RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT IMPACT NETWORK | A collaboration between the Australian Council for International Development and Australian universities

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Sector Skills Improvement: Supporting Research Producers, Users, and Brokers to improve research communications and uptake

Call for Expressions of Interest
23 June 2020

About the RDI Network: Established in 2009, the Research for Development Impact Network (RDI Network) is a network of practitioners, researchers, and evaluators - working in international development. The Network has become a key outlet for accessing diverse research expertise, brokering partnerships, convening forums and conferences, as well as supporting ethical research practice among NGOs and academia in Australia. RDI Network is a partner of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and receives funding support from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), as well as secretariat support from volunteering sector experts.

Are you (or do you have a team with) an experienced learning consultant, research communications and uptake academic, or UX designer actively engaged in the field of international development?

Are you committed to seeing evidence influence development policy and practice?

An exciting opportunity exists to consult with the Research for Development Impact Network (RDI Network) on a new project aimed at improving the sector's skills in research communications and uptake. We are looking a highly skilled and experienced consultant or consultancy team to work with our steering group, and project manager (Whitney Yip).

The RDI Network has an established body of work that supports the sector's improvement in research communication and uptake skills. There are also many other trusted and reliable resources (from well-known organisations) available online and offline to support such improvements.

However, there is yet to be:
- A reliable self-assessment tool for individuals and organisations to evaluate skills and capacities, categorising **research producers**, **users**, **brokers** or **all three** roles, at **entry**, **medium**, or **advanced** level.
- A cohesive, responsive conduit and/or tool(s) to address any skills gap and direct individuals to the right resources, at the right time, at the right level.

This project aims to design those tools with the development of a rough-and-ready prototype for the end of 2020, with reiterations and finalisation within the next year.

DEADLINE: By COB Wed 22 July 2020. Please read the details below prior to submitting an expression of interest.

To express your interest in this consultancy, please provide:
- Recent CV(s) detailing present role(s) and responsibilities; and
- A three-page (max) expression of interest statement against the project details (below), proposing your/your teams timeline and approximate budget

Please send your completed expression of interest by email to Whitney Yip, Network Communications Coordinator at wyip@acfid.asn.au no later than COB Wed 22 July 2020.

What has RDI Network done so far to improve research communications and uptake skills in the development sector?

As a key outlet for development practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to access current and emerging research, part of the RDI Network's key objectives is to support and improve members skills' in research communication and uptake.

To this end, the RDI Network has commissioned several projects into:

1) the ***impact*** of research used in programming and policy decisions in the development sector. See Evidence to Impact: Development contributions to Australian aid funded research.

2) ***how*** research is (and is not) used across the development sector. See Research Communication and Uptake Sector Snapshot.

3) supporting research producers to ***strategically plan*** for maximum research impact. See Enhancing Research Impact in International Development: A practical guide for practitioners and researchers.

4) supporting researchers to ***foster genuine research partnerships*** to increase research influence and impact. See *Partnerships in Practice* guidance series.

5) hosting skills workshops for sector professionals to ***develop practical skills*** to maximise research impact. See *Fast Track Your Impact* workshops.

6) organising a network of experts available for ***research collaboration*** and ***expert advice*** in practice**.** See *Find An Expert* database.

7) conducting skills workshops with sector professionals for (positive) ***organisational change*** towards research use in programming and policy. See Action Research Project.

8) documenting a ***sector baseline*** for organisational attitudes, culture, and capacity to:

- research use in development programming and policy
- research use in development research, monitoring and evaluation

See Scorecard on Research for Development (SORD). The SORD is used to assess changes in capacity in relation to research impact and use. Organisations are asked to assess themselves against six domains; Vision, People, Skills, Motivation, Systems and Resources.

So, why this project now?

Feedback from the above projects, including the current SORD organisational capacity assessment scores has highlighted to the RDI Network the need to increase the sector's skills in research communication, uptake and facilitation of research impact. Feedback from RDI members has also highlighted demand for skills development in these areas, across both smaller and larger organisations. As such, the RDI Network seeks to increase the development sector's skills and capacity for rigorous and consistent use of ethical, relevant, and reliable research in policy, practice, and programming.

