

## Call for Concept Papers for an Incentive Award Program

### 1. Project Background and Purpose of the Incentive Award Program

The Minimally Invasive Tissue Sampling (MITS) Surveillance Alliance is a consortium supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to standardize procedures, share best practices, ensure high quality data, and facilitate the expansion of MITS-informed cause of death classification. As an Alliance, our goal is to implement approaches to facilitate the use of MITS by interested institutions and researchers and grow the network of partners using pathology-based surveillance in various populations, geographies, and contexts. MITS is a promising new approach to more precisely define specific causes of death in populations where complete diagnostic autopsy is not routinely performed. Technicians with minimal training and oversight can effectively conduct MITS in low-resource settings with the support of expert technical assistance in pathology, with initial results suggesting that the MITS-informed cause of death classification is comparable to that of complete diagnostic autopsy, particularly for infectious disease mortality (Castillo, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. RTI International serves as the MITS Surveillance Alliance Secretariat and is responsible for the management of the incentive awards program to promote the use of MITS.

In support of the objectives of increasing the use of MITS in global regions where autopsy is not acceptable or affordable, the MITS Surveillance Alliance will issue incentive awards in the amount of \$1,000 per MITS completed. The maximum award amount is \$150,000. The award process is anticipated to begin in June 2019 and all MITS incentive awards must be completed prior to September 30, 2020.

The goal of this funding is to facilitate the expansion of the use of MITS globally where complete diagnostic autopsy is not routinely performed. The incentive awards are to support postmortem studies with MITS to improve cause of death classification.

Additional support that will be provided to the awardee through this award process includes:

- Documentation of the procedure to conduct MITS;
- Access to protocols, training materials, model consents and procedures to implement MITS;
- Travel and per diem costs for theoretical and practical training;
- MITS kits containing biopsy needles, formalin jars for tissue samples, etc.; to be used for implementation
- Access to the MITS Alliance website and a web-based Quality Control (QC) process for interpretation of MITS;
- An invitation to participate in MITS Alliance Technical Working Groups; and
- An invitation for membership and attendance at the annual MITS Alliance meeting, paid for by the MITS Alliance Secretariat Community of collaborators in MITS and determination of Cause of Death

---

<sup>1</sup> Castillo P, Ussene E, Ismail MR, et al. Pathological Methods Applied to the Investigation of Causes of Death in Developing Countries: Minimally Invasive Autopsy Approach. PLoS One. 2015;10(6):e0132057. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0132057



Incentive grants are being provided by the Alliance to promote and fund an expanded use of MITS in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). LMIC are prioritized, however, other locations will be considered on a case by case basis with well documented needs and justification. Issuance of these awards is facilitated through an RFA process and is paid in an amount of \$1,000 per MITS completed.

Expectations of Awardees include:

- Participation in training on performing MITS (travel costs to be provided by the Secretariat in addition to award);
- Implementation of community sensitization in MITS-naïve populations prior to performing MITS;
- Verification that MITS kits have been utilized by logging MITS barcode information into website tracking system;
- Participation in quality assurance and quality control practices; and
- Completion of a brief final report on findings.

To apply for these awards, an applicant must complete a two-step process that includes the submission of a concept paper followed by an invitation to full application.

## 2. Minimum Eligibility Requirements

Successful awardees must:

- Be legally registered to operate in the proposed country;
- Be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project, not acting as an intermediary/ consultant;
- Be willing to comply with all technical and financial requirements for participation in the program, including reporting and documentation of MITS Kit use;
- Be willing to participate in Alliance meetings, trainings, workshops, or other activities considered important for achieving project goals;
- Be able to obtain formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics approval to conduct MITS in the selected population;
- Provide a description on the current project and how MITS will be incorporated;
- Not be currently receiving funds to purchase kits/materials for the conduct of MITS or already have the funding for the stated sample size of MITS in their project funds.
- Provide a letter of support from your organization indicating the ability to utilize facilities and staff to conduct MITS.

## 3. Application Process

***\*\*\*Please contact the Secretariat ([MITSAlianceGrants@rti.org](mailto:MITSAlianceGrants@rti.org)) any time during the application process with questions or for clarification\*\*\****

The first step is to complete a Concept Paper, following the instructions contained in this document, that describes the overall plan to integrate MITS into the current protocol being implemented. The concept is then submitted to [MITSAlianceGrants@rti.org](mailto:MITSAlianceGrants@rti.org) for review by designated Alliance members through a competitive process. The concept paper is scored by the designated Alliance members who will notify applicants of the evaluation and whether their score is high enough to make it to the next stage in the process. Selected applicants will be requested to submit a full program description and additional supporting documentation to facilitate the execution of the award.



