

Request for Proposals

Harnessing the power of social media to increase vaccination confidence and uptake

Date Due: August 1st – October 31st, 2022 (Rolling)

FUND MANAGER CONTACT INFORMATION

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Alliance for Advancing Health Online's Vaccine Confidence Fund II

Request for Proposals

About

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused global devastation with the deaths of over 6.25 million people, disrupting economic and social prosperity with a disproportionate impact on historically excluded or marginalized communities globally. It has also significantly changed our daily lives in all aspects – from the way we live, work, and engage with key public information, including through the use of social media and online platforms. Now, over a year after the first COVID-19 vaccines were introduced, while nearly 60% of the global population has been fully vaccinated, the relationship between vaccines and the public has changed. Amidst COVID-19 fatigue and complacency, we have seen:

- A shift from hesitancy driven by safety and efficacy concerns to hesitancy driven by a desire for individual freedom and rights¹
- An assumption that breakthrough infections caused by newer COVID-19 strains may mean that available vaccines are not working
- That local environment and community are influential in an individual's desire to be vaccinated
- That the COVID-19 epidemic has influenced willingness to vaccinate generally. For example, in a 15-country COVID-19 Perception study conducted by the Africa CDC, 1-in-6 people declared that they are now less likely to vaccinate than before the outbreak.²

This illustrates that there are still significant headwinds that must be explored and mitigated to promote vaccination confidence — for COVID-19 and routine immunizations — and drive uptake around the world.

The *Alliance for Advancing Health Online* is bringing collaborators from the technology, health, global development, and academic sectors together to advance public understanding of how social media can best be utilized to better understand and increase the health and resiliency of communities around the world. The *Alliance* launched its first program of research in June 2021- the Vaccine Confidence Fund ("the Fund"), which funded 33 research projects. To respond to the quickly evolving landscape, persistent unmet needs, insights and lessons learned via the first round of research, the Alliance is now launching a second round of funding to **explore how social media can be leveraged to increase vaccination confidence and uptake for COVID-19 and routine immunizations**. The Fund is managed by Global Impact and financially supported by Meta Platforms, Inc. ("Meta") and Merck & Co., Inc., Rahway, NJ, USA (known as MSD outside the United States and Canada) ("MSD"). Meta and MSD will not participate in the selection of fund recipients.

¹ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/covid-19-vaccine-confidence-one-year>

² <https://africacdc.org/download/covid-19-vaccine-perceptions-a-15-country-study/>

Areas of Interest

The Fund is seeking proposals that address this primary research question:

How can social media³ be utilized to understand and increase vaccination confidence and uptake?

The Vaccine Confidence Fund II will be funding projects that explore how social media can be leveraged to drive confidence in, and uptake of, COVID-19 vaccines and routine immunizations (i.e., childhood and adult immunizations included in the World Health Organization's recommendations for routine immunization⁴). Unlike the previous Fund, we are exclusively interested in projects that assess an intervention's ability to impact real world health outcomes. To that end, all submissions should go beyond online measurement techniques to also measure offline health behaviors and outcomes.

We also encourage projects that look at how health care workers can be equipped to leverage social media and online engagement to promote vaccination confidence and uptake in their communities, or among health care workers themselves.

Example interventions (not comprehensive) that applicants may want to consider exploring include:

- 1. Use of chatbots and messaging for offline health:** Projects that explore how online messaging services can be used to increase vaccine uptake, e.g., through reminders, availability information, and chatbots. Projects could also examine how social media can be used effectively by health care workers and organizations to reduce barriers to vaccine uptake.
- 2. How social media can be leveraged to reach priority populations:** We are interested in projects that meet people where they are at with health information to effectively drive offline action. This may include projects that increase awareness of and access to care for marginalized groups through relevant messaging, messengers (e.g., health workers) and/or outreach using social media.
- 3. Social media as a platform for public health messaging:** Social media offers the ability to reach both wide and targeted audiences with content in various formats, for example through ads, live videos, and comment exchanges. Projects that examine what effects these messaging campaigns have on health behavior change.
- 4. Online health communities and social norming interventions.** Projects that examine the effect of participation in online health groups, or use of social media for other community building, on vaccination confidence, intent to vaccinate, and vaccine uptake. Projects that explore how others (healthcare workers and individuals) can use social media to influence friends' and families' vaccination decisions.

