

Cross-border Conflict, Evidence Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme

Request for Applications (RFA)

Request for Applications for research on conflict and climate

1. Basic details

RFA details	
RFA No.	G026_XCEPT_Conflict and Climate
Activity Name:	Conflict and Climate
Issuance Date:	5 July 2024
Application Deadline:	9 September 2024
Funding agency(ies) ("Funder"):	Chemonics Group UK Ltd., on behalf of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) using UK International Development funds
Implementation Country(ies) ("Country") and Locality(ies):	Worldwide
Chemonics UK Point of Contact:	XCEPT Research Fund, XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com
Deadline to submit questions regarding this RFA:	5 August 2024

2. RFA activity description

2.1 Background

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 rigorous, actionable public good research to inform policies and programmes that support peace.

The programme includes the XCEPT Research fund (XRF), managed by Chemonics, to enable responsive research on emerging conflicts and build evidence on what works to stabilise, resolve, and prevent conflict.

Specifically, the XRF aims to:

- Increase understanding of the **transnational dimensions of conflict**, including how conflict and instability connect across borders and regions.
- Draw lessons from **interventions** to prevent, stabilise and resolve conflict to inform more effective policy and programme responses.

- Centre **local knowledge** in research and policy responses, including through support to Global South institutions and researchers.
- Advance **gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)** through research design and practice.
- Promote the use of **innovative technologies** in conflict research, including remote sensing and artificial intelligence.

The XRF is inviting applications for up to £500,000 of funding for projects of up to 24 months that contribute to these objectives by building a body of research to inform **responses to the conflict-climate change nexus across borders**.

2.2 Objective of the activity

The XCEPT Research Fund (XRF) invites proposals to build a body of research that explores responses at the intersection of climate change and violent conflict. In XCEPT's effort to build an impactful body of work in this field, this research project will sit alongside an XRF Research Fellow, who will support XCEPT thought leadership and uptake (see separate recruitment [here](#)).

Much research to date on climate change and violent conflict focuses on analysis of the problem, unpacking the complex causal relationships between the two. The XRF seeks proposals that instead focus primarily on analysis of solutions, to help inform policy and programming responses. This may require building on and/or building out research to disentangle interactions between climate change and conflict, but with a clear view to addressing response options. Research may approach solutions from both sides of the climate-conflict nexus: be it the conflict implications of interventions to adapt to or to mitigate the effects of climate change, or the climate implications of interventions to prevent, stabilise and resolve conflict. XCEPT recognises that climate and conflict objectives at times conflict and, conversely, that opportunities exist to leverage climate interventions for peacebuilding purposes, and vice versa. Moreover, both conflict and climate are part of complex borderland and cross-border systems, and so interventions in either area may affect countries and regions far beyond the place where the intervention was focused, through flows of trade, money, people and shared natural resources.

Applicants are invited to develop a research question(s) and proposal that responds to this theme. The research proposed must fit within the following parameters:

- It should demonstrate a clear link to **borderlands and/or the cross-border or transnational dimensions of violent conflict** and to **climate change**.
- It should focus primarily on analysis of **responses** at the intersection of climate and conflict, be it interventions to adapt to or to mitigate the effects of climate change, and/or interventions to prevent, stabilise and resolve conflict.
- It should focus on **geographies relevant to XCEPT**. These are: Africa, particularly West Africa, the Sahel, North Africa, Central Africa, and the Horn of Africa; the Middle East; Asia, particularly Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The research may focus on one region or on several.
- Drawing on comparative analysis and/or larger datasets, the research should seek to move beyond recommendations for specific programmes, institutions and local contexts to draw bigger picture lessons about generalisability (or not) and on what works and what doesn't.

In addition, XCEPT would particularly value proposals that:

- Connect various research areas to take an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and responding to the intersection of climate change and conflict.
- Are conducted independently by, or in partnership / collaboration with researchers or research organisations based in the Global South.
- Speak to issue sets that have been addressed to date in XCEPT research. Upon award, XCEPT can facilitate connection to other XCEPT research teams, as relevant.

