

Systematic Reviews in International Development- Call for Proposals

February 22nd 2010

Background

The Department for International Development (DFID) leads the UK Government's fight against global poverty. It aims to help practitioners and policymakers increase the use of rigorous evidence in decision-making. DFID's Research and Evidence Division is developing an initiative to strengthen the international community's capacity for evidence-informed decision making. DFID is calling for proposals from **review teams who want to be part of a cutting-edge pilot to increase the use of evidence in policy and contribute directly to shaping international development policy and practice.**

The program focuses on developing and disseminating systematic reviews in international development that will map, critically appraise and synthesise international development evidence. As part of a pilot of this approach, DFID has developed a set of over 40 priority systematic review questions (available [here](#)) and is inviting proposals from suitable candidates to undertake a systematic review. This is an opportunity to work on highly policy relevant research and synthesis and be part of a program to strengthen evidence-informed policy making.

DFID takes a broad perspective on systematic reviews not limited to qualitative approaches that includes qualitative and quantitative reviews of complex interventions (realist reviews). 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, including qualitative evidence if applicable; and (2) examining the variation in reported outcomes, not only their mean. A range of approaches to synthesising research have been described by [Barnett-Page and Thomas](#) (2009).

Systematic reviews should be done to recognised standards, which include peer review of protocols. Examples of guidelines can be found here:

- Social, education and justice policy- [Campbell Collaboration](#)
- Health sciences and policy- [Cochrane Collaboration](#)
- Education, health and social welfare policy- [EPPI-Centre](#)
- Ecology and conservation- [Centre for Evidence Based Conservation](#)

For some systematic reviews, DFID will offer to organise the external peer review process through the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) at two key stages: protocol and draft review. Additionally, methodological support, workshops and technical assistance will be made available and run by the EPPI-Centre at the Institute of Education.

Please access the list of systematic review [questions](#) and [application form](#)

Applications should include the following: (1) systematic review question; (2) name(s) and CV(s) of lead researcher(s) and outline of proposed review team; (3) briefly situate this question in the literature and evidence base (4) outline of proposed review, including your inclusion criteria for studies, your proposed search strategy and steps to assure quality, and methods of synthesis (5) proposed study time line and budget. The proposal should not exceed the word limits on the application form.

As an approximate guide, we expect a medium-sized study to cost around £25,000, and normally in the range of £5,000-£50,000. The amount will vary by topic and size of the

literature. Additional funds may be available for a very large topic. Value for money will be a significant part of the decision-making process for awards.

The study outputs comprise:

(1) a protocol, which is subject to external review; (2) the final report, also subject to external review; (3) two short summaries, one in 'policy brief' style (no more than 1,000 words) 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 an evidence database.

Protocols for successful bids should include the following sections: (1) Background; (2) Objectives; (3) Review team; (4) Methods (inclusion criteria, search strategy, methods of data analysis); (5) Timeline; (6) Plans for updating; (7) Sources of funding; (8) Statement of conflict of interest; (9) References; (10) Names and contact details of primary investigators. Protocols should be delivered on or before July 15th, 2010.

Reports should include the following sections: (1) Abstract; (2) Executive summary; (3) Background; (4) Objectives; (5) Methods; (6) Search results; (7) Details of included studies; (8) Synthesis results; (9) Causal chain analysis; (10) Limitations; (11) Conclusions and recommendations; (12) References (included and excluded studies). Final reports should be delivered within 6-8 months after the start of the contract.

The outputs must be made freely and publicly available and will be posted on DFID's research portal, R4D. Additionally, we strongly encourage the use of outputs and derived papers for publication in peer review journals.

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

Applications should be submitted by COB **Tuesday 6th of April, 2010**. Proposals should be sent to systematicreviews@dfid.gov.uk.

Proposals will be reviewed according to the review criteria in Annex A. The contact person for successful proposals in the first round will be contacted by mid-May. Please note that we reserve the right to approach individuals to complete systematic reviews if we do not receive applications of sufficient quality.

Any enquiries regarding this call should be sent to systematicreviews@dfid.gov.uk.

References:

Barnett-Page E, Thomas J (2009) 'Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: a critical review', *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 9:59, doi:10.1186/1471-2288-9-59.
(Freely available at <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2288/9/59>)

Appendix

Criteria for review of proposals to conduct systematic reviews

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria (the weight accorded each criterion is shown in parentheses):

1. *Experience of lead researcher(s)*: do the lead researchers have relevant experience in: (i) the relevant research and policy area ii) conducting systematic reviews (25%)? Does the team include the right mix of relevant technical skills (10%)?

2. *Awareness of, and adherence to, systematic review procedures (20%):* does the proposal make clear an awareness of the procedures required to meet systematic review quality standards? Is the application of these procedures (e.g. systematic review of all available literature) evident in the proposal?

3. *Incorporation of appropriate methodological approach for the specific subject (25%):* does the proposal recognise the importance of developing a review using appropriate techniques and, if relevant, of focusing the review within a single discipline? Does the proposal recognise the importance of analysing 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?

4. *Budget and timeline (20%)* Where more than 1 credible application is received for each question, value for money and timeliness of reviews will be a major consideration.

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.