

Revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel

53rd Board Meeting

GF/B53/07

7 – 9 May 2025, Geneva, Switzerland

Board Decision

Purpose of the paper: This paper presents for Board decision modifications to the Technical Review Panel (TRP) Terms of Reference in preparation for the 2026-2028 allocation period.

Decision

Decision Point: GF/B53/DPXX: Approval of the Revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel

The Board notes the recommendation of the Strategy Committee as set forth in GF/SC27/EDP01 and approves the revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel as set forth in Annex 1 to GF/B53/07, which shall have effect as of the date of this decision.

Budgetary implications (included in OPEX budget): None

A summary of relevant past decisions providing context to the proposed Decision Point can be found in Annex 3.

Executive Summary

Context

- The Strategy Committee (SC) has delegated authority from the Board to oversee the Technical Review Panel (TRP) and authority to approve certain modifications to the TRP Terms of Reference (TORs). For material modifications to the TRP's mandate, the SC advises and makes recommendations to the Board.¹
- In preparation for the 2026-2028 allocation period, the revision of the TRP TORs presents an opportunity to:
 - Evolve the TRP model to safeguard the TRP role of providing impactful independent technical reviews in a changing environment, recognizing the indisputable value of the TRP while acknowledging the Global Fund strategic direction to streamline, simplify and differentiate across the grant lifecycle;
 - Align with the Global Fund's changes to the allocation methodology and to reduce the level of effort for applicants and for the Secretariat according to Board steer and as highlighted in the OIG Advisory Review on Evolving the Technical Review model²; and
 - Incorporate lessons learned from the 2020-2022 and 2023-2025 allocation periods, including experiences from countries, lessons on differentiated funding request review and findings from the evaluation of the Global Fund's Funding Request and Grant Making Processes for GC7.³
- Following the 27th SC meeting in March 2025, the SC recommends to the Board the proposed revisions to the TRP TORs⁴ outlined in Annex 1, which were developed with input from the TRP. This paper outlines the revisions proposed to the TRP TORs, their rationale, the risks associated with delaying or rejecting the proposal, and proposed measures to mitigate risks that might ensue from advancing with the proposal.

Conclusions

- The proposed revisions to the TRP TORs reflect considerations of the Global Fund Strategy, lessons learned from previous grant cycles on differentiated funding request review, findings and recommendations of recent evaluations. They also reflect the Global Fund's strategic direction of simplification and efficiency, changes to the allocation methodology, targets to reduce the level of effort for applicants and the Secretariat primarily in the areas of: TRP mandate, membership

¹ Charter of the Strategy Committee approved by the Board on 28 January 2016 (GF/B34/EDP07) and amended on 13 June 2018 (GF/B39/EDP02) and on 14 November 2019 (GF/B42/DP06).

² GF-OIG-21-014, 04 October 2021.

³ <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/iel/evaluations/2024-04-01-funding-request-and-grant-making-processes/>

⁴ GF/SC27/ER01: Revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Technical Panel

and review modalities. Inputs from the SC meeting in March 2025 have also been incorporated into this proposal, which was subsequently submitted to and recommended by the SC (GF/SC27/EDP01).

Input Sought

- The Board is requested to approve the following:
 - Decision Point: **GF/B53/DPXX**: Approval of revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel.

Report

What is the need or opportunity?

1. The TRP TORs set the high-level framework (mandate, principles and operating modalities) that guide the functioning and processes of the TRP as an impartial panel of technical experts providing rigorous, independent technical review and assessment of funding requests to the Global Fund. To ensure the TRP is fit for purpose in the 2026-2028 allocation period, revisions are proposed to the TRP TORs to: (i) strengthen impact in the next cycle of grants in line with the Global Fund's strategic direction of simplification and efficiency, changes to allocation methodology and the target to reduce the level of effort for applicants and the Secretariat; (ii) take into consideration other ongoing streamlining and differentiation efforts across funding request and grant-making processes; and (iii) incorporate lessons learned from the 2020-2022 and 2023-2025 allocation periods on differentiated funding request reviews, as well as findings from the independent evaluation on the funding request and grant-making stages of Grant Cycle 7.
2. The TRP serves a critical role for independent technical review. The TRP mitigates relevant risks to the Global Fund's investments and ensures that funding requests are evidence-based and adapted to country context. The proposal to evolve the TRP model recognizes the indisputable value of the TRP. It also acknowledges the increased technical capacity of the Secretariat and greater involvement of the Global Fund partnership throughout the funding request, grant-making and grant implementation stages. This collectively fosters greater organizational capacity to identify and resolve concerns in funding requests early and provides additional quality assurance. Given this organizational maturity, and the need to further simplify, streamline and differentiate processes in line with the trends for Grant Cycle 8, the TRP's role can be further optimized to drive greater impact across portfolios, notably by leveraging its independent review in countries with the highest disease burden and allocation and/or where there are critical programmatic challenges.
3. The proposed revisions are centered on the role and mandate of the TRP in light of broader operational and policy changes taking place across the Global Fund review process aimed at streamlining and simplifying funding request and grant-making processes in four main areas: (i) streamlining the funding application by reducing the number of requirements and associated documents to be submitted by applicants; (ii) streamlining the review and approval of funding requests and grants by internal and external stakeholders, such as the TRP; (iii) strengthening organizational effectiveness and adaptability notably through enhanced use of technology, process efficiencies and organizational adjustments; and (iv) streamlining risk management and assurance processes to make these mechanisms more efficient while maintaining the effectiveness of oversight and acknowledging higher risk acceptance in lower funding allocation contexts.

