

WHAT THE TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL LOOKS FOR IN A CONCEPT NOTE

This paper was originally published as an annex of the February 2015 *Report of the Technical Review Panel on the Concept Notes Submitted In the Third and Fourth Windows of the Funding Model*. This is a final version containing an updated section offering specific examples of concept notes that exemplify the qualities described in the paper.

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Introduction: the TRP's role

The Technical Review Panel (TRP) of the Global Fund is an impartial team of experts responsible for providing a technical assessment of funding requests for strategic focus and technical merit. The TRP reviews requests for funding to ensure that Global Fund investments achieve the highest impact. The review criteria – laid out in the TRP's terms of reference – include technical soundness, feasibility, sustainability and value for money. Based on these criteria, the TRP reviews submitted concept notes and makes recommendations to the Global Fund Board and to the Secretariat (through the Grant Approvals Committee) on:

- The funding request
- The priority of its various components
- Any adjustments to those priorities necessary to maximize impact in the country context and to strengthen alignment with the Global Fund's aims and strategic guidance

This document seeks to provide guidance to those preparing concept notes about what the TRP looks for as it reviews concept notes.

The concept note

The essential document through which an applicant makes a funding request is the concept note. The TRP reviews the concept note in conjunction with national disease-specific strategic plans and the overall national health plan to determine if the funding request is strategically focused, aligned with existing national plans and Global Fund policies, likely to achieve its objectives, and positioned to achieve high impact. While other documents (e.g. the modular template and the financial gap analysis) are also reviewed, the concept note receives the closest scrutiny in TRP review and should be a self-contained document. This makes it essential that the concept note:

- Presents the current epidemiological and programmatic situation in the country, highlighting significant gaps in the response, especially those to be addressed by the funding request
- Makes a compelling case that the activities selected for Global Fund support will fill critical gaps in a way that is likely to achieve high impact
- Clearly shows how the activities proposed for funding complement existing programs funded by the government or other donors

- Concisely but completely describes the activities to be funded, who will carry them out, how they will address barriers and challenges to implementation, how they respond to existing gaps and needs, and what impact they are expected to achieve based on observed outcomes and effectiveness of past efforts in country
- Shows the feasibility of achieving its goals through a clear and thorough analysis of the country's capacity to implement the proposed activities or providing a clear strategy for addressing any capacity gaps identified
- Demonstrates a strategy for achieving long-term sustainability of the activities, eventually reducing the dependence on external funding

Ideally, the length of concept notes should be less than 40 pages. The concept note must be self-contained, i.e. it should extract, analyze, synthesize and briefly summarize the relevant information from the annexes. While annexes can be submitted for TRP review, they should be selectively chosen to provide essential background and contextual information that directly supports the funding request.

To maximize the utility of annexes only annexes that are referenced in the concept note itself should be submitted. Also, the preference is for not more than 10 annexes. Information contained in the annexes should not be copied and pasted into the concept note. Instead, the relevant information in the annex should be summarized as concisely as possible (for example, in a short paragraph), and a reference to the specific page in the annex should be provided where more information may be found. As not all annexes may be read, it is critical that the concept note itself concisely, coherently and completely presents the funding request.

A well-composed concept note is essentially a narrative, telling the complete story of how the applicant will make use of Global Fund investments to successfully implement the proposed activities and achieve the highest impact possible.

What the TRP looks for in each section of a concept note

Section 1: Country context: the situation analysis

This section of the concept note must provide a comprehensive situation analysis of the disease(s) being addressed and the challenges in responding to them in country. This situation analysis should focus on three key elements:

1. A **concise, up-to-date epidemiological summary** of the disease situation, which includes a discussion of key populations and significant geographic variations (section 1.1). If significant gaps in knowledge exist (e.g. prevalence of disease or size of key populations), they should be highlighted here and plans must be included in the request (section 3) to address those gaps relevant to proposed activities.
2. A **summary of the most critical constraints and barriers to effective responses** in the country. These include highlighting populations with low access to prevention and treatment, describing laws, societal norms and other key barriers and inequities that impede access to health services, and laying out weaknesses in health systems and community systems that deliver services (section 1.1).
3. A **description of the disease-specific national strategic plan(s)**, very briefly summarizing each of the key program areas in the national strategic plan, ongoing challenges to success

and how they are expected to be addressed, which build on lessons learned and successes in implementation to date (section 1.2).

The focus in this section is to give the TRP an understanding of those populations and geographic locations where programs can have the greatest impact, while highlighting existing inequities, barriers and challenges that need to be addressed to improve the national response.

Section 2: Funding landscape, additionality and sustainability: current funding for national strategic plan program areas and remaining gaps

This section of the concept note should paint a clear picture of where existing national and donor resources are currently targeted in terms of the major program areas of the national strategic plan (section 2.1). The primary goal of this section is to lay out for the TRP those parts of the national response that are adequately funded by government or external donors, while focusing attention on the most critical response gaps in need of increased financial support.

