UNIVERSITY of RWANDA

Guidelines for Application and Selection of Research Grants in Priority Areas of Vaccines, Immunization and Health Supply Chain Management (VIHSCM).

Regional Centre of Excellence for Vaccines, Immunisation and Health Supply Chain Management (RCE-VIHSCM), 2021

Approved by the Academic Senate of May 11,2021

East African Community
One People, One Destiny

KFW

Acronyms

DRIC: Directors of Research and Innovation Committee

DVC-AAR: Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of academic affairs and research

EAC: East African Community

RCE: Regional Centre of Excellence

RCE-VIHSCM: Regional Centre of Excellence for Vaccines, Immunization and Health Supply Chain Management

PI: Principal Investigator

UR: University of Rwanda

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

One vital part of health systems is an efficient supply chain management for the provision of health institutions with medical commodities including essential medicines, vaccines, diagnostics, medical equipment and products for family planning.

The East African Community (EAC) established the Regional Centre of Excellence (RCE) for Vaccines, Immunization and Health Supply Chain Management (VIHSCM) in 2015 at the University of Rwanda (UR) in Kigali in order to address challenges of supply chain management of vaccines and other health commodities by strengthening the human resource capacity.

The ***mission*** of the EAC RCE-VIHSCM is to contribute to solving existing performance challenges of the health supply chain management (HSCM) system in the EAC region through the generation of knowledge and its translation into policy and practice. Among the RCE's ***objectives*** are achieving excellence in research and dissemination of knowledge that informs best and evidence-based practices for VIHSCM and supports implementation of innovation in VIHSCM.

Even though the number of peer-reviewed publications on VIHSCM in the EAC region has increased over the past years, there is still a dire need for the creation and expansion of more solid evidence base upon which policies and best practices to improve medicine supply chain management can be based. Research conducted by national researchers, who have an in-depth understanding of the context and local realities, is inadequate.

For this reason, the RCE-VIHSCM in collaboration with health supply chain management experts has identified gaps and key areas where further research on VIHSCM in the EAC is needed:

Topic 1. Access to essential medicines and vaccines
Topic 2. Use of innovation and technologies in VIHSCM
Topic 3. Effective management of vaccines
Topic 4. Supply Chain workforce : availability and strategies to build HR
Topic 5. Quality of medicine
Topic 6. Financing of medicines and vaccines

1.2 Objectives of the grant

The general objective of the grant is to enhance capacity building by promoting regional research in the six priority areas of VIHSCM in the EAC region.

The specific objectives are to:

- generate new knowledge relevant to the six priority areas in the EAC region
- strengthen the link between evidence generation and health policy making
- enhance experience exchange between the researchers in the EAC Member States
- stimulate capacity building for research and interest of (junior) researchers in VIHSCM

- to promote female participation in research

Only VIHSCM-related research proposals meeting the following criteria are eligible for support:

- ✓ The research proposal must be related to the priority areas of RCE-VIHSCM, and broadly contributing to SGD#3.
- ✓ The research proposal must not duplicate a proposal submitted to another national or international agency for simultaneous consideration;
- ✓ The research project must be original and not received by another funding partly or entirely from another funding organization.

1.3 EAC RCE-VIHSCM Grant Application Requirements

A complete application file with its annexes must include the following items:

- Cover letter
- Completed proposal application form (appendix - I)
- Budget and justification of budget lines
- Data collection form(s)
- Informed consent forms (in English and local language)
- Short CVs of investigators including 1 page of relevant publications
- Proof of affiliation to an EAC based institution for only Principal Investigator (PI)
- Letter of support from the proposed grant recipient's institution

Applications should be always submitted electronically. The proposals should be written in English, easy to understand and respecting the scientific writing standards and ethics.

1.4 Eligibility for funding

All public universities and public research institutions in the EAC, as well as Government organizations with expertise in the VIHSCM based in the East African Community region are eligible for funding. VIHSCM-related scientists, researchers and scholars based in EAC countries are encouraged to apply as well. However, the Principal Investigator (PI) shall be an EAC national. Nevertheless, the research team may include researchers from outside the EAC. Proposals respecting a gender quota of 40% for women will be prioritized. In addition, collaborations between research institutions from different EAC Partner States on multi-country proposals are encouraged.

