

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

A research programme on evidence use in policymaking: Interventions to influence the use of evidence

1. Programme summary

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Research Commissioning Centre (RCC) has been established to effectively commission and manage research to enhance FCDO's impact. The RCC is part of Global Research and Technology Development (GRTD), which represents the FCDO's portfolio of high-quality and impactful research and development

Led by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), the University of Birmingham, and a consortium of UK and global research partners, the RCC aims to commission different types of high-quality research in FCDO's key priority areas. All FCDO-funded research and development (R&D) investments commissioned by the RCC will be implemented using rigorous and robust research methodologies and quality standards. These R&D standards include meeting the Frascati definition requirements and FCDO's Ethical Guidance for Research Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (European Union 2014; FCDO 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2002). For this research, the RCC is working with the Economic Growth Research Team (EGRT) in the Research and Evidence Directorate (RED) of FCDO.

2. Description of research to be commissioned

Research title: Interventions to influence the use of evidence in policymaking

The objective of the research programme on evidence-use in policymaking, is to advance empirical knowledge on how to improve the use of research evidence by policymakers in the economic policymaking space and beyond.

Under this programme, we are issuing an open call for expressions of interest (Eols) for evaluations of interventions to improve the use of research evidence by decision-makers in governments in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, with a view to generating actionable knowledge about how, for whom and under what circumstances evidence-use interventions work in practice.

3. Background

Over the past few decades, there has been a rapid expansion in the production of high-quality evidence to support policy decision-making in low- and middle income countries (LMICs).¹ At the same time, it is clear that simply generating evidence and making it available to policymakers is insufficient to ensure its effective and timely use to inform policy.

¹ For example, one analysis found an increase in the number of African institutions involved in evidence synthesis from 31 in 2008 to 521 in 2019 (Pan et al. 2021).

There is increasing recognition of the role evidence intermediaries² play in the evidence ecosystem, as entities that work between evidence producers and decision-makers to translate and mobilise knowledge. Some intermediaries may also generate or fund new research, alongside brokering, communication and capacity-building initiatives. They may be embedded as individuals or units within governments, for example, as policy labs;³ hosted by universities, NGOs or foundations; or operate as independent organisations ([Breckon and Boaz 2023](#)).

Despite what some researchers have labelled the ‘labification’ of the policy field, in which a proliferation of structural approaches to evidence intermediation have been deployed to increase the use of evidence in policymaking,⁴ there is very limited rigorous impact evidence about their effectiveness, particularly in ([Hayter and Morales H. 2023](#)).

More broadly, a recent systematic review of approaches to increase evidence use in policy decision-making, conducted by the Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE) and 3ie (Nduku et al. 2025), found just 18 counterfactual impact evaluations. The majority of these were conducted in high-income countries and many were rated as having some concerns or being at high risk of bias due to methodological limitations. Nevertheless, several studies from the review demonstrate that robust impact evaluations of interventions designed to increase evidence use in policymaking can be successfully conducted with promising results on policy outcomes. These include [Hjort and colleagues' \(2021\)](#) randomised controlled trial of research information sessions for municipal mayors in Brazil on the effectiveness of tax reminder letters and [Mehmood and colleagues' \(2024\)](#) experiment offering econometrics training for deputy ministers entering service in Pakistan.

4. Research need

Working with counterparts in EGRT at FCDO, the RCC has conducted an extensive period of scoping to shape the research priorities of this funding round. In addition to the systematic review with PACE (Nduku et al. forthcoming), this has involved consultations with researchers, practitioners and funders, as well as with senior economic policy officials in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, to assess the state of the field and identify key gaps for new research. Findings from the scoping phase are summarised in an accompanying [pathfinding paper](#), which suggests priorities for future research.

The current research programme aims to advance collective understanding of how to improve the use of research evidence in policymaking and generate actionable insights for researchers, evidence intermediaries and decision-makers through learning from evaluations. There is a particular focus on embedding evidence use at the individual,

² We follow [Breckon and Boaz \(2023\)](#) in defining evidence intermediaries as individuals or organisations for whom evidence is central to their everyday mission, operate with a closeness to government but with a degree of independence from it, and facilitate the transfer, exchange, and translation of knowledge between researchers and policymakers.

³ In their recent review of policy labs, Hayter and Morales H. (2023) note the wide range of terminology used to describe these entities – including ‘social labs’, ‘innovation teams’, ‘evidence centres’, and ‘delivery units’, ‘mechanisms’, or ‘hubs’ – and the functions they serve.

