

Outcomes Accelerator: Cohort 5 Call for Proposals Sustaining and Scaling Mental Health Outcomes

Submission Deadlines

Expression of Interest (EOI) application [portal](#) opens August 20, 2026

EOI submission deadline: October 2, 2026

1. Introduction

The Outcomes Accelerator is a catalytic platform to accelerate more effective testing, scaling and mainstreaming of outcomes-based financing (OBF) approaches into the delivery of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) impact. The Outcomes Accelerator works with stakeholders across the OBF ecosystem – including governments, development agencies, investors, services providers, intermediaries, and knowledge partners – to address the key barriers facing the market and unlock funding for high-quality OBF projects.

The Outcomes Accelerator offers flexible funding, targeted expertise, and networking to support OBF initiatives with testing, launching, and scaling.

The founding members of the Accelerator are SECO, FCDO, and the UBS Optimus Foundation, who have engaged Levoca LLC to perform the day-to-day Secretariat activities of the Outcomes Accelerator. Further details on the role of the Secretariat can be found in the Application Guidance section below.

See information on the winners of the first four Cohorts of the Outcomes Accelerator [here](#).

This Call for Proposals invites applications for innovative OBF initiatives that **improve mental health outcomes**, with a strong emphasis on early intervention, community-based delivery, and systems integration at scale.

2. Background and Context

Mental health is one of the defining human development and societal challenges of our time. More than 1 billion people globally live with mental health conditions.¹ Yet fewer than half receive any treatment, and in low-income countries, fewer than 1 in 10 do. This burden also falls heavily on youth: 1 in 7 adolescents are affected, and suicide is among the leading causes of death for young people. With the onset of mental health conditions occurring mostly before the age of 24, early intervention amongst youth is critical to preventing mental health issues from becoming a life-long battle. Reducing suicide mortality is also an explicit global commitment, with the suicide rate serving as an indicator under SDG target 3.4 on mental health.

¹ World Health Organization (WHO), "[Over a billion people living with mental health conditions – services require urgent scale-up](#)," news release, 2 September 2025.

Yet in most low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), systems are not built to respond. Community-based infrastructure and trained support remain scarce, conditions go undetected and untreated, and young people lack access to timely, trusted, and culturally relevant care. Median government spending on mental health remains at just 2% of total health budgets, unchanged since 2017. High-income countries spend up to \$65 per person; low-income countries spend as little as \$0.04.²

Mental health is also not a standalone issue. Its impact extends far beyond the individual, creating substantial costs for health systems, society, and the broader economy. It intersects with education, early childhood development, and livelihoods, shaping whether people learn, work, parent, and participate in their communities. The costs of inaction are therefore felt across sectors and economies, while the returns to action are substantial: every dollar invested in scaled-up treatment for common mental health conditions is estimated to return several times its value in health and productivity gains.³

The case for OBF in mental health initiatives is not simply that more funding is needed. It is that the funding which does exist rarely flows to what works or stays long enough to build sustainable solutions.⁴ By linking funding to verified outcomes, OBF aligns incentives across stakeholders, strengthens accountability, integrates robust measurement and verification, and builds the case for sustained public investment, offering a more cost-effective pathway for domestic governments to deliver better health and economic outcomes at scale. Because needs evolve over a person's life, OBF structures can also support delivery models that adapt the type and intensity of support as circumstances change, rather than locking financing to a single service.

For its fifth cohort, the Outcomes Accelerator is seeking proposals that use OBF to address these challenges, by making mental health outcomes contractible and verifiable, sharpening accountability for results, and giving domestic governments and funders a concrete reason to commit to mental health and sustain that commitment over time. This cohort is an opportunity to further test and strengthen OBF approaches that intentionally integrate mental health into broader service delivery systems, with a particular focus on youth as a target population, due to the importance of early intervention in a person's life.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen alignment around shared and standardized outcome metrics in the field. More consistent measurement approaches can enhance comparability across programs, support funder confidence, and help better demonstrate the broader social and economic returns of investment. Proposals are therefore encouraged to align with existing measurement frameworks where possible, use comparable indicators, and contribute to a more coherent and interoperable measurement ecosystem.