To deliver the right resources to different groups, the following categorisation delineates different typical roles in the sector:

- **Research producer**: someone who conducts research and records the findings in research outputs
- **Research user:** someone who accesses and applies research in policy and practice
- **Research broker/translator:** someone who translates research into non-expert terms or directs attention to research outputs

The RDI Network notes that development professionals may self-identify as one or multiple categories at different times of their careers and are likely to move between different levels of skill and capability. To

ensure resources are pitched to the right level, the levels of skill and capability can be categorised into the following:

- Entry level skills and capability
- Medium skills and capability
- Advanced skills and capability

What are the project details?

The RDI Network has an established body of work (as listed above in *Background*) that supports the sector's improvement in research communication and uptake skills. There are also many other trusted and reliable resources (from well-known organisations) available online and offline to support such improvements.

However, there is yet to be:

- A reliable self-assessment tool for individuals and organisations to evaluate skills and capacities, categorising **research producers**, **users**, **brokers** or **all three** roles, at **entry**, **medium**, or **advanced** level.
- A cohesive, responsive conduit and/or tool(s) to address any skills gap and direct individuals to the right resources, at the right time, at the right level.

This project aims to design those tools. This project will require several integrated components.

Component 1: Developing tool/s for skills and capacity self-assessment for the sector

> Component 1 will develop a self-assessment tool for individuals and/or organisations to evaluate their skills and capabilities in research communications and uptake.
>
> The self-assessment tool/s (online *and* offline) is expected to enable development professionals to evaluate their existing skills and encourage 'up-skilling' to address any gaps.
>
> Possibilities could include an online tool/s, a pop-up interactive quiz, or a static document available for download. An existing tool developed by Fred Hollows Foundation is useful to put forward starting ideas on what this might look like or what it may involve.
>
> Broader information to inform the development of the tool/s will be gathered from Steering group members, key informant interviews, focus group interviews or other data gathering activities.
>
> This component may also include testing the RDI Network's working definitions of skill and capability levels to be either confirmed or revised.
>
> Ideally, the tool/s would work in conjunction with the SORD. This way, an organisation or a group of staff from within an organisation can undertake the self-assessment and the SORD to develop a comprehensive understanding of where skills and capability gaps exist (eg. the organisation needs to motivate research use more, *and* staff need training in this particular skill set).

Component 2A & 2B: Sorting and categorising available resources

> RDI Network has compiled various resources and is looking to curate and make such resources accessible. Individuals will be directed to the most appropriate to their skills and context via Component 3 to improve their skills in research communication and uptake.
>
> **2A external resources:** The RDI Network has compiled a set of external resources (links to other reputable websites and reading materials) that support the improvement of research communications and uptake.

2B our resources: The RDI Network has produced, and will continue to produce resources, projects, and guidance documents that address the topic of research communications and uptake. See above list in *Background*.

Sort, organise and catalogue **2A** & **2B** to match and address:
i)   The research categories that have been set.
ii)   Gaps in skills and capability in research communication and uptake.

It will also be relevant to explore recommendations for further training/workshops/guidance that the sector believes RDI Network could provide in the next grant year/s.
It may also be relevant to explore resources and training materials that promote, and self-initiate systems change in organisations.

Component 3: Create self-managed learning experiences

The third component is to develop and define the best way to deliver the above two components into a broader package that is interesting, compatible with busy professional lives, and sparks action.

