

Covid-19 Node: National Coordination of a Multi-sectoral and Multi-level Pandemic Response Call for Expression of Interest September 30, 2020

Background

In June 2020, the Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage (JLN) launched the Covid-19 Node to respond to countries' needs for practical knowledge about pandemic response and maintaining essential health services during pandemics. Related to this, a recent JLN scoping survey revealed an interest in practical solutions on creating and managing cross-sectoral teams to mount a coordinated response to the pandemic, developing pandemic/epidemic preparedness and response strategies, and strengthening management and coordination across sectors and across different levels of government administration units to ensure a prompt and effective response.

In response, the JLN partnered with the Health Systems Strengthening Accelerator (Accelerator) program to launch a virtual collaborative on multi-sectoral, multi-level coordination of pandemic responses. The collaborative will facilitate cross-country exchanges on government leadership, stewardship, and the functions and capacities a government and its partners need, also referred to as institutional architecture, to continuously strengthen health systems, including in times of crisis such as a pandemic. These exchanges will generate practical guidance on what has worked and not worked, to help inform future responses.

Rationale: The need for Multi-sectoral and Multi-level Pandemic Response

The Accelerator is a global five-year initiative that increases people's access to high performing health systems by supporting countries as they co-create, innovate and adapt, in order to build more effective and sustainable health system interventions on their journeys to self-reliance. The Accelerator facilitates work with key actors from across sectors to advance their understanding of the most pressing systemic issues, identify their root causes and draw from global and regional experience to co-create innovative solutions that are tailored to the local context. The Accelerator is led by Results for Development (R4D) in partnership with the Health Strategy and Delivery Foundation (HSDF, headquartered in Nigeria), and ICF.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be devastating for health systems, economies and human and socioeconomic conditions in many countries. To slow the spread of the virus and to reduce its toll, country leaders must manage strong systems-focused, multi-sectoral coordination, planning, and monitoring. Mounting a coordinated response requires collaboration from various government agencies, line ministries, and devolved units of government. It also requires coordination of supply chain, human resource, financing, and other health system elements, as well as inclusion of state and non-state actors; all working swiftly towards a concerted effort that requires updated and reliable information to inform decisions and actions. The Accelerator will leverage on the JLN's established network of in-country leaders and its network management approach to lead the technical facilitation of a virtual collaborative over the next six months with a focus on drawing out and synthesizing country implementation

experience, and providing practical guidance on multi-sectoral, multi-level coordination of pandemic responses.

Objectives:

The main objective of the virtual learning collaborative will be to create a forum for countries to address their challenges and successes with managing central coordination of an epidemic response, to learn practical approaches from one another and ultimately develop practical guidance that can inform future responses. Technical facilitators will help distill and synthesize the best practices and guidance on multi-sectoral, multi-level strategies for pandemic preparedness, within the overall framework of improving stewardship and the institutional architecture for attainment of universal health coverage (UHC). The Accelerator will also link countries in the collaborative with USAID missions' in-country to identify opportunities for direct technical assistance or implementation support through the Accelerator – where possible, and to global evidence and innovations through existing knowledge aggregators such as JLN's emerging COVID Node, WHO guidance, among others.

Learning objectives:

Within the frame of coordinating multi-sectoral and multi-level strategies for pandemic response, countries will respond to important questions such as:

- How to assess how well current approaches to organizing the national COVID response are working and what needs to be updated or changed to strengthen the effectiveness of the national response across sectors, levels and partners?
- How to most effectively engage the various levels of government, communities, and civil society – including citizens' voice and vulnerable groups – in countries' national responses and ensure a coordinated response particularly in devolved/decentralized settings?
- How to enhance coordination across various levels of care in the health system and shift resources, power and authority closer to the most appropriate service delivery level to improve case management?

Proposed activities to achieve these objectives may include:

- Facilitating rapid exchange of evidence, practical experience, and innovations to support countries' COVID response, focusing on how countries establish and effectively manage multi-level and multi-sectoral coordination
- Capturing, documenting, and rapidly disseminating learning in practical tools, such as evidence briefs, case studies, and other innovative modalities, that are highly practical and can be adapted and used in many countries
- Aligning with in-country implementation support processes, with strong feedback loops between country-level action and learning and the learning exchanged across countries through the JLN
- Linking collaborative members to global evidence through existing knowledge aggregators
- Framing COVID topics around longer-term health systems strengthening and UHC, with a longer-term vision of increasing country health systems' resilience

Expected outcomes

The technical facilitation team aims to be responsive to the membership on the modalities to be used and the outputs from this collaborative. The list below illustrates the expected outputs:

	September 2020-December 2020	January 2021- April 2021
1. Launch webinar	X	
2. Virtual webinar learning engagements	X	X
3. One-on-one country check-ins	X	X
4. Working meeting: Synthesizing country experience into a collaborative output		X
5. Launch the collaborative output		X
6. Final virtual meeting		X

In addition to the outputs listed above, we will capture and synthesize key themes and practical lessons from countries' implementation experience as a global public good for wider sharing and dissemination.

