



CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT
EVIDENCE / POLICY / TRENDS

FUTURE HORN, FUTURE SUDANS: MULTIPLE AND COMPETING CENTRES

Q&A session – 08 September 2025

Dr Ruth Citrin, XCEPT Executive Director

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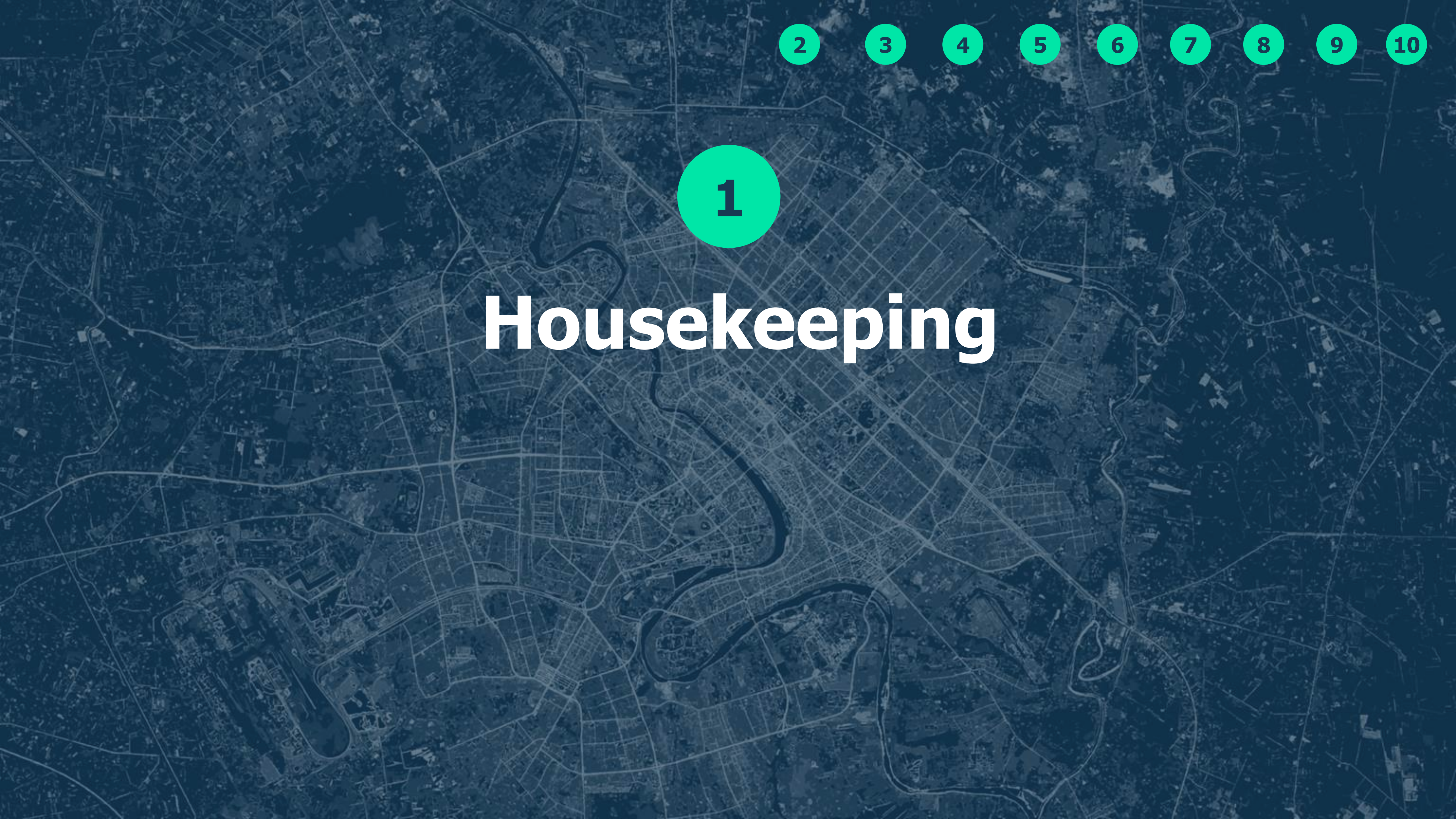
Hannah Stogdon, XCEPT Senior Research Manager

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Jenny Sharp, XCEPT Senior Research Fund Manager

Agenda

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- 7 Timelines
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An aerial photograph of a city, likely St. Louis, with a river winding through it. The image is dark blue with a grid of white lines representing streets. Ten red circular markers with white numbers are placed across the map. Marker 1 is in the upper center, and markers 2 through 10 are in a horizontal row at the top right.

