

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

### URBAN HEALTH INITIATIVE (UHI)

#### Afghan Information Ecosystem: Phase I, Qualitative Research

#### I. Summary:

Date of issuance: 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Submission Deadline (Kabul time): 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Internews invites Afghan research organisations to submit proposals to perform research on the Afghan Information Ecosystem.

This RFP is open to Afghan research organisations with experience in field-based qualitative research in Afghanistan.

The objective of the RFP is to identify an appropriate organization to conduct qualitative research on the Afghan Information Ecosystem.

**Please note that due to award restrictions, the proposal cannot include any subgrants or contracts to other organizations. All work must be performed by the bidding organization.**

Internews invites proposals submitted via email to Fazel Ahmadi, Internews Senior Grants officer at [fahmadi@internews.org](mailto:fahmadi@internews.org) with copy to Sharmini Boyle, Internews Country Director at [sboyle@internews.org](mailto:sboyle@internews.org), and Internews Finance and Grants Director at [sidrees@internews.org](mailto:sidrees@internews.org)

#### II. Background:

Internews' activities proposed here are funded by an award from USAID for work on the Urban Health Initiative (UHI) under a consortium led by JHPIEGO.

The purpose of **Urban Health Initiative (UHI)** is to improve public and private health services delivery in FIVE major urban cities through 1) Strengthening MoPH capacity and stewardship; 2) Improving access to primary and secondary health care services; 3) Improving quality of public and private health services; and 4) Improving people awareness and health care behaviors. UHI will be a new USAID activity in Afghanistan. This is a five-year technical assistance (TA) Activity, with elements of service delivery that are necessary for filling gaps in access to, and quality of, essential health services in five urban cities. The Activity aims to improve health outcomes of people living in urban areas particularly focusing on the health of women and children and other vulnerable populations such as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and communities living in slums.

Internews' **Information Ecosystem Analysis (IEA)** is an analytical framework that can capture all dimensions of the relationship between information supply (media landscape) and information

demand (the human element). It is a multi-phase, human centered approach to understand how people and communities find, value, trust and share information in their own local contexts, whether it's from the media or not.

**This RFP refers to the conducting of “Demand Side Research”** designed to capture insights from consumers on the following aspects of their relationship to their information supply:

1. **Information Need:** The information that people value enough for them to seek it out.
2. **Access:** The ways in which people typically gain access to the information they seek, and the level of risk they undertake to do so through all **channels:** TV, Radio, print, digital and social media, word of mouth.
3. **Sourcing:** The preferred or most frequently consulted specific **sources** that people seek out for the information they need: media sources, community sources, specific online groups or individuals.
4. **Sharing:** The ways in which people pass on sourced information results in patterns of information flow and exchange back and forth between individuals and groups and sets up a landscape in which certain actors and groups gain significance for better or worse (see Trust and Influence).
5. **Trust:** The consumer's belief in the relative reliability and truthfulness of different sources as an indicator of their trust in the information itself.
6. **Influence:** The influence that is given to and comes from being a trusted source, and how that influence is used by influencers and experienced by consumers.
7. **Information Literacy:** The extent to which consumers are able to discern false information in their information ecosystem, how vulnerable or predisposed they are to rumor and misinformation (related to Sourcing, Sharing, Trust and Influence)

### III. Scope of Work

Internews invites Afghan organizations to submit proposals to conduct qualitative research on the Afghan Information Ecosystem. Examples of Internews' work on Information Ecosystems Analysis can be seen at: <https://internews.org/search?keys=Information+Ecosystems> .Details of the research methodology will be provided to the successful applicant, who will need to collaborate with Internews' Ecosystem Advisors for a period of training before the research project is launched.

