Framework for ICARS' Demonstration Projects

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1.   Introduction

ICARS partners with low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) governments and supports their efforts to mitigate antimicrobial resistance (AMR) by co-developing and financing AMR intervention and Implementation Research projects (referred to as "research projects" in the following). The goal is for the projects to provide tailored solutions at national and local level that the countries can implement and scale up.

Each country applying for an ICARS grant must belong to the "DAC-list" (developed by OECD's Development Assistance Committee), which confirms the eligibility to receive official development assistance (ODA). The updated list can be accessed on OECD's webpage.

In addition to being eligible to receive ODA, partner countries must demonstrate that they are committed to develop and implement the research project according to ICARS' five core principles: "Country ownership", "One Health lens", "Partnerships", "Solution-focused" and "Sustainability" as detailed in ICARS' core principles in section 3. Countries requesting support are expected to lead the development and implementation of the research projects in collaboration with ICARS and to demonstrate commitment to implement successful solutions on a larger scale. At the moment, ICARS is financing and engaging in the co-development of small scale demonstration research projects with a typical duration of 2-3 years.

This framework describes the phases of the application process (Figure 2), which includes: Expression of Interest (phase 1), Concept Note (phase 2) and Project Proposal (phase 3). The framework also specifies the general requirements that ICARS' research projects must adhere to.

For information on how to develop the documentation required for each of the phases please see the *Guideline for the Expression of Interest and Concept Note* and *Guideline for the Project Proposal* and for information on how to administer a project grant please see *Guideline for Project Administration.* For questions concerning this framework please contact ICARS at contact@icars-global.org.

2. Definitions

The sections below provide definitions for selected terms used in *Guideline for the Expression of Interest and Concept Note* and *Guideline for the Project Proposal*. Understanding these terms is key to developing a good application.

TABLE 1. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
General terms	
Intervention research	Intervention research examines the effects/efficacy of an intervention on an outcome of interest.
Implementation research	Implementation research facilitates the uptake of evidence-based interventions and research findings and addresses implementation bottlenecks using optimal approaches for a particular setting. It is conducted in real world settings in real time using methods that are fit for purpose, focusing on processes and outcomes. It is relevant, context-specific, demand-driven, multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary[1].
One Health Lens	ICARS takes a broad definition of 'One Health' and works with projects in all sectors thereby not restricting projects only to those with multisectoral AMR interventions. The One Health lens requires collaboration and communication between multiple disciplines, professions and stakeholders to optimize the health of people, animals, crops, and their shared environment in the AMR context.
Application terminology	
Theory of change	A theory of change is a description of how and why the interventions/implementation research project will bring about the desired change.
Log frame	The log frame explains the *links and logical flow* between planned activities, expected results (output) and desired changes (outcome).
Objectives	Objectives are defined as what the research project aims to achieve within its duration.
Outputs	Outputs are usually quantitative and qualitative results such as products or services that are required to achieve outcomes. Outputs are produced as a direct result of activities and are measurable[2].
Outcomes	Outcomes are what the research project aims to achieve in the short and medium term. They are the result of project outputs as well as factors beyond direct control (such as policy changes and/or practices of stakeholders/users of project outputs). Outcomes are often measurable.
Impact	The impact is the longer-term effect(s) of achieving the outcomes. An impact is often not measurable.
Indicators	Indicators are measures of project performance and are based on valid and reliable data that can be monitored with simple data collection methods. Indicators may be qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative indicators are usually numerical values while qualitative indicators reflect people's knowledge, attitudes and perspectives on a given situation or subject[3].
Baseline	A baseline is the status of any given activity, output or outcome before the activity begins.
Milestone	A milestone is a measurable indicator on progress towards the specific delivery of outputs and/or outcomes by periodic evaluation of the research project.
Budget terminology	
Direct costs	Direct costs are the costs required to execute a project that are directly attributable and can be reasonably allocated to the research project. Costs that would not be incurred if the project did not exist are often indicative of direct costs.
Overhead	Overhead represents a sum of indirect administration costs that support the entire operation of a participating institution or stakeholder and that may be shared across projects. Costs that would be incurred regardless of whether the grant is funded are often indicative of indirect administration costs.

