8.2: Grant awarding agencies

There are many national and international funding agencies that include intervention trials in their funding portfolio. These include, but are by no means limited to, the WHO Tropical Diseases Research Programme, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the UK Medical Research Council, the US National Institutes for Health, the Wellcome Trust, the Volkswagen Foundation in Germany, and the French Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM). The pharmaceutical industry and several non-governmental public–private partnerships created in the last decade have partnered with academic institutions in the development of new drugs and vaccines for LMICs, including supporting clinical trials. In addition, some government development agencies, such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and UK Department for International Development (DFID), also support studies on the evaluation of public health interventions.

2.1 Understand the remit

All funding agencies have their own specific remits and priorities. Even for intervention trials, some agencies have specific programmes for particular diseases or will only support certain kinds of study. It is imperative to be familiar with the remit of the agency to which a funding application is planned and to understand what they expect from supporting a research proposal; otherwise, a lot of unnecessary time can be wasted by applicants.

Many funding agencies will ask why they, rather than some other group, should support a specific trial. For example, for a trial of a new vaccine that has been developed by a pharmaceutical company, a likely question is why the company is not providing the support, as it will stand to benefit if the vaccine is found to be efficacious.
2.2 Early contact

Those wishing to conduct a specific trial must decide on the most suitable funding agency to approach for support. One sure way of ensuring that a particular funding agency is an appropriate recipient of an application is to make early contact. Most agencies have detailed information on their websites where information about the forms of support offered, the application process, and deadlines for applications are available. Where there is uncertainty, it is always a good idea to contact individual officers in the agency. They usually welcome an early opportunity to discuss a potential applicant’s plans, and they will suggest the best way to submit a grant application. Importantly, they will advise if the agency is unlikely to support a particular application (for example, because the topic is outside of their remit or priorities). Such information early in the process of seeking a grant may be invaluable. A common mistake is to leave the preparation of an application and contact with the grant agency until close to a deadline. Plan ahead, and leave plenty of time for discussions with the grant agency’s officers and to prepare an application. A rushed application is almost always a poor one. Many funding agencies will offer to look at an outline application, sometimes known as a letter of intent or a concept note, to advise on whether or not it is within their remit or how it might be modified to better fit their funding schemes.