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Housekeeping

Q&A housekeeping



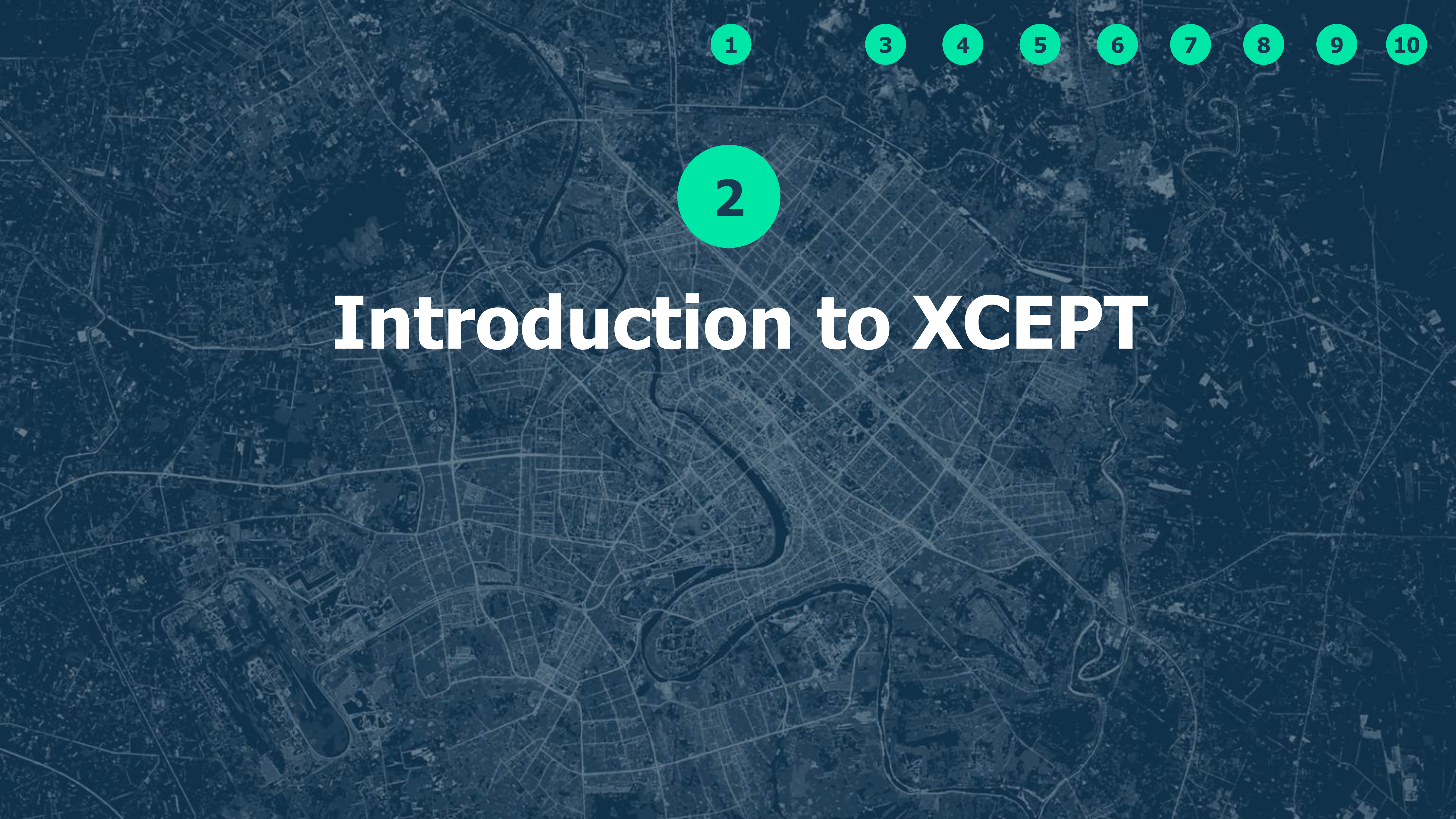
Please write any questions into the Q&A tool. You will not be able to unmute and ask questions verbally, so you must write your questions into the Q&A.



We will record this session and share it online afterwards.



We may not get to all the questions today, or there may be some that we are not able to answer immediately. In that case, we will make sure that we respond to those questions in writing within a few days of the clarification questions deadline.



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Introduction to XCEPT

About XCEPT



The Cross-border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme brings together world-leading experts and local researchers to examine **conflict-affected borderlands**, **how conflicts connect across borders**, and the **drivers of violent and peaceful behaviour**.

