



Request For Proposals

**Impact evaluation of the Elton John AIDS Foundation's
People Who Use Drugs Portfolio Strategy**

Deadline for receipt of proposals:

15th February 2026, End of Day (GMT)

1. About the Foundation

The Elton John AIDS Foundation was established in 1992 and is one of the leading independent AIDS organisations in the world. The Foundation's mission is simple: an end to the AIDS epidemic. The Elton John AIDS Foundation is committed to overcoming the stigma, discrimination, and neglect that keeps us from ending AIDS. With the mobilisation of our network of generous supporters and partners, we fund local experts across continents to challenge discrimination, prevent infections, and provide treatment as well as informing government strategies to end AIDS.

The Foundation launched its five-year strategy¹ in 2020 to deliver impactful programmes, particularly to the most marginalised communities who have been most impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and who are often left behind. We commission work across our priority areas (portfolios): LGBTQ+ communities, People Who Use Drugs, Young People, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the USA.

2. PWUD Portfolio Background

Launched in 2022, the People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) Portfolio aims to respond to the people who use drugs communities' emerging health and HIV needs by demonstrating viable pathways for drug policy reform and harm reduction expansion at the global, regional, and country level. The Portfolio has six priority countries where multiple grants (called 'layering' approach) are being made: Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Thailand, and the USA.

The Portfolio has three strategic pillars that address the political, funding, and programmatic challenges faced by the PWUD community in the drug policy reform and HIV response at the global and local level.

Only 30 countries around the world have adopted some form of drug decriminalisation,² in contradiction to compelling evidence that criminalisation, which often leads to incarceration and human rights violations, results in worse health and HIV outcomes. *Through our first strategic pillar, we aim to progress policies on decriminalisation and/or access to harm reduction services in our priority countries.* With our partners, we have been developing roadmaps on drug policy reform that aim to build a framework for national movements to repeal or revise harmful national laws on personal drug use and possession. We also aim to increase the provision of harm reduction services via legislation, as well as ensuring access to harm reduction services under Universal Health Coverage schemes.

Harm reduction approaches³ are effective at preventing infectious diseases and reducing overdose amongst people who use drugs. However, investment on harm reduction is socially and politically sensitive in most places, resulting in significant gaps in programme coverage and quality globally. *Through our second strategic pillar, we aim to increase (or at least maintain) the amount of funding allocated for harm reduction in lower- and middle-income countries.* With our partners, we have been influencing key financing mechanisms and bilateral and multilateral donors to improve their policies, processes, or financial monitoring on harm reduction. At the same time, we have been doing budget advocacy to influence local governments in priority countries to allocate new harm reduction funding at the domestic level.

¹ The Foundation's 2020–2025 strategy has been extended to end of 2026 due to the COVID-19 pandemic disruption

² <https://www.citywide.ie/decriminalisation/countries.html>

³ Includes needles and syringes programme, drug dependence treatment, overdose prevention, and testing and treatment for HIV, TB, Hep B/C

To directly support people who use drugs to access relevant and accessible quality services, *we aim to develop comprehensive harm reduction service delivery models through our third strategic pillar.* We have been piloting and documenting the effectiveness of tailored harm reduction services to the intersecting needs of young people, pregnant women, men who have sex with men, and male sex workers who use drugs in priority countries. Moreover, we have been expanding the provision of overdose prevention services to communities that are often not reached by the public health infrastructure in the USA.

Overall, we envision for people who use drugs to be free from violence and criminalisation, have access to relevant and effective harm reduction strategies, and rely on continued political commitment, and investment to meet their health needs (see Annex for the Portfolio's visual Theory of Change).

The Portfolio began grant making in January 2022. As of November 2025, the Portfolio has 25 grants (active and completed) across priority countries, as well as grants at the global and regional level. Most grants are expected to be completed by the end of 2026 Q1.

3. Scope of Work

This Request for Proposals (RFP) seeks to recruit an external team to support the conduct of an impact evaluation of the Foundation's PWUD Portfolio strategy. Overall, we seek to will explore the achievements and limitations across the portfolio impact wins and building a coherent narrative that captures the Foundation's unique role in driving drug policy reform and improving access to harm reduction.

3.1. Purpose

The evaluation should understand the results of the Foundation's investments and unique contribution within the wider environment of drug policy reform, harm reduction, and HIV responses at the country, regional, and global level. It should test the validity of the Portfolio's underlying assumptions, including addressing community needs through responsive models of care, strengthening the ecosystem of community-led advocacy, supporting power shifts, and identifying the most effective stakeholder engagements that drive policy and legal change.

