



**International
Science Council**
The global voice for science

BELMONT
F O R U M



NORFACE
NETWORK

Request for expressions of interest for a synthesis study of the Belmont Forum–NORFACE Transformations to Sustainability programme

The International Science Council, on behalf of the Belmont Forum and NORFACE network, is seeking an expert or team of experts to work with the ISC in designing and conducting a synthesis study of the knowledge and learning emerging from the Transformations to Sustainability (T2S) programme.

Terms of Reference

I. Background

Goals and objectives of the T2S Programme

The Belmont Forum–NORFACE T2S programme contributes to re-structuring the domain of sustainability research by putting the social sciences, as well as the humanities, at the heart of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on sustainability, making a step change in scale and scope for research programming in this area. The programme, which was launched to the public in 2017, has two major goals:

- To develop understanding of and promote research on transformations to sustainability which are of significant social, economic and policy concern throughout the world and of great relevance to both academics and stakeholders.
- To build capacity, overcome fragmentation and have a lasting impact on both society and the research landscape by cultivating durable research collaboration across multiple borders, disciplinary boundaries, and with practitioners and societal partners.

The T2S programme funds twelve transnational research projects that are studying the challenges of transformations to sustainability in widely different socio-environmental domains and contexts around the globe.

See www.t2sresearch.org for more information about the programme and the projects.

Rationale for a synthesis study

The midterm evaluation of the T2S programme in 2020 highlighted both the significant opportunities for cross-project, integrated knowledge production and learning offered by the programme and the difficulties in realizing those opportunities due to resource constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two major areas of potential learning and synthesis of knowledge have been identified:

- *In the theory of and methodological approaches to transformations to sustainability.* Given that the projects work on a range of very different social-ecological problems and solutions, and with varying approaches, synergy and synthesis across them is crucial to scaling up findings and developing theory – for example, in relation to how social transformation can be accelerated or steered, and the role of transdisciplinary research approaches. There is a need for critical, comparative and synthetic analysis of findings and evidence from the projects.
- *In programme design for transformations to sustainability research.* The T2S programme offers an opportunity to learn about how principles and features of international transdisciplinary research programme design influence the shape, processes and outcomes of research programmes and the achievement of programme objectives and goals. The current programme was inspired by the T2S programme of the International Social science Council (now the International Science Council), which had similar programme objectives and principles but some structural differences (see www.transformationstosustainability.org). A comparative analysis of the design of the two programmes would produce useful insights for future international research programmes which aim to foster integrated, engaged research for sustainability.

The overarching goal of the study is thus to make the best possible programme-level contribution to knowledge on (1) transformations to sustainability and (2) how to enable and foster research for transformations to sustainability in terms of programme design, drawing on the ongoing work and findings of all projects in the programme and on perspectives from all regions of the world represented in the projects.

II. Users of the study

The immediate users of the study will be the programme funders. However, the study will produce findings that will be of direct interest to the sustainability research and policy community and to research funders, as well as to practitioners in the sustainability domain. Some of the agreed deliverables could be aimed at broader audiences.

III. Specific objectives of the study

The consultant will undertake the following actions:

1. Scoping/mapping the potential contributions to theory, methods, policy or practice in transformations to sustainability from across the current projects and identifying, in consultation with the programme members and coordinators, those which should form the focus of synergy and synthesis work. Any synthesis work already produced on the three completed projects from the ISC T2S programme should be considered. All the current projects should be engaged to some degree in the consultation and synthesis work (with the support of the T2S programme coordinators), paying attention to the goal of supporting collaboration across academic disciplines, societal sectors and parts of the world.
2. Synthesizing the learning on the agreed topical foci.
3. Making a comparative and critical analysis of the design of the ISC–T2S programme and the Belmont Forum–NORFACE programme and of the impact of design features on the shape, processes and outcomes or anticipated outcomes of the two programmes.
4. Presenting and helping disseminate the findings and results of the study.

IV. Approach and methodology

It is expected that the study will begin with an exploration and scoping phase that will determine the chosen approach and deliverables, which may further evolve over the course of the study, in consultation with the Advisory Committee.

For Specific Objectives 1-3, the consultant(s) will be expected not simply to review and synthesize outputs of the 12 current projects (not least since the projects will be ongoing until between early and late 2022), but rather to actively engage the projects in an exploratory, collaborative and synergetic process of producing collective knowledge. Consultative processes involving the programme funders and wider community of transformations to sustainability researchers could be considered.

However, the study should not impose an undue workload on the project members. To the greatest extent possible, they should be engaged in the production of collective knowledge through activities that enrich and contribute to their work or professional development. It is expected that activities will include not only the project leaders but also other project partners, academic and societal, and especially from the Global South.

For Specific Objective 4, it is expected that the consultant(s) will review written documentation and consult key respondents via survey or web-based or telephone meetings.

V. Governance and accountability

The main point of contact for the consultant will be the T2S Programme Coordinator at the ISC, who will liaise with the main T2S coordination office.

The study will be overseen by an Advisory Committee representing the funders, research projects and other stakeholders. The Advisory Committee will make the final decision on the selection of