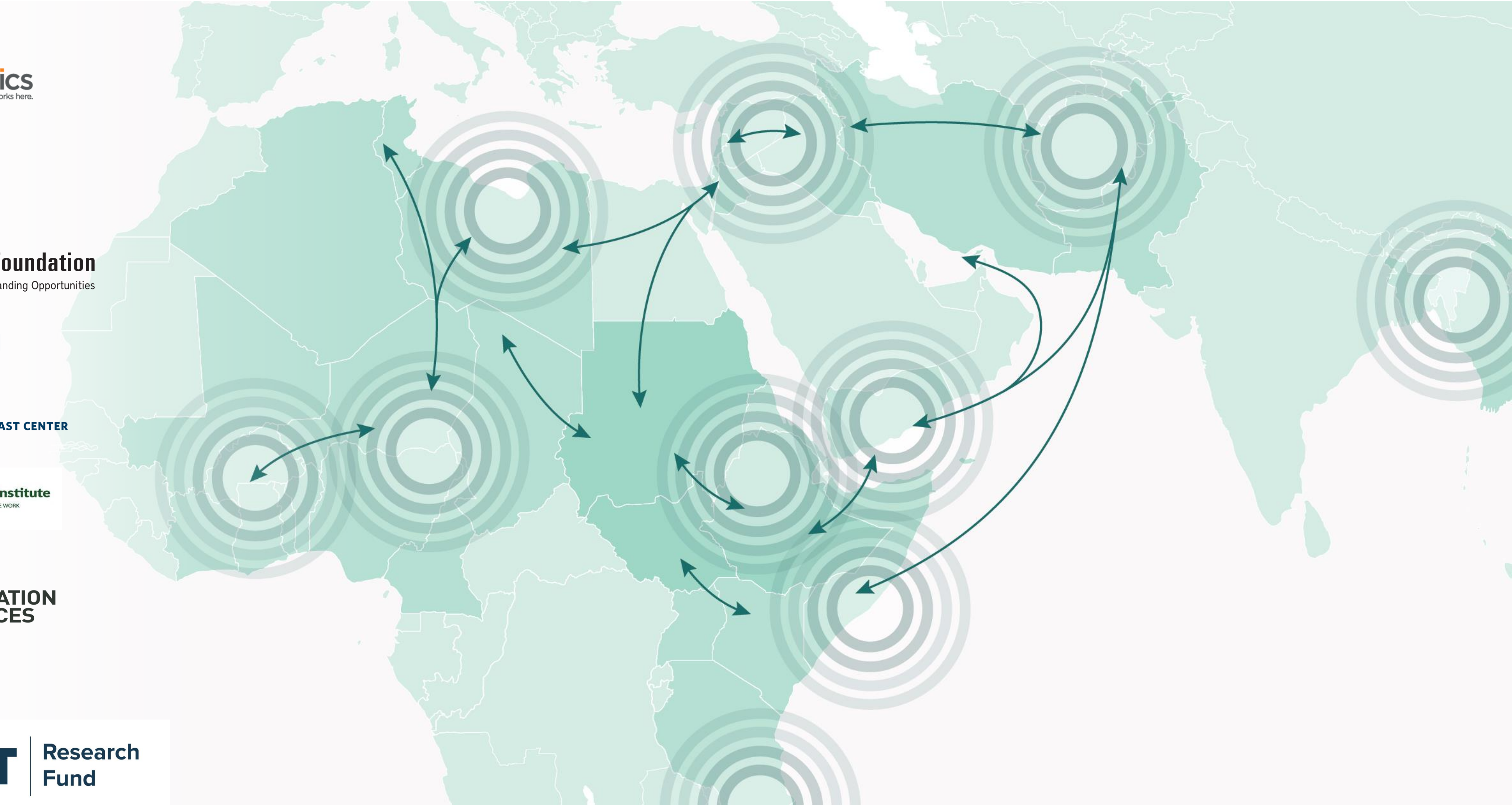


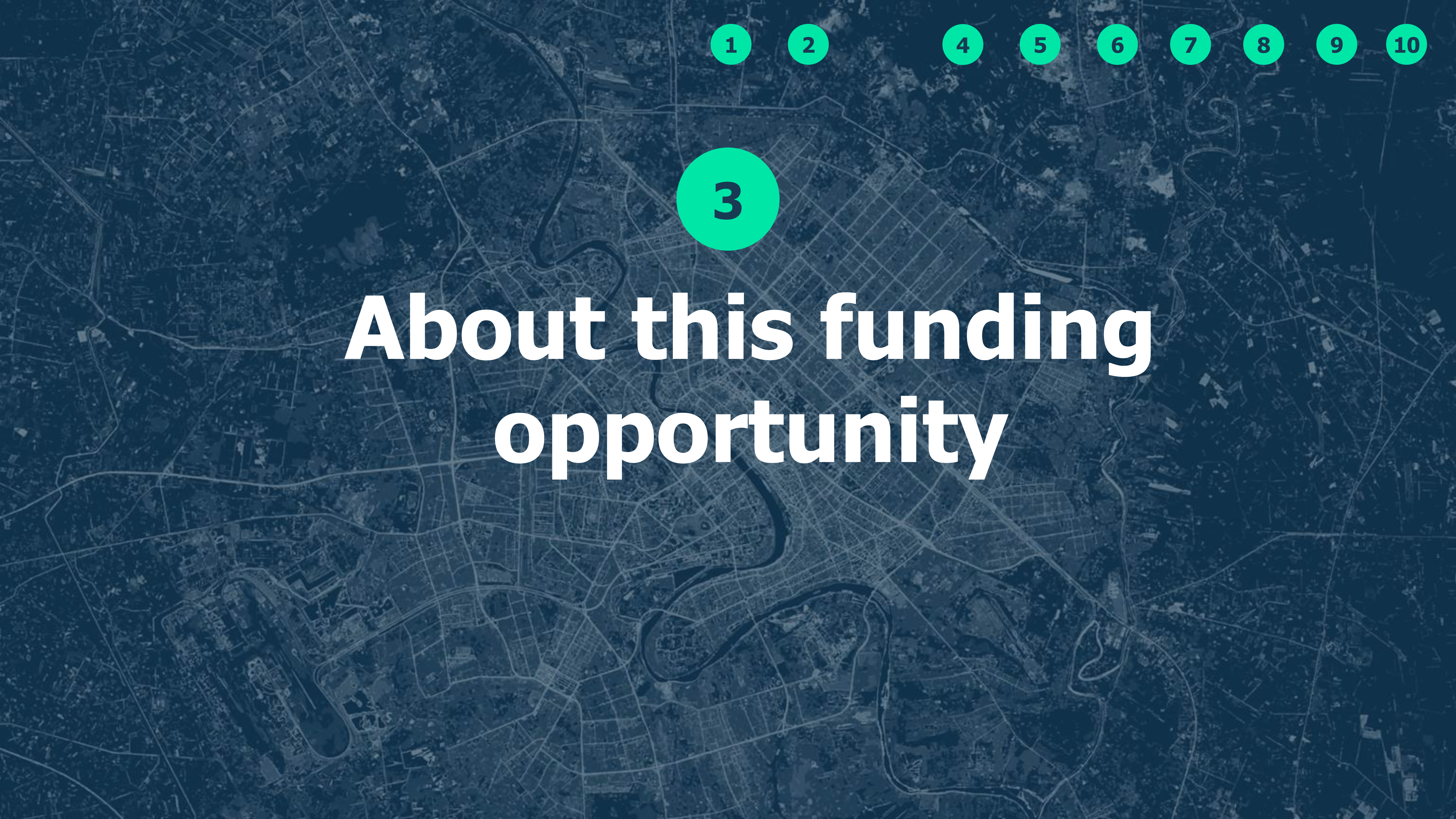
Funded by UK International Development, XCEPT offers actionable research to inform policies and programmes that support peace.



