

FAQ- DFID Systematic Review Program

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1. Do I need to submit an 'Expression of Interest' or a 'Letter of Interest' or am I allowed to submit directly a full proposal?

You **do not need to** submit an 'Expression of Interest' or a 'Letter of Interest' - you go directly into the full proposal.

2. It says "review groups may wish to propose a sub-question under these headings"- what does this mean?

Some of the proposed questions might be usefully broken down into smaller questions. If you think you need to reword the question or suggest a sub-question, please put this on the form. **You cannot however submit a new question that is not derived from one of the 49 questions.**

3. What are the steps for application?

Step 1: Download the application form and guidelines.

Step 2: Complete Application Form

Step 3: Submit your application online to systematicreviews@dfid.gov.uk

4. Can one organization be awarded more than one grant?

Yes.

5. Can more than one affiliate of an organization submit proposals?

Yes.

6. Do I need to submit a separate application for each question I want to bid for?

Yes, because the composition of the teams and the methods will vary from questions to question.

7. What are the target/focus countries under this call for proposals?

Systematic reviews must focus on developing countries. For some questions, the target region is further specified, either geographically or according to 'low-income', or 'least developed' classifications. Where relevant, evidence and studies from non-developing country settings may be incorporated into the review if there is a strong rationale for doing so.

8. What is the primary audience of DFID's funded systematic reviews?

DFID policy makers, DFID advisors, developing country policy makers and development programme managers are key audiences for the reviews.

9. What is the deadline for submission of proposals?

The deadline for submissions is **close of play (i.e. 5pm GMT) Tuesday April 6th**

10. When will successful applicants hear back?

Successful applicants will be contacted in **mid-May**.

11. What is the deadline for the submission of protocols, draft reviews and final reviews?

The deadline for protocols is **July 15th 2010**, draft reviews **October 15th** and final reviews **December 15th**.

12. How much does a systematic review cost? Are there any grant limits?

The cost of a systematic review will depend on the size of the evidence base. If there are only 5 studies to review, the review should be quite short. If there are 200 studies to review, the review will take longer and cost more. As an approximate guide, we expect reviews to cost around £25,000, and normally in the range of £5,000-£50,000. There are no pre-established funding limits.

13. What resources does a systematic review entail?

The minimum team size for a systematic review is 3 members, including one lead investigator and two research assistants. In order to conduct a comprehensive search, teams will need full-text access to journals, an academic library and the internet. Access to statistical software packages for meta-analysis is an advantage. Some teams will be given access to EPPI-reviewer which generates forest-plots and supports thematic analysis and framework analysis. Please indicate on the application form if you wish to opt for EPPI-Centre methodological support if you want to take advantage of this.

14. How do I know if my institution qualifies for this RFP?

Any organization can apply - the review criteria (found in the call) include the qualifications and experience of the study team.

15. Does DFID embrace/promote certain systematic review methods and approaches only?

No. DFID takes a broad perspective on systematic reviews not limited to quantitative 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; (2) for quantitative reviews, examining the variation in reported outcomes, not only their mean; (3) for qualitative or mixed-method reviews, using an accepted method of qualitative data synthesis.

16. Does DFID only want systematic reviews of Randomized Control Trials?

No. The type of study and method of synthesis must be appropriate to the question. RCTs might be the relevant study type for some interventions, but quasi-experimental methods (such as matching, regression-based design, pipeline approach) are admissible studies of intervention effectiveness, whereas qualitative or mixed methods studies might be appropriate to understanding why something works or does not work.

17. What kind of methodological standards are expected from systematic review?

There are many systematic review methods available (see for example [Barnett-Page E, Thomas J \(2009\) 'Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: a critical review', BMC Medical Research Methodology 9:59](#)) and many guidelines for conducting systematic reviews including:

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

DFID supports systematic reviews that employ the relevant methodology for the question asked and the studies reviewed. A statistical meta-analysis of qualitative studies will not be terribly useful.

DFID recognizes that there are no standard methodologies for systematic reviews in international development and that this field contains many varied disciplines, from crop sciences to governance.

DFID supports systematic reviews that adhere to the general principles of systematic reviewing, which include a protocol that is peer reviewed, identifying all available literature, composition of the review team to reduce bias and careful documentation of process.

18. According to which criteria will the quality of protocols and draft reviews be determined?

Protocols and draft reviews will be assessed according to whether they are substantively important and methodologically appropriate. Criteria and weights are found in the call for proposals document.

19. What does “methodological support provided by the EPPI-Centre” entail? Do I have to use this?

EPPI-Centre is a leading centre for the production and dissemination of systematic reviews using a variety of methods. The support will involve a workshop in June on systematic reviewing and methods, the provision of technical assistance during the review period and access to specialized software and other support. This will be DFID-funded and is optional. We encourage review teams who have not conducted a systematic review previously to opt for the methodological support.

20. Can I register my review with other systematic review groups such as Cochrane, Campbell, or the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence?

Yes. Review teams with experience in systematic reviewing may wish to use other institutions to provide methodological support and peer review functions. Please indicate this on the form.

21. What does external review arranged by 3ie entail? Do I have to use this?

3ie will be involved in reviewing proposals, and will also arrange for the peer review of the protocols and draft reviews, funded by DFID. You do not have to use this option. If you prefer to organize this through other means, please give details in the form of your peer review process.

22. Where can I find out more about systematic reviews?

The sites of the Campbell and Cochrane Collaborations both contain guidelines on producing systematic reviews. These resources, and others, are listed on the site maintained by 3ie to support this RFP.

23. What support can 3ie give to preparing proposals?

3ie has put up a dedicated website with resources for those wanting to submit proposals in response to this RFP. 3ie staff cannot give advice on individual proposals, or be named as part of teams submitting proposals.

