

Request for Proposals

Harnessing social media to increase vaccination confidence and uptake

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FUND MANAGER CONTACT INFORMATION

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Alliance for Advancing Health Online's Vaccine Confidence Fund

Request for Proposals

About

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused global devastation with the deaths of over 3 million people, disrupting economic and social prosperity with a disproportionate impact on historically excluded or marginalized communities globally. It has also significantly changed our daily lives in all aspects – from the way we live, work, and engage with key public information, including through the use of social media and online platforms. COVID-19 vaccines will play a critical role in returning our societies to some sense of pre-COVID-19 normalcy and ultimately ending this pandemic. As vaccines become increasingly available in all countries, the public health priority will shift from addressing concerns around vaccine access and supply to better understanding the dynamics of vaccine demand, hesitancy,¹ and confidence.²

The *Alliance for Advancing Health Online* is comprised of members from the technology, health, global development, and academic sectors that have joined forces to advance public understanding of how social media can best be utilized to better understand and increase the health and resiliency of communities around the world. The *Alliance* is excited to launch a request for proposals (RFP) for research supported by the Vaccine Confidence Fund (“the Fund”). Facebook and Merck & Co. are financially sponsoring the Fund. Other *Alliance* members will be serving on the Advisory Council.³

With more and more communities relying on social media as a significant source of information related to COVID-19 vaccines and the scale of these digital and online platforms, it is vital that we better understand the role these platforms can play and effectively harness their capabilities to increase vaccination confidence and contribute to vaccine decision-making. This Fund is focused on supporting research on ways to more effectively increase vaccination confidence⁴, particularly among historically marginalized or excluded communities globally.

Areas of Interest

The Fund is seeking proposals that address this primary research question:

¹ Vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon. It is a long-standing and complex global health challenge where complacency, low confidence, and lack of convenience are some of the key driving (and overlapping) factors.

² The term “confidence” allows a spectrum from no confidence to high confidence. Confidence here is defined as “trust in (1) the effectiveness and safety of vaccines; (2) the system that delivers them, including the reliability and competence of the health services and health professionals, and (3) the motivations of the policymakers who decided on the needed vaccines.” (See definition here:

https://www.who.int/immunization/sage/meetings/2014/october/1_Report_WORKING_GROUP_vaccine_hesitancy_final.pdf)

³ The Advisory Council – a small interdisciplinary group of domain experts from the vaccination confidence, public health, social media, and behavioral and data sciences fields – is responsible for providing expert guidance and thought leadership during key milestones of this Fund’s grant selection and management processes.

⁴ This Fund is focused on supporting *vaccination* confidence and uptake. Vaccines are defined as the actual product (i.e., injection/medication) while *vaccination* is defined as the entire system around the delivery of vaccines.

How can social media⁵ be best utilized to better understand and increase vaccination confidence and uptake?

We highly encourage applicants – especially from interdisciplinary teams and cross-sectoral partnerships – to develop truly transformative proposals that address critical research gaps with creative solutions. We also invite applicants to develop their own ideas that align with the Fund’s primary research question and principles. Research proposals should include the following: a well-defined problem statement that articulates a key research gap and/or specifies a focus population (making it clear why this research is novel and how it will add to the current body of understanding); a proposed research methodology and approach (ideally using interdisciplinary methods); and a measurement framework that outlines clear measures and their intended plans for capturing data. A dissemination plan, timeline, budget and budget narrative, organizational information, and CVs of key project personnel will also be required.

Understanding how social media can contribute to vaccine uptake is this Fund’s north star. Recognizing the complexity of this challenge, and that vaccination confidence is the pathway to vaccine uptake, this Fund is interested in pursuing new and transformative approaches to addressing the immediate challenges of increasing vaccination confidence and uptake for COVID-19 as well as routine immunizations. As such, this Fund is intentionally less specific about prescribing research questions or methodological agendas. We instead want to encourage exciting and innovative approaches that meet the stated criteria. We also are interested in supporting proposals that focus on historically marginalized or excluded communities globally.