These parameters for proposals are deliberately broad. We invite researchers to tell us – and to evidence with the proposed literature review – what today's most consequential questions and knowledge gaps are, with a view to informing responses to the conflict-climate change nexus across borders.

2.3 Detailed activity description

The organisation/consortium selected for this award will have the opportunity to develop a body of research on responses at the intersection of climate and conflict. The selected proposal will be expected to:

- Undertake a **rapid evidence assessment** to establish the gaps in the research in the area they have chosen to explore.
- Design and implement one or more **research projects** that respond to the gap(s) identified.
- Support the design and oversight of **complementary research projects**, to be commissioned through the XRF.

There are three phases in this award:

Phase 1. Rapid evidence assessment

The first phase is expected to involve the production of a rapid evidence assessment (REA). This will be a rigorous and systematic search and synthesis of evidence. It is similar in nature to a systematic review but acknowledges that methodological concessions are required to ensure the assessment can be produced in a short timeframe.

The outputs for this phase of the award include:

1. **Phase 1 inception report**, setting out final research questions for the REA, scope, work plan, the proposed framework for quality appraisal of the literature, and suggested report structure. Due one week after award kick-off.
2. **First draft** of the REA. Due two months after award kick-off.
3. **Final version** of the REA. Due three months after award kick-off.
4. **Briefing note** (approx. 2 pages) that outlines the key findings of the REA. Due four months after award kick-off.
5. **Presentation**. Presentation of key findings to key stakeholders, accompanied by presentation slides. Due four months after award kick-off.

The final version of the REA will be submitted to a relevant journal or published by XCEPT.

Phase 2. Design of research projects

After the first draft of the REA has been submitted, the organisation/consortium will be invited to design a package of research that responds to the gaps identified in the first-phase REA. The design of this package constitutes the second phase of the award.

There are two different types of research projects anticipated as part of this award:

- a) Research that will be **designed and implemented by the core team itself**. This/these projects would draw down on the total budget for this award. The main research outputs for this package of research would be one or more manuscripts prepared for submission in a peer-reviewed journal or published through XCEPT as a peer-reviewed research report. Each project also should include policy-focused outputs, such as summary briefing notes and presentations to policy audiences, as well as outputs geared for a wider public audience, such as commentaries, blogs, podcasts, or videos.
- b) **Complementary research projects** that will be commissioned through the XRF. These projects would help build out the body of research on the gaps identified in Phase 1, whether contributing, for example, additional expertise and analysis not present in the core team's research, or providing a more separate, but coherent contribution to addressing the evidence gap. The core team would support the commission and, as relevant, the implementation of these projects. Complementary projects would be funded separately from this award; however, any time spent by the core team contributing to the design and oversight of these projects would draw down on the total budget for this award.

XCEPT has in-house capacity to conduct research and analysis using satellite imagery and open-source investigations. Both the projects led by the core team and the complementary projects commissioned through the XRF may benefit from this capacity. The organisation/consortium selected will be encouraged, though not required, to consider how these technologies could be integrated into the research. This service would be funded separately from this award.

The output for Phase 2 of the award is:

- **Phase 2 inception report**, setting out:
 - Detailed proposals for research project(s) to be led by the core team, including research questions; geographies; methodology; outputs; team; risk matrix; and a detailed budget.
 - Suggested proposals for complementary research projects to be commissioned through the XRF, including potential research questions and geographies.

The Phase 2 inception report will be due four months after award kick-off.

There will be a break point at the end of Phase 2. If XCEPT is satisfied that the Phase 1 REA is of sufficiently high quality, and that the projects proposed in the Phase 2 inception report appropriately respond to the gaps identified in the REA and are feasible and likely to lead to high quality research, then the organisation/consortium will move to the third phase of the award.