The programme includes the **XCEPT Research Fund** (XRF) to commission high-quality new research.

Research on borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and what drives violence





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About this funding opportunity

About this funding opportunity

Exploring the rise of multiple and competing centres in the Horn of Africa and beyond

- New urban hubs are reshaping political and commercial power in the Horn of Africa, often emerging in borderlands.
- XCEPT research shows these hubs are driven by shifting commodity flows and finance, Red Sea geopolitics, and borderland politics.
- A borderlands lens reveals how transnational trade, finance, and mobility shape conflict, challenging state-centric approaches to peacebuilding.

About this funding opportunity

Few studies have combined data on trade, finance and conflict across the Horn's peripheries. Further research will deepen our understanding of:

- How the emergence of **new centres** in the Horn is affecting conflict dynamics
- How these dynamics **compare** with those in other regions

The research is intended to provide new evidence to improve policy and programme responses to conflict.

Thematic scope

How does the emergence of multiple centres in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region reshape conflict dynamics?

Sub-themes include:

- **Emergence and evolution:** What drives the emergence of these centres?
- **Economic drivers:** How do shifting commodity chains, digital finance systems, diaspora revenue flows and other economic forces contribute to the rise or fall of these centres?
- **Maritime and security dimensions:** What roles do maritime trade, port-centric investment, and regional security deployments (especially in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden) play in shaping these dynamics?
- **Political and social implications:** How do these centres affect political settlements, centre-periphery relations, and incentives for violence? What are the implications for state formation and governance?

Approach

Proposals need not address all the sub-questions

- However, all submissions should engage with the core theme related to the **emergence of hubs / centres** and their **implications for conflict dynamics** in the region.
- **Additionally**, all submissions also should indicate how research will surface **actionable considerations** for policy and programme responses.

Geographic scope

While the research is expected to focus on the Horn of Africa, we welcome proposals that offer comparative analysis, particularly in XCEPT's core geographies:

- The Middle East, especially Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen
- The Horn of Africa, especially Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia
- Coastal West Africa and the Sahel
- Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Myanmar

Key info

Total number of awards	3-5
Value of each award	Up to £120,000 GBP each
Period of performance of each award	12 Months
Clarification question deadline	Thursday 11 September 2025, 18:00 BST
Submission deadline	Thursday 25 September 2025, 10:00 BST
Estimated start date	December 2025

Funding levels

Budget. Applicants are encouraged to consider the appropriate scale for their project:

- **Up to £15,000** – For desk-based research papers (sole or co-authored) drawing primarily on existing literature, data, and analysis. These projects are not expected to involve field data collection but may include remote interviews.
- **£15,000–£40,000** – For projects that include field data collection. At the lower end of the scale this may involve key informant interviews requiring travel; at the higher end it may involve interviews, surveys or field-based case studies in one or two locations.
- **£40,000–£80,000** – For projects involving more substantial field data collection, potentially across multiple sites or countries, and delivering more extensive outputs.
- **£80,000–£120,000** – For projects proposing a portfolio of research activities across multiple sites, potentially involving mixed methods and multiple outputs that offer comparative case studies in different geographies or address a more complex array of interventions.

