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# Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL)

## Pre-announcement of funding opportunities

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## 1. Introduction

This document provides early notification of upcoming opportunities to apply for funding to contribute to the strategic research agenda of the Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL). The information should enable prospective researchers and evaluation specialists to develop project ideas and assemble teams in preparation for a call for expressions of interest for large projects and a call for full proposals for small projects, which will be issued in early February 2019.

## 2. About CEDIL

CEDIL is a new international research centre, established to innovate in and improve methods to undertake and maximise the value of impact evaluations and evidence synthesis in international development. The Centre is a collaboration between the Campbell Collaboration, the Centre for the Evaluation of Development Policy (EDePo), the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre), International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and Oxford Policy Management (OPM). It has been provided with £15 million by the Department for International Development (DFID) for an initial five-year period. Of this, £9.5 million is allocated to three programmes of work (PoW) which will be composed of independent research and evaluation projects, as detailed below.

## 3. Overview of CEDIL research

During its first year of operation, the CEDIL Directorate and its Intellectual Leadership Team examined theory and practice in international development impact evaluation to identify key challenges to evaluation that require further research and methodological innovation. It now seeks to address these challenges by commissioning research projects under three interrelated programmes of work (PoW):

1. Evaluating complex interventions
2. Enhancing the transferability of evaluation through middle range theory
3. Enhancing the use and usefulness of evaluation findings

The first two challenges – complexity of the interventions and transferability of the results – are related. It can be argued that the higher the complexity of the intervention, the lower the transferability of the results. The workings of complex interventions are very sensitive to variations in implementation and in the characteristics of the context, so that the external validity of evaluations of these interventions is very limited. However, solutions to these two challenges do not need to be the same. For example, a ‘package’ of interventions could be successfully evaluated without producing findings that are valid in other contexts. Conversely, the transferability of even simple interventions may not always be well understood. Our programmes of work will therefore support studies that address the two challenges separately, though we are aware that in some cases addressing complexity may contribute to our understanding of the transferability of the findings and vice-versa.

For the first two PoW, CEDIL will commission both large (up to £1 million) and small (under £300k) projects. The third PoW will only include small projects. The timeline for large projects is limited to a maximum of three years. We recognise that for some evaluation types, this may be an insufficient amount of time to realise higher level outcomes. To address this, CEDIL encourages a) applications for a study design plus initial rounds of data collection (with a view to seeking

additional funding for further rounds of data collection and analysis), b) applications for studies where some data already exist for CEDIL funded projects to build upon

For large projects, we will welcome applications from teams that have established relationships with interventions they intend to evaluate, or from evaluation teams who seek to be entered into a match-making process with DFID programmes (and potentially other interventions).

**Applicants are advised to consult the CEDIL inception papers for further information on possible approaches to be adopted in applications.** However, proposals need not be restricted to methods discussed in the inception papers.

CEDIL encourages applicants to consider the formation of cross-disciplinary teams as a means to drive methodological innovations.

The monetary values listed against each programme of work indicate the amount of activity we wish to support under each programme. However, the final allocation of funding will be determined by the quality of project proposals across all three programmes of work.

The following sections describe the themes under the programmes of work in greater detail and lay out the objectives and scope of the studies to be commissioned.

### **3.1. Evaluating complex interventions (approx. £5.5 million)**

The first programme of work aims to **support research to strengthen evaluations of complex interventions**. We define complex interventions as multi-activity and multi-outcome 'packages'. Examples are anti-poverty packages, multi-sectoral nutrition interventions, budget support and peace-building programmes. Complex interventions have multiple causal pathways which may interact in various ways including non-linear relationships such as threshold effects and feedback loops. The causal logic may involve examination of necessary and sufficient conditions rather than the intervention-outcome model common in quantitative impact evaluation designs. This complexity is often ignored, and such interventions are usually evaluated one component at a time or in a black-box fashion, disregarding the interactions between components. Consequently, current evaluation approaches can typically conclude whether an intervention worked or not but cannot explain how and why. They do not provide a sufficient understanding of which components of a complex intervention were crucial to its success or failure, and how these interacted with specific contextual factors where the intervention was implemented.

Without this information, determining how an intervention should be altered to improve outcomes, or whether a similar intervention package will work elsewhere becomes difficult or impossible.

We will support research that 'opens the black box' by unpacking theories of change, understanding context and implementation, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, and tracking pathways to change.

The overall programme of work will consist of several, separately commissioned large and small projects:

- **Impact evaluations exploring mechanisms (large projects).** We aim to fund several innovative impact evaluations of complex interventions. It is expected that the evaluations will identify the causes of the observed project effects in a transparent and convincing way and employ new methodologies as defined above. These projects will be funded for up to three years.

- **Reviews of system-based approaches and process evaluations (small projects).** Alongside the complex evaluations, we will commission evidence reviews to unpack mechanisms of interventions that adopt a 'system approach' or a 'process approach'. The goal of these reviews is to unpack theories of change in priority areas using multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative evidence. They will be funded for one year to 18 months.