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1 Theobald S. et al. (2018), Implementation research: new imperatives and opportunities in global health, *Lancet,* 392: 2214-2228
2 Joint Programming Initiative on Antimicrobial Resistance (2019), Explanation Impact Pathway
3 Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (2008), Results Management in Norwegian Cooperation. A Practical Guide

3. Key Considerations

Before developing the Expression of Interest (EoI), the Concept Note and the Project Proposal, it is important to be aware of the following key considerations that every research project must align with to be considered for an ICARS grant.

Core principles

ICARS has five core principles that every research project must adhere to.

TABLE 2. CORE PRINCIPLES

ICARS Core Principles	
Country ownership	• Projects must be country-owned and led. • Priorities defined by individual countries should be based on the country's National Action Plan (NAP), needs and challenges to prevent, contain or mitigate AMR at national and local levels. • An integrated top-down (e.g. government, local authorities) and bottom-up (e.g. practitioners, researchers, farmers, community representatives) approach.
One Health Lens (human, animal, environment and crops)	• A collaborative, multisectoral and holistic approach. • Activities relevant to one sector while recognizing the impact on other sectors. • AMR-specific[4] and AMR-sensitive activities[5].
Partnership	• A solution development partnership - with key stakeholders at national and local levels and where relevant at regional and international levels. • Alignment and collaboration across public, private, and philanthropic sectors and various disciplines. • Maximizing the use of limited resources, building on existing programmes, work/networks for an effective approach and to avoid duplication. • Participatory cross-disciplinary research approach.
Solution-Focused	• Providing context-specific policy-, programme and practice-relevant evidence-based solutions. • Translation of country national action plans and international policies, standards and frameworks into practice on the ground. • Identifying enablers and barriers to implementation of existing solutions. • Combining immediate action with long-term vision.
Sustainability	• Cost-effective solutions (economically and technically feasible and practical for the country). • Laying the foundations for change and supporting initial implementation. • Integrating into existing resources, systems and infrastructure, where possible • Capacity and capability building in country – supporting leaders and local champions, utilizing and expanding expertise of existing capacity and training the next generation. • Alignment to other global and country agendas and priorities (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, Universal Health Coverage[6]).

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4 AMR-specific interventions have as their main purpose the reduction of AMR; for example, promulgating and enforcing regulations to ensure people can only obtain antimicrobial medicines with a valid prescription (World Bank, 2019)
5 AMR-sensitive interventions contribute indirectly to combating AMR. Their primary purpose is not AMR control; they can be designed and delivered to maximize their impact on AMR; for example improving access to clean water and sanitation, thereby reducing the spread of infections (World Bank, 2019)
6 Universal health coverage is defined as ensuring that all people have access to needed health services of sufficient quality to be effective while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship (WHO, 2020)

Co-developing the application, research expertise and ensuring synergy
It is important to ensure that the Concept Note and the Project Proposal are developed using the best national research expertise available. The Concept Note and the Project Proposal should be co-developed between the responsible Ministry (or ministries) and research institutions/universities with involvement of public, private or non-governmental stakeholders, as appropriate (see section 4).

It is expected and strongly encouraged that the Responsible Ministry will reach out to all those who can help deliver on the research project, including research institutes, universities, local and national experts as well as the private and non-governmental sector where appropriate. Foreign experts may take part in the development and implementation of the research project, if there is a lack of/limited national expertise on condition that any foreign participation builds country capacity.

It is expected that the research projects will build on existing national and regional activities and priorities. It is furthermore important to ensure synergy between the research project in question and other related ongoing research or other AMR programmes, projects/activities nationally.

4.   Project Participants

This section provides a description of the different types of institutional participants and the associated individual key roles in an ICARS research project. The final composition of project participants should be designed alongside country experts and structures.

### 4.1. Institutional participants

Responsible Ministry
"Responsible Ministry" refers to the ministry (or ministries) with ultimate responsibility for the application process (i.e. EoI, Concept Note and Project Proposal), research implementation, ongoing oversight and evaluation of the research project as well as the further uptake and scale-up of successful solutions. This also includes the responsibility to ensure synergy with other related ongoing research or other AMR projects/activities. The Responsible Ministry will also ensure that the Concept Note and the Project Proposal are developed using the best national research expertise (see section 3 above).

