



**Advisory Review**

# **Evolving the Technical Review Panel model**

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# Executive Summary

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 1. Executive Summary

The Global Fund's Technical Review Panel (TRP) is an impartial team of experts appointed by the Strategy Committee (in accordance with the delegated authority from the Global Fund Board) with the responsibility of providing rigorous, independent technical assessment of funding requests made to the Global Fund.<sup>1</sup>

Following a request from the Access to Funding department (endorsed by the Strategy Committee and the TRP), the Office of the Inspector General reviewed (i) TRP's mandate, structure, governance, and accountability mechanisms and (ii) the effectiveness and efficiency of TRP review processes.

After almost 20 years of existence, there is a need to re-assess the TRP's mandate, strengthen its processes, governance and oversight mechanisms. The observations from this review will help to inform preparations for the next funding cycle and revision of Terms of Reference for the TRP.

#### The TRP's mandate

The TRP was established in 2002 under the rounds-based system<sup>2</sup> to review all proposals and make funding recommendations to the Board. At the time, the Global Fund Secretariat did not have sufficient technical capacity, and an independent, technical assessment was required to not only ensure proposals were technically sound, feasible and had potential for impact, but more importantly to provide unbiased recommendations to the Board with regards to countries' financial allocations. Since then, the TRP has grown organically in terms of its mandate, expertise, and pool of reviewers. Its evolution has not however fully reflected or aligned with the Global Fund's evolution. There is scope to leverage the benefits availed from transition to New Funding Model, increased roles of various stakeholders in the funding request development process, and portfolio differentiation.

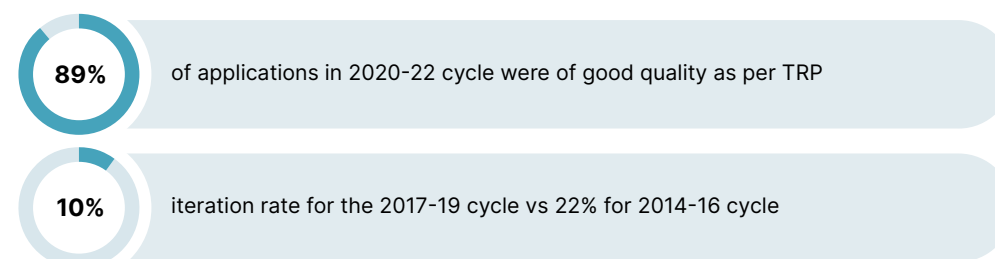
When the Global Fund moved from a rounds-based system to its New Funding Model, multiple changes were introduced in how funding requests were developed. A robust allocation formula now guarantees an unbiased allocation to countries. This allocation-based model has improved the predictability of funding and enabled on-going programs from one allocation cycle to another.

Various stakeholders' roles have evolved considerably with respect to developing funding requests. Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs), Country Teams, Global Fund technical experts and Technical Partners all play an active role in country dialogue, and in ensuring funding requests are strategic and prioritized.

Differentiated application modalities (Full Reviews, Tailored and Program Continuation) allow for flexible and tailored funding requests which match the country's needs and context, enabling applicants to develop quality applications more efficiently.

The above elements have contributed to an overall improved quality of funding request. As noted in TRP's Lessons Learned report, 89%<sup>3</sup> of applications in the 2020-22 allocation-cycle were rated as good quality by TRP reviewers. The improved quality of funding requests has also resulted in a decrease in iteration rates, from 22% in the 2014-16 allocation-cycle to 10%<sup>4</sup> in 2017-19.

**FIG 1: IMPROVED QUALITY OF FUNDING REQUESTS**



1 Terms of Reference of the TRP [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3048/trp\\_technicalreviewpanel\\_tor\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3048/trp_technicalreviewpanel_tor_en.pdf)

2 Under the rounds-based system, countries competed for funds, with no allocations. The system tended to favor the best application and not the greatest need

3 2020 Technical Review Panel Lessons Learned ([https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10771/trp\\_2020-lessonslearned\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10771/trp_2020-lessonslearned_report_en.pdf))

4 The Technical Review Panel's Observations on 2017-2019 Allocation Cycle ([https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/8965/trp\\_2017-2019observations\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/8965/trp_2017-2019observations_report_en.pdf))

# Executive Summary

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### The TRP's Technical Expertise

TRP carries out its mandate with the support of a technically diverse and expert team of members. The membership term of the TRP is four years, extendable by one year, with a three-year cooling-off period. The four-year term has existed since TRP's establishment and reflected TRP's independence under the rounds-based system. The majority of members are recruited in the lead-up to the first year of each allocation cycle, when nearly 90% of allocations are reviewed and recommended. This puts pressure on onboarding, induction, and scheduling processes to ensure that new TRP members are fully cognizant of Global Fund policies, processes and the TRP's review criteria. In 2020, costs associated with onboarding and induction (for specific training and expanded review groups) amounted to US\$920k, which represents one-third of TRP's original budget. Carrying out onboarding and induction in a virtual environment is difficult, with members joining from several different time-zones, adding another layer of complexity. Further, it takes at least one review window for new members to become effective and during this period they are added onto review groups leading to non-adherence to standard group size requirements.

Given the TRP's critical role in reviewing Global Fund investments, having the right mix of technical expertise and soft skills for TRP members is essential. Ensuring that candidates are interviewed during the recruitment process in addition to screening applications would allow for a more effective assessment of candidates' professional competencies, knowledge and experience, and ensure a good fit to the TRP role. By staggering membership terms, reducing the number of members by favoring broader expertise, and leveraging technology, a more in-depth recruitment process is feasible.

### TRP Review Process

Since 2016, the TRP has piloted several different review approaches and has continuously evolved its review criteria to better differentiate between review types (differentiated application modalities were introduced from 2017-19 cycle and formalized guidance on differentiated review approaches from 2020-22 cycle). Despite these efforts, only limited differentiation has been achieved: the TRP spends roughly the same effort on each funding request, no matter its size, complexity, or past performance.

This has created tensions between the Secretariat's expectations of a more differentiated review (strategic in terms of depth and involvement) of small portfolios, and TRP's view that sufficient time and attention must be devoted to all funding requests, as not all countries have the same level of support from partners and from the Global Fund Secretariat.

In the current cycle, TRP's efforts to differentiate have been affected by COVID-19, as the pandemic started just two months before the start of review window 1. The urgency at the time was to smoothly organize review windows to minimize any disruption to country programs. This required a huge amount of effort from TRP members and the TRP Secretariat to shift to remote working. Despite all the challenges (several different time-zones, technological challenges, 52% of new members and many members being involved in COVID-19 responses in their countries), TRP was able to review and recommend an unprecedented amount of allocation of US\$11.34B in 2020. However, this meant there was less focus on efforts to differentiate.

Apart from new members being added to review groups the limited number of TRP members with broad expertise is another factor for non-adherence to group size requirements. Even for smaller grants, the same review group composition is followed, with at least two disease experts (for the disease being reviewed) and one expert each from Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH), Human Rights and Gender (HRG) and Strategic Information and Sustainable Financing (SISF).

By following the same review process for each funding request, as opposed to differentiating in terms of group composition and level of effort, the cost of reviewing a funding request was nearly the same no matter the size of the grants reviewed for windows 1 - 3.

**FIG 2: COSTS OF REVIEWING ONE FUNDING REQUEST FOR HIGH IMPACT, CORE & FOCUSED PORTFOLIOS**

HIGH IMPACT	CORE	FOCUSED
US\$37K	US\$40K	US\$37K

Improvements were implemented in windows 4 and 5 as a result of enhanced uptake of guidelines in terms of number of reviewers according to funding request type, optimizing use of reviewers with double expertise, providing training to primary reviewers to increase their leading role and emphasizing the considerations for number of issues and actions according to funding request type. Guidelines with respect to review groups could be implemented as all members were fully onboarded by windows 4 and 5.

# Executive Summary

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### Governance and Accountability

#### A. The Strategy Committee's Oversight Role

While the Strategy Committee (SC) approves the TRP's Terms of Reference (TORs) and appointment of members, its oversight role could be strengthened in some areas.

Firstly with regards to TRP's workplan and budget, as the approval mechanisms for this are disconnected. TRP's overall budget is approved by the Audit and Finance Committee as part of the Strategy, Impact, and Investment Division's (SIID) budget, and the level of effort for carrying out funding request reviews and advisories is approved by the Secretariat's Access to Funding department.

In the 2020, actual TRP spend was US\$6.7M against an initial budget of US\$3.05M, more than double the initially agreed expenditure. Budget management is the responsibility of the TRP Secretariat and the TRP Leadership was not involved in development or monitoring of the budget. In July 2021, TRP reported average costs incurred per funding request to the Strategy Committee, however budget overspent was not included.

FIG 3: TRP'S BUDGET VS. ACTUAL COSTS

BUDGET	ACTUAL	OVERSPEND
US\$3.05M	US\$6.7M	US\$3.65

The SC has limited oversight over TRP Leadership selection. Serving TRP members elect a Chair and Vice-Chair from amongst the membership, a continuing requirement since the TRP was created to ensure its independence.

Performance reporting of the TRP needs to be strengthened. Of TRP's 27 KPIs, 77% are measured by surveys of TRP members, which does not provide a complete snapshot of TRP's performance.

#### B. TRP Internal mechanisms

TRP's internal oversight mechanisms need to be strengthened. There is no monitoring framework accompanied by regular upwards reporting on compliance to the TRP Leadership. During Windows 4 and 5 of the 2020-22 cycle, the TRP implemented changes to differentiate the review process further and reduce costs. However, rather than being identified by internal TRP processes, this was triggered by a request from the Global Fund Secretariat.

Performance assessment of TRP members is conducted annually for the Leadership, Focal Points and for the first two review windows for newly recruited members. For all other members, performance assessment is not conducted despite being required in the TRP's Terms of Reference. A pilot was trialed in 2017, but the process was considered burdensome and was discontinued.

### Recommendations

#### Mandate

Assess the opportunity to update the TRP's role, considering the Global Fund's evolution. In assessing TRP's mandate, the Strategy Committee should ensure TRP expertise and experience is leveraged the most for:

- portfolios with substantial disease burden and Global Fund allocations
- poor-performing countries
- cross-portfolio bottlenecks

The SC should decide if all funding requests should be reviewed every allocation cycle independently of their past performance (grant & Country performance) and allocation.

#### Membership Terms

To ensure a smooth transition between funding cycles, including the onboarding of members, and to reduce on-boarding costs, TRP should explore staggered joining dates and/or different term lengths to allow for a better split between current and new members.

To ensure that the TRP remains a quality group of experts, the process to recruit members needs to be updated to ensure candidates are a good fit for the role, rather than relying solely on screening CVs and application forms. New technologies (self-video interviews) should be explored, with potential panel interview for final candidates.

#### Review Process

Adopt an updated differentiated review approach by screening portfolios based on two main criteria – allocation size & performance (grant & country performance). Based on the above, develop a review approach that includes:

- differentiated review process steps,
- tailored group composition both in size and expertise,
- review outcomes,
- review timelines,
- differentiated Level of Effort (LoE) framework, linked with the type of Funding Request and scope of work.

