

# ALIGN Flexible Research Fund Terms of Reference

The ALIGN project is inviting proposals for its inaugural Flexible Research Fund. The Fund aims to support knowledge generation and translation and learning to understand and address discriminatory gender norms that affect the lives of adolescents and young adults. Small-scale projects up to GBP 15,000 will be funded, building on existing research and practice, to communicate knowledge and experiences and strengthen collaboration within an emerging community of practice.

## 1. About ALIGN

The Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) Project is a four-year project aimed at establishing a digital platform (available at [www.alignplatform.org](http://www.alignplatform.org)) and supporting an emerging Community of Practice (CoP) centred on gendered norms affecting adolescents and young adults. ALIGN seeks to advance understanding and challenge and change harmful gender norms by connecting a global community of researchers and thought leaders committed to gender justice and equality for adolescents and young adults. Through the sharing of information and the facilitation of mutual learning, ALIGN aims to ensure knowledge on norm change contributes to sustainable gender justice.

ALIGN is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and is led by the Overseas Development Institute.

## 2. About the ALIGN Fund

### 2.1 What it is and who it will fund?

The ALIGN Flexible Research Fund ('the Fund') is a flexible research fund that will be used to identify innovative research, interventions and knowledge, to make it possible to understand and address discriminatory gender norms that affect the lives of adolescents and young adults. The Fund is intended to respond to knowledge gaps by supporting the development of new research, in addition to the synthesis and translation of existing research and knowledge on gender norms to inform policy and practice outputs.

We particularly invite applications from Southern organisations and from organisations working on implementation or evaluations of policy and programmes related to norm change, empowerment, gender equality and equity and sustainability of change processes.

### 2.2 What are the themes?

Discriminatory gender norms can serve to restrict the choices and agency of young people and limit opportunities to develop their full capabilities (i.e. the potential to live the lives they want and achieve valued ways of 'being' and 'doing') (Kabear, 1999; Nussbaum, 2003). This particularly applies to girls and women but also applies to boys and men. In recent years there has been a flurry of policy and academic interest in gender 'norms'. This in part stems from recognition that economic change and technological modernisation are not necessarily always leading to substantial gains in gender equality with a consequent renewed focus on the socio-cultural, economic and political factors that influence development strategies, including unequal gender norms.

We define gender norms as: *The often implicit, informal rules by which people are expected to abide, held in place (and influenced) by beliefs, behaviors and practices (and sometimes perceived rewards and sanctions) and bound into the values people and societies accept implicitly, accept reluctantly, or actively contest. Norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions and produced and reproduced through social interaction*

Project ALIGN is interested in developing, building and sharing new knowledge and methodological innovations to better understand the dynamics of gender norms and norm change processes. The fund aims to facilitate the sharing of innovative knowledge, policy and programmes that engage with the following learning areas:

- identify 'what works' to change discriminatory gender norms
- how to engender sustainable social change and empowerment
- how to handle backlash
- how to understand the theory of norm change and the methods
- scalability and sustainability of norm change interventions or actions

Project ALIGN also is interested in ensuring this knowledge is communicated to those in positions of influence and leadership and, where relevant, also translated into impactful policies and practice.

The ALIGN CoP members are particularly invited to apply for funding relating to the below thematic areas (although proposals in other thematic areas may be considered):

1. Health and wellbeing
2. Education and life skills
3. Communications and media
4. Economic empowerment and related Interventions
5. Legal implementation
6. Addressing violence through norm change

## 2.3 How will the ALIGN Flexible Research Fund work in practice?

The Fund is expected to have several application windows across the lifetime of Project ALIGN. The total budget for this first window is £100,000. Within this first window, we expect to fund between six and eight awards of six to eight months' duration, depending on certain factors, including the quality of applications and funding amount requested.

The first call will be advertised in December 2017, with funding commencing from April 2018.

