USAID Youth Excel: Our Knowledge Leading Change Program Grant Competition

Using 'Research-to-Change' (Implementation Research)
to Strengthen Mental Health and Psychosocial support for marginalized and vulnerable youth in East and Southern Africa

Request for Concept Notes
Deadline: August 11th, 2021 at 11:59 pm EAT

Key Grant Competition Information and Dates	
Request Number	FY22-Youth Excel-Grant Competition-01 Issued under USAID Youth Excel Cooperative Agreement Number 7200AA20CA00024
Issue Date	**July 15th, 2021**
Website	https://www.irex.org/program/seeking-concept-notes-strengthening-youths-mental-health-east-africa-and-southern-africa Access all grant competition information and updates posted regularly here.
Email	excelyouth@irex.org Sign up to receive weekly grant competition emails at: http://eepurl.com/hlNwwH
Questions	Submit questions by email on an ongoing basis by **August 3, 2021** **To:** excelyouth@irex.org **Subject:** FY21-Youth Excel ESA Grant Competition-01 Questions Check for responses posted by **July 29th and August 5, 2021**
Webinars	Attend optional webinars on project design open to all applicants. **Date: July 27, 2021 at 1pm East African Time** **Topic:** Strengthen mental health and psychosocial support for marginalized or vulnerable youth **At:**https://www.eventbrite.com/e/youth-excel-grant-competition-webinar-registration-163400271611 Webinar slides, recording, and transcript will be posted by **July 29th, 2021** **Date: August 2, 2021 at 3pm East African Time (EAT)** **Topic:** What is "Research-to-Change" (Implementation Research)? **At:** https://www.eventbrite.com/e/youth-excel-grant-competition-webinar-what-is-implementation-research-registration-163406217395 Webinar slides, recording, and transcript will be posted by **August 4, 2021**
Grant Competition Deadline	Submit Concept Note by **August 11th, 2021 at 11:59 pm East African Time (EAT)** **At:** https://www.jotform.com/build/211944167938163
Participatory Selection	Eligible applicants will be invited to attend an optional participatory selection workshop. **Date: August 18th, 2021 at 11 am East African Time (EAT)** **At:** https://irexorg.zoom.us/j/94992029421 Eligible applicants participating in the optional workshop will be invited to provide feedback on 3 concept notes by **August 20th, 2021 at 11:59 pm East African Time.**

	Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full application later in August **2021**.
Grant Start Date	**October/November 2021**

About Youth Excel: The USAID Youth Excel: Our Knowledge Leading Change program implemented by IREX and its consortium supports young leaders and youth-led and youth-serving organizations around the globe to conduct quality "research-to-change" (implementation research); use data and learnings to improve their own cross-sectoral, positive youth development programs; synthesize data and learning; and engage in intergenerational dialogue with adult decision-makers so that together youth and adults can shape and advance data-informed development policies, agendas, and programs.

What is "research-to-change" (implementation research)?
Information is a powerful resource that can be used to help organizations grow and make their programs work better. "Research-to-Change" (implementation research) allows for organizations to gather data as they implement a program, take what they learn, and turn it into what they do as they adjust and adapt their program in real-time.[1]

What is positive youth development?
Positive youth development engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. Youth Excel works from the assumption that to contribute to healthy, productive, and engaged youth, positive youth development programs must focus on strengthening youth assets, youth agency, youth contribution, and the surrounding enabling environment.

What is GESI?
Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) is an approach that help us to understand the importance of equal rights and opportunities for all individuals regardless of their social identity. This concept addresses unequal power relations between different social groups that cause exclusion.

What is protection?
The protection approach helps us to understand and prepare for protection concerns related to Youth Excel, which can be digital, physical and psychosocial. Considering protection helps us to take local protection measures to prevent, mitigate and respond to risks and threats that Youth Excel can unintentionally exacerbate (risks associated with programs, operations, and people). Youth Excel aims to understand the specific risks, but also the protection capacities, the available resources and the right to protection of participants.

What is knowledge mobilization?
Knowledge mobilization is the strategic dissemination of knowledge products with a focus in driving change through the dissemination of information and data that are the result of different research and learning activities and are made openly available to the public for further use, re-use or re-distribution.

