



Request for Proposal (RFP) for Understanding the pathway for SARS-CoV-2 pathogen genomic sequencing data and research uptake

1. RFP Background & Objectives

In response to the emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, Wellcome funded ten PIs to establish a consortium of labs to enable SARS-CoV-2 pathogen genomic sequencing (PGS) and surveillance. These projects aimed to strengthen local SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance capacity and enable rapid and open sharing of sequence data and its analytical outputs.

Ensuring and facilitating the rapid uptake and sharing of sequence data and analyses into decision-making processes was and remains a crucial motivation for these projects. More broadly, research funders (including Wellcome) are increasingly requiring grantees to demonstrate how they will engage with relevant stakeholders or communities, as well as defining how they plan to strengthen the likely relevance of their work (e.g. by engaging with decision-makers to understand their needs and to build awareness of their work and/or by defining the added value of working as a consortium). Furthermore, grantees are asked to consider how they will communicate and share their outputs (including data) with decision-makers as part of their impact strategies.

Whilst this coupling of evidence generation to decision-making is sought after and encouraged, less is understood about how other components of the research environment, for example the resource (including research funding and time), knowledge, social/structural and emotional support (or lack thereof) enable or hinder this. This is particularly relevant in fast-paced environments which require ready and responsive evidence to support outbreak responses of known and/or emerging infectious diseases such as SARS-CoV-2.

Wellcome's portfolio of SARS-CoV-2 sequencing grants represents a unique opportunity to learn about these issues from projects which are similar in scope (strengthen SARS-CoV-2 surveillance capacity and enable rapid and open data sharing to inform decision making) but very different in contexts. Wellcome's Infectious Diseases and Research Environment teams are looking for a supplier to map and consider from a researcher and research community¹ perspective what the challenges and benefits of Wellcome-funded activities during the Covid-19 pandemic has been, and understand the various mechanisms that enable and/or constrain data sharing and uptake of data, analyses, and research² across varying global contexts.

2. RFP Specification

This section sets out the specification of services for this RFP exercise. Suppliers should use this section to fully understand Wellcome's requirements and to inform their response. We are happy for suppliers to work in partnership. If this route is chosen suppliers must carefully outline how they will work together to ensure the project is successful.

¹ For the scope of this project, Wellcome defines "research community" as the people who supported the award including researchers at all career stages and professional staff

² The portfolio under consideration includes data generation, data sharing, data analyses, and research.



Objectives

There are **three objectives** to this study:

1. To understand the pathway for the generation of sequence data, open sharing (both with decision-makers and on data sharing platforms such as GISAID) of data, and data analysis into decision making within different regional, cultural and political contexts and the associated barriers, challenges, and factors contributing to success, from a perspective of the demand and effect on researchers, and research teams and processes.
2. To learn from a diverse range of researchers (within the SARS-CoV-2 sequencing portfolio) what hidden and unaccounted for processes may be/were involved in the generation and sharing of scientific evidence (including data) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this was/is used.
3. To understand the challenges and issues faced by researchers in context specific interactions with decision-makers (e.g. who researchers needed to involve to be addressing the right policy questions and for the evidence to be communicated to the right individuals in the evidence-to-decision-making pathway and for data to be shared openly and rapidly) and potential solutions to address these.

Key to this project is ensuring that local (where the SARS-CoV-2 work was conducted across Africa, SE Asia, Middle East, and Latin America) political and cultural sensitivities are considered.

Scope of requirements

We seek to commission a supplier with a network of regional or local researchers (or who are willing to work in collaboration with other suppliers) who can engage directly with the SARS-CoV-2 grant holders to undertake this work. We are looking for an agency/researcher to develop the methodology and deliver a robust research study exploring the following:

1. Engage with the research community within the SARS-CoV-2 PGS portfolio and conduct research (such as interview and surveys) to understand their perspectives on pathways to data generation, open data sharing, and data analyses and its uptake and the barriers, challenges, and factors for success.
2. Explore and understand how SARS-CoV-2 genomic sequencing was conducted and how scientific evidence (including data) was generated and shared during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this was/is used.
3. Explore and understand the challenges and issues faced by researchers in context specific interactions with decision-makers. For example, who researchers needed to involve: i) to address the right policy questions; ii) for data to be shared openly on repositories or directly with decision-makers, and iii) for the analytical outputs to be communicated to the right individuals in the evidence-to-decision-making pathway, and potential solutions to address these.
4. Identify and model the strategies for evidence and data uptake and use within and across the different cultural and policy contexts within the SARS-CoV-2 PGS portfolio in response to the pandemic.