What do we propose to do and why?

What is our proposal?

The following is recommended to the Board for approval:

4. **Membership term length:** It is proposed that the term of service for TRP members be increased from four to up to six years from the date communicated in the recruitment letter, contingent on a mid-term review after three years, which will consider Global Fund needs, members' performance and members' interest and availability to continue serving. The TRP Chair would retain the flexibility to extend membership terms, but the maximum period for such term extensions will change from two years to six months. The proposed increase of the TRP membership term ensures better alignment with the Global Fund Strategy periods going forward and would allow TRP members to serve across grant cycles. Thus, Global Fund applicants would benefit from stronger TRP member experience and institutional knowledge gained through longer-term engagement in funding request review processes. A longer TRP member term of service will also imply a lower frequency of recruitment of new members (currently every 3 years), resulting in substantial cost savings of a minimum of US\$120,000 every 6 years. The service term for the TRP Leadership (i.e., Chair, and two Vice-Chairs), currently of two years, would increase to three years to align with allocation periods and with other Global Fund Committee Leadership terms.
- a) **Recruitment:** To bridge the current TRP membership terms with the model for longer terms of service, it is proposed that all members recruited for the 2023-2025 allocation period who have not yet participated in a funding request review (5 members) and members on the reserve list (32 members) should begin their 6-year term from the start of the next allocation period. Additionally, current members recruited for the 2023-2025 allocation period who have already participated in a funding request review (76 members) would be extended to continue service until the end of 2028. Considering these bridging measures, the next recruitment of new TRP members will take place in 2028 in preparation for Grant Cycle 9 (2029-2031 allocation period) for a six-year term. The number of members in the TRP pool at the start of Grant Cycle 8 will therefore be 113, compared to 161 at the start of Grant Cycle 7. This proposal will support the TRP to maximize utilization of TRP members already in the membership pool, while promoting efficiency in terms of recruitment and training/onboarding costs and efforts.
5. **TRP Review Modalities:** The options to streamline review modalities of different funding request portfolios aims to: (i) allow for a greater focus on implementation versus program design to help reduce countries' workload for funding request development; (ii) protect the gains in countries with the highest disease burden and lowest economic capacity through leveraging TRP inputs where they are most needed to deliver impact; and (iii) contribute to the Secretariat's efforts to streamline across the funding request and grant-making processes.

Considering the inputs received at the 27th SC Meeting (March 2025), the following differentiation modalities are proposed:⁵

- (a) **Full review.** The proposed revisions make no changes to High Impact and Core portfolios that fall under the full review model, noting that the full review modality enables the TRP to conduct a comprehensive review of the strategic priorities and programmatic interventions proposed for funding in Core and High Impact countries, which constitute a higher share of the total Global Fund allocation and global disease-burden. These funding requests would continue to be based on and refer to National Strategic Plans at country level.
- (b) **Program Continuation.** The proposed revisions recommend that the High-Impact and Core portfolios that meet a set of principle-level criteria agreed upon in collaboration with the TRP would qualify for program continuation, and would follow either:
 - i) a targeted TRP review on specific areas or interventions in the funding request where TRP review is needed; or
 - ii) a costed extension in accordance with relevant policies, which does not require a TRP review.

The criteria determining a grant's eligibility for Program Continuation (including whether a targeted TRP review or costed extension applies) would be developed in collaboration with the TRP and in accordance with relevant policies. Such criteria for considering a grant for Program Continuation could include high portfolio performance, whereby the program shows positive evolution over time or is on track to achieve global targets and/or is highly commoditized.