Below we have included illustrative research examples that would be interesting but they are, by no means, intended to be exclusive or prescriptive:

- Projects that seek to provide improved understanding and/or guidance on how community, national, and global level influencers’ – such as health organizations, public authorities, media outlets, civil society organizations, or politicians – online behavior can increase vaccination confidence and uptake, especially among historically marginalized or excluded communities globally.⁶
- Projects that explore and test exciting, novel, and innovative approaches to leveraging social media. This may include going beyond traditional fields of study to seek approaches from other disciplines that may be applicable to addressing the challenges of COVID-19 vaccine uptake. Or proposals may seek to provide greater insight on how these platforms and their data⁷ can be applied to provide new perspectives, approaches, or analytical methods for increasing COVID-19 vaccine uptake or other routine immunizations.
- Projects that explore a deeper understanding of focus communities’ – i.e., historically marginalized or excluded communities globally – dynamics, specifically with regard to how online

⁵ The Fund’s definition of social media is meant to be broad and inclusive. Our social media definition includes: traditional social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, SnapChat); search engines (e.g., Google, Bing, etc.) and other online platforms that gather user data and micro-target users; and online chatbots. This Fund recognizes that social network data analyses and other big data analytical techniques may also be leveraged as analytical methods in prospective research proposals.

⁶The Fund is interested in research around messaging only when there is a clear behavioral science element. Proposals only focusing on message testing/campaigns are not of interest.

⁷ Private user data from any social media platform will not be considered.

influences may fit into the broader context of offline behavior. This may include projects that look at new ways social media currently does or may affect vaccination confidence and uptake in a community and/or explore key factors along the influence pathway that contribute to validation/discreditation sharing or the formation of/contribution to community beliefs.

This Fund is interested in proposals which can articulate findings that have either immediate or potential impact on the way we understand vaccination confidence or uptake in communities. However, this Fund is also acutely aware of the ambitious timeline and appreciates that critical data (e.g., data from vaccination centers/health clinics) needed, particularly for assessing impact, likely will not be publicly available during the actual research implementation. As such, where impact data may not be available, this Fund is open to other ways of capturing interim results or measurements (e.g., self-reported data) and particularly welcomes new ideas on how to tackle this issue.

The Fund's Principles

Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate how the Fund's core principles, as articulated below, will be incorporated into research plans.

Equity: Given the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on historically marginalized or excluded communities globally, the Fund is committed to ensuring that equity is core to the work we support and we prioritize equity as an essential principle. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines *equity* as the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. Equity includes the shifting of power to the communities of focus, shifting narratives, and language to be representative and inclusive of all experiences and identities. Thus, this Fund is interested in proposals that focus on reaching historically marginalized or excluded populations globally and that are authentically considerate, aware of, and proactively addressing the significant barriers those populations experience.

Community Engagement: We believe one way to achieve equity is ensuring authentic community engagement throughout this work. From research design through to research implementation and dissemination of findings, we highly encourage all applicants to engage proactively and authentically partner with the communities with whom they are working. This engagement would include seeking to understand the obstacles, potential solutions, and assets to build on, from the perspective of the community – ensuring that their voices, perspectives, and experiences are centered in the work. This also includes sharing resources with the community, as with any other partners. The Fund will not finance proposals that appear to be extractive in nature vis a vis the communities they seek to work in or learn from; we very much encourage applications from individuals and institutions representative of these same communities.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: This Fund highly encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-fertilization of ideas from outside traditional disciplines. While not exhaustive, example researchers and disciplines that this Fund would be interested in seeing further integrated and supported include behavioral sciences, communications (including marketing), data sciences, technology, and public health. This Fund firmly believes that rigorous collaboration and partnership is at the heart of the truly bold and transformative approaches (and solutions) needed to address the complexity of today's vaccination confidence and uptake challenges.

External Validity: Challenges and solutions to increasing COVID-19 vaccination confidence and uptake can often be context specific. While this Fund seeks to support historically excluded or marginalized communities globally, this Fund’s priority is also to surface insights that are more universally valid and potentially scalable, at least within focus communities globally. In lay terms: the Fund would prefer to support research where the findings are potentially applicable to segments of the population or population cohorts rather than, for example, a single demographic within a single city.