The Responsible Ministry will typically appoint a Lead Research Institution (see below). The Responsible Ministry may, if deemed appropriate and in consultation with ICARS, choose to have project management personnel (including the Project Coordinator and/or Finance Manager role) in-house or to delegate the responsibility for the specific tasks associated with these roles to a participating research institution or university. This would typically be the Lead Research Institution, and may be done via a formal letter of delegation. The Responsible Ministry will continue to have ultimate responsibility for project development and delivery as per the agreement with ICARS.
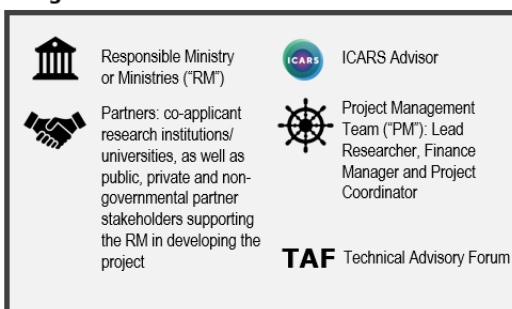
Lead Research Institution
Among the co-applicant research institutions or universities the Responsible Ministry will typically, and in consultation with ICARS, appoint a Lead Research Institution. The Lead Research Institution is responsible for the overall scientific quality and progress of the research project. The Lead Research Institution will appoint a Lead Researcher (see section 4.2). If appropriate, project and finance management responsibilities may be hosted at this organisation.

FIGURE 1. INVOLVEMENT OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS THOUGHOUT THE PHASES
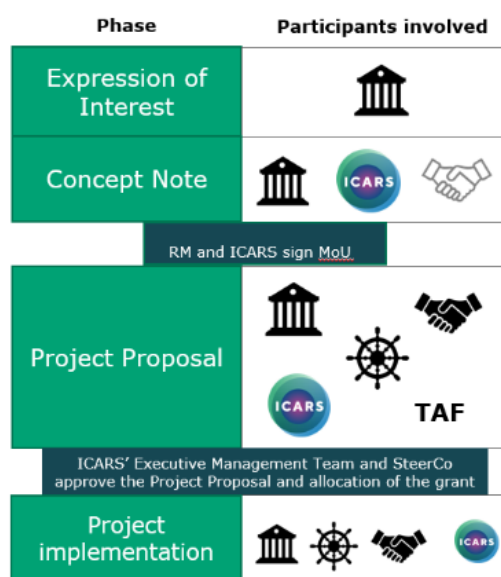
Co-applicants

"Co-applicants" are research institutions or universities that contribute to the development of the Concept Note, Project Proposal and in the implementation of the research project. Co-applicants are expected to provide a substantial intellectual contribution to the development and implementation of the research project and to appoint individual researchers to be devoted to the research project. Co-applicants must be listed in the Concept Note.

Partner Stakeholders

"Partner Stakeholders" are public, private or non-governmental stakeholders such as a hospital or a farm community that participates in/contributes to the development and testing of solutions that will address AMR. They are not research institutions or universities. Partner Stakeholders are expected to be involved from the development of the Concept Note and must be listed in the Concept Note.

4.2. Individual key roles

See below for a description of the individual key roles in a research project. Together, the Project Coordinator/Finance Manager and Lead Researcher constitute the "project management team" as illustrated in Figure 1. These roles play a key role in ensuring the success of the research project and should ideally be involved from the preparation of the Concept Note and throughout the implementation of the research project. The roles involve a substantial workload, especially for the Project Coordinator and the Lead Researcher. For more information about the responsibilities of the Project Coordinator and the Lead Researcher, please see *Tasks and Responsibilities of the Project Coordinator and the Lead Researcher.*

Project Coordinator/Finance Manager

Each research project must have a "Project Coordinator" who is responsible for the overall administrative, and stakeholder management of the research project, reporting to ICARS and ensuring that appropriate rules and regulations are followed. This person will be the primary contact for the ICARS Advisor throughout the development of the Concept Note and Project Proposal and during project implementation.

