

NIHR SDO programme NHS Evaluations funding stream

First call for proposals for research into promising innovations in healthcare delivery in the NHS

Research Brief (REF: EV2001): CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The NIHR Service Delivery and Organisation programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from WORD in Wales. Researchers from Scotland and Northern Ireland should contact NETSCC to discuss their eligibility to apply.

1. Introduction

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme has established a new NHS Evaluations funding stream. This is its first call for proposals. We anticipate spending about £3 million per year through this funding stream once it is well established with two calls for proposals each year. Although there is no formal cap on this call, the programme has in mind that projects are likely to cost up to £500,000. Applicants should note that we anticipate funding a range of projects in both size and duration. Value for money will be an important consideration for all projects and project costs will be carefully scrutinised and must always be well justified.

A new panel – the SDO NHS Evaluations Panel will assess proposals submitted to this work stream. This new stream will provide a mechanism by which we can bring research to bear on promising innovations in healthcare delivery which arise in the NHS, and which are often initiatives led or supported by Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) or by one or more NHS trusts or Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) working together. We also aim to promote closer links and working between SHAs, NHS trusts and PCTs, and their local academic institutions/partners with expertise in researching health services delivery and organisation.

This call provides SHAs, NHS trusts, PCTs and other NHS organisations with the opportunity to consider what innovations might benefit from being researched or evaluated. It also gives research organisations/academic institutions the opportunity to make contact and work with strategic health authorities.

We are seeking **full proposals** using the online application form only. The deadline for submission is **5 November 2009 by 1pm**. Proposals should be submitted by a research organisation (usually an academic institution) and must also be supported by the relevant SHA.

Proposals submitted to the NHS Evaluations Panel will be assessed initially for the importance to the NHS of the research proposed, and then for scientific quality; more details of this process are given in Section 5.

2. The SDO programme objectives

The Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme is one of the national research programmes of the NHS in England and is a constituent programme of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The NIHR SDO programme improves health outcomes for people by:

- commissioning research and producing research evidence that improves practice in relation to the organisation and delivery of health care, and
- building research capability and capacity amongst those who manage, organise and deliver services – improving their understanding of the research literature and how to use research evidence.

The primary audience for SDO commissioned research is decision makers in the NHS in England and Wales – particularly managers and leaders in NHS organisations. We focus our research commissioning on topics and areas where we think research evidence can make a significant contribution to improving decision making and so to improving the organisation and delivery of healthcare to patients.

Further information on the SDO programme, including a list of past, current and recently commissioned projects, can be found on the SDO website: www.sdo.nihr.ac.uk.

Since April 2009, the NIHR SDO programme has been managed by NETSCC, Service Delivery and Organisation - part of the NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre at the University of Southampton.

3. Background to this call

Within the NHS, many innovations and initiatives which support the wider NHS would benefit from independent and rigorous evaluation. The findings from such evaluations could help the NHS decide whether and how to adopt such innovations. The SDO NHS Evaluations Panel aims to fund projects that would contribute to the national focus on innovation arising from the Darzi report *High Quality Care for All* (2008).

This work stream will also promote closer links between SHAs, NHS trusts and PCTs and local academic institutions with relevant expertise. We are seeking proposals from academic organisations, but **these proposals must have the support and involvement of the relevant NHS organisations and must be explicitly signed off by the relevant SHA**. Below are two examples of research we are already funding:

- An evaluation of the Advancing Quality programme in NHS North West in which acute hospitals are financially rewarded for meeting quality targets for a set of surgical care pathways. More details at www.advancingqualitynw.nhs.uk. The evaluation is being undertaken by a team from the University of Manchester (www.sdo.nihr.ac.uk/sdo2502008.html)
- A research evaluation of the North East Transformation System (NETS) which was set up by NHS North East and aims to transform health services in the region to promote excellence. It draws on ideas about improvement sometimes labelled “lean management” and particularly on the Virginia Mason Production System, pioneered by a US hospital, and the Toyota Production System. More details at <http://www.northeast.nhs.uk/vision/nets/>.

The SHAs sponsoring each innovation approached the SDO programme to fund these evaluations. This is the kind of research we want to fund – involving an important innovation of potential value to the wider NHS and a genuine research partnership between SHAs or NHS trusts/PCTs and their academic partners. Researchers should be aware that the SDO remit is different from that of the Health innovation and Education Clusters (HIEC) and should consider carefully where to submit their research proposal.

