



# RFI IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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# Implementation Guide: Introduction

The Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) is a COHRED service to improve the fairness, efficiency and impact of research collaborations globally. Given our origins in “research for health”, the RFI was created with the aim of improving global health, equity and development. However, with minor modifications, the RFI is also completely appropriate to be used in any other field of science collaboration. As we discovered, improving the fairness of research is also a strategic advantage in research organisations, institutions and businesses: greater fairness results in greater efficiency, longer-lasting partnerships, less conflict, improved uptake, reduced reputational risk and greater impact. The RFI is, therefore, of relevance to all key stakeholders in any research collaboration anywhere and of any duration - even though we started with the aim of increasing the research and innovation capacity of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in particular.

The overall impact of the RFI should be more capable research and innovation systems in all countries of the world to deal with all the important local, regional and global health and development challenges – now and in the future. The RFI is in direct support of the Sustainable Development Goals - particularly SDG 17 on Partnerships.

The RFI can be used by all organisations, institutions, businesses or government departments who engage as actors, sponsors, facilitators of research and research partnerships. In particular, the RFI has been designed for use by:

1. *Government departments with a major responsibility for supporting or undertaking research including but not limited to Ministries of Science and Technology, Health, Higher Education*
2. *National research and innovation agencies*
3. *Academic and research institutions/organisations*
4. *Private sector / Industry research divisions and organisations*
5. *Research funders, sponsors, and philanthropies*
6. *Other key stakeholders – including but not limited to – large non-profits engaging in research, international organisations and multi-national bodies, development organisations promoting and using research and innovation, and others who associate themselves as concerned stakeholders*

# RFI Documentation

## What you will need:

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RFI Summary Guide



RFI Reporting Guide



RFI Implementation Guide

Further documentation will be added over time. Please see the RFI website for latest updates.

<http://rfi.cohred.org>

## Copyright and Fair Use

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*The current version of the RFI Implementation Guide is ready for use. It is version 2, so we are convinced it can be improved. We are welcoming any comments for improvement. Please send your comments to [rfi@cohred.org](mailto:rfi@cohred.org) or upload them on the RFI website.*

## Implementing the RFI

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### 1.1. What does this Guide aim to achieve?

The RFI Institutional Implementation Guide was written to make it as easy as possible for any research partner to begin producing an annual or biennial “RFI Report”. Once your ‘institution’ – with which we mean any organisation, business, research or academic organisations, research funders, government departments engaged in doing or funding research, large non-profit organisations, or even major multi-year research programmes – has decided that the RFI should become part of its institutional reporting, then this guide will help you set up the system and infrastructure to do so efficiently and with most impact.

This guide builds on the RFI Reporting Guide (Document 2) which provides the motivation for engaging the RFI and details the required Reporting.

The RFI Institutional Implementation Guide (Document 3) is next – it shares learning to date on how to make the most of the RFI Report: i) managing the research partnerships of your institutions better; ii) creating standards for fairness and collaboration between your institutions and your preferred research partners; and iii) building stronger global research systems able to support health, equity and development in low and middle-income countries even more.

### 1.2 Who should read this guide?

This guide is aimed at all stakeholders in research collaborations – in specific, the six main constituencies are:

- *Government departments with a major responsibility for supporting or undertaking research including but not limited to Ministries of Science and Technology, Health, Higher Education*
- *National research and innovation agencies*
- *Academic and research institutions/organisations*
- *Private sector / Industry research divisions and organisations*
- *Research funders, sponsors, and philanthropies*
- *Other key stakeholders – including but not limited to – large non-profits engaging in research, international organisations and multi-national bodies, development organisations promoting and using research and innovation, umbrella-bodies in science, professional science organisations, national registries of sciences, and others who identify themselves as concerned stakeholders in global research for health, equity and development*

Within any of these institutions, there are key staff members who will be responsible for promoting the adoption and use of the RFI Report in their own institution and – to most effect – also by their major research partners. These include, but are not limited to:

- *Senior Research Directors and Officers in government departments*
- *Executive Directors, their Deputies in national research and innovation agencies*
- *Deans or Vice-Presidents tasked with research development in academic and research institutions*
- *Vice-President for Strategy, for External Affairs, for R&D, or Emerging Markets, or VP Corporate Social Responsibility, or Community Engagement, in the private sector*
- *The Executive and Programme Staff in public and private research funding organisations – specifically those promoting collaborative research between high- and low-income countries*
- *And many others, including Chairs of Research Ethics Committees, science journal editors - deputy editors – and science writers, concerned citizens, non-profit organisations and their leadership, national science advisors (especially those supporting science development in low- and middle-income countries), academic staff teaching research methods and relations, science diplomacy practitioners, and more*
- *Last – but probably most important – are Researchers and Research Leaders, those who usually initiate, nurture and maintain research partnerships around the globe. It is with them that the realization for the need of the RFI often begins and who may be able to engage all those listed above, the ‘research managers and Executives’ to take interest in the RFI for internal and external benefits, and contribute to a more fair and capable research world*

This Guide is a Generic Guide

This Guide has to be generic: with so many different actors in global research and innovation, and with so many different organisational models and ways of working, it is impossible to create a ‘one-size-fits-all’ Implementation Guide.

Nevertheless, it should be easy to transform the suggestions given below into a pragmatic model of RFI Reporting that suits your institution.

The most important consideration is to create an institutional reporting system that:

- *Delivers your own Institutional RFI Report cost-effectively,*
- *Is able to generate institution-wide action based on the findings of the Report, and*
- *Offers transparency and a commitment to fairness in relation to your research partners*

Figure 1 - Overview of RFI Report Implementation



### 1.3. A Refresher on RFI Reporting Requirements

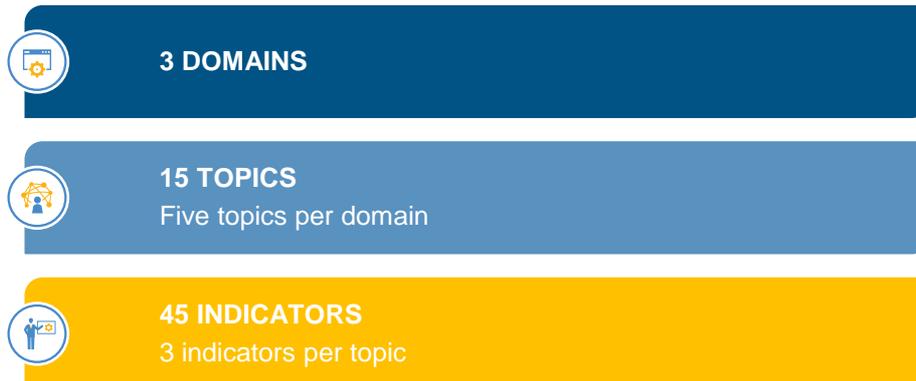
The RFI Reporting Guide (Document 2) provides a pragmatic framework to define ‘fairness’ in research collaboration and research partnerships. Through an extended global consultation, the reporting requirements have been defined based on this framework.

Fair research partnerships are characterised by:

- *Fairness of Opportunity*
- *Fair Process*
- *Fair Sharing of Benefits, Costs and Outcomes*

Each of these three ‘domains’ of fairness can be analysed by focusing on the five key elements or topics that constitute ‘Opportunity’, ‘Process’ and ‘Benefit, Cost and Outcome Sharing’.

And, in turn, each topic can be measured by 5 indicators – to make sure all relevant aspects are covered. Overall, therefore, the RFI Report is built through collecting, collating, and analysing your own organisational behaviour and policy in these 45 areas.



The RFI Report starts with reporting on each indicator in the following manner:

1. *Provide specific answers as required under each topic in the RFI Reporting Guide*
2. *Provide supportive documentation to substantiate your responses. Feel free to use or create innovative documentation including financial records, case studies, anecdotes, videos, external partners' reports, and any other method that demonstrates how your organisation deals with specific issues*
3. *Provide specific short- and medium-term plans for further improvement of your institution's behaviour, policies, actions in relation to research collaboration and partnerships. This is the strategic part of engaging RFI Reporting*

#### **For Each Indicator**

- *Report on each indicator according to specifications*
- *Provide supportive documentation*
- *Outline future actions to improve fairness and performance*

The next step enables your institution to demonstrate any other actions, activities, policies, practices that may not fit any of the indicators. Instead of doing so for each indicator, we propose your Institutional RFI Report reviews the collective of all replies given per 'Domain of Fairness' – and then add any other information you feel will further demonstrate your partnership strategies, intentions and commitment.