Expected outputs

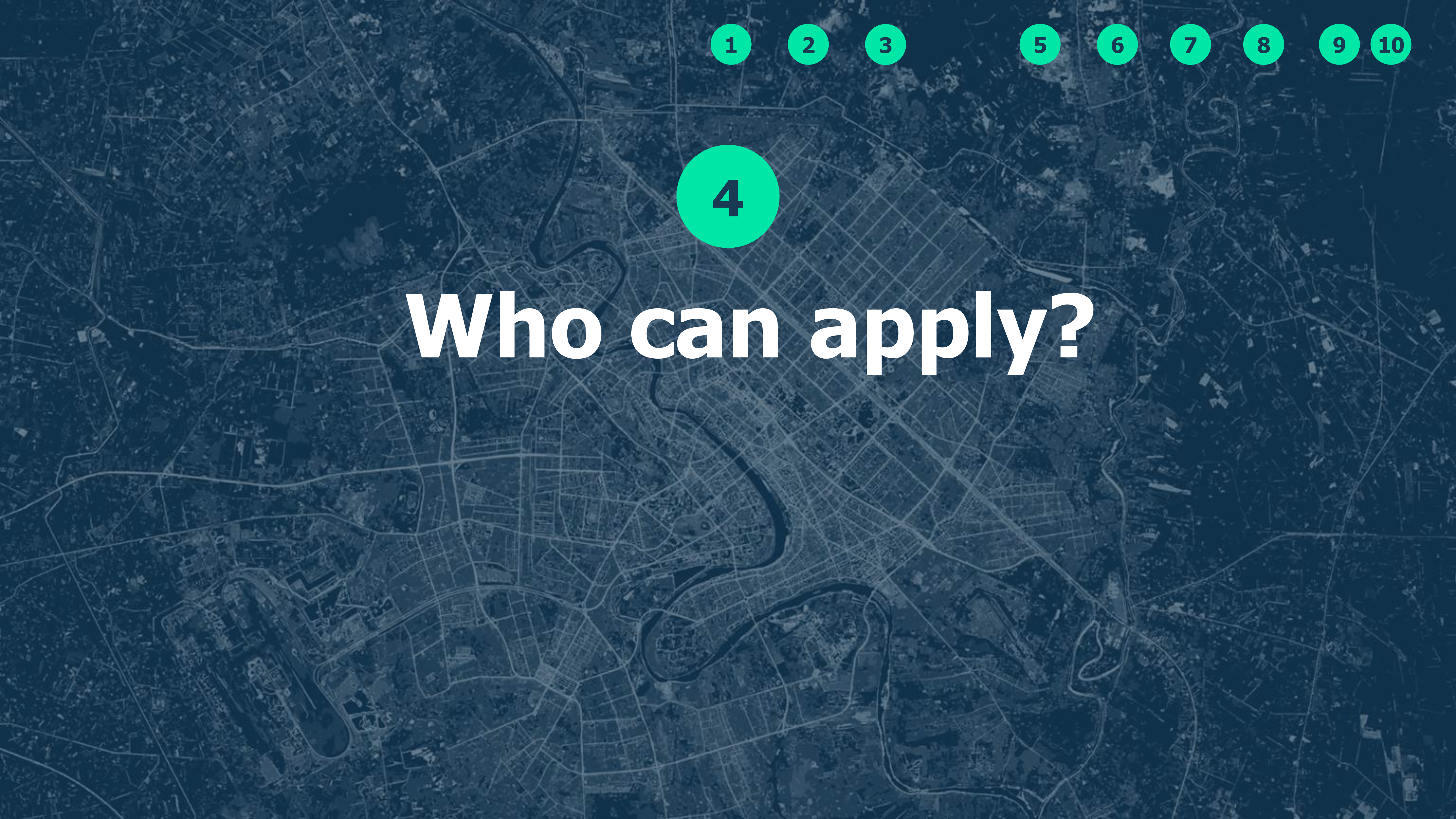
- **Main output:** A high-quality, peer-reviewed paper (or series), suitable for publication by the Awardee or in an academic journal.
- **Policy-focused outputs:** summary briefing notes and presentations to policy audiences.
- **Public-focused outputs:** commentaries, blogs, podcasts
- **Complementary activities:** Opportunities to present at events, webinars and policy briefings

Applicants should list the outputs they plan to produce in the Application Form

Expectations for research quality

XCEPT is a public good research programme and we expect research to meet the standards of high-quality research:

- **New and novel**
- **Use rigorous and robust research methodologies**
- **Adhere to internationally recognised ethical standards**
- **Achieve policy impact and public benefit**

An aerial photograph of a city, likely St. Louis, with a river winding through it. The image is overlaid with a dark blue filter. Ten red circles, each containing a white number, are arranged in a horizontal line at the top. A larger red circle with the number 4 is positioned in the upper center of the map.

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Who can apply?

Who can apply?