Projects under this theme should:

- Focus on understanding the processes within complex evaluations that generate change and the ways in which different components of a complex intervention interact with each other and with the context of the intervention
- Aim to produce findings that can inform the design and implementation of future complex interventions
- Clearly document the methods used to analyse causal relationships and the lessons learned from the application of those methods

Listed below are some examples of questions that projects may address:

1. What contextual factors appear crucial to the success or failure of the complex intervention?
2. What emergent outcomes are produced by particular 'packages' of interventions and what processes are responsible for these outcomes?
3. Are the benefits of complex evaluations distributed equitably? Are there certain components of interventions that are critical for ensuring that vulnerable and marginal populations benefit from the intervention?
4. To what extent are complex interventions implemented as they were designed to be implemented? What factors account for divergence?
5. Is the intervention replicable? What contextual factors condition impact?

### **3.2. Enhancing the transferability of evaluation through middle range theory (approx. £3 million)**

Individual impact evaluations often tell us little about whether an intervention will work in other contexts, as methods to extrapolate the results of evaluations from one context to another are currently underdeveloped. There is great uncertainty regarding the extent to which the result of an evaluation can be applied to other contexts.

The second priority theme aims to **enhance the transferability of evaluation findings** by re-orienting the focus of evaluation methods from measuring the impact of interventions to building theories that explain how and why interventions generate the observed outcomes. These theories are considered 'middle range' as they are specific enough to inform decision-making in the adoption, design and implementation of a development intervention, but general enough to inform those decisions in a variety of contexts and to meet a variety of goals.

**Large projects** under this PoW may be of two types. The first type is **impact evaluations using theoretical modelling**. These will be impact evaluations of interventions informed by middle-level theory. As for the previous programme of work, the expectation is that these evaluations will use

methods that address causality and that are 'novel'. Projects will be funded for up to three years, which may only allow for design and mid-term evaluation of interventions.

The second type of large project is **secondary data modelling studies and ex-post "big data" evaluations**. In the first case, teams will evaluate projects by applying behavioural models to existing high quality secondary data. The models will be informed by mid-level theories and will be used to assess potential impacts of interventions with a focus on transferability and scalability. The use of large datasets (especially approaches which utilise big data) and new applications of statistical learning methods will be encouraged. Unlike large impact evaluations collecting primary data, these studies will be funded for up to two years.

**Small projects** under this PoW will produce **papers developing mid-level theories for specific categories of intervention and reviews utilising and testing a mid-level theory**. Teams will develop mid-level theories which can inform project evaluations. The papers may include a specific evaluation proposal which in future could test the mid-level theory. Since they utilise findings from a number of studies in different contexts, systematic reviews are also suited to developing mid-level theories. The projects developing mid-level theory should be completed in twelve months or less, and reviews within 18 months.

Projects under this theme should:

- Propose and assess causal linkages between categories of intervention actions grouped in a mid-level theory, and the behavioural changes that contribute to outcomes and impact.
- Aim to produce findings that can inform the design and implementation of similar interventions in different contexts, by identifying contextual factors which influence causal relationships
- Document the methods used to assess transferability of findings, and the lessons learned from the application of these methods

Projects may focus on the relationships between intervention design, context and implementation, or implementation, context and outcomes, or both.

### **3.3. Enhancing the use and usefulness of evaluation findings (approx. £1 million)**

Though the ultimate goal of evaluation is to inform policy and practice, relatively little is known about the use of evaluation results and how it can be promoted in policy-making. To improve the uptake of evidence produced by CEDIL and other research, the Centre intends to fund and generate knowledge from studies delivering on the following activities:

1. Developing and testing communication tools (small projects). We will invite applications for studies that:
  - a. Propose new and innovative means of promoting the use of evidence. Examples would include evidence-based guidelines, interactive evidence platforms or other web-based decision-making tools, and support to evidence-based budgeting.
  - b. Rigorously examine the effectiveness of different approaches. Applicants will be invited to assess impact of communication tools on attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of policy-makers through, for example, field or lab experiments. These studies will be funded for up to three years.

2. **Guidelines for policy-makers (small projects).** We will invite groups and networks of researchers, evaluators and policy makers to develop guidelines on how to use evidence of different types and quality from multiple sources to make decisions.
3. **Models of stakeholders' engagement (small projects).** Tools for effective stakeholder engagement will be identified and assessed by piloting them with CEDIL-funded evaluations. The experience will be collated in a tool with wider application outside CEDIL.

## 4. Project specifications

In addition to addressing the specifications for the programmes of work described in section 3, projects will be required to meet a number of other criteria.

### 4.1 Priority themes and countries

For CEDIL, DFID have provided a list of priority countries and themes that the commissioned projects should focus on, which are listed below. Projects must focus on interventions in at least one of the countries on this list. Preference will be given to projects addressing the themes below, though other areas may also be considered. Note that this list may be further refined prior to the release of the calls for proposals.