The evaluation should also serve as a learning tool. Internally, it should provide insights to inform future programming, grant making, and MEL practices, ensuring that future funding decisions are highly strategic, sustainable, and responsive to the current global funding landscape. It should assess whether layering across country, coupled with regional and global grants, was an effective grant making approach, and under what conditions it was successful.

Externally, the evaluation should generate evidence that can shape the wider drug policy reform and harm reduction field by highlighting good practices, effective advocacy and service delivery models, and recurring barriers or risks that are relevant for other donors, governments, CSOs, and multilateral institutions. In addition, the evaluation could offer the opportunity to share lessons to the broader evaluation community, particularly around the design and execution of strategy- and portfolio-level evaluations in the philanthropic sector.

3.2. Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ)

The table below outlines the questions that this evaluation will answer. The evaluation questions are structured around the three strategic pillars of the Portfolio, with an additional line of inquiry on the cross-cutting layering approach. This structure ensures that the evaluation remains focused on assessing portfolio-level progress and strategic relevance, whilst also surfacing country-specific insights through the sub-questions. The intent is to capture both the overarching contribution of the Foundation's funding and the distinct storylines from each of the six priority countries.

Focus	Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ)	Sub-Questions (SQ)
Pillar 1: Legal and Policy Advocacy	1. How, to what extent, and in what contexts has the PWUD Portfolio contributed to improving enabling environments for people who use drugs at country, regional, and global levels?	1.1. What specific drug policy and legislative progress or changes have occurred in the priority countries and globally? 1.2. How has the Portfolio's support enabled PWUD communities and civil society to strengthen their voice and influence duty bearers (state actors) on drug policy reform? 1.3. How has the Portfolio's support enabled non-duty bearers (e.g., media, legal professionals, traditional leaders, religious leaders) to support PWUD community and civil society on drug policy reform? 1.4. How well has the regional and global work reinforced or amplified country-level work and vice-versa? 1.5. What contextual factors have shaped progress or setbacks, and what lessons can be drawn for future strategies on drug policy reform?
Pillar 2: Harm Reduction Funding Advocacy	2. How, to what extent, and in what contexts has the PWUD Portfolio influenced financial investment in harm reduction at country and global levels?	2.1. What progress have occurred from engaging global mechanisms and movements in shifting or unlocking new resources for harm reduction? 2.2. What new resources have been mobilised domestically in the priority countries? To what extent has the Portfolio strengthened country-level budget advocacy for sustainable government financing? 2.3. How well has the global work reinforced or amplified country-level work and vice-versa? 2.4. What contextual factors have shaped progress or setbacks, and what lessons can be drawn for future strategies on harm reduction budget advocacy?
Pillar 3: Harm Reduction Service Delivery	3. Is the PWUD Portfolio effective in improving harm reduction access for people who use drugs at the country level, and why?	3.1. To what extent have the Portfolio's pilot harm reduction models demonstrated relevance and effectiveness in improving health and HIV outcomes for people who use drugs? 3.2. To what extent have the Portfolio's pilot harm reduction models been scaled up, absorbed, or influenced policy and system integration?
Grant Making Approach	4. Has the PWUD Portfolio's layering approach across country, regional, and global levels been effective in advancing drug policy reform and harm reduction expansion?	4.1. Did the Portfolio fund the right partners and programmes vis-à-vis Portfolio's strategy? 4.2. What benefits, gaps, or missed opportunities emerged in the layering approach? How should this approach be adapted by the Foundation? 4.3. How well did the Portfolio synergise with other portfolios in the Foundation that are operating in the same country? 4.4. How valuable and appropriate has the Portfolio's management and non-financial support been for partners?

3.3. Values and Principles

This evaluation should be underpinned by the following values and principles:

Utilisation. A good and meaningful evaluation for the PWUD Team should generate insights that are credible, useful, and empowering for both the Foundation and the partners. It should deliver clear and actionable recommendations that the Foundation can realistically take forward. Moreover, it should provide clear summaries and outputs that are ready for use by the primary intended users.

Transparency. At its core, the evaluation should seek to producing evidence-based insights whilst creating space for partners and stakeholders to candidly share their perspectives that are free from donor-driven power imbalances. It should foster candid reflection, recognising that partners operate in highly constrained and criminalised environments, where progress and outcomes often cannot be judged solely by traditional, quantitative metrics. Honesty about both successes and shortcomings will be valued, stepping outside comfort zones to ask hard questions and surface genuine learning.

Representation. The evaluation should prioritise gathering diverse perspectives from across the Portfolio, including smaller community-led organisations and those in the Global South, to improve rigour and inclusivity.

Triangulation. The evaluation should use multiple data sources and multiple lines of evidence to produce credible insights. The evaluation should not reduce findings to a crude Value for Money framework but rather understand how our investments have ‘moved the needle’ in priority countries.