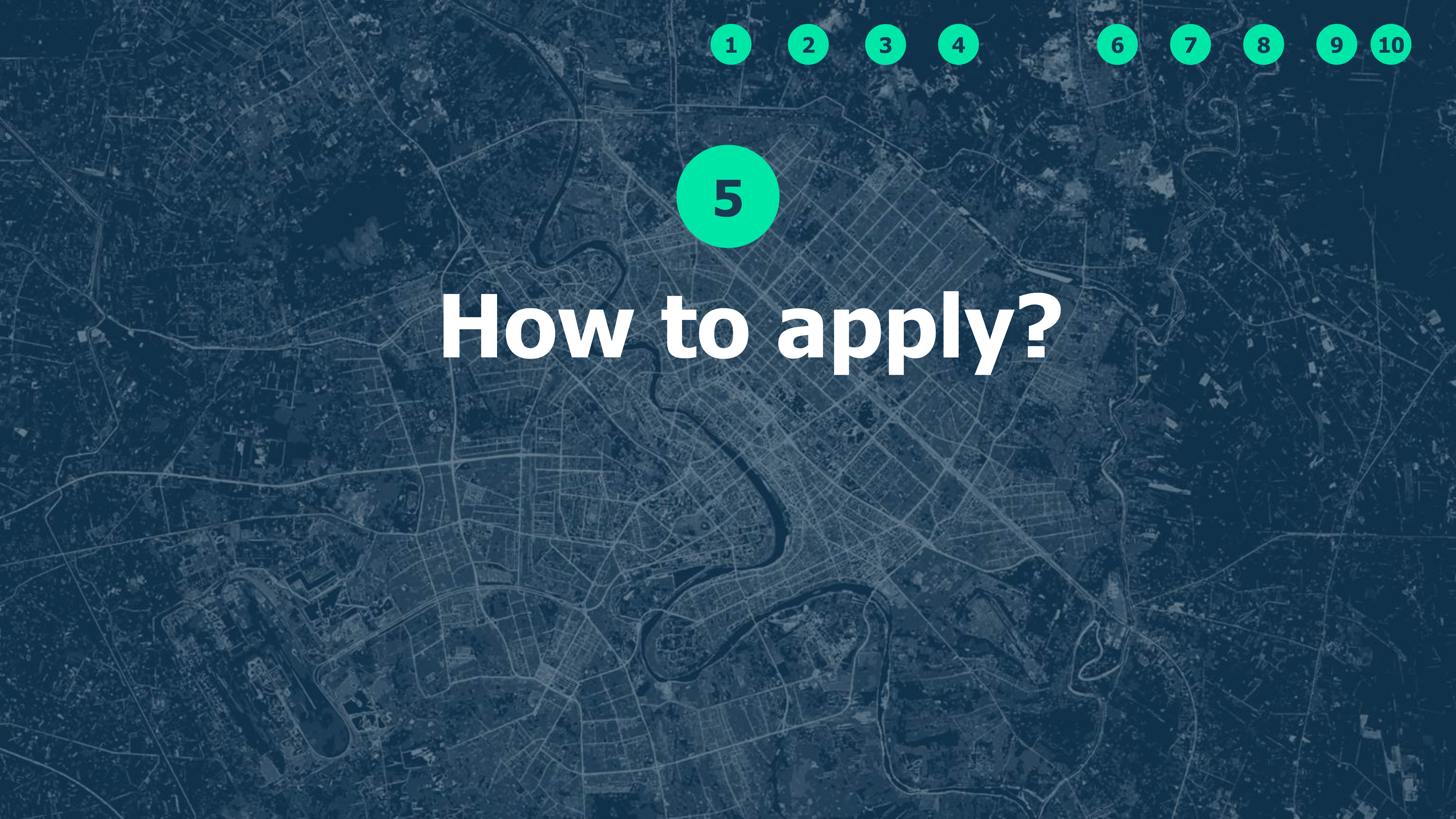
Both individuals and organisations.

- Successful applicants will be responsible for managing **funds, duty of care, safeguarding, and risk management**, and must have appropriate approaches in place to manage these effectively.
- **Global South** researchers and research organisations are strongly encouraged to apply.
- **Inter-disciplinary** research encouraged, also partnerships between academics and policy professionals.
- Applications from **consortia** or partnerships are welcome. A lead should be declared.
- No formal requirements for Principal Investigator / Co-Investigators.

Who can apply?

Eligible organisations

- **Government bodies (national, regional or local) are not eligible for this opportunity.** This exclusion does not apply to publicly funded, independent, and non-political research institutes.
- **Multilaterals** can apply.
- Should have a track record of:
 - Managing projects of equivalent scale.
 - Engaging in the research area proposed.



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How to apply?

How to apply?

Stage 1: Concept Note

To apply at the Concept Note stage, applicants should prepare and submit the following documents:

Application Form, including:

- **Concept Note** (max. 1200 words), incl. sections on: Research idea and evidence gap; methodology; outputs; team. References to literature in the footnotes will **NOT** count toward word limit.
- **Summary Budget** - high-level breakdown across major categories (e.g. personnel, activities, equipment, etc.). This should include costs related to fieldwork, editing and publication, dissemination, etc. + reasonable overheads as applicable.

Annexes:

- CVs of Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators (as relevant) (max. 3)

The completed Concept Note Application Form and CV(s) should be submitted via email to XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com by the submission deadline.

How to apply?

