International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

Request for Qualifications: Impact evaluation of teacher performance incentives interventions in rural Shaanxi Province, China

3ie Policy Window Three  RFQ PW3.04.CH.PG.SP

Issue date: 22 January 2015
Deadline for applications: 23:59 GMT, 16 February 2015

1. Introduction

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) requests research organisations or consortia to submit qualifications for a proposal preparation grant under 3ie’s Policy Window 3 (PW3) grant programme.

The proposal will be for the high-quality impact evaluation of a teacher performance pay programme implemented by the Shaanxi Province Department of Education (DOE), China or other relevant interventions being implemented by the DOE. The proposal will describe the theory of change for the intervention and include research questions and an impact evaluation design.

2. Overview of Policy Window Three

3ie’s PW3 funds high-quality, mixed-methods impact evaluations commissioned by a 3ie member organisation to answer questions about the attributable impact of interventions they implement. 3ie promotes theory-based impact evaluations that make use of an experimental or quasi-experimental counterfactual to examine the full programme causal chain to answer questions about what works, why, how and at what cost.

Policy window grants are awarded in two phases.

2.1 Phase one: qualifications and proposal preparation

The first phase begins with this request for qualifications (RFQ). 3ie will conduct an internal and external review of the complete submitted applications. One of the external reviewers will be the implementing agency representative.

The selected research team will receive a Policy Window Preparation Grant (PWPG) of US$20,000 to develop one proposal. In case the selected research team and DOE see convenient to present more than one proposal, the total PWPG can be for up to a maximum of US$30,000 for three proposals (see section 4.3). Please see the 3ie PWPG agreement and grant administration templates for more details.
The PWPG covers costs associated with proposal preparation activities, including costs of engaging with the implementing agency and 3ie. The costs include a field visit and one or more visits to work with the relevant staff of the implementing agency and to conduct capacity-building workshops with their staff. These activities ensure dialogue between implementing agency staff and the research team as a basis for the process of agreeing on the impact evaluation questions and design.

At the end of phase 1, the PWPG grantee will submit the proposal, including proposed budget, using the 3ie PW3 evaluation proposal form. The proposed design is due within three months of the signing of the PWPG grant agreement. More details about the timeline for this RFQ are provided below.

2.2. Phase two: full proposal and impact evaluation

The proposed impact evaluation design and budget will be reviewed and scored by at least two internal and at least three external reviewers, including a representative of the implementing agency. It is 3ie’s intent, although not guaranteed, to fund up to one proposed evaluation, conditional on the proposal receiving adequate scores on all selection criteria (see section 4.5 for selection criteria). 3ie may provide comments and request a resubmission of a proposal that does not receive adequate scores. 3ie reserves the right not to award any follow-on impact evaluation grant.

If the full proposal for phase 2 is accepted, 3ie will award the research team a grant to conduct the impact evaluation under 3ie’s standard terms and conditions. Please see http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/funding/policy-window/how-to-apply/ for the 3ie grant agreement and grant administration agreement templates.

3. Background

Almost 73 per cent of the population in Shaanxi Province lives in rural areas, some of which are remote and isolated. Like in other provinces, school is compulsory and free through grade nine, but great challenges remain for rural education, particularly for children in poor counties of Shaanxi.

According to provincial education authorities, the poor quality of teaching in rural areas and a very competitive exam system that creates incentives for neglecting poorly performing students are among the main problems.

The most qualified teachers prefer to teach in urban areas, where it is more likely to find better performing students and more incentives related to students’ performance on standardised exams. For example, parents and schools in urban areas are more able to top-up pay for teachers who provide extra tutoring. As a result, teachers in rural areas tend to be less qualified and less motivated to teach their students. They tend to focus only on highly performing students who are most likely to pass the exams. In urban schools, almost all students end up going to academic high school and few students drop out before reaching grade 12.

The national government started the Teacher Performance Pay Policy Programme in 2009 to address this problem. The policy focuses on linking student performance to teacher
performance pay. The policy has been implemented in Shaanxi since the start of the programme. The Shaanxi DOE has had questions about the implementation of this policy, including the extent and manner in which it has been implemented and its impact on teaching quality and equity of results. Very importantly, the Shaanxi DOE wants teaching to reduce the gaps between students’ performance within a class, between schools in a given area and between schools in rural and urban areas. This is in contrast to incentive programmes that seek only to increase the number of students passing the national exam.

A recently completed impact evaluation of 216 primary schools in Shaanxi Province showed that a teacher incentive programme based on a pay for percentile approach and designed to allow teachers to pay equal attention to all students in their class (both high- and low-performing students) had a large and statistically significant impact on student achievement relative to the control group. They are continuing to carry out research to see if these positive pay for performance results are sustained in a second year. They are moving to roll out this approach across primary schools in the prefecture between 2015 and 2018. The DOE wishes to know if pay for performance really is the only approach that works effectively to address performance gaps between students, schools and areas.

4. Policy Window Preparation Grant (phase one)

4.1 Eligibility

1. Only legally registered organisations and consortia of registered organisations, not individuals, may apply.
2. The grant-holding organisation must be located in the People’s Republic of China, with researchers of Chinese nationality as the lead or co-lead principal investigator (PI).
3. The application may include other researchers who are not employees of the grant-holding organisation.
4. Applicants are encouraged to include a researcher with a demonstrated international reputation as one of the PIs.

4.2 Preparation process and expectations

The study team will hold at least one workshop to build capacity among the implementing agency (Shaanxi DOE) to increase understanding of impact evaluation among its staff during the preparation grant period. This workshop will form part of the process of identifying and illustrating the programme’s theory of change and discussing possible evaluation designs.

