Thematic Window 2
HIV Self-testing, Republic of Zambia
Phase I Request for Proposals
Issue date: 13 August 2014
Deadline for questions: 23:59 GMT 22 August 2014
Submission deadline: 23:59 GMT 21 September 2014

1. Overview

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) in coordination with the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health, Government of the Republic of Zambia, is issuing an open request for proposals (RFP) to conduct a formative research study related to the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions using HIV self-tests in the Republic of Zambia. 3ie anticipates awarding one grant. There is no pre-determined budget ceiling, but cost proposals will be reviewed carefully for reasonableness, and the final selection will be made on a best value basis.

The formative research study produced under phase 1 of 3ie’s Thematic Window on HIV Self-testing, Zambia, will be publicly disseminated as background information for phase 2 of the window, which will provide grants for pilot programmes using HIV self-tests to be implemented and evaluated using rapid impact evaluations. The formative research is meant to inform the design of these pilot programmes, as well as to provide information to help with the design of the evaluations.

Applicants are responsible for knowing and understanding all of the information in this RFP and in the question-and-answer document to be posted on the 3ie website.

3ie reserves the right not to award a grant under this call.

2. Background

There is increasing international interest in the possibility of HIV self-testing. First-time testing and repeat testing are considered vital for preventing HIV and AIDS and for reaching the UNAIDS 2020 targets of 90 per cent of people with HIV knowing their status, 90 per cent of people with HIV receiving antiretroviral treatment and 90 per cent of people on treatment having an undetectable viral load. UNAIDS released a brief technical note on HIV self-testing in May 2014 and the World Health Organization sponsored a special issue of AIDS and Behavior on HIV self-testing published in July 2014.
3ie’s Thematic Window on HIV Self-testing (TW2) was launched in early 2013 in collaboration with the Government of Kenya. In July 2014, 3ie published a set of formative research studies for Kenya undertaken in phase 1 and will announce the awards of the phase 2 grants in August 2014. 3ie is now launching the thematic window in the Republic of Zambia to include one formative research study and up to two pilot projects with impact evaluations.

3. Scope of formative research

The objective of the formative research study for Zambia is to collect information specific to the population and health system in Zambia in order to augment the large amount of information on HIV self-testing produced by international bodies and by 3ie’s TW2 programme in Kenya in the past two years. The research design for this formative study may include a variety of methodologies, but the methodologies should be rigorous and well-specified. The study should include analysis of information from a large, representative sample of Zambians along with sub-samples of key populations. It is expected that the study will also have a quantitative component. All data collected under this grant must be submitted to 3ie and will be made publicly available (with appropriate measures to keep respondents anonymous).

The formative study should not involve the actual use of HIV self-tests. This kind of evaluation will be conducted in phase 2. The selected research team for the formative study may elect to use a small number of self-test packages for demonstration purposes. The selected team is expected to liaise directly with the Government of Zambia and with any HIV self-test producers regarding the types and brands of tests that are appropriate to consider.

Applicants must propose and justify the specific set of research questions they plan to address in their studies. 3ie expects that the selected study will address these questions:

1. What are likely to be the most effective, efficient, and ethical ways of distributing self-test kits to potential users?

2. What methods are likely to be effective for ensuring and promoting linkage to care for counseling, confirmatory testing and treatment for those using self-tests?

3. What kinds of health providers and other service providers would be effective and acceptable in the distribution of self-test kits and the linkage to care?
4. What legal or social concerns might be associated with different distribution methods?

5. What tools, instructions and demonstrations are most likely to ensure users correctly perform and read the test?

6. Are there special considerations for any key populations?

The selected research team will be expected to present the findings in public events organised by the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health, Government of the Republic of Zambia, and 3ie and possibly by others in addition to submitting the findings for posting on the 3ie website according to the 3ie final report format.

4. Eligibility

The call is open to organisations implementing HIV and AIDS programmes and/or research in Zambia. The applicant organisation must be able to sign the 3ie grant agreement for TW2, phase 1 Zambia, which is available on the 3ie website.

For-profit organisations are eligible to apply, but are restricted to the same indirect cost limits as non-profit organisations and may not charge a fee.

5. Major milestones

TW2 phase 1 applications are due 21 September 2014. 3ie hopes to announce prospective awards on or about 17 October 2014 and complete grant signing in the three to five weeks following the award announcement. This timing will depend on what revisions are requested to the proposed research design and/or the proposed budget.

The draft final report is due April 30, 2015. This deadline will not be extended, since the results of phase 1 need to be disseminated before phase 2 can commence. Applicants should, therefore, present a feasible work plan to complete the research in that timeframe. The research design and the research work plan should carefully consider all possible Institutional Review Board or other research approvals and ways to reduce the time necessary to receive them.

6. Instructions for applicants

The application shall consist of four documents:
1. A technical proposal not to exceed twenty (20) pages (including any attachments, tables, figures, etc. but excluding the cover page and CVs) submitted as a single Microsoft Word-compatible file with font size no smaller than 11 point;
2. The curriculum vitae of all proposed principal investigators, not to exceed five pages per person and compiled in a single Microsoft Word-compatible file with font size no smaller than 11 point;
3. A cost proposal submitted as a Microsoft Excel-compatible file in the 3ie budget template; and

The technical proposal shall be structured in the following format:
- Overview of and justification for the proposed research questions;
- Research design and methodology (including a description of all data collection);
- Qualifications of individuals on the research team. (CVs should only be submitted for the principal investigators; this section may present information on other research team members if desired);
- Past performance references for the applicant institution. This section should describe at least three similar projects conducted by the organisation and provide the full contact information for the client or similar stakeholder for each project; and
- Work plan.

The cost proposal must include the following information:

- Proposed line-item budget in the 3ie budget template and conforming to the 3ie direct cost policies
- Budget narrative

5. Submission and review process

Any questions regarding this RFP should be submitted to TW2@3ieimpact.org no later than 11:59 GMT 22 August 2014. All submitted questions and the answers will be published on the 3ie website the following week.

All applications must be sent via four attachments (or five if the cover page is a separate file) to a single email message to TW2@3ieimpact.org. Applications must be received by 23:59 GMT 21 September, 2014.

The cover page must include a certification that the person authorised to sign the grant agreement for the applicant has read and is willing and able to sign the 3ie grant agreement. Applications that do not include this
certification will be considered ineligible and will not be reviewed. The grant agreement will be available on the 3ie site no later than 15 August 2014.

Applications will be scored according to the following selection criteria and points by at least two internal and one external reviewer.

- Relevance and understanding of proposed research questions (15 possible points);
- Research design and methodology (30 possible points);
- Qualifications of the proposed principal investigators (20 possible points);
- Past performance of the institution on similar research projects (20 possible points);
- Feasibility of work plan (15 possible points).

Grants will be awarded on a best value basis. Therefore, cost proposals will not be scored, but the final selection will take into account cost reasonableness of individual applications and relative prices across applications as well as total funding available.