² WHO Mental Health Atlas 2024 (Geneva: WHO, 2025), <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/382452/9789240114487-eng.pdf>

³ Chisholm, D. et al. (2016), Scaling-up treatment of depression and anxiety: a global return-on-investment analysis, *Lancet Psychiatry* 3(5).

⁴ WHO and World Bank (2025), *Financing for NCDs and mental health: making the money work better*, Policy Brief, International Dialogue on Sustainable Financing for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, February 2025.

3. Scope and Thematic Areas

The Outcomes Accelerator welcomes innovative proposals that apply OBF to achieve clear, measurable mental health outcomes. Projects may be focused primarily on mental health, or mental health may be integrated within the design of broader social and economic programs. In either case, priority will be given to projects that advance the use of mental health outcomes as payment metrics, and all projects must include mental health or psychosocial outcomes in their theory of change and measure them. Proposals that support young people (ages ~10-25) will be prioritized for this cohort, as adolescence and early adulthood are the critical window to help prevent crisis, self-harm and suicide amongst youth.⁵

This call seeks proposals that use OBF to:

- Address barriers to investment in evidence-based, integrated community-based mental health interventions;
- Strengthen preventive and community-level models, and embed support within systems people (particularly youth) already use, such as primary care, schools, and workplaces;
- Increase access to trusted, trained support, particularly where services are scarce or hard to reach;
- Engage participants, including youth, in the design, delivery, and governance of programs to ensure relevance, trust, and cultural alignment;
- Crowd in public and/or private capital to ensure sustainable financing and scale beyond donor support;
- Demonstrate a clear pathway to government integration and/or uptake, including policy alignment and financing mechanisms; and
- Include robust, cost-effective measurement frameworks to contribute to a more coherent evidence base.

This call is open to all mental health topics and conditions; the thematic areas listed below are illustrative examples intended to signal the breadth of what is in scope. Proposals may span more than one area.

- Systems integration in primary and community health: Approaches that integrate mental health into primary healthcare, schools, workplaces, and community settings.
- Suicide prevention and crisis response: Approaches that identify, support, and respond to young people at risk of self-harm or suicide, including early identification, crisis response, referral pathways, and post-crisis support.
- Community-based support and prevention: Programs that build social connection and belonging, strengthen protective relationships, expand access to trusted and trained support, and foster resilience and wellbeing through community-based approaches, particularly among young people.

⁵The WHO defines young people as ages 10 to 24. For proposals focused on youth employment or the school-to-work transition, applicants may apply the youth age definition applicable in the delivery context (for example ILO's 15 to 29, or the African Youth Charter's 15 to 35). For any questions, please reach out to the Outcomes Accelerator Secretariat.

- Gender-informed care: Approaches that respond to the distinct mental health needs, risks, and barriers faced by women and girls (for example, integration with sexual and reproductive health services, perinatal mental health, and responses to gender-based violence) and by men and boys (for example, elevated suicide risk and low rates of help-seeking)
- Fragile and conflict-affected settings: Psychosocial support in fragile and conflict-affected settings, particularly where people experience acute and/or ongoing trauma.
- Education: Interventions that embed mental health and psychosocial support within education systems to improve learning, attendance, retention, and transitions, including school-based support services and social-emotional learning with measurable outcomes.
- Employment: Programs that integrate mental health support into employment, skills, and livelihoods initiatives, recognizing that psychosocial wellbeing shapes whether people can secure, retain, and progress in work, particularly for young people navigating the transition from education to employment.
- Technology: Programs that utilize accessible, tech-enabled care and safe digital spaces, including approaches that promote healthy use of technology and extend trusted support to populations that are hard to reach through in-person services.

