OUTCOMES ACCELERATOR: COHORT 5
MENTAL HEALTH CALL FOR PROPOSALS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*This will be a living document updated continuously as questions are received through the virtual informational Webinar or to the Outcomes Accelerator inbox (**OutcomesAccelerator@levoca.org**).*

1. Scope and Eligibility

Q1. Does our project have to focus exclusively on mental health?

Projects may focus primarily on mental health, or mental health may be integrated within broader social and economic programs, for example education, employment, or health programs. In either case, all projects must include mental health or psychosocial outcomes in their theory of change and measure them. Priority is given to projects that use mental health outcomes as payment metrics.

Q2. Is this call only for youth-focused projects?

The call is open to all mental health topics and populations, but proposals that support young people (ages approximately 10–25) will be prioritized for this cohort, since adolescence and early adulthood are the critical window for prevention and early intervention. For proposals focused on youth employment or school-to-work transitions, applicants may apply the youth age definition applicable in their delivery context, for example ILO 15–29 or the African Youth Charter 15–35.

Q3. Which countries are eligible for the Outcomes Accelerator?

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 with significant unmet need for mental health support, where systems lack accessible community-based services, and where there is strong potential for government partnership and integration. See Q21 on how government engagement is weighed in contexts where the target population is excluded from public services.

Q4. Who can apply for the Outcomes Accelerator?

We invite applications from individual organizations or consortia, including outcome funding organizations (multilateral and bilateral funders, private philanthropy, corporates, and domestic governments), service delivery organizations (non-profit and for-profit), market support providers (deal developers, intermediaries, advisory firms, research organizations), and impact investors. All projects should involve the participation of non-state actors.

Q5. What types of proposals will not be considered?

Proposals will not be considered if they lack a clear OBF component; do not define clear, measurable mental health outcomes (mental health referenced only incidentally is not in scope); focus primarily on specialized or institutional care without prevention or system integration; or rely primarily on medicalized or pharmaceutical approaches.

Q6. What does the Call for Proposals mean by "medicalized or pharmaceutical approaches"?

By medicalized, we mean approaches that treat mental health primarily as a clinical or medical issue, focused on diagnosis and treatment by health professionals. The approaches we seek to support emphasize prevention, early support, and community-based delivery embedded within systems people already use, including schools and workplaces. Clinical elements are important and can form part of a project, and the same goes for medication where it is a part of care. The concern is a model that relies purely on clinical or pharmaceutical treatment, without prevention or systems integration.

Q7. Do we need a project that is ready to launch? Are early-stage or late-stage proposals favored?

The Accelerator welcomes initiatives across a range of maturities, from early-stage concepts and feasibility work through to projects approaching launch or scale. There is no preference for the project stage. Evaluation is based on alignment with the Call for Proposals and the strength of the proposal itself.

What does vary by stage is the level of evidence expected, which 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. On partnership evidence, see Q25.

2. What the Accelerator Funds

Q8. Does the Accelerator fund the design and development of projects using OBF, or does it provide funding based on the outcomes a project achieves?

The Accelerator provides design funding to help projects incorporate and integrate outcomes-based financing into their intervention. It does not pay for outcomes, and it does not fund service delivery. Outcome payments and delivery costs are financed through the transaction itself, by outcome funders and investors.

Accelerator funding is pipeline acceleration support: scoping studies, design work, and capacity building to get OBF projects to launch or scale. In practice, this supports an organization that has been incubating or developing a project but has not had the funding to dedicate internal staff time, or to hire an expert, to design and structure the outcomes-based financing elements. It is pre-implementation funding focused on design services, and it cannot fund the actual delivery of a project.

The availability of outcome funding for the eventual transaction is one of the traction signals that strengthens a proposal.

Q9. Could funding under this call complement or supplement an existing program? Can an existing program or project apply?

Yes, a proposal can come from an existing program. One example would be a proven program you are looking to scale up or take into a second phase, where you want to determine whether outcomes-based financing could help that scale-up reach more beneficiaries or new geographies. That is exactly the kind of work the Accelerator can and should support.

What falls outside the scope is using the funding to support the ongoing implementation or rollout of an existing project.

Q10. Can the funding pay for our own staff time, or do we need to hire external experts?