Each research project must also have a "Finance Manager" who is responsible for the financial management of the grant and distribution of the budget to co-applicant research institutions or universities and Partner Stakeholders as appropriate and in a timely manner. The Finance Manager is also responsible for financial reporting to ICARS (see section 8).

The Responsible Ministry will appoint the Project Coordinator and the Finance Manager after consultation with ICARS. The Project Coordinator and the Finance Manager will typically be employed at the Responsible Ministry or the Lead Research Institution, but always at the same Responsible Ministry or Lead Research Institution since the roles are closely connected.

For simplicity purposes *Tasks and Responsibilities of the Project Coordinator and the Lead Researcher* and *Guideline for Project Administration* presumes that the same individual take on Project Coordinator and Finance Management responsibilities although in some cases these roles may be divided among different people within the Responsible Ministry or Lead Research Institution in question.

Lead Researcher

The Lead Researcher is employed at the Lead Research Institution and is responsible for the technical and scientific management of the research project. The Lead Researcher will lead the research project as head of the day-to-day Project Management Group. The Lead Researcher will also ensure that the research project is implemented according to the approved Project Proposal. The Lead Researcher will work closely with the Project Coordinator to ensure coordination and progress.

ICARS Advisor

The ICARS Advisor is both ICARS' and the country's focal point on the research project. The ICARS Advisor is an ICARS employee who contributes to the development of the research project and acts as the coordinating link between the Project Coordinator and ICARS. The ICARS Advisor will support the co-development of the Concept Note and the Project Proposal with the other project participants and will continue to provide oversight and advice throughout the implementation of the research project. Should the appointed ICARS Advisor change before the completion of the project, ICARS will notify the Responsible Ministry, mentioning the name and contact of the new Advisor. In addition to the ICARS Advisor, ICARS

may consult with an external subject matter expert to support the project co-development in certain areas where additional expertise is needed.

PhD and Master Students

The inclusion of PhD and Masters Students as researchers in the project is encouraged, with such involvement being an important part of capacity-building. The respective students will primarily be enrolled at national universities. Supervision should be provided by national researchers, but if needed co-supervision may be provided by international researchers. Further details on the financial aspects of PhD and Masters students' involvement are described in *Guideline for the Project Proposal.* It should be noted that ICARS will not have any financial commitments towards the students when the research project is terminated.

TABLE 3. INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPANTS AND INDIVIDUAL KEY ROLES

Individual Key roles	Institutional Participants				
	Responsible Ministry	Lead Research Institution or University	Co-applicants	Partner Stakeholders	ICARS
Project Coordinator/ Finance Manager	X	X			
Lead Researcher		**X**			
ICARS Advisor					**X**

*A role can only be placed at one participant. "**X**" marked in bold indicates where a role <u>must </u>be placed, several "X's" indicate the participants where a role can be placed.

5.   The Application Process

The application process for an ICARS grant is divided in four phases (phase 1-4) as illustrated below in Figure 2. The expected duration for the application process is approximately six-eight months depending on the situation in the involved country and the proposed research project. Support for a research project will only be provided at the end of phase 4, meaning after the optimization and finalization of the Project Proposal and after receiving final approval by ICARS' Executive Management Team and Steering Committee.

ICARS will use three evaluation cycles per year to assess EoI's. The submission deadlines for each cycle are listed below. The EoIs should be submitted to ICARS before end of day CET of the respective deadlines.

- Cycle 1 – deadline: 15 February
- Cycle 2 – deadline: 15 June
- Cycle 3 – deadline: 15 October

EoIs should be submitted to ICARS at contact@icars-global.org.