1.5 Award and duration

The award amount will be a maximum of EUR 20.000 for each proposal, and the research project shall be implemented within a period of 12 months from the date ethics (IRB) approval has been obtained.

1.6. Call for proposals

The call shall specify the following:

- Template format
- Deadline for submission of proposals
- Selection process
- Timeline
- Contact person

1.7. Submission of Proposals

All proposals will be submitted electronically and in English language only. The applications must be signed by the Principal Investigator and must be accompanied by a letter of support signed by the Head of the concerned institution. Unsigned copies will be considered incomplete and will not be processed.

2. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROPOSAL PREPARATION

The proposal application will include the cover sheet, the proposal summary, the background, objectives, methodology, timeframe, beneficiaries, references and proposal budget. The application will also include data collection forms, informed consent and CV of investigators in its appendices. Detailed instructions can be found in the Appendix I – Application Form.

Concise proposals would assist reviewers in effectively dealing with them. Therefore, the Project Description should not exceed 10 pages (please follow instructions, accordingly).

The proposal document must be typed in MS Word using font size 12 "Times New Roman". All proposal pages must have 2.5 cm margins at the top, bottom and on each side. Line spacing must be 1.1.

3. PROPOSAL ASSESSMENT

Proposals received by the RCE-VIHSCM are immediately allotted a unique Grant Proposal Number which is referred to in all subsequent communications. All proposals will be reviewed utilizing the merit review criteria, described in greater length below.

3.1 Review Process

The review process is carried out in three steps, i.e. administrative screening followed by technical & scientific review and final selection.

3.1.1 Administrative Screening

All proposals received before the deadline will be carefully screened to check completeness in all respects and compliance to administrative requirements. The administrative screening will be done by a Grant management committee that will be appointed by RCE-VIHSCM in collaboration with

UR research directorate. The RCE may contact the PI for further information. All proposals short-listed in the administrative screening will be submitted to the experts' reviewers for technical & scientific review.

3.1.2 Technical & Scientific review

A group of experts' reviewers will be identified and appointed by the RCE management team. They will evaluate the proposals based on the assessment scorecard. Each proposal will be reviewed by three members of the Committee.

	Criteria	Sub-criteria	Details	Weight (100%)
1	Proposal	Scientific merit and feasibility	Reflect on the proposed rationale, approach and methodology.	15 %
			Reflect on the scientific, ethical, logistics and technical feasibility as proposed.	15 %
			Reflect on extent to which proposal clearly addresses one of six priority VIHSCM areas	10 %
			Reflect on extent to which proposal clearly focuses on equitable access to vaccines and medicines	5 %
			Reflect on extent to which proposal addresses one or more of cross-sectional areas identified, and/or is a multi-country proposal	5 %
2	Track record of joint applicants	Past research	Reflect on past contributions to knowledge production (e.g. journal articles, book chapters, designs, performances, etc.) of the team.	10 %
3	Gender & capacity building	Gender	Research team consists of at least 40% women	5 %
		Capacity building	Reflect on extent to which a component of capacity building for research and stimulating interest of (junior) researchers in VIHSCM is included	5%
4	Impact	Impact on knowledge production	Reflect on extent to which proposed research significantly advance discovery and understanding on VIHSCM in the EAC region	5 %
		Wider impact	It is clear how such impact will be measured and followed up	5 %
5	Collaboration	Liaison within EAC	The research promotes experience exchange between the region Partners States, institutions and researchers	5 %
6	Dissemination	Publication	There is a clear dissemination plan, including commitment for publication	5 %
7	Realistic plan and budget	Plan of activities	Realistic plan with timelines	5%

		Specific Budget lines for research	Detailed Budget with unit costs, as well as budget justification	5%
	TOTAL			**100%**

After the review, each reviewer will send the scores to the RCE-VIHSCM grant management committee.

3.1.3. Selection of proposals for funding

The University of Rwanda Directors of Research and Innovation Committee (DRIC) will meet to triangulate and validate the external reviewers' scores and recommend proposals to be funded. The DRIC is a standing committee of the UR, chaired by the UR Director of Research and Innovation and composed of Directors of Research and Innovation from the 6 Colleges of UR. The criteria in sections 3.1.2. and 3.1.4. will guide the deliberations of DRIC. The decision from DRIC will be considered as final.

