

Request for Proposal

Leading a Community of Practice for Strengthening Systems for Safer Childbirth

Please submit a proposal to lead a Community of Practice for Merck for Mothers' Strengthening Systems for Safer Childbirth by June 30th, 2022 5:00pm EST to CSTMFORMOTHERS@merck.com

In September 2021, Merck for Mothers launched a new multi-sectoral initiative – Strengthening Systems for Safer Childbirth – that aims to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.1 by investing in locally-led collective action to strengthen health systems.¹ The initiative's primary objective is to support solutions in India, Nigeria, and Kenya² that sustainably improve access to safe, high-quality, respectful maternal health care with the ultimate goal of reducing maternal mortality.

Local coalitions of NGOs, civil society, and social enterprises will implement solutions in their specific geographic areas defined at the state, district, county, or city level. Merck for Mothers and co-funders are in the process of awarding 5-7 coalitions for three years starting in September 2022.

Merck for Mothers seeks to establish a community of practice (COP) that will link and support coalitions to share experiences, problem-solve collectively, deliver intended results, demonstrate impact, achieve sustainability, and amplify their learnings.

ABOUT MERCK FOR MOTHERS

[Merck for Mothers](#) is our company's initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. We collaborate across sectors – working with governments, community-based and non-governmental organizations, patient groups, professional associations, UN agencies, research institutions, social entrepreneurs and other businesses – to improve the health and well-being of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period. When a mother is healthy, receives high-quality maternity care and has a safe delivery, we set the foundation for children, families, communities and societies to thrive for generations to come. Since our launch in 2011, we have reached more than 18 million women through programs promoting safe, high-quality, respectful care.

Community of Practice | Scope of Work

We are requesting proposals from qualified organizations³ with expertise in convening multi-partner and stakeholder coalitions across diverse geographies. Organizations should have a deep footprint, as well as local leadership, in Merck for Mothers' focus countries – Nigeria, Kenya, and India – and ability to function both across and within countries. The selected organization will link and support coalitions to share experiences, problem-solve collectively, deliver on intended results, demonstrate impact, achieve sustainability, and amplify their learnings over a three-year period.

¹ SDG target 3.1 is to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030.

² In addition to India, Nigeria, and Kenya, there will be one additional coalition in a *to be determined* country.

³ Please see [funding exclusion criteria](#) to determine whether your organization is qualified to apply.

OVERVIEW OF COALITIONS

Selected coalitions will include local organizations across sectors and disciplines – such as private health care providers who deliver maternal health care services or local entrepreneurs who bring innovation to service delivery through data, financing, digital platforms, transport, coordination systems logistics, etc. Coalition members will work collectively to achieve sustained measurable improvements in maternal health in their selected geography with a focus on improving quality maternal health services, informed by women’s needs and preferences, and may involve high-quality connectivity and digital inclusion, client engagement and community support, and/or financing and affordability of care.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The selected organization will demonstrate relevant expertise and experience through a proposed plan to support coalitions both individually and collectively in a community of practice. The community of practice organization will be charged with facilitating safe, open and transparent exchange between coalitions that are operating in different geographies and local contexts.

A survey issued among applicants for Strengthening Systems for Safer Childbirth revealed that coalitions are looking for support in four key areas:

1. Support with **communications & advocacy efforts to elevate coalitions’ work**, including:
 - Synthesizing key findings and lessons learned into communication assets and amplifying through traditional media, social media, and storytelling, etc.
 - Effectively communicating successes and lessons learned with both local and global stakeholders to enable policy change and contribute to global knowledge
2. Provide technical assistance to effectively **measure and report on harmonized indicators** to demonstrate impact against key indicators and measurement domains in population health and health systems strengthening
3. Establish a **learning platform** for coalitions to:
 - Routinely discuss challenges, co-create solutions, exchange resources and tools, and share lessons learned
 - Have dedicated time and space to tackle specific issue areas (i.e., digital engagement, elevating women’s voices, private sector integration, programmatic sustainability) via working groups
4. Support **programmatic sustainability** by cultivating relationships with a diverse network of global/regional/local stakeholders including:
 - Mobilizing outside funders to support innovative financing solutions
 - Engaging with various stakeholders (i.e., policy makers, bi-laterals, multilaterals, investors, funders) to support programmatic and operational sustainability of projects

The organization selected to lead the community of practice will conduct a needs assessment – using the survey already issued among applicants as a starting point – to identify each coalition’s challenges and

priorities, help coalitions build their capacity to reach individual and collective goals, and facilitate workshops to address cross-cutting needs.

WE ARE INTERESTED IN SUPPORTING AN ORGANIZATION THAT HAS THE FOLLOWING CAPABILITIES:

- A deep footprint and local leadership in focus countries, Nigeria, Kenya and India, with the ability to function both across and within countries
- Experience effectively convening organizations across borders while providing locally guided support and guidance that is grounded in local context and activates local networks and stakeholders/experts to help coalitions advocate for solution uptake
- An innovative approach to and/or track record of creating groups with and for people who are underserved in the global health community
- Demonstrated ability to gather and disseminate insights from the collective experience of the community of practice and stakeholders, as well as ability to translate them into actionable recommendations to inform advocacy and the evidence base
- Experience with implementation research and evaluation, including writing up findings, to ensure outcomes across coalitions are assessed using harmonized indicators or domains
- A track record of utilizing participatory methods to build trust, cohesion and collaboration among stakeholders and facilitate learning
- Commitment to values of diversity, inclusion, especially of populations to be served or supported by solutions, and equity.

