



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

A first look at NFM4 application materials

At a meeting in early March, the Global Fund gave its technical partners a taste of the new application materials for the forthcoming Global Fund grant cycle, NFM4.

Key inputs considered

In developing the new materials, the Secretariat considered several issues related to various surveys and focus groups it had conducted, as well as data from other sources. The new application materials are based on:

- 1,189 survey responses from external stakeholders in the applicant survey.
- 150 survey responses from external stakeholders in the lessons learned survey.
- 89 survey responses from internal stakeholders in the lessons learned survey.
- The results of focus groups with 25 participants including Technical Partners, key population (KP) organization members and technical assistance (TA) providers
- Ongoing interviews with Global Fund Country Team (GFCT) members.
- 268 Technical Review Panel (TRP) survey responses on Funding Request quality from 2017-2019 and 2020-2022 submissions.
- An analysis of 115 data points comparing Funding Request submissions from 2017-2019 and 2020-2022.
- Inputs from the Technical Evaluation Reference Group (TERG) Strategic Review (SR) 2020 and the Prospective Country Evaluation (PCE) Synthesis Report 2020-2021.

2020-2022 Applicant Survey Responses

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, applicants were even more positive about their experience applying for funding than they were in 2017. When asked how they would rate their overall experience in applying for funding from the Global Fund, 94% rated their experience positively, saying that the process was easier, quicker, and straightforward. Country dialogue was enjoyed by most of the respondents, with inclusivity from virtual dialogue seen as a positive trend. GFCT support was appreciated and viewed as a critical factor in the success of a funding application.

Lessons learned on application materials in the 2020-2022 funding cycle

According to the Operational Policy Manual (OPM), there are currently five possible types of funding requests: (i) Tailored for Transition; (ii) Tailored for a National Strategic Plan (NSP); (iii) Tailored for Focused Portfolios; (iv) Program Continuation; and (v) Full Request and Review. A more detailed explanation of what these mean can be found in the [Operational Policy Manual](#). However, the reality is that there are seven, the remaining two being: (i) Tailored for Material Change; and (ii) Tailored for Challenging Operating Environments. These are referred to in the OPM but not included under the list of five. This is yet another example of the Global Fund's inconsistency in its documents.

Respondents were asked about the five approaches, which on the whole they appreciated: 92% of internal and external stakeholders thought the Secretariat should keep the five approaches used in 2020-2022. The link to NSP should be maintained; but substantive revision recommended for the Program Continuation approach.

Stakeholders' quotes on the five funding approaches

"We should keep the five different funding approaches. If any of these are removed, we won't feel the owners and community members being represented during the fund request process.

Individual from KP organization

"They can be kept, with some revision or adaptations of the forms. The Program Continuation form is the most inadequate and needs to be completely revised."

Consultant/TA provider

"The focus should be on requests tailored for NSP."

Consultant/TA provider

"Yes, the five funding requests approaches should be kept. This leaves a range of choices and a certain openness for each country. Moreover, in the case of countries of which I am aware, the choice has been made to underpin the request with the NSP. This has made it possible to assess the gaps and the funding request share in national needs."

Member of national non-government organization or civil society

Respondents appreciated the template instructions, guidance documents, and FAQs. However, recurrent problems were expressed regarding the length of documents and the complexity of the language used by the Global Fund (especially for those without English as their native tongue). Readers of our articles on [Global Fundspeak](#) and the [Operational Policy Manual](#) will already be familiar with our views on this subject and a plea for plain English; and surely this must be an integral part of any revised template for the upcoming funding cycle.

Stakeholder quotes on the templates and instructions

“The most useful information were the instructions put in the application form at the beginning of each section”
 Consultant/TA provider

“The documents were generally helpful, although at times too complex and detailed.”
 Technical partner

“There should be a revision of the wording of language to make sure it’s accessible.”
 Member of a KP group

“The most useful annex was the FAQs, we would have a look there whenever we had doubts.”
 Consultant/TA provider

“Simpler language would allow more dedication to strategy reflection and not to understand what is meant in the instructions.”
 Consultant/TA provider

Finding: Funding requests are increasingly integrated compared to previous cycles

There were significantly more Full Review applications in 2020-2022 than in 2017-2019, and fewer ‘streamlined’ applications (PC and Focused).