Given the type of knowledge development and translation invited for these funds, we expect applicants to be able to respond within these timeframes. Applicants will be required to submit a completed application form, outlining their proposal, in response to the ToR, and demonstrating eligibility, relevance and experience.

Applicants are invited to apply to produce the following types of synthesis, primary research and analysis of existing research:

1. Translate innovative research on gender norm change for policy or practice, including sharing rigorous evaluations of programmes and policies and developing further analysis of existing data to reveal norm change processes;
2. Develop and share new tools on measuring and monitoring norm change;
3. Develop and share knowledge on the sustainability of gender change processes

4. Share knowledge on experience of regressive policy or action undermining sustainable change
5. Develop and share innovation regarding learning from qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods research on norm change, including the scalability of lessons learnt
6. Develop understanding of the effect of wider political and economic change processes on norm change
7. Share knowledge of programme failure and key learning

Outputs may include, but are not limited to:

1. Web text for the digital platform around a certain topic or theme
2. Open-access, peer-reviewed journal articles
3. Easily digestible policy, practice and knowledge development deliverables such as short films, policy briefs; blogs or narrative accounts; toolkits
4. Reports with web text summaries

## 3. Application process

### 3.1 Timeline of key dates

**The deadline for submitting applications is 15 January 2018.**

Any applications received after this time will be discounted and will not be eligible for consideration.

**The application form is made of two documents: a technical proposal and a financial proposal.**

**Both technical and financial proposals can be downloaded from the Align website at**

**[www.alignplatform.org/funding](http://www.alignplatform.org/funding)**

Please make sure you submit **both forms** with your application, otherwise we will not be able to accept your submission.

Completed application forms must be submitted to [align@odi.org.uk](mailto:align@odi.org.uk) . Please title your email 'ALIGN fund application'.

We expect to notify applicants of the preliminary outcome of their full proposal submission **by 28<sup>th</sup> February**. Any funding offers will be made subject to any clarifications and requested modifications.

Only eligible applications (see Section 4.2) will be evaluated by the Review Panel according to the evaluation criteria set in Section 4.3.

Successful awards are expected to start as soon within two weeks of the specific statement of work being issued.

### 3.2 Eligibility criteria

The following eligibility requirements need to be met to enable assessment by the Review Panel. Failure to meet any of the criteria below will result in your application not being considered and being excluded for further consideration

#### **Requirements:**

- **Eligible organisations and individuals:** organisations (corporate or non-profit) as well as individuals only if affiliated with an organisation/ institution. In any other case, individual applications will not be

considered. Members of the Review Panel are permitted to apply if affiliated with an organisation/research institution, but will thereby not be part of the Panel's shortlisting committee

- **Duration and commencement:** Awards are to be carried out and completed within an eight-month period maximum, anticipated to start within 2 weeks of the contracting arrangements being in place.
- **Budget size:** The maximum budget is £15,000 (should your project require more funds please notify us and provide an explanation).
- **Language of proposals:** Applications must be completed in English.
- **Format of application:** Only fully completed ALIGN application forms will be accepted

*Technical proposal:*

- Only ALIGN technical proposals in .doc or .docx format will be accepted – applications in any other format or template will be rejected.
- Word limits as set out in the application form will be strictly enforced. Any text over the word limit specified for each section will be deleted and will not be made available to reviewers, which may compromise the integrity of your application

