

Lessons Learned from the Expression of Interest (EOI) Process - school-aged children's vision and hearing screening and AT provision

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EOI Process

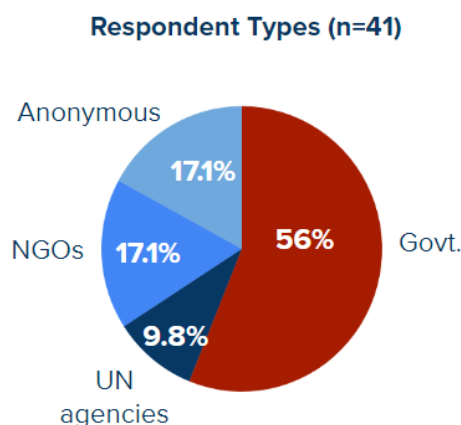
Guided by a new country approach approved by the Board, ATscale initiated an Expression of Interest (EOI) to seek interest from low- and middle-income countries for catalytic funding support focused on scaling up/implementing vision and hearing screening and provision of eyeglasses and hearing aids in school-aged children. The EOI was open for two months, from November 2023 to January 2024. As this country approach is new, it is relevant to evaluate and refine it to make the whole process more effective in the future for ATscale and applicant countries. This note covers the lessons learned, which can inform future EOI processes.

The EOI yielded remarkable results, **with 41 EOIs received from 33 countries** across the three eligible targeted regions and 48 countries (East and West Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia). EOIs were received from various levels of the Government: the Prime Minister's office, the President's office, the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Education (MoEd), and the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoS). There were also various joint inter-ministerial submissions.

This strong response underscored the relevance and resonance of ATscale's objectives among diverse stakeholders and the political willingness of the countries to invest in AT. Furthermore, the quality and diversity of submissions reflected a deep commitment to addressing the gap for scaling up screening services (vision and hearing in school-aged children) and providing AT. In addition to the core objective of the EOI, the process was also meant to galvanize political support and engagement from a wide range of stakeholders across the eligible targeted regions for AT.

Findings from the online survey

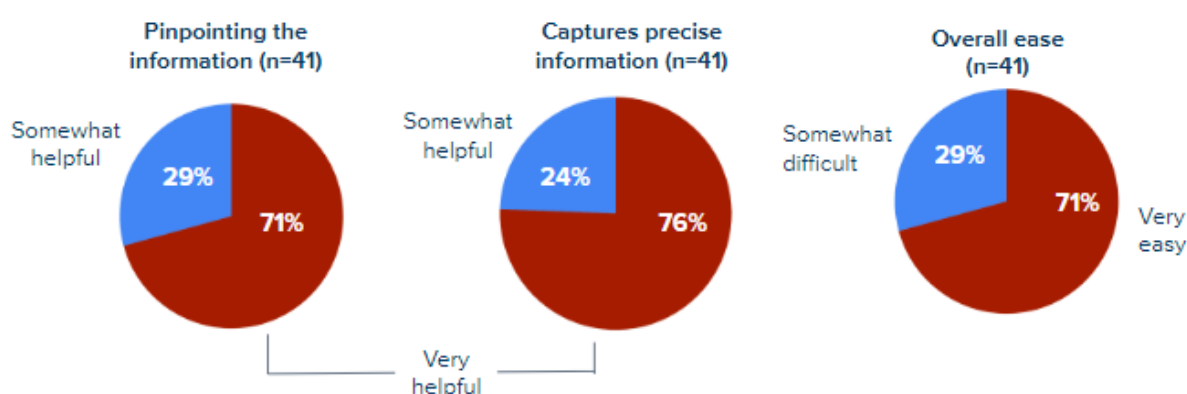
The ATscale secretariat designed a set of questions to obtain feedback from the participants (Government, UN agencies and NGOs) who submitted or supported the countries' governments to submit their EOI. We also contacted the countries or partners who did not submit an EOI. The questionnaire went through several internal iterations before being made public using the SurveyMonkey online survey tool and sent to all targeted audiences, as mentioned above. The survey included questions to capture feedback on the checklist, information collection, content, timing, and duration, ATscale's support



during the process, challenges, and recommendations. The questionnaire is enclosed in Annex I.

A total of 41 responses were received; the majority of them came from the various government ministries/departments. The findings and recommendations emerging from the survey are provided below.

Observation 1. The EOI pinpointed and captured precise information and was easy to complete and submit.