Proposals will not be considered if they:

- Lack a clear OBF component;
- Do not define clear, measurable mental health outcomes; proposals where mental health or wellbeing is referenced only incidentally, without a defined role in the theory of change or corresponding outcome, are not in scope;
- Focus primarily on specialized or institutional care without prevention or system integration; and
- Rely primarily on medicalized or pharmaceutical approaches.

4. Geography

Projects must be delivered in or for the benefit of countries eligible for official development assistance (ODA) according to the [OECD-DAC List of ODA Recipients](#).

Priority will be given to contexts where:

- There is significant unmet need for mental health support;
- Systems lack accessible, community-based services; and
- There is strong potential for government partnership and integration.

5. Project Maturity

The Outcomes Accelerator welcomes initiatives across a range of maturities, from early-stage concepts and feasibility work through to projects approaching launch or scale. This approach reflects and recognizes that the mental health OBF market is still developing, and a healthy pipeline depends on supporting promising concepts at earlier stages as well as those that are further advanced. The level of evidence expected is proportionate to maturity: earlier-stage applicants

should show a credible path to building traction with government partners or system actors, while later-stage applicants should be able to evidence it. Relevant signals of traction include engagement with key partners, particularly government partners or system actors, and progress toward securing outcome funding. Where it exists, evidence of support, commitment, and leadership from outcome funders, domestic government partners, and other key partners (for example, letters of support, MOUs, or official announcements) will strengthen a proposal.

Preference will be given to initiatives that:

- Show early government buy-in or co-design;
- Are aligned with national or sub-national policy priorities; and
- Demonstrate potential for institutionalization within public systems.

6. Outcomes-Based Financing Approaches

The Outcomes Accelerator is instrument-agnostic as long as projects support the design, implementation or capacity building for an Outcomes-Based Finance approach. Projects should adhere to [OECD guidance](#) and definitions of OBF. Instruments may include, but are not limited to, impact bonds, outcomes bonds, impact-linked loans and bonds, outcome funds, nature credits and environmental market mechanisms, carbon-linked payments, pull finance mechanisms, outcomes contracts, among other tools, strategies, and approaches. All projects should involve the participation of non-state actors. Private investment is not required but may be considered a bonus when it adds knowledge and rigor, and/or financial viability to the project.

7. Who can participate?

The Outcomes Accelerator invites applications from individual organizations or consortia, including, but not limited to:

- Outcome funding organizations, including multilateral and bilateral funding organizations, private philanthropy, corporates and domestic governments;
- Service delivery organizations, including non-profit and for-profit organizations that implement outcomes-focused programs;
- Market support providers, including deal developers, intermediaries, advisory firms, research organizations; and
- Impact investors, including funds, development finance institutions, foundations, institutional and other investors, or providers of risk or working capital.

8. Technical Criteria for Assessment

All proposals will be objectively assessed using the evaluation criteria in the table below to support decision making and shortlist the most promising applications and EOIs. The assessment scores for proposals will remain confidential within the Outcomes Accelerator. For transparency and learning purposes, applicants that reach the Full Proposal stage may ask for qualitative feedback on their proposals. The Outcomes Accelerator's Governing Committee will review shortlisted proposals and endorse final selections.