Based on the above screening process, for portfolios with high performance (less need for technical review) and low allocation (less critical GF mission), three options could be explored: **Option 1** – No TRP review, **Option 2** – TRP review every other cycle, and **Option 3** – Tailored TRP review.

#### Governance & Oversight

- The TRP Leadership with support from TRP Secretariat should submit its workplan together with the corresponding budget to the Strategy Committee for review and approval. Projected overspend above a threshold limit should be re-submitted for approval before expenditure is incurred. A bottom-up approach to budgeting should also be developed divided into three aspects reflecting TRP's mandate.
- To strengthen oversight on Leadership selection while preserving TRP's independence, the Strategy Committee could opt for one of the following three options:
  - Reviewing and approving the design of the leadership selection process;
  - Receiving a formal report of the process, specifying the detail steps taken and confirming that the approved process was executed as designed; or
  - Formally endorsing (or challenging) the outcome.
- As part of annual reporting, a set of prioritized, data-driven KPIs (with defined targets) that provides a holistic snapshot of performance covering all areas of TRP mandate should be reported to the Strategy Committee by the TRP Leadership with support from TRP Secretariat.
- A performance monitoring framework with regular reporting to the TRP Leadership should be developed to ensure compliance with key internal guidelines.

# Background

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

## 2. Background

### 2.1. The need for an OIG advisory

Created in 2002, the TRP provides independent and rigorous technical assessment of funding requests and acts as an advisory body to the Board.

As preparations begin for the next funding cycle, the Secretariat requested this advisory review to support the evolution of TRP's mandate, processes, and governance mechanisms so that Global Fund investments can achieve greater impact.

The Secretariat identified a need for further differentiation in the TRP review approach and to further optimize TRP review processes. In this respect, the TRP and the TRP Secretariat took steps to implement short-term improvements from window 4 onwards of the 2020-2022 allocation cycle. This OIG advisory was requested to generate insights for longer-term improvement.

In parallel with this review, the Access to Funding department, which supports the TRP, is reflecting on its own structure and processes. The outputs from this advisory will be used to ensure adequate resourcing and effective functioning to support TRP.

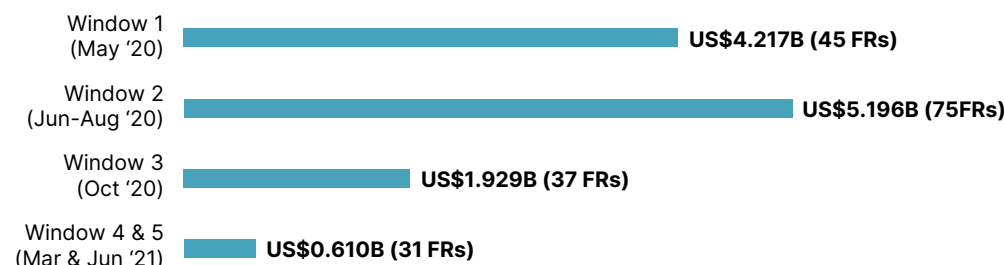
### 2.2. TRP's mandate

The Technical Review Panel performs the following key functions and fulfills its mandate under the oversight of the Strategy Committee of the Board.

**A. Review of funding requests for highest impact (accounting for 96%<sup>5</sup> of TRP's overall cost):** The TRP is responsible for assessing the strategic focus, technical soundness, and potential for impact of funding requests, in accordance with the Global Fund Strategy and any subsequent guidance from the Board.

For the 2020-22 cycle, TRP has reviewed and recommended 177 funding requests across five windows, amounting to US\$11.95 billion - more than 90% of the allocated funds.

**FIG 4: OVERVIEW OF WINDOW-BY-WINDOW FUNDING REQUESTS AND AMOUNTS REVIEWED**



**B. Serving as an advisory body to the Board (accounting for 3% of TRP's overall cost):**

The TRP serves as an advisory body to the Global Fund Board. For the 2020-22 cycle, as part of its advisory role, TRP expanded early engagement<sup>6</sup> activities, reviewed 15 Strategic Initiatives (SIs), reviewed COVID-19 Response Mechanism technical guidance, provided input to the development of the new Global Fund strategy and is currently undertaking two advisory reviews - *RSSH Lessons Learned* and *Decolonizing, Racial, Ethnic and Indigenous Inequalities in review of TRP processes and policies*.

**C. Reporting on lessons learned (accounting for 1% of TRP's overall cost):** The TRP, through the Strategy Committee, has responsibility for sharing lessons learned that may have broad policy and financial implications with the Board.

For the 2020-22 cycle, TRP conducted an overview for the 2020-22 cycle, provided a lessons-learned report based on review of funding requests from windows 1 to 3 and review of 13 SIs.

In addition to the above, TRP operates through working groups to accomplish internal and admin-related tasks, such as for implementing short-term changes to differentiate the review process, for overall performance reporting to the Strategy Committee, and for supporting this OIG advisory and other reviews.

<sup>5</sup> Based on actual costs spend till April 2021 on carrying out the three areas of the TRP mandate

<sup>6</sup> Under this, Country teams may request early TRP steer prior to funding request submissions, to get technical inputs on proposed strategies and interventions.



# Background

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 2.3 Structure – roles within the Technical Review Panel

**A. Leadership** - TRP Leadership consists of a Chair and two Vice-Chairs who serve a term of two years. They are elected by serving TRP members.

**B. Focal Points** - TRP Focal Points are members selected by the Chair and Vice-Chairs to support Leadership in overall management of TRP operations. There are two focal points for each of the six TRP expertise areas. Focal Points select members to: participate in TRP reviews; provide guidance and mentorship to TRP members; review and sign off TRP review forms to ensure quality; and lead relevant TRP working groups, including the development of TRP lessons learned.

**C. Primary/ Secondary reviewer** - Each TRP review group for reviewing funding requests has a primary and a secondary reviewer who facilitate group deliberations and prepare TRP review forms.

**D. TRP Secretariat** - The Global Fund's Access to Funding Department provides secretariat support and facilitates the effective functioning of the TRP and its activities, coordinates communication with other parties, and manages logistics in a manner that supports the TRP's independence and the confidentiality of internal TRP deliberations.

### 2.4 TRP interfaces with the wider organization

**Board:** TRP Leadership participates in Board meetings and observes proceedings through an "all areas pass".

**Strategy Committee:** TRP reports to and is accountable to the Board through the Strategy Committee. The TRP chair is an ex-officio member of the Strategy Committee.

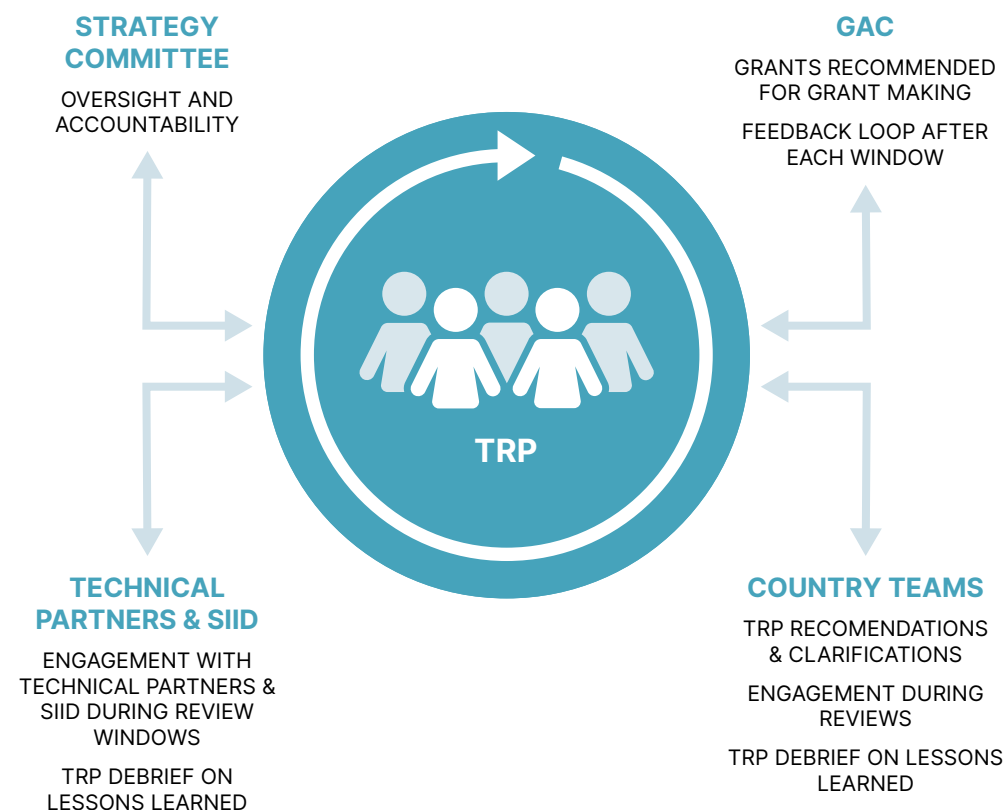
**Grant Approvals Committee (GAC):** TRP Leadership and GAC meet after each window to exchange information on key issues and/or policy direction.

**Technical Partners:** TRP engages with various Technical Partners for constructive dialogue. Partners provide critical resources to inform the TRP review process.

**Global Fund Secretariat:** TRP engages with in-house technical experts (Disease Advisors, RSSH experts, the Community Rights and Gender (CRG) team and the Health Financing team). During the review of funding requests, TRP also engages with Country Teams to obtain clarifications and contextual information regarding portfolios.

**Technical Evaluation and Reference Group (TERG):** TRP Leadership attends TERG meetings.

FIG 5: TRP INTERFACES WITH THE WIDER ORGANIZATION





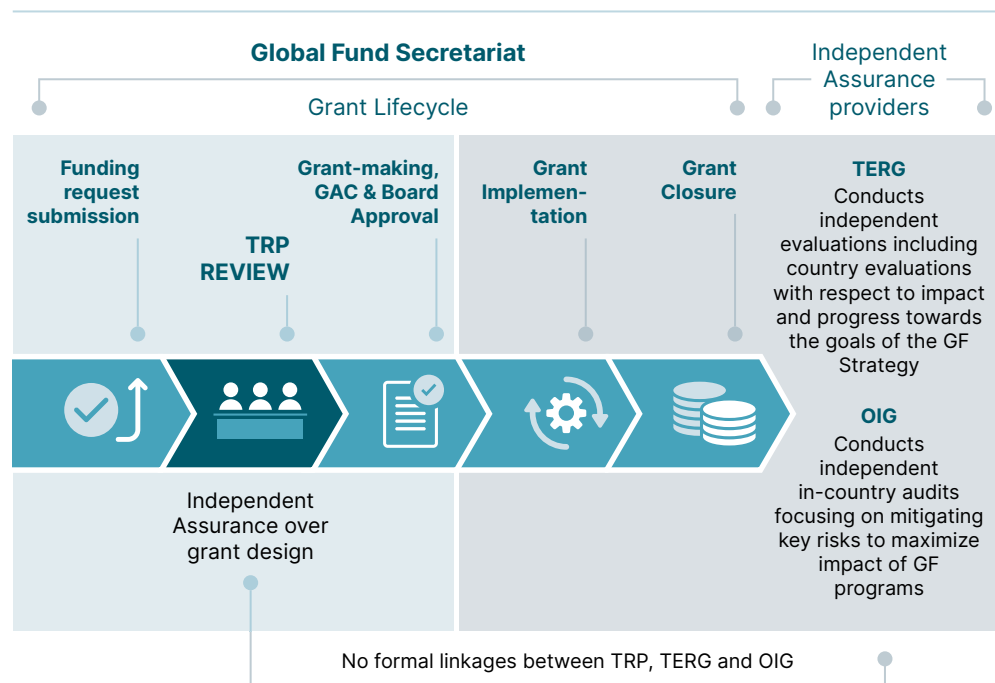
# Background

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 2.5 The TRP's role in the Global Fund grant life cycle

TRP reviews are performed at the very beginning of the grant life cycle, ensuring funding requests are technically sound and well-placed to achieve the greatest impact.