About the grant competition: As a USAID New Partnerships Initiative award, Youth Excel conducts grant competitions to offer funding opportunities for local organizations **to test and adapt solutions for a problem in a regional context through youth-led "research-to-change" (implementation research) approaches** for positive youth development.

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[1] WHO Implementation Research Toolkit.

Through this grant competition, Youth Excel seeks concepts to strengthen youth mental health for marginalized, key or vulnerable youth across East and Southern Africa. Factors such as poverty, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, inadequate economic opportunities, gender-based violence, political conflict and harmful cultural norms contribute to youth mental health challenges, particularly vulnerable youth and youth from marginalized groups. The COVID-19 health and economic effects have further increased vulnerability of youth to mental illness. While there is uneven data on youth mental health issues in Eastern and Southern Africa, studies show that anywhere from 15% to over 30% of children and youth may experience mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, elevated stress levels, substance abuse, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and other mental illnesses; however, mental health topics remain broadly stigmatized across the region. This is further heightened by limited mental health support and policy frameworks at national levels, a lack of training for health providers and other youth workers, including teachers, and limited availability of mental health professionals. Limited existing data in some places demonstrates that young women experience higher prevalence of mental health challenges than young men.

This grant competition will fund youth-led and youth-serving organizations who are addressing youth mental health and psychosocial support and wellness. However, the grant competition will not directly fund clinical services and treatments.

This may include, but is not limited to, the following activities: programs to support youth well-being; raising awareness of mental health issues; tackling stigma around youth mental health; non-medical youth support services; training for non-medical service providers such as youth workers, teachers, to support youth during or after traumatic events; access to services, particularly for marginalized youth; and programs to help families and communities support youth well-being, promote positive mental health, and identify youth who may need additional support..

Youth Excel will fund either of the following:

- ❑ A. Your organization has a project or program model that addresses youth mental health and/or psychosocial support. Youth Excel funding will enable you to implement this program and conduct research and learning activities as you implement to make your program better.

- ❑ B. Your organization is currently implementing a project or program that addresses youth mental health and psychosocial support from another donor. Youth Excel funding will enable you to add research and learning activities to your existing program to make the program better.

Youth Excel is interested in funding local youth-led and youth-serving organizations to better understand and address youth priorities for this problem in this region.

Issuance of this request for concept notes does not constitute an award commitment on the part of Youth Excel, nor does it commit Youth Excel, IREX, or USAID to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. The application is submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

1. What kind of grants are available?

- **Purpose:** using "research-to-change" (implementation research) to improve mental health support and/or psychosocial support of marginalized and vulnerable youth in East and Southern Africa
- **Locations:** Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia.
- **Number:** 3 – 6. *Subject to the availability of funds, Youth Excel reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.*
- **Type:** Fixed amount subaward. Payments based on the negotiated budget will be made upon successful completion of project milestones. *ADS Reference 303mat Mandatory Standard Provisions for Fixed Amount Awards to Nongovernmental Organizations apply.*
- **Amount:** USD $25,000 - $75,000. Applicants can propose the amount required for project implementation within this range. *Cost share is not required.*
- **Start:** October/November 2021
- **Length:** 6 - 12 months. Applicants can propose the time required for project implementation within this range.

2. Who can apply to the grant competition?

Local youth-led and youth-serving organizations serving youth aged 15-35 who meet the following minimum criteria and share Youth Excel objectives are eligible to apply. Organizations led by or serving marginalized groups, which may include age, gender, disability, ethnicity, and other identities, are encouraged to apply. The grant competition is not restricted to certain technical sectors or to research organizations.

Eligible	Not Eligible
✓ Registered Organizations	✗ Individual or Group
✓ Local	✗ International
✓ Nongovernmental Organizations or Private Companies	✗ Government Institutions or Political Parties
✓ Youth-led and/or youth-serving	

✓ Eligible to receive USAID funding:
   o Has or willing to register for DUNS Number
   o Able to sign ADS 303mav Certifications, Assurances, Representations, and Other Statements of the Recipient
	✗ Not eligible due to any of the following reasons:
	   o Appears on Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control list
	   o Has active exclusions in the System for Award Management
	   o Appears on United Nations Security Designation list
	   o

	✗ Has received Youth Excel funding or has conflict of interest

3. How can eligible organizations apply to the grant competition?

Complete responses in English in Annex I. Concept Note Template. Submit concept notes in English by **August 11th, 2021 at 11:59 pm East African Time.**