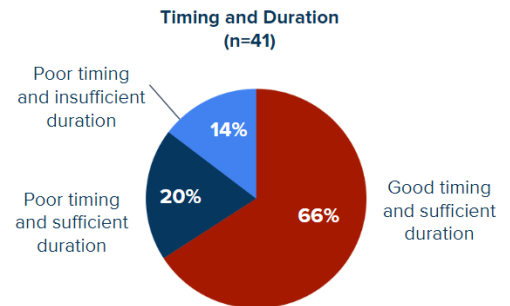
Most of the respondents (> 70%) were satisfied with the clarity, ability and overall ease of the EOI to guide, pinpoint, collect and submit relevant and concise information. The respondents did report, however, that finding information on national AT budget allocation under the different ministries was time-consuming and challenging - something that we had expected. It was also difficult for some respondents to provide refractive error and hearing impairment estimates in school-aged children due to a lack of reliable data sources. Finally, some respondents reported other issues, such as difficulty consolidating the different parts of the submission into one file.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Offer an online application portal to fill out and submit the information.
- 1.2 Make the EOI available in official UN languages widely used in the particular geographical region.
- 1.3 Add Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to the EOI template that will also include how to address challenges referring to the sources.

Observation 2. The EOI was appropriate in terms of the timing and duration provided to send a submission.

Most of the respondents (> 60%) were satisfied with the timing (that is, November to January) and duration (that is, two months) provided to submit an EOI, with 20% of the respondents reporting that the timing was not good but the duration was sufficient. We were indeed conscious that the end-of-year holiday season might be a challenge for some, but timing and other imperatives made us proceed regardless.



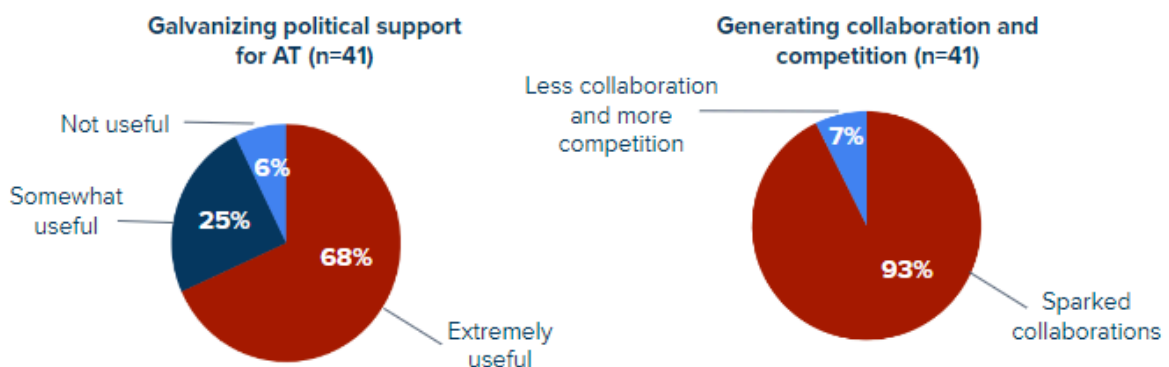
Recommendations

2.1 Though two months may be enough, consider allowing a three-month window.

2.2 Avoid important holiday seasons when planning the timing of EOIs, if possible.

Observation 3. The EOI galvanized political support for AT and collaboration among government and non-government agencies

Most respondents (> 60%) reported that the EOI process galvanized political support for AT and sparked collaborations between various government and non-government agencies.



Examples have been cited wherein the Ministry of Health or another leading ministry took charge and called upon all the national AT stakeholders to provide input and work towards the submission. A great number of responses (> 60%) also confirmed that civil society and Organizations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) were engaged in preparing the submission. Some respondents reported that it was challenging to gather all stakeholders given the EOI duration. One country that did not submit an EOI suggested that it is not customary for government ministries to submit proposals to funding agencies like ATscale, which is a little surprising given other similar mechanisms in global health. In these countries, ministries may be willing to provide a letter of support for this type of opportunity but are not willing to submit the proposal directly.

Recommendations

3.1 Reach out directly to the governments of relevant countries when launching EOIs to address any potential resistance to the government submitting a proposal.

3.2 Suggest stronger language in the document encouraging the government to convene all stakeholders to respond to such EOIs.

Observation 4. The EOI captured an overview of national AT and program situations

The respondents reported that the content was appropriate and could capture the overview of AT and programme situations in the country. Respondents also opined that it helped them know the scope of the application of AT, country strengths and limitations in terms of areas that need more effort to build a national programme on AT. However, in certain places where the EOI asked yes/no questions, some respondents felt that having additional spaces to justify their answers would have been helpful. More flexibility could be provided in the narrative sections (allowing more than 250 words but within a certain word count) to describe the situation clearly. Some respondents requested more clarity around co-financing to clearly define the requirements and role of partners other than the government.

Recommendations

4.1 When designing EOI materials, use yes/no questions and word limits carefully. Offer opportunities for applicants to justify and detail their responses.

4.2 Explore for pilot testing of the EOI materials to ensure clarity of requirements for applicants.

Next steps:

Implementing the recommendations identified above will go a long way in refining future EOI and grant processes. The ATscale secretariat has analyzed the feedback meticulously, identifying the following four key themes:

1. Improve clarity in the EOI form and provide more space for the respondents to record their responses.
2. Provide clearer guidance on co-funding expectations.
3. Enhance efforts to establish channels for ongoing communication, offering support and clarification to potential applicant countries.
4. Kickstart process of strategic thinking regarding a potential online platform submission, including a review of compliance with such potential platform with UNOPS policies.