Actionable Focus: Research should be immediately actionable and valuable for the global health community rather than highly theoretical. However, the Fund will consider projects that may not directly increase vaccinations in a particular community, but rather, for example, provide new approaches to increasing vaccination confidence that can be adapted to other settings/contexts or provide new insights on vaccination behavior that can be shared with and used by others.

Transparency and Information Sharing: This Fund recognizes that we can only truly maximize our impact by being transparent. Information sharing is a critical process; it will enable the global health community to collaborate effectively and efficiently to solve the toughest challenges around increasing vaccination confidence and uptake. This Fund is interested in supporting proposals that are committed to rapidly disseminating insights, data, and learnings from their work as public goods for implementers to utilize in the design and execution of their vaccination campaigns and to continue to advance the global agenda around vaccination confidence and uptake. Proposals that explicitly embrace open access and open data principles will be viewed favorably by the Fund.

Selection Criteria

All submitted research proposals will be reviewed in a standardized manner by both the Fund manager and the Advisory Council. Reviewers will assess proposals against the following key criteria to determine which proposals will ultimately receive funding. Please note that the selection criteria below are provided to guide award selection and are not intended to exclude prospective applicants should they not meet each and every criterion.

Domain	Selection Criteria
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance: Does the proposal contain a coherent and compelling problem statement? • Alignment: Do the proposal’s research question(s) and research methods align with the Fund’s primary research question? • Equity: Does the proposal aim to support focus communities, or address underlying drivers of disparities, especially in trying to achieve health equity? • Experience: Does the proposed research team have a proven track record of expertise in the proposed fields of study?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility: Are the proposed research methods technically and methodologically feasible given time and cost constraints (see more details

	<p>below)? Do the proposed research methods adequately and appropriately consider privacy, i.e., do the methods design for user consent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novelty: Is the proposed line of inquiry novel and does it have the potential to fill an important knowledge gap? • Engagement: Does the proposed research incorporate engagement with the focus communities before, during, and after the research? • Urgency: Does the approach reflect the immediate circumstances of the community? Are there any risks that those circumstances may change in the immediate future? • Collaborative partnerships: Does the proposed research team reflect interdisciplinary areas of expertise? Does the proposed research team pursue partnerships across sectors/disciplines to generate bold and innovative solutions? • Applicability: Can the anticipated research results be used to shape and inform practical public health and technology interventions in the short-term? How can the results of this research be applied in communities beyond those studied?
Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact: Does this proposal articulate clear measures and their pathway to immediate or potential impact (i.e., vaccine uptake)? If impact data is not available (due to the project timeline), are there interim results that can be tracked?
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget: Does the proposal include a budget and clear justification for key budget items?

Expectations of Grantees

- Participate in kick-off call with Fund manager
- Submit a mid-term progress report and final report via a grant management platform. Reporting will be lightweight but meaningful and focus on reviewing anticipated versus actual outcomes, metrics, and milestones as submitted in the approved proposal
- Attend at least two virtual meetings and phone calls to provide status updates on research progress. Specific dates for reviews will be communicated at the time of award and based on the proposed research plan’s timeline
- Submit a plan of dissemination to share the results/findings

Submission of Proposals

The RFP process and receipt of proposals will be conducted via a web-based platform. Applicants should submit proposals via <https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/vaccineconfidencefund> by **August 6, 2021**. Detailed instructions for submitting the proposal are also included in the link. For technology support, please contact VCFinfo@charity.org.

It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that files are complete and transmitted by the deadline. The applicant bears full responsibility for data errors or omissions.

Key application requirements include:

- Project title, summary, and background/rationale that articulate a key research gap and/or specifies a target population (making it clear why this research is novel and how it will add to the current body of understanding)
- Research objectives and methodology (ideally using interdisciplinary approaches) with timeline
- Measurement framework that outlines clear measures and intended plans for capturing data
- Dissemination plan
- Key project team members' CVs/resumes
- Budget and budget narrative (The budget template can be found [here.](#))

Ethical Considerations

The Fund will not support:

- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, disability, race, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, military service, or status.
- Religious organizations, unless the particular program will benefit a large portion of a community without regard to religious affiliation and does not duplicate the work of other agencies in the community.
- Organizations that engage in terrorist activities or are involved in any acts dangerous to human life that are in violation of the criminal laws of any country where we operate, in compliance with the U.S. Patriot Act as well as international anti-terrorism rules.