**FIG 6: TRP ROLE IN GRANT LIFE CYCLE, TOGETHER WITH OTHER ASSURANCE PROVIDERS**



TRP presents the outcomes of its review process to countries in TRP review and recommendations form. There can be two types of recommendation on funding process:

**A. Recommend for grant-making** - This recommendation is made when the TRP assesses that the funding request is technically sound, and any outstanding issues can be addressed during the grant-making process and/or grant implementation through clarifications (TRP issues and recommendations) that can be cleared by the TRP or the Secretariat (as indicated by the TRP on the form).

**B. Request further iteration for the applicant to resubmit the funding request** - An iteration is triggered when the TRP does not find the proposed program will achieve maximum impact, due to major weaknesses in a combination of areas that cannot be addressed through discrete clarifications, and which require a major strategic refocusing of the funding request.

Once grants are approved, any subsequent material program revisions (if the revision contradicts TRP's original review and recommendation, there is a lack of agreement in the normative guidance, significant gaps in evidence to support a Program Revision, unexplained lack of impact, or difficult trade-offs in decision making) require TRP review and recommendation.

TRP is a diverse group of global health and development experts, who bring a profound level of knowledge, expertise, and experience in global health.

TRP plays a critical role at the core of the Global Fund's operating model and provides a rigorous and independent technical assessment of funding requests to the Board over investments, helping to support the Board's decision making when approving grants. TRP reviews ensure that funding requests are strategically focused, technically sound, prioritize the required interventions and are positioned for the greatest impact towards ending the three diseases.

For the Global Fund Secretariat, TRP review is an important checkpoint in the grant life cycle that not only provides rigorous, independent technical assessment and recommendations for improving the quality of funding requests, but provides the Secretariat with leverage to drive key actions during the grant cycle.

For applicants, TRP reviews provide an external assessment with specific recommendations to address gaps in program design. TRP reviews also bring rigor and discipline to the process for developing funding requests.

TRP is uniquely placed within the Global Fund operating model as it has visibility on all funding requests and can therefore synthesize key gaps, regional trends, and overall perspectives of funding applications and related processes.

# Objectives and Methodology

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 3. Objectives and methodology

At the request of Access to Funding (endorsed by the Strategy Committee and the TRP), the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) carried out an advisory review on potential ways to evolve the TRP model in relation to reviewing funding requests, strategic initiatives, and serving as an advisory body to the Board. This review focused on the following two objectives:

#### ■ The adequacy of TRP's mandate, structure, governance, and accountability mechanisms to support effective delivery of the Global Fund's strategy, including:

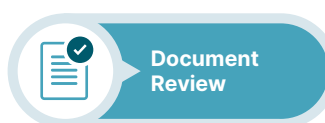
- TRP's role and approach in relation to the Global Fund's evolution (round based vs allocation-based model, increase in Global Fund technical expertise).
- Effectiveness of recruitment, on-boarding, and performance assessment processes to drive accountability.
- Role of Strategy Committee in providing overall direction and oversight over TRP (work plan, reporting, budget and KPIs).

#### ■ The effectiveness and efficiency of processes to review funding and strategic initiative requests (including virtual, onsite or hybrid reviews), ensuring robust oversight and value-add, including:

- Use of differentiation principles in the review approach.
- Effectiveness and efficiency of funding request review processes (in terms of review group composition, sign-off mechanisms, timeframe, and quality assurance).
- Effectiveness of TRP engagement with Country Teams and Secretariat to ensure the country context as well as Secretariat technical expertise are considered in the TRP review process

Six main advisory techniques were used across the review.

FIG 7: ADVISORY METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES USED



#### Document Review

- Terms of Reference of the TRP (2007 till date)
- TRP policies, procedures and guidelines (Operating procedures manual, guidance on how TRP reviews differentiated funding requests, Conflict of Interest procedures, etc).
- TRP member recruitment process
- Onboarding and Training program for new members
- Strategy Committee submissions and minutes of the meetings



#### Stakeholder Engagement

- 52 hours of individual interviews conducted with:

##### Secretariat stakeholders:

- MEC, MEC -1, Access to Funding and other Secretariat stakeholders.
- Bi-weekly meetings with TRP Secretariat and project team

##### TRP Members/ Ex-members

- TRP working group members and former TRP members
- Several workshops with TRP working group members

##### Strategy Committee members

- Present and former Chair/ Vice-Chair of Strategy Committee



#### Analytics

- Extensive data analysis from window 1 to 4 on TRP review group composition, timelines, questions to country teams, review outcomes and honorarium fees.
- Improvements in window 5 were taken into consideration and highlighted accordingly.



#### Survey

- Survey feedback on TRP review collected from:
  - TRP Members: response rate – 82% (92)
  - GAC Partners: response rate – 47% (20)
  - Country Teams: response rate – 42% (108)
  - Disease Advisors, RSSH and CRG: response rate – 50% (16)



#### Review Process Testing

- Reviewed twelve funding requests based on coverage of all portfolio categories, application modalities, iteration and early engagement<sup>7</sup>
- Reviewed two SIs<sup>8</sup>
- Attended opening plenary, partner feedback session, TRP meeting with a Country Team and TRP plenary in window 5



#### Benchmarking

- Benchmarked TRP membership, structure and processes with GAVI's Independent Review Committee (IRC).
- IRC is similar to TRP as it's also an independent, impartial group of experts that serves to guarantee the integrity and consistency of an open and transparent funding process and reports to GAVI's Programme and Policy Committee.

<sup>7</sup> Funding requests reviewed – Malawi HIV/TB, Nigeria Malaria, Cameroon Malaria, Ghana Malaria, Congo HIV/TB, Tajikistan HIV/TB, Mauritius HIV, Kosovo HIV/TB, Nicaragua HIV/TB, Angola HIV/TB/Malaria, Laos (PDR) HIV/TB and Bangladesh HIV/TB

<sup>8</sup> SIs reviewed – Data and HIV Differentiated Service Delivery

# Key Focus Areas

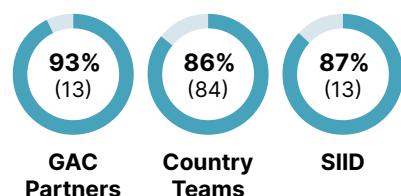
## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 4.1 Mandate: Re-assess TRP's mandate in light of the Global Fund's evolution

The TRP is a critical part of the Global Fund's operating model. Its reviews occur during the 'design' part of the grant life cycle and provide an independent assessment of all funding requests to ensure Global Fund investments are strategically focused and well-positioned to achieve the greatest impact.

The OIG advisory found that the TRP is a value-adding function both for the Global Fund Secretariat and the Board. Its value is derived from the technical expertise of its members and especially from their independence, which is much appreciated and valued by the Board.

FIG 8: FEEDBACK FROM SURVEYS



"...TRP is a value-adding function that helps increase impact of GF-funded programs in countries."

### A. Funding Request Review

Since its establishment in 2002, TRP has evolved in terms of mandate and expertise. Its mandate was expanded in 2010 and 2011 to include reporting on lessons learned from Funding Request reviews, as well as other advisory services to the Board. It was further expanded to include a focus on Value for Money (vfm), Key Populations (KP) and Community Systems Strengthening (CSS) in 2011. In 2016, in order to better align with Global Fund strategy, TRP's expertise was expanded to Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH), Human Rights and Gender (HRG) and Strategic Information and Sustainable Financing (SISF). The TRP's composition has evolved as well, from 17 members initially to a current pool of 161 members, reflecting both the increase in funding applications and the need to incorporate additional expertise for the expanded focus areas.

Changes to the TRP's mandate could have better considered the evolution of the Global Fund's funding model, leveraging three key aspects of this evolution in relation to Funding Request reviews: (1) the transition from a rounds-based approach to an allocation approach, known as the New Funding Model, (2) increased Secretariat involvement and expertise over time, and (3) evolved differentiated processes.

FIG 9: TRP EVOLUTION 2002-2021

### KEY GLOBAL FUND MILESTONES

1. Move to New Funding Model
2. New departments TAP, CRG and HF
3. Portfolio and process differentiation

### TRP EVOLUTION 2002-2021



# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 1. From a rounds-based system to the New Funding Model