3.1.4 Equality criteria for distribution of grants among EAC countries and researchers

The selection process will be primarily based on the proposal's scientific and technical merit outlined in section 3.1.2. In addition, the process will apply equality criteria to give to all EAC partner states and to as many researchers as possible, an opportunity to win the grant.
First, all proposals will be marked out of 100 marks. After administrative and technical evaluation, proposals will be listed on descending order based on the marks. Proposals that will be marked 70/100 and above will be eligible for funding. Before awarding funding to a second proposal from the same EAC country, the DRIC will first make sure that proposals from other EAC countries that have 70% and above are served. The maximum number of grants won by the same country should not be above 1/3 of total grants during the same round of call for proposals.
Secondly, the PIs should not receive more than one grant per round of call for research proposals. The maximum amount per one proposal is Euro 20,000. All winners have to comply with German Financial Cooperation / KFW funding requirements before being awarded the grants.

3.1.5. Feedback to applicants

The UR Research Director will submit the minutes of the selection meeting of the DRIC to the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of academic affairs and research (DVC-AAR) and will request him/her to issue feedback letters to all the applicants indicating the status of their applications. The minutes and compiled report of the proposal's evaluation process will be shared with KFW for approval.

3.2 Condition of a Compulsory Agreement

The agreement will be signed between authorised representatives of two institutions; the University of Rwanda on one side and the institution where the PI of the selected proposal is employed on the other side before receiving the award (please see Section 4 for agreement conditions). For applicants from the University of Rwanda, the UR-SPIU will do direct management of the contract.

Applicants of Grants are informed that only RCE-VIHSCM may make commitments, awards or authorize the expenditure of funds. An institution / PI providing financial / personnel commitments, in the absence of an agreement, would be doing so at own risk.

4. GENERAL CONDITIONS RELATING TO THE AGREEMENT CONCERNING RCE-VIHSCM GRANT

The following are general conditions which become effective if an agreement is signed between the UR and the Institution of a PI whose proposal is recommended for funding. Applicants to the Grant are strongly advised to read these conditions before submitting a proposal, as in case their proposal is recommended for funding and their respective Institution signs an Agreement with the UR, they will have to strictly abide by these conditions.

4.1 Principal Investigator (PI) and His / Her Employer Organization/ Institution

a. The Organization/Institution and the PI (or Responsible Technical Officer), who must have an employment at the Organization/Institution for a period that covers the suggested research timeframe), shall be jointly responsible for all the technical and administrative aspects of the work referred to in the proposal.
b. The Organization/Institution is required to notify the UR and RCE-VIHSCM immediately of knowledge that the PI will cease or ceases to be an employee of the Institution or is no longer continuing the responsibilities described in the proposal. Under such circumstances the UR and RCE-VIHSCM has the right to:
    (i) Cancel the funding or;
    (ii) Agree to continue the project under a new PI proposed by the Organization/Institution and approved by UR and RCE-VIHSCM

4.2 Financial Arrangements

Payments shall be made into the bank account(s) of the Organization/Institution as specified in the Agreement and in accordance with the schedule of payments contained therein.

Disbursements will be made based on the following achieved milestones:

- Milestone I: upon signing the contract, ethical clearance and approved research protocol (40%)
- Milestone II: upon submission and approval of draft report by the RCE-VHSCM grant management committee (35%)

- Milestone III: upon submission of a proof for publication of research in peer-reviewed journals (25%)

The funds allocated to this agreement will not be used to cover any item that is not mentioned in the budget section of the application form and shall be expended only in accordance with its terms. In the event of this Agreement being cancelled under any circumstances, the Institution shall refund to the RCE-VIHSCM the balance of uncommitted funds/the total amount of the agreement and the report of the expenditures.

4.3. Monitoring

The Grant management committee will also be responsible for follow up the implementation of the research and this will include onsite monitoring. The committee will review and approve all technical and financial report at the end of each milestone and recommend the disbursement of the next instalment.