The selected study team will engage with the DOE and other stakeholders it may identify to explain the rationale for conducting an impact evaluation, what will be learned from it and the implications for programme design, data collection, analysis and use of results.

During the preparatory phase, 3ie requires the research team to coordinate closely with the DOE on evaluation questions and study design. If needed, the study team is expected to conduct formative research needed to ensure high-quality design, within the PWPG time and resources available. Workshops for DOE staff and other key stakeholders help ensure an on-going dialogue between the DOE staff and the research team throughout the study.
3ie expects the workshop(s) and discussions with DOE staff to cover the following areas:

- Take stock of administrative and existing survey and other data that might be useful for the evaluation
- Determine evaluation questions and timeframes for evaluation;
- Discuss a feasible evaluation design including identification methods;
- Discuss data collection methods; and
- Agree on and carry out scoping activities and other background research needed to generate information and develop a policy engagement and research communication plan, using 3ie guidance and templates.

The study team members must demonstrate their ability to conduct the study for which they win an award and their availability to start and finish the study within the timeframe indicated in this RFQ.

### 4.3 Budget

The preparation grant will be US$20,000 for one proposal (up to US$30,000 for three), and will cover costs associated with the activities necessary for producing a strong impact evaluation research proposal(s), including evaluation questions, a feasible identification strategy and capacity-building plan. Eligible activities include a short and relevant literature review, formative field research, researcher time and travel to meet with implementing partners, engagement workshops (inception and capacity building), preliminary checking of relevant administrative data and site visits.

The preparation grant will be paid in two tranches. The first tranche will be 60 per cent of the approved budget, paid on contract signing. The second tranche will be 40 per cent of approved budget, which will be paid after review and approval (if it meets review and selection conditions) of the impact evaluation proposal.

### 4.4 Timeline

The following table includes an indicative list of deliverables and deadlines for both the preparatory phase (phase 1) and the full impact evaluation proposal phase (2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity or deliverable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 January 2015</td>
<td>RFQ call launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 February 2015</td>
<td>Submission deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 February 2015</td>
<td>Review and scoring of team applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 February 2015</td>
<td>Team identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 February 2015</td>
<td>3ie contracts team</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 March-30 June 2015</td>
<td>Preparation phase</td>
</tr>
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<td>1 July 2015</td>
<td>Deadline for submission of full proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-15 July 2015</td>
<td>Review of proposal</td>
</tr>
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<td>15 July 2015</td>
<td>Proposal selected and sent for approval; team notified</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 July 2015</td>
<td>Team contracted to implement study</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 August 2015</td>
<td>Latest date for starting implementation</td>
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</table>
### 4.5 Selection criteria

The qualifications submitted in response to the RFQ will be reviewed and scored according to the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation grant: Phase one</th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credentials of the research team</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational capabilities to hold and manage the grant</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sector experience and involvement of developing countries researchers and/or research organisations</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate membership of 3ie</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Full impact evaluation proposal application: Phase two**

| Qualification of research team (including credentials, sector experience and involvement of developing countries researchers and/or research organisations) | 20         |
| Organisational capability to hold and manage the grant | 20         |
| Quality of technical proposal, internal validity | 25         |
| Demonstrated relevance of research question to the need of the implementing agency and potential for uptake of study findings | 25         |
| Cost | 10         |
4.6 Phase one qualification review process

Qualifications will be reviewed and scored by one 3ie internal reviewer, two external reviewers, including an implementing agency representative. It is 3ie’s intent, although not guarantee, to award the proposal preparation grant, conditional on the applicant receiving adequate scores on all criteria. 3ie may provide comments and request applicants to make change to strengthen their capacities. 3ie reserves the right to not award any grant in case no applicant meet the requirements.

5. Instructions for applicants

RFQ applications must include the following information:

1. Completed organisation information form, located on the 3ie website.
2. Curriculum vitae (CV, not to exceed three pages each) of all proposed PIs, along with a signed letter from each indicating the share of working time during the three months of the preparation grant expected to be spent on the proposal preparation work and confirming availability for that expected share of working time. It is expected that these PIs will participate in the proposed impact evaluation. Applicants are required to provide only information relevant to the grant in their CV.
3. If applicable, include CVs (not to exceed three pages each) of additional researchers who will be involved in conducting the impact evaluation, if approved. Applicants need to provide only information relevant to the grant in their CV.
4. Copies of up to three impact evaluation reports or publications relevant for this call, with proposed PIs as named authors.
5. Proposed budget, for the proposal preparation costs (US$20,000 for one proposal and up to a maximum of US$30,000 three proposals). The proposed budget must follow 3ie’s direct cost and indirect cost policies, including the cost of two engagement workshops. The budget should be presented in 3ie budget format and follow 3ie budget guidelines.

6. Submission guidelines

- Please submit all files in a single email message not to exceed 10MB to pw3@3ieimpact.org mentioning ‘PW China Shaanxi’ in the subject line no later than 23:59 GMT, 16 February 2015.
- Components three and four, above, should be submitted in a single Microsoft Word or .rtf file in font size equal to or larger than 11 point.
- The signed letters from the PIs and sample impact evaluation studies relevant to the grant may be submitted as separate pdf files.
- Budget notes may be submitted as a separate Microsoft® Word or .rtf file in font size equal to or larger than 11.

Incomplete submissions will not be considered.

Please direct any questions related to this RFQ to pw3@3ieimpact.org by 23:59 GMT on 26 January 2015. By 28 January 2015, a single document with all questions and answers will be made publicly available at RFQ webpage. This RFQ does not constitute a guarantee of an award.