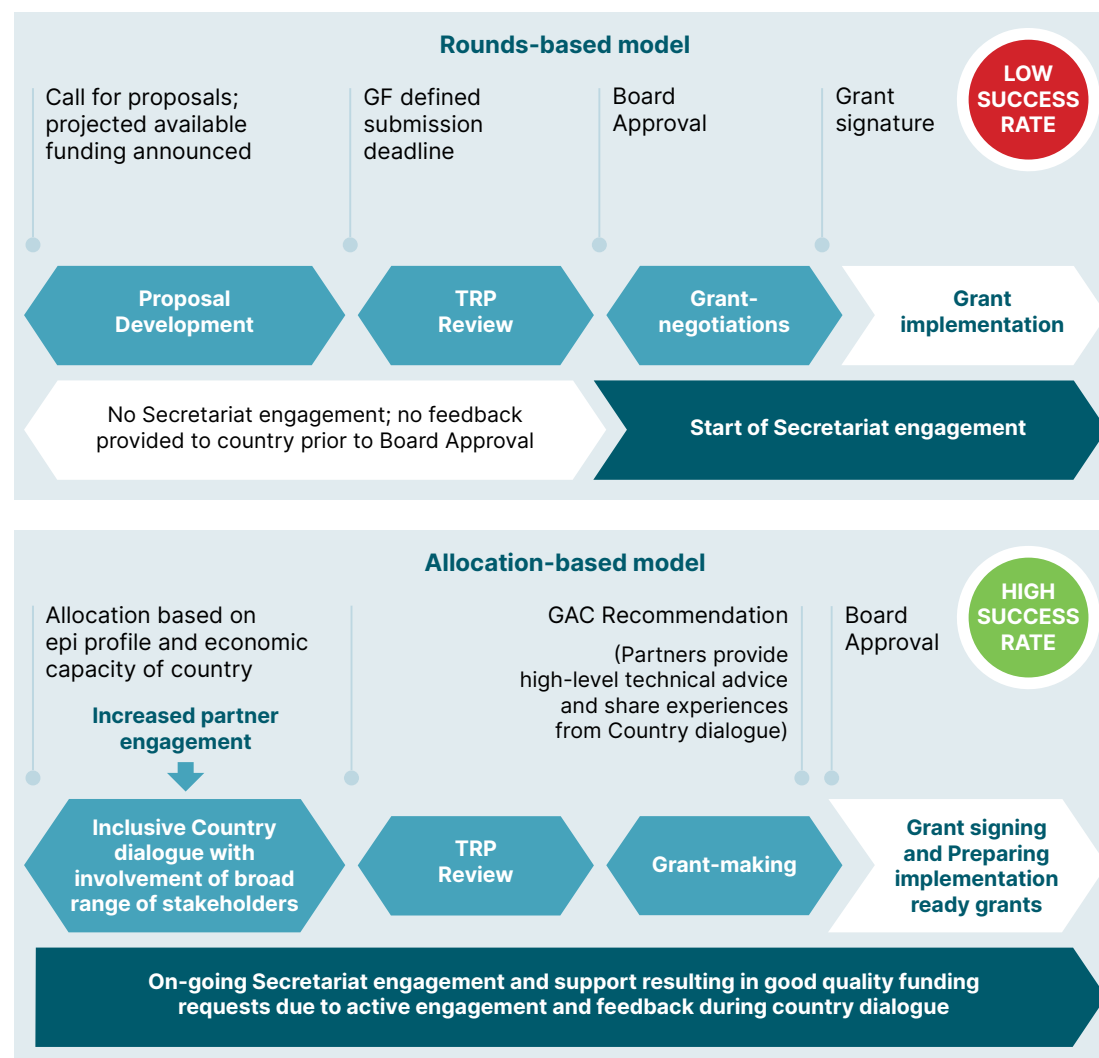
TRP was established in 2002 to review all funding applications and make funding recommendations to the Board. Under the rounds-based system, TRP reviews were designed to ensure an unbiased assessment of applications that determined the level of grant awarded to each country. At the time, TRP was the only technical assessment that took place before Board approval.

In 2014, the Global Fund moved from a rounds-based system to a New Funding Model (NFM), which changed many aspects. Allocation amounts are now based on a multi-faceted formula which heavily prioritizes countries' epidemiological profile and economic capacity. **This formula-based approach guarantees an independent, unbiased allocation and predictability of funding.** Transition to NFM provided for a more iterative approach to the review process and included provisions in TRP's ToRs for enhanced TRP engagement with Secretariat and technical partners. However, the move to NFM as a key organizational change has not entirely been reflected in the TRP's approach: while independence remains important to ensuring Funding Requests are properly designed, it is not driven by the need to independently decide the financial allocation for a country.

The process to develop funding requests has evolved as the roles of various in-country stakeholders have increased. CCMs and Technical Partners now play a more active role in country dialogue, ensuring Funding Requests are strategic and prioritized, for example:

- The role of the CCM has increased to ensure inclusive country dialogue with involvement of a broad range of stakeholders (Civil Society Organizations, Key Populations, People living with the disease, Government, Private Sector, etc.).
- The role of technical partners has increased through i) supporting countries in developing technically sound national disease and health sector strategies ii) ensuring funding applications are evidence-based, comprehensive and prioritized and iii) providing expert and peer review of applications.

FIG 10: KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ROUNDS-BASED VS ALLOCATION-BASED MODEL<sup>9, 10</sup>



<sup>9</sup> The Global Fund's New Funding Model [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/1467/replenishment\\_2013newfundingmodel\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/1467/replenishment_2013newfundingmodel_report_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The success rate of applications under the Rounds-based system was overall around 50% [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3106/siic10\\_07trp\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3106/siic10_07trp_report_en.pdf)

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

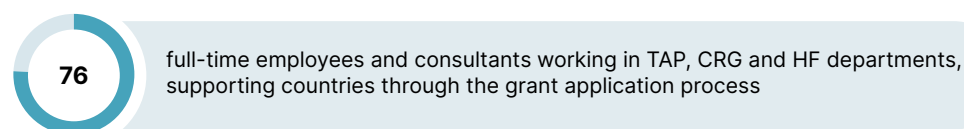
### 2. Increased Secretariat involvement and expertise

**Global Fund Country Team involvement** in country dialogue has increased over time. Lessons learned from previous implementation periods and from portfolio analysis now help shape funding requests.

Whereas under the Rounds-based system, the Secretariat used to play a less proactive role in influencing investments prior to Board approval, the Secretariat now plays a more active portfolio management role, helping to optimize impact.

**Global Fund Secretariat capacity** has increased to support countries and grant management. When the TRP was established, the Global Fund had no in-house technical capacity. The Technical Advice and Partnership (TAP) department, created in 2013, is staffed with 24 disease advisors providing support throughout the grant life cycle. Similarly, the RSSH team (under TAP), CRG and HF departments have been created over time, all providing input in varied capacities in the development of funding requests.

FIG 11: GLOBAL FUND TECHNICAL CAPACITY



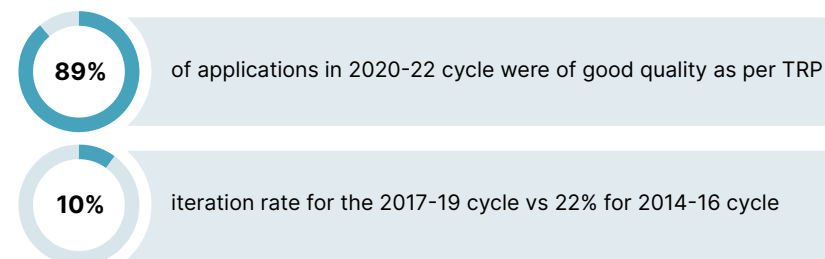
### 3. Evolved differentiated processes

**Portfolio differentiation** was introduced by the Secretariat's *Differentiation for Impact* project that sought to organize Grant Management processes, controls, systems, and Country Teams via a differentiated model to achieve maximum impact against the three diseases. Through this project, the Global Fund acknowledged the need to differentiate between portfolios based on their disease burden and allocation size: High Impact, Core or Focused.

**Differentiated application modalities** were adopted from the 2017-19 cycle to allow for flexible and tailored funding requests, right sized to match a country's needs and context. Full Reviews, Tailored, and Program Continuation Funding Requests enable applicants to develop quality applications more efficiently.

All the above elements have contributed to an overall improved quality of funding requests over time.

FIG 12: IMPROVED QUALITY OF FUNDING REQUESTS



While independent review of funding requests is essential and an integral part of the Global Fund's business model, it is important to better leverage the elements of the New Funding Model, increased Global Fund Secretariat involvement in funding request development, and portfolio differentiation, to enable the TRP to focus its review where it matters the most.

As detailed in section 4.3, the TRP does not differentiate sufficiently between portfolios. It devotes almost the same amount of time, resources, effort, and same processes to each portfolio, irrespective of size, complexity, and program performance. This is inconsistent with the organization's new funding model and prevents the targeting of expertise where it is most needed, i.e.: (i) portfolios with substantial disease burdens and Global Fund allocations (e.g., DRC, India), (ii) poor performing countries (e.g., Angola) and (iii) cross portfolio bottlenecks (e.g. HIV treatment cascade, TB missing cases and low use of GeneXpert, Key Affected Populations, Human Rights barriers, Adolescent Girls and Young Women).

"It is obvious that the role of the TRP must evolve [...] and be less about detailed review of all funding requests and more about strategic advice on how to improve quality and impact of the grants."

GAC Partner



# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### B. TRP's Advisory Role

**Early engagement:** this was further expanded in the current cycle, as part of the TRP's advisory role. In specific challenging cases, Country teams can request early engagement with the TRP prior to funding request submissions, to get an early technical steer on proposed strategies and interventions. This new initiative has had successes and challenges. For Angola, issues flagged by the TRP provided helpful advice to guide the work of the CCM and Secretariat in operationalizing the subnational approach in the subsequent funding request. For Laos PDR, however, the early TRP review brought challenges: the TRP did not have sufficient in-depth expertise and review criteria tailored to innovative financing as it's an emerging theme (Laos PDR was working on a joint investment deal with the World Bank). There was also a lack of consistent reviewers from the early engagement through to the subsequent funding request review, which culminated in inefficiencies.

TRP review comes after a significant amount of effort and resources has been spent by the applicant in developing a funding request. Early engagement provides applicants and country teams with an early steer during the funding request development process and should be expanded further.

**Advisory role for Strategic Initiatives:** In its advisory role for the 2020-22 cycle, the TRP was asked to review the Strategic Initiatives (SIs). Early engagement is essential, as some SIs had continuing components from the previous cycle and were already mid-implementation (e.g., SIs on Data and Procurement, Supply Management Transformation) when submitted for review.

**Advisory role throughout implementation:** despite the thorough review process, country-level programs can face challenges throughout the implementation cycle. Often, well-designed grants are impacted by various events at the country level, for example by political instability, changing political hostilities and stigma for certain key affected populations or regional conflicts. In these instances, the Secretariat would benefit from TRP advice in re-adjusting grant strategies and design. While this should remain an on-demand service, TRP's expertise and experience could be beneficial when adjusting grants during implementation.

**Lessons learned exercise:** the TRP is uniquely positioned to provide the Board, Strategy Committee, Secretariat, Technical Partners, and applicants with insight on Global Fund portfolios. With full visibility on all funding requests, it is able to capture trends, similarities, and regional perspectives. The TRP's lessons-learned report after each window is seen as an insightful tool by many stakeholders. However, with over 150 recommendations for various stakeholders (Board, Secretariat, Technical Partners, and applicants) there is a need to better prioritize the recommendations that are critical and that would have the highest impact. For these recommendations, a tracking, monitoring, and follow-up process with a feedback loop to the TRP should be developed.

### Recommendation 4.1

The Strategy Committee should assess the opportunity to update the TRP's role, considering changes in the organizational landscape. In assessing TRP's mandate, the SC should ensure the TRP focuses on key impact areas: (i) portfolios with substantial disease burden (ii) poor performing countries and (iii) cross portfolio bottlenecks. The SC should decide whether:

- All funding requests should be reviewed for every allocation cycle, regardless of their past performance, complexity, and allocation – see recommendation 4.3
- To expand and enhance TRP's advisory role for early engagement (before funding request submission), particularly for poorly performing portfolios and during implementation when significant country events demand changes to grant design. This should continue to be an on-demand service and the Secretariat should clearly define the submission requirements for any such cases.
- Recommendations from TRP's lessons learned report should be prioritized, tracked and followed up, with reporting to the TRP and subsequently to SC on implementation. To operationalize this, TRP Secretariat should work with Global Fund Secretariat to define roles, responsibilities, and timelines with respect to tracking and following up on prioritized recommendations.

