Broad Agency Announcements: Co-Designing Implementation Research Approaches to Address Global Health Challenges

The USAID Health Research Program is committed to finding solutions to global health challenges, especially those facing women, newborns, and children. The Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) is a procurement vehicle used by USAID to generate, test, and scale-up innovative solutions to development challenges using a co-design approach. This approach is unique to other procurement processes because it emphasizes stakeholders working collaboratively to create solutions. As illustrated below, the BAA includes five steps, beginning with a call for expressions of interest, and typically culminating in one or more awards based on a concept developed and refined through the co-creation process.

**USAID BAA PROCESS**

**THE BAA PROCESS IN ACTION: REAL-WORLD INTRODUCTION AND SCALE OF SIMPLIFIED REGIMEN TO MANAGE NEWBORN SEPSIS**

The Health Research Program used the BAA process in 2017 to test systems approaches to scale-up and sustain management of sepsis in young infants at the community level, when referrals are not possible. A hallmark of the BAA process is its co-design approach to identify the innovative ideas and promising solutions to development challenges. Following a review of expressions of interest, the Health Research Program invited selected participants to participate in a co-creation workshop in Lusaka, Zambia. Researchers, implementers, policy makers, and technical experts from nine countries shared their experiences managing newborn sepsis, exchanged ideas, and collaborated to develop and refine country-specific concepts for implementation research on the introduction and scale-up of simplified regimens for sepsis management in young infants. Key to the co-creation process was the use of human centered design, a participatory approach to developing interventions that are grounded in a deep understanding of and empathy for the needs and experiences of end users.

Over the course of the five-day workshop, participants actively engaged in a facilitated co-design process which included five phases: discovery, ideation, prototyping, formulation, and reflection. Participants were introduced to the concept of designing based on empathy for and understanding of user experiences through the development of “personas” for key stakeholder groups (e.g., family, frontline health worker, district health manager). Based on these needs and experiences of these groups, country teams generated new ideas for newborn sepsis management. Participants then completed a series of exercises to select the best ideas and developed prototypes. Prototypes were revised with feedback from technical resource partners and other country teams. Teams used workshop discussion and outputs to inform concept notes for consideration of funding.
“The co-design approach also provided ample opportunity for South-to-South exchange and learning from other country experiences, which was helpful given the range of country experiences with introducing the simplified regimen for newborn sepsis management.” – Sara Sulzbach, Senior Research Advisor for USAID’s Health Research Program

**BAA CO-DESIGN PROCESS**

**VALUE ADD OF THE BAA PROCESS**

The Health Research Program has utilized the BAA approach to collaboratively develop solutions for a host of priority maternal and child health challenges. In every instance, added value has been realized through USAID’s collaboration with participants, technical experts and development partners. Feedback from BAA participants suggests that the co-creation process was valuable and helped to generate innovative implementation research concepts to address key maternal, newborn and child health concerns. In addition to enhancing the original concepts, the BAA process offered participants a chance to increase their technical knowledge, engage in cross-country collaboration, and gain exposure to a cutting-edge design approach. The Health Research Program has also used the BAA process to forge new partnerships with donors and leverage additional resources to address priority health challenges.

“There has been a lot of value added. We have been able to reach people who have worked in this area before, we have learned from them, we have learned from the experts, we have altered some of our initial over-ambitious aspects of our proposal to more realistic, doable, implementable, ideas. And for us, we have met other…participants [from our country] and ultimately ended up blending and synergizing. So, had this workshop not happened, we wouldn’t have met and wouldn’t have done this blending together…the value added is certainly there.” – Participant

Given the success and the benefits of the BAA, the Health Research Program is committed to using this process in the future to identify and support promising solutions to other global health challenges in maternal, newborn and child health, and potentially other priority areas.

Visit the Health Research Program website (www.harpnet.org) to learn more about the BAA process including ways to participate, and find out more about the implementation research USAID supports.