#### Objective:

Using Internews' guidelines for human-centered research in target communities, the Information Ecosystem research will analyze the qualitative data gathered to provide granular insights into the “demand side” of the information ecosystems where the project's target populations are located (multiple urban and rural locations). These insights will refer to the information needs, trusted sources and influencers, platform preferences and informal information flows on topics relevant to project themes: access to health services, quality of

care, trust in health systems etc. These demand side findings will be cross-referenced and compared across locations as well as with “supply side” mapping (provided to the research team) to generate insights that will improve UHI program design and effectiveness:

- **Actual needs and challenges** as they surface rather than what might be assumed
- **Appropriate methods and approaches** that are trusted and in step with practices and experiences of communities
- **Trust networks** that foster engagement and ultimately impact
- **Inclusion** - Fostering more networked, inclusive and demand-based systems to strengthen the autonomy of individuals and their decisions

### Approach:

The research will take a **design research approach** to explore the information ecosystems of the 5 provinces of Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif, particularly focusing on their relevance to the health of **women, children and other vulnerable populations** and including 5 urban and at least 3 rural locations where researchers will look at the ‘information demand side’ questions (listed above) within specific community contexts. Design research focuses on identifying human needs through empathy and rigorous fieldwork. Data gathering is followed by synthesis and insight generation and proceeds iteratively; research questions evolve during the research. Insights from design research are not just informative; they inform the design of more effective and impactful activities aligned to project objectives.

The actual number and physical locations will be determined by Internews in collaboration with the selected bidder. However, the bidder should plan and budget for the complexities of hiring, deploying and managing field research teams in five focus provinces. The bidder should propose an approach that is realistically identifies time and cost requirements. Researcher and respondent security is of primary importance for field site selection.

An IEA Research Manager from Internews will be based remotely during the fieldwork period during which time they will work closely with the Internews Kabul-based team and Afghanistan-based Project Manager appointed by the research partner.

The research approach will begin with an “Inception and Training Workshop”. The precise structure of the qualitative fieldwork will be finalized during the Inception Workshop and Training Workshop. All field researchers will be trained together on all methodologies before deployment into the field.

The research approach for this study will be dynamic and iterative. Field-based synthesis will allow the team to refine and re-frame research questions and will begin to suggest potential hypotheses to be tested and validated through ongoing fieldwork. Regular online synthesis sessions will organize early findings into frameworks for analysis. The Research Manager will also collaborate on the synthesis of findings from the fieldwork.

Bidders shall address the following activities in their proposal:

## Activities:

### 1. Recruiting local researchers

The research company shall recruit and vet researchers who are from each field location, as well as recruit and vet a core Research and Reporting Team who will liaise with and manage the field researchers. Field researchers will be trained in a variety of design research techniques before going back to their communities. Proposals should describe how many researchers will be recruited from each location and the approach that will be used to identify and recruit. This should include how female researchers will be included in the team.

### 2. Inception Workshop and Training

The field research will kick off with a workshop to bring together key members of the project team in an open forum to explore the research focus and target outcomes. This workshop shall take place online, will be led by Internews, and will include the entire research team (the research company, core research team and recruited field researchers). It will kick off the training week. While Internews will design and lead the training, the bidder will collaborate in training the researchers (including providing trainers and translators) and finalizing the research design. By the end of the training week, the bidder will produce an Inception Report, which will include the detailed research framework, evaluation plan, and research instruments.

### 3. Key Informant Interviews

The field research team will conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews with the key informants. Proposals shall consider the suggested key informant profiles below, suggest any modifications, and propose how many of each type of interviews shall be conducted. Proposals will explain approaches to identifying and recruiting potential local key informants. As gender is a critical component of this study, bidders shall specifically note the number of male and female respondents to be recruited for each type of interview. Bidders shall also explain briefly and clearly how they will ensure the participation of an appropriate proportion of women respondents and other population groups.

	Type of Key Informant Interview	Purpose
A.	<b>Experts on the political, regulatory, health, cultural, and security context in Afghanistan</b>	Background/context (to be conducted in Kabul by the research company)
B.	<b>Key influencers within each geographic area in the information flow process, e.g. elders, religious leaders, local government officials physicians, etc.</b>	Background/context at local level; deep dive into the mechanics, motivations and processes of information flow

	(to be conducted in each field site by the local researchers)
<b>C. Key information consumers – representatives of different typologies of information users</b>	Deep dive into information needs and use in different groups, contexts and environments (to be conducted in each field site by the local researchers)

#### 4. Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions will help achieve deeper and nuanced understandings on different aspects of information environments and people’s experiences. Discussions shall focus on respondents’ attitudes, needs, and challenges with regards to accessing, sharing, creating, and assessing information, and how these have changed over time and in different circumstances.