FIGURE 2. THE APPLICATION PROCESS DEVIDED IN PHASES
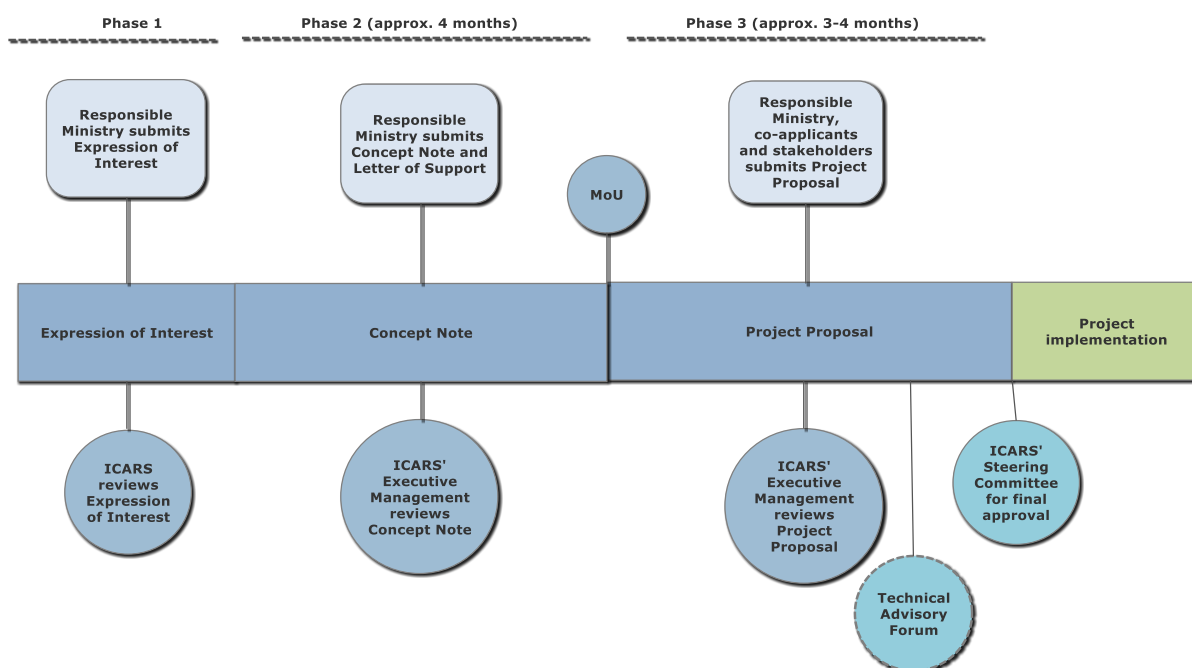
5.1. Application Phases

Phase 1: Expression of Interest (EoI)
Countries interested in partnering with and getting support from ICARS should submit as a first step an EoI. The EoI consists of a cover letter from the Responsible Ministry (or ministries) and a description of the background and justification of the research project, including the current knowledge gap existing in the country, and the proposed subject area/field and intervention.

Countries will need to provide their request to ICARS via their relevant ministries. Upon review by ICARS, feedback will be provided to the Responsible Ministry. If the conditions are met, the ministry will be invited to submit a Concept Note.

For detailed information about how to develop the EoI please see *Guideline for the Expression of Interest and the Concept Note.*

Phase 2: Concept Note

The Concept Note is a description of the research project idea, including the background and justification of the research project, the research question, aim, objectives, expected outcomes and impact, the proposed theory of change, and key interventions and outputs, alongside a description of how the research project aligns with country strategies on AMR. Co-applicant research institutions/universities and Partner Stakeholders should ideally be involved in the development of the Concept Note and throughout the other phases. The Concept Note must list the co-applicant research institutions/universities and Partner Stakeholders known at the time. It is the responsibility of the Responsible Ministry to coordinate and develop the Concept Note.

The Responsible Ministry must submit the Concept Note to ICARS, after the EoI is approved by ICARS. It is expected that co-developing the Concept Note takes 4 months. ICARS' Executive Management Team will assess the Concept Note using the assessment criteria stated in *Guideline for the Expression of Interest and Concept Note*.

Memorandum of Understanding

Upon ICARS' approval of the Concept Note a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be signed between ICARS and the Responsible Ministry (or ministries). The MoU must, at minimum state the subject area(s), aim and objectives of the research project, as well as the country's willingness to implement the solutions, if successful, on a larger scale. Entering into a MoU with ICARS does not represent a guarantee that the country will receive funding; rather it is an agreement to co-develop a Project Proposal.