- (c) **Tailored for Transition.** The TRP will provide a targeted review of all Transition Funding Requests to ensure these portfolios benefit from additional and independent technical input on the strength of their transition plans. Review by the TRP would also give Country Teams the opportunity to leverage TRP insights on transition plans when negotiations with the country are difficult or when concerns exist about the pace or quality of the transition.
- (d) **Tailored for Focused Portfolios.** Focused portfolios have lower disease burdens and relatively lower country allocations (making up 5% of the total Global Fund allocation). The proposed revisions to the TRP TORs introduce an approach whereby the CCMs and the Secretariat, in consultation with relevant technical partners, may request TRP review if needed. General guidelines that would inform a decision to request a TRP review could include unfavorable context for impactful interventions, insufficient technical advice received during funding request development, proposed strategic direction not within WHO normative guidelines, etc. The proposal takes into account the 2021 OIG Advisory on Evolving the TRP Model,⁶ which recommends an “updated differentiation approach” that considers not requiring

⁵ For further details, refer to Annex 2 of this paper

⁶ https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/11474/oig_gf-oig-21-014_report_en.pdf

a TRP review in cases where there is less need for additional technical review and where the Global Fund allocation is low.

To ensure continued independent oversight and access to technical inputs, while aligning with the principles of simplification and differentiation, the current proposal includes the following measures:

- i) the TRP will be engaged upfront to provide input on priority investment areas for Focused Portfolios (through regional/sub-regional pre-shaping meetings) that will inform grant design;
- ii) TRP review can be requested by the CCMs and the Secretariat, in consultation with relevant technical partners, during grant design; and
- iii) the Secretariat will consult the TRP in defining the principle-level criteria that will guide CCMs and Secretariat to determine when to request a TRP review.

For Focused Portfolios and Program Continuation, steps will be taken to enhance technical support and independent input where needed. Specifically:

- a. the TRP will be included as one of the partner participants of the GAC, providing the TRP an opportunity to see and offer input on Focused Portfolios and Program Continuation applicants that do not undergo a TRP review;
- b. the Partner Situation Rooms will serve as fora to raise technical issues pre- and post-funding request submission for consideration by applicants; and
- c. the Secretariat will proactively identify countries in need of additional technical support and raise this to the attention of the relevant partners.

The proposed approach for Focused and Program Continuation Portfolios reflects SC guidance for greater differentiation, while balancing greater risk acceptance in these portfolios with measured changes to the approach for independent oversight.

6. The various elements to support operationalization of the differentiated TRP review approach proposed here (including, the process steps, guidelines to determine TRP review, guidance on applying review criteria etc.) will be elaborated in the TRP Review Approaches Manual,⁷ which will be updated prior to the start of the Grant Cycle 8, and relevant operational policies.
7. **Budgetary implications:** The Secretariat noted the proposal would lead to a reduction in overall TRP cost and TRP OPEX budget, with fewer funding requests reviewed by the TRP and savings on recruitment. Additional processes in this proposal would be carried out following a light touch process with any associated cost for TRP contributions to GAC being covered by savings.
8. **Minor edits for consistency:** Edits have been made throughout the TRP TORs for consistency, including clarity on conflicts of interest, updated references to the Independent

⁷ https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13013/trp_review-approaches_manual_en.pdf

Evaluation Panel (rather than Technical Evaluation Reference Group) and TRP engagement with other parties including with the broader Global Fund partnership. Furthermore, edits have been incorporated to reflect climate and health, digital health technology and data privacy among the expertise needed to ensure the TRP is equipped to review and advise on emerging and priority needs within country programs.

What did we consider?

What would the risks be of delaying or rejecting the decision and what are the proposed measures to mitigate risk that might ensue from advancing with the proposed revisions?

9. Failing to prioritize and differentiate TRP review will limit opportunities to simplify and streamline the application process, thereby maintaining a model that has high transaction costs for applicants and leads to inefficient allocation of resources and level of effort. This proposal puts focus on the intrinsic value of the TRP in a context where lack of action to enhance simplification and differentiation could potentially undermine global health efforts and delay critical interventions for those most in need.
10. Not approving the revised TRP TORs at this time would be a missed opportunity to support the efficient execution of two important next steps: (a) confirmation of the membership of the TRP pool that will ensure effective review of funding requests in Grant Cycle 8, including the subsequent launch of the next TRP recruitment based on the revised TORs and review criteria in preparation for Grant Cycle 9; and (b) the development and publication of new application materials for countries in July 2025 that take into account the expectations for country programs as defined by the revised TRP review criteria approved by the SC.
11. The proposals for Focused Portfolios and for Program Continuation applications present some risks in that the eligible country funding requests will not have the additional quality assurance afforded through a standard TRP review ahead of grant-making. These risks are however minor, and they are mitigated by the fact that:
 - i) the guidelines that will be used to identify funding requests for these simplification options do not in any way proscribe TRP review from being called upon if needed to ensure programs are strategically focused and positioned to achieve impact;
 - ii) contributions from the TRP as part of the GAC partners ensure there is opportunity for the TRP to view and provide inputs on those grants that did not go through a TRP review; and
 - iii) there is increased Secretariat maturity and greater involvement of partners throughout the funding request and grant implementation stages. Furthermore, country programs and capacity have matured over several years of Global Fund financing – supporting the case for a differentiated approach.