Conduct of Research and Informed Consent:

- Research must be of sound scientific merit and conducted in conformity with all applicable laws and regulations, and generally accepted standards of research. No clinical studies will be funded by the Fund.
- All grantees must obtain, in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, any necessary approvals of any research protocol and any data privacy authorization to use and disclose personal health information, if applicable.
- All grantees must use an informed consent form with all research participants. These should be uploaded to the Fund manager upon completion of the project.

Review & Notification Process

Applications will be reviewed by the Fund manager (housed at [Global Impact](#)) and the Advisory Council. Successful applicants will be notified on a rolling basis. Applicants that have been selected to receive a grant will be notified of selection, and final award determination will be dependent upon successful completion of background check/vetting and receipt of all necessary bank account information.

The Fund's RFP window will remain open through August 6, 2021, or until all available funds have been committed and exhausted. The Fund anticipates making quick determinations on most applications, ideally within several weeks of initial submission. The first reviews are anticipated to begin late-June 2021.

Issuance of this RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Fund or the *Alliance*, nor does it commit the Fund or *Alliance* to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of applications. Further, the Fund reserves the right to reject any or all applications received.

Summary of Key Dates

Date	Activity
June 10, 2021	- RFP released
August 6, 2021	- Submission deadline
June 15 – August 20, 2021	- Selection and grant awards (rolling basis)
June 30, 2021 – January 31, 2022	- Research conducted
August – October 2021	- Light-touch mid-term review of funded research projects
February 15, 2022	- Final grantee reporting deadline

Contractual Terms & Conditions

The Fund’s decisions will be final in all matters relating to RFP solicitations, including whether or not to grant an award and the interpretation of the Fund’s RFP Terms and Conditions. By submitting a proposal, applicants affirm that they have read and agree to these Terms and Conditions. See grant agreement (see [full application](#)) for complete Terms and Conditions.

- The Fund is authorized to evaluate proposals submitted under its RFPs, to consult with outside experts, as needed, in evaluating proposals, and to grant or deny awards using criteria determined by the Fund to be appropriate and at the Fund’s sole discretion. The Fund’s decisions will be final in all matters relating to its RFPs, and applicants agree not to challenge any such decisions.
- All applicants to the Fund are expected to review and begin internal pre-approval of the Fund’s standard grant agreement [see [full application](#)]. Given the time pressures in disbursing funds as soon as grantees are selected for funding, the Fund seeks to avoid protracted negotiations around grant agreement language. The Fund expects grant applicants to work internally within their institutions to seek pre-approval for as much of this existing language as possible prior to grant approval. The Fund reserves the right to rescind award decisions if protracted discussions around grant agreement language threaten the overall timeline of research projects.
- The Fund will not be required to treat any part of a proposal as confidential or protected by copyright, and may use, edit, modify, copy, reproduce, and distribute all or a portion of the proposal in any manner for the sole purposes of administering the Fund RFP website and evaluating the contents of the proposal.
- Feedback provided in a proposal regarding the Fund will not be treated as confidential or protected by copyright, and the Fund is free to use such feedback on an unrestricted basis with no compensation to the applicant. The submission of a proposal will not result in the transfer of ownership of any IP rights.
- All research projects must be in line with the terms of service of any platforms they use.
- Personal data submitted with a proposal, including name, mailing address, phone number, and email address of the applicant and other named researchers in the proposal may be collected, processed, stored, and otherwise used by the Fund for the purposes of administering the Fund’s RFP website, evaluating the contents of the proposal, and as otherwise provided under the Fund’s Terms and Conditions. If grantees collect or receive any confidential information, this information should only be

used in furtherance of the funded project and grantees shall not disclose such information to any third party without the disclosing party's written consent. Confidential information is any information that the disclosing party identifies as confidential or proprietary information to the receiving party.

- Neither the Fund nor the applicant is obligated to enter into a business transaction as a result of the proposal submission. The Fund is under no obligation to review or consider the proposal.
- Applicants represent and warrant that they have authority to submit a proposal in connection with the Fund's RFP and to grant the rights set forth herein on behalf of their organization. All awards provided by the Fund in connection with this RFP shall be used only in accordance with applicable laws and shall not be used in any way, directly or indirectly, to facilitate any act that would constitute bribery or an illegal kickback, an illegal campaign contribution, or would otherwise violate any applicable anti-corruption, anti-terrorism, or political activities law.