Bidders shall propose an appropriate number of focus groups for each site. The description shall include numbers of participants per focus group, and demographic breakdowns for each focus group. Focus groups shall be conducted with both men and women.

#### 5. Deliverables

The bidder will produce the **inception report** with a detailed research framework, evaluation plan, and research instruments by the end of the Inception and Training Workshop.

The bidder will also produce a detailed **final report** synthesizing key findings from all aspects of the research, and presenting recommendations for the design of future interventions. A consideration of what worked, what didn’t work in the research approach, in addition to recommending next steps for the research, shall be part of the final report. A **slide deck** summarizing key points and featuring illustrative visuals will be delivered along with the report.

Internews has already conducted a detailed literature review of current research and analysis of the Afghanistan information and media environments. This report will be made available to the successful bidder.

The final report will be approx. 25 pages long and should include:

- Introduction
- Executive summary of key findings and recommendations
- Methodology overview
- Narrative analysis of key findings
- Pictures from the ethnographic elements of the study – catalogued and collated
- Recommendations for future interventions and future research

A draft will be provided to Internews for comments; the bidder will address the comments in a final version. Internews reserves the right to edit the report.

#### **PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Proposals shall include a brief description of the research team, including research manager(s) from the company, number of local field researchers proposed, interpreters for training and all synthesis sessions (for the research manager), and a brief description of the approach to recruiting local field researchers.
2. Proposals shall include a brief description of the methodology for each component of the research outlined above; number of respondents suggested for each activity; and any modifications suggested to the research described in this RFP, along with a brief, clear description of why the modifications are proposed.
3. Proposals shall include a timetable for the project. Bidders may modify the sample timetable in this RFP as appropriate. It is envisioned that the Inception and Training Workshop will start in April-May 2021 dependent on vetting approval.
4. Proposals shall include an analysis of security risks to researchers and mitigation measures planned.

#### **IV. Level of Effort:**

This project overview illustrates the anticipated level of effort (LOE). Bidders may propose changes to this chart, not to exceed a change of +/- 10% of the total LOE estimated below. Any proposed changes must be accompanied by a clear, concise explanation of why the modifications are proposed.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>LOE</b>
<b>Recruitment of core research management team and field team</b>	14 days
<b>Inception and Training workshop</b>	6 days
<b>Inception report preparation</b>	5 days
<b>Fieldwork (8 research locations within 5 provinces)</b>	40 weeks
<b>Analysis/Report and Presentation Writing (including revisions)</b>	25 days
<b>Total:</b>	90 days

#### **V. Award Amount:**

Under this RFP, Internews anticipates awarding one (1) fixed price contract for up to 150,000 USD.

## VI. Timeline:

Internews anticipates awarding a contract to the selected respondents on or about the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021, for a performance of up to 6 months.

### Timeline for deliverables

Deliverables	Due Date
<b>Inception Report (with evaluation plan and instruments for review)</b>	Project kickoff +5 days
<b>Draft Preliminary Report based on fieldwork analysis</b>	End of fieldwork +30 days
<b>Final Report</b>	+14 days
<b>Presentation</b>	+3 days

Organizations can submit only one application.

## VII. Instructions to Respondents:

Proposals must be submitted by email. Individual messages may not exceed 2.5MB. The subject line must include the words “**Response to RFP Information Ecosystems Research**”. The documents constituting the proposal must be included as attachments. The email must list and describe the documents to be included as parts of the proposal. If more than one message is required to transmit the proposal, each message must be identified as part of a multi-part submission (e.g. “message 1 of 3”).

Any portion of the proposal containing confidential or proprietary information shall be clearly marked within the proposal itself either by highlighting or italics. The email must describe specifically how these sections are identified.

All proposals submitted will be acknowledged within three (3) days and will note the documents submitted. The respondent is responsible for ensuring and confirming that the emails comprising the proposal are received by the Internews representatives indicated above.

