

Request for Proposals

International Pathogen Surveillance Network: Catalytic grant fund

Award range: USD 50,000 – 250,000

Award length: Up to 12 months

Funders: The Gates Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, Wellcome and the Institute of Philanthropy, in cooperation with the International Pathogen Surveillance Network (IPSN), a WHO-hosted network¹.

Important dates:

Opening date: Friday 17 April 2026

Webinars:

- 29 April 2026, 9:00-10:00 CET. Registration link:
https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_TPHXOMY1Sz2EufGRAZrORw
- 30 April 2026, 15:00- 16:00 CET. Registration link:
https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_H9xKNYx3TrSa-rCIY7Jxng

Closing date to submit questions for webinars: EOD Friday 24 April 2026

Closing date for submission of concept notes: Thursday 14 May 2026 23:59 CET

Submission of full proposals: By invitation after evaluation of concept notes

Funding decision: Q4, 2026

The International Pathogen Surveillance Network: Catalytic Grant Fund

The IPSN catalytic grant fund is dedicated to supporting member organisations to pilot innovation and create an evidence base for the rapid scale-up of pathogen surveillance along two technical tracks: 1) pathogen genomic surveillance (PGS) and 2) wastewater & environmental surveillance (WES)². The fund, which is housed within the UN Foundation on behalf of the IPSN, supports projects globally in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Eligibility criteria

Through this call, awards between USD 50,000 and 250,000 are available for IPSN member organisations from low- or middle-income countries (LMIC) as per the [World Bank's classification](#) or for consortia in which the lead applicant is an IPSN member domiciled in a LMIC. Projects are expected to be completed within 12 months, but longer projects can exceptionally be considered if justified.

The catalytic grant fund will *not* support projects under the following conditions:

- The application is outside of the scope of pathogen genomic surveillance or wastewater & environmental surveillance.

¹ The Institute of Philanthropy will dedicate funding specifically for Wastewater and Environmental Surveillance track proposals

² [Wastewater and environmental surveillance \(WES\)](#) is disease surveillance using samples from sewage, or other environmental waters impacted by human wastewater.

- The lead applicant is not an IPSN member. Eligible organisations who are not yet members will be given the opportunity to join the IPSN during the proposal process. For more information on the IPSN membership terms and application please refer to the IPSN website.
- The lead applicant organisation is not domiciled in a LMIC. IPSN member organisations from high-income countries (HIC) may be included as co-applicants in the application but cannot be the lead applicant. The majority of the project's scope and funds must remain in the lead applicant organization.
- The lead applicant organisation is the World Health Organization. WHO teams or offices may be included as co-applicants in the application but cannot be the lead applicant.
- Any organisation that does not meet the UN Foundation's (UNF) due diligence requirements will be excluded; applicants are required to ensure that they comply with these requirements as part of the application process.
- Organisations that are not able to receive funds based on financial, legal and/or governance capabilities.
- Lead applicant individuals that received funding in Round 1 of the catalytic grant fund will not be eligible for Round 2.
- Organisations may be excluded from further grants based on financial, governance or performance inadequacy in previously awarded grants.

The IPSN values diversity in technical projects and project applicants. We welcome applications from LMIC members across all regions, and applicants across genders, nationalities and ethnicities. We encourage applications from early career researchers.

Scope

The catalytic grant fund will support projects in two separate technical tracks 1) Pathogen genomic surveillance and 2) Wastewater and environmental surveillance. Priority will be given to projects that will contribute to achieving the IPSN's objectives and theory of change (see Annex 1) and that will:

- Contribute to creating knowledge, research, or a research-enabling environment
- Produce outputs and evidence that can be applied in different countries
- Leverage international partnership and cooperation, with a preference for collaboration between LMICs.

The catalytic grant fund will *not* support projects that:

- Involve genomics NOT related to pathogen genomic surveillance and/or wastewater and environmental surveillance. For example, proposals on the development of therapeutics without any use of pathogen genomic data, isolate-based pathogen surveillance using only conventional molecular techniques such as PCR, and microbial composition and signatures of non-communicable diseases such as cancer are not eligible.
- Involve water and sanitation NOT related to pathogen surveillance. For example, proposals addressing water quality issues, including but not limited to water pollution, contamination

monitoring, treatment systems, or drinking water standards, are not eligible for this funding opportunity.

- Use funds for procurement of equipment or reagents for routine surveillance activities.
- Use funds for procurement of hardware for mass data storage, hosting of tools or data that extend beyond the proposed project timeline. Purchase of IT equipment needed for the project, for example for data analysis, is warranted.
- Involve research with human or animal subjects, e.g., through clinical study without additional ethical review.

The catalytic grants will prioritize the funding of projects which demonstrate a direct impact on public health systems. Applicants should define the project's pathway to public health impact on their applications.