5. Map the processes involved in the above with a view to understanding the social, resource and emotional demand on research teams and develop an evidence base that can be used to inform the use of PGS for future response preparedness.

Approach

Key to this programme of work is ensuring local (where the SARS-CoV-2 work was conducted) political and cultural considerations are considered, mapped and incorporated into findings. Thus, the research approach should be rooted in methodologies that enable the accommodation of a multiplicity of social and cultural perspectives and contexts. It is anticipated that the study will incorporate an initial survey or similar method to collect baseline information from all grant holders not provided within official grant reporting and proposals within the SARS-CoV-2 PGS portfolio. This will be followed by more contextually rooted data collection and analysis approaches, which might include, but not be limited to those below. However, we are open to other approaches that could achieve a similarly robust result:

- Bringing together PIs across the portfolio to share their experiences and learnings.
- A series of in-depth interviews with a selection of research groups.
- Focus Groups and structured workshops with relevant stakeholders.
- Other participatory research methodologies.
- A selection of case studies for both successful and challenging instances of research uptake to ensure barriers and successes are comprehensively mapped.

Whilst we recognise that the research teams within Wellcome's SARS-CoV-2 PGS portfolio are not obliged to engage in this project, the project would ideally capture a geographically diverse range of experiences.

Thus, the project will be conducted in a phased manner where:

- *Phase 1* will be to engage with and gather baseline information from the research community using a questionnaire/survey approach. Wellcome will support recruitment and initiate contact with the relevant research groups (e.g. via introductory emails and communiqués) to introduce both the project and the chosen supplier(s). We expect the supplier to have sufficient experience to engage directly with the research community after the project commences. This phase will also identify research groups who are willing to be involved in more in-depth interviews, focus groups, or other participatory methods.

At the end of Phase 1, Wellcome in consultation with the supplier and informed by responses to the survey, will assess the level of engagement from the research community. In the event that there has been insufficient engagement, then Wellcome will have the right to terminate the contract at the end of Phase 1 without any further liability to the supplier.

The supplier will then proceed with the below deliverables.

- *Phase 2* will involve contextually rooted data collection and analysis approaches (potential approaches outlined above).
- *Phase 3* will be to clearly articulate the findings and the rationale in a specified format (for example a report, synopsis, or publication) that is standardised across suppliers (if multiple suppliers are contracted).



We expect the suppliers to engage regularly with and update the Wellcome team on progress and deliverables.

Deliverables

- Clearly and concisely articulated findings of the research in line with the three objectives outlined above in a format that is standardised across suppliers (see Phase 3 above). The deliverable should draw out the key findings and clearly outline the key successes and challenges and must include an executive summary. For the avoidance of doubt Wellcome will own the intellectual property in the deliverables and as such reserves the right to determine how this work is ultimately published, this includes the use of a CC BY licence.
- PowerPoint Presentation and slide deck.
- Anonymised raw survey, interview, and focus group data.
- Wellcome will retain ownership of all data collected as part of this work which suppliers must ensure are GDPR compliant and in an easily sharable format. Wellcome reserves the right to subsequently make the data available to others for reuse if it can be done so in accordance with data protection legislation. The supplier is required to obtain appropriate consent from participants to enable this. Where multiple suppliers are contracted, the standards for data collection and formatting must be agreed in advance. It is recommended that sensitive and potentially identifiable data be processed using the UKDS FiveSafes framework. You can find out more about the UKDS here: <https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical/access-control/five-safes>.

This is an outcome specification and suppliers should request the budget needed to deliver the required outputs over a period of 9 - 12 months. Payments will be linked to milestones, which will be agreed with the supplier.

3. RFP Timetable

#	Activity	Responsibility	Date
1	RFP issue to Suppliers	WT	12 April 2023
2	Submission of expression of interest to RFP and supplier Q&A to Wellcome Contact	Supplier	24 April 2023
3	Return of responses to supplier Q&A (collated response to all at the same time).	WT	27 April 2023
4	Submission of RFP Response	Supplier	12 May 2023
5	RFP Evaluation Period	WT	15 May 2023 to 2 June 2023
6	Notification of Interview	WT	2 June 2023
7	Supplier Presentations	WT and Supplier	W/C 12 th June
8	Notification of Contract Award	WT	W/C 26 th June
9	Contract Negotiation	WT & Supplier	July/Aug
10	Contract Start Date	WT & Supplier	Mid-August

4. Response Format



The following headers support the timetable by providing further detail of the key steps.