⁴ A mapping exercise found 152 cases of *delivery approaches* – which may include delivery units or reform labs that seek to support the implementation of priority policies or achieve priority outcomes – across 80 countries ([Mansoor et al. 2021](#))

organisational and systemic level such that initiatives achieve lasting and sustainable impact.

Interventions tested should be informed by existing evidence and identified gaps, but could be designed to address supply or demand considerations, or both:

1. Strategies to facilitate the production of new research evidence that responds to the needs of policymakers

For example, these could include evaluation of:

- Different approaches to the co-production⁵ of research, including evidence synthesis.
- Different approaches to engaging policymakers during the early stages of research development.
- Technical support to build policymakers' skills in commissioning and utilising research evidence, including developing research questions.
- Initiatives to support researchers to meet the needs of policymakers – for example, to understand who is involved in policymaking and how to navigate bureaucratic structures to access relevant decision-makers.

2. Strategies to facilitate the use of existing research evidence

This could include evaluation of:

- Structural and process-related initiatives to change the culture of evidence use within organisations, for example, the norms, routines or incentives related to the use of research evidence. This could include the evaluation of policy labs embedded within or closely associated with the government.
- Approaches to raise the awareness of the meaning and value of the use of research evidence in decision-making within government institutions.
- Support services, for example, rapid response units, designed to answer pressing policy questions by distilling relevant research evidence for policymakers in a timely way.
- Technological innovations, such as generative AI-powered tools, that enable policymakers to access instant evidence summaries.

Interventions should be underpinned by a credible theory of change (ToC) that demonstrates how they are expected to increase evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) in the context in which they will be delivered. Applicants are invited to refer to the FCDO RCC [conceptual framework](#) of evidence to policy, which provides a high-level framework into which more granular, context-specific ToCs can be nested. We welcome projects that examine the entire evidence-to-policy journey or specific aspects of the larger ToC.

Evaluations should focus on interventions, or combinations of interventions, that have the highest potential for impact on EIPM. These can be newly designed innovations which have not yet been implemented, or existing interventions that would benefit from evaluation. Previous studies have suggested that promising interventions will:⁶

⁵ Co-production involves the collaboration of researchers and policymakers in the production of research.

⁶ See, for example, Nduku et al. (forthcoming); Bonargent (2024); Hayter and Morales H. (2023); Rao (2024)).

- Understand the policymaking context in which the intervention takes place
- Operate through multiple mechanisms/ components or a single highly targeted, context-relevant approach
- Involve close collaboration/ co-production with policymakers
- Generate timely outputs for policymakers.

Another dimension of impact considers the prevalence and scalability of the intervention(s) being evaluated, and the extent to which actionable learning can be generated to inform existing initiatives.

5. Research questions and approach

Indicative research questions include:

- What interventions are effective at increasing the use of research in policymaking in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia?
- What are the mechanisms through which effective interventions operate?
- How effective are evidence intermediaries, such as knowledge brokering institutions or embedded policy labs, in bridging the gap between evidence and policy? What strategies do they use?
- What strategies facilitate the institutionalisation of evidence use by policymakers?
- What are the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of an intervention in a given setting?
- What are the implementation costs associated with effective evidence-use interventions? What are the prospects for long-term sustainability or scalability?

The research question(s) should be addressed through prospective or retrospective mixed-method impact evaluations to test the effect of strategies targeting increased evidence use in policymaking. Approaches include experimental or quasi-experimental designs, combined with a detailed process evaluation to understand intervention implementation and important mediators or moderators of intervention impact. Alternatively, these could employ mixed-method “small n” approaches that explore an institution- or system-level approach that is not amenable to counterfactual evaluation—for example, examining the overall contribution of a particular intermediary organisation to EIPM. Eols should include a high-level discussion of the methodological approach, including the evaluation design, data sources and analysis approach, which can be developed further by successful teams at proposal stage.

Key design considerations

What is the geographic focus?

Studies should be conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. They can adopt a single country focus or a comparative approach across multiple contexts.

What is the sectoral focus?

We encourage studies that focus on economic policy or reform areas of national importance for economic growth. Examples include, but are not limited to, energy systems, high-volume transport, industrial policy, labour markets, and trade policy. However, as the objective of the research is to increase empirical knowledge on how to influence the use of evidence in

policy decision-making, we welcome proposals in any sector or policy area currently lacking strong EIPM evidence.

What do we mean by evidence?

We distinguish evidence from other types of information in that evidence (i) substantiates or disproves a specific proposition and (ii) is appropriate in terms of quantity and quality for addressing the question or need at hand ([Glandon, Kelly and Gaarder \(2024\)](#)).