Expected level of effort

Participants will be expected to:

- Establish a multi-sectoral country team involved in the country's pandemic response
- Actively participate in monthly virtual meetings
- Engage with, and be responsive to, the technical facilitator(s) via email, telephone, Skype, including monthly check-ins for feedback on country implementation and translating learnings from the technical collaborative
- Contribute to the development of knowledge products, including providing feedback and suggestions via virtual meetings and emails

Profile of participants

Country Core Groups (CCGs) should nominate a team of five to six individuals to participate. In order to maximize the potential for learnings to translate to action, it is important that the participants who are identified form a small, highly engaged team and can demonstrate the following success factors:

- Their *commitment to action* to improve pandemic responses in the country, such that their complementary strengths can be channeled towards collective action and improvement;
- Their *understanding of the complexities* involved in national coordination of pandemic responses, and *current involvement in their country's response*, can provide valuable and practical insights on concrete challenges and solutions;
- Their *time availability and ability to engage continuously* with the collaborative.

In keeping with the theme of multi-sectoral coordination strategies, we expect a diverse profile of participants, with country teams including participants drawn from national epidemic/pandemic response or multi-sectoral coordination units, Ministries of Health, UHC agencies, National Institutes of Public Health, service delivery and policy units (both national and sub-national levels); and at least two

representatives from other priority sectors (e.g., education, finance, transport, and environment). In our experience, active and continuous participation are key factors for success in cross-country exchange and knowledge co-creation. We are therefore seeking teams who can meet the expected level of effort as outlined above. The individual roles below provide examples of the type of individual profiles you may choose to select to form your team:

	Organization	Level	Description
1	National multi-sectoral coordination unit	National	A professional directly responsible for managing or overseeing the national pandemic response unit usually linked to the executive/President's/Prime Minister's office. The individual should have a strong grasp of key policy questions surrounding pandemic responses, as well as practical know-how of the country's response.
2	Ministries of Health epidemic/pandemic response unit or National Institute of Public Health	National	A professional representing the epidemic preparedness and response unit at the Ministry of Health or National Institute of Public Health. This person is likely to be participating in the national coordination unit; AND/OR A professional directly involved with service delivery arrangements' policy design, implementation and monitoring. The ideal candidate should have a good sense of the key questions and information needs of the MOH and other key stakeholders to support the clinical teams for the COVID response such as ramping up testing, setting up isolation, quarantine and treatment centers, contact tracing etc.
3	Ministry of Education/ Finance/ Transport/ Environment	National	Two individuals – one each from two of these four Ministries – Education/ Finance/ Transport/ Environment, who are leading the sectoral plan to mitigate the effects of COVID at their parent Ministry. These persons are likely to be participating in the national coordination unit as a representative of their parent Ministry.
4	National multi-sectoral coordination unit communications team	National	A professional in charge of developing communication strategies and/or engaging with civil society for the COVID response.
5	Devolved level of Government	Sub-national	A professional representing the devolved level of government or a secondary administration level as the case may apply.

Maximum number of participants

The virtual collaborative will be limited to five countries with approximately 25-30 participants. The EOI is open to the full JLN membership and the technical facilitators welcome responses from all countries. However, countries will be prioritized for selection based on relevance of country experience and being able to constitute a strong multi-sectoral team (see evaluation criteria below).

Funding capacity

Due to the current travel restrictions, this collaborative is restricted to virtual engagement for a period of six months. No travel is anticipated.

Call for Expression of Interest (EOI)

To kick off these activities, the Technical Facilitation team welcomes all JLN member countries to submit an Expression of Interest. We encourage countries to make a collaborative application through the CCG. Countries should use [this link](#) to access a short EOI response form where your country team will provide the following information:

- The relevance of the topic to the country and any specific priorities in advancing the country in the learning questions;
- Planned or ongoing activities being undertaken related to the learning activities;
- How the learnings will be translated to country action;
- Proposed country participants and their professional background and position, demonstrating relevance to the collaborative to their daily work;
- Contact person, including name, title and email.

In the event that the applicant does not have all the above information readily available, or they cannot constitute a multi-sectoral team by the EOI deadline, countries interested in participating in this collaborative are encouraged to use [this link](#) to access a form to indicate their interest, while they develop a more detailed expression of interest. All applications will be reviewed, and decisions communicated by November 23, 2020. In the event that you are not able to access the [EOI response form](#), the CCG coordinators should write to the JLN network manager at jln@msh.org for alternative arrangements to submit your EOI. For any questions related to the application, please contact Agnes Munyua at amunyua@r4d.org

Deadline and instructions for submission

Please submit your EOI via [this link](#) by **November 13, 2020**. All applications will be reviewed, and decisions communicated by November 23, 2020.

Evaluation Criteria

Prospective countries should meet the following criteria:

- Must demonstrate the relevance of the topic to their pandemic preparedness and support, and how this links to the broader goal of improving stewardship for attainment of UHC;
- Demonstrate a clear plan on how learning from the technical initiative will be rapidly translated to country implementation;
- Propose a strong, multi-sectoral team representing organizations as suggested in the participant profiles.