4. Call for proposals: researching promising innovations in healthcare delivery in the NHS

For this first call, we are particularly interested in proposals to research or evaluate “promising innovations in healthcare delivery” in the NHS in England and Wales. We are seeking innovations which are likely to have the following four characteristics:

- **Promising innovations in healthcare delivery** which have a substantial potential benefit and could be applied more widely in the NHS. Benefit might include greater efficiency and productivity, improved quality and safety, or better patient experience. The scale of potential impact is key, meaning innovations which could be widely used in the NHS and/or which have significant and ongoing benefits.
- **Being piloted, tested or implemented in a number of healthcare organisations** so that there is an opportunity to evaluate the innovation in practice, preferably in a number or range of settings and to understand how they work. Evaluations of a promising innovation in a single organisation will be considered if they can deliver generalisable findings of value to the wider NHS.
- **Involving the application of ideas or technologies introduced or transferred from other countries, sectors or settings** because innovations are rarely wholly new and often involve the transfer of ideas or the application of new technologies or methods into the healthcare setting. We have a broad definition of “ideas or technologies” and this could include a new organisational tool or technique, a new model or process for care delivery or a new technology that changes organisational routines. Evaluations of diagnostic or therapeutic technologies do not fall within the remit of the SDO programme and would more usually be undertaken through the NIHR Health Technology Assessment (HTA) programme.
- **Have not already been well explored and tested through research** so knowledge is lacking on impact, effectiveness, optimal implementation or adaptation, relationship to organisational context and generalisability and sustainability in the NHS. Where an innovation has already been demonstrated to work well and its implementation is well understood, then any case for its evaluation would be less convincing.

No study design or evaluation approach is being specified. Both formative and summative research will be considered including research to assess costs, benefits and impacts. The proposed evaluation should be appropriate in scale and method to the innovation to be researched. It should provide the kind of evidence which decision makers in the wider NHS would need both to decide whether to take up the innovation in their own organisations and to understand how to implement the innovation effectively in their own organisations.

5. Criteria and process for proposal selection

There is no formal cap on this call, although the programme has in mind that projects are likely to cost up to £500,000. Applicants should note that we anticipate funding a range of projects in both size and duration. Value for money will be an important consideration for all projects and project costs will be carefully scrutinised and must always be well justified.

The application process will be in **one stage**, and proposals which are found to be within the remit of this call will be reviewed by the SDO NHS Evaluations Panel which will shortlist a number to be further assessed by the SDO Commissioning Board. Feedback will be provided on all proposals which are within remit but not shortlisted, but which were considered by the SDO NHS Evaluations Panel. In addition, general feedback notes on the response to the call will be posted on the SDO website after the Commissioning Board has met.

Full proposals shortlisted for consideration by the Board, will be subject to external peer review before assessment by the SDO Commissioning Board. The Board will make recommendations to the Programme Executive Group (PEG) on whether to fund each proposal. Full proposals which are not funded will receive feedback from peer reviewers and the Commissioning Board.

The SDO NHS Evaluations Panel is predominantly made up of practising managers working in the NHS and service users/lay representatives. It also includes some academics with relevant research expertise. The primary criterion against which this Panel assesses outline proposals is that of **NHS need – whether the proposed research will be useful to research users in the NHS, and is likely to contribute to improving decision making**. It will use four main criteria to make this judgement:

- Relevance of the proposed research to the main areas or themes set out in this call for proposals.
- Relevance of the proposed research to the needs, interests, and current and future challenges for the management community in the NHS.
- Likelihood that the proposed research will produce findings which are useful to and capable of application by the management community in the NHS.
- Likelihood that the proposed research will promote greater engagement of the academic community of researchers and the practice community of healthcare managers. Proposed research should aim to develop links between academic institutions and NHS organisations in this area.

The SDO Commissioning Board consists primarily of academics with relevant research expertise but also contains some practising managers and service users/lay representatives. Its main concern is the **quality of the proposed research**. It uses two main criteria to make this judgement:

- Scientific rigour and quality of the proposed research, and the expertise and track record of the research team.
- Value for money of the proposed research, taking into account the overall cost and the scale, scope and duration of the work involved

The Commissioning Board will also draw upon the assessment of NHS need for a project made by the NHS Evaluations Panel, where appropriate.