If critical gaps remain in some national strategic plan program areas and they are not being addressed within the current funding request or by other funding sources, the concept note should clearly explain how they will be dealt with through other national and/or donor resources. This will assist the TRP in understanding why certain program areas have been prioritized in the funding request. Additionally, the applicant is asked to identify ways in which Global Fund resources have helped to leverage other donor resources (section 2.1) and to show that national support for programs meets Global Fund counterpart financing requirements (section 2.2).

Sections 1 and 2 should together, clearly explain the epidemiological, programmatic and funding contexts and the current responses to the epidemic(s). There should also be a clear picture of the existing funding landscape, the gaps in it and how they are to be addressed. The most essential gaps in and challenges to effective national responses should be clear, providing the background for justifying the selection of each major component of the request as described in Section 3 of the concept note.

Section 3: Funding request to the Global Fund: What is the Global Fund being asked to support and what impact will it have?

This is the most important section of the concept note. In this section, the concept note should describe in a self-contained manner the priority areas selected, the major activities to be undertaken under each priority area, and the expected impacts from Global Fund support of these priorities.

In developing section 3, the applicant should select a limited number of priority program areas to be supported by the funding request from among the identified programmatic and funding gaps. The choice of these priority areas should flow logically out of the summary of the current epidemiological situation and responses provided in the first two sections and those linkages should be made clear in the narrative. The selected priority program areas should be positioned to achieve high impact by clearly targeting the most essential epidemiological priorities and response gaps identified. Once these are defined, the applicant must provide three sets of important information for each priority program area:

- A **programmatic gap table** (section 3.1) quantitatively describing the current gaps in coverage in the area, the amount of coverage available through other resources, and the additional coverage to be

provided through this funding request. If some program areas cannot be easily quantified in tabular form, they should be described in narrative form (section 3.1).

- A **funding request narrative** (section 3.2) which describes each of the major program areas selected for support and what is to be done in the area. For each program area, this narrative should provide:
 1. The overall goal and objective of the program area
 2. The major activities to be conducted under the program area to achieve the program goals and objectives
 3. A brief description of the implementers of each key activity and their relevant experience (section 4 can provide more detail on their capacity and experience)
 4. An explanation of how the proposed activities build off lessons learned and past experiences in country. In particular the way in which they will deliver services and address gaps, inequities and barriers identified earlier in the concept note to ensure successful implementation
 5. Estimates of the expected key outcomes and impacts of the activities based on evidence of the proven effectiveness of these activities from past programs in the country, pilots or response analyses. If no country specific measures are available, global best practice estimates can be used

- A **modular template** (section 3.3) describing the program areas chosen, proposed indicators and targets, specific activities and investments in each program area, and expected costs. The modular template should be accompanied by a narrative in section 3.3 of the concept note, which describes:
 1. The costs and prioritization of each program area within the allocation amount and the impact it will achieve
 2. The costs and prioritization of additional activities within each program area or of additional program areas within the above allocation amount and the additional impact they will achieve over related activities in the allocation amount

The funding request narrative should be self-contained, providing sufficient detail for the TRP to review the proposed activities for appropriate focus, technical soundness, feasibility and sustainability, value for money and expected level of impact. The funding request narrative must clearly explain what is to be achieved in each program area, the major activities through which these achievements will be realized, who will carry them out, how these activities will be implemented and how previously identified issues and problems are to be addressed, and what the likely impacts of the Global Fund's support will be.

This narrative should be provided for each program area in both the allocation request and the above allocation request. The modular template will normally provide more detail on specific activities, costs and indicators in each of these program areas, but the funding request narrative should stand on its own as a description of the major components in each program area.

The narrative accompanying the modular template (section 3.3 of the concept note) must contain at a minimum the following:

- A **prioritized list of the modules and interventions to be funded by the allocation amount:** The most important elements should be presented first with cost figures (both annual and total), a summary

of the specific activities covered by that cost, and the expected impact and/or coverage gains clearly delineated by year

- A **second prioritized list of the modules and interventions to be funded by the above allocation amount**: Again, the most important above allocation elements should be presented first, with cost figures (annual and total), a summary of the additional activities to be conducted using these additional resources; and a description of the additional expected impact and/or coverage clearly delineated by year

It is also extremely helpful if prioritized summary budget and coverage/outcome tables for the activities in both the allocation and above allocation funding requests are provided in this section. Providing costed and prioritized lists in section 3.3 is critical as the TRP must review the prioritization proposed in the concept note and may choose to recommend changing the priority order, moving items between the allocation and above allocation requests, or ask that additional priorities be considered in an iterated concept note. If such costed and prioritized lists are not provided, the TRP may need to request an iteration of the concept note.

The TRP is increasingly expecting to see more concrete evidence and documentation of improved outcomes and impact for the proposed activities and better assessments of the overall impacts to be achieved in each program area. It is therefore critical that the applicant draws upon lessons learned implementation experiences and past impact assessments, while simultaneously ensuring that newly supported activities under the funding request are adequately described and explained to assess their outcomes and impacts. The TRP will be supportive of requests for data system improvements to ensure that measures of the outcomes and impacts of supported programs are available to inform future national strategic planning and concept note development.