Table 1: Technical Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Description	Max Points (Total = 100)
Potential for Impact and Accelerator Additionality	Applicants must clearly articulate the mental health challenge being addressed, including underlying systemic barriers and unmet needs. Proposals must demonstrate strong alignment with the objectives of this Call for Proposals (detailed above) and define clear, measurable mental health outcomes. Competitive proposals will: • Demonstrate a strong theory of change linking activities to measurable improvements in mental health and psychosocial outcomes; • Clearly explain why OBF is appropriate and how it will improve effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability; and • Identify key barriers preventing the initiative from moving forward and explain how support from the Outcomes Accelerator will address these barriers. Proposals should also demonstrate how proposed outcomes and indicators are meaningful, credible, and aligned with the priorities of key stakeholders, particularly program participants and service providers (including youth, where relevant), and align with existing measurement frameworks where possible.	35
Stakeholder Support and Likelihood to Launch	Proposals must demonstrate readiness to launch – or a credible pathway to launch - backed by strong support and engagement from key stakeholders, with particular emphasis on government partners and system actors. Competitive proposals will: • Demonstrate clear market traction and interest from relevant partners; • Demonstrate commitment and leadership from government partners, investors, private funders including alignment with policy priorities, co-design, or early-stage agreements where available; • Present a credible, well-defined pathway to sustainable financing beyond donor support; • Demonstrate meaningful engagement of beneficiaries and communities in design and delivery; and • Articulate a clear pathway to government adoption, integration, and/or co-financing over time, including how the intervention could be institutionalized within public systems.	25

Capacity to Deliver and Staffing	The Outcomes Accelerator will prioritize proposals with strong implementing organizations or consortia that demonstrate the capability to deliver. Competitive proposals will: • Demonstrate relevant technical expertise in mental health, program delivery, and OBF where applicable; • Provide evidence of past performance and delivery of similar interventions or programs; • Demonstrate strong and clearly defined partnerships, including roles and responsibilities across organizations; • Include appropriate staffing structures and governance arrangements; and • Demonstrate the ability to operate in the proposed context, including engagement with government systems and stakeholders.	20
Innovation, Demonstration Effect and Scalability	The Outcomes Accelerator will prioritize proposals that are innovative and have strong potential to influence broader systems and markets. Competitive proposals will: • Demonstrate innovation in program design, financing mechanisms, or delivery approaches; • Show potential to generate learning and evidence that can inform broader sector practice; • Provide a clear and credible pathway to scale, including expansion across geographies or populations; • Demonstrate financial sustainability and a pathway to long-term funding beyond donor support; and • Articulate how the model can be scaled through government systems or large institutional partners, including integration into policies, programs, or budgets.	20

In addition to the technical criteria, proposed budgets will be assessed separately at the Full Proposal stage with consideration for realism and price reasonableness. Indicative budget amounts for each product category are provided in the Application Guidance below.

All applications will be required to meet the due diligence and eligibility requirements of the UBS Optimus Foundation and the donors to the Outcomes Accelerator, if selected.

Application Guidance

What types of activities are eligible for Accelerator support?

Outcomes Accelerator takes a portfolio approach, aiming to balance late-stage and early-stage concepts, a range of instrument types, and innovation level. The table below provides indicative guidance on potential uses for Pipeline Acceleration funding. It is intended for guidance only.

Table 2: Indicative Uses of Accelerator Funding

Product	Description	Indicative Amount
Scoping study	Country-focused, looks at one or more topics. This should be done in partnership with an interested outcome funder.	Up to \$60K -100 K
Early-Stage Design	High value opportunity requiring detailed design study.	Up to \$300K
Late-Stage Design	Concept in late stage of design, requiring funding support to reach launch (e.g. finalization of key contracts, including outcomes contract).	Up to \$200K
Project Scale Up	Funding to support the design of a scale-up phase of an existing outcomes-based project. Can include design of outcomes fund.	Up to \$200K

Application Process

The application process is a two-step process: (1) Expression of Interest (EOI), and (2) Full Proposal for shortlisted applicants by invite only. The EOI will include an initial screening for eligibility, followed by general information about the organization(s), project details and concept, and general funding requirements.

Applications that are successful at the EOI stage will be invited to submit a full proposal, which will require greater detail about the project, including buy-in from relevant stakeholders, project risks, activities, staffing and a full budget breakdown.

