

Call for proposals for synthetic reviews



The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) has been created to enhance development effectiveness through the promotion of evidence-based policy-making. 3ie will be funding new studies of the impact of development interventions, and undertaking reviews of existing studies (synthetic reviews). This call is to invite proposals to undertake synthetic reviews of studies assessing the impact on any development-related theme.

Reviews are to be restricted to interventions in low and middle-income countries, though may also draw on evidence from developed countries on the basis of existing reviews for those countries. It is hoped to award contracts for the undertaking of a minimum of four reviews under this call.

3ie is partnering with the Campbell Collaboration (C2) (www.campbellcollaboration.org) in the production of synthetic reviews. All reviews will be registered with C2, and the protocols and reviews submitted to C2. Accordingly reviews must satisfy C2 criteria. 3ie's approach is also influenced by the realist perspective, which stresses the importance to recognizing how outcomes may vary by context and the underlying behavioural mechanisms at work. In practice this means: (1) setting the outcome review in the broader context of the underlying program theory, reporting evidence on all assumptions and links in the causal chain, not only outcomes; and (2) examining the variation in reported outcomes, not only their mean. An example of this approach is Van der Knapp et al. (2008).

Proposals should include the following: (1) topic of the review; (2) name and CV(s) of lead researcher(s); (3) a list of possible studies to be included in the review (this list need not be comprehensive, but is required to show that there are at least three studies to be reviewed in the proposed topic area); (4) proposed study time line and budget (based on assumption that the work can start during September 2009). As an approximate guide, studies financed under the first call for proposals had an average budget of US\$35,000 with the work being carried out over a period of six to eight months. The 3ie website lists studies already being supported (<http://www.3ieimpact.org/page.php?pg=synthetic>).

The study outputs comprise: (1) a C2 title registration and protocol for the study, which is subject to approval by 3ie; (2) the final report; (3) two short summaries, one in 3ie 'EQ brief' style and one of 150-200 words suitable for a web-page feature; and (4) list of all included studies in a format suitable to be included in 3ie's impact evaluation database.

3ie encourages proposals from researchers based in developing countries, and proposals including such researchers in the study team.

Proposals should be sent to reviews@3ieimpact.org by Friday 26th June 2009. Proposals will be reviewed by three reviewers, including two external experts (one nominated by C2 and one an impact evaluation expert). The review criteria are attached. The contact person for successful proposals will be contacted by Friday August 28th, 2009. Any enquiries regarding this call should be sent to Hugh Waddington at hwaddington@3ieimpact.org.

Reference

van der Knaap, Leontien M., Frans L. Leeuw, Stefan Bogaerts and Laura T. J. Nijssen (2008) Combining Campbell Standards and the Realist Evaluation Approach: The Best of Two Worlds?, *American Journal of Evaluation*.

Appendix

Criteria for review of proposals to conduct synthetic reviews

Proposals are pre-screened to ensure they meet the criteria of being to conduct a synthetic review of impact evaluations of a socio-economic development intervention in low and middle income countries. Proposals which pass this pre-screening are assessed against the following criteria (the weight accorded each criterion is shown in parentheses):

1. *Relevance of proposed topic* (10%): will the review address a well -defined, and policy relevant issue?
2. *Experience of PIs* (40%): do the PIs have relevant experience in: (i) conducting synthetic reviews, and (ii) impact evaluation of development interventions? Does the team include the right mix of technical skills with respect to statistical synthesis and contextual analysis?
3. *Awareness of, and adherence to, C2 procedures* (25%): does the proposal explicitly mention C2, or otherwise make clear an awareness of the procedures required to meet C2 quality standards? Is the application of these procedures (e.g. systematic review of all available literature) evident in the proposal?
4. *Incorporation of realist perspective* (25%): does the proposal recognize the importance of analyzing the program theory across the causal chain? Is the collection of material and proposed method of analysis set up in a way so as to achieve this?

Each of the above criteria is scored on a scale of 0-10. An aggregate score is then calculated using the weights shown, to give a total score of 0-10. This total score is increased by 5% if the review team includes members based in a developing country, and by a further 5% if the proposal comes from an institution based in a developing country.