*Financial proposal:*

- Only ALIGN excel template will be accepted. Any change to the format will not be accepted.
- Please ensure all your costs in the budget are inclusive of VAT (where applicable)
- **Number of applications permitted:** Organisations may submit more than one proposal either as the lead organisation or in partnership with another organisation, provided these are substantively different. If proposals are not substantively different, the chairs reserve the right to disqualify a proposal for review
- **Application standards:**
  - Applications should be original and ensure the proposed work does not already exist
  - Prospective awards must focus on gender norms
  - We expect the highest standards in research ethics. We expect that individuals in institutions will have their own standards and requirements regarding ethical considerations, incorporating principles regarding concern for the welfare of subjects/participants, respect for people and the environment and an obligation to treat people fairly, equitably and with dignity.
  - Proposed methodologies must demonstrate rigour and the highest standards of knowledge development and translation.
  - All written outputs must be peer-reviewed by technical experts for quality assurance purposes and **this should be within the proposal budget**. The chairs of the Review Panel and at least one other advisor will sign off final outputs.
  - Funded awards must produce knowledge translation to expert peer-reviewed standards, (all outputs will be peer reviewed for acceptance for the ALIGN platform) to be confirmed during the contracting process, depending on the size and duration of the award.
  - All outputs will have to be available on open access
  - Prospective awards must demonstrate value for money. This is defined as demonstrating economy, efficiency and effectiveness within the proposed budget. Any in-kind or matching funding will also be positively assessed.

**Recommendations:**

- **Financial and non-financial contributions:** Contributions to the proposals in the form of financial resources or in-kind contributions are encouraged but are not a requirement.
- **Eligible organisations/individuals:** In addition to their primary purposes of generating or translating knowledge, awards can be used to facilitate and promote inter-, multi- or trans-disciplinary collaboration, build capacity and encourage South–South and North–South partnerships among ALIGN CoP members.

### 3.3 Evaluation criteria

The Review Panel will evaluate eligible applications as per the evaluation criteria cited below. The highest scoring proposals will be shortlisted (there is no minimum score threshold for shortlisting).

Each shortlisted proposal will be individually assessed by experts representing relevant thematic and geographic expertise.

**Figure 9: Review criteria**

Review criteria (to be refined)	Percentage weighting
1. Policy, programme and knowledge development relevance	
a) Is the proposal closely related to the subject of gender norms as defined in the ToR?	
b) Is there clear policy/programme or knowledge development demand to further understand/broker knowledge translation/research on this theme?	30%
c) Does the application demonstrate a clear pathway for how it will enhance knowledge, policy influence or practice?	
2. Technical merit	
a) Is the proposal responding to issues of gender equity and/or inequality, well thought-out and clearly articulated?	15%
b) Will the study/knowledge translation be able to answer proposed questions?	
c) Are there threats that could compromise the validity of proposal? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?	
3. Innovation	
a) Does the proposal specify the innovative content and/or approach relative to existing knowledge on this issue?	20%
b) Does it support engagement with new research and policy questions, or introduce novel methods, measures or interventions in approaching norm changes?	
4. Composition of the team	
a) Does the proposed composition and experience of the team demonstrate the required rigour?	15%
b) Does the proposed composition and experience of the team demonstrate the required expertise specifically on gender norms research?	
5. Logistical viability	
a) Does the approach to organising and managing the proposed work show a good understanding of the necessary timeframes, organisation of budget and delivery process?	10%
b) How appropriate and strong are the partnerships to execute the proposed activities?	
6. Value for money	
a) How do the proposed research activities provide value for money (demonstrating economy, efficiency and effectiveness)?	10%

## 4. Our engagement with funded research awards

**The Fund Review Panel:** The fund will have a multi-disciplinary panel of advisors in areas related to the themes of this call. This panel, comprising ALIGN management team members and independent thematic experts, will review the applications against the criteria outlined above. All written outputs must be peer-reviewed by technical experts for quality assurance purposes. Final outputs will be signed-off by the chairs of the Review Panel with the support of the Panel.

**Fund management:** In coordination with the research partners, the ALIGN operations team will support the financial and risk monitoring of successful awards.

**Communication and research uptake team:** The ALIGN operations team will also provide guidance and support to research partners regarding the co-branding of outputs and may advise on research uptake, as determined by discussion with the team once awarded.

**Reporting:** Successful applicants will be required to develop, in collaboration with the ALIGN team, objectives and a financial and narrative reporting framework to describe progress against objectives, which will be agreed at contracting.

## 5. Contact

For any queries please contact [align@odi.org.uk](mailto:align@odi.org.uk)