To reflect FCDO and RCC's role in commissioning research, this call is primarily focused on the use of evidence generated from research, by which we mean a systematic investigative process employed to increase or revise current knowledge. This could range from conceptual and theoretical research to policy evaluations and systematic reviews.

What policy processes or decisions are we interested in?

The primary emphasis is on policymaking by national governments, including elected officials, senior civil service staff and those working for them in key ministries and supporting agencies. It may include policymaking at the sub-national government level where this has national implications for economic growth. We conceive of policy in a broad sense, so interventions could aim to increase evidence use in government strategy, national planning, public sector investment decisions, programme implementation, legislation, reform, regulation, or similar.

While recognising that the government policymaking process is complex, iterative and non-linear, it can nevertheless be helpful to consider different stages or entry points during which evidence can play a role, including:

- **Agenda setting:** Identifying issues that require policy attention
 - **Policy formulation:** Developing potential solutions to address identified issues
 - **Decision-making:** Choosing a course of action from available options
 - **Implementation:** Putting the chosen policy into practice
 - **Evaluation:** Assessing the outcomes and impacts of the implemented policy
- (See, for example, Jann and Wagrich 2017).

Interventions can be designed to increase evidence use at one or more phases in the policy process, provided the objective is to influence meaningful policy outcomes.

What outcomes are we interested in?

Impact evaluation designs should clearly define what 'impact' means and how it will be measured. At EoI stage, this could include the objectives of the intervention and the area(s) of the evidence-to-policy ToC on which the intervention focuses. Where invited, full proposals should specify how evaluations will measure evidence use as their primary outcome. Preference is for measures that capture observable policy outcomes, but indirect outcomes such as policymakers' attitudes, beliefs or intentions can be used to understand the causal chain. Applicants are invited to consult the FCDO RCC [inventory of measures](#), which compiles existing measures used to track aspects of evidence use in policymaking. Applicants are also welcome to propose the validation or development of new outcome measures as part of their proposal.

We are interested in the extent to which interventions increase the use of research evidence in policy processes but also the quality of evidence use. This includes assessing whether the evidence is valid (e.g., if the findings described as ‘evidence’ are legitimate), whether the evidence was correctly interpreted and appropriately applied in the given context, and if possible, whether its use led to the intended impact.

As long-term outcomes, we invite projects that consider the downstream socio-economic impact of interventions to improve evidence use in policymaking.

6. Deliverables and timeline

Studies should be designed to generate actionable recommendations that support researchers, intermediaries and policymakers in the high-quality use of evidence for policy decision-making.

The following outputs are expected for each research project:

- **Inception report and slide presentation** outlining the study’s approach and work plan.
- **Final report**, including executive summary. Submission of at least one peer-reviewed journal article is strongly encouraged.
- **Workshop presentation** to share learning with RCC/FCDO.

Study timelines should be dictated by the research requirements, with a maximum of two years from signing the funding agreement. Where proposed study includes downstream outcomes which would be expected to take longer to manifest, this can be discussed with FCDO.

Indicative milestones and target dates are suggested below for applicants’ information. Teams invited to submit full proposals will be asked to provide a populated work plan with timelines and deliverables. Applicants should be propositional in their approach and focus on structuring the work to maximise quality of outcomes and value for money.

Phase	Milestone	Target date or timeline
Inception	Kick-off meeting	Within two weeks of agreement signing
	Protocol/inception report	Within one month of the kick-off meeting
Implementation	<i>Determined by study design</i>	
	Satisfactory delivery of quarterly progress reports	Every three months of the kick-off meeting (3-21 months, as applicable)
Reporting	Satisfactory submission of research report	Within three months of the end of data collection and two years of the agreement signing
Knowledge sharing and research uptake	<i>To be specified in the proposal</i>	

We expect to hold one or more events for commissioned teams to share learning with FCDO and each other. More information will be provided to successful teams at the proposal stage.

7. Preferred expertise and skills of the team

We welcome bids from any organisation(s) able to deliver against the FCDO's scope of work and encourage applications from groups of individuals or partners bringing their skills together to meet the research needs.