### a. Concept Paper

Applicants are invited to submit a concept paper which must not exceed 8 pages using the form provided in Attachment A (Concept Paper Template).

For process or other clarifications, applicants are requested to submit questions to [MITSAllianceGrants@rti.org](mailto:MITSAllianceGrants@rti.org) prior to January 25, 2019. Responses will be shared with all and posted on <https://mitsalliance.org/> on February 1, 2019.

Concept papers will be accepted from **February 1 to February 28, 2019 by 5:00pm** (Eastern Standard Time). Only typed, electronic submissions will be accepted. All submissions must be sent directly to [MITSAllianceGrants@rti.org](mailto:MITSAllianceGrants@rti.org). Applicants may only submit one Concept Paper per organization.

Concept papers must specify the following:

- Proposed populations to be studied
- Number of MITS planned
- Summary/protocol of current project being conducted into which the addition of MITS is proposed

Concept papers must specify the activities that the small incentive awards will be used to fund. The awards can be used to fund the following activities:

- Training of staff (e.g. cascading of training within awardee institutions)
- Start-up costs
- Quality control analysis fees
- Facilities costs to support the conduct of MITS procedures
- Assemble and conduct Cause of death classification panel
- OTHER uses of incentive funds – to be suggested by the applicant

Only complete concept papers will be evaluated. Please ensure you have submitted all required materials.

All concept papers will be evaluated based on the criteria outlined in Section b below (Evaluation of Concept Papers)

### b. Evaluation of Concept Papers

Once concept papers have been received, a committee will be assigned to review the application and will apply the following criteria to scoring the concept papers.

As a first step, the evaluation committee shall verify compliance with the basic instructions set forth in this RFA (i.e. number of pages, font type and size, format and attachments).

The technical evaluation of the concept papers will cover the relevance of the project, its merits and effectiveness, its viability and sustainability. The concept paper packages will be given an overall score out of 100 points in accordance with the breakdown provided in the Evaluation Grid below.

No.	Area(s) of Assessment	Maximum
<b>1.</b>	<b>Organization History and Past Performance</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1	Ability to implement MITS given the organization size and staffing structure based on experience implementing projects of a similar size and complexity.	10
<b>2.</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>60</b>
2.1	<u>Problem identification and statement.</u> MITS will be valuable and integrated into existing projects of the recipient organization. Applicant will be evaluated based on a clearly stated research question.	10
2.2	<u>Proposed use of incentive funds</u> Description of how MITS incentive funds will be used appropriately (i.e. for training, facilities costs, staff, cause of death panel, etc.). Applicants will be evaluated based on ability to leverage existing project resources in the implementation of MITS and feasibility of implementation given existing resources and MITS incentive funding.	20
2.3	<u>Project approach and strategies</u> Appropriate use of MITS which addresses the research question identified by the organization. Appropriate plan for how to interpret MITS results, including description of cause of death assignment process if appropriate.	20
2.4	<u>Population</u> Applicant includes a description of current geographical coverage of project and how MITS is appropriate to use in this population. Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) are prioritized, however other locations will be considered. Note that priority will be given to LMIC countries and populations or areas where MITS has not yet been utilized (MITS-naive populations).	10
<b>3.</b>	<b>Project Staffing and Facilities Description</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1	<u>Project Staffing</u> Staff qualifications and experience are sufficient to conduct MITS. Preferred staff should include a pathologist, microbiologist, pathology technician and/or microbiology technician, a social scientist to support community sensitization, and others that may be necessary to conduct MITS.	20
3.2	<u>Project Facilities</u> Facilities are suitable to execute MITS, including location to conduct MITS, store and process samples, and to conduct histopathological and/or microbiological analysis of MITS samples.	10

### c. Supporting Documentation

Successful applicants at the RFA stage will be informed on or around **March 15, 2019** and they will be requested to submit a full program description and additional supporting documentation to facilitate the execution of the award. Applicants may be disqualified if unable to provide the full supporting documentation.