Awards granted in connection with RFP proposals will be subject to any additional Terms and Conditions contained in the grant agreement (or, in some cases, other mechanisms) pursuant to which the award funding will be provided. The Fund will pay grantees the total amount specified in the grant agreement. Grantees may not use funds for any purpose other than the project. The Fund reserves the right to request repayment of any grant funds used in breach of the signed grant agreement, and reserves the right to modify, suspend or discontinue payment for breach of the signed grant agreement. Applicants understand and acknowledge that they will need to agree to these Terms and Conditions to receive an award. See grant agreement for complete Terms and Conditions.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **When is the RFP available?**
 - The RFP will be available via vaccineconfidencefund.org on June 10, 2021.
- **When is the deadline for submissions?**
 - The submission deadline is Friday, August 6, 2021, 12:00am EST. We encourage proposals to be submitted as soon as they are ready, as proposals will be evaluated on a rolling basis.
- **What countries are eligible?**
 - Research that takes place in any country is eligible. The goal of the RFP is to ensure diversity of research globally – in both high-income and low-income countries.
- **How much is the grant amount?**
 - The range of awards will vary based on the scope of the research, but award amounts will range between \$100,000 and \$250,000, with the expectation that some awards could exceed this ceiling.
- **What will the disbursement schedule be?**
 - The funds will be disbursed in two tranches: (1) upon execution of the grant agreement by the parties, and (2) following the submission of required reports and information to the Fund manager.
- **Who are the Alliance members?**
 - The *Alliance for Advancing Health Online* is focused on advancing public understanding of how social media can best be utilized to better understand and increase the health and resiliency of communities around the world. The *Alliance's* first activity is to launch the Vaccine Confidence Fund.

- *Alliance* members currently include the Bay Area Global Health Alliance, the CDC Foundation, Facebook, the MIT Initiative on the Digital Economy, MSD (known as Merck in the US and Canada), Sabin Vaccine Institute, the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the World Bank and the World Health Organization. Further discussions with other key relevant institutions are currently ongoing with the goal of expanding the *Alliance* membership.
- Some representatives from the *Alliance* may also participate on the Advisory Council.
- **Who is funding this research?**
 - Facebook and Merck & Co. are providing funding to Global Impact – the third-party grant fund manager who will be independently executing the Fund including:
 - Design and syndication of the RFP
 - Managing the RFP process
 - Managing transparent reviewing and scoring process for grants
 - Selection of grantees with input from Advisory Council
 - Conducting compliance with all grantees
 - Managing financial transaction and monitoring & evaluation
 - Compiling research findings and issuing an impact report covering the Fund’s aggregate activities and successes across its portfolio of grantees
- **What are the expectations around information and data sharing/dissemination?**
 - In the view of the Fund, all project data, results, and insights generated by grantees should proactively be shared with relevant communities and the public, while also protecting the privacy of participants and any confidential information and adhering to local and national laws. Please reference our Fund principles in this RFP for further details on our approach to information sharing.
- **How should social media factor into research?**
 - While there are many factors that may influence confidence and uptake, we are seeking proposals that are specifically looking at the role of social media and how they can be used as tools to contribute to increasing vaccination confidence and uptake.
- **Are COVID-19 preventative behaviors of interest to this Fund?**
 - While this Fund’s primary focus is on COVID-19 vaccination confidence and uptake (as well as routine immunizations), we would also be interested in better understanding how social media can be or has been leveraged to improve COVID-19 preventative behaviors (e.g., masking, social distancing), particularly if those learnings can identify promising strategies to increase vaccine uptake.
- **Will this Fund support proposals focused on stopping the spread of misinformation or disinformation as it relates to vaccine hesitancy?**
 - The goal of the fund is to support research on how social media can contribute to increasing confidence in and access to vaccines, which might touch on misinformation but isn't the single focus.
- **Who do I contact if I have questions regarding my application?**
VCInfo@charity.org