Phase 3. Implementation of research projects

Once the Phase 2 inception report has been approved by XCEPT, the selected core team will implement the research they designed, while the XRF will commission complementary research projects that respond to the gaps identified in the Phase 1 REA. The outputs for each project will be determined alongside XCEPT as part of the Phase 2 design. The Phase 3 research projects are expected to last approximately 18 months and should aim to be completed by 30 September 2026.

3. Application and award details

3.1 Award details	
Type of Award available	Cost reimbursable grant agreement
Expected number of Awards	One
Expected Amount for each Award	£500,000

3.2 Pre-application Information Session

To learn more and ask questions about this funding opportunity, please join the virtual Information Session on **Monday, 22 July 2024 at 1400-1500 BST**. You will be able to write your questions into the Zoom question box and the team will respond during the session. To register for the Information Session, please complete this form: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_dR93dB0rQSGIKRjq67WCaQ#/registration

If you have any **clarification questions**, please ask them at the Information Session or email them to the Commission Point of Contact at xcept-fund@chemonics.com by **2359 BST on Friday, 26 July 2024**.

Questions asked during the Information Session and via email will be collated into a FAQ document that will be shared with all prospective applicants on the XCEPT website by **Friday, 2 August 2024**.

3.3 Intended recipients

This funding opportunity is open to research organisations as well as consortia of researchers from different organisations, provided there is a lead organisation. Chemonics will only make an award to one organisation. If applying as part of a consortia, the lead organisation will be responsible for contracting and managing downstream partners if selected.

Researchers and research organisations based in the Global South¹ are strongly encouraged to apply, independently or in partnership / collaboration with researchers or research organisations based in the Global North. Any proposed partnerships should clearly outline roles and responsibilities, with a focus on ensuring equity within the project. Applications by – or in partnership with – Global South researchers or research organisations will be scored more favourably (see Section 4 – Evaluation).

XCEPT encourages collaborative research. Proposals should consider whether the research would be strengthened through the participation of researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds, or through partnerships between academics and policy professionals.

¹ For the purposes of this solicitation, “Global South” refers to countries listed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA). See [DAC List of ODA Recipients 2024/2025](#).

3.4 Eligibility and prerequisites for applications

- **Applicants may not offer or supply any and all items that are made by Huawei Technology Company, ZTE Corporation, Hytera Communications Corporation, Hangzhou Hikivision Digital Technology Company, Dahua Technology Company.**
- Applicants must be able to comply with Ethical and Business Conduct requirements outlined in the cover page of this RFA and Chemonics' Supplier Code of Conduct (included in the Applicant Self-Assessment Form, Annex A), which is based on the [FCDO Code of Conduct](#), available at https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment_data%2Ffile%2F1043334%2FSupply-Partner-Code-of-Conduct1.docx.odt&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK.
- Applicants should only include eligible costs in their budget in line with FCDO [Eligible Cost Guidance for Commercial Contracts](#), and [FCDO Eligible Cost Guidance for Accountable Grant Agreements](#).
- Applicants may not offer or supply any commodities or services that are provided by a vendor included on any list of suspended, debarred, or ineligible bidders used by the United Kingdom or the United States Government.
- Applicants must be (led by) a legally registered organisation formally constituted, recognised by and in good standing with appropriate authorities, and compliant with all applicable civil and fiscal regulations.
- Applicants must cooperate fully with Chemonics Due Diligence process and complete the Due Diligence Self-Assessment Form provided under this RFA. Applicants will also be screened through Visual Compliance checks.
- Applicant lead organisations must display sound governance structure and management systems in the form of financial, administrative, and technical policies and procedures and present a system of internal controls that safeguard assets, protect against fraud, bribery, corruption and any type of funds misuse and aid diversion.
- Applicant lead organisations must have in place and provide a Safeguarding Policy, including details of procedures and measure to ensure application of the policy during implementation.
- Applicant lead organisations must provide duty of care to applicant's staff and/or consultants and must be able to provide relevant duty of care policies, processes and procedures to evidence ability to fulfil this requirement.
- The following types of organisations will NOT be eligible to receive an award under the XCEPT Programme:
 - Any entity that has been found to have misused donor funds in the past (unless specifically approved by FCDO);
 - Any entity included in any supplementary information concerning prohibited individuals or entities that may be provided by the U.K. government;
 - Any entity whose name appears in Visual Compliance (a search engine that searches U.K., U.S. and other international excluded party lists) with an active exclusion;
 - Political parties, groupings, or institutions or their subsidiaries and affiliates;
 - Organisations that advocate or promote illegal activities; and,
 - Faith-based organisations whose objectives are for religious purposes, and whose main objective for the activity is of a religious nature

Each organisation can only submit one application as a prime applicant.