## VIII. Eligibility:

Bidders must meet the following criteria in order to be considered eligible for the award:

- A local, independent and registered organization in Afghanistan;
- All bidders must be in good standing in performance and reporting under previous subgrants from Internews, Jhpiego or any other organization, if applicable;

- All bidders shall be committed to meet all reporting requirements and deadlines.

#### **IX. Required Documents to be Submitted in Response to this RFP**

- Detailed technical narrative.

The technical narrative should be specific, complete, and precise, and demonstrate the bidder's relevant experience and technical expertise. It should be between 12 and 15 pages in length, using 1-inch margins and Times New Roman 12-point font. Tables of contents are optional and are not included in this page limit. Annexes should not exceed 10 pages total (in addition to the main technical narrative document).

A complete technical narrative will include the following sections:

1. **Contextual Background:** This section should demonstrate the bidder's understanding of the Afghan context.
  2. **Methodology:** This section should demonstrate the bidder's technical approach and expertise. The methodology section should address all components of the scope of work detailed above, including interviewer recruitment, field management structure, respondent recruitment (including the inclusion of female respondents), and quality controls.
  3. **Staffing:** This section should list the names and detail the qualifications of lead project staff.
  4. **Institutional Capacity and Past Performance:** This section should demonstrate how the bidder possesses the skills and relevant experience needed to implement and meet the methodological requirements of the project.
  5. **Annexes:** Mandatory annexes include CVs of the project manager and any key technical staff, past performance references, and a detailed work plan, including due dates for key deliverables.
- Detailed budget that includes adequate budget notes in support of costs identified. **Please note that due to award restrictions, the proposal cannot include any subgrants or contracts to other organizations. All work must be performed by the applicant organization.**
  - Signed cover page that includes the organization name, full contact information for the organization, including email address, phone number, and name and title of the authorized representative of the submitting organization who has signed the cover page.
  - Organizational qualification and experience
  - Copy of valid Registration License
  - USAID Information Form to include list of Key Individuals of the Organization



- Other materials that support the proposal (as applicable)

All Proposals(s) must be written in English.

### **X: Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals will be reviewed and evaluated on the following criteria, starting with the criterion of the most relative importance (1) and decreasing further down the list (through 3):

1. **Quality of project concept and approach;** clear and concise presentation of the proposed activities and outcomes; sound research methodology and approach to quality control. Modifications to the proposed framework will be considered but must be accompanied by a brief and compelling explanation as to why the changes are proposed.
2. **Institution's record and capacity;** a proven track record of qualitative field research across Afghanistan
3. **Qualifications of key staff**
4. **Cost effectiveness;** clear explanation and description of all costs presented
5. **Clear and simple monitoring and evaluation plan**

Award shall be made to the bidder whose proposal is responsive to the RFP and is most advantageous to the project, all factors considered.

### **XII. Award Notification and Responses**

Successful respondent(s) will be notified of selection within fifteen (15) working days following the deadline for submission of proposals.

The successful respondent(s) must confirm the proposal and acceptance of the selection within two (2) working days of selection notification or the selection will be withdrawn due to non-responsive respondent and offered to the next most qualified respondent.

Once selection is finalized, unsuccessful bidders will be notified that an award has been made.

Notice of selection of the proposal is not to be construed as a contract award. Once the selection is confirmed, the organization will need to be vetted according to USAID guidelines. A final contract will then be negotiated with the successful respondent.

Annexes:

1. Key Themes and Questions to be Explored in the Information Ecosystems Research, Phase I
2. Detailed Budget Template
3. USAID Information Form

## **ANNEX 1: KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED IN THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEMS RESEARCH, PHASE I**

Theme 1: Information needs

Theme 2: Information flows

Theme 3: Understanding trust and influence

### **Theme 1: Information needs & use**

- Identify needs across different segments of the urban population, with an emphasis on women, adolescents, children and vulnerable groups
- Map experiences of the information landscape from an on-the-ground perspective
- Elicit details about information needs related to family planning, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, immunization, nutrition and TB.
- Identify how information is processed, used, and applied

What information do people need? Where do they turn to address different kinds of needs? Where are the gaps in meeting these needs? How do needs change during times of change (e.g. elections)?

