanitarian health, acting in an independent personal capacity, drawn from academic institutions, NGOs, governmental organisations and UN agencies. A full list of Funding Committee members can be found on the [R2HC website](#).

#### 47. What are the assessment criteria?

Applications will be assessed using a standard set of criteria. These include the following:

##### a. Impact

- How relevant is the research proposal to the stated aim of the R2HC programme?
- To what extent does the research proposal demonstrate how it would strengthen the existing evidence base?
- How great is the potential impact of the research relative to its total budgeted cost?
- How well does the proposal demonstrate a viable pathway to impact?

##### b. Soundness of methodology

- Is the research methodology clearly described, and appropriate to the research objectives and the humanitarian context?
- Does the methodology take into account the need for baseline data and subsequent monitoring and evaluation?
- Does the methodology include an appropriate balance of quantitative and qualitative methods?

##### c. Operational feasibility

- How realistic is the proposal in terms of the timeframe, the budget and the operational challenges that are likely to be faced?
- Is the proposed configuration of roles and responsibilities of the various partners, including in-country partners, appropriate and credible?
- To what extent have the risks and challenges associated with implementing the proposed research been considered and addressed?
- Are ethical considerations adequately addressed?

##### d. Value for money

- How cost effective is the intervention in question (if relevant)?
- Does the budget appear reasonable for the proposed package of work, and do the costs represent good value for money?
- Given the likely impact of the research relative to the amount of funding requested, to what extent does the proposal represent overall value for money?

e. Strength of research partnership and team

- Is there evidence of a partnership between (single or multiple) research institutions and operational organisations that will facilitate the implementation of the research and the uptake of the research findings?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of consortium members proportionate and balanced?
- To what extent does the lead organisation and the Principal Investigator have the necessary experience and expertise to successfully lead the management and implementation of the research project?
- What is the overall strength of the research team in terms of relevant experience and expertise?

f. Uptake and dissemination

- Are publications foreseen in respected academic journals?
- Does a sound plan exist for uptake and dissemination of research findings that is differentiated by audience? This might include: humanitarian actors; academic institutions and/or scientific community; policy makers, government and non-governmental organisations and other key stakeholders in the country of research; those affected by the research.
- What steps will be taken to ensure that research findings will be put into practice, and what is the role of each partner in research uptake?

**48. When will R2HC make final decisions on which proposals have been accepted?**

R2HC aims to inform all applicants if their Full Proposal has been successful during March 2019.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE PROPOSAL IS FUNDED?

**49. Will an extension beyond the 24 month duration limit for research activities be allowed in the event of delays in obtaining ethical clearance from my institution or the host government?**

Yes. If there are delays during the project start-up phase or the research implementation period, these can be accommodated during the uptake period. R2HC aims to be flexible in the case of unforeseen delays.

**50. When can successful applicants begin research activities?**

Research activities can begin once the necessary due diligence checks on the lead organisation and partners have been carried out, and the Grant Agreement has been signed. We aim for this to be concluded by June 2019.

## OTHER

*If you have further questions, please contact us at [r2hc@elrha.org](mailto:r2hc@elrha.org), putting "Query" in the Subject line.*