3.5 How to apply

The total value of the award will be up to a maximum of £500,000, to cover the cost of the Phase 1 rapid evidence assessment, Phase 2 research design, and the Phase 3 implementation of research projects. The Phase 1 REA is expected to cost a maximum 10% of the total value of the award.

Proposals are expected to be for a maximum of 24 months in length. The Phase 1 REA and Phase 2 inception report are expected to take a maximum of four months. The funding for the Phase 3 research projects will depend on performance during phases one and two.

Expected start date is October 2024 and all projects should aim to be concluded by 30 September 2026.

Templates to be used when developing the application are provided in Annexes A-C.

Application documents required:

1) Applicant Self-Assessment Form

All organisations selected for award are subject to a pre-award risk assessment conducted to ascertain whether the organisation has the minimum management capabilities required to manage UK funds and comply with Chemonics' Supplier Code of Conduct (included in the Applicant Self-Assessment Form) based on the [FCDO Code of Conduct](#). The applicant is therefore required to complete the Self-Assessment Form as the first step in the pre-award risk assessment process. The **Applicant Self-Assessment Form** is contained in [Annex A](#). Applicants should provide copies of any available policies or documentation that is requested in the Applicant Self-Assessment Form in their submission of their application.

2) Application Form

Proposals should include the completed **Application Form** ([Annex B](#)), which includes the following sections:

1. **Applicant information.** To provide information about the lead organisation and any sub-contract partners.
2. **Project overview.** To provide summary information about your project.
3. **Technical proposal.** This is the section of the Application Form that will be scored. It includes the following sections:
 - 1) **Literature review** (Up to 2000 words). This review should include a statement of the question(s) or issues you view as relevant to the scope of work. It should then review the literature to demonstrate the research gap and explain why it is important.
 - 2) **Approach to rapid evidence assessment** (Up to 500 words). Describe how you plan to undertake each stage of the Phase 1 rapid evidence assessment, including: searching for and screening studies; assessing the quality and relevance of studies; and synthesising findings.
 - 3) **Ideas for new research projects** (Up to 2000 words). Based on the gap(s) identified in the literature review, you should propose a package of research to be implemented by the core team. The proposal should address how you will ensure coherence and synthesis across strands or sub-projects to move beyond recommendations for specific programmes or institutions and draw bigger picture lessons on what works and what doesn't. Explain the research idea(s) and key research question(s); choice of geographies; methodology; proposed outputs; stakeholders involved; and expected

impact. You may consider including ideas for complementary research to be funded by the XRF contributing to additional expertise or analysis not present within the core team.

- 4) **Approach to ethics, safeguarding, risk and duty of care** (Up to 500 words). Describe your approach to ethical research and how you analyse risks and ensure the safety and security of your researchers and research subjects. Please also describe how you will integrate gender- and conflict-sensitive research practices into your approach.
- 5) **Research team and track record** (Up to 500 words). Propose your core research team and their roles and responsibilities, explaining why you have selected this team to best deliver the proposed research; describe your track record of delivering research related to your proposed research; describe the relevance of your networks; show evidence of your ability to produce rigorous, high-quality research outputs; and describe how individuals and/or organisations from the Global South will meaningfully participate in the award.
- 6) **Value for Money** (Up to 250 words). Describe how you will oversee the project and financial management of this funding opportunity and how the proposed costs achieve Value for Money.

References to the literature should be included as footnotes, which will not count towards the word limits.

