



**Assessing Priority Research Questions of Indian National Health Programmes
through Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT):
SORT IT to achieve SDG targets for TB in India
[ICMR-NIE TB SORT IT project 2024-26]**

#25YearsofICMRNIE

Note

This course is structured in line with the SORT IT curriculum and requirements, with the potential for eventual TDR registration/accreditation during the course cycle

Call for Applications

Background

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)-National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE) [ICMR-NIE], Chennai is one of the permanent institutes of the ICMR, Department of Health Research (DHR), Government of India. ICMR-NIE located in Chennai is ICMR's flagship organization that focuses on training and research in the areas of biostatistics, epidemiology, public health and health systems (<https://nie.gov.in/>). ICMR-NIE has played a key role in supporting India's national TB program in developing the methodology for subnational certification to monitor progress towards ending TB and a differentiated TB care model aimed at reducing TB deaths. Based on the request of Central TB Division, we led two national level evaluation projects, one on active case finding and second on direct benefit transfer. We are hopeful the recommendations will contribute towards achieving the outcomes of active case finding and direct benefit transfer, taking us closer to the SDG targets for TB.

ICMR-NIE hosts the ICMR School of Public Health. This course will be conducted by the Division of Health Systems Research of ICMR-NIE, under the aegis of ICMR School of Public Health.

Any research used to generate practically usable knowledge to improve program implementation, regardless of the type of research is called operational research (OR). We use OR to denote both operational and implementation research (for details, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V39XdsJa1M>). **The purpose of this OR capacity building initiative is to not only enhance the capacity of TB programme managers and implementers of India in OR but also to generate evidence by answering priority OR questions set by India's National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) in TB and TB related areas.** Evidence generated from these ORs from routine programme settings will guide existing policy and/or practice and help us move closer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) TB targets (for year 2030 when compared to 2015): 80% reduction in TB incidence, 90% reduction in TB deaths and zero catastrophic costs due to TB care. WHO/TDR coordinated Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT) approach will be used.

ICMR-NIE is a SORT IT collaborating institute and the WHO/TDR coordinated SORT IT approach will be used in India during 2024-26 to

- Enhance the capacity of India's NTEP programme managers/implementers, and managers/implementers/researchers/academicians from NTEP partner organizations in OR
- Generate evidence for decision making within India's NTEP for practice and/or policy change

The strategy of this programme will be

- Identification of participants through a competitive process (mentees)
- Identification of suitable SORT IT mentors
- Linkage of mentors to mentees
- Developing OR capacity through mentored OR projects and papers around **TB and TB related areas** (leading to first-year SORT IT and second-year M-PHISOR certificate)

ICMR-NIE Chennai (**lead institution/secretariat**) and **SORT IT partners (co-institutions experienced in SORT IT in India)** plan to implement this along with support and guidance from Central TB Division and WHO India.

ICMR-NIE invites applications from managers, implementers from NTEP and managers, implementers, researchers, and academicians from NTEP partner organizations for this national Operational Research training course over two years. This is a "SORT IT" (Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative) course and is conducted under the umbrella of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases at the World Health Organization (WHO-TDR). SORT IT supports organisations, projects and countries to undertake operational research in accordance with their own priorities, develop adequate and sustainable operational research capacity, and create an organisational culture of policy

and practice being informed by operational research, leading to improved programme performance (for details, visit <https://tdr.who.int/activities/sort-it-operational-research-and-training>).

The initiative teaches the practical skills needed to undertake and publish operational research. The course duration is two years with 3 modules per year with clear milestones and measurable targets. Failure to fulfil the expected outputs linked to each module implies the candidate does not return for the next module. Participants go through the whole research process and complete the SORT IT course (first year) and M-PHISOR course (second year) with a defined product which is a peer-reviewed OR manuscript to be submitted for publication (one per year) in peer-reviewed scientific journals which in turn contributes to improved policy and/or practice.