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

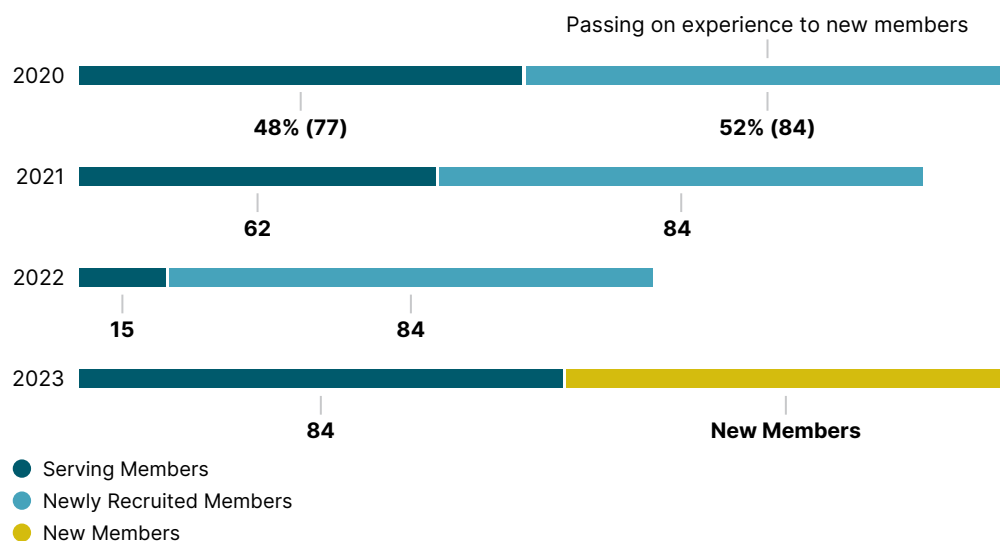
### 4.2 Technical Expertise: Ensuring TRP expertise

#### 4.2.1 Change membership term requirements to enhance institutional memory

The current TRP membership term is four years, extendable by one year, with a three-year cooling-off period between terms. This four-year term has existed since the establishment of TRP in 2002 and reflects the TRP's independence under the rounds-based system.

Currently, more than 50% of TRP members are recruited a few months before the first year of the allocation cycle (52% were newly recruited for 2020-22 cycle and 74% for 2017-19 cycle), when more than 70% of funding requests (representing nearly 90% of allocation amounts) are reviewed and recommended.

FIG 13: SERVING VS. NEW MEMBERS FOR 2020-22 CYCLE



“We went from a well experienced team to a very novel team in 6 months. The new window 5 reflects a lack of expertise among new members.”

TRP Member

While the current approach is important to ensuring new members provide an unbiased view and bring a fresh perspective when reviewing funding requests, it has some drawbacks:

- Members have less exposure to Global Fund operating model, policies, and processes. For instance, TRP review of Costa Rica's HIV Funding Request recommended including workplan tracking measures, however Global Fund guidance for focused countries does not recommend this. This was highlighted by the Country Team and was rectified in the final TRP Review Form.
- There is increased pressure on training, onboarding, and scheduling (in 2020, it cost US\$0.92M to onboard new members). First, virtual induction and on-boarding is difficult to ensure new members not only understand Global Fund's policies and processes but the peculiarities of TRP review process, so required more time. Second, it takes at least one review window for new members to become effective. New members are added to review groups so that they become aware of the TRP review processes, leading to expanding of review group size and non-adherence to guidelines.

Changes were implemented during windows 4 and 5 for enhanced uptake of guidelines, which was possible as new members were fully on-boarded by the time.

When benchmarking against GAVI's Independent Review Committee (IRC), it was noted that IRC members have a three-year term, extendable by a further three years, with a cooling-off period of one year. Currently 45% of IRC members are serving an extended term, whereas for TRP members, terms are rarely extended.

#### Recommendation 4.2.1

To maintain a balance between fresh perspective and exposure to the Global Fund operating model and to reduce on-boarding costs, explore updating membership term to allow for a better split between serving and new members. This can be achieved by staggering member recruitments and allowing members to extend their membership by up to two years. This will not only create a better distribution between serving and new members but also a less intense recruitment process, since each year new members will be recruited vs all at once with the current set up.



# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

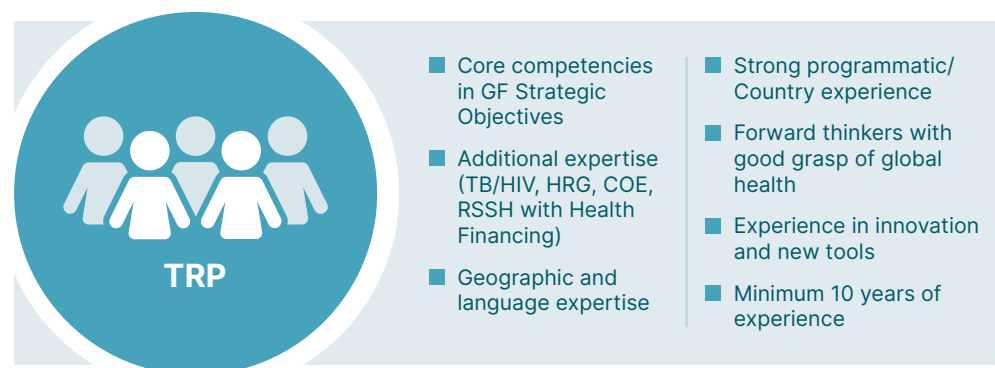
### 4.2.2 Recruitment and onboarding of TRP members

#### A. Establish an in-depth recruitment process

TRP is an impartial team of experts that provides rigorous and independent technical assessment to support Board decisions to approve grants. Having quality experts is critical to discharging the TRP's mandate, as well as for the credibility of its reviews. The pool of TRP members has grown over time, from 17 in 2002 to 161 today. This growth has reflected the additional expertise required, evolving from only expertise in the three diseases to the key areas covered by the 2017-2022 Global Fund Strategy (Maximize impact against HIV, TB, and malaria, as well as the additional core objectives of Building Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health, Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and Gender Equality, and Mobilizing Increased Resources).

The Strategy Committee approves TRP member recruitment requirements: profile, experience and areas of expertise, and a wide range of stakeholders - Technical Partners, TRP and the Secretariat - provide inputs as part of a robust process.<sup>11</sup> Recruitment requirements are well defined to ensure the TRP remains a group of quality technical experts. The profile for TRP members requires:

**FIG 14: PROFILE REQUIREMENTS FOR TRP MEMBERS RECRUITMENT**



**During the recruitment process**, application forms and CVs are screened by a recruitment company and then by a panel consisting of Technical Partners, the TRP, the Global Fund Secretariat and the recruitment company. No interviews are conducted.

While such a process has merits in terms of being efficient and easy to manage for such an extensive pool of experts, it is challenging to fully evaluate the relevancy of a candidate's profile, experience, knowledge, professional competencies, soft skills and whether the candidate is best suited for the TRP role.

The current recruitment process's effectiveness could be enhanced to ensure better compliance with the pre-defined criteria:

- **Strong programmatic/country implementation experience:** in 35% (6/20) of CVs reviewed, candidates did not have sufficient programmatic experience.
- **Secondary expertise.** 55% of current members are rated as having strong secondary expertise (TB and HIV, HRG and HIV, etc.) during the screening process. Secondary expertise is important not only to deliver the aims of the strategy but also to ensure efficiency in the review process by reducing the number of reviewers per Funding Request (see section 4.3). So, an appropriate balance needs to be ensured. However, selecting for primary expertise may mean less qualified primary expertise.

The current screening process would also benefit from better ways to measure requirements such as innovative thinking and ideas, and for verifying the regional experience indicated by candidates in their application.

Given that TRP members review and recommend billions of dollars of Global Fund investments, selection of strong candidates is critical. More stringent processes need not be burdensome if improvements to the overall process are implemented, such as staggered membership terms (as explained in section 4.2.1). In addition, by favoring secondary expertise, the total pool of experts can be reduced, making this process even more efficient and manageable.

In benchmarking this aspect with other organizations, it was noted that extensive interviews are conducted for selecting GAVI's IRC members.

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### B. Enhance virtual onboarding

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more time, effort, and resources were spent on inducting members. The induction process was comprehensive and was conducted on multiple levels:

**Pre-reading material:** A pre-meeting pack of reading material and trainings was shared (containing the TRP's Role and Mandate, operating manual, briefings on how to conduct differentiated reviews, Information Notes, Technical Briefs, etc).

**On-line trainings and webinars:** In windows 1, 2 and 3, specific induction sessions were conducted which included briefings on new developments, review guides including differentiated and quality reviews, and disease specific and cross-cutting webinars led by various Secretariat teams. Recordings from the sessions were uploaded to the Global Fund's online learning platform, iLearn, which members could refer back to at their convenience.

**Pairing with existing member:** New members were paired with an existing member to ensure proper mentoring.

As new members were not cognizant to TRP processes, and as virtual reviews added another layer of complexity, additional members were added to review groups, leading to non-adherence with standard group composition requirements and incurring additional honorarium costs. The total cost of induction in 2020 was US\$0.92M.

FIG 15: TOTAL COST OF INDUCTION

TRAINING SESSIONS (W1, 2B & 3) SERVING & NEW MEMBERS	NEW MEMBERS ADDED TO REVIEW GROUPS	TOTAL INDUCTION COST
US\$0.24 M	US\$0.68 M	US\$0.92 M

### Recommendation 4.2.2

To ensure that the TRP remains a quality group of experts, the process to **recruit members needs to be updated** to ensure candidates are a good fit for the role rather than relying solely on screening CVs and application forms. Consideration should be given to:

- Staggering membership terms - see recommendation 4.2.1- to allow a steady number of members to be recruited each year.
- Focusing the recruitment on attracting members with two or more core expertise areas, with the aim of reducing the overall pool of experts.
- Exploring different technological solutions to ensure that short-listed candidates are interviewed (e.g. self-video interviews), with potentially panel interviews for final candidates.
- Developing a clear recruitment guide to ensure compliance with agreed profiles and expertise, and ensure consistency in recruitment.

**Enhance the virtual induction program** by focusing more on TRP review process steps. Consideration should be given to holding dedicated detailed sessions only for new members during initial review windows.

### 4.3 TRP Review Process: Differentiate based on Portfolio Requirements

Reviewing Funding Requests represents more than 95% of the TRP's activity. Independent and rigorous review is extremely valuable to the Board which approves the grants, and useful for Country Teams in addressing programmatic challenges at country level. The need to differentiate between Funding Request reviews has been identified since 2015, and the TRP has subsequently put a lot of effort into updating its ToRs and processes to address this concern.

In 2015, the TERG conducted a thematic review<sup>12</sup> to analyze funding decision-making processes and recommended that funding requests should be considered with a high degree of differentiation in the scope and depth of the TRP review process. From 2016, the TRP TORs recognized the need for flexibility and differentiation on how the TRP engages with and reviews a particular funding request, versus a standardized "one-size-fits-all" approach. For the 2017-19 cycle, differentiated application modalities (Full Review, Tailored and Program Continuation) were introduced and the TRP adjusted its review criteria based on the application modality.

The TRP has piloted several differentiated approaches and is constantly evolving its differentiated review criteria. In April 2020, TRP guidelines on "How the TRP reviews differentiated funding requests" were approved<sup>13</sup>, which further detail the differentiated review approach linked to application modalities. These guidelines contain criteria for reviewing funding requests, the size and the composition of review group based on type of application, recognizing the characteristics of focused portfolios which have lower disease burdens and relatively lower country allocations. The guidelines also recognize the need for limited number of recommendations in portfolios that focus on a few programmatic areas, which are feasible and cost-effective to implement.