Ethical. The evaluation should be grounded in relevance and respect for partners’ time. Secondary data will be first utilised, so that additional data collection could focus on adding depth, nuance, and reflection, rather than duplicating effort. At the same time, it should set clear expectations about scope and limitations, avoiding over-claiming or forcing methods that are ill-suited to the KEQs.

3.4. Study Design

The evaluation is expected to utilise a mixture of designs and approaches (methodological bricolage⁴) to assess the performance of the Portfolio overall and per pillar.

As the most important part of the application, the proposal should clearly detail the framework, methodology, principles, and data collection methods on how to best answer each KEQs and sub-questions, including the rationale for your selection. We highly encourage a creative, non-traditional approach in this evaluation due to the complex nature of the Portfolio.

All grants within the PWUD Portfolio have quarterly monitoring reports against their project’s results chain and budget. Additionally, all strategic grants are expected to undergo an endline evaluation upon completion,⁵ and some grants have produced knowledge products in the form of abstracts, research studies, or workshops depending on the partner’s priorities. This evaluation is expected to build on these reports and studies.

⁴ Aston, T. and Appgar, M. (2022) The Art and Craft of Bricolage in Evaluation, CDI Practice Paper 24, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2022.068

⁵ Not all strategic grants would be completed during the portfolio evaluation. In such cases, major source of secondary data would be from the midline evaluation; otherwise, through the grant monitoring reports.

3.5. Evaluation Team

The evaluation will be hybrid, which means that the evaluation team will be composed by both an internal evaluator (Foundation MEL Manager) and external evaluator(s). The complexity of the PWUD Portfolio and time limitation of the evaluation warrants the knowledge and familiarity of an internal evaluator on the portfolio's work and the contexts they operate in, whilst complementing the additional expertise and impartiality of an external evaluator.

The proposal should outline the suggested delineation of key responsibilities between the internal evaluator and external evaluators. We expect the external team to have at least one lead (global) consultant or principal investigator, who will co-lead the evaluation with the Foundation MEL Manager, plus additional team members depending on the proposed study design. We highly encourage the inclusion of consultants coming from the priority countries of the Portfolio.

3.6. Deliverables and Timeline

The following are the key deliverables and timeframe for this assignment:

Deliverables	Expected Completion
1. Inception Report, including data collection tools	Mar / Apr 2026
2. First Draft Evaluation Report	July / August 2026
3. Second Draft Evaluation Report	August / September 2026
4. Final Evaluation Report, including an Executive Summary (3-5 pages), Full Narrative (max 30 pages), and Annexes	September / October 2026
5. Final datasets	September / October 2026

We are expecting to select the final consultant by the end of February 2026; and start the contracting process in early March 2026. Given this, inception planning is expected to commence mid- or late March 2026. We *must* have the final report by the early October 2026. We are estimating around **30 days⁶** for the completion of this assignment spread across this time period.

4. Qualifications

The external team should demonstrate:

- Strong evaluation experience, particularly on using various designs, analytical approaches, and methods (necessary)
- Strong experience in HIV programming, harm reduction, human rights, and movement building, particularly on people who use drugs communities (necessary)
- Strong experience working in fragile or restrictive legal contexts (necessary)
- Strong experience working in priority countries (necessary)
- Good understanding and experience on causal pathways and complexity-aware evaluation methodologies, as well as participatory and power-aware methods (desirable)
- Experience in evaluating strategy- and/or portfolio-level evaluation (desirable)
- Experience working in philanthropic space (desirable)
- Lived experience representation (desirable)

We expect the external team to have background in public health, social sciences (anthropology, sociology, or political science), and policy.

⁶ This is only a projected number of days by the Foundation, where 1 working day is equivalent to 8 hours. Please indicate your proposed number of days and overall project timeline in the proposal.

5. Application Process

5.1. Requirements

Applicants should submit a full technical proposal of **no more than 10 pages** (excluding timeline, Annexes, and Appendices) in English along with a detailed financial proposal in British Pound Sterling (GBP). The following are the *minimum* requirements that should be included in the application:

- Overall Approach and Methodology
- Ethical considerations and risk management
- Evaluation team and delineation of responsibilities
- Financial proposal in GBP (Annex or Appendix)
- Timeline (Annex)
- CVs of external team (Annex)
- Declaration of Conflict of Interest, with mitigation strategy if applicable (Annex)
- One sample report of a previous similar work (Appendix)

There is no set template for the technical proposal; however, we do not require a Background section, and it should begin with your proposed approach in answering the KEQs and sub-questions.