TIMELINE: 3 years, starting with a kickoff in September 2022

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: The Community of Practice organization will work closely with Merck for Mothers, coalition members, and [Rabin Martin](#), the secretariat for Strengthening Systems for Safer Childbirth. The selected organization will report to Merck for Mothers and Rabin Martin. Reporting will include, but is not limited to, submission of progress reports and expense reports at agreed upon intervals and a final project report within 3 months of the agreement's end date.

Proposal Format

Your submission should be five (5) pages maximum in Microsoft Word (any standard font, size 11), plus any relevant appendices noted below, as well as a detailed budget. Final proposals are due June 30th, 2022 5:00pm EST to CSTMFORMOTHERS@merck.com.

Your proposals should use the following format:

1. **Executive summary**
2. **Narrative** | The narrative is limited to 5 pages and should include the following components:
 - a. **Approach**
 - b. **Proposed activities**, should provide detailed description of your proposed activities and touch on the following:

- i. Leading communications & advocacy efforts to elevate coalitions' work
 - ii. Guiding coalitions to measure and report on harmonized indicators to demonstrate impact against key domains in population health and health systems strengthening
 - iii. Establishing a learning platform to routinely discuss challenges, co-create solutions, and share lessons learned
 - iv. Supporting programmatic sustainability by cultivating relationships with a diverse network of global/regional/local stakeholders
 - v. Implementing innovative solutions for ensuring local coalitions actively engage, participate, shape, and drive the objectives of the community of practice and a proposed plan for assessing coalition engagement in the community of practice
 - c. **Detailed timeline** of key activities, milestones and deliverables over the three-year period as a GANTT chart
3. **Experience |** Please describe your organization's experience in the following areas:
- a. Developing and disseminating learnings – including how these have influenced change
 - b. Capacity building and technical support to community-based organizations, nonprofits, and local social enterprises
 - c. Facilitating a community of practice in the health sector, particularly within maternal health
 - d. Collaborating with funders, multi-/bi-lateral agencies, communications agencies, advocacy organizations, government agencies, etc.
 - e. Coordinating global initiatives while providing locally guided support that is grounded in local context
 - f. Shaping communities and coalitions to elevate the voices of people who are underserved and expand their belonging in decision making – challenging traditional ways of working in global health
4. **Other |**
- a. Beyond the objectives communicated earlier in this RFP, what other activities or goals would be important to address to ensure the community of practice is valuable and productive across Strengthening Systems for Safer Childbirth?
 - b. What challenges do you anticipate and how would you overcome them?
 - c. If a conflict were to arise amongst the coalitions within the community of practice, what steps would you take to address and resolve the issue?
5. **Supporting documents (Proposal Appendix) |**
- a. Examples of previous work/deliverables from similar efforts
 - b. Demonstration of living diversity, inclusion and belonging principles through organizational structure, specifically integration of geographically and culturally diverse team members
 - c. Brief bio sketch of 2-3 key personnel
 - d. Most recently audited annual financial statement

While there is no page limit for supporting documents, please keep them as brief as possible. Note that no other appendices will be accepted. Additional information not requested will be disregarded.

6. **Detailed budget with accompanying budget narrative |** Please provide a **detailed project budget**

with an accompanying **budget narrative**. Merck for Mothers expects to award a three-year grant, of up to \$350,000 USD per year, to the selected Community of Practice organization.

Key Dates

- **RFP Q&A:** Applicants who have questions concerning the contents of this RFP shall submit them in writing no later than **June 15th, 2022** via email to CSTMFORMOTHERS@merck.com. Collated questions with responses shall be distributed to all applicants no later than **June 22nd, 2022**.
- **Proposal submission:** Interested applicants must submit their proposal to Merck for Mothers by **June 30th, 2022 5:00pm EST**.
- **Notification:** Applicants will be notified of their status by July 14st, 2022.
- **Launch:** A public launch (e.g., press release, website feature, etc.) is tentatively scheduled for September 2022. More details to follow upon application status notification.

Funding Exclusion Criteria

Merck for Mothers is able to provide funding to not-for-profit and for-profit entities. Organizations may be headquartered in the U.S. or other countries. The following activities and organizations **are not eligible** for Merck for Mothers funding support:

- Activities or organizations that directly influence or advance Merck business (commercial) or marketing interests, including purchase/influence of purchase of Merck products. *This often includes academic institutions linked to health care delivery systems that may purchase and/or use Merck products.*
- Political organizations, campaigns and activities
- Engagement/payments of government officials and government agencies (which in many cases could include hospital employees in government-run facilities)
- Payments/incentives/benefits going to health care providers or facilities (including teaching hospitals)
- Major infrastructure improvements
- Purchase of supplies or equipment unrelated to this project or program
- Direct clinical care and purchase of pharmaceutical products
- Payment of staff salaries or other costs not involved in this project or program
- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age, national origin, veteran's status or disability
- Robust governance and final controls, including two years of audited financial statements

Note that for not-for-profit organizations, we are not permitted to provide funding that exceeds 50 percent of an organization's annual operating budget.