



ODI Working Paper Series on Public Finance and Service Delivery Call for proposals and papers

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I. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in better understanding the relationship between public finance and service delivery. How can public finance structures, systems, and processes support efficient, effective, and equitable public spending on public services? While the mechanics and technical issues of public finance within certain sectors are increasingly well understood, its links to broader aspects of sector management and interactions with varying institutional and political contexts require further exploration.

ODI's [working paper series on public finance and service delivery \(WPS\)](#) aims to address these issues by promoting practical, policy-relevant research that contributes to a more inclusive and interdisciplinary agenda on public finance and service delivery with greater learning across professions, specialisms and sectors. The first working paper in the series, [Public finance and service delivery: What's new, what's missing, what's next?](#) takes stock of this emerging agenda, identifies the blind spots in the current discussions, and makes proposals on how the agenda can be further advanced. This call for proposals and papers sets out in more detail the kind of research we are looking for, across two types of contributions:

- A **call for proposals**, soliciting proposals of full research projects including data collection and analysis. This option is most suitable for researchers who have an interesting research idea or question and are looking for financial support to implement it (further details in section IV). A successful proposal submission will be granted up to £20,000.
- A **call for papers**, requesting an extended abstract of a working paper. This option is most suitable for practitioners or researchers who have already gathered interesting insights and findings based on previous data collection and analysis, or personal observation and experience, and are looking for financial support to turn them into a publication (further details in section V). A successful paper submission will be granted up to £8,000.

The working paper series and the financial support provided to accepted submissions is funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation \(BMGF\)](#).

II. Objective of Working Paper Series

The working paper series (WPS) aims to contribute to the body of knowledge at the nexus of public finance and service delivery, by offering a platform for stakeholders within the public finance management (PFM), service sector and decentralisation communities of practice to share their experiences and insights, discuss community challenges and develop actionable policy recommendations. Using the insights and policy recommendations, the working paper series also aims to influence policy makers in government and development partner organisations to think about more inclusive, multidisciplinary approaches and reforms to strengthen public spending on service delivery.

The series aims to cover a range of broad themes including:

- Orienting PFM systems to support service provision
- Financing arrangements for service providers
- Fiscal decentralisation and services
- Political institutions and spending on services
- The role of technology in facilitating effective spending on services



III. Call for contributions to the Working Paper Series

1. What research are we looking for?

This call for contributions to the working paper series seeks to attract practical, policy-relevant research proposals and papers on public finance and service delivery that go beyond describing and analysing PFM processes, tools, and mechanisms as they broadly relate to their presumed role in service delivery. We are looking for research that empirically explores how PFM practices link with different aspects of broader sector management (e.g. functional assignment, performance monitoring, staff management, interinstitutional coordination, etc.), and how their application and effectiveness might vary given the diversity of institutional and socio-political contexts found across and within countries. The working paper series puts a premium on submissions that propose innovative research questions and approaches that are inspired by interdisciplinary thinking.

In terms of geographical focus, we are primarily looking for research on Sub-Saharan Africa, although contributions examining other low- and middle-income country contexts will be considered as well if they provide particularly interesting insights or comparisons. We welcome research on any service sector (education, water, agriculture, transportation, public works, etc.) while taking a particular interest in health. We are also keen to include research using comparative frameworks that contrast different geographical areas (within or across countries), service sectors, institutional arrangements, or procedural approaches. The research can use a qualitative, mixed-methods or a purely quantitative approach. Primary data collection in the field is encouraged but not required. Making use of administrative datasets is welcomed.

2. Who are we looking to contribute?

This call is looking for contributions from **academic and non-academic researchers, practitioners, and experts** from a range of disciplines and sectors with an interest in conducting policy-oriented research on public finance and service delivery. Given our interest in advancing inclusive, multidisciplinary research, we encourage collaborations across different communities of practice and professions.

This call invites two different types of contributions to the working paper series, namely

- A **call for proposals**, soliciting proposals of full research projects including data collection and analysis. This option is most suitable for researchers who have an interesting research idea or question and are looking for financial support to implement it (further details in section IV).
- A **call for papers**, requesting an extended abstract of a working paper. This option is most suitable for practitioners or researchers who have already gathered interesting insights and findings based on previous data collection and analysis, or personal observation and experience, and are looking for financial support to turn them into a publication (further details in section V).

IV. Call for proposals

The call for proposal is aimed at researchers and practitioners with an original research idea on the role of public finance in service delivery. The research should draw on empirical evidence and have practical policy relevance aimed at strengthening service delivery outcomes. ODI aims to support putting innovative research ideas into action by providing financial support to conduct data collection and analysis as well writing up the research findings into a working paper format to be published in the working paper series.