What are the health related information needs of women and adolescents? What are the best ways to meet them? Are there specific types of information women would like via phones or other means? Or is connecting with others more important than the information?

How do people make choices about information? How do communities respond to information from different sources including biased information sources?

What content is locally most relevant to different communities? How does the format of information affect its use?

How do people check, verify or triangulate health information and who do they turn to for that? Do youth verify and triangulate health information in the same way their parents do? What are the differences?

## Theme 2: Information flows

- Identify key influencers and disseminators and healthcare providers
- Map word of mouth networks
- Identify places and means by which health information is exchanged
- Identify social norms around gathering, sharing, and assessing different types of health information
- Trace information journeys to and from residents and their contacts in other places

From what sources do people get their health information – across different information types? Once they get a piece of information, what do they do? Who, if anyone, do they share it with? How?

What are the key networks of trust and influence?

What happens when people travel frequently between urban and rural environments, where information cultures are so different? How are information flows impacted?

Are there pockets of change or resistance in communities? What can be learned that might help improve information flows across the country?

To what extent, and under what conditions, can people express themselves freely, for instance about choices around termination of pregnancy? How do norms about expression impact information flows?

How does literacy, in all its forms — textual, technological, and media — impact how health information flows among populations?

### Theme 3: Understanding trust and influence

- Uncover relative levels of trust and reliability by touch point/information type/event type
- Explore the metrics communities used to determine whether a particular piece of health news or information/ source is credible, trustworthy, or worth passing on to their networks.
- Examine the uses and perceptions of secular versus religious information sources
- Identify and consider the impact of potential “change agents” such as ICT users and students, travelers, youth, etc.
- Consider the changing and contextual nature of trust

How is trust established? What makes a source believable? Why are different sources trustworthy or not trustworthy? Are different sources/people trusted more or less for different information? Which sources are trusted for different types of health information? How does trust change over time?

Are local influencers more important than national or regional influencers? Do local influencers share characteristics across communities?

How does the perception of whether or not any information adheres to Islamic principles influence people’s feelings of trust for that information?

How does loyalty contribute to trust and to people’s use of health information sources?

In what conditions do insurgent/extremist messages flourish? How do people interpret it?

How is influence changing? In what ways are youth influencing their families and communities in new ways? How important is the educated, tech-savvy elite in terms of influence? Who do they influence? How and in what ways are women influencers behind the scenes?

Are there any social disruptors within the communities? What is their impact on health information consumption, flow, use, etc.?

Are there any examples of radical transformation of trust? How and when is trust built where it had not been strong previously?

## ANNEX 2: Detailed Budget Template

Annex 1						
Detailed Budget						
	Unit	Quantity	Level of Effort (LOE)	Rate	Total	Budget Narrative
<b>Personnel</b>						
Staff Person (Position)	mo	0	50%	-	-	
Staff Person (Position)	mo	0	100%	-	-	
Staff Person (Position)	mo	0	100%	-	-	
Consultant (Role)	mo	0	50%	-	-	
Consultant (Role)	mo	0	100%	-	-	
Consultant (Role)	mo	0	100%	-	-	
<b>Total Personnel</b>						
<b>Travel</b>						
Domestic Airfare (Specifics here)	ea	0		-	-	
Domestic Per Diem (Specifics here)	day	0		-	-	
<b>Total Travel</b>						
<b>Supplies</b>						
Supply #1 (Describe)	mo	0		-	-	
Supply #2 (Describe)	ea	0		-	-	
<b>Total Supplies</b>						
<b>Contractual - <u>No subawarding allowed under this RFA</u></b>						
<b>Total Contractual</b>						
<b>Other Direct Costs</b>						
ODC #1 (Describe)	mo	0	100%	-	-	
ODC #2 (Describe)	mo	0		-	-	
ODC #3 (Describe)	ea	0		-	-	
<b>Total Other Direct Costs</b>						
<b>PROJECT TOTAL</b>						

End of RFP