#### **For Each Domain**

- *Supplement the information provided for each indicator with any other good partnership practices or actions used or promoted by your organisation*

The third step is to produce an *INTERNAL* RFI Report. If there is a communication and publication department available, they will usually be engaged to produce a high-quality report that is easy to read, brings out the main points and encourages action internally in the organisation, government department, business or research funder.

The INTERNAL report services these two major purposes:

- *It is the status report of an organisation's performance in the key area of research collaboration – enabling action to be defined and taken to optimize this*
- *It provides the basic evidence and information needed by an institution to define the content of the EXTERNAL RFI report*

The final step is to produce the *EXTERNAL* RFI Report – the report that is validated by the COHRED RFI Team and is used as part of your institution's regular corporate reporting. An RFI Reporting Institution will decide which parts of the INTERNAL Report are suitable for publication externally – which will then be submitted to the RFI Team for validation. It is then that the RFI Logo can be used on the report, websites and other materials that the institution wishes to use to make its 'RFI Compliance' known.

The EXTERNAL report services these two major purposes:

- *It is / becomes an essential part of institutional reporting in the research and innovation sector. It is a major statement of institutional or corporate approach, behaviour and values towards stakeholders, prospective partners, funders and other interested parties*
- *The data from RFI Reports provide the substrate for the RFI Global Learning Platform: the evidence-base being created to improve how global research and innovation for health, equity and development is done and is progressing.*

The next sections deal with this in detail.

# Overview of the Six Step RFI Report Implementation

## Implementing the RFI - Detailed View

### Responsibility of RFI Reporting institute



# Implementing the RFI

## Six simple steps

### **STEP 1: Decide to Engage the RFI**

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Deciding to engage fairness and effectiveness in institutional research partnerships as an explicit corporate value is the most important and first step. For this decision to have institution-wide impact and to be of benefit to external partners, an executive decision to implement the RFI at Institutional Level is essential.

The initial driver to join the RFI may well come from research leaders or research assistants, more junior development officers or project managers, business unit staff and government officials – or it may come from the Executive or CEO interested in defining more clearly the role of the institution as a ‘responsible corporate citizen’ in the research and innovation sector. Each of these may be involved in conduct or support of ongoing research involving a variety of partners, and see the wisdom and value in making partnership values and collaboration policies explicit.

For most impact, internally and externally, the RFI Report needs to become an institution-wide, corporate or mission-critical aspect of businesses, organisations, funders and other stakeholders. For that reason, a positive decision of and support by the CEO, Executive Director, Executive Team, Minister or Vice/Deputy Minister is an essential first step.

Why would an Institution decide to engage with the Research Fairness Initiative?

- *Fairness is a widely-shared value – the RFI makes it practical and explicit*
- *The RFI Report creates transparency towards your research partners and, in return, generates transparency of your partners towards your institution. Longer lasting, more productive relationships are the result*
- *The RFI leads to increased research capacity for those needing it most – in low- and middle-income countries. This is important if you and your partners work there*
- *As it happens – the criteria that define ‘fairness’ are, by and large, also criteria for more efficient and effective research collaboration. As your institution changes to improve fairness, it will see its research productivity and impact increase*
- *Reputational risk may be reduced by being seen to actively promote measures that increase fairness in research partnerships*

## RFI Implementation Guide

- *'RFI-compliant' institutions may well be able to attract more funds, better people, greater global interest. It may be a visible target of corporate social responsibility with the added benefit of increasing one's own competitiveness in an increasingly competitive global research environment*
- *There is no other instrument to measure, standardise or benchmark research (and other) collaborations. By joining the RFI, your institution can both contribute to the 'evidence-base' on research collaboration, and benefit from what others contribute*
- *The RFI web provides pointers to many 'best practices', 'standards', 'guides', examples, case studies, local solutions that are mostly unknown to you, and that will expand as users and use of the RFI increases over time*
- *These are just some of the many actual and potential benefits to your organisation and to your partners. They are meant to help you 'make the case' for including the RFI in regular corporate reporting*
- *You will probably find other reasons that are more convincing in your specific research environment. Please share these with us – they may be of use to others as well!*

## **STEP 2: Establish the Institutional (RFI) Report Team**

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Establishing the Institutional (RFI) Report Team is the next step. There are really two important principles in constituting the team:

1. *The Chair of the Report Team should be senior enough to have direct access to the CEO / Executive Team / Government Department Management – and – to be able to lead a team of the senior staff tasked with compiling the Institutional (RFI) Report.*  
*For example, she or he could be Vice-President, Deputy CEO, Deputy Minister, Chair of the Institutional Research Ethics Committee, or a Senior Portfolio Manager with direct reporting lines to the Executive.*
2. *The Members of the Team should be those whose usual responsibilities align most closely with the specific Domain / Topic / Indicator, who are senior enough to deal with and access all information needed, and who can – in future – execute actions based on the RFI Report.*  
*Clearly, the team should also remain manageable in size and reflect the different interest areas dealing with the collaboration and partnerships that the Institution maintains or wishes to develop.*  
*For example, a large research organisation could create a team of 5 or 6 people – constituting the head of legal services / administration, director of finance, chair of the Ethics Committee, VP for Research and Development, Director of External Medical Affairs, Senior VP for Emerging Markets.*

As no two organisations are the same, each Institution will have to decide who to include in their (RFI) Reporting Team – keeping in mind the need to be able to act on findings later on.

Now that the Institutional (RFI) Report Team (“the Report Team”) has been formed, it can start its work towards preparing the first (RFI) Report. The Chair and Members should establish a plan of work and appropriate budget that may look – basically – like a general planning cycle: a series of meetings, interim information gathering, report writing, and acting on the findings only to repeat the cycle again for the next biennial (RFI) Report.

In small organisations, this could be the work of 1 person without any meetings. In large institutions, it will require more explicit meeting time and team work. Design a work-flow that suits your institution best.

- **Meeting 1: Establishing the team, starting the process**
  - *Confirm (RFI) Reporting Team membership and modus operandi*
  - *Consider the RFI Reporting Guide in detail*
  - *Allocate work according to sector and expertise*
  - *Agree on next meeting: time and deliverables*
  - *Agree to send draft reports in time for Chair to collate and disseminate before next meeting*
  
- **Meeting 2: Producing the first Draft of the Internal (RFI) Report (ideally this meeting is held not more than 3 months after meeting 1)**
  - *Consider first Summary of responses – collated, highlighting major areas for further discussion, gaps, difficulties, problems with interpretation*
  - *Collectively review responses and questions raised from the first sectional draft reports*
  - *Address and solve these, or contact the COHRED RFI Team for technical support*
  - *Do not be surprised at the added value resulting from what is probably the first ever joint meeting of all staff involved in research and research management in your institution*
  - *Encourage this new creative opportunity*
  - *Agree on further information required or analyses to be done*
  - *Set date for next meeting: time and deliverables*
  - *Agree to send full sectional reports in time for Chair to collate*
  
- **Taking Action**
  - **Step 3: Internal** – *Design strategies to increase benefits of research partnerships*
  - **Step 4: External** – *Publish the RFI Report*

Whereas the first two steps concern establishment of the institutional mechanisms to produce the internal (RFI) Report, the following two steps deal with actions that should result from the report.

### **STEP 3: Internal Action - Improve Research Collaboration**

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- **Meeting 3:** *Producing the first Internal RFI Report (ideally this meeting is held not more than 1 months after meeting 2)*
  - *The complete DRAFT of the Internal RFI Report is pre-circulated to the team members to prepare for meeting 3*
  - *Collectively review responses and questions raised from the completed first version of the Internal (RFI) Report*
  - *Again, do not be surprised at the added value resulting from this second joint meeting of all staff involved in research and research management in your institution: Instead – use it creatively to generate actionable items that will improve the way the institution is handling all aspects of fair and effective research partnerships*
  - *Agree on next steps:*
  - *After making appropriate changes, it is now that the Chair should meet with CEO / Executive to discuss Internal (RFI) Report, findings and the suggested actions. (ideally this meeting is held as soon as possible after the completion of the Internal (RFI) Draft Report)*
  - *It is then for the CEO / Executive to decide to accept the Internal (RFI) Report, to ask for further clarification or modification, and to agree to act on the results. One of these actions is to produce the external RFI Report*
- **Meeting 4:** *Decide on actions based on the Internal RFI Report (suggest maximum 1 month after meeting with CEO/Executive)*
  - *What works, what needs improvement?*
  - *Set time-lines and prioritise actions: year 1, year 2, and longer-term*
  - *Allocate clear responsibilities, tasks and deliverables*
  - *Establish a project management system to ensure progress towards goals*

It may be that the CEO / Executive / Officers in Charge lead some actions, delegate some to other staff in the institution, and leave other actions to the Institutional Report Team.