In accordance with the above feedback, the EOI template and content will be refined based on specific programmes needs. The ATscale secretariat is committed to keep engaging with stakeholders to co-create solutions and refine the EOI framework iteratively. Ultimately, these efforts will strengthen ATscale's commitment to innovation and country impact, empowering organizations to pursue grants aligned with their goals and country needs effectively.

Annex 1

EOI Feedback Survey Questionnaire

Survey for the lessons learned on ATscale's Expression of Interest (EOI) Process on scaling up vision and hearing screening and provision of assistive technology to school-aged children

Introduction: This survey is part of the lesson learning on the ATscale's Expression of Interest (EOI) process on the 'scaling-up vision and hearing screening and provision of assistive technology to school-aged children' program. This survey is one of the key sources of data collection, involving stakeholders at the global, regional, and national levels for the EOI submission process.

Thank you for your time and cooperation. The survey will not take more than 15 minutes. The lesson-learned report will be available for all the stakeholders from April 2024 onwards. The deadline for the survey is February 16th, 2024.

Disclaimer: All responses will remain completely anonymous. The feedback on ATscale's Expression of Interest (EOI) is sought solely for the purpose of ATscale's learning and improving such future EOI processes. This feedback will not in any way influence or correlate with the outcomes of the EOIs submitted by the countries.

Q1. How would you rate the clarity and simplicity of the EOI form in capturing information about the assistive technology sector?

1. Easy to understand and fill out
2. Moderately difficult to understand and fill out
3. Extremely difficult to follow and fill out

Please provide specific suggestions on how to further improve the form; simple to follow and easy to fill out.

Q2. Did the provided checklist (attached as Annex I and II¹) effectively guide the information collection and your submission?

1. It was very helpful to pinpoint the information needed
2. It was somewhat helpful to pinpoint the information with less clarity in some places

¹ Annex I: Overview of the wider wider AT situation in the country
Annex II: Overview of the eye, ear and hearing care provision in school age children
Annex III: Major challenges, plans, existing partnership mechanisms, co-financing/contribution complementing AT financing

3. It was not helpful to pinpoint the information needed

Please provide specific suggestions on how to further improve the checklist section:

Q3. Did you find the narrative section (Annex III) useful for information collection and submitting appropriate responses?

1. It was very helpful as a guide to capture and submit precise information
2. It was somewhat helpful as a guide to capturing and submitting precise information.
3. It was not helpful as a guide to capture and submit precise information

Please provide specific suggestions on how to further improve the narrative section:

Q4. From Annexes I, II, and III, which information was not easily found/available?

Q5. Was the content provided in the checklist and narrative description able to capture the high-level situation of the country's AT and eye and ear care services for school-aged children?

1. Yes, to a great degree
2. Yes, to a modest degree
3. No, it was not able to reflect the high-level situation

Please provide specific suggestions on how to improve the content of the checklist and narrative section to capture the high-level situation of the country's AT system:

Q6. Did the timing and duration work well for you to compile and submit the required information for the EOI?

1. The timing was good, and the duration was sufficient
2. The timing was not good, but the duration was sufficient
3. Both timing and duration were not good

Please provide specific suggestions on how to improve the timing and duration of EOI further:

Q7. How would you assess the level of collaboration among government and non-government stakeholders involved in the submission process?

1. It helped in healthy collaboration among stakeholders toward a common goal
2. It created more competition and less collaboration among the stakeholders
3. It generated neither collaboration nor competition among the stakeholders

Please provide specific suggestions on how further to improve collaboration among stakeholders through the process of EOIs:

Q8. Please provide a rating on the engagement of civil society such as parents' associations, assistive technology users and organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in the EOI process:

1. Civil society was fully engaged throughout the entirety of the EOI process
2. Civil society was moderately involved in the EOI process
3. Civil society was not involved at all in the EOI process

Please suggest how to improve civil society engagement in the EOI process at the country level, if any.

Q9. In your opinion, did the EOI process effectively galvanize political support for the assistive technology sector?

1. It was very helpful to galvanize political support for AT
2. It was somewhat helpful to galvanize the political support for AT
3. It wasn't helpful to galvanize the political support for AT

Please provide specific suggestions on how to improve the EOI process further to generate political momentum around AT in the country:

Q10. Did the support provided by the ATscale secretariat during the EOI submission process, such as bilateral meetings, webinars, and Q&As, adequately assist you in working on the EOIs?

1. The support provided was adequate for effectively working on the EOI
2. The support provided was moderate and could have been better
3. The support provided was not enough

Please provide suggestions on what additional support ATscale can provide or the specific areas in the EOI form where you needed additional guidance or clarification

Q11. Please share any challenges you encountered during the EOI submission process:

Q12. What were some of the challenges faced and lessons learned from participating in the EOI submission process that could be utilized to enhance similar procedures in the future?

Q13. Please state the reasons as to why the country did not submit the EOI (relevant only for countries who were interested or started to fill out EOI but were not able to submit in the end).