The team selected for this award is expected to build on the literature review submitted as part of this proposal when they complete the rapid evidence assessment during Phase 1 of the award. We expect that the ideas for new projects submitted as part of the proposal may need to be adjusted as part of the Phase 2 design of new research projects, informed by gaps identified in the more detailed REA. The purpose of asking for project concept notes as part of the proposal is primarily to understand your basic research ideas and how you design research projects.

4. **Applicant declaration.** Applicants responding to this RFA must disclose any conflict of interest and sign this declaration, in keeping with Chemonics' ethical and business conduct requirements (see Section 5.2: Ethical and business conduct requirements).

3) **CVs**

Proposals should include **CVs** for the lead researcher and up to four additional researchers (maximum five CVs). These should include a list of relevant publications to which the researcher contributed, if applicable. CVs should ideally be no longer than 2 pages.

4) **Budget**

Proposals should be submitted along with a **budget** ([Annex C](#)). Applicants should only include eligible costs in their budget in line with FCDO [Eligible Cost Guidance for Commercial Contracts](#), and [FCDO Eligible Cost Guidance for Accountable Grant Agreements](#).

The budget should provide a detailed breakdown of costs for the completion of the Phase 1 "REA" and the Phase 2 "Design of research projects", covering, where applicable: staff costs, including day rates; equipment; travel and accommodation; event costs; administration and overhead costs. Budget lines should be broken down to show the various costs under each heading. The Phase 1 REA and Phase 2 research project design is expected to cost a maximum 10% of the total value of the award.

A detailed budget is not required for Phase 3 "Implementation of research projects". However, at this proposal stage you should provide an indication of how much time each of the proposed core team members is expected to spend on the project, along with their day rates. Please also include

indicative budget line items for materials costs such as data collection and uptake-related expenses. Detailed budgets for the Phase 3 research will not be required until the Phase 2 inception report.

XCEPT requires quarterly monitoring reports, which typically includes a financial report. At the end of the award we require a completion report, including a detailed financial report.

The application must be signed by an authorised agent of the applicant.

Applications shall be submitted in English.

Applications, including all supporting documentation, should be submitted electronically to xcept-fund@Chemonics.com and should reference RFA No. G026. Applications must be submitted no later than **23:59 [BST] on 9 September 2024**. Late or unresponsive applications will not be considered.

All application documents required by this RFA must be submitted by the required deadline. Failure to submit all required documents may be considered non-responsive and Chemonics shall have the right to reject such submissions.

4. Evaluation

4.1 Review of application and selection process

Proposals will be judged by a panel of experts from academia, the XCEPT consortium, and the UK Government. Applications will be judged against the merit review criteria in the table below:

Merit Review Category	Rating (Points)
1. <i>Literature review</i>	30
2. <i>Approach to rapid evidence assessment</i>	10
3. <i>Ideas for new research projects</i>	30
4. <i>Approach to ethics, safeguarding, risk and duty of care</i>	10
5. <i>Research team and track record</i>	20
6. <i>Value for Money</i>	Pass/Fail
Overall Rating	100

1. *Literature review*

- Relevance to the topic and awareness of existing literature
- Clarity and relevance of the evidence gap identified
- Critical analysis and synthesis of the literature

This will primarily be assessed based on the answer submitted to question 3.1 in the Application Form.

2. Approach to rapid evidence assessment

- Clarity and aptness of the methodological approach; including the approach to screening studies and synthesising key concepts in the literature
- Rigour and robustness of the approach
- Feasibility of approach within proposed timeline
- Clearly demonstrated access to the required literature

This will primarily be assessed based on the answer submitted to question 3.2 in the Application Form and the workplan submitted.

3. Ideas for new projects

- Originality and relevance of the proposed approach
- Clarity of research ideas and questions
- Feasibility and realism of plan for research delivery; including delivering on time and within budget
- Robustness of quality assurance processes built into the design, implementation, writing, and dissemination of the research proposed
- Coherence and synthesis of research strands
- Importance of the topic for providing evidence that can improve policy responses
- If relevant, approach to integrating innovative methods such as GIS and satellite imagery, open source investigations, and/or big data/AI into the research process

This will primarily be assessed based on the answer submitted to question 3.3 in the Application Form.