Clearly, there is going to be great variability in follow-up of the Internal (RFI) Report – the key is that follow-up needs to happen.

One of the actions that is likely to be delegated back to the Institutional Report Team is the publication of the final external RFI Report.

## **STEP 4: External Action – Publish the RFI Report**

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- **Meeting 5: Produce External RFI Report** (suggest maximum 3 months after meeting with CEO Executive)
  - *The Institutional RFI Report is the property and responsibility of your institution / business / organisation / department. Following an internal approval process, you are welcome to publish the report as part of the institutional Annual Reports*
  - *However, at this time, the report cannot yet carry the RFI Logo, nor can it be called the “[Name of Institution] RFI Report” as no external validation has taken place by the RFI Team at COHRED*
  - *We suggest that you do not publish an internal report and then again an external report that does carry the RFI logo – to reduce confusion and costs*
  - *The 5th Meeting should, therefore, decide exactly what parts of the Internal (RFI) Report will be published externally, and how this will be presented and laid out. Once this has been done to the Institution’s satisfaction and standards for publications, it can be submitted for RFI Validation and publication*

**TABLE 1: Summary & Comparison of Internal and External RFI Report**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Internal</b> Institutional (RFI) Report</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>External</b> Institutional (RFI) Report</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is produced, reviewed and edited by the Institutional (RFI) Report Team</li> <li>• Is completely reviewed at least once every two years, while progress monitoring takes place regularly as part of Executive reporting. It can be used, edited and improved internally as often as is needed for the development of the institution</li> <li>• It raises staff awareness and creates a corporate culture of fairness in research collaborations</li> <li>• Creates the opportunity for synergy and common goals between divisions, teams, departments and R&amp;D units - creating greater efficiency and impact</li> <li>• It supports the development of an internal forward-thinking and problem solving approach by finding answers to RFI indicators that request the institution to provide examples of solutions to existing problems</li> <li>• It creates the internal evidence- base to design and maintain the most effective research collaborations and partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is reviewed and validated by the RFI Secretariat / COHRED RFI Team</li> <li>• Is published by the Institution for external communication as part of its Corporate Reporting and is also made available to the public through the RFI Web Portal</li> <li>• Is commented on by the public and other participating organisations with feedback.</li> <li>• Validation and use of RFI Logo is provided for a maximum period of 2 years</li> <li>• Raises awareness current and prospective research partners, sponsors and the general public on the values, policies and practices of your organisation</li> <li>• It creates transparency and may set your institution apart from similar organisations, creating a potential competitive advantage to attract staff, partners, funding</li> <li>• Provides many opportunities for comparative results with other institutions, and provides institutional access to other institutions' policies and practices to can be used as role models, case studies and inspiration</li> <li>• It helps create the global evidence-base on what constitute high quality, fair and effective research partnerships that can impact global health, equity and development</li> </ul>

## STEP 5: Submit for RFI Validation

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### Validation Criteria

During the extensive global consultations that preceded and accompanied the construction of the Research Fairness Initiative, a broad consensus became apparent that the RFI should focus on creating a tool that encourages improvement of partnership relations and behaviour rather than creating a ranking tool.

At this time, the RFI has the character of a 'compliance tool' and 'fair partnership resource and evidence base'. It is not intended to 'rank' nor express judgment nor 'certify' – at least not for now. Instead, the RFI it is intended to:

- *Make participating institutions, businesses, funders, governments and other stakeholders aware of many existing publications, guides, contracting tools and even global agreements on how to construct and maintain fair, effective research collaborations that contribute to global health, equity and development*

To achieve this, the RFI Web Portal will list an increasing number of publications, guides, tools and agreements that your organisation may wish to adopt or adapt. As this will grow continuously, do consult the relevant RFI web-pages when completing the RFI Report: <http://rfi.cohred.org/resources>

Validation will include an assessment if your institution uses existing guides, or has at least considered them and found better ways to address key issues in research partnership management.