- Wellcome will be guided by the supplier as to what is a reasonable budget for this activity as we do not want your proposal to be limited in scope or ambition

Expression of Interest

Suppliers are asked to submit a short expression of interest by e-mail to RFP@Wellcome.org in accordance with the RFP timetable, which should contain the following information.

- Confirming whether you are a company or individual, if company please provide full company name, address, and company registration number.
- A non-binding cost estimate as a single figure in GBP.
- Which geographies you or your organisation would/could work across to deliver this project. Please indicate whether:
 - You or your organisation have existing global networks and if so what geographies;
 - You or your organisation, as part of this project, have the infrastructure and networks to identify regional researchers outside of your geography to undertake this work;
 - You or your organisation work in a specific geography (e.g. across Africa only), and if so how you would work in collaboration with other suppliers to deliver this project.

Supplier Q&A

Prior to the submission of your RFP response, Suppliers are provided the opportunity to submit any questions they have about the exercise and the activity. All questions will be collated, anonymised, answered and returned to all Suppliers who have submitted an expression of interest in the RFP process. Please make sure you ask all questions at this stage. If you have any additional questions after this deadline these will not be answered to ensure that this is a fair and equitable process.

RFP Proposal

Having submitted an expression of interest, Suppliers are requested to submit a full proposal which respond to the following questions;

RFP Questions

This section requests responses from Suppliers specific questions in relation to this RFP exercise.

#	Question	Max
1	<p>Provide a short proposal outlining how you would approach the work and the proposed methodology (including how you will incentivise a broad range of researchers and their research teams to participate and the proposed sample size/number of focus groups or similar).</p> <p>Please also include how you will approach data protection when handling the survey data, as well as other data collected during the study, and how the data will be managed and destroyed.</p>	750 words



2	Provide a proposed delivery plan outlining the project deliverables and timelines. If you would work with other suppliers, please detail how you would coordinate the project.	250 words
3	Outline the proposed project team with a brief description of their relevant experience.	750 words
4	Describe your approach to working closely with the Infectious Diseases and Research Environment teams at Wellcome.	250 words
5	Provide a cost proposal which details and justifies the proposed costs to meet our requirement.	250 words
6	What makes you best placed to fulfil Wellcome's requirements set out within this request? This could include networks, previous experience etc.	250 words
7	Outline any major risks and challenges you foresee with meeting Wellcome's requirements, including engaging with researchers (who have multiple time commitments) across a large geographical area, and staying within budget. Please include your mitigation strategies for these risk and challenges.	250 words
8	Provide 2-case studies of where you have successfully provided services similar to those described in this RFP	500 words

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

Methodology (40%)	<p><i>Coverage:</i> How well are the desired focus areas (as outlined in the specification) covered in the proposed methodology addressed?</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Is the proposed methodology robust, feasible and aligned with the needs of the research?</p> <p><i>Utility:</i> Will the proposed methodology deliver the desired, credible, and useful results?</p>
Experience (25%)	<p><i>Skills and Experience:</i> Does the supplier have the relevant skills, experience, and contextual understanding to deliver this work?</p>
Delivery & Outputs (25%)	<p><i>Communication:</i> Is there a good plan for communicating with the Wellcome team and other suppliers?</p> <p><i>Delivery plan:</i> Is the proposed delivery plan appropriate and achievable? Including where relevant how you would collaborate and work with multiple suppliers to deliver this project.</p> <p><i>Feasibility:</i> How feasible is the delivery plan? Are there significant risks associated with the proposed timelines, and how well are they mitigated?</p>
Budget (10%)	<p><i>Value for Money:</i> Is the proposed work within budget and good value for money?</p>

Contract Feedback



This section allows Suppliers to provide specific feedback to the contractual agreement which will be used should their proposal be successful. Contract feedback is to be incorporated into your proposal as an annex and in the following format;

Clause #	Issue	Proposed Solution/Comment

Suppliers submitting proposals as a registered company should review Wellcome's Terms and Conditions which can be found [here](#).