With detailed guidelines, there has been a marked improvement over previous cycles in efforts to differentiate the review process.

Balancing independent review of each funding request with the need to differentiate has always been a challenge for the TRP. TRP review principles and processes which put a strong focus on consensus have not always been conducive to differentiation. In the current cycle, TRP's efforts to differentiate have been affected by COVID-19, as the pandemic started just two months before the start of review window 1. The urgency at the time was to smoothly organize review windows to minimize any disruption to country programs. However, this meant there was less focus on efforts to differentiate.

As part of this advisory, the OIG assessed how the TRP differentiates funding request review, with the aim of supporting the Panel on its differentiation journey. The following five areas were considered:

#### A. Review Steps

TRP review process follows six review steps.

1. Individual TRP members review each funding request.
2. Group meetings are held for members to discuss their assessment, reach consensus and to raise questions with Country Teams.
3. Meetings with Country Teams to receive clarifications to questions.
4. Funding requests are discussed at a plenary session with other TRP members to ensure they are evaluated by a broad range of expertise and experience.
5. Focal points for each disease and cross-cutting area review and sign off. The review is a quality assurance measure to ensure recommendations are clear, coherent, feasible and consider principles of differentiation.
6. Sign-off by one member from TRP Leadership, to ensure quality and consistency of the review form and that recommendations are clear and actionable.

<sup>12</sup> TERG Position Paper: Mechanisms for Review and Decision Making of Concept Notes in the Global Fund Funding Model

<sup>13</sup> The review approaches of the TRP [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9552/trp\\_reviewapproachesdifferentiatedfundingrequests\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9552/trp_reviewapproachesdifferentiatedfundingrequests_report_en.pdf)

# Key Focus Areas

The TRP review process is therefore reasonably elaborate, with the involvement of many reviewers, multiple steps, and multiple levels of signoffs. There is limited differentiation of funding requests based on portfolio size, disease burden/trajectory, the risk involved or the funding landscape. The same review steps are followed for all funding requests, as shown below:

**FIG 16: TRP FUNDING REQUEST REVIEW PROCESS<sup>14</sup>**

## TRP Funding Request Review process

	1. Individual Review	2. Group Meeting	3. Meeting the Country Team	4. Plenary	5. Focal Points Sign-off	6. Leadership Sign-off
Country	Amount	Review group composition	Number of Qs	Number of TRP Members in the plenary	Number of FPs	Leadership
<b>MOZAMBIQUE (HT)</b> Full Review	<b>551.5 M</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>55</b> (with 6 other FRs)	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CABO VERDE (HTM)</b> Tailored Focus	<b>4.72 M</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>47</b> (with 6 other FRs)	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>

14 As per the TRP's review guidelines, Mozambique should have had 7 reviewers and Cabo Verde 3 reviewers

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### B. Review Group Composition

As stated previously, TRP guidelines define the review group composition for application modalities:

- The review group assigned to review a disease component should comprise of 2 disease experts (for the disease being reviewed), 1 HRG expert, 1 SISF expert and 1 RSSH expert.
- For Focused portfolios, where a funding request is less than US\$5 million, review group should consist of 3 members.
- For Transitioning portfolios, where a funding requests is less than US\$5 million, review group should consist of 4 members.

By reviewing the group composition from Windows 1 to 3, we noted that there is limited differentiation in the average number of reviewers assigned for High Impact-Core-Focused portfolios. The same was true for the 2017-19 cycle.

**FIG 17: AVERAGE NUMBER OF REVIEWERS**

	HIGH IMPACT	CORE	FOCUSED
For 2020-22 cycle	10	10	9
For 2017-19 cycle	9	8	8

In 73% (121/165) of funding requests, the number of actual reviewers significantly exceeded the standard composition as per the guidelines. This excess of reviewers was evenly distributed across the three-portfolio categorization. The total costs incurred in relation to the excess number of reviewers was US\$1.14 million (this includes US\$0.68 in relation to new members).

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

**FIG 18: PERCENTAGE OF FUNDING REQUESTS WITH EXCESS REVIEWERS ACROSS PORTFOLIO CATEGORIES**



In 82% (9 out of 11) of funding requests reviewed for focused portfolios (less than US\$5M), there were more than three reviewers (for example, the Solomon Islands TB funding request with an allocation of US\$1.2M had six reviewers; the Honduras Malaria funding request with an allocation of US\$4M had eight reviewers).

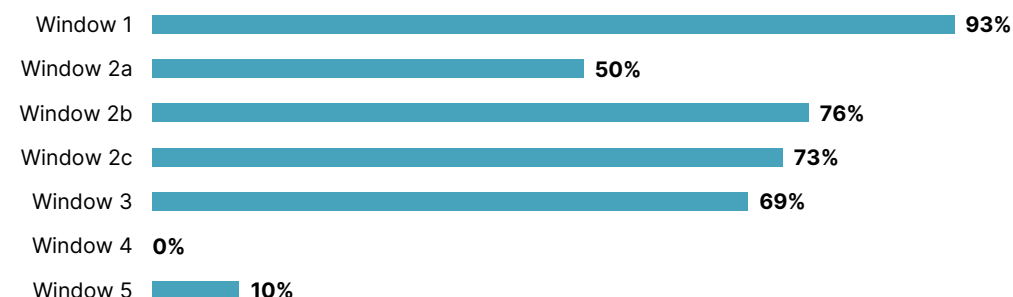
Similarly, all four funding requests reviewed for transitioning portfolios (less than US\$5M), had more than the four reviewers prescribed by the guidelines. The Mauritius HIV funding request with an allocation of US\$2.3M had six reviewers, while the Costa Rica HIV funding request with an allocation US\$2.2M had five reviewers.

The root causes for this are several:

- While the Secretariat has progressively embedded principles of differentiation in its processes, the approach used for TRP reviews has not kept pace. There is a disconnect between the TRP and Global Fund stakeholders' expectations of a more differentiated review of small portfolios: TRP members tend to be of the view that smaller funding requests deserve similar time and attention, as these countries do not enjoy the same level of support from partners and Global Fund Secretariat.
- Virtual onboarding due to COVID-19 has led to new members being added onto review groups, increasing the size of the groups and resulting in limited differentiation.
- The limited number of TRP members with expertise in more than one core area means that, even for smaller grants, the same composition is followed for scheduling, with at least 2 disease experts (for the disease being reviewed), 1 RSSH, 1 HRG and 1 SISF expert.

On a window-to-window comparison, drastic improvement was seen after window 3, as the Global Fund Secretariat discussed with TRP Leadership on how to differentiate the reviews further and reduce the cost of reviews. This led to setting up a working group to implement improvements, which led to an enhanced uptake of guidelines, use of reviewers with double expertise, and reinforcing the context and criteria for reviewing focused portfolios during opening plenary, at the time of preparation of meeting with Country Teams and at plenary sessions. More guidance and training were provided to primary/secondary reviewers for their specific role in leading the discussions, encouraging the use of discussion boards, adjusting the number of Focal points according to funding request type, etc. All these changes led to notable improvements in windows 4 and 5. Further, the guidelines were better implemented as most new TRP members were fully inducted by this time.

**FIG 19: WINDOW-BY-WINDOW COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGE OF FUNDING REQUESTS WITH EXCESS REVIEWERS**



# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### C. Review Timelines

Preparing a well-designed, ready to implement grant is a complex process that involves many stakeholders and takes about 10 months on average. Such a lengthy process is often a burden for low-capacity countries that have to balance the preparation of new grants with the implementation of current ones.

Screening application forms and the TRP review takes about one-third of the time from funding request submission to Board approval of the grants (see Figure 20 below). The same amount of time is taken irrespective of portfolio categorization (High Impact and Core – 70 days and Focused – 64 days<sup>15</sup>, of which, the average number of days specifically for TRP review process for High Impact – 35, Core – 34 and Focused – 30 days) or grant size, due to the same review steps being followed for all grants, as previously stated. The same lack of differentiation is also observed for the grant making and Board approval steps.

TRP reports on a Performance and Accountability (P&A) metric of 80% of final TRP forms to be cleared by TRP and accepted by Country Teams within 8 working days (in the previous cycle it was 10 working days) of the end of the TRP plenary meeting. In the 2020-22 cycle, the target for this metric was increased from 8 to 10 days to incorporate the challenges of remote reviews. Despite this, in 58% of cases the target was not achieved as TRP review processes were severely affected by the remote review modality. Review group members were widely spread across various geographies and had to work across several different time zones.

In 58% (96/165) of cases, it took an average of 19.5 working days between TRP end and acceptance of final form by Country Teams. For the 2017-19 cycle, challenges in meeting the KPI were noted in 39% (99 out of 251) of cases.

One bottleneck is focal points' review and sign-off, which takes nearly five days on average. This could be due to the higher workload for focal points for RSSH, HRG and SISF (who sign off 10-11 funding requests per person) vs. focal points for HIV, TB, and Malaria (who sign off 4-6 funding requests per person).

The lengthy durations mentioned above result in insufficient time for grant-making activities. For example, Cameroon submitted its HIV/TB and Malaria Funding Requests together in window 2c. While HIV/TB was cleared on time, Malaria took over a month after the TRP plenary meeting, giving the country much less time for grant-making activities, as the Grant Approvals Committee review was scheduled less than two months later. The country had to apply for additional flexibility so that TRP recommendations could be cleared during grant implementation.

**FIG 20: TIMELINES FROM FUNDING REQUEST SUBMISSION TO GRANT APPROVAL**



<sup>15</sup> This includes pre-screening, pre-reading, TRP review and final TRP form accepted by Country Teams

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### D. Review Outcomes

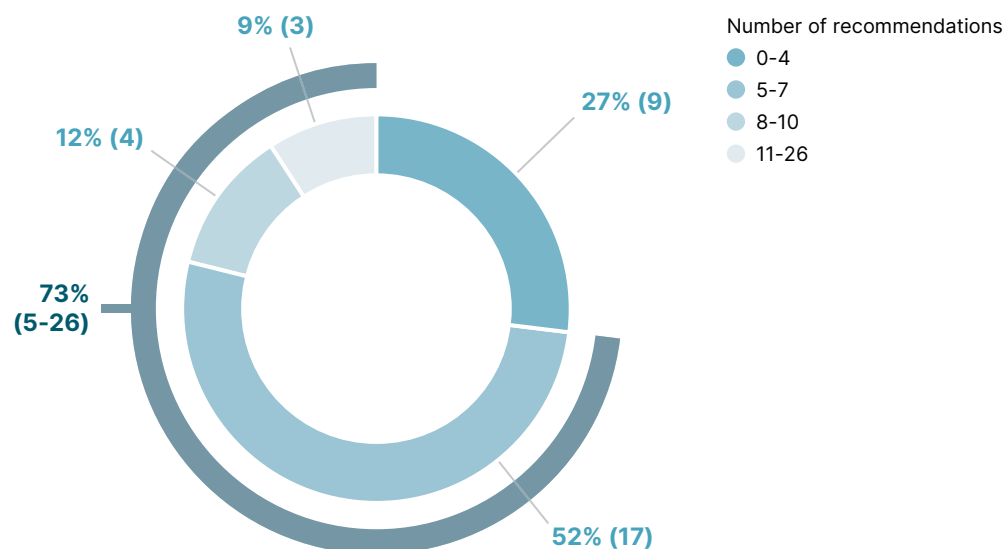
As with the previous categories – review steps, group composition and review timelines – there is very little differentiation with regards to review outcomes. The number of TRP recommendations across the three portfolio categories is nearly identical. This aspect was better differentiated in the previous cycle.