- *The RFI requests institutions to make explicit how they deal with the key issues raised in the domains / topics / indicators of the RFI Report. The purpose is to create transparency, accountability and the global evidence-base on what works and what does not*

Reporting on all indicators in the RFI is required. Although it is clear that many research institutions may not (yet) have made explicit statements or policies or have not standardised their own practices in relation to all 45 indicators, completing the RFI Report will point your institution towards key gaps. Subsequently, the RFI Report will ask you to state how you will address such gaps in the next 2 years.

Completeness of RFI Reporting is another key criterion for Validation. What the RFI Team cannot judge – at least not at first – is how realistic the responses are nor on how serious the follow up on plans will be. We trust your partners, other stakeholders, concerned citizens and civil society, however, to read published reports and compare these to reality. The RFI Website will support this interaction.

The impact of the RFI will depend on how seriously you take your partners: publishing an RFI Report means a commitment to which your partners can hold you to account.

- *The RFI Report for your institution is published as part of overall institutional or corporate reporting*

It is not a document produced by the Corporate Social Responsibility office, or a statement by a project officer, or a research administrator – the RFI Report is part of the full corporate reporting, and is published as such.

For example, large corporates will usually produce an Annual Review report, and Annual Financial Statements report, possibly an Annual Corporate Governance report – and, increasingly, a report that documents how the business acts as a ‘corporate citizen’. This can have various names – such as CSR Report, or “Creating Shared Value” report or similar reports with other names.

Public sector organisations generally publish an Annual Report and an Annual Financial Report. Those in the research domain may report separately on research outputs, impacts and innovations. An RFI Report could, in this case, be seen as a ‘constitutional or ethical report on social value in research’ – or any other term that will suit the specific environment of the institution.

In either case, the RFI Report should be considered as an additional report produced to these annual reports – as part of the Reporting Portfolio.

Given the nature of the issues addressed by the RFI, it is entirely reasonable to produce the RFI report only every second year. This is also the maximum validation period provided by the RFI Team.

**IN SUMMARY:** at this time, there are three major criteria for validation:

1. *Is your Institutional RFI Report produced according to the RFI Reporting Guide, and where the RFI Website lists resources, were these used or considered?*
2. *Is the RFI Report complete?*
3. *Will it be included as part of institutional or corporate reporting?*

If all three conditions are met in full – then – for the first RFI Report:

- *the RFI Logo can be used on the Institutional Report*
- *the RFI Reporting Institution can state that they are ‘RFI Compliant’ in all their materials*
- *The RFI Web Portal will include your organisation with all other RFI Compliant Organisations*
- *This will remain in force for 2 years from date of validation*

### Validation Process

#### Submit RFI Report in final form to the RFI Team<sup>4</sup>

1. *Submit via RFI Web Portal (<https://rfi.cohred.org/validation>)*
  - *If you wish to consult the RFI Team before submitting, this can be done as well to reduce time between submission and validation. This facility is available to all institutions that have paid their RFI contribution*
  - *In case some conditions are not met in full - then specific feedback on adaptations needed will be provided, after which a re-submission should be done*
2. *Make sure Annual RFI subscription is paid*
  - *A scale based on budgetary size of your institution is available from the RFI Portal. If in doubt, please contact the RFI Team and request an invoice*
3. *Validation will take place within 2 months of submission*
  - *Provided the three criteria are met in full and RFI Subscription has been received*
  - *Time will be longer if improvements are needed to the RFI Report*

#### Validation - technical support

- *The RFI Team is able to provide technical support via telephone, teleconferencing, or provide training meetings at institutions. These need to be budgeted separately*
- *In preparation of the first report, the RFI Team will make itself available as much as possible for telephone consultation as well – without charge – but may not be able to respond very quickly*
- *<http://rfi.cohred.org/support>*

#### Validation - disagreements

- *It is possible that disagreements arise as part of the validation process. In first instance, the COHRED RFI Team will attempt to resolve these with the Chair of the Institutional (RFI) Reporting Team*
- *Should this not lead to a rapid solution, then the disagreement is forwarded to the RFI Governance Board for consideration and resolution. The RFI Governance Board will be created and developed from 2017 onwards, and is, in essence, a group representing all stakeholders using the RFI. (See RFI Document 4 - Governance and Management)*