Individuals submitting proposals as a sole trader (not registered) should review this [document](#).

Individuals submitting proposals through their own personal services company please highlight this to the Wellcome contact immediately (see point 7 below).

Wellcome Data Protection Compliance

Under [GDPR/Data Protection law](#), Wellcome must keep a record of all personal information it is processing (i.e., collecting, using, and sharing). This record will be made available to the Information Commissioner's Office upon request.

This is Wellcome's record of data processing activities which meets GDPR article 30 requirements.

Suppliers are asked to complete the [TPSRA2](#) assessment before the RFP submission deadline for Wellcome to assess how you handle data.

Supplier Presentations

Following a submission of the proposal, successful proposals will be invited to a virtual meeting which will last 50 minutes in total and will be a PowerPoint presentation followed by questions and answers session.

5. About Wellcome

Wellcome supports science to solve the urgent health challenges facing everyone. We support discovery research into life, health and wellbeing, and we're taking on three worldwide health challenges: mental health, climate and infectious diseases. Find out more about Wellcome and our work at: wellcome.org.

6. Non-Disclosure and Confidentiality

Prospective Suppliers should be aware that inappropriate publicity could have a serious effect upon Wellcome's business. The information contained within this document or subsequently made available to prospective suppliers is deemed confidential and must not be disclosed without the prior written consent of Wellcome unless required by law.

7. Prospective Suppliers Personnel - IR35 and Off Payroll Working Rules



Before the RFP response deadline, Prospective Suppliers must make the Wellcome Contact aware if they are intending to submit a proposal where the services will be provided by any individuals who are engaged by the Prospective Supplier via an intermediary i.e.

- Where the Prospective Supplier is an individual contracting through their own personal services company; or
- The Prospective Supplier is providing individuals engaged through intermediaries, for the purposes of the IR35 off-payroll working rules.

8. Independent Proposal

By submission of a proposal, prospective Suppliers warrant that the prices in the proposal have been arrived at independently, without consultation, communication, agreement or understanding for the purpose of restricting competition, as to any matter relating to such prices, with any other potential supplier or with any competitor.

9. Funding

For the avoidance of doubt, the output of this RFP exercise will be funded as a **Contract** and not as a Grant.

10. Costs Incurred by Prospective Suppliers

It should be noted that this document relates to a Request for Proposal only and not a firm commitment from Wellcome to enter into a contractual agreement. In addition, Wellcome will not be held responsible for any costs associated with the production of a response to this Request for Proposal.

11. Sustainability

Wellcome is committed to procuring sustainable, ethical and responsibly sourced materials, goods and services. This means Wellcome seeks to purchase goods and services that minimise negative and enhance positive impacts on the environment and society locally, regionally and globally. To ensure Wellcome's business is conducted ethically and sustainably, we expect our suppliers, and their supply chains, to adhere to these principles in a responsible manner.

12. Disability Confident

The Wellcome Trust is proud to be a Disability Confident Employer (DC Level 2) and we encourage all our partners and suppliers to do the same. More information about this can be found on the government website [Disability Confident employer scheme and guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/disability-confident-employer-scheme). Disability Confident is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people.

13. Accessibility



Wellcome is committed to ensuring that our RFP exercises are accessible to everyone. If you have a disability or a chronic health condition, we can offer adjustments to the response format e.g. submitting your response in an alternate format. For support during the RFP exercise, contact the Wellcome Contact.

If, within the proposed outputs of this RFP exercise, specific adjustments are required by you or your team which incur additional cost then outline them clearly within your commercial response. Wellcome is committed to evaluating all proposals fairly and will ensure any proposed adjustment costs sit outside the commercial evaluation.

14. Diversity & Inclusion

Embracing [diversity and inclusion](#) is fundamental to delivering our mission to improve health, and we are committed to cultivating a fair and healthy environment for the people who work here and those we work with. As we learn more about barriers that disadvantage certain groups from progressing in our workplace, we will remove them.

Wellcome takes diversity and inclusion seriously, and we want to partner with suppliers who share our commitment. We may ask you questions related to D&I as part of our RFP processes.

15. Wellcome Contact Details

The single point of contact within this RFP exercise for all communications is as indicated below;

Name: Alyce O'Connor

Role: Procurement Officer

Email: RFP@wellcome.org