Either approach is acceptable. Some applicants have in-house outcomes-based financing expertise and use the Accelerator funding to support their own staff time to develop the project. Others are new to OBF and do not have that capability in-house but see a project that would lend itself well to the approach. In that case, the funding can be used to subcontract or hire the experts who will help with the OBF design and structuring.

Q11. Can Accelerator funding support capacity strengthening for government and implementing partners?

Yes, but not as its core purpose. Accelerator funding can support capacity building as a part of transaction design or to help a public counterpart understand and own an outcomes contract.

General institutional capacity building, or core program delivery costs not tied to an OBF approach, is not what this funding is intended for.

3. Funding Amounts and Grant Terms

Q12. What is the grant implementation timeframe?

The implementation timeframe is 12 months, measured from the start of the contract rather than from selection.

Q13. How many projects do you hope to fund under this call?

There is no fixed target and the final figure depends on the volume of proposals received, how many are shortlisted, the portfolio construction and decision-making undertaken with the donors.

Q14. If selected, who do we contract with?

Selected applicants receive funding once the proposal has final approval and a legal written agreement is signed by all parties. The UBS Optimus Foundation serves as the fiduciary host and contracting entity for the Outcomes Accelerator.

All applicants must meet the due diligence and eligibility requirements of the UBS Optimus Foundation and the Accelerator's donors. Each selected organization goes through an organizational due diligence process before contracting. The 12-month implementation period begins once the contract starts.

4. The Outcomes-Based Financing Approach

Q15. Which OBF instruments are eligible?

The Accelerator is instrument-agnostic, as long as projects support the design of an OBF approach consistent with OECD guidance and definitions. Instruments may include impact bonds, outcomes bonds, impact-linked loans and bonds, outcome funds, pull finance mechanisms, and outcomes contracts, among other tools and approaches.

Q16. Is private investment required?

No. Private investment is not required, but it may be considered advantageous where it adds knowledge, rigor, or financial viability to the project.

Q17. How are outcome payments timed, and does the entire project budget need to be tied to outcomes? For example, could payments be disbursed in tranches against midline as well as endline results, and can some budget lines be non-outcomes linked?

There is no prescriptive formula or single correct way for a project to be designed, and each of these arrangements is possible. Within the transaction you are designing, payment structure is a design choice. Most OBF projects use a mix of incentives that link payments to both outputs and outcomes. That mix helps balance risk, and it can address cash flow to the project.

Relatedly, not every indicator needs to be tied to payment; projects typically track a broader set of outputs and outcomes for learning and program management, with a subset serving as payment metrics.

We recognize that in many contexts doing this is quite new. Part of what this call sets out to do is advance the thinking and practice. We are looking for proposals that genuinely try to advance the approach and design it responsibly, not proposals that tie every dollar to an outcome.

Q18. Is OBF the right mechanism for new and disruptive ideas whose impact potential still needs to be tested? Does it allow a program to critically revisit its own underlying assumptions and readjust interventions?

On testing genuinely new or disruptive ideas: yes, OBF can be used this way. But the evidence suggests a more nuanced understanding of innovation, which has tended to come from allowing delivery organizations more flexibility in how they deliver services and reach outcomes, generally building on approaches that have already been tested and are grounded in evidence, with some existing understanding of what the outcomes should be.

On revisiting assumptions and readjusting: this is where the evidence points more strongly. OBF does support programs in revisiting underlying assumptions about how services are delivered and gives them freedom to adjust how interventions are delivered. Evidence shows it has been more used for "innovation" in how outcomes are delivered, rather than as a vehicle for testing a completely new program.

For further information, we suggest reviewing the following OECD paper, which includes a section assessing the claims made about OBF and innovation and offers a more detailed discussion of the evidence.

5. Outcomes and Measurement

Q19. Are there preferred or mandatory mental health outcome frameworks?

We are not prescribing a specific mental health outcome framework. Proposals should align with established measurement practices in mental health, using validated, widely used instruments and comparable indicators wherever possible. Consistent with the Call for Proposals and its assessment criteria, proposals should demonstrate that outcomes and indicators are meaningful, credible, aligned with stakeholder priorities, and aligned with existing measurement frameworks where possible.