### Validation - considerations for the future

- *For future versions of the report, another validation criterion will be added – namely – assessment of extent to which improvements announced in your previous report have been acted upon or exceeded*
- *Also for the future: it is likely that global learning (see Step 6) will lead to 'best practices' and 'benchmarks' for certain key aspects of fairness in research partnerships. Future requirements may well include some of these for approval as well. However, the inclusion of these will be decided upon exclusively by the Board of Governors of the RFI (See RFI Document 4: Governance and Management)*

## **STEP 6 : Use the RFI Global Learning Platform**

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### **1. Global Learning on Research Collaboration – Contribute to and Use the RFI Global Learning Platform.**

The RFI Team will maintain the public RFI Website which has – at this stage – three major functions:

- *It serves as a searchable database of all RFI Compliant institutions, and a portal to their RFI Reports*
- *It is a repository knowledge and experiences on fair, effective research partnerships with great impact – containing examples, cases, papers, guidelines, model contracts and other resources that may be used by research institutions around the world*
- *And, it will be used to conduct and present results of meta-analyses, in-depth-studies, and develop benchmarks and best practices as a direct result of all RFI Reports being produced globally*

It may be surprising to learn that following 150 or more years of research collaborations there is no 'body of evidence' on creating and maintaining the best partnerships. There is much literature, there are guidelines, tools and global instruments – but the RFI constitutes the first systematic attempt to create a global evidence-base in this field which is so crucial for global health, equity and development. Contributing to it enhances its value – using it enhances your institution.

### **2. Implementing the RFI – Role and Added Value of COHRED RFI Team**

The RFI Team can support all and any step in the process of creating an institutional RFI Report. We do this through:

- *Making relevant guides available – to anyone wishing to use these, although some will require an active subscription for access*
- *Email and telephone support is available to all institutions who have an active subscription*
- *Tailor-made on-site consultancies or training workshops – charged individually based on time requirements, location and size of trainee group*

In the near future:

- *Digitization of RFI Report – submit, use templates and publish entirely online to reduce costs to your institution*
- *Regular updates, in-depth study reports, consultation for new standard and benchmark development, and more*

### **3. Implementing the RFI – Frequently Asked Questions**

As RFI use progresses, more questions are being asked. Answers to some of these are provided here. However, please consult the RFI Web Portal to see the growing list of questions and answers:

<http://rfi.cohred.org/faq>

Please do not hesitate to post questions. The RFI Team will get back to you as soon as possible, by email or otherwise. Your questions will also be used to improve the RFI in all its aspects!

#### ***How much time and effort does it take to produce the RFI Report?***

The time is directly proportional to the extent of research activity of an institution. A small non-profit involved in a few research projects, one dedicated person may complete the RFI Report in less than a day and have final internal agreement in another day. In a national innovation agency, multi-national organisation or business with large R&D budgets, it may well take a team of 6 to get all data together, and up to 6 months to submit a report to the CEO. However, there are two major considerations why 'time and effort needed to produce the RFI report' may not be the right question to ask and answer.

Firstly, ALL of the topics covered in the RFI are essential components of effective and efficient research organisations. So, if your organisation does not have the information to answer these questions, it is actually a great investment in improving functioning of your own research business.

- *For example: if you do not have a clear organisational policy that specifies how research ethics review in foreign countries with foreign partners needs to be done, you open yourself to serious reputational damage. By examining institutional policies and practice, and by comparing these against global best practices, your institution can prevent damage to itself, its partners and potentially the study participants*

Secondly, the time it takes to answer a question is very short compared to changing institutional policy or practice in many cases. The RFI simply indicates an area for improvement – but agreeing on and achieving the improvement may take years!

- *For example: a major national innovation agency in a middle-income country applied the RFI. It responded to Indicator 2.10.3. External Financial Audit and found that it used a locally accepted accounting standard. Upon further reflection with the COHRED RFI Team, it appeared that close to 50% of its annual research budget was derived from foreign sources, and that it would make this institution more acceptable to receive foreign funding if its accounting standard would be changed to a globally accepted one. In this case, answering the question took literally less than a minute, but changing the internal accounting standard may*

*well take 3 years before completion. Yet, this was seen by the Executive as a key benefit of using the RFI and it endorsed this decision*

***Explain what is meant by: “the RFI is a compliance tool”***

The RFI Web Resources pages (<http://rfi.cohred.org/resources>) lists many articles, guidelines, tools and templates, and even international agreements that should influence how research partnerships are being constructed, maintained, grown, monitored and evaluated. RFI Reporting requires you to take note of these existing resources and apply one or more – or adapt one or more – to improve your institutional partnerships policy and practice.