Phase 3: Project Proposal

After a ministry has entered into a MoU with ICARS, the next step for the country is to co-develop a Project Proposal with ICARS. The Project Proposal is a detailed description of all aspects of the research project. This includes the methodology within a theory of change framework, alongside details about how the research project has been co-developed with relevant institutions/stakeholders and how the Responsible Ministry and partners anticipate to do a large-scale implementation of the identified solutions. It is expected that co-developing the Project Proposal takes 3-4 months. For detailed information on how to develop the Project Proposal please see *Guideline for the Project Proposal.*

The Project Proposal shall be submitted to ICARS whose Executive Management Team will assess whether it is well-articulated and addresses an important gap in the NAP implementation. If it fits within the remit of ICARS, the Project Proposal is forwarded to ICARS' Technical Advisory Forum for a scientific evaluation using the assessment criteria stated in *Guideline for the Project Proposal.*

If ICARS and the Technical Advisory Forum conclude that the Project Proposal is well-justified and fits within the remit of ICARS, the last step for the country is to optimize the Project Proposal based on any feedback and suggestions for enhancement provided by ICARS and the Technical Advisory Forum.

When ICARS' Executive Management Team finds that the Project Proposal has been optimized to an extent that is satisfactory, the Project Proposal will be presented to the ICARS Steering Committee for final approval and allocation of the grant.

6. Project Duration

Projects will typically run for two to three years. The expected duration of the research projects must be indicated in the Concept Note and the specific duration of the research project must be agreed upon with ICARS before submitting the Project Proposal.

7. Finances

Research projects may be submitted at a value of up to 500,000 USD with some projects expected to require substantially less funding. Where the project requires a value greater than 500,000 USD, it must be discussed with the ICARS Advisor.

It is expected that the majority of funding and working time on the research project will be allocated to local researchers and other participants in the partner country. The expected working time of every participant must be stated in their individual CVs and in Budget Form 3 as part of the Project Proposal.

The Project Proposal must include a detailed budget for the research project. See the *Guideline for the Project Proposal* for detailed information about eligible budget items, maximum overhead rates, how to develop the budget, requirements for external audit etc.

ICARS may cover some costs for the co-development throughout phase 2 and 3. Costs to be covered must be agreed with ICARS on a case-by-case basis.

Any interest gained, any exchange rate gains will be recognised as income and will be specified separately in the annual accounts. Any unused funds and interest gained will be returned to ICARS at the end of the project with a clear indication of the ICARS project reference and project title.

8. Award of a Grant

The grant is awarded to the Responsible Ministry or the Lead Research Institution having the Finance Manager role. When a grant is awarded, a Grant Letter will be sent from ICARS to the ministry/institution. The Grant Letter is part of the "Grant Framework" consisting of the following documents:

The Grant Framework
- The Grant Letter
- Framework for ICARS' Demonstration Projects
- Guideline for the Expression of Interest and appendices
- Guideline for the Project Proposal, the approved Project Proposal and appendices (budget, draft log frame, signature page and CV's from key researchers and participants)
- Guideline for Project Administration
- The Partnership Agreement (prepared after project initiation)
- Full log frame (prepared after project initiation)

Other documents
- Local, official letters of approval (when such are required)
- Research permits, approvals etc.
- In-country rules and regulations on employment conditions, financial procedures, procurement etc.

By receiving the Grant Letter, the ministry/institution pledge to implement the research project and follow the applicable rules and regulations for administering the grant as stated in Grant Framework.

See *Guideline for Project Administration* for more information about requirements for the administration of grants, including the Partnership Agreement which the Responsible Ministry, the Lead Research Institution, co-applicants and Partner Stakeholders must become part of within the first half year of the research project.

8.1. Data Protection Act

ICARS is subject to the European General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR) and the Danish Data Protection Act, nr. 502 of 23 May 2018 (with any subsequent amendments), which amongst others awards the researchers and other project participants involved in the application certain rights when information about them is processed. Please note in particular that at his or her request, project participants have the right of access and the right to data portability. For detailed guidance please view the *ICARS Data protection policy* (currently in development).

8.2. Announcement

Information about granted projects will be published by ICARS, including (but not limited to) objectives, participating institutions/stakeholders and project summary, on www.icars-global.org and other web and social media platforms.