

# Setting priorities for the Robert Carr Civil Society Networks Fund for 2013 and 2014

The International Steering Committee (ISC) of the Robert Carr Civil Society Networks Fund (RCNF) held its first face-to-face meeting in Amsterdam this week. Inspired by Robert's commitment to vulnerable communities and protecting their human rights across the world, the RCNF is aimed at: a) supporting global and regional civil society networks addressing critical factors for scaling up access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support; and b) protecting the rights of inadequately served populations across the world.

The RCNF focusses on networks that support inadequately served populations. These are key and other populations that face a higher HIV risk, mortality and/or morbidity when compared to the general population and at the same time have less access to information and services. They include people living with HIV, gay men and other men who have sex with men, women and men who use drugs, prisoners, sex workers and transgender people and in a number of localities would also include women and girls, youth, migrants and people living in rural areas. Civil society networks play a crucial role in fighting the barriers to access to services for these populations but are increasingly facing considerable financial challenges in the current funding environment.

Launched in Washington DC in July last year, the RCNF announced its first funding decisions last December. Following a peer review process 24 regional and global networks were awarded grants for a total of \$5.4 million. The grant period for this first round began January 1<sup>st</sup> and will end December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013.

The first round of the RCNF has been an important learning experience. The ISC is using the lessons learned to improve both the processes and impact of its funding. ISC members also appreciate the patience of our stakeholders as we learn and adapt. We value the thoughtful feedback that was received directly from global and regional networks, as well as from individuals. This feedback was carefully considered when making decisions during our first meeting and will continue to inform future decisions. The ISC committed to continuously improving its processes and the impact of its funding, based on lessons learned from experience and feedback it receives.

The ISC of the RCNF has refined its vision and goals and made decisions on a number of key issues. They include the following:

1. The **application eligibility criteria** will be improved by making them more specific. They include clearer definitions of 'networks', of 'regional' and 'core costs'. The focus of the RCNF will remain, first and foremost, on supporting quality work that has a clear and meaningful impact in fulfilling the RCNF's core outcomes. The RCNF decided that it will support networks with substantive track records on results. It will also fund new or emerging networks if they fill a gap and are submitting their application as part of a consortium with other proven networks that can provide mentoring and support as the new or emergent networks grow. The RCNF will continue to fund both global and regional networks but with a positive funding bias towards proposals submitted by consortia of networks or by global networks.
2. The **application review process** will be improved by developing a clearer set of criteria for assessing global versus regional proposals, by balancing the assessment criteria of different types of activities and by having an improved due diligence procedure as part of the application process. The ISC will develop and share publically a clearer Conflict of Interest Policy for both members of the ISC and the

Programme Advisory Panel (PAP). In addition to being reviewed by the PAP, which advises the ISC on which proposals to fund, each proposal will be reviewed by two external reviewers. A new rebuttal system will encourage interaction between the networks and the PAP.

3. **Transparency** will be further increased by having an improved Call for Proposals, by publishing the review form and criteria to be used by the PAP, and by publishing the funding decisions. Each applicant will receive an explanation of any funding decision specific to its application.
4. The ISC has defined and clarified the respective **governance and management roles** within the RCNF: the ISC being the final decision making body, the PAP advising the ISC, the Fund Management Agent (FMA) – the Dutch Aids Fonds – supporting the ISC and PAP and contracting donors and grantees on behalf of the RCNF. The Dutch Aids Fond also serves as the Secretariat of the RCNF. The current Governance Charter will be reviewed, improved and published on the website.
5. **Monitoring** of funded grants will be strongly linked to the four outcomes:
  - *Improved capacity of global and regional networks to support meaningful participation of inadequately served populations in influencing the delivery of effective HIV responses at the global, regional and national levels;*
  - *Increased organizational capacity and technical expertise within inadequately served populations to influence HIV responses for greater relevance, better delivery, and improved equitable access;*
  - *Identified policy gaps, addressed barriers to service access, redressed human rights abuses, reduced stigma and discrimination, and expanded legal services for inadequately served populations;*
  - *Resource mobilisation to ensure that HIV responses have sufficient, strategically targeted investments to deliver results.*

A draft roadmap or 'theory of change' will be developed to better clarify the synergies and linkages between regional and global networks within the broader civil society architecture. The draft roadmap will articulate possible pathways from activities delivered by networks to the goal and outcomes of the RCNF, which in turn lead to intended impacts at the national level.

6. The RCNF decided to have a **midterm review** of its activities and processes in 2014.
7. The RCNF will launch a **new round for proposals** no later than June 2013 in order to make funding decisions known by December 1 2013. Global and regional networks or consortiums of networks will be asked to submit proposals for two years of funding. Details on the funding levels available across global networks, regional networks, and consortia of networks will be clearly described in a new RFP. Networks that received funding in the first round will be asked to submit new proposals to enable a fair review of all applicants based on the same enhanced processes.
8. **Communication** of the RCNF will be largely improved by a new communication strategy and a new website.
9. The ISC is extremely concerned by the dramatic **funding gap** that remains to fund the critical work of global and regional networks. This became very clear again in the

results of the survey held in January among the eligible networks for round 1. Over half of the budgets in 2013 of the networks still need to be funded. The ISC encourages donors to increase their funding for this work either through the RCNF or directly to networks and other funding channels. The ISC will develop a fundraising strategy in order to attract new donors.

10. The ISC is to strengthen the **collaboration** of the RCNF with civil society networks, donors, UNAIDS, and the Global Fund to fight HIV, TB and Malaria in support of civil society's contribution to the AIDS response.

The ISC is hopeful that these decisions will contribute to strengthened regional and global civil society networks devoted to improving the lives of inadequately served populations. We hope that this communique and on-going dialogue with the RCNF stakeholders will allow for a better understanding of the aims of the RCNF and how it functions. We are grateful to civil society, governments, foundations and other institutions for their support of this new instrument aimed at safeguarding a critical component of the international effort in global health.

On behalf of the International Steering Committee,

Michel Kazatchkine, Chair  
George Ayala, Vice-Chair  
Ton Coenen, Fund Management Agent (Aids Fonds)

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*Members of the International Steering Committee are: Erika Arthun, George Ayala (vice-Chair), Jude Byrne, Sophie Dilmitis, David Haroz, Michel Kazatchkine (Chair), Anna Seymour, Anne Skjelmerud, Kenly Sikwese. Kate Thomson and Peter van Rooijen are observers.*

[Annex 1](#): the Vision, goals and outcomes of the Robert Carr Civil Society Networks Fund