Section 4: Implementation arrangements and risk assessment

The TRP will also assess the feasibility and sustainability of Global Fund supported activities. Central to this assessment is the ability of the Principal Recipient and other key implementers to deliver the proposed activities. In the final section of the concept note, the applicant is asked to discuss the management experience and capacity of the Principal Recipient, the arrangements to be made for identifying and recruiting sub-recipients, including active engagement of people living with the three diseases and key populations, and the mechanisms for ensuing coordination among these bodies.

Section 4 provides the applicant the opportunity to explain these arrangements to the TRP, highlight the strengths and limitations of the Principal Recipient and other key implementers in managing major activities of this type, and describe measures being put into place to mitigate any identified risks. If relevant, this section should also describe how the funding request will integrate with ongoing Global Fund grants or other disease requests from the applicant, ensuring efficient implementation and avoiding duplication of efforts.

Concluding remarks

The TRP recognizes the amount of effort that goes into the country dialogue and concept note preparation processes and trust that guidance in this document will assist applicants in preparing more focused, self-contained and successful concept notes to request Global Fund support.

Applicants preparing concept notes are requested to factor the above considerations into their deliberations and concept note development and writing activities. Concept notes must start with a clear situation analysis, leading to a comprehensive assessment of gaps and challenges in the current response. Use these analysis and assessments to select the program areas and specific activities that build upon past experiences and lessons learned and are likely to maximize the impact of the Global Fund investment in the country. Describe the program areas concisely and clearly within the narrative section of the concept note and be sure to summarize them in two separate, prioritized and costed lists for the allocation and above allocation portions of the funding request. Completely describe the capacity in country to carry out these activities successfully, describing any risks and proposing adequate risk mitigation strategies.

Taking these steps will help to strengthen the content of submitted concept notes, while also greatly reducing the need for iteration. The TRP looks forward to working with applicants and countries as they strengthen their national responses.

WHAT THE TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL LOOKS FOR IN A CONCEPT NOTE: EXAMPLES

To further illustrate the qualities the TRP looks for in a concept note and what those qualities look like in practice, the TRP offers this selection of specific examples from actual concept notes submitted and approved under the allocation-based funding model.

To view a particular example:

1. Use the electronic version of this report and be connected to the internet.
2. Click on the “Concept note” link of the desired example. The link connects to a file that contains a PDF version of the particular concept note narrative. The file will likely download onto your computer.
3. Find the file on your computer and open the PDF.
4. Navigate to the particular section noted (“Section 1.1,” for example) and read the section.

Section 1.1: Country Disease, Health and Community Systems Context

	South Sudan	Concept note
Malaria	Chad	Concept note
	Nigeria	Concept note
TB	Moldova	Concept note
TB/HIV	Viet Nam	Concept note

Section 1.2: National Disease Strategic Plans

TB/HIV	Nigeria	Concept note
	Viet Nam	Concept note
HIV	Somalia	Concept note

Section 1.3: Joint Planning and Alignment of TB and HIV Strategies, Policies and Interventions

TB/HIV	Nigeria	Concept note
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Section 2.1: Overall Funding Landscape for Upcoming Implementation Period

TB	Moldova	Concept note
	Papua New Guinea	Concept note
TB/HIV	Viet Nam	Concept note

Section 2.2: Counterpart Financing Requirements

TB	Moldova	Concept note
TB/HIV	Viet Nam	Concept note

Section 3.1: Programmatic Gap Analysis

Malaria	Chad	Concept note
	South Sudan	Concept note
HIV	Cuba	Concept note
TB	Moldova	Concept note
TB/HIV	Viet Nam	Concept note

Section 3.2: Applicant Funding Request

Malaria	Chad	Concept note
	South Sudan	Concept note

Section 3.3: Modular Template

Malaria	Nigeria	Concept note
	South Sudan	Concept note
TB	Moldova	Concept note
TB/HIV	Nigeria	Concept note

Section 4.1: Overview of Implementation Arrangements

Malaria	Chad	Concept note
	Nigeria	Concept note
TB	Moldova	Concept note
TB/HIV	Nigeria	Concept note
	Viet Nam	Concept note

Section 4.2: Ensuring Implementation Efficiencies

Malaria	South Sudan	Concept note
HIV	Somalia	Concept note
TB	Moldova	Concept note
TB/HIV	Nigeria	Concept note

Section 4.3: Minimum Standards for Principal Recipients and Program Delivery

Malaria	Chad	Concept note
	Nigeria	Concept note
	South Sudan	Concept note

Section 4.4: Current or Anticipated Risks to Program Delivery and Principal Recipient(s) Performance

Malaria	South Sudan	Concept note
TB	Papua New Guinea	Concept note
HIV	Cuba	Concept note
TB/HIV	Nigeria	Concept note