What do we need to do next to progress?

What is required to progress the proposal?

12. The Board is requested to approve the decision on page 2. Board approval of the revisions to the TRP TORs will enable the TRP to:
 - i) implement TRP pool replenishment processes in line with revised membership terms; and
 - ii) work with teams across the Secretariat to update internal operating procedures and review processes in preparation for the next TRP reviews for the 2026-2028 allocation period.
13. The Secretariat will define the key elements of the differentiated TRP review — including the review process, guidelines for determining TRP review, and review criteria — while engaging with the TRP on relevant aspects. These details will be captured in the *TRP Review Approaches Manual: How the TRP Differentiates Funding Request Reviews* and relevant operational policies.
14. The Secretariat in collaboration with the TRP will ensure that the review of funding requests during the 2026-2028 allocation period is based on the proposed differentiated TRP review model.

Recommendation

The Board is requested to approve Decision Point presented on page 2.

Annexes

The following items can be found in Annex:

- Annex 1: Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel_tracked (attached)
- Annex 2: Evolving the TRP Model in the current context (attached)
- Annex 3: Relevant Past Decisions

Annex 3 – Relevant Past Decisions

Decision	Summary
GF/SC27/EDP01: Approval of revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel	The SC recommended the revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel for Board approval following the March 2025 Strategy Committee meeting.
GF/SC25/EDP01: Establishment of the Strategy Committee Working Group on Technical Review Panel Matters	The SC approved the establishment of a Working Group to oversee the revisions of the terms of reference of the TRP and the replenishment of the TRP membership pool.
GF/SC18/05: Revised Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel	The SC approved revisions clarifying the TRP's mandate and areas of expertise needed in the TRP membership pool, and revisions on TRP governance, ethics, review modalities, and honoraria and operational costs.
GF/SC16/EDP01: Establishment of the Working Group on Technical Review Panel Matters	The SC approved the establishment of a Working Group to oversee the revisions of the terms of reference of the TRP and the replenishment of the TRP membership pool.
GF/SC11/DP02: Approval of modification to the Terms of Reference (including Review Criteria) of the Technical Review Panel	The SC approved modifications to the TRP terms of reference and review criteria as set forth in Annex 1 to GF/SC11/11.
GF/B46/DP03: Approval of the Strategy Narrative for the 2023-2028 Global Fund Strategy	The Board approved the Strategy Narrative for the 2023-2028 Global Fund Strategy as presented in GF/B46/03_rev1.
GF/SC09/DP03: Establishment of Working Group on TRP Matters (March 2019)	In view of preparing the Technical Review Panel for review of funding requests in the 2020-2022 allocation period, the SC approved the establishment of a Working Group on TRP Matters to oversee the replenishment of the TRP membership pool and revision of the terms of reference of the TRP, based on Strategy Committee guidance and lessons from the 2017-2019 allocation period.

<p>GF/SC02/DP02: Approval of Amended and Restated Terms of Reference of the Technical Review Panel (October 2016)</p>	<p>Based on the recommendation of the Strategy Committee Working Group on Technical Review Panel Matters, the Strategy Committee approved the amended and restated terms of reference for the TRP as well as the TRP's revised Review Criteria, as set forth in Annexes 1 and 2 of GF/SC02/07 – Revision 3, respectively.</p>
<p>GF/SC01/DP03: Access to Funding Principles of Differentiation (June 2016)</p>	<p>The SC approved the Secretariat's proposed core guiding principles for differentiation for the application, review and approval processes, as set forth in Annex 1 to GF/SC01/12 – Revision 2. The access to funding principles of differentiation informed the development of revised terms of reference for the TRP and additional operational aspects of the access-to-funding process that the Secretariat developed in advance of the 2017-2019 allocation period. The SC also established the working group on TRP matters.</p>