Number of Participants

This certificate course proposes to include 12 participants (mentees - Indian nationals) for a period of two years. The participants retain their existing affiliation and attend nineteen days (divided across three modules) per year of in person modular training in Chennai. Mentees could be managers, implementers from NTEP and managers, implementers, researchers, and academicians from NTEP partner organizations. The researcher may be an operational researcher / technical partner from WHO India / research institutions / academia / NGOs / other not-for-profit organizations who are closely working the NTEP. We do not encourage participants from for profit / private sector. Selection will be competitive. Application from participants who have already completed or attended a SORT IT course will be rejected. Young participants (<40 years) will be preferred. However, this should not discourage others to apply.

Faculty for the course

The course will be facilitated by SORT IT mentors. These include experienced, reputed SORT IT faculty and successful participants of the earlier SORT IT course in India/elsewhere who have now been promoted as junior/senior mentors.

Modules in year one (SORT IT)

Year one of the course is composed of three practical modules (in person at Chennai), conducted over a period of 12 months.

Module 1: Research question and protocol development – 29 July to 03 Aug 2024 (key deliverable, see milestone 1 below)

Module 2: Data management and data analysis – 05 to 10 Aug 2024 (key deliverable, see milestone 2 and 3 below)

Module 3: Scientific paper writing – 07 to 14 March 2025 (key deliverable, see milestone 4 below)

Milestones in year one (SORT IT)

Milestone 1 - Submission of OR proposal to CCHRC Ethics committee (deadline 26 Aug 2024)

Milestone 2 - Submitting the data capture tool and data analysis plan to course coordinator (deadline 26 Aug 2024)

Milestone 3 - Submission of the OR related anonymized data and draft analysis to course coordinator (deadline 03 Feb 2025)

Milestone 4 - Submission of OR paper to peer reviewed indexed scientific journal (deadline 14 April 2025)

Modules and milestone in year 2 (M-PHISOR)

The module and milestone dates for year 2 (2025-26) will be finalized in March 2025.

Research

Each year, the OR will have to be carried out within 6 to 8 months, encouraging simple research projects at sufficient scale that address priority OR questions of NTEP (<https://tbcindia.gov.in/WriteReadData/l892s/7358744598RNTCP%20research%20priorities.pdf>). These should be mostly based on secondary quantitative data that are routinely collected and available in paper-based forms (registers or treatment cards) or electronic databases. The secondary data may be captured retrospectively and/or prospectively. Only if required and guided by the research question, some variables (quantitative or qualitative) may be collected as primary data (data that is not routinely captured by the program). Feasibility to do so within the course timelines should also be considered as such OR proposals (involving primary data) usually undergo a full ethics review and this process takes time. Based on experience, we advise participants to submit concept notes involving secondary data as much as possible. To summarize, OR involving patient interventions and patient questionnaires (primary data) are less likely to be accepted as suitable for this course as they cannot usually be completed within the time frame.

The second OR proposed in year two may be follow up OR to document change or assess a different research question under the same theme. For example, in year 1, the OR may assess the losses and predictors of losses in a care cascade. By acting on the findings, in year two, the same OR may be repeated to assess changes in the care cascade. Alternately, in year one, for an initiative, the implementation fidelity may be assessed and in year two the implementation outcomes or impact may be assessed.

The research questions around **TB and TB related conditions** proposed in the concept note by the participants in their application should be of direct relevance to NTEP.

SORT IT and M-PHISOR certificates

On attending all three modules and successful completion of all milestones in year one, the participant will receive a WHO/TDR accredited SORT IT certificate from ICMR-NIE. Similarly, on attending all three modules and successful completion of all milestones in year one, the participant will receive a M-PHISOR (Mentorship for Public Health Implementation Strengthening and Operational Research) certificate from ICMR-NIE. There is no participation certificate.

What does the participant gain?

- Practical skills for undertaking the entire operational research process from concept to publication
- The experience of learning and sharing knowledge within a team of motivated participants and talented facilitators in operational research (who act as mentors) from different countries.
- An opportunity to excel and gain visibility in operational research and to prepare for increased research responsibilities and research leadership in their country
- Participants are strongly encouraged to help train and eventually lead others (as mentors) to maximise long term capacity development and impact. The philosophy used is “see one, do one, teach one”

What does the participant’s organization gain?

- A person who is well trained in OR and can help their program or institution undertake relevant OR to identify challenges and improve programme performance in a sustainable manner.
- The approach will strongly complement “innovation” within routine operations and contribute to critical reflection on program orientation and its impact over time.

