



Research Brief

Lessons and good practice for grant makers

Strengthening capacity for research in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) is a long-term and complex process that requires regular input at multiple levels – at the individual, institutional and environmental. This research brief outlines research capacity strengthening lessons and good practice examples emerging from experiences and published literature by the Centre for Capacity Research, to support organisations and individuals involved in the design and awarding of research capacity strengthening-related grants.

Award design stage

- Ensure at least one participant in the award-design stage have adequate research capacity strengthening expertise such as detailed knowledge of research capacity strengthening theory and literature, as well as practical experience of research capacity strengthening implementation in LMICs
- Identify and agree shared principles of research capacity strengthening with all stakeholders involved in the award design
- Identify and agree research capacity strengthening goals and objectives as stated in the call for proposals with all stakeholders at the design stage¹
- Consider using an award mechanism that allows research capacity strengthening goals and objectives to be appropriately aligned with the existing capacities of potential LMIC partners - as existing capacity varies widely across LMIC research institutions, flexibility in investment, and expected outcome, may need to be aligned accordingly
- Consider specific awards to support research capacity strengthening, especially for low capacitated LMIC institutions
- Maximise the opportunities for research capacity strengthening learning and evaluation. Be explicit about how learning and evaluation appropriate to research capacity strengthening activities can be built into individual grants or across award schemes as a whole
- Develop clear research capacity strengthening assessment and weighting criteria for reviewers and panel members that take account of the agreed principles, goals and objectives.
- Ensure consistency about research capacity strengthening across scheme notes, applicant information and panel guidance documents.

¹ESSENCE (2016). Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation framework for Research Capacity Strengthening. ESSENCE Good Practice Document Series



Information provided to applicants

- Design succinct application forms with clear guidelines on how to complete the research capacity strengthening component of the form and a description of the research capacity strengthening assessment criteria
- Provide a definition of research capacity strengthening and outline the research capacity strengthening principles, goal and objectives of the award
- Provide links to research capacity strengthening good practice resources
- Ensure expectations for embedded learning and evaluation, or participation in award-associated learning and evaluation, are clearly communicated in the call for proposals and reporting requirements – this may include exemplars of potential learning and evaluation approaches appropriate to complex, non-linear research capacity strengthening interventions

Award-making stage

- Ensure all review panel members have a common understanding of the research capacity strengthening principles, goal and objectives, and the associated assessment criteria and their weighting (for instance a briefing before the panel meeting starts)
- Follow a structured format for discussing each application to encourage consistency by panel members and external reviewers in applying (weighted) assessment criteria and in considering the research capacity strengthening goals and objectives of the grant

Post-award

- For large grants with multiple award recipients, consideration should be given to hosting a research capacity strengthening ‘good practice’ meeting with awardees prior to the dispersal of funds. Early-stage awardee meetings may also present the opportunity to facilitate research capacity strengthening collaboration across award holders and to develop/implement cross-cutting research capacity strengthening learning and evaluation programmes
- Ensure clarity with awardee institutions on the level and uses of overhead payments to support research capacity strengthening activities. Encourage the use of some overhead funds to support institutional investment in research management and support.

Further information

Gregorius S, Dean L, Cole DC and Bates I. The peer review process for awarding funds to international science research consortia: a qualitative developmental evaluation [version 3; peer review: 2 approved]. *F1000Research* 2018, **6**:1808 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.12496.3>