The financial proposal should reflect a realistic and cost-efficient budget that enables delivery of a high-quality evaluation whilst demonstrating value for money. Applicants should ensure that the proposed costs are aligned with the methodology, level of effort, scope, risks, and geographic spread of the assignment. A succinct narrative must be included in the budget table to explain assumptions behind each line. The funding request must be **no more than GBP 82,000**.

5.2. Submission

Please submit your queries and/or application by **15th February 2026, 23:59 GMT** using “Application: PWUD Portfolio Evaluation” as subject line to miguel.camacho@eltonjohnaidsfoundation.org

Applicants with more than one idea may submit multiple applications. Each idea requires a separate application, and applicants may submit **no more than two proposals**.

Applicants are responsible for all costs associated with proposal preparation. All enquiries will be treated confidentially. We welcome applications from around the world.

5.3. Modification and Withdrawal

Applicants may request to modify or withdraw their proposal by giving written notice to the Foundation before the deadline. Submission of revised proposals should be done before the deadline.

6. Proposal Review and Criteria

6.1. Review Process

The Foundation will establish an internal Review Committee, led by the Foundation MEL Manager, to assess the proposals in accordance with the RFP. The structure and composition of the Committee is in the sole discretion of the Foundation.

The Foundation MEL Manager will conduct an initial screening of the proposals in compliance with the requirements listed in Section 4.1. Non-compliant applications may not be considered for the next stage.

The Review Committee will then conduct a full review of the forwarded proposals from the initial screening based on the criteria and weightings set out below:

Criteria	Description	Weight
Technical Proposal (70%)		
Design and Approach	Rigour, feasibility, and clarity of proposed evaluation design and approach in answering the KEQs and suitability for priority countries	30%
Qualifications	Alignment of the external team's expertise, experience, and skills with the necessary and desirable requirements outlined in Section 4	15%
Values and Principles	Depth of integration of the Portfolio's values and principles in the proposal	10%
Risk Management	Identification of anticipated risks and associated mitigation plan, including safeguarding of community members	10%
Workplan Quality	Logical activities with realistic timeline, clear milestones, and resource allocation	5%
Financial Proposal (30%)		
Value for Money: Activities	Reasonable estimate for each of the proposed activities and indirect costs	10%
Value for Money: Human Resources	Reasonable estimate for each of the team member's daily rate and other costs	10%
Completeness and Transparency	Demonstrated consideration of all potential expenses, with full transparency in budgeting	10%
Total Weighted Score		100%

Below is the indicative scoring metrics for each criterion:

Scoring	Description: <i>The proposal gives the Foundation with a...</i>
1 – 3	Poor to weak level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet requirements
4 – 6	Moderate to Good level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet requirements
7 – 8	Very Good level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet requirements
9 – 10	Excellent level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet requirements

The Committee will rank all reviewed proposals and identify a shortlist of applicants based on their total weighted score. We will only contact applicants who are shortlisted, which is expected during the last week of February 2026.

6.2. Interview

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview between the last week of February 2026 and first week of March 2026. Interviews may include:

- Methodology deep dive and alignment
- Evaluation team roles and responsibilities alignment
- Budget clarification and alignment
- Administrative and logistical matters

Based on the interview discussion, the Foundation may submit a request to the shortlisted applicants for an amended proposal should they still be under consideration in the RFP process. The Foundation reserves the right to this request without commitment.

Shortlisted applicants may choose not to attend the interview or submit an amended proposal. However, this will automatically forfeit their application.

7. Awarding

7.1. Contracting Process

Following the final selection, the Foundation will engage the successful applicant through a formal contract. The contracting process will include:

Contracting Process	Indicative Timeline
a) Notification of selection	End of February 2026
b) Reference checks and Contract refinements	First two weeks of March 2026
c) Finalisation and signature of contract	
d) Project start / Kick-off meeting	Last two weeks of March 2026

Contracted applicants should be prepared to begin work promptly upon contract signature.

7.2. Contractual Obligations

The selected consultant will be required to comply with all the Foundation policies, terms, and conditions. Any failure to comply may result in contract suspension or termination.

7.3. Payment Terms

Payments will be made based on successful completion of deliverables, typically structured as:

- 20% on approval of the Inception Report
- 30% on submission of the First Draft Evaluation Report
- 20% on submission of the Second Draft Evaluation Report
- 30% on approval of the Final Draft Evaluation Report and submission of final datasets

Alternative schedules may be considered and agreed with the Foundation during the contracting process.

7.4. Quality Assurance

The Foundation reserves the right to request revisions of deliverables if they do not meet the Foundation standards. Performance of the consultant(s) will be assessed on timeliness, quality of work, ethical conduct, and responsiveness to the Foundation.

Annex

PWUD Portfolio Theory of Change (Simplified, visual version)