Track 1: Pathogen genomic surveillance

Examples of projects that may be conducted include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Developing approaches for better integration of genomic surveillance into public health decision-making
- Piloting innovative approaches to pathogen genomic surveillance that accelerate uptake and capacity building.
- Developing country or regional investment cases or cost benefit analysis for pathogen genomic surveillance to generate evidence of impact for specific use cases
- Developing innovative or harmonized workflows or pipelines for pathogen genomic surveillance
- Developing systematic validation and benchmarking approaches for genomics workflows or pipelines
- Developing approaches to improving trust, quality or volume of data-sharing
- Developing approaches for improved integration of laboratory and sequencing data with epidemiological and/or clinical data
- Testing approaches to sharing of best practices across the IPSN, including across geographies and sectors.
- Improving interoperability of pathogen genomic surveillance systems
- Piloting decentralised approaches to pathogen genomics analysis or intelligence exchange

Track 2: Wastewater & Environmental Surveillance

This track will support projects that:

- Demonstrate how WES data contributes to and strengthens public health intelligence
- Evaluate the costs and cost-effectiveness of WES implementation across public health contexts

In line with the mission of the IPSN, all proposals should include a component of pathogen genomics, but do not need to be focused on it as the primary goal.

Examples of projects that may be conducted include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Surveying public health decision-makers to evaluate how WES data is currently used in practice, identifying barriers to integration and gaps in translating signals into public health insights
- Mapping the pathway from WES signal detection to public health intervention across multiple jurisdictions to identify where breakdowns occur and what enables effective use
- Developing and validating approaches for integrating WES data with genomic sequencing, epidemiological, and clinical data streams
- Conducting cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analyses of WES implementation across differing public health contexts
- Developing country- or region-specific investment cases for WES, synthesizing cost, feasibility, and public health impact evidence
- Quantifying the economic value of WES-enabled early outbreak detection

Application process

The application process will welcome applications through the two separate technical tracks (PGS and WES). However, lead applicant organizations will only be eligible for funding under one of the two tracks and are encouraged to submit only one application.

Under each track, the application process will consist of two stages. In the first stage, the lead applicant submits a concept note online including applicant(s) information, an overview of the project proposal, and estimates of the budget required and the duration of the project. Concept notes will be accepted following the publication of this Request for Proposal and until Thursday May 14, 2026 23:59 CET. Concept notes must be submitted via an online form found via this [link](#).

A concept note [template](#) (in PDF format) is available to support the preparation of the concept note sections ahead of the online submission. The template is for informational purposes only; applications will only be accepted online.

The IPSN Secretariat will then review the concept notes in consultation with independent technical advisors. In the second stage, shortlisted applications will be invited to submit a full application. The invitation may include requests for clarification and/or suggestions formulated during the review process. Full applications will be evaluated by the IPSN Secretariat and technical advisors. A funding decision will be communicated following completion of full due diligence by UNF.

The lead applicant will be responsible for submitting the concept note and, if shortlisted, the full application. Applications received after the deadline, submitted through other channels, or by a partner other than the lead applicant organization will not be considered.

Subject to due diligence as per the UNF's [policy](#), successful applicants will be sent a grant agreement from UNF to sign. Awarded grants will be publicly communicated by the IPSN Secretariat, including but not limited to, on the IPSN website [funding page](#).

Following publication of this Request for Proposal, the IPSN Secretariat will hold two webinars on [April 29 and 30, 2026](#) to answer questions from potential applicants. The webinars will cover the same information and are catering to multiple time zones. Applicants need only register for and attend one webinar if desired. Organisations can submit questions for clarification on the scope, eligibility, and application process ahead of the webinar via IPSN-fund@who.int. Please submit questions by end of day [Friday April 24, 2026](#). Questions will be addressed by the IPSN Secretariat during the webinar, which will be recorded and made available for applicants.

Criteria for Assessment

In addition to the inclusion and exclusion criteria described in the eligibility section above, applications will be assessed according to the following sets of criteria.

Prioritization criteria:

- Proposals with a well-defined path from activities through to measurable outputs and outcomes that link to the IPSN theory of change and bodies of work. Please refer to the IPSN section of this document for further details
- Projects that contribute to more effective and sustainable capacity, especially through collaboration among LMICs
- Organisations or consortia with a proven track record and with demonstrable capacity to implement the proposed project
- Projects with a reasonable chance of success, while ensuring that there is space for innovation and risk taking (i.e., success need not be guaranteed but should be plausible)
- Projects likely to be able to demonstrate measurable impact within twelve months of the grant award
- Projects proposals that clearly demonstrate that without the requested funding, the proposed activities are unlikely to be possible (i.e., there is no other source of financial, material or human resources to carry out the project)
- Projects that contribute to the overall equity and diversity of the grant portfolio

Technical criteria:

Additionally, full proposals will be assessed on their demonstration of technical knowledge and expertise in the relevant topic area, such as knowledge of background and gaps, suitable approach and methodology, and outputs consistent with objectives and methods. Depending on the topic of the proposal, technical assessment may be in the following areas:

Track 1 – Pathogen Genomic Surveillance:

- Pathogen genomic surveillance country capacity building, including decision-making, governance, and funding mechanisms in different geographical contexts; multi-pathogen and pathogen-specific capacity requirements for pathogen genomic surveillance systems
- Pathogen genomic surveillance data, including knowledge of challenges and opportunities, stakeholders, and technical requirements in the areas of data quality and standards, data analysis platforms, pipelines and products, and data and benefit sharing
- Pathogen genomic use cases in specific areas of surveillance and public health, current research, knowledge, and evidence-gaps within the above areas of technical expertise

Track 2 – Wastewater and Environmental Surveillance:

- WES epidemiological and surveillance methods, including study design, data integration, and signal interpretation within a public health context
- Health economics and analytic methods, including cost-effectiveness modeling, return on investment frameworks, and economic evaluation of public health interventions
- Comprehensive knowledge of wastewater and environmental surveillance applications in public health, current research, knowledge, and evidence-gaps within the above areas of technical expertise

Application documents and resources

- [Online concept note application form](#)
- [Concept note template](#) (PDF format, for informational purposes only)

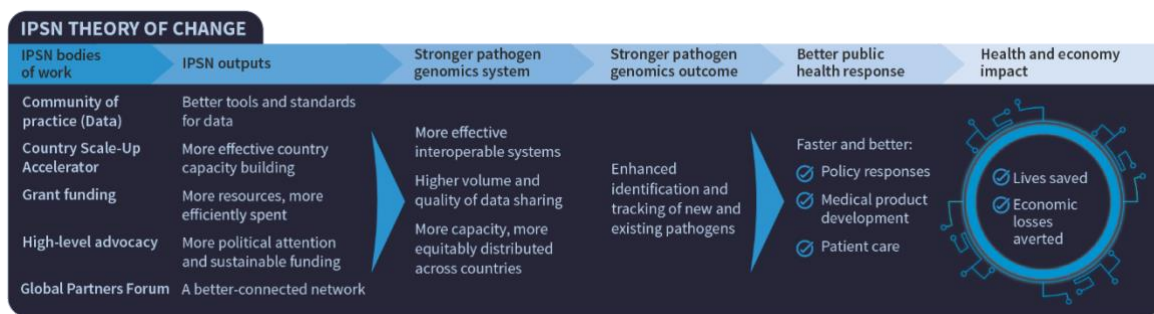
Annex 1

The International Pathogen Surveillance Network

The International Pathogen Surveillance Network (IPSN) is a global network of pathogen genomic actors, brought together by the WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence, to accelerate adoption of pathogen genomics to improve public health decision-making.

The IPSN member organizations represent stakeholders of academic, governmental and non-governmental organizations that contribute to the advancement of public health and actively work in the field of pathogen genomic surveillance or in adjacent fields. It sets out to create a mutually supportive global network of genomic surveillance actors that amplifies and accelerates the work of its members to improve access and equity. Learn more about the IPSN and how to become a member [here](#)

Objectives and theory of change



Operational bodies and areas of work of the IPSN

The IPSN comprises five core areas of work, detailed below.

1. Communities of practice to solve common challenges

At the heart of the IPSN’s work is a set of communities of practice that enable experts to engage in peer learning, knowledge exchange and the generation of new evidence and/or tools. Launched in January 2024, the Community of Practice on Pathogen Genomics Data aims to strengthen the connectivity and interoperability of pathogen genomics data systems to enhance local to global surveillance. In response to Mpox being declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization in 2024, IPSN launched a Community of Practice for Specialized Surveillance in Emergency Response to identify and mitigate gaps for utilizing pathogen genomics and wastewater surveillance in the emergency response. In 2025, IPSN launched a new community of practice specifically focused on wastewater and environmental surveillance and genomics.

2. Country Scale-up Accelerator to align efforts and foster South-South exchange

The IPSN has established a Country Scale-Up Accelerator (CSUA) to accelerate and amplify the efforts of IPSN members to rapidly increase country capacity for pathogen genomic surveillance.

The CSUA's projects and deliverables contribute to the IPSN toolkit, a set of capacity-building tools as global goods created by IPSN partners for the whole network, and to empower increased LMIC-LMIC bilateral and subregional partnerships for capacity development.

3. Funding to improve equity and to empower IPSN projects

To ensure improved coordination and harmonization of donor efforts, the IPSN has established a Funders Forum to support the IPSN activities and members.

4. High-level advocacy and communications to keep pathogen genomic surveillance on the agenda

With active engagement of countries, partners, regional organizations and WHO, the IPSN keeps pathogen genomic surveillance on the global agenda and ensures strategic buy-in.

5. Global Partners Forum for pathogen genomics to bring partners together

The annual forum brings together key players from all IPSN entities involved in pathogen genomic surveillance, providing a high-profile stage to build partnerships, introduce innovations, socialize ideas and advocate for political and financial commitments. See the programme of the 2025 PHA4GE Conference and IPSN Global Partners Forum [here](#).