1. Expected outputs for successful submissions

Submissions that are selected for funding are expected to produce the following outputs over the course of the funding period:

- A peer reviewed working paper presenting key findings of the research outlined in the proposal.
- One additional output (a blog post, briefing note, policy brief or conference presentation – to be agreed with ODI) to promote the working paper and enhance the dissemination of key findings and policy recommendations emerging from the research.

The outputs will be reviewed according to ODI's peer review and quality assurance process. Peer review, editing and publication costs for the working paper and additional outputs will be funded by ODI and do not need to be budgeted for in applicant submissions. The ODI team will work closely with selected applicants to support and enable dissemination opportunities.

2. Project timeline

	No later than:
Deadline for proposal submission	16th May 2021
Announcement of accepted proposals	30 th June 2021
Deadline for submitting full draft of working paper	30 th April 2022
Working paper returned from peer reviewers	30 th June 2022
Deadline for submitting revised draft of working paper	31 st August 2022
Publication of working paper in the working paper series before this date	31 st December 2022

3. Financial support

To support the research outlined in the proposal and produce the outputs listed above, applicants may apply for an amount of up to £20,000 in funding (or USD or EUR equivalent). In order to claim the endowment, the budget document [ODI WPS Budget](#) outlining the anticipated expenses must be submitted along with the proposal. Funds will be paid upon delivery of draft and final deliverables but advanced payment for some research activities may be considered.

4. Submission requirements

All applicants are required to submit the following documents:

- Research prospectus in narrative form (approx. 2000 words) outlining research questions, motivation, and policy relevance (potential target group of policy recommendations), research methods and analytical approach, timeline for data collection and analysis. The research prospectus should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_WPS_Prospectus
- Application form [ODI WPS Application](#). The application forms should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_WPS_Application
- An up-to-date Curriculum Vitae. The CV should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_CV
- Proposed Budget (as per [ODI WPS Budget](#)). The proposed budget should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_WPS_Budget



Proposals must adhere to the following criteria:

- Applications should be original and ensure the proposed work does not already exist or should be substantively different to already existing work.
- All applications should be in English and stay within the word limits provided.
- Only ODI application forms and budget templates will be accepted. Any modifications to the format will not be accepted.
- All costs in the budget must be provided in GBP, USD or EUR and be inclusive of all relevant taxes and overheads.
- Applicants are strictly prohibited from using any funding for activities that may be construed as [lobbying](#).
- Applicants must ensure the proposed research will be carried out to the highest ethical standard. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that potential ethical issues relating to the research project are identified in the proposal and brought to the attention of the relevant approval or regulatory body.
- ODI funding granted through this call for proposal may be used in conjunction with other funding sources; however, it is important to demonstrate in the application form how ODI funding will add value. The research specific findings, conclusions and policy recommendations presented in the ODI working paper cannot have been published elsewhere previously. Funded research that will go on to be published elsewhere must be open access in line [with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation guidelines](#). This includes the publication of all anonymised supporting datasets.
- This call for proposals is not able to support individuals or organisations whose name appears on the [Office of Foreign Assets Control \(OFAC\) list](#) or who is a citizen or resident of an OFAC-sanctioned country (currently Cuba, Iran, Syria, North Korea, and the Crimea Region of Ukraine) with which the Gates Foundation is not permitted to do business.
- Prospective awards must demonstrate value for money. This is defined as demonstrating economy, efficiency and effectiveness within the proposed budget.

5. Deadline for submissions

Submissions, including the research prospectus, the application form, the CV and the budget document should be sent to DPFresearchcall@odi.org.uk, using the subject line 'Submission: PFM working paper series' no later than 23:59 BST (UTC+1) on the 16th May 2021. Any applications received after this time, or any incomplete submissions, will not be considered.

V. Call for papers

The call for papers is directed at research that does not require significant further data collection or analysis. Instead, practitioners and researchers have already gathered interesting insights and findings based on previous research or analysis, or based on personal observation and experience, and are now looking to turn them into a publication. The call for papers explicitly invites contributions from practitioners such as government officials or advisors presenting findings and insights that have not emerged from a formal research design, but that are based on first-hand observations and experiences and unstructured information gathering. The call for papers can also be used to finalise early drafts or sketches of work-in-progress. ODI aims to support the dissemination of these existing insights and findings by providing financial support to make them accessible to a broader audience by publishing them as part of the working paper series.



1. Expected outputs for successful submissions

Submissions that are selected for funding are expected to produce the following outputs over the course of the funding period:

- A peer reviewed working paper presenting key findings of the research outlined in the paper outline.
- One additional output (a blog post, briefing note, policy brief or conference presentation – to be agreed with ODI) to promote the working paper and enhance the dissemination of key findings and policy recommendations emerging from the research.