At: https://www.jotform.com/build/211944167938163

4. How will applicants be selected to receive funding?

1. **Eligibility screening:** IREX will conduct an initial review of the concept note, based on the following criteria for responses to Parts A and D, and disqualify applicants and concept notes that are not eligible for consideration.
   ✓ Does concept note satisfy the basic parameters? [Refer to Section 1]
   ✓ Does applicant meet the minimum eligibility criteria? [Refer to Section 2]
   ✓ Is concept note complete and submitted on time? [Refer to Section 3]

2. **Participatory selection:** Youth Excel seeks partners interested in collaborating and sharing knowledge with each other and stakeholders through learning events and data summits during project implementation. Youth Excel is also committed to participatory grant-making in which those people who are most impacted participate in decision-making. In order to build the foundation for open exchange during the grant competition phase, eligible applicants will provide feedback on each other's concept notes. *As part of the submission process, applicants will acknowledge Annex 1. Part B. Questions 1-9 of the concept note, except for any confidential or proprietary information indicated, may be shared at the discretion of Youth Excel for the purpose of this grant competition.*

   Eligible applicants will be invited to an optional participatory selection workshop on **August 18th, 2021 at 11 am East African Time (EAT)** to give input on the grant competition process and criteria. *Applicants will be required to submit a signed conflict of interest statement and complete a conflict of interest declaration if any arise during participatory selection.*

   Eligible applicants participating in the workshop will be invited to review 3 concept notes by **August 20th, 2021 at 11:59 pm East African Time (EAT)** based on the following criteria for responses to Part B. Questions 1-9 related to concept design:
   ✓ Does applicant clearly identify and demonstrate understanding of the problem that the concept will address? [Question 4]
   ✓ To what extent does the proposed solution address the problem in a realistic, meaningful, and innovative way? [Question 5]
   ✓ Does applicant articulate its motivation and priority for the concept? [Question 6]
   ✓ Does applicant demonstrate clear understanding of the context, informed by preliminary gender equality and social inclusion analysis? Does applicant describe how it will adapt the concept to be effective in the context? [Question 7]
   ✓ Is the concept inclusive of youth and marginalized group(s)? Is the concept and approach responsive to youth priorities? Does applicant display understanding of risks and demonstrate safeguarding measures to ensure the concept does no more harm? [Question 8]
   ✓ Are applicants aware of potential risks for participating youth and are they considering of mitigation strategies? [Question 9]

Participating applicants will provide an overall assessment of each concept note with brief comments that will be shared with the applicant and Youth Excel review panel.

- ☐ Strongly Recommended
- ☐ Recommended
- ☐ Not recommended

Youth Excel reserves the right to make final decisions based on the selection criteria about which applicants will be invited to the full application and final negotiation stages of the grant competition.

3. **Youth Excel review:** The panel, comprised of selected Youth Excel consortium staff, Global Youth Advisory Council members, and USAID staff, will use the same criteria for responses to Part B, Questions 1-9 to assess the concept design, as the following criteria for Part B, Question 10 and Part C to assess capacity:
   - ✓ Is the concept feasible for the applicant to implement within the proposed timeframe and funding amount? Does the applicant display the technical expertise needed for the proposed approach? Does the applicant demonstrate fundamental technical and financial management systems and capacity through a track record of successful implementation of projects of similar size and scope? [Part B, Question 10 and Part C]

   The panel will rate concept notes on the following criteria:
   - ✓ **Responsiveness:** concept's approach and value for youth priorities related to the grant competition theme and region. [Part B, Questions 1-9; informed by participatory selection review]
   - ✓ **Feasibility:** applicant's understanding of requirements and proven capacity to successfully implement the concept. [Part B, Question 10 and Part C]
   - ✓ **Impact:** concept's potential to advance positive youth development outcomes and learning. [Overall]
   - ✓ **Protection:** applicant's awareness of potential risks for participating youth and consideration of mitigation strategies [Question 9]
   - ✓ **Inclusion:** applicant's commitment to diversity and inclusion (especially regarding work with and/or support to vulnerable or marginalized groups such as girls and women, youth with disabilities, youth from ethnic or religious minorities, and other identities)[Overall]

   Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full application.