Research proposals should include the following:

³ The Fund's definition of social media is meant to be broad and inclusive. Our social media definition includes: traditional social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, SnapChat) and other online platforms including: WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger Chat services; and online chatbots. This Fund is less interested in applications that focus on traditional SMS interventions.

⁴ https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/immunization/immunization_schedules/immunization-routine-table1.pdf?sfvrsn=c7de0e97_9&download=true

1. Well-defined problem statement that articulates a key research gap and specifies the population of interest, making it clear why this research is novel and how it will add to the current body of understanding.
2. Proposed research methodology and approach. Priority will be given to causal impact studies that leverage experimental design (RCT) and other causal inference methods (ex: regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences). Applications should address: data collection (including sampling where applicable), bias correction, a detailed analysis plan and measurement of key outcome variables.
3. A dissemination plan, including which academic journals and other media will be targeted.
4. CVs of key project personnel and organizational information. We encourage proposals that include creative teams, with partners from different sectors. Applicants should detail the expertise of the team in their proposed research method as well as track record of disseminating findings in the proposed outlets.
5. Timeline, budget and budget narrative.

The fund will **not** support research proposals that fail to present a coherent theory of change or rationale for how and why the proposed research and subsequent findings hold the potential to improve actual vaccine uptake.

Unlike the first Vaccine Confidence Fund, awards from this fund will be made on a rolling basis with a “first come, first served” approach to funding. We encourage applicants to submit their applications well before the final deadline (October 31st, 2022) to ensure that adequate funding remains available to support proposed budgets.

The Fund’s Principles

In addition to the requirements above, we also expect that successful proposals will demonstrate how they are in-line with the Fund’s guiding principles as listed below:

Equity: Given the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on historically marginalized or excluded communities globally, the Fund is committed to ensuring that equity is core to the work we support, and we prioritize equity as an essential principle. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines *equity* as the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. Equity includes the shifting of power to the communities of focus, shifting narratives, and language to be representative and inclusive of all experiences and identities. In practice, this means that the Fund is interested in proposals that focus on reaching historically marginalized, excluded or under-served populations. Additionally, we will look to ensure that the aggregate batch of proposals funded will provide learnings across a diverse range of geographies and communities.

Community Engagement: From research design through to research implementation and dissemination of findings, we highly encourage all applicants to engage proactively and authentically with the communities they are seeking to serve. This engagement would include seeking to understand the obstacles, potential solutions, and assets to build on, from the perspective of the community – ensuring that their voices and experiences are centered in the work. This also includes sharing allocated resources with the community, as with any other partners. The Fund will not finance proposals that appear to be

extractive in nature vis a vis the communities they seek to work in or learn from; we very much encourage applications that are done in partnership with individuals and institutions representative of the focus communities.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: This Fund highly encourages cross-sectoral collaboration and cross-fertilization of ideas from outside traditional disciplines. While not exhaustive, disciplines that this Fund would be interested in seeing further integrated and supported include behavioral sciences, communications (including marketing), data science, technology, and public health. **In practice, this means that we encourage and will give priority to proposals that include partners from different sectors** – an example of such a collaboration could include bringing together an academic institution skilled in research and study design, an implementing NGO based in the target community, and a marketing agency.

Scalable: Challenges and solutions to increasing vaccination confidence and uptake can often be context specific. While this Fund seeks to support historically excluded or marginalized communities globally, this Fund’s priority is also to surface insights that are generalizable and potentially scalable, at least within focus communities globally. In lay terms, this means that the Fund will prioritize research where the findings are potentially applicable to segments of the population or population cohorts rather than, for example, a single demographic within a single city.

Actionable: Research should be immediately actionable and valuable for the global health community, rather than highly theoretical. The Fund is looking for empirical research findings that hold the potential to improve and contribute to practical learning and implementation science in the public health community.

Information Sharing: The Fund views information sharing as critical, as it will enable the global health community to collaborate effectively and efficiently to solve the toughest challenges around increasing vaccination confidence and uptake. To that end, this Fund is interested in supporting proposals that are committed to disseminating insights, data, and learnings from their work as public goods for implementers to utilize in the design and execution of their vaccine campaigns and to continue to advance the global agenda around vaccination confidence and uptake. This is why would like to see a dissemination and/or publication plan for each proposal.

Selection Framework

All submitted research proposals will be reviewed in a standardized manner by both the Fund Manager and an Advisory Council. Applicants may want to consider the below questions when developing their proposal.