The outputs will be reviewed according to ODI's peer review and quality assurance process. Peer review, editing and publication costs for the working paper and additional outputs will be funded by ODI and do not need to be budgeted for in applicant submissions. The ODI team will work closely with selected applicants to support and enable dissemination opportunities.

2. Project timeline

	No later than:
Deadline for paper submission	16th May 2021
Announcement of accepted papers	30 th June 2021
Deadline for submitting full draft of working paper	15 th November 2021
Working paper returned from peer reviewers	31 st January 2022
Deadline for submitting revised draft of working paper	31 st March 2022
Publication of working paper in the working paper series before this date	30 th June 2022

3. Financial support

To support the write up of the working paper and complementary output outlined in the submission, applicants may apply for an amount of up to £8,000 in funding (or USD or EUR equivalent). In order to claim the endowment, budget document [ODI WPS Budget](#) outlining the anticipated expenses must be submitted along with the proposed paper.

4. Submission requirements

All applicants are required to submit the following documents:

- An extended abstract of the working paper in narrative form (approx. 1500 words) outlining the research question, context and motivation, research methods and analytical approach, key findings, policy recommendations. The extended abstract should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_WPS_Abstract
- Application form [ODI WPS Application](#). The application forms should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_WPS_Application
- An up-to-date Curriculum Vitae. The CV should be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_CV
- Proposed Budget (as per [ODI WPS Budget](#)). The proposed budget must be submitted using the following naming convention: [Applicant name]_WPS_Budget

Papers must adhere to the following criteria:

- Applications should be original and ensure the proposed work does not already exist or should be substantively different to already existing work.
- All applications should be in English and stay within the word limits provided.



- Only ODI application forms and budget templates will be accepted. Any modifications to the format will not be accepted.
- All costs in the budget must be provided in GBP, USD or EUR and be inclusive of all relevant taxes and overheads.
- Applicants are strictly prohibited from using any funding for activities that may be construed as [lobbying](#).
- Applicants must ensure the proposed research will be carried out to the highest ethical standard. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that potential ethical issues relating to the research project are identified in the application and brought to the attention of the relevant approval or regulatory body.
- ODI funding granted through this call for papers may be used in conjunction with other funding sources; however, it is important to demonstrate in the application form how ODI funding will add value. The research findings, conclusions and policy recommendations presented in the ODI working paper cannot have been published elsewhere previously. Funded research that will go on to be published elsewhere must be open access in line with [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation guidelines](#). This includes the publication of all anonymised supporting datasets.
- This call for papers is not able to support individuals or organisations whose name appears on the [Office of Foreign Assets Control \(OFAC\) list](#) or who is a citizen or resident of an OFAC-sanctioned country (currently, Cuba, Iran, Syria, North Korea, and the Crimea Region of Ukraine) with which the Gates Foundation is not permitted to do business.
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5. Deadline for submission

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VI. Selection and review process

Applications will be reviewed after the submission deadline against the criteria listed below. Please note that these criteria are meant to provide general guidance to the review process. Their weight and relevance will be applied with some flexibility to accommodate the diverse nature of the expected submissions.

Criteria	Specific question(s)
Research quality	Does the proposal or paper have the potential to produce novel, ambitious and/or interesting empirical research, using a robust and appropriate methodology?
Contribution to the research agenda of the working paper series	How will the research findings contribute to the research agenda of the Working Paper Series? How important are the research questions or the gaps in knowledge that are being addressed? Is the project likely to lead to new or better understanding of these questions?



Interdisciplinary approach	Are the research questions of interest to researchers or practitioners from different fields and communities? How will the research findings likely contribute to improving the mutual understanding between different professions, specialisms and sectors?
Policy impact	Does the research design demonstrate a clear understanding of context? Does the research have the potential to be applied to contemporary challenges facing policymakers in low- and middle-income countries? Will the research contribute towards policy impact?
Value for money	Are the funds requested essential for the work and justified by the quality, potential contribution and relevance of the research?

VII. Publication and dissemination of research

Following a successful review process, the working paper will be published as part of ODI's Public Finance and Service Delivery working paper series on the ODI website, as well as being disseminated through ODI's social media channels. ODI's communications team will work with the author to launch and disseminate the complimentary output.

1. Intellectual property

Any intellectual property rights in the research and the published working paper will belong to the author(s) and, as part of the contracting process, they will grant ODI a non-exclusive, perpetual, worldwide, irrevocable, assignable, royalty-free licence to use (including for commercial purposes), sub-license and/or use for commercial purposes the research materials and the published working paper. The research and works produced will be published as open access under [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Generic License](#) (CC BY 4.0) in line [with the guidelines issued by the Funder, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation guidelines](#).

VIII. Who to contact in case of questions?

Questions and queries regarding the application process can be sent to DPFresearchcall@odi.org.uk using the subject line 'Query: PFM working paper series'.