Stage Two: Project Proposal

- Shortlisted applicants will be asked to complete a full technical application, providing past performance examples, completing due diligence forms, and submitting a detailed budget and workplan.

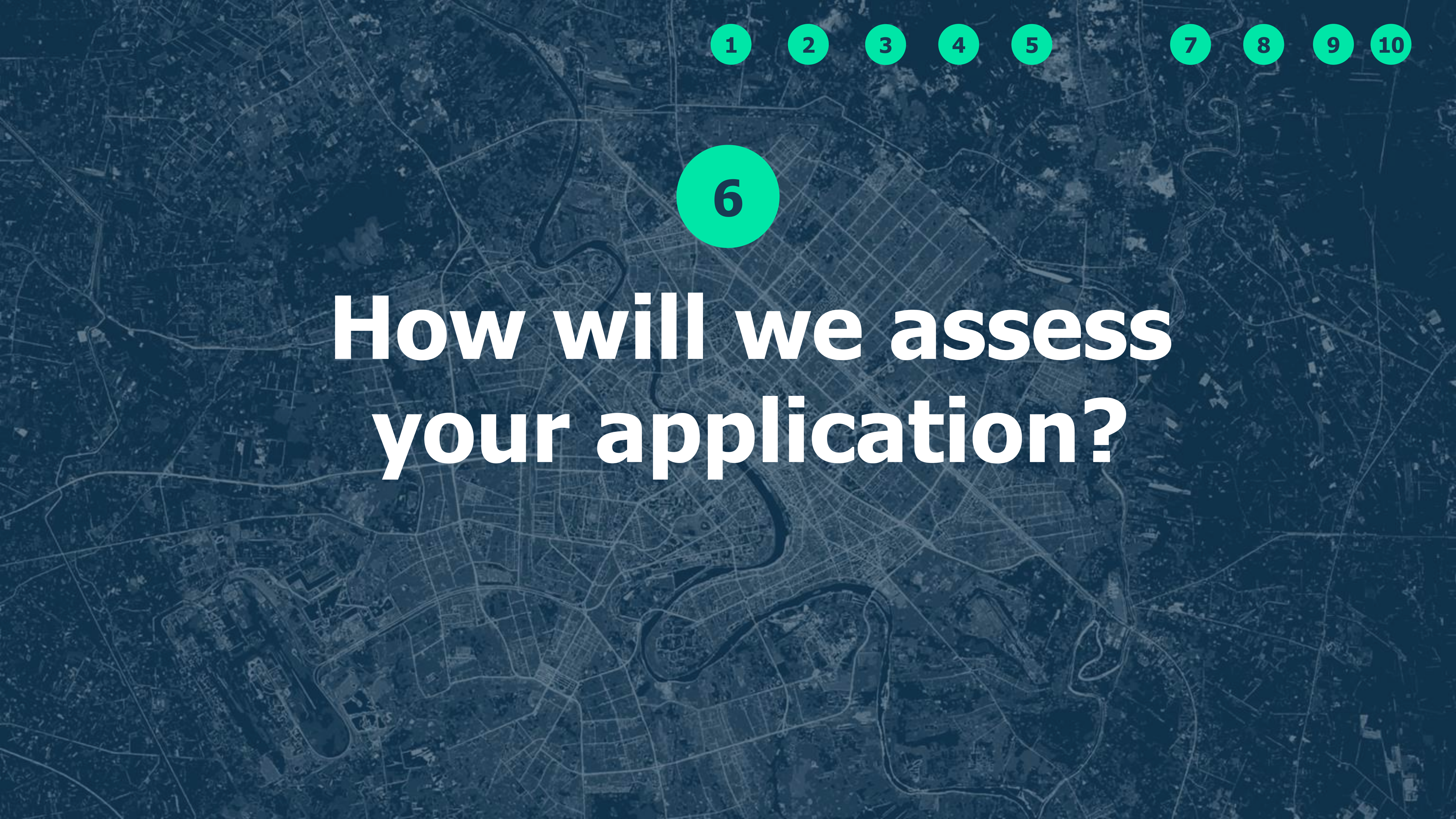
How to apply?

There is a different form for individual applicants vs. organisational applicants

To learn more about this opportunity and to apply, click on the documents below:

- [Call for concept notes](#)
- **Concept Note Application Form**
 - [For individuals](#)
 - [For organisations](#)
- [FAQs](#)

Applications must be submitted via email to XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com