4.4 Relationship and Responsibility of Parties

The Organization/Institution shall be solely responsible for the manner in which work on the project is carried out and accordingly shall assume full liability for any damage arising from research or other technical services under this Agreement. The detailed roles and responsibilities of each party will be specified in the agreements.

4.5 Equipment and Supplies

Unless otherwise agreed, and subject to subparagraph below, any equipment acquired under this agreement shall become the property of the Organization/Institution and the Principal Investigator shall be jointly responsible for the proper safeguard, maintenance and care of all equipment acquired during the grant period.

4.6. Reporting requirements

a. The Institution or Principal Investigator shall correspond with RCE-VIHSCM for any follow-up, submission of reports, requests for further release of funds, and any other technical matters.

b. The Principal Investigator shall submit technical and financial reports to RCE-VIHSCM in accordance with the following provisions:
   i. Technical reports shall be forwarded through and countersigned by the authorized official of the Institution. ***The day ethical clearance is obtained by the Principal Investigator for the project will be considered as the starting date of the project.***
   ii. ***Activity plan should be submitted according to RCE-VIHSCM format within two weeks after receiving the notification of award (template will be provided).***
   iii. Monthly activity report should be submitted to RCE-VIHSCM.

iv. A compiled ***progress report*** (technical and financial) should be submitted according to RCE-VIHSCM format of progress reports (template will be provided) every three months.

v. Before the expiry date of the project, a ***final report*** (technical and financial) shall be submitted according to RCE-VIHSCM format of final reports (template will be provided)

vi. Financial reports together with supporting documents should be forwarded to RCE-VIHSCM, after being jointly certified by the Institution's chief technical officer and the Principal Investigator. Original supporting documents should be kept for a period of 10 years at the recipient institution for audit purposes (upon request).

vii. In instances of failure to use the funding during the approved period, or misuse of the funding, the recipient institution, will have to reimburse the total amount that would have not been spent or misused.

4.7. Research Involving Human Subjects

a. **Ethical Aspects:** It is the responsibility of the Institution and the PI to safeguard the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research supported in whole or in part by funds from the Grant, in accordance with the appropriate national code of ethics or legislation, if any, and in the absence thereof, the Helsinki Declaration and any subsequent amendments. Such funds may be used only to support investigation where:
   i. The rights and welfare of subjects involved in the research are adequately protected,
   ii. Freely given informed consent by participants has been obtained,
   iii. An ethical clearance is provided to the project by a local / national research ethics review committee, and
   iv. Any special national requirements have been met.

b. **Protection of Subjects:** Without prejudice to obligations under applicable laws, the Institution shall make appropriate arrangements to eliminate or mitigate the consequences to subjects or their families in the case of death, injury or illness resulting from the conduct of research.

4.8 Publicity

The Institution and the Principal Investigator shall not refer to the relationship of RCE-VIHSCM to the project or to products or processes connected with the project, in any statement or material of a publicity or promotional nature issued for commercial purposes, or with a view to financial benefit.

Scientific publications using data from these grants shall mention the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) funding through RCE-VIHSCM.

Prof. Alexandre LYAMBABAJE

Vice Chancellor

Appendices

APPENDIX I. APPLICATION FORM

COVER SHEET OF APPLICATION FORM

SHADED AREA FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	
DATE RECEIVED (dd/mm/yy)	RCE-VIHSCM PROPOSAL ID NUMBER **RCE-VIHSCM /……..**
NAME OF COUNTRY OF APPLICANT	HAS THIS PROPOSAL BEEN SUBMITTED TO ANOTHER AGENCY FOR FUNDING YES ☐ NO ☐
NAME OF ORGANIZATION/INSTITUTION	IF YES, WRITE NAME OF AGENCY WITH ACRONYM
TITLE OF PROPOSAL (120 characters maximum):	
WHAT IS THE PRIORITY AREA ADDRESSED BY THIS PROPOSAL? (more than one area can apply) ☐ Topic 1: Access to essential medicines and vaccines ☐ Topic 2: Use of innovation and technologies in VIHSCM ☐ Topic 3: Effective management of vaccines ☐ Topic 4: Supply chain workforce: availability and strategies to build HR ☐ Topic 5: Quality of medicines	
NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)	
LAST NAME:	FIRST NAME(S):
TITLE:	
POSTAL ADDRESS:	
NAME OF PI's INSTITUTIONAL HEAD:	
ADDRESS	