Application Stages:



Anticipated Cohort Timeline

- **EOI Submission Window:** August 20 – October 2, 2026
- **Full Proposal Submission Window:** November – December 2026 (dates to be confirmed)
- **Due Diligence and Contracting:** February - April 2027 (dates to be confirmed)

Submission Deadlines

- Applicants can create an account to submit EOIs on the online portal starting August 20, 2026.
- The EOI submission deadline for Outcomes Accelerator support is October 2, 2026.
- The Full Proposal submission deadline (invite only) is anticipated to be December 18, 2026 (*To be announced and confirmed at a later date*).

All questions should be sent to OutcomesAccelerator@levoca.org.

Applicants with concerns about sharing highly sensitive information should reach out to the Outcomes Accelerator Secretariat to discuss possible non-disclosure arrangements or an option to redact highly sensitive information in their proposals with a short justification explaining why information was left out.

Assessment Process

All applications will be subject to a competitive assessment to ensure that selected projects contribute to the Accelerator's goals as well as demonstrate value for money, using the technical assessment criteria provided above to guide decision-making and review.

At the EOI stage, projects will first be screened for their eligibility as pass/fail and then be assessed based on evaluation criteria as to whether they will be invited to submit a full proposal. Additional information and clarifications may be requested upon EOI review.

At the full proposal stage (invite only), projects will be assessed on a greater level of detail, including a project budget, staffing, and KPIs. The Outcome Accelerator can enter into a dialogue with proponents on all aspects of their proposal before submitting recommendations for final approval. Applicants may be requested to present their proposal in-person or virtually to the Outcomes Accelerator members and/or independent experts in a pitch session before final decisions are made. Full proposal templates will be made available to short-listed applicants.

Applications will be selected based on a holistic view of the project proposal against defined criteria for each cohort and will be carefully selected to ensure a complementary portfolio balanced in theme, region and levels of novelty.

Decision-making

All proposals will be assessed competitively and transparently guided by the assessment criteria outlined above. The final selection of Outcomes Accelerator applications will be made by consensus by the member organizations of the Governing Committee of the Outcomes Accelerator, consisting of FCDO, SECO and the UBS Optimus Foundation. Proposals will be submitted to Levoca in its role as the Outcomes Accelerator Secretariat for eligibility screening, technical review, and processing, who will share documentation with the Governing Committee.

To support decision-making recommendations on grant approvals, the Governing Committee may invite external, independent, non-voting member(s) and other outcome funders on ad hoc or permanent basis to participate in the technical review process. Project proponents may be required to present their proposals virtually to a panel of Outcomes Accelerator donors, donor observers, and independent experts before final decisions are made.

Contracting (UBSOF)

Selected Applicants will receive Outcome Accelerator funding once the proposal has received final approval and a legal written agreement to use Outcome Accelerator funding towards implementation of the project is signed by all parties (the Trustee, UBS Optimus Foundation, and the grantee).

Transparency and Disclosure

The Outcomes Accelerator is committed to transparency and sharing knowledge as a public good. All materials and studies supported with Outcomes Accelerator funding should be made public when possible, including, but not limited to, feasibility and design studies and outcomes contracts. Proposals may opt-in to be included in the public Outcomes Accelerator [Pipeline Database](#).

Conflicts of Interest

The Outcomes Accelerator will identify and take appropriate measures to avoid or resolve conflict of interest situations by the Secretariat, as well as any voting or non-voting members and observers of the Governing Committee of the Outcomes Accelerator.

Levoca, in its role as the Secretariat of the Outcomes Accelerator, operates its advisory services and other business activities at arm's length from the Outcomes Accelerator and is not eligible to apply for Outcomes Accelerator sub-grants or be hired by sub-grantees using Accelerator grant money.

Feedback

The Outcomes Accelerator is a laboratory for learning and innovation and will continually review and improve its operating processes as needed, including seeking feedback from the market.

Questions and Contact Information

For any questions or further information, please reach out to the Outcomes Accelerator team at OutcomesAccelerator@levoca.org.