Call for Proposals
ALNAP 33rd Annual Meeting Papers

Overview

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance is a network of international humanitarian actors comprising Academics, Donors, Non-Governmental Organisations, Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations and United Nations Organisations, dedicated to improving humanitarian performance through organisational and systemic learning. The Network holds an Annual Meeting structured around a theme of interest to the membership: recent themes have included change processes in humanitarian organisations, collaboration, and engaging with crisis affected populations.

Due to restrictions related to COVID-19, this year ALNAP will hold a virtual ‘curtain raiser’ for its 33rd Annual Meeting, which will be held in person in mid-2021. The ALNAP Secretariat intends to engage a research consultant to produce a set of papers for both the virtual curtain-raising event and the in-person meeting. The key deliverables for this work are:

- Up to four short (5 pages) Discussion Papers, to inform virtual sessions on the theme of uncertainty
- A Background Paper, written on the basis of discussions from the virtual sessions and wider literature, provided prior to the in-person event in 2021
- A Meeting Study, produced after the Annual Meeting, reflecting the conversations and learning from the Meeting participants

The consultant will also be expected to contribute substantively to the design and content of the virtual sessions, which will be organised by the ALNAP Secretariat. The consultant will participate in the virtual event in November 2020 and attend the in-person meeting in mid-2021 (TBC).

Background

Facing the unknown is a consistent reality for humanitarian actors. Large-scale international emergencies may happen unexpectedly. And, whether large or small, crises unfold in unpredictable ways. We don’t always know how people and governments will react, if or how populations will move and for what period of time, and what resources will be available. We often lack information – about both the present situation, and how it may develop in the future.
But while humanitarians are experts in responding to crises and dealing with unknowns, they are not experts in managing uncertainty. This difference has become apparent in recent months, as the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the globe, creating unprecedented, long-lasting and wide-ranging uncertainty.

COVID-19 has forced humanitarians to reckon with an unknown present and an unknown future: ‘Who is affected?’ ‘What is safe?’ ‘What will happen?’ ‘What should we do?’ ‘When will things be more certain?’. It has shown how humanitarian actors (and people and organisations of all sizes in many sectors, for that matter) can struggle to adjust quickly to handle new uncertainties. But in looking to manage uncertain futures in humanitarian settings, important practical and ethical questions emerge – not least of which are what organisational resources might be needed and how crisis-affected people could be included in decision-making.

Humanitarians have developed different strategies to handle the unknown – all with various degrees of success. Risk management aims to deal with the unknown by measuring and mitigating. Scenario planning is used to identify and prepare for different possible futures in a crisis. And rapid cyclical approaches to monitoring and learning, though used less commonly, can allow humanitarians to adjust humanitarian delivery over time. These different approaches online underline the fact that, although there is a growing body of experience and learning, we lack a shared language for and understanding of uncertainty in humanitarian action and how to manage it.

It is within this context that the 33rd ALNAP Annual Meeting will explore the challenges posed by uncertainty for humanitarian action and the things that humanitarians can do to better equip themselves to respond. The Meeting will look at effective approaches for managing uncertainty.

**Aim and Scope of the documents**

The Discussion Papers will be based on a short literature review and are intended to:

- Introduce the theme of the Annual Meeting
- Frame the broad scope of discussions
- Provide an overview of existing/current good practice on dealing with uncertainty
- Identify key questions for consideration at the meeting

The contents of the Discussion Papers will be determined by the literature review. However, at this stage, we would expect the following elements to fall within the scope of the review:

- What is the difference between risk and uncertainty, and what are the strengths and limitations to applying risk management approaches to uncertainty?
- How can tools such as scenario planning, anticipatory action and modelling help humanitarians plan for uncertainty?
- What impact does the ability to plan for and respond in uncertainty have on affected populations? How are humanitarians perceived during uncertainty?
• What financing and programming models are needed to plan for and respond in uncertainty? How should monitoring, evaluation and accountability systems take account of uncertainty?

• How should decisions be made in uncertainty?

• When situations are highly uncertain, how should the risk burden be shared between national and international actors, implementers and donors? What are the most effective approaches?

• How do crisis-affected communities think about and manage uncertainty, and what can humanitarian programmes learn from this?

• How can individual humanitarian practitioners accept and cope with uncertainty? What skills and support do front line workers and humanitarian professionals need to function well under uncertainty?

• In what ways can humanitarian actors work together to effectively handle the broad uncertainties facing the sector?

• What can we learn from the COVID-19 pandemic about dealing with uncertainty?

**Expected output**

**Contributions to Event Design:**
The consultants will be expected to participate actively in event design, including identification of speakers and facilitators on the basis of best practices identified in the literature review.

**Discussion Papers:**
The consultants will be expected to produce a final set of up to 4 documents ready for copyedit, approximately 2,000-3,000 words each, in MS Word, with bibliography, text boxes and any appendices, tables and diagrams required. This document should adhere to the ODI Style Guide and include correct references for all bibliographical sources.

**Virtual event facilitation:**
The consultants will be asked to facilitate one of the sessions for the virtual learning event.

**Background Paper:**
The consultants will be expected to produce a long-form paper, based on the Discussion Papers and content from the virtual event, as well as additional interviews and desk-based research. This will be a document, of 12,000 words, in MS Word, with bibliography, text boxes and any appendices, tables and diagrams required. This document should adhere to the ODI Style Guide and include correct references for all bibliographical sources.

**Final Meeting Study:**
The consultants will also be expected to produce a second copy-ready final document (the Meeting Study) of 15,000—25,000 words, in MS Word, with bibliography, text boxes and any appendices, tables and diagrams required. This document should adhere to the ODI Style Guide and include correct references for all bibliographical sources.
Process

The consultant will work with the ALNAP Secretariat closely to suggest detailed literature on the topic.

Support provided by ALNAP will be as follows: [Please note that all travel will be paid for directly by ALNAP (unless agreed in advance) and will not be billed by the consultant]

- Coding software for transcript coding
- Travel costs for attendance of the in-person meeting
- Travel costs for attendance of any launch event, if travel is required

Day Allocation

This contract is expected to cover 55–65 days over the period of September 2020 – September 2021. The end date for the contract will be dependent on the ability to organise an in person Meeting in mid-2021.

Schedule of Tasks and Key Deliverable Deadlines

Deadlines:
Discussion Papers first draft for comment from ALNAP Secretariat: Q4 2020
Discussion Papers final draft for copyedit: Q4 2020
Virtual event facilitation: 18-19 November
Background Paper first draft for comment from Secretariat: Q1 2021
Further deadlines TBC depending on date of in-person Meeting in 2021

Schedule of tasks:

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How to apply

Please send a CV and Expression of Interest by Monday, 31 August, to: alnap@alnap.org

The Expression of Interest should be no more than 5 pages in length and should include:

- A brief statement of your motivations in applying for this work, and description of relevant prior research and work;
- A description of key tasks and day allocations against each deliverable;
- Links to two pieces of published work that are indicative of the consultant's writing style for this type of work.