#### Countries

Afghanistan	Ethiopia	Mali	Pakistan	Tanzania
Bangladesh	Iraq	Mozambique	Rwanda	Uganda
Burma/Myanmar	Jordan	Nepal	Sierra Leone	Yemen
Chad	Kenya	Niger	Somalia	Zimbabwe
Democratic Republic of Congo	Lebanon	Nigeria	South Sudan	
	Malawi	Occupied Palestinian Territories	Sudan	

#### Themes

- Economic development, inclusive growth, trade, investment, infrastructure and building markets
- Governance, conflict, extremism, security and stability, justice
- Anti-corruption including illicit financial flows
- Humanitarian
- Migration and modern slavery
- Climate change and sustainable resource management.
- Accelerating use of family planning
- Education
- Disability and gender
- Nutrition
- Southern innovation and use of technology

### 4.2 Research uptake component

CEDIL aims to achieve research uptake and policy impact through the commissioned projects. As such, applicants will need to a) put forward proposals for studies that will produce findings that are

useful to policy makers and other stakeholders, and b) have a solid plan for engaging with users throughout the study so as to maximise their value to, and use by, end users. Projects will be particularly encouraged to maximise the relevance of work to CEDIL's funder, DFID, by addressing DFID funded programmes or DFID policy areas.

### 4.3 Expected contributions to CEDIL

CEDIL funding is intended not solely to support independent research projects, but also to build a community of practice among researchers and evaluation experts and to engage with the Centre's broader ambitions to innovate in the field. All recipients of CEDIL funding will be expected to make substantive contributions to the wider work of the Centre. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Submitting a select number of research outputs over the lifetime of the contract which will enable the Centre to identify and develop synergies and overlaps with other projects;
- Contributing to Centre-level efforts to enhance user engagement with CEDIL's research agenda by, for example, writing blogs for the CEDIL website or collaborating with other project teams, the CEDIL Directorate and the Intellectual Leadership Team to produce policy briefs, guidance notes or other user-oriented outputs;
- Participating annual CEDIL workshops or conferences;
- Participating in Centre-managed workshops on thematic and methodological issues

Proposal budgets should include an allocation for the above activities.

In consultation with the project teams, CEDIL may attach an Intellectual Leadership Team member to the project study teams.

### 4.4 Southern partnerships

CEDIL particularly encourages applications from researchers and evaluation practitioners in the Global South, particularly from the priority countries noted above. Applications submitted by Northern institutions will be expected to share scientific leadership of projects with Southern partners.

## 5. Calls for proposals

The CEDIL projects will be commissioned under two distinct calls for proposals: **call 1**, which will be for **large projects** with a value of £500,000-£1 million each and a duration of approximately three years; and **call 2**, which will be for **smaller projects** with a value of £100,000-£300,000 each and a duration of six months to three years, depending on the specification within each Programme of Work. Call 1 will have two stages, an expression of interest (EoI) stage followed by a shortlisting process and a full proposal stage, while call 2 will have a single short-proposal stage.

The three programmes of work described in section 3 of this announcement will be included in both calls for proposals, with the exception of PoW 3 which will only be included under call 2.

Within **call 1**, there will also be two separate streams:

- **Stream A** will be for applicants that have already identified the intervention or policy they would like to evaluate/study, and applicants will outline their proposed study design at the EoI stage.
- **Stream B** will be for applicants that have a team and a methodological area of expertise, but that have not yet identified an intervention to study. Following the shortlisting process, these applicants will pair up with a DFID or other donor intervention through a matchmaking process that will be organised by the CEDIL Directorate. They will then develop their full proposal based on the newly identified intervention.

The two calls for proposals are the first stage to address CEDIL's research agenda. The CEDIL Directorate intends to secure additional funding in the years ahead to support larger and longer-term evaluation projects.

## 6. Indicative commissioning timelines

We anticipate that projects will be commissioned according to the following timeline, though this is subject to change and potential applicants should check the CEDIL website and subscribe to the CEDIL e-newsletter to be informed of any changes.

### Call 1:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| • Early February 2019: | Call for expressions of interest published  |
| • Late March 2019:     | Deadline for submission of expressions of interest  |
| • Late April 2019:     | Invitations for full proposals for large projects/<br>Commencement of matchmaking process |
| • Early July 2019:     | Deadline for submission of full proposals   |
| • Late September 2019: | Decisions announced   |
| • Early January 2020:  | Project start date  |

### Call 2:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| • Early February 2019: | Call for small projects published                  |
| • Late March 2019:     | Deadline for submission of small project proposals |
| • June 2019            | Decisions announced                                |
| • Early September 2019 | Project start date                                 |

## 7. Supplier engagement events

In February 2019, the CEDIL Directorate will run several events for those interested in applying for CEDIL funding to explain more about CEDIL's research agenda and the calls for proposals, respond to queries, and give applicants an opportunity to meet and form networks. We expect there to be three in-person events, and two online webinars. Interested researchers should subscribe to the CEDIL newsletter through the [CEDIL website](#) for further details of these events, which will be announced soon.

## 8. Further information

If you would like to receive notification when full call details are released, as well as other CEDIL related news and updates, please sign up to our mailing list at the bottom of the CEDIL website's homepage: <https://cedilprogramme.org/>.

If there are questions you would like to raise with the CEDIL Directorate, please email us at [cedil.commissioning@opml.co.uk](mailto:cedil.commissioning@opml.co.uk)