4. Approach to ethics, safeguarding, risk, and duty of care

- Aptness and robustness of approach to ensuring ethical research standards throughout the project cycle.
- Strength of approach to ensuring the safety and security of researcher(s) and research subjects.
- Robustness and aptness of identification and mitigation of risks.
- Integration of gender- and conflict-sensitive research practices from design to implementation.

This will primarily be assessed based on the answer submitted to question 3.4 in the Application Form.

5. Research team and track record

- Track record of 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.
- Capacity of the (lead) organisation to manage project delivery and finances.
- Extent to which individuals and/or organisations from the Global South lead and meaningfully participate during different stages of the research cycle, from research design to data collection, analysis, validation, authoring, and uptake.

This will primarily be assessed based on the answer to question 3.5 in the Application Form and the submitted CVs.

6. Value for Money

No points are assigned to the total cost for the proposed application. However, the applicant is expected to describe how the proposal offers value for money (question 3.6 in the Application Form) and to submit a detailed budget by line item (Annex C), which will be reviewed for cost reasonableness, thoroughness, and value for money. Budgets that do not demonstrate reasonable costs or an excellent value for money (VFM) will not be considered to be responsive to this request for applications. A good budget is one that is clear and reasonable and reflects best use of organisational and grant resources to demonstrate good VFM for FCDO.²

5. Regulations

5.1 Governing regulations

XCEPT Research Fund awards are made under the authority of FCDO [Standard Terms and Conditions](#), and Chemonics' Supplier Code of Conduct (included in the Applicant Self-Assessment Form, Annex A), based on the [FCDO Code of Conduct](#).

XCEPT is required to ensure that all organisations receiving FCDO funding comply with the guidance found in the regulations referenced above, as applicable to the respective terms and conditions of their grant awards.

FCDO retains the right to reject Chemonics' proposal of any successful applicant and terminate, in whole or in part, a subsequent award at any time.

This Request for Application does not establish an obligation for Chemonics UK to fund any activity or provide any awards to any applicants.

5.2 Ethical and business conduct requirements

Chemonics is committed to integrity in commissioning, and only selects grantees based on criteria such as technical merit and value for money.

Chemonics does not tolerate fraud, collusion among applicants, falsified proposals, bribery, or kickbacks. Any organisation or individual violating these standards will be disqualified from this solicitation process, barred from future opportunities, and may be reported to both our Office of Business Conduct and FCDO.

Programme and Chemonics employees may not ask for, and applicants are prohibited from offering, any money, fee, commission, credit, gift, gratuity, thing of value, or compensation to obtain or reward improper favourable treatment regarding this solicitation. Any improper request from a programme employee should be reported to Saba Gill at sgill@chemonics.com or to BusinessConduct@chemonics.com.

Applicants responding to this RFA must sign a declaration using the template available in Section 4 of the Application Form, to include the following as part of the proposal submission:

² For more on value for money, see the UK Government's 2020 guidance: [DFID's Approach to Value for Money](#).

- Disclose any close, familial, or financial relationships with Chemonics or XCEPT programme staff. For example, if an applicant's cousin is employed by the programme, the applicant must state this.
- Disclose any family or financial relationship with other applicants submitting proposals. For example, if the applicant's father owns a company that is submitting another proposal, the applicant must state this.
- Certify that the prices in the application have been arrived at independently, without any consultation, communication, or agreement with any other applicant or competitor for the purpose of restricting competition.
- Certify that all information in the proposal and all supporting documentation are authentic and accurate.
- Certify understanding and agreement to Chemonics' prohibitions against fraud, bribery and kickbacks.

Please submit all questions concerning this solicitation to the attention of: **XCEPT Research Fund**, via email to XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com no later than **26 July 2024**.

All questions must be provided in writing.