E-MAIL 1:	E-MAIL 2:
☐ UNIVERSITY ☐ GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION ☐ OTHER	
REQUESTED AMOUNT (EUR .....)	PROPOSED DURATION (12 MONTHS MAX): .....
SIGNATURE OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	SIGNATURE (AND STAMP) OF INSTITUTIONAL HEAD
NAME & DATE:	NAME & DATE:

1. PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Please provide one page executive summary, **up to 500 words**. The summary should include (i) rationale (ii) objectives, (iii) methods, (iv) expected outcomes (national / regional perspective)

2. BACKGROUND

Please provide a **2-page background**. Background includes literature review of previous studies on the subject (global / regional / national), stating its public health importance and rationale of proposing the study this time at this place on this population, considering gender, equity and human rights (please quote references using a standardized citation style)

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 General objective: the overall aim expected to be achieved from this research

3.2 Specific objectives: 2-3 clearly stated SMART specific objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to EAC, time-bound), which break-down the general objective

1.

2.

3.

4. METHODOLOGY

An appropriate clear description of activities and information on the general plan of work should be provided here. The methodology section should describe;

4.1 Study design (observational / experimental, mentioning specific type, accordingly)

4.2 Study setting / data sources (clearly indicating where the study will be conducted: country, city, institution(s), department(s), etc.). This includes settings for primary data collection, and specific sources of secondary data (e.g. medical records; health registers; insurance registers; national census records, etc.)

4.3 Study population (study subjects and their respective characteristics)

4.4 Sample size (sample size assumptions / estimate)

4.5 Sampling method (method to be used to select subjects ensuring a representative sample of the target population; inclusion and exclusion criteria)

4.6 Data collection (data collection method(s) and tool(s) as appropriate: ***data collection tool(s) to be annexed to the proposal*** but sections / variables described under this section; focus group/interview guidelines; checklists; anthropometric measurements (e.g. weight, height, circumference, BMI, WHR, etc.) with reference to measurement / estimation method; biological measurements (laboratory investigations with reference to measurement / estimation method / kit); relevant definitions of exposure(s) and outcome(s) as appropriate to proposal; background / number of data collectors, etc.

4.7 Data management plan (A clear plan of data coding, entry, cleaning, and analysis to be used, considering disaggregation of collected data by sex, age and socio-economic quintiles. Please mention specific statistical tests and references software)

4.8 Coordination, monitoring and quality control (plan for field work supervision to ensure proper / scientific data collection, data management, quality control indicators, etc.)

4.9 Ethical considerations:

All research proposals submitted for the Grant must adhere to ethical conduct of research on human subjects. This commitment will be ensured by the RCE-VIHSCM Selection Committee. The PIs are required to obtain clearance from an official Ethical Review Committee/ Institutional Review Board once the proposal has been awarded, which is a ***condition*** for consideration for funding. Litigation involving human research must be accompanied by: (a) copy of ethical clearance certification and (b) the informed consent documents (in English and local language).

5. TIME FRAME OF PROPOSED ACTIVITIES (Gantt chart)

Please indicate the activities to be conducted and check the corresponding timing by marking (X) or shade the appropriate cell(s). Overlap is expected (i.e. more than one activity in certain months)

Starting Month:_____ ***Year***:_____
Expected End Month:_____ ***Year***:_____

Activity	**Year 1**											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Milestone I: obtain ethics approval from relevant authority												
Submission of the Progress Report*												
Milestone II: submission of draft report												
Submission of the Final technical and Financial Report*												
Milestone III: submission scientific publication of research												

6. BENEFICIARIES OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Who are the direct/ indirect beneficiaries of the study, what are the benefits both groups [direct / indirect] are likely to accrue in the short or long term.

7. REFERENCES CITED

Any references cited should be listed here, using standardized citation style (e.g. Vancouver Style). This includes citations for scientific papers, books, reports, laboratory methods, standardized questionnaires / check-lists, biostatistical software, etc. References should be listed in numerical ascending order with corresponding citations in the text, marked as shown [#].

