Understanding impact: how the Risk Pool Fund can (and could better) address risks to project implementation in LMICs.

Background and rationale

The business of philanthropy is inherently risky. Even tried-and-true interventions can hit unexpected roadblocks during implementation. Yet, the philanthropic sector lacks mechanisms to support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) when projects face challenges, thus placing the onus of dealing with risk management squarely on grantees and the populations they serve. As a result, the impact is often compromised or lost for a lack of relatively insignificant amounts of contingency funds.

The Risk Pool Fund (RPF) is a pooled resource specifically targeted to prevent critical disruption to projects supported by a nominating funder in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). It is a collaborative experiment that makes fast, flexible funding available to pre-selected non-profits that are encountering an unexpected obstacle that threatens impact. The obstacle must fall within the risk area categories that the RPF cover: funder created obstacles; acts of God; NGO misfortune; economic or policy changes; and highly leveraged roadblocks and solutions.[1] By distributing risk among a group of funders and implementers who share a common programmatic focus (for example, health in LMICs), the RPF aims to protect impact for both the implementing organisation and the funders.

The RPF seeks to conduct a study amongst its portfolio of supported projects, so as to better understand its impact over the past several years. In doing so, the RPF also seeks to better understand how risk is being mitigated, communicated, and addressed by both implementing organisations and funders. Ultimately, drawing on these findings and lessons-learned, the RPF hopes to revise their model for risk mitigation in development, and better advocate for the fund's utility and value.

Audience and use of findings

The primary audience for this research is the RPF Board and Management, who will utilise the findings to inform ongoing adaptation and improvement of the RPF. The secondary audience is the wider funder community as well as prior / present RPF nominees, so as to increase their knowledge on risk mitigation, communication, and support.

Research objectives

The overall aim of this research is to document narratives of grantee and funder experiences with the RPF; to assess this data for patterns; to identify and articulate data-driven lessons-learned; and to translate these findings into proposed recommendations for how the RPF can better evidence and strengthen their model.

The preliminary objectives of this research are to:

- Understand the extent to which grantees have accurately identified roadblocks and solutions to them, and the extent to which the RPF contributed to these interventions.
- Understand if / how access to the RPF has resulted in implementing programmes' organisational behaviour change in terms of how they assess, communicate, navigate, and mitigate risk.
- Ascertain the extent to which the RPF's assessment and mitigation tool has been appropriate and effective on the part of grantees and technical reviewers; and
- Identify strengths, gaps, and / or limitations in the RPF model as applied to its prior grantees (including barriers to access).

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[1] Highly leveraged roadblocks and solutions include, for example, instances where a lack of robust organisational planning leaves a small and discreet budget shortfall to conclude a multi-year project without recourse to other supplementary funds.

<h1 style="text-align:center">Consultant Terms of Reference</h1>

Research questions

The preliminary research questions are:

- What patterns and lessons-learned can be drawn from documented narratives of grantee and funder experiences with the RPF?
- Drawing on the perspective of both grantees and funders, to what extent have prior grantees proposed effective roadblock solutions, and to what extent did the RPF contribute to these interventions?
    - Where an implementing organisation faced roadblocks relevant to the RPF's scope—but did not seek or receive RPF support—what measures were taken by the organisation to respond to the roadblock, and to what extent did these measures disrupt implementation of the planned programme?[2]
- Does access to the RPF result in implementing programmes' organisational behaviour change in terms of how they assess and navigate risk, and if so, how?
    - Relatedly, what are implementing programmes' motivations or barriers to reporting risk and meaningfully mitigating it?
- To what extent does the RPF's assessment and mitigation tool appropriate and effective for grantees and technical reviewers?
- What strengths, gaps, and limitations in the RPF model are evident amongst its grantees' documented experiences?
- What lessons can be drawn from grantees' document experiences, and how can these be best catalysed to evidence and strengthen the RPF model?

Key available data

Documentation on the RPF approach, eligibility criteria for RPF nominees, examples of past applications, technical reviews, and agreements will be provided to the consultant for background review.

Subsequently, the consultant will work with RPF leadership to identify key people to interview. These are likely to include funders, roster nominees since 2018, and grantees. There may also be value in speaking with other stakeholders or individuals involved in programme implementation and/or the grant-making space, which can be discussed once the consultant is appointed.

Therein, possible data includes the following:

- Literature and documentation
    - Academic and grey literature on barriers and risks to programme implementation in LMICs
    - Relevant ORA publications[3]
    - ~60-70 applications to the RPF [including applications; organisational demographics and key characteristics; external review panel (ERP) recommendations; and, where grants were provided, reporting forms]
    - Preliminary findings of an ongoing RFP research study[4]
- People for interviewing or surveying:
    - A network of approximately 30 funders
    - ~200–300 focal points in implementing organisations (international and national)
    - Academics conducting implementation research.

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[2] This can include documented cases from organisations that subsequently received support from the RPF (for this or other roadblocks), but did not initially receive RPF support and therefore resorted to other mitigation and resolution measures.
[3] https://openroadalliance.org/resource/ora-roadblock-analysis-report/;
http://stanford.ebookhost.net/ssir/digital/48/ebook/1/download.pdf; https://openroadalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The_Risk_Toolkit_2017.pdf
[4] The RPF will soon conduct a separate research study that draws on much of this available data. This research project is intended to build on the findings of that study and is timed to be able to incorporate its initial findings.