In this way, the RFI is a tool that enhance ‘compliance with existing guides, policies and practices’. The RFI does not develop new guidelines where there are existing ones. Instead, it encourages sharing experiences and improvements to these guidelines through the RFI Web Portal – which may well lead to new and improved guides, standards and benchmarks over time.

Another way in which the RFI can be used as a ‘compliance tool’ is by requiring that recipients of research funding become RFI Reporting Institutions. This will provide some security to the funder or the government of countries of recipient institutions, for example, that various approaches to best partnerships practices are explicitly considered and the best selected for individual collaborations.

- *For example: currently, a National Science Foundation, a corporate research sponsoring foundation, and a regional government body with research sponsorship responsibilities are all considering requiring that the lead organisation in any funded partnership becomes an RFI Reporting Institution*

**“RFI Reporting requires you to take note of these existing resources”**

***Is the RFI also applicable beyond ‘health research – can it be used in science collaboration more generally?’***

The short answer is ‘Yes – the RFI is a generic tool – it applies to all kinds of research, scientific and innovation partnerships and collaborations’.

We began the RFI in the broad domain of ‘health research – simply because that is where COHRED developed its expertise since 1993. However, since 2004, we have widened our work considerably to a wider domain ‘research and innovation for health, equity and development’. This can include virtually any field of science, and the RFI has been designed to cover this much wider area.

We encourage use of the RFI to any sphere of science collaboration – and look forward to fine-tuning the topics and indicators if that will be necessary to make it more appropriate.

***Can the RFI reduce the negative side of ‘brain drain’?***

The theory on which the RFI is premised is that:

- *Research and innovation are essential for development of low- and middle-income countries for health, equity and sustainable economic development. The future of any country – no matter how distant it may appear now – is through increasing its human capital and transform into a knowledge economy. This cannot happen without consistent, long-term and substantive investment by all countries and regions in research, science, innovation*
- *Research does not happen by chance – it requires strong, multi-faceted, resilient and responsive ‘research systems’. This includes research expertise, but also research management expertise, research communication, financing including venture funding of start-ups, education relevant to research, and a flourishing private sector to deal with user-focused design and ability to go to scale*

Research partnerships are the only vehicle to achieve all this. Going it alone is probably not even an option for the largest country – it certainly is not an option for every other country and their institutions and businesses but only if these partnerships are ‘fair’. That is exactly what the RFI intends to promote and achieve.

Back to the question then – if the RFI is successful in generating more fairness and effectiveness in research partnerships between high- and low-income countries, then this will be seen in better, more stable and more competitive research environments in low income countries. This means more capable universities, national research agencies, non-profit research organisations and research-focused business – which reduce brain drain and perhaps lead to brain gain in specific areas of excellence that can develop.

**“Research does not happen by chance – it requires strong, multi-faceted, resilient and responsive research systems”**

### Internally

- Promotes alignment with organisational values.
- Increases research ("R&D") efficiency.
- Improves quality, cost-effectiveness and impact of partnerships

### Externally

- Creates clarity and transparency for partners and stakeholders
- Creates fairness right from the start
- Attracts those you want to work with.
- Demonstrates responsible corporate / organisational citizenship in R&D
- Highlights organisational innovation

### Globally

- Builds global evidence-base on research collaboration
- Encourages use and development of standards, benchmarks and best practices
- Contributes to the Global research capacity needed for health, equity and sustainable development



# RFI

## Contact

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For assistance on any other platforms, please use the details below to get in touch. Or contact us directly with the details on the cover page.

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**RFI Web Portal** <http://rfi.cohred.org>

**RFI Support** <http://rfi.cohred.org/get-help/>

**RFI Resources** <http://rfi.cohred.org/rfi-evidence-base/>

**RFI Frequently Asked Questions** <http://rfi.cohred.org/FAQ>

**Email contact** [rfi@cohred.org](mailto:rfi@cohred.org)

**RFI Validation Criteria** <http://rfi.cohred.org/rfi-validation-criteria/>

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