## Attachment A - Concept Paper Instructions and Template

All applicants must use this specific template for the concept paper. The template contains 3 pages. An Applicant's form, once completed, may vary in length but should **not exceed 8 pages, excluding proposed personnel CVs and protocol**. All responses must be provided in a 11-point size font or greater. Within the responses, the applicant must ensure that the text:

- provides the information requested under the headings below, in the order in which it is requested, and in proportion to its relative importance (see the relevant scores set out in the evaluation grid and in the Guidelines);
- provides full information (as the evaluation grid will be applied solely on the information in the concept paper);
- is drafted as clearly as possible to enable it to be evaluated.

Responses should clearly and concisely explain the proposed activity's purpose, objectives, activities and expected impact.

**\*\*\*Please contact the Secretariat ([MITSAllianceGrants@rti.org](mailto:MITSAllianceGrants@rti.org)) any time during the application process with questions or clarification\*\*\***



## Basic Organizational Information

Please complete the table below to provide basic organization information.

<b>Organization's Name</b>	
<b>Address, including country</b>	
<b>Office Telephone Number(s)</b>	
<b>Web Address and/or Social Media Address</b>	
<b>Principal Investigator (Name, Title, Phone, and E-mail Address)</b>	
<b>Contact Person if different from PI (Name, Title, Phone, and E-mail Address)</b>	
<b>Names and Titles of other key staff</b>	
<b>Documentation of legal registration in the proposed country</b>	
<b>Organization's authorized signatory (Name, Title, Phone, and E-mail Address)</b>	

### 1. Organizational Background and Past Performance

- Please briefly describe your organization's mission and goals, and the sector(s) that you work in, including the target groups that you work with. Please include a brief summary of your organization's experience implementing projects of a similar size and complexity.
- Provide at least three references for completed projects, funding source and results of the work in the following format:

<b>Sponsor/Client</b>	
<b>Sponsor/Client contact information</b>	Name: Phone Number: Email:
<b>Project Title</b>	
<b>Performance Period</b>	
<b>Value of award</b>	\$
<b>Major project conducted</b>	
<b>Goals/Aims</b>	
<b>Outcome against goals (publication references, if applicable)</b>	

3. Provide a letter of support from your organization indicating the ability to utilize facilities (lab, storage space, etc.) and staff to conduct MITS.

## 2. Project Description

2.1 Problem identification and statement: Describe the current project being conducted by your organization and how MITS will be valuable and integrated into this existing project of the recipient organization. Applicant will be evaluated based on a clearly stated research question.

2.2 Proposed use of incentive funds: Define how the MITS incentive funds will be used (i.e. training of staff, start-up costs, quality control, analysis fees, facilities' costs, staff, training of staff (e.g. cascading of training within awardee institutions, cause of death panel). If you are proposing other uses of incentive funds, please provide details on those activities and how they will benefit the project. Applicants will be evaluated based on ability to leverage existing project resources in the implementation of MITS and feasibility of implementation given existing resources and MITS incentive funding.

2.3 Project approach and strategies: Describe the research question(s) which will be addressed with MITS. Include in this description the number of MITS kits requested for use within 12 months, the organs or sample types to be collected, and the analyses planned for the MITS samples. Appropriate use of MITS which addresses the research question identified by the organization. Appropriate plan for how to interpret MITS results, including description of cause of death assignment process if appropriate.

2.4 Population: Provide a description of the population being studied and reasons for their selection. Please describe why MITS is appropriate to use in this population. Note that priority will be given to LMIC countries and populations or areas where MITS has not yet been utilized.

## 3. Project Staffing and Facilities Description

3.1 Project Staffing: Describe the staff committed for MITS. Describe their qualifications and experience to conduct MITS. Preferred staff should include a pathologist, microbiologist, pathology technician and/or microbiology technician, a social scientist to support community sensitization, and others that may be necessary to conduct MITS. Please provide a CV or biosketch for the principal investigator.

3.2 Project Facilities: Provide a description of facilities available to conduct MITS, store and process samples, and to conduct histopathological and/or microbiological analysis of MITS samples.



### Certification Statement

I certify that the applicant organization meets the minimum eligibility qualifications. We are legally able to implement research in the proposed country; are directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project, not acting as an intermediary/consultant; are willing to comply with all technical and financial requirements for participation in the program, including reporting and documentation of MITS kit use; are willing to participate in Alliance meetings, trainings, workshops, or other activities considered important for achieving project goals are able to obtain formal IRB or Ethics approval; do not currently either receive funds to purchase kits/materials for the conduct of MITS or already have the funding for the stated sample size of MITS in our project funds.

---

Authorized Signature

---

Date

---

Print Full Name and Title