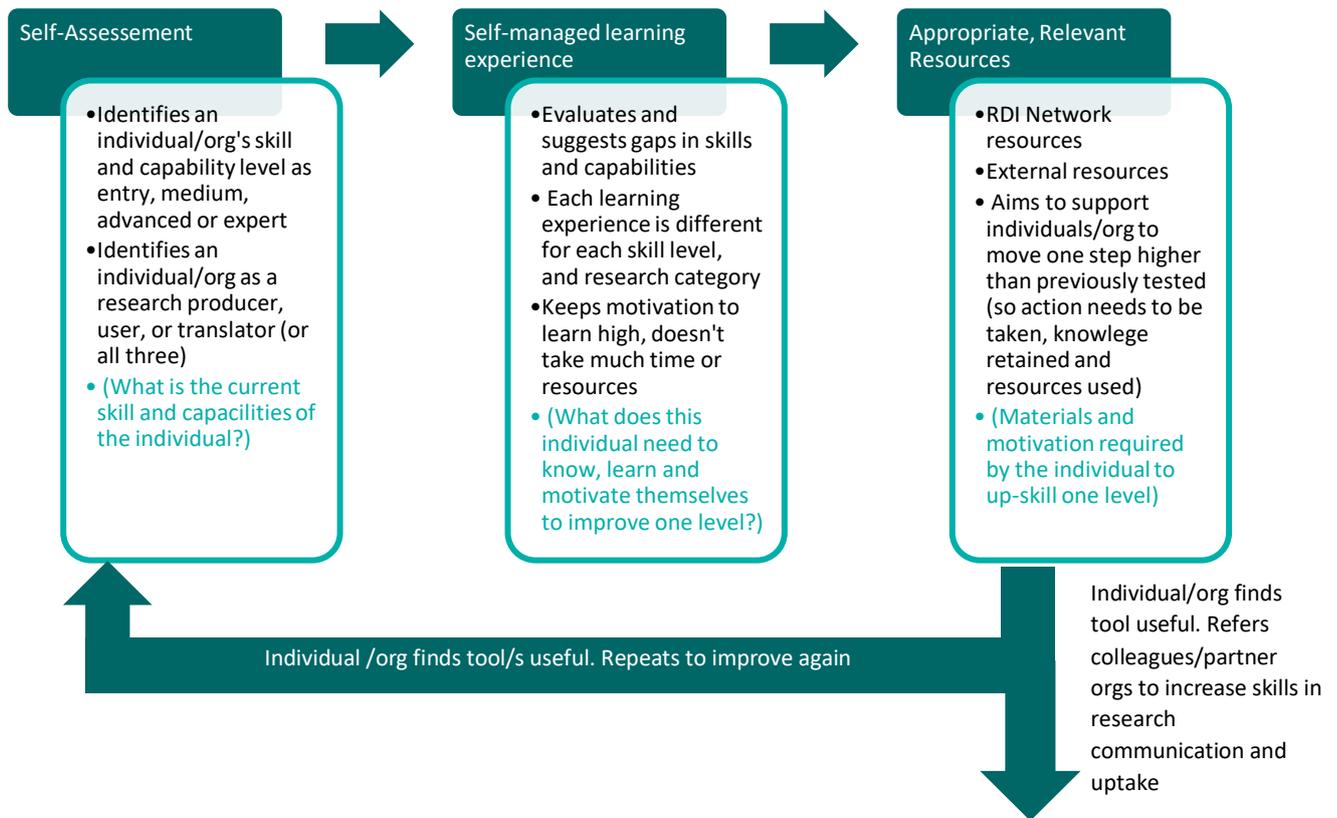Develop an interactive, engaging system to:
i)   Attract sector professionals to take the self-assessment developed under component 1 (individually or as organisation groups). A communication plan will also be developed with the Communications Coordinator to market this new product.
ii)   Collect the self-assessment data and evaluate the individual or organisation undertaking the self-assessment. Ideally, the RDI Network receives a copy of non-identifiable data to create a baseline for the sector.
iii)   Categorise and evaluate the individual or organisation undertaking the self-assessment in the three research categories and corresponding skills matrix and identify the gaps in their skills.
iv)   Direct the individual or organisation to the right resources (*Component 2A & 2B*), at right learning level to address the skill gaps.
v)   Encourage participating individuals or organisations to keep 'up-skilling' until skills in all domains are advanced. Ideally, this would also encourage individuals or organisations to refer others to participate as well.