- Journal articles should start with name of author (with suffix et al, if more than six authors), followed by title of study, name of journal, volume, page numbers and **year** of publication (in bold at the end).
- Books should start with the title, followed by Editors, Publishers, and **year** of publication (in bold at the end).
- Reports should start with title, followed by name of writer, reference to organization for which it was written, reference number of report if any and **year** of reporting (in bold at the end)

8. PROPOSAL BUDGET WITH JUSTIFICATIONS

Budget breakdown should be provided in a tabular format, as shown below, with the full term of requested budget from the Grant. The breakdown should be restricted to 2 pages.

Instructions for budget items:

i. Personnel

RCE-VIHSCM expects that the PIs and Co-Investigators will be faculty / researchers at eligible institutes, with research as one of their normal functions. RCE funds will not pay basic salaries for researchers but **may contribute to allowances** for PIs and Co-Investigators. Personnel costs may also include compensation for data collectors, field workers, lab technicians, data managers, etc. However, the personnel cost could not exceed 50% of the total grant budget.

ii. Material and Supplies

The budget must indicate the general types of expendable materials and supplies required, with their estimated costs. The breakdown should be more detailed when the cost is substantial.

iii. Equipment

The Grant does not support general purpose equipment, such as a personal computers, telephone sets, photocopying / facsimile machines etc.

iv. Human Subjects

The needs for requiring direct compensation of participants (which is not generally recommended) must be fully justified (e.g. transportation, hot meals, etc.)

v. Travel

Travel and its relation to the proposed activities must be specified and itemized by destination and cost. The Grant does not support travel outside the EAC region.

vii. Field Work

Funds may be requested for field work necessary for data collection other than the personnel cost.

viii. Training

Training expenses should be minimized to only specialized training needed for staff using related research equipment or improving research skills

ix. Dissemination of Results

The cost involved must be in accordance with the proposed dissemination plan such as local conferences, publications and dissemination workshops. Participants are encouraged to contribute to dissemination activities within the EAC region.

x. Other Costs

The budget must identify and itemize other anticipated costs not included under the headings above. Examples include telecommunications and photocopying. Reference books, periodicals and other scientific literature may be charged to the Grant only if they are specifically required for the project.

OUTLINE OF THE BUDGET (in EUR)

Total Amount Requested: EUR .....

Budget Breakdown

No	ITEM OR ACTIVITY	Amount Requested from RCE–VIHSCM Grant	Amount available from other Sources	JUSTIFICATION
1.	Personnel* - -			
2.	Materials & Supplies - -			
3.	Equipment - -			
4.	Local Travel - -			
5.	Field work - -			

6.	Training -			
7.	Dissemination of results** -			
8.	Other costs** -			
	Total EUR			

*Up to 30 % of total budget; **Up to 5 % of total budget;

9. APPENDICES

Please provide as appendices:

- Data collection form(s)
- Informed consent forms (in English and local language)
- Short CVs of investigators including 1 page of relevant publications
- Proof of affiliation to an EAC based institution for only Principal Investigator (PI)
- Letter of support from the proposed grant recipient institution

APPENDIX II

Certification for Proposal

I certify to the best of my knowledge that:

i. All statements in the proposal entitled

"……
……
……"
(Excluding scientific hypotheses and scientific opinions) are true and complete, and

ii. The text and graphics herein as well as any accompanying publications or other documents, unless otherwise indicated, are the original work of the signatories or individuals working under their supervision.

I agree to accept responsibility for the scientific conduct of the project and to provide the required project reports, if an award is recommended from the RCE-VIHSCM Grant, as a result of this proposal.

NAME (TYPED)	**Signature**	**Date (dd/mm/yy)**
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR		
CO-INVESTIGATOR-1		
CO- INVESTIGATOR-2		
CO- INVESTIGATOR-3		

INSTITUTIONAL HEAD OR HIS/HER AUTHORIZED REPRESENTAVE		
NAME (TYPED)	**Signature**	**Date (dd/mm/yy)**
TITLE		
TELEPHONE NUMBER	FAX NUMBER	E-MAIL ADDRESS