Endnotes:

Ainamani, H. E., Gumisiriza, N., & Rukundo, G. Z. (2020). Mental health problems related to COVID-19: A call for psychosocial interventions in Uganda. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12*(7), 809.

Bukusi, D. (2015). Kenya mental health policy 2015–2030. In.

Kapungu, C., Jessee, C., Sebany, M., Juan, C., & Edmeades, J.E. (2018). Gender and Mental Health: An Opportunity to Achieve Sustainable Development. Washington, DC: YouthPower Learning, Making Cents International. https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/USAIDYouthPower_MentalHealth_v5_WebReady.pdf

Kutcher, S., Perkins, K., Gilberds, H., Udedi, M., Ubuguyu, O., Njau, T., . . . Hashish, M. (2019). Creating evidence-based youth mental health policy in sub-Saharan Africa: A description of the integrated approach to addressing the issue of youth depression in Malawi and Tanzania. *Frontiers in psychiatry, 10*, 542.

Mwambwa-Johnson, E. Y. (2021). *Mental Health Literacy Among Rural and Urban Young Adults in Zambia.* Walden University,

Annex 1. Concept Note Template

USAID Youth Excel: Our Knowledge Leading Change Program Grant Competition

**Using 'Research-to-Change' (Implementation Research)
to Strengthen Mental Health and Psychosocial support for marginalized and vulnerable youth in East and Southern Africa**

**Concept Note Template
Deadline: August 11th, 2021 at 11:59 pm East African Time (EAT)**

A. Key Information

Proposed Activity Title	
Proposed Activity Start Date	
Proposed Activity End Date	
Proposed Funding Amount in Local Currency	
Proposed Funding Amount in USD	
Organization Legal Name	
Organization Address	
Organization Type (select all that apply)	❑ Local. Country: ❑ Registered ❑ Non-governmental ❑ Youth-Led or Youth-Serving
Organization DUNS Number (if available)	
Signatory Name	
Signatory Title	
Signatory Phone	
Signatory Email	

B. Questions
   1. **Sub-theme:** select the primary sub-theme that your concept best addresses.
      - ☐ Gender-Based Violence
      - ☐ Impacts of COVID-19
      - ☐ Shift to Digital World
      - ☐ Transition (back) to Learning and Earning
      - ☐ Youth Innovation
      - ☐ Other:

2. **Country:** specify the country where you will implement your concept.
   - ☐ Eswatini
   - ☐ Kenya
   - ☐ Malawi
   - ☐ Tanzania
   - ☐ Uganda
   - ☐ Zambia

3. Type of Activity: select the type of activity that best describes your organization's proposal.
   - ❑ A. **New program** (this grant will enable to implement a program model and conduct research and learning activities as you implement to make your program better)
   - ❑ B. **Existing program** (this grant will enable to add research and learning activities to your existing program to make the program better). Please provide a letter of support from current donor using the template provided with this application.

4. **Problem:** describe the need for your concept. What is the problem that your concept will address to enhance or support mental health and/or psychosocial support of marginalized or vulnerable youth, in relation to the selected sub-theme and country? *(250 words)*

5. **Program (new or existing):** describe your program, approach, objectives, and expected results. How will your concept address the problem and promote positive youth development? How will your concept contribute to the regional, cross-sectoral knowledge base? *(250 words)*

6. **Learning Priorities:** What are you passionate about learning from your program through Research-to-change component? Select one primary learning priority and explain why it is important to your concept and organization. *(250 words)*

   - ☐ Explore solutions before investing time and resources: *You are currently exploring different potential solutions for an issue facing your community. You have an idea of how the program could achieve change, but are relying on some assumptions. Research-to-change can use information to determine whether a program would be practical to implement in a certain context.*

   - ☐ Address gaps between program expectations and realities: *You have explored different solutions to address a particular issue in your community and are confident that your program will work. However, when the program is being implemented, you are not seeing the impact that you had expected. When programs fall short of their expected impact, it is often the due to contextual issues. Research-to-change focuses on understanding implementation and contextual issues so that programs can be adapted to reach their full potential.*

   - ☐ Help your organization learn and thrive: *Your organization has been implementing solutions in your community for some time now, but you have noticed that mistakes are being repeated and successes are not being built upon. A key driver of strengthening quality of programs is the learning capacity of organizations. Research-to-change better places organizations to anticipate problems, develop responses, and become more effective when approaching new challenges.*