Course follow-up

- In between the modules 2 and 3, candidates will return to their respective health programmes/projects to continue their routine work and in addition collect the data pertaining to their OR projects.
- Participants will be contacted intermittently after course completion to determine accomplishments and policy and practice impact of their studies.
- Course facilitators will be available to provide guidance.

Criteria for successful applicants

- Involved actively in the running of a national or state or NGO programme or major health institution in a program or disease specific field
- Statement from applicant - Provide written commitment to attend all three modules per year over two years of the training course, return to their programme or

institution after the course and implement course knowledge at programme level for a minimum of at least 30 months from the start of the course. **This is mandatory and we urge you to use the standard template provided.**

- Name, contact details and statement from supervisor - Provide a written statement from the supervisor or coordination/operations or relevant authority attesting to the investment of resources and granting the applicant permission to have time and opportunity to carry out and publish operational research (with applicant being the first author) and adhere to all the course milestones and timelines. **This is mandatory and we urge you to use the attached standard template.** Name and contact details of the supervisor should be kept ready before filling the online application.
- Name, contact details and statement from an experienced local mentor is encouraged (not mandatory). Name and contact details of the supervisor should be kept ready before filling the online application (not mandatory).
- Recommendation letters from those other than supervisor, local mentor (not mandatory) that can strengthen the application are also encouraged (heads of other directorates, policy makers and so on). **For medical college faculty / researchers / NTEP partners / WHO medical consultant, letter of recommendation from the state program manager (or higher level) will strengthen the application (not mandatory).**
- Ability to mobilize the funding required to carry out operational research. Please note that we do not provide any funds for conduct of research which should be conducted in routine operational settings utilizing existing workforce and resources.
- **Outline a one - two-page concept note (one page for each year)** with a) title (max 20 words) a) description of a problem that the candidate has identified within a given program (max 250 words) b) formulate a research question (using PICOT format) that is proposed to be developed into an operational research project (max 100 words). Please note that the research questions using already available routine programme data (secondary data) are preferred as studies involving primary data collection are unlikely to fit into the time-line and expected outputs of the course and .c) brief methodology (max 250 words) including whether primary or secondary data collection (if secondary, what is the source of data and whether it is available in paper-based or in electronic format and whether you have the permission to access data). **Submitting a two-page concept note is mandatory.**
- Masters in Public Health (MPH) or an equivalent, or a strong recommendation
- Fluent in written and spoken English and computer literate

Sponsorship

- We will provide a full scholarship to successful applicants (12 numbers). The scholarship includes all tuition fees, travel expenses, meals and accommodation.

How to apply?

Please read this call for applications document completely before applying.

Application deadline: **Monday, 17 June 2024**

To access the templates for the supporting documents: [Cntl+Left Click here for Templates](#)

Application along with supportive documents must be submitted online using the online application link provided below. We will NOT accept applications over other channels of communication.

[Cntl+Left Click here for Online Application link](#)

In addition to filling the required details in the online application link, the supporting documents (all merged into a single pdf) that must be uploaded at the end of the application are:

- *Short one page CV of applicant (no template provided) - mandatory*
- *Statement from applicant (template provided) - mandatory*
- *Statement from supervisor (template provided) – mandatory*
- *Two-page concept note (one page for each year – template provided) - mandatory*
- *Recommendations from a local mentor (no template provided - not mandatory)*
- *Other recommendation letters to strengthen your application, say letter of support from the state (or higher level) program manager (no template provided - not mandatory)*

For any other clarifications, please email ICMR-SPH office (icmrniesph@nie.gov.in) with a copy to Dr Hemant D Shewade, Scientist E, Division of Health Systems Research, ICMR-NIE (hemant@nie.gov.in)

Note:

1. Failure to provide all the above requested information and documents in the suggested templates will result in the rejection of your application at the stage of screening itself. Incomplete applications will also be discarded at the stage of screening.
2. The decision of ICMR-NIE will be final in matters related to the selection to the course. You will not be able to pursue any dispute related to selection matters legally. Apply to the course only if you agree to this condition.
3. Please note that all supporting documents must be merged as a single pdf