The team conducting the evaluation should demonstrate the following experience and expertise:

- Partners or specialists who will operate flexibly to achieve maximum impact and learning.
- Deep understanding of the policymaking context in which the intervention takes place.
- Existing relationships with the proposed intervention deliverers and recipients (e.g., intermediary organisation(s), government department(s)), or demonstrated capacity to build such research partnerships.
- Methodological expertise appropriate to the impact evaluation design, including for RCTs, quasi-experiments or small-n evaluations.
- Expertise in mixed-method process and/or cost evaluation.
- Excellent written and spoken communication, with demonstrated ability to convey and disseminate findings to policymakers.
- Working proficiency in English. Where research is conducted in non-English speaking contexts, the capacity to conduct research in relevant languages other than English should be demonstrated.
- Organisational capacity to manage and implement the project effectively.

8. Estimated budget

The project budget is intended to cover the researchers' time as well as any necessary support required to complete the work as intended. This includes, but is not limited to, data collection and analysis costs, travel and dissemination costs. The total budget for this assignment should not exceed **£400,000**, including VAT and other charges.

Budgets are not required at the EoI stage, but teams invited to prepare full proposals will be asked to submit a fully costed budget that demonstrates value for money. We expect research teams to propose a reasonable budget that reflects a comprehensive understanding of the assignment and an efficient utilisation of resources commensurate with the scope of work.

Where a study involves evaluating an active evidence-use intervention, we would expect to cover only the research costs associated with evaluating the intervention. We are open to making funding available (within the £400k budget ceiling) to support the delivery costs of a new intervention that demonstrates a credible route to impact, fills an important evidence gap, and accompanies a feasible implementation plan.

9. Eligibility

Only legally registered organisations and/or their consortia of registered organisations, not individuals, may apply. There are no restrictions on the number of proposals an organisation can lead or be named on across the research programme,⁷ provided they demonstrate the necessary expertise and capacity to carry out the project(s) successfully.

To maintain the independence of the evaluation and minimise bias, research teams should be independent of any organisation delivering or closely associated with the intervention being evaluated. However, we recognise that some evaluations may benefit from existing relationships between research teams conducting the evaluation and the organisation where the intervention takes place, such that their position cannot be considered independent. In these cases, research teams should explain the safeguards to be implemented to ensure an objective evaluation.

The RCC strongly encourages the leadership of in-country research partners where primary research is undertaken.

10. Criteria for selection

The commissioning process involves two stages. In this first instance, teams should submit an EoI which should follow the word limits specified in the application form. Accompanying CVs should not exceed three pages.

EoIs will be screened for completeness and eligibility and scored on the following criteria:

#	Criterion	Description	Score weighting
1	Understanding of the Expression of Interest	The extent to which the application reflects the call for EoIs and meets the objectives of the project and the needs of the intended audience.	25%
2	Methodological approach	The extent to which the methodological approach, at a high level, is appropriate for meeting the objectives of the project.	25%
3	Proposed team	The extent to which the proposed core team demonstrates the required contextual, methodological and project management expertise to carry out the project.	25%
4	Equity and inclusion	The extent to which the project involves a diverse research team with an equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities and substantively engages researchers and other key stakeholders from the country(ies) or region(s) in which it takes place.	25%

⁷ Research teams are welcome to apply for the complementary workstream on 'Studies of evidence use in practice' should they be well-positioned to do so.

Please note that, in addition to the strength of individual submissions, some decisions may be made on a strategic basis across the programme, for example, based on geography, policy area or intervention type, to maximise learning from the round. Please also note that, given the current funding climate, the final budget envelope is subject to FCDO review, but we expect to commission 5-10 evaluations in this workstream.

Successful teams at the EoI stage will be invited to submit a full research proposal and budget, for which templates will be provided.

11. Deadline for submission of Expressions of Interest: 27 June 2025 (17:00 GMT)

12. Competition process and indicative timeline

Stage	Target date
Call for expressions of interest launched	10 April 2025
Deadline for queries	25 April 2025
Q&A webinar	1 May 2025
FAQs posted	8 May 2025
EoI submission deadline	27 June 2025 [17:00 GMT]
Invitations to full proposal issued	Week beginning 28 July or 4 August 2025
Deadline for queries	20 August 2025
FAQs posted	26 August 2025
Proposal submission deadline	26 September 2025 [17:00 GMT]
Outcome decided and bidders notified	Week beginning 27 October 2025
Signing of accountable grant	Dependent on due diligence

13. Q&A and contact

This project is managed by the FCDO Research Commissioning Centre. If you have any questions related to this opportunity, please submit them to the rcc@3ieimpact.org mailbox by 25 April 2025, including 'RCC evidence use interventions - Request for clarification' in the subject line.

We will also be holding a Q&A webinar on 1 May 2025 to provide an opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification. In the interest of fairness and transparency, all questions and answers will be published on the [call page](#) on the GRTD website.

References

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