☐ Share learnings and become a leading organization: *You have finished implementing a program and your team has learned so much about what works and what does not work. You might want to share this information with other organizations doing similar work so they can build on your successes and learn from your mistakes. Research-to-change also involves creating knowledge products (i.e., presentations, reports, publications) to spread learning to other organizations, strengthen credibility, expand reach, and sustain funding.*

7. **Context:** describe the geographic context (districts/regions) where you will implement your concept. What are key power dynamics, norms, social customs, and policies in the context, and how will your concept be sensitive to them? What factors may enable or disable the implementation and impact of your concept in the context? *(250 words)*

8. **People and inclusion:** describe whom your concept will engage and impact. What are the characteristics of the marginalized or vulnerable youth? Which groups of youth aged between 15 and 35 years will your concept include (e.g., age, gender, youth with disabilities, ethnic or religious marginalized groups, rural/urban areas, socioeconomic background, level of education, other identities etc.), and how will your concept identify and respond to their priorities? Which groups of stakeholders will your concept engage to support youth and their priorities? *(250 words)*

9. **Youth Protection:** what are some of the risks that diverse youth may face while participating in your program? explain how your organization will ensure that participating youth do not experience additional harms through your program or any mitigation strategies. (e.g., What strategies, policies, approaches, trainings, and/or other processes)

10. **Capacity:** describe your organization's technical and financial capacity to implement your concept. What structures and systems does your organization have for project management? What relevant experiences and skills does your organization have from implementing similar projects? *(250 words)*

C. **Past Performance:** list 3-5 donor-funded projects of similar size and scope that demonstrate your organization's capacity to successfully implement the proposed concept.

Project Name Project Number Funder Prime Amount Start and End Dates Reference Name Reference Title Reference Email Address Reference Phone Number Description *(100 words)*	
Project Name Agreement Number Funder Prime Amount	

Start and End Dates Reference Name Reference Title Reference Email Address Reference Phone Number Description *(100 words)*	
Project Name Agreement Number Funder Prime Amount Start and End Dates Reference Name Reference Title Reference Email Address Reference Phone Number Description *(100 words)*	
Project Name Agreement Number Funder Prime Amount Start and End Dates Reference Name Reference Title Reference Email Address Reference Phone Number Description *(100 words)*	
Project Name Agreement Number Funder Prime Amount Start and End Dates Reference Name Reference Title Reference Email Address Reference Phone Number Description *(100 words)*	

D. Certifications

I, [Applicant Signatory Name and Title], certify that [Applicant Organization Name] is a local entity organization that:

- ❑ Is legally organized under the laws of [Country];
- ❑ Has its principal place of business or operations in [Country];
- ❑ Is majority-owned by individuals who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of [Country];
- ❑ Is managed by a governing body, the majority of whom are citizens or lawful permanent residents of [Country];

And is:

- ❑ Youth-led organization whose Chief Executive Officer or other leaders are under the age of 35, and whose Board of Directors are predominantly under the age of 35, and who has a mission, mandate, or programs with an expressed priority of serving or support youth under age 35.
- ❑ Youth-serving organization that has a mission, mandate, or programs with an expressed priority of serving or supporting youth under age 35.

And is a *(choose all that apply).*:

- ❑ A female-led organization whose Chief Executive Officer or other leaders are female, and whose Board of Directors are predominantly female.
- ❑ An organization with a specific mission to work with marginalized groups (e.g., Youth with disabilities)
- ❑ An organization with a specific mission to work with vulnerable youth (e.g. youth in conflict areas, youth living with HIV/AIDS or orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS)

I acknowledge that responses to Annex 1. Part B. Questions 1-9, except for any confidential or proprietary information contained in the questions marked below, may be shared at the discretion of Youth Excel for the purpose of this grant competition.

The following questions contain confidential or proprietary information: *(Check all that apply).*

- ❑ Question 4
- ❑ Question 5
- ❑ Question 6
- ❑ Question 7
- ❑ Question 8
- ❑ Question 9

[Signature]
[Title]
[Organization]
[Date]

E. Optional Materials

Optional: share links or attachments (up to 20MB) for up to three materials in any format that demonstrate your organization's commitment, impact, and learning related to youth mental health, psychosocial support, and positive youth development.