Domain	Considerations
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Importance: Does the proposal contain a coherent and compelling problem statement?• Alignment: Do the proposal’s research question(s) and research methods align with the Fund’s primary research question and stated priorities?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity: Does the proposal aim to support focus communities, or address underlying drivers of disparities, especially in trying to achieve health equity? • Novelty: Is the proposed topic / line of inquiry novel and does it have the potential to fill an important knowledge gap? • Applicability: Can the anticipated research results be used to shape and inform practical public health and technology interventions in the short-term? How can the results of this research be applied in communities beyond those studied?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility: Does the proposal identify a feasible approach to measuring intent / offline action / vaccine uptake? Are the proposed research methods technically and methodologically feasible given time and cost constraints (see more details below)? Do the proposed research methods adequately and appropriately consider privacy, e.g., do the methods design for user consent? • Engagement: Does the proposed research incorporate engagement with the focus communities before, during, and after the research? • Urgency: Does the approach reflect the immediate circumstances of the community? Are there any risks that those circumstances may change in the immediate future? • Team / Partnerships: Does the proposed research team have cross-sectoral areas of expertise? • Experience: Does the proposed research team have a proven track record of expertise in the proposed fields of study?
Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology: Does the research project employ a robust methodology that will produce clear and defensible findings? Do applicants have a solid plan for data collection, bias correction, a detailed analysis plan and measurement of key outcome variables? Again, please note that priority will be given to causal impact studies that leverage experimental design (RCT) and other causal inference methods (e.g., regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences).
Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination: Do the applicants outline a robust plan for dissemination of their results? For example, do they have target journals and a projected timeline for publication and/or an alternative plan to share results with the global public health community? Further, are the plans for dissemination realistic given the team’s experience to-date?
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget: Does the proposal include a budget and clear justification for key budget items?

Expectations of Grantees

- Participate in regular calls with Fund Manager.

- Submit a mid-term progress report and final report via a grant management platform. Reporting will be lightweight but meaningful and focus on reviewing anticipated versus actual outcomes, metrics, and milestones as submitted in the approved proposal. Reporting will include relevant charts, images, or captions that can be used to tell a narrative around the impact of their work and for dissemination purposes.
- Attend 1-2 virtual meetings and phone calls to provide status updates on research progress. Specific dates for reviews will be communicated at the time of award and based on the proposed research plan's timeline.
- Contribute standardized summarized findings, imagery, and other information to the Fund Manager in support of the compilation of a final "Insights Report."
- Drive dissemination of results/findings e.g., through publication in a journal or other proposed information-sharing approaches.

Submission of Proposals

The RFP process and receipt of proposals will be conducted via a web-based platform. Applicants should submit proposals via <https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/vcf2> by **October 31st, 2022**. Applicants will be required to complete all sections of the grant application directly in the platform. PDF versions of the proposal cannot be uploaded into the platform. Additional detailed instructions for submitting the proposal are also included in the link. For technology support, please contact VCInfo@charity.org.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that files are complete and transmitted by the deadline. The applicant bears full responsibility for data errors or omissions.

Key application requirements include:

- Project title, summary, and background/rationale that articulate a key research gap and/or specifies a target population (making it clear why this research is novel and how it will add to the current body of understanding)
- Research objectives and clear methodological approach, with timeline
- Measurement framework that outlines clear measures and intended plans for capturing data
- Dissemination plan
- Key project team members' CVs/resumes
- Budget and budget narrative (The budget template can be found [here](#).)

Ethical Considerations

The Fund will not support:

- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, disability, race, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, military service, or status.
- Religious organizations, unless the particular program will benefit a large portion of a community without regard to religious affiliation and does not duplicate the work of other agencies in the community.
- Organizations that engage in terrorist activities or are involved in any acts dangerous to human life that are in violation of the criminal laws of any country where we operate, in compliance with the U.S. Patriot Act as well as international anti-terrorism rules.

Conduct of Research and Informed Consent:

- Research must be of sound scientific merit and conducted in conformity with all applicable laws and regulations, and generally accepted standards of research. No clinical studies will be funded by the Fund.
- All grantees must obtain, in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, any necessary approvals of any research protocol and any data privacy authorization to use and disclose personal health information, if applicable.
- All grantees must use an informed consent form with all research participants. These should be uploaded to the Fund Manager upon completion of the project.