These learning experiences can be organised online and/or offline (with a preference for online). If delivered digitally, it must be within the RDI Network's existing online systems (ie. not building a new platform or website, app or otherwise). While it is self-managed learning, it is important that there is a call-to-action to read, reflect, or act promptly.

Possibilities could include gamification, email courses, list campaigns or dedicated newsletter, automated masterclasses, monthly informal get-togethers, etc.

This will likely require user-research, journey maps (how will individuals and organisations find this tool and be motivated to use it?), focus groups and user-testing to ensure the most effective system/learning experience is developed for individuals at the various entry points and research categories that were defined.

With all the components together, this project will improve the sector's skills in research communication and uptake in the following way:

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Self-Assessment
- Identifies an individual/org's skill and capability level as entry, medium, advanced or expert
- Identifies an individual/org as a research producer, user, or translator (or all three)
- (What is the current skill and capacilies of the individual?)

Self-managed learning experience
- Evaluates and suggests gaps in skills and capabilities
- Each learning experience is different for each skill level, and research category
- Keeps motivation to learn high, doesn't take much time or resources
- (What does this individual need to know, learn and motivate themselves to improve one level?)

Appropriate, Relevant Resources
- RDI Network resources
- External resources
- Aims to support individuals/org to move one step higher than previously tested (so action needs to be taken, knowlege retained and resources used)
- (Materials and motivation required by the individual to up-skill one level)

Individual /org finds tool/s useful. Repeats to improve again

Individual/org finds tool useful. Refers colleagues/partner orgs to increase skills in research communication and uptake

The end goals of this project are to develop tools/mechanisms that:
- Support individuals (and organisations) to assess themselves (or staff) on order to determine their skill and capability level; this will also allow us to develop a sector baseline
- Support individuals (and organisations) to use the indicated tools, resources, and guidance, and improve their research communication and uptake (educational strategy; RDI Network's theory of change)
- Support individuals (and organisations) to move along the learning materials, retain the knowledge and obtain a higher skill level than previously held, and augment a growing community of practice
- Enable individuals (and organisations) to refer others in the development sector to the RDI Network website as a relevant and reliable place to source 'up-skilling' materials.

Ideally, this project is:
- Easy to maintain and update for the RDI Network secretariat (deleting expired weblinks, updating content with upcoming projects, etc.)
- Users are easily tracked for progress levels; RDI Network Secretariat can easily trigger a process to re-energise or re-motivate learning, and/or understand drop-outs
- Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework to produce information on usage, quality, and resources gaps in which RDI Network can provide further training/workshops/guidance (new projects or repeat workshops like 'Fast Track Your Impact' or Action Research Project) that the sector needs
- Contains an effective, and replicable communications and marketing strategy to repeat every quarter to ensure a steady flow of users
- Referral system for established users to invite other colleagues and peers to use the RDI Network tool and/or introduce to the RDI Network.

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- Rubric for RDI Network Secretariat to assess upcoming RDI Network activities and products (if and where appropriate) to fit into the established framework

How will this project be evaluated?

The RDI Network has an established Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework. To monitor and evaluate this output, we require the consultant to work with the secretariat to:

Responsibility of RDI Secretariat	Responsibility of Consultant/s
Sample demographics; gender, organisation, career stage, etc.	Administer individual assessment before and after utilising RDI Network's resources on improving research communication and uptake. Repeat after 3 months and 12 months
Metrics - number of people/orgs participating, engagement levels (i.e. social media/website metrics), etc.	3-5 key informant interviews and 1-3 case studies utilising key questions from RDI Network's MEL implementation plan
Random organisation sample - administer SORD before and after utilising RDI Network's resources on improving research communication and uptake. Repeat after 12 months	Referral rate, retention rate during learning period

These evaluation activities can be administered via a website/window pop-up, email survey, phone calls, or by utilising the RDI Network members-only area, Google Analytics or in any other format deemed relevant and appropriate.

I am interested. How do I apply?

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