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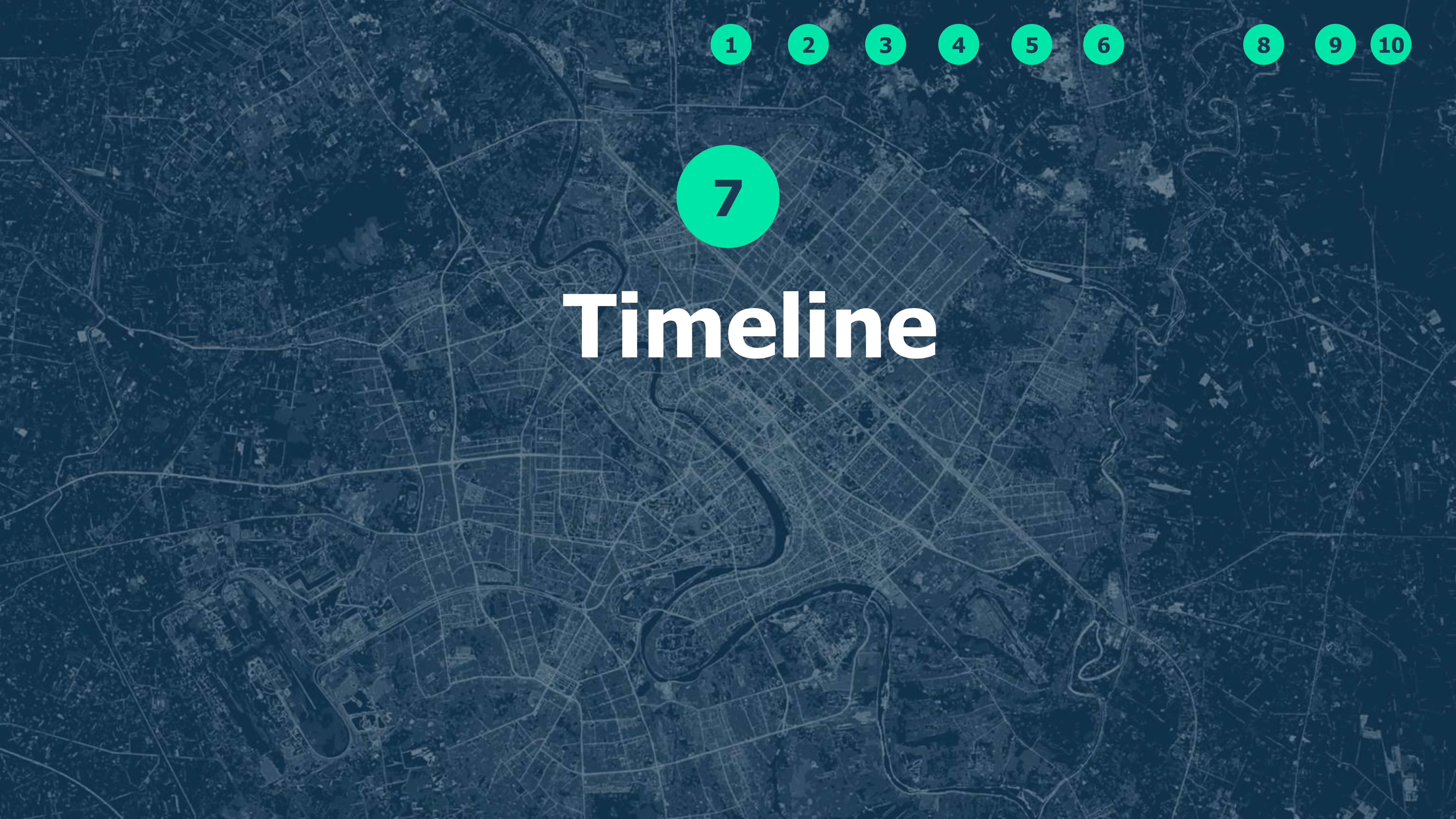
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**How will we assess
your application?**

Scoring criteria

Applications will be evaluated by a Selection Committee based on the criteria below. **Please note that this award criteria should be considered as a guide only.**

Evaluation criteria	Scoring
Research idea and evidence gaps • Relevance to the themes, questions, and XCEPT focus geographies described in this call. • Clarity of the proposal, clear description of the conceptual framework, and precision of the research question(s). • Originality of the proposed topic, awareness of existing literature and evidence gaps. • Consideration and integration of relevant gender dimensions.	40
Methodology • Aptness of the methods proposed, including rigour and robustness of the empirical strategy to address research questions and test hypotheses and of the approach to data collection and analysis. • Feasibility of the methodological approach, based on the time and budget proposed. • Robustness of quality assurance processes built into the design, implementation, writing, and dissemination of the research proposed. • Aptness and robustness of approach to ensuring ethical research standards throughout the project cycle. • Integration of gender- and conflict-sensitive research practices from design to implementation. • Feasibility and realism of plan for accomplishing the deliverables and delivering on time and within budget. • Relevance and aptness of proposed outputs for academic and policy impact.	30
Research team • Academic credentials and experience delivering research related to the research idea. • Track record using the proposed methodology. • Relevance of existing networks for research access. • Evidence of ability to produce rigorous, high-quality research outputs. • Extent to which individuals and/or organisations from the Global South lead and meaningfully participate across the research cycle, from research design to data collection, analysis, authoring, and uptake.	30
Total score	100



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Timeline

Timeline



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XCEPT support for Fund awardees

Tailored support for Fund awardees

- Research management and implementation
- Remote methods support
- Research engagement and policy uptake
- Quality assurance and expert consultation
- Publications support and research communications
- Joining the XCEPT research community

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Q&A

XCEPT

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Contact information:

XCEPT Fund team – XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com