Table 1. Number of Funding Requests by application approach (2022 Predicted)

Application approach	2017-2019	2020-2022
Full Review	42	84
Program Continuation	85	9
Tailored for NSP	7	32
Tailored for Transition	7	10
Tailored to Challenging Operating Environments	12	0
Tailored to Material Change	31	0
Tailored for Focused Portfolios	0	55
Total	184	190

Each cycle has had fewer funding requests, with a 44% increase in combined versus single component

Funding Requests from 47 in 2017-2019 to 68 in 2020-2022. This has been driven by an increased number of Joint TB/HIV submissions in Focused Portfolios and more integrated FRs.

Table 2. Number of Funding Requests by component by cycle (2022 Predicted)

Component	2014-2016	2017-2019	2020-2022
HIV	64	59	38
TB	61	51	25
Malaria	72	63	53
RSSH	14	5	6
TB/HIV	41	41	52
Integrated	0	6	16
Total	252	225	190

2020-2022 funding cycle recommendations

Based on the results of the surveys and the data reviews, the Secretariat made the following recommendations for the next funding cycle:

- Optimize the application approaches to ensure suitability for increasing integration and further stream lining, using the current five (or seven?) funding request approaches as a starting point.
- Adapt funding requests to support strategic objectives, once finalized.
- Explore how to better prepare countries for funding request submission, including strengthening NSPs.
- Identify a larger cohort for the most streamlined application approaches in the next cycle, in line with TERG SR 2020 recommendations.
- Ensure that the applications and review processes accommodate innovative financing approaches (e.g., blended financing, Payment for Results (PfR), Debt to Health (D2H), etc.) so they can be implemented without requiring exceptions.
- Use simple language.
- Deliver a more differentiated process and reduce documentation required for Focused Portfolios, across funding request and grant review stages.

2023-2025 funding cycle timeline

2023-2025 funding cycle application materials

By the end of July 2022, the following materials will be available:

- Funding request templates and instructions
- Performance framework template
- Budget template
- PAAR template
- Programmatic Gap table
- Funding Landscape table

- Health Product Management template
- Implementation Arrangements Map guidance
- Co-financing guidance
- Modular framework handbook
- Core information notes
- Technical briefs

Between August and December 2022, the remaining documents will be issued

- Remaining Technical Briefs
- Applicant Handbook
- FAQs
- E-learnings
- Webinars
- Training Slides
- Program split template (December)
- Allocation letters (December)

?An early start for Funding Request application and guidance materials to be issued

Based on what has happened under previous cycles, July 2022 may seem very early for the main application documents to be made available when the windows for funding requests submissions only open in March 2023.

However, the Secretariat pointed out that more than 10,000 stakeholders worldwide are actively engaged in country dialogue and even more in the implementation of the grant lifecycle processes; and they all need bringing up to speed with the new changes.

Accordingly, the decision for the early launch of materials was based on strong requests from internal and external stakeholders who wanted the materials ready four or more months before the allocation letters which, it was felt, would give countries and stakeholders sufficient time to prepare for country dialogue and funding request development. Moreover, it takes time to develop change coordination materials to equip a broad range of stakeholders. Only after the application materials and guidance are final can stakeholders engage in coordination activities to embed the new changes and ensure that expectations are clear.

Partner consultation on funding request forms

The timeline for consultation on the new forms was described, as per Table 3.

Table 3. Timeline for partner consultations on the new materials

Deliverable	Timeline
1st draft: 5 funding request forms and Full Review instructions	End of March
Consultations with internal and external stakeholders (TRP working group, Technical Partners)	4-15 April
2nd draft: 5 funding request forms + 5 sets of instructions	Mid-May
Consultations with internal and external stakeholders (TRP working group, Technical Partners)	16-27 May
Final version: 5 funding request forms + instructions	Mid-June

Translation of funding request forms + instructions
Application materials published on Global Fund website

July
End of July

There was also discussion on how to best organize the two technical partner consultations on the funding request forms and instructions. It was decided that a similar approach as the last cycle be used: to set up a Technical Partner Working Group with representatives from key organizations, to discuss and consolidate feedback.

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