<div align="center">**Consultant Terms of Reference**</div>

Research methods

The RPF expects that the consultant will propose a robust yet rapid methodology to collect and analyse the relevant data, with a view to answering the research questions. The consultant should propose their methodology in the Expression of Interest (see 'Application process', below)—and, if selected, is expected to elaborate on their methodology in the inception report (see 'Deliverables', below).

The consultant may find this description of contribution analysis useful,[5] but this approach is not required if deemed less appropriate than other methods such as grounded theory[6] and / or framework analysis.[7] Consultants are welcome to propose mixed methods approaches.

Regardless of the chosen approach, the RPF anticipates the data collected and method of its analysis will be largely qualitative in nature and will likely include the coding of data in order to identify patterns and themes (therein, qualitative findings may be presented in a quantitative fashion, where relevant). Consultants should be mindful of the study's timetable (see 'Timetable, below), to be sure their method of data collection and analysis is not only robust but also efficient in nature.

Ethics and risk

This consultancy is not expected to involve interviews with vulnerable populations. As such, an ethics board review is not needed for this work.

Nevertheless, where relevant, RPF expects the consultant to conduct research according to all appropriate ethical standards including informed consent; a commitment to the anonymity of statements provided and the confidentiality of participation; the safe storage of all data; and the deletion of data at the end of the project post-transfer to RPF. The consultant is expected to communicate these protections to the study's participants, and to obtain verbal consent prior to the collection of any data. The consultant should also inform study participants of how they may raise any relevant concerns (i.e., by emailing RPF's Victoria Tayler @ victoria@riskpoolfund.org).

Deliverables

The consultant is expected to produce the following deliverables:

- An inception report with a list of planned documents for review, a plan for key informants to interview, draft topic guides for interviews, a draft survey tool, and a planned methodology for data analysis (~5 pages, not including the topic guide / survey tool if being used).
- A final report addressing the research questions in narrative form, with recommendations for how RPF can use this data to develop operationally and strategically over the next 5 years (~10 pages, including executive summary).
- A slide deck detailing key findings and recommendations; and
- The transfer of all collected and organised data (e.g., anonymised transcripts, survey results, *et cetera*) to RPF (following research management's sign-off of the above products, and in accordance with the data management plan detailed in ethics and risks, above).

Timetable

Approximately 20 days of time, taking place over a 2–3-month period, starting in late March 2023, with the completion of all deliverables targeting a 15 June 2023 deadline. This timeline is so as to overlap with other ongoing RPF research, scheduled to commence in mid-January and end in late March. Initial findings from the other RPF research study (which will be described during onboarding) will help to inform this research.

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[5] https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/contribution_analysis
[6] https://delvetool.com/blog/constructivist-gt
[7] https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol26/iss6/21/

Consultant Terms of Reference

The consultant may organise their own time according to this deadline, but will also be expected to periodically check in with research management (see 'Research management', below). The following timetable can be used as a guide.

Date	Progress / deliverable
End March '23	• Submission of EOI and CV
April- '23	• Interviews with shortlisted candidates
Late April '23	• Begin document review
Early May '23	• Completion of document review • First draft of the inception report (with RPF rapid review)
Mid-May '23	• Finalise inception report • Begin data collection • Alignment with other ongoing RPF research (to be described after onboarding)
Late May '23	• Continue data collection • Alignment with other ongoing RPF research (to be described after onboarding) • Begin data analysis
Early June '23	• Complete data collection
Mid-June '23	• Complete data analysis
Late June '23	• Zero drafts of all other deliverables (with RPF rapid review)
15 July 2023	• Completion of the final report • Completion of the slide deck detailing the study and its findings • Transfer of all data to RPF, and deletion following sign-off of all other deliverables

Research management

The consultant is expected to engage at routine check-ins with a research supervisor but is largely expected to conduct the study in a self-directed manner. The precise mechanism of research management and oversight will be discussed and decided during the onboarding process.

Resources required.

It is assumed that the consultant will have or procure their own required hardware and / or software.

Qualifications and experience required.

Essential

- Master's degree in social sciences, development studies, public health, implementation science, or similar
- A minimum of 5 years' experience working in development or humanitarian organisations, including at least 2 years' in-country experience
- Demonstrated experience in designing and conducting rapid primary and secondary research projects, specifically including experience conducting scoping reviews, qualitative interviews; and qualitative analysis including coding of qualitative data.
- Excellent written and verbal communication in English
- Ability to work flexibly and independently to a deadline, including to conduct interviews in time zones across the world.

Desirable

- PhD and / or postgraduate research in a relevant field, evidencing qualitative research experience including coding of qualitative data
- Seven+ years' experience working in development or humanitarian organisations, with extensive in-country experience.

Budget

As above, the RPF expects this work will take approximately 20 days of consultant time. The consultant is expected to propose a daily rate for their time (see 'Application process', below).

Application process

Please prepare and send an Expression of Interest (not exceeding 2 pages) to the RPF's Executive Director (RD) Victoria Tayler (victoria@riskpoolfund.org) **no later than 27 March 2023** explaining:

1. How your previous experience makes you the right person to conduct this work (being sure to highlight both your relevant operational and research experience).
2. Your proposed methodology to answer the research questions; and
3. Your expected daily rate for the work.

Please also include your CV, in which you list any research publications you have substantially contributed to (this can include reports, conference papers, *et cetera*, in addition to peer-reviewed literature).

Suitable applicants who are shortlisted will be contacted by 31 March 2023 to arrange an interview taking place remotely.[8]

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[8] If you are considering submitting an EOI but have questions that are unaddressed by this ToR, please contact the ED.