**FIG 21: AVERAGE NUMBER OF TRP RECOMMENDATIONS**

	HIGH IMPACT	CORE	FOCUSED
For 2020-22 cycle	7	7	6
For 2017-19 cycle	6	5	4

As per TRP guidelines, for focused countries the outcome of the TRP review should be a limited number of recommendations (maximum of four). These should focus on a few programmatic areas which are feasible and cost effective to implement in the given context, and which take account of the Global Fund's higher risk appetite in focused portfolios.

**FIG 22: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOCUSED PORTFOLIOS**



In 73% (24 out of 33) of focus portfolio funding requests reviewed during windows 1 to 4, there were more than 4 recommendations. A slight improvement was seen in window 5, where only half of funding requests had more than four.

Analysis of TRP recommendations for the 2017-19 cycle found that a higher number of TRP recommendations remained outstanding for focused/core countries (16% vs. 6%) than for high-impact countries.

In terms of root causes, certain challenges were noted in terms of review outcomes:

- Timelines were not adequate to implement the recommendations, meaning actions carried over to the next allocation cycle. For instance, in one focused portfolio, the coverage target for prevention activities in prison could not be included in the National Action Plan (NAP) for HIV/AIDS and is now planned for a new NAP 2022-2028.
- Efficiencies could not be found to fund additional interventions. For instance, in one focused portfolio, a TRP recommendation required finding efficiencies to fund strengthening primary healthcare and community-level service delivery for TB case finding, care and treatment, however these could not be found.
- While the Global Fund Secretariat is strengthening its processes to track and follow up on TRP recommendations, it is beneficial for the TRP to analyze open previous recommendations systematically to ensure that recommendations are reasonable, realistic and feasible within the timeframes provided.

The TRP's differentiated review approach is based on five application modalities (i.e. Full Review, Tailored for NSP, Tailored for Transition, Tailored for Focused and Program Continuation). Templates for Focused and Transition applications are nearly 80% similar to the template for Full review, with nearly the same information requirements although with lesser details. This leads to all focused portfolios needing to undergo the same review process and does not take account of the fact that the Global Fund has less investments, less leverage, and higher risk appetite in focused portfolios.



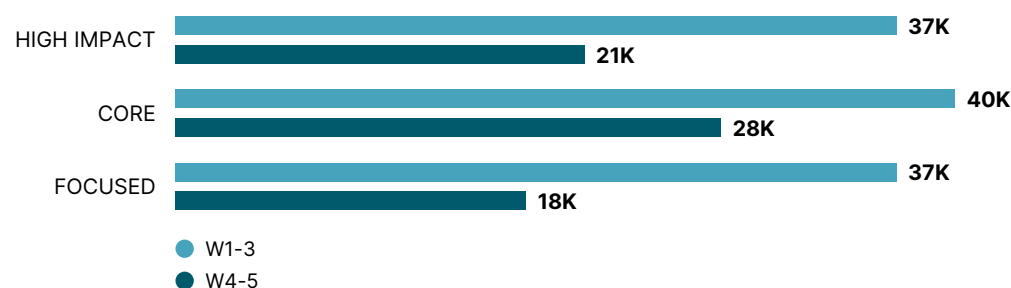
# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

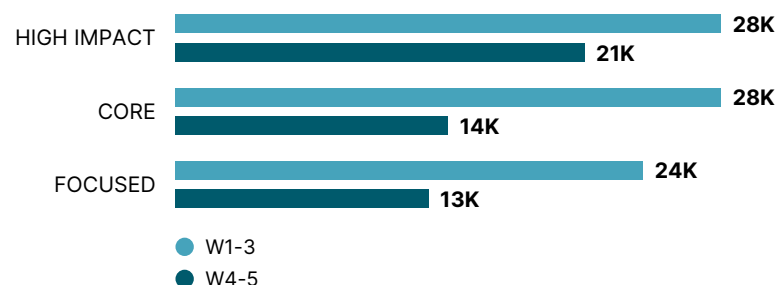
### E. Cost per Funding Request

From Windows 1 to 3, TRP costs for reviewing funding requests were similar across the three portfolio categories.

**FIG 23: TRP REVIEW COSTS PER FUNDING REQUEST ACROSS PORTFOLIO CATEGORIES**



**FIG 24: TRP REVIEW COSTS PER DISEASE COMPONENT ACROSS PORTFOLIO CATEGORIES**



This was due to limited differentiation in the number of reviewers allocated to funding requests, and the Level of Effort (LoE) not being linked to the funding request type or scope of work

Serving TRP members receive an honorarium for actual services provided<sup>16</sup>. The daily amount of honorarium has been fixed as per the Honorarium Framework approved by the Board. The variable component is the number of days it takes for the review process, which is referred to as LoE.

The actual LoE for reviewing funding requests varied across windows and across the five types of Funding Requests (Full Review/ Tailored for NSP/ Tailored for Focused/ Tailored for Transition and Program Continuation), as detailed below. For instance, it took 7.5 days per reviewer to review a focused portfolio funding request in window 3, versus 5.75 days in window 4.

**FIG 25: LEVEL OF EFFORT FOR REVIEWING ONE FUNDING REQUEST (IN DAYS)**

Details	Window 1	Window 2a	Window 2b	Window 2c	Window 3	Window 4	Window 5
Level of Effort for reviewing one Funding Request (in days)	Big bets: 6 Full Review: 5.5/4.5 Focused: 3.5	7	7.75	8.5	7.5	5.75	6.5

Equally, there is no link between the LoE to review funding requests and the scope of work involved. For instance, the Bangladesh HIV funding request which was iterated in window 1 had a LoE of 4.5 days and in window 3 had a LoE of 7.5 days. The Gambia case listed below was similar.

**FIG 26: LEVEL OF EFFORT NOT LINKED TO SCOPE OF WORK**

	Window	# of reviewers	LoE (in days) per reviewer
<b>BANGLADESH</b> HIV FR	Window 1 (Iterated)	8	4.5
	Window 3	6	7.5
<b>GAMBIA</b> HIV/TB FR	Window 2b (Iterated)	7	7.75
	Window 4	5	5.75

For windows 4 & 5, following a request from the Global Fund Secretariat to TRP Leadership to differentiate and reduce costs, improvement was noted, as review group composition as per guidelines was maintained by optimizing the use of reviewers with secondary expertise (refer to figures 23 and 24).

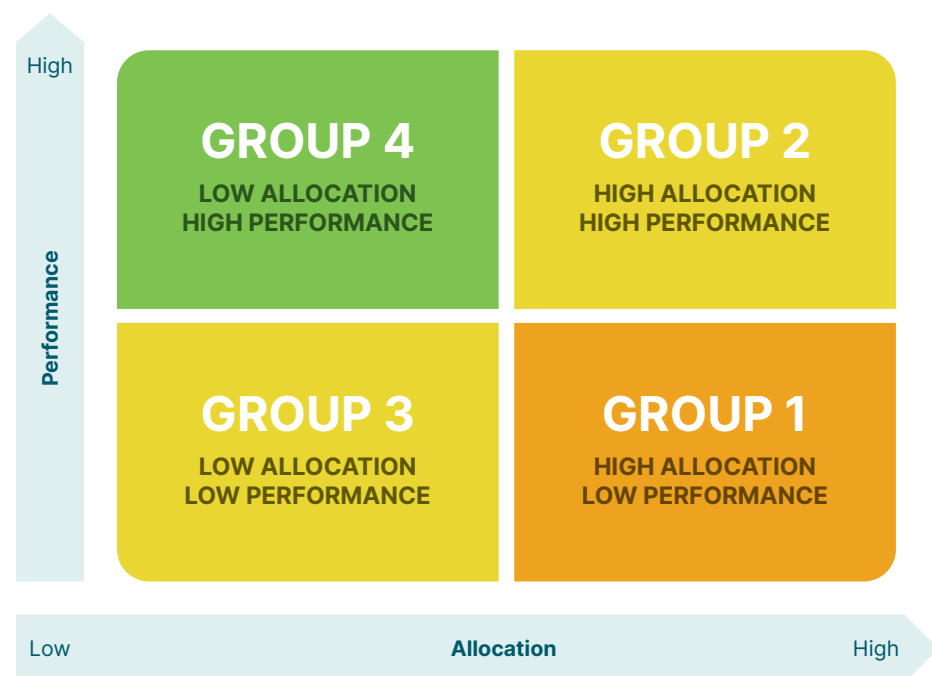
<sup>16</sup> Terms of Reference of the TRP [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3048/trp\\_technicalreviewpanel\\_tor\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/3048/trp_technicalreviewpanel_tor_en.pdf)

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### Recommendations 4.3

To focus TRP attention where it matters the most, there is a need to differentiate further. The TRP would benefit from having an evaluation process by which all Funding Requests (FRs) are assessed based on two main criteria: allocation size and performance (grant and country performance). Based on this assessment each FR would follow a differentiated review route.



Based on the four quadrants the differentiated approach would cover the following areas: (i) review steps, (ii) group composition, (iii) review outcomes and (iv) timeliness.

#### GROUP 1

##### HIGH ALLOCATION & LOW PERFORMANCE

Funding Requests are critical for Global Fund success and TRP's independent in-depth review is extremely important to achieving impact across the Global Fund portfolio. The FRs in this quadrant should follow all steps of the standard current review process; group composition, plenary sessions and various sign offs are needed.

#### GROUP 2

##### HIGH ALLOCATION & HIGH PERFORMANCE

These FRs are critical for the Global Fund's mission and are already performing well. Since allocations are high in these portfolios, TRP review should be conducted every 3 years. However, a more differentiated review process should be followed in terms of smaller group size, use of discussion boards instead of plenaries, and one or two focal point sign-offs.

#### GROUP 3

##### LOW ALLOCATION AND LOW PERFORMANCE

These are low allocation (less critical for the Global Fund's overall mission) but also low on performance. TRP review should be conducted every three years but with a more differentiated process (limited group size, use of discussion boards instead of plenaries, one or two focal point sign-offs and limited number of recommendations) as the Global Fund has higher risk appetite for these low allocation portfolios.

### GROUP 4

#### LOW ALLOCATION & HIGH PERFORMANCE

This group of Funding Requests benefits the least from the TRP's technical expertise as they are already performing well and have a low allocation. Depending on Board / Strategy Committee appetite to change the TRP's mandate – refer to recommendation 4.1 – there are three options to differentiate the review for this quadrant:

##### Option 1

For high-performance programs (less need for technical review) and low allocation (less critical for Global Fund mission), **consider no TRP review** for these FRs.

