Request for Qualifications: impact evaluation of early childhood development interventions to improve parenting in rural China

3ie Policy Window Three

RFQ PW3.06.CH.PG.ECD

Issue date: 3 March 2015
Deadline: 23:59 GMT, 7 April 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.

The prepared proposal will be for a high-quality impact evaluation of an early childhood intervention to improve parenting in rural China implemented by the Training and Communication Centre of the National Health and Family Planning Commission (TCC/NHFPC) or other relevant interventions being implemented by the TCC/NHFPC.

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 Policy Window Three (PW3) funds high-quality, mixed-methods impact evaluations commissioned by policymakers and programme managers 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 and 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). The qualifications will be reviewed and scored by at least one internal 3ie reviewer, two external reviewers and one 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 TCC/NHFPC see convenient to present more than one proposal, the total PWPG can be for up to a maximum of US$30,000 (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 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 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 guarantee, to fund 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 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

The National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) was the result of a merger between the National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) that the Chinese government initiated in 2012. The NHFPC is responsible for monitoring and improving the health of mothers and infants. NHFPC units and assigned personnel operate at each and every level of the government (central government, provincial government, prefecture, county, township and village).
There is growing recognition of the importance of early childhood development (ECD) programmes in China, particularly on the health of children between 0-3 years of age, and on education outcomes later in life. Children in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to early ECD deficits. Approximately 58 million children are left with caregivers in villages because parents have migrated to urban areas for employment. Traditional parenting practices and absenteeism of parents leave many infants and young children without the connection, attention and interactions needed to acquire language and to develop important cognitive, motor, social and emotional abilities.

Previous studies have shown that young babies and children living in rural China are not reaching their full developmental potential. For example, a 2013 survey of 2,000 rural infants aged 6-12 months in Shaanxi Province, showed that around 40 per cent were significantly delayed in either their cognitive or psychomotor development, based on their scores on the internationally standardised Bayley Scales of Infant Development (BSID).

Why are such a large number of rural Chinese children performing so poorly, and what can be done to solve this problem? A growing number of economic and psychology studies point to the importance of early childhood intervention for reaching childhood development milestones. The critical period between 0-3 years is considered to be a crucial window, during which interventions designed to improve cognitive development can have significant and lasting effects, even into adulthood. Moreover, intervening during this time period is considered to be the most cost-effective from a policy perspective.

The TCC/NHFPC is interested in designing and evaluating interventions that improve early childhood development in poor rural areas. TCC/NHFPC has developed a parenting curriculum for caregivers looking after toddlers in rural areas of Shaanxi Province, and an intensive training programme for local family planning officials to interact and provide training to caregivers. The objective of the intervention is to increase caregivers’ understanding and practice of caring for toddlers’ non-physical needs. However, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the programme needs to be determined across a number of dimensions, including the use of child care centres or home-visits, the use of alternative materials (such as toys or books), the frequency of children monitoring, or the training received by caretakers.

4. Policy Window Preparation Grant (phase one)

4.1 Eligibility

- Only legally registered organisations and consortia of registered organisations, not individuals, may apply.
- 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).
- The application may include other researchers who are not employees of that organisation.
- 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 one workshop to build capacity amongst the TCC/NHFPC and/or implementing agencies to increase understanding of impact evaluation amongst the staff of the implementing agency during the preparation grant period. This workshop will form part of the process of developing the theory of change and discussing possible evaluation designs.

The selected study team will engage with TCC/NHFPC and any other implementing agencies at all levels 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 ensure the cooperation and agreement of implementing agency programme staff for the chosen evaluation questions and study designs. The workshops for implementing partner staff and other key stakeholders help ensure an ongoing dialogue between the implementing agency staff and the research team throughout the study.

3ie expects the workshop(s) and discussions with TCC/NHFPC 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 of US$20,000 (or up to US$30,000 if multiple proposals are to be presented) 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>3 March 2015</td>
<td>RFQ call launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 April 2015</td>
<td>Application submission deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-15 April 2015</td>
<td>Review and scoring of team applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 April 2015</td>
<td>Team identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 April – 24 April 2015</td>
<td>3ie contracts team</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 April – 31 August 2015</td>
<td>Preparation phase</td>
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<td>1 September 2015</td>
<td>Deadline for submission of full proposal</td>
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<td>1-11 September</td>
<td>Review of proposal</td>
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<td>11 September</td>
<td>Proposal selected</td>
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<tr>
<td>23-29 September 2015</td>
<td>Team contracted to implement study</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 October 2015</td>
<td>Latest date for starting implementation</td>
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### 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>
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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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector experience and involvement of developing countries researchers and/or research organisations</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate membership of 3ie</td>
<td>5</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Full impact evaluation application: phase two</th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification of research team (including credentials, sector experience and involvement of developing countries researchers and/or research organisations)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational capability to hold and manage the grant</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of technical proposal, internal validity</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Demonstrated relevance of research question to the need of the implementing agency and potential for uptake of study findings</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

### 4.6 Phase one qualification review process
Qualifications will be reviewed and scored by one 3ie internal reviewer, two external reviewers, and one 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 changes 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, up to $20,000 for one proposal, US$25,000 for two proposals, and up to $30,000 for three proposals for the preparation costs. The proposed budget must follow 3ie’s direct cost and indirect cost policies, including the cost of two engagement workshops.

6. Submission guidelines

- Please submit all files in a single email message not to exceed 10MB to pw3@3ieimpact.org mentioning ‘PW China ECD’ no later than 23:59 GMT, 7 April 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.
- The budget should be presented in 3ie budget format and follow 3ie budget guidelines. 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 by 10 March 2015. By 12 March 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.