Review & Notification Process

Applications will be reviewed by the Fund Manager (housed at [Global Impact](#)) and the Advisory Council. Successful applicants will be notified on a rolling basis. Applicants that have been selected to receive a grant will be notified of selection, and final award determination will be dependent upon successful completion of background check/vetting and receipt of all necessary bank account information.

The Fund’s RFP window will remain open through October 31st, 2022. All grant proposals will be reviewed, scored, and selected (on a rolling basis) by November 30th, 2022.

Issuance of this RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Fund or the *Alliance*, nor does it commit the Fund or *Alliance* to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of applications. Further, the Fund reserves the right to reject any or all applications received.

Summary of Key Dates

Date	Activity
August 1st, 2022	- Application window opens
October 31st, 2022	- Submission deadline
August 2022 – November 2022	- Selection and grant awards (rolling basis)
January 2023 – December 2023	- Project implementation
June 2023 – July 2023	- Light-touch mid-term review of funded research projects
March 15th, 2024	- Final grantee reporting deadline

Contractual Terms & Conditions

The Fund’s decisions will be final in all matters relating to RFP solicitations, including whether or not to grant an award and the interpretation of the Fund’s RFP Terms and Conditions. By submitting a proposal, applicants affirm that they have read and agree to these Terms and Conditions. See grant agreement (see [full application](#)) for complete Terms and Conditions.

- The Fund is authorized to evaluate proposals submitted under its RFPs, to consult with outside experts, as needed, in evaluating proposals, and to grant or deny awards using criteria determined by the Fund to be appropriate and at the Fund’s sole discretion. The Fund’s decisions will be final in all matters relating to its RFPs, and applicants agree not to challenge any such decisions.

- All applicants to the Fund are expected to review and begin internal pre-approval of the Fund's standard grant agreement [see [full application](#)]. Given the time pressures in disbursing funds as soon as grantees are selected for funding, the Fund seeks to avoid protracted negotiations around grant agreement language. The Fund expects grant applicants to work internally within their institutions to seek pre-approval for as much of this existing language as possible prior to grant approval. The Fund reserves the right to rescind award decisions if protracted discussions around grant agreement language threaten the overall timeline of research projects.
- The Fund will not be required to treat any part of a proposal as confidential or protected by copyright, and may use, edit, modify, copy, reproduce, and distribute all or a portion of the proposal in any manner for the sole purposes of administering the Fund RFP website and evaluating the contents of the proposal.
- Feedback provided in a proposal regarding the Fund will not be treated as confidential or protected by copyright, and the Fund is free to use such feedback on an unrestricted basis with no compensation to the applicant. The submission of a proposal will not result in the transfer of ownership of any IP rights.
- All research projects must be in line with the terms of service of any platforms they use.
- Personal data submitted with a proposal, including name, mailing address, phone number, and email address of the applicant and other named researchers in the proposal may be collected, processed, stored, and otherwise used by the Fund for the purposes of administering the Fund's RFP website, evaluating the contents of the proposal, and as otherwise provided under the Fund's Terms and Conditions. If grantees collect or receive any confidential information, this information should only be used in furtherance of the funded project and grantees shall not disclose such information to any third party without the disclosing party's written consent. Confidential information is any information that the disclosing party identifies as confidential or proprietary information to the receiving party.
- Neither the Fund nor the applicant is obligated to enter into a business transaction as a result of the proposal submission. The Fund is under no obligation to review or consider the proposal.
- Applicants represent and warrant that they have authority to submit a proposal in connection with the Fund's RFP and to grant the rights set forth herein on behalf of their organization. All awards provided by the Fund in connection with this RFP shall be used only in accordance with applicable laws and shall not be used in any way, directly or indirectly, to facilitate any act that would constitute bribery or an illegal kickback, an illegal campaign contribution, or would otherwise violate any applicable anti-corruption, anti-terrorism, or political activities law.

Awards granted in connection with RFP proposals will be subject to any additional Terms and Conditions contained in the grant agreement (or, in some cases, other mechanisms) pursuant to which the award funding will be provided. The Fund will pay grantees the total amount specified in the grant agreement. Grantees may not use funds for any purpose other than the project. The Fund reserves the right to request repayment of any grant funds used in breach of the signed grant agreement, and reserves the right to modify, suspend or discontinue payment for breach of the signed grant agreement. Applicants understand and acknowledge that they will need to agree to these Terms and Conditions to receive an award. See grant agreement for complete Terms and Conditions.