- ✗ Lack of independent assessment of FRs before grant approval.
- ✗ Against the current TRP mandate of reviewing all FRs.
- ✗ Miss out on lessons learned from well-performing portfolios.
- ✗ Lesser discipline and rigor in development of FRs (chances of going off-track).
- ✗ Might require alternate review mechanisms to be defined at Global Fund Secretariat level (additional workload).
- ✓ Would allow TRP to focus its effort on Group 1.
- ✓ More time for implementation as FR development time is reduced.
- ✓ More time with Global Fund Secretariat Teams to focus on performance monitoring/ enhancing impact of programs.
- ✓ Act as incentive to Countries to elevate performance to forego in-depth TRP review.
- ✓ Global Fund Secretariat's experience of reviewing C19RM application can be leveraged.

##### Option 2

**TRP review** of these FRs can happen every six years – **every other allocation cycle**.

- ✗ Lack of independent assessment of FRs before grant approval.
- ✓ Will ensure all FRs are reviewed by TRP, even if every 6 years.
- ✓ Will allow TRP to focus its effort on Group 1.
- ✓ More time for implementation as FR development is reduced.
- ✓ Enable TRP to document and share lessons learned from well-performing portfolios, even if every 6 years.
- ✓ More time with Global Fund Secretariat Teams for performance monitoring/ enhancing impact of programs.
- ✓ Incentive to Countries to enhance performance for a reduced frequency of TRP review.

##### Option 3

A tailored review with limited review steps, much smaller group composition, no plenary and one sign-off for every allocation cycle.

- ✗ Compliance with fast-track review might be difficult.
- ✗ TRP members' appetite for "light" review.
- ✓ Will maintain the TRP independent review before grant approval.

The above differentiated framework of review should result in a **differentiated of Level of Effort** (LoE) clearly linked to scope of work and type of funding request.

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 4.4 Governance and oversight

#### 4.4.1 TRP internal monitoring and assessment

TRP members are not Global Fund staff and are therefore not bound by the Global Fund's internal accountability mechanisms or performance management processes. Instead, and to ensure consistent review of Funding Requests among the very diverse pool of technical experts, the TRP Leadership with support from TRP Secretariat has developed clear review guidelines.

#### Monitoring framework

As detailed in section 4.3, these guidelines were not always observed in the current review cycle. As a result, key elements of the review process such as group composition, review timelines and outcomes were not in line with the guidelines, affecting differentiation efforts and putting pressure on the budget.

The TRP Secretariat collects and analyzes data throughout the review process (e.g. timelines of TRP review form, number of recommendations, group composition, membership utilization rate). There is however limited timely, regular reporting on all these aspects to TRP leadership, to assess whether course correction is required.

In the 2020-22 cycle, the Global Fund Secretariat consulted with TRP Leadership to consider differentiating the review process further and reduce costs which were implemented by the TRP in Windows 4 and 5. Having a more robust and formal reporting mechanism and accountability framework would have allowed TRP to self-detect non-compliances earlier in windows 1-3, and to implement appropriate course correction measures.

#### Performance assessment of TRP members

In 2014, ToRs of the TRP were revised to include performance assessment of individual TRP members. In line with this, performance assessment of all members was piloted in 2017, with each TRP member providing feedback on three other reviewers that they had worked with. However, the methodology and the process were deemed to be burdensome and the process was discontinued. In 2020, the methodology was updated, and the process was re-launched to assess the performance of the Leadership and Focal Points on an annual basis, and for New Members for the first two windows they participate in.

As per the current TORs of the TRP, "a systematic and structured assessment of individual TRP members will be developed, to provide feedback and inform subsequent selection of TRP members to attend future TRP meetings". However, because performance assessments are not conducted for all members, this is consequently not part of the criteria for selection to serve in subsequent windows.

Primary and secondary reviewers are not assessed for their specific role in the review process (e.g. leading preparation of review form, leading presentation in plenary, ensuring outcomes are reflected in review form, adherence to timelines).

For 50% (34 of 68) of new members who were recently assessed, lower performance ratings were noted in the second window compared with the previous windows that they had participated in.

At GAVI, performance of each member is assessed every window by the Chair of the IRC and feedback is also provided by the IRC Secretariat, which forms one of the bases for inviting members for the next window.

#### Recommendation 4.4.1

A performance monitoring framework with regular reporting to the TRP Leadership should be developed. As a minimum, it should contain:

- **Overall operational performance:** Window-by-window budget, actual spend/ budget utilization, timelines of TRP reviews, compliance with guidelines (adherence to group composition/ adherence to number of questions / recommendations), member utilization rate, etc).
- **Individual member performance:** this should ensure individual member accountability and drive continuous learning and performance improvement. Assessment tools can be enhanced to include a section on key strengths and opportunities for improvement.

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### 4.4.2 Strategy Committee Oversight role

The Strategy Committee (SC), as per its Charter,<sup>17</sup> approves the TRP's Terms of Reference (TORs), appointment of members, guidelines, evaluation criteria, processes, workplan and procedures. The Committee may also advise and make recommendations to the Board on material modifications to the TRP mandate. The Committee is responsible for oversight of the TRP, including review of evaluations and recommendations, and annual performance assessment in accordance with the performance assessment framework adopted by the Board.

### Disconnect between approval mechanisms for TRP's workplan and budget

The TRP workplan, as per the TOR, includes the following:

- Reviewing all funding requests
- Reporting on lessons learned
- Providing an advisory function to the Board
- Other TRP Working Groups to accomplish specific/admin tasks

While the majority of the TRP workplan is included in its TORs (e.g. reviewing all funding requests, reporting on lessons learned), individual advisories are approved separately by the Strategy Committee. However, the TRP's overall budget<sup>18</sup> is approved as part of SIID's budget by the Audit and Finance Committee.

Separately, the Level of Effort (number of days required) for reviewing individual funding requests/SIs/providing advisory services and for other working groups is approved by Access to Funding.

In July 2021, average costs incurred per funding request were reported to Strategy Committee but overall budget versus actual costs were not included. In March 2021, two new advisories were approved by the SC Leadership despite the TRP having already exceeded its original budget in 2020.

In the 2020, TRP's budget was overspent by 120% or US\$3.6M (original budget US\$3.05M vs. actual spend US\$6.7M<sup>19</sup>). This was largely due to the effects of COVID-19, as previous years' budget overspend was in the range of 5-12%. Other contributing factors to the overspend were limited differentiation (as explained in section 4.3), non-adherence to review group size requirements and LoEs not linked to the scope of work performed.

The budget was approved before the pandemic started and should have been revised to incorporate the effects of COVID-19. In addition, certain non-COVID-19 related assumptions were not considered in budget development. The following assumptions should have triggered a revision:

- COVID-related effects such as an increase in the number of TRP windows, and time-zone differences which meant review of funding requests took longer, and which required more TRP members per review window.
- Less than 5% of applications being 'Program continuation'(which require a low level of effort) compared to 41% of applications in the previous cycle.
- The review of Strategic Initiatives not being part of the original workplan.
- Savings were expected from travel-related costs, however 30% of the travel budget was used by members who had limited access to internet and used hotel facilities to perform TRP reviews.

TRP Leadership historically has never been involved in development and/or monitoring of the TRP's budget. The budget is handled by two teams within Access to Funding (TRP Secretariat and budget focal point). The increased Level of Effort and increased number of members which were finalized by the TRP and TRP Secretariat in March 2020 for window 1 was not communicated to the budget focal point, and consequently the budget was not revised. TRP costs were incurred and then justified at the point of expenditure.

<sup>17</sup> Charter of the Strategy Committee [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/2938/core\\_strategycommittee\\_charter\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/2938/core_strategycommittee_charter_en.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> This does not include the TRP honoraria which are approved by the Board as part of the Global Fund Honorarium Framework (GF/B38/EDP13)

<sup>19</sup> In October 2020, TRP overspent was reported to AFC

# Key Focus Areas

## Evolving the Technical Review Panel model

### The Strategy Committee has no authority to appoint or approve TRP Leadership

As per the TRP's TORs, serving TRP members elect a Chair and two vice-chairs from amongst their membership. The SC has the authority to extend leadership terms for a limited time to ensure orderly transition.

No process is defined for the SC to approve the appointment of TRP Leadership. TRP members self-elect TRP leadership, a requirement since the establishment of TRP in 2002 to reflect TRP's independence under the rounds-based system. While maintaining TRP's independence is essential, it is also imperative to create a line of accountability with the Strategy Committee.

Benchmarking with GAVI's IRC, their Chair and Vice-Chair are designated by the CEO in concurrence with the Programme and Policy Committee.

### The performance framework could be improved

The TRP's performance assessment was incorporated into its revised TORs in 2014, under which the TRP is required to undertake and submit an annual assessment of its own performance to the SC, which will review the assessment and evaluate the TRP's effectiveness in fulfilling its Terms of Reference.

While the TRP's performance assessment framework, which was developed in 2017, is comprehensive, there is room to improve its measurement.

77% (21/27) of KPIs are based on the results of a feedback survey with TRP members, which may be subjective and based on perceptions rather than objective data. Moreover, targets have not been defined for many of the KPIs. Further, there is no KPI on operational budget utilization.

### Reporting of 2020 Performance Assessment could be better supported with insight/analysis

In its performance assessment for 2020, certain aspects were reported as needing improvement; for example, engagement with technical partners, need to revisit KPI and stakeholders' feedback on TRP review. In order to provide constructive feedback, further insight or analysis could have been provided to make the reporting complete.

### Recommendation 4.4.2

- As part of its annual reporting, the TRP Leadership with support from TRP Secretariat should submit its workplan together with the corresponding budget to the Strategy Committee for review and approval. Projected overspend above a threshold limit should be re-submitted for approval before expenditure is incurred.
- TRP Leadership together with TRP Secretariat should adopt a bottom-up approach to budgeting based on Level of Effort per funding request and should be revised taking into consideration any updates in underlying assumptions. The budget should be divided into three aspects reflecting TRP's mandate (reviewing funding requests, advisory services and providing lessons learned report), and further sub-divided into various cost categories.
- To strengthen oversight on Leadership selection while preserving TRP's independence, the Strategy Committee could opt for one of the following three options:
  - Reviewing and approving the design of the leadership selection process;
  - Receiving a formal report of the process, specifying the detail steps taken and confirming that the approved process was executed as designed; or
  - Formally endorsing (or challenging) the outcome.
- TRP Leadership together with TRP Secretariat should develop a set of prioritized, data driven KPIs (with defined targets) that provides a holistic assessment of the TRP's performance, covering all areas in its mandate. As a minimum, this set of prioritized KPIs should be reported annually, together with achievements and areas for further improvement, for example:
  - Percentage review forms accepted within XX working days after end of meeting.
  - Percentage of previously recommended action points implemented (all and/or recommendations that are cleared by TRP).
  - Percentage of FRs reviewed in a differentiated way in terms of group composition, review process steps, issues/recommendations.
  - Budget utilization: Costs managed within approved budget.
  - Feedback from Stakeholders on clarity and actionability of recommendation.