Note that not every indicator needs to be tied to payment. Projects will typically track a broader set of outputs and outcomes for learning and program management, with only a subset serving as payment metrics. For those payment metrics, whatever framework is used, the indicators must be contractible and verifiable.

Q20. In humanitarian or fragile contexts, what level of outcome attribution is considered acceptable?

We do not prescribe a single attribution standard. What we ask for is a measurement framework that is robust, cost-effective, and proportionate to the context. In fragile and humanitarian settings, a full experimental counterfactual is often not feasible.

What matters is that the outcomes being paid for are real and plausibly driven by the intervention: well-defined outcome metrics using validated instruments, independent verification of results, and a credible contribution story. It is most important that in the proposal you describe what you will measure, how it will be verified, and why that is credible in your context.

6. Government Engagement and Country Context

Q21. The call emphasizes government engagement, adoption, and integration. What would you require in terms of government cooperation and project adoption in countries where the target population is largely discriminated against and excluded from most public services?

Country context matters, and we expect every proposal to be aligned with the specifics of its own local context. Governments typically manage the health, education, and community systems that the public uses, and they are the actors who can sustain and scale effective models after donor funding ends. A pathway to government integration can therefore be one of the strongest signals of sustainability in a proposal. But it is not a strict requirement in every case, and where populations cannot access government services, it makes sense for the proposal to reflect that reality. What matters most is a credible pathway to sustainable financing beyond donor support, whether through government or other funding pathways.

Q22. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, where the government may not be able to serve as the direct counterpart for a project, who can fulfill that role?

In fragile settings, the direct counterpart may not be the national government. It could be an organization representing the government, a subnational or local authority, a quasi-governmental organization, or a third party organization. All of that is acceptable and would not exclude an applicant, provided the proposal offers a strong, clear explanation of the context, who the partners are, and how outcomes would be financed.

Q23. Do projects implemented in more than one country have a stronger opportunity than single-country projects?

No. There is no preference for single-country or multi-country proposals. Assessment rests on alignment with the call and the strength of the proposal.

7. Funders, Partnerships, and Consortia

Q24. Do you expect applicants to have an outcome funder already identified at the EOI stage?

Funder engagement is treated as an important indicator that a proposed project has support behind it. The strongest EOIs articulate what existing partnerships are in place, or how the project is grounded in real demand from a government or an outcome payer for the outcomes concerned. Even for early-stage scoping work, we suggest there is an outcome funder, government, or other party interested in paying for outcomes to help drive the project forward.

Q25. What evidence of partnerships do you expect, and when?

The strongest EOIs articulate what existing partnerships are in place and how the project is grounded in real demand from a government or outcome payer.

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, we encourage submission of more detailed evidence of partnerships at that stage. Letters of support, MOUs, or official announcements from outcome funders and government partners will strengthen a proposal. As noted in Q7, the level of evidence expected is proportionate to project maturity.

Q26. How many consortium partners are allowed under this call?

There is no set number. What matters is demonstrating that the partnerships add value to the project, and that they can facilitate government engagement and pathways to financing in the relevant context.

8. Application Process and Assessment

Q27. Who makes the final funding decisions?

Final selections are made by consensus of the Outcomes Accelerator's Governing Committee, consisting of FCDO, SECO, and the UBS Optimus Foundation. Levoca, as the Secretariat, conducts eligibility screening, technical review, and processing, and shares documentation with the Governing Committee. Independent external experts may also be invited to support the review.

Q28. Will we receive feedback on our application?

Assessment scores remain confidential within the Outcomes Accelerator. For transparency and learning, applicants that reach the Full Proposal stage may ask for qualitative feedback on their proposals.

Q29. Our proposal contains commercially or otherwise sensitive information. How is that handled?

Applicants with concerns about sharing highly sensitive information should reach out to the Secretariat to discuss possible non-disclosure arrangements, or the option to redact highly sensitive information with a short justification explaining why it was left out.

Note that the Accelerator is committed to transparency: materials and studies supported with Accelerator funding should be made public where possible, including feasibility and design studies and outcomes contracts.

Q30. Where can we send further questions?

All questions should be sent to OutcomesAccelerator@levoca.org. The Call for Proposals and the application portal are available on the Outcomes Accelerator website. We aim to answer questions of broad relevance in this document; for questions specific to your own project, please email us and we are happy to review them or arrange a short call.