6. General guidance for applicants

Our primary aim is to commission research which is well designed, will be effectively carried out by the research team and will provide findings which meet the requirements of the SDO programme and the needs of NHS management and leadership community it serves. We do not require or expect any particular methodological approach, disciplinary background or expertise, research team structure or other constraints on applicants. However, experience of reviewing applications over a number of years leads us to make the following general points which we urge applicants to take into account:

- **Theoretical framing and empirical methods.** In addressing issues in a way likely to lead to the wide applicability of findings, we encourage applicants to demonstrate the sound theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of their proposals and to show the theoretical and conceptual connections between their proposed research questions and empirical work. Empirical projects are likely to use a wide diversity of methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches, carefully matched to study questions and with clear understanding as to how findings from different empirical approaches will be integrated. Theoretical, unfocused and poorly justified empirical investigations are unlikely to be funded.
- **Research team makeup and expertise.** Substantial empirical projects are likely to utilise broad teams with significant input from diverse disciplines and a commitment to developing robust inter-disciplinary approaches. However, applicants should bear in mind the difficulties of managing large and diffuse project teams across multiple institutions and the need to show that applicants will commit an appropriate amount of time and effort to the project. The principal applicant should generally be the person who has contributed most to the intellectual and practical development of the proposal and who will take *de facto* responsibility for its implementation. The SDO programme will look favourably on proposals which include an element of research capacity-building.
- **Stakeholder involvement.** Applicants should demonstrate clear involvement of all relevant stakeholders (including, where relevant, local communities, lay people, service users, carers and minority ethnic communities as well as health care practitioners and managers) during the design, execution and dissemination of the research.
- **Linkage and exchange.** Successful projects are most likely to involve partnership working between experienced academic teams and those more closely involved in the design and delivery of services.
- **User involvement.** It is a core concern of the SDO programme that all commissioned projects should pay appropriate attention to the needs and experiences of service users and their carers. Proposed projects should be explicit in their explanations as to how the proposed work has potential implications for service delivery that could lead to enhanced public and community engagement.
- **Location of research.** The NIHR Service Delivery and Organisation programme is funded by the NIHR with contributions from WORD in Wales. Researchers from Scotland and Northern Ireland should contact NETSCC to discuss their eligibility to apply.

- **Research governance.** Applicants should ensure that their proposal complies with the Research Governance Framework. Successful applicants will be required to provide proof of research ethics committee approval for their project where required.
- **Costs.** NIHR programmes currently fund Higher Education Institutions (HEI) at a maximum of 80% of Full Economic Cost (except for equipment over £50,000 – 100%). For non-HEI institutions, NIHR may fund 100% of costs. However, the SDO programme reserves the right to award a grant for less than this maximum and for less than the amount sought by applicants where appropriate.

7. Dissemination and knowledge mobilisation

In outlining their research plans, the applicants should make clear how findings will be communicated effectively to a wide variety of academic, policy and service audiences. Researchers should bear in mind the two main objectives of the SDO programme (see Section 2) and recognise that the SDO programme seeks to fund projects which show a creative and proactive approach to engaging with the NHS management and leadership community. Researchers will be expected to deliver the following written outputs from any proposed research:

- an executive summary (500 words) and research summary (5000 words) with clearly identified policy, managerial and practice implications;
- a full report detailing all the work undertaken with supporting technical appendices (up to a maximum of 80,000 words).

Applicants should outline plans for conference, seminar and other forms of dissemination to go alongside written communications. Where appropriate, the proposed work should be designed and delivered in a way that is likely to lead to significant high-quality peer-reviewed publications. Projects lasting more than one year will be expected to deliver interim reports on progress and provisional findings every 6 months.

8. Application process and timetable

Any questions, queries or requests for clarification in relation to this call for proposals should be sent by email to sdo@southampton.ac.uk with the reference number and title for the call for proposals as the email header. Applicants should be aware that while every effort will be made to respond to enquiries in a timely fashion, these should be received at least two weeks before the call closing date.

The process of commissioning will be in **one stage** for this call and applicants should submit **full proposals** via the website by **1pm on 5 November 2009**. No late proposals will be considered and the deadline will be strictly observed. No paper-based only submissions will be considered although a paper copy with original signatures is required to be submitted within one week of the closing date in addition to the e-mailed application. Applicants whose proposal is deemed not to be within the remit of the SDO programme or of this call, will be notified approximately three weeks after the closing date.

Shortlisted applicants will be notified that their application is being proceeded to the commissioning board and applicants who are not shortlisted will be notified of this within approximately three weeks of the meeting of the SDO NHS Evaluations Panel meeting. Please note that these timings may be subject to change largely depending on the level of response to the call.



■ NIHR Service Delivery and Organisation programme

We intend to hold a briefing meeting in London before the next call to which representatives from SHAs, other NHS organisations and academic/research partner organisations will be invited. The purpose of the meeting will be to provide an opportunity for dialogue and discussion about the call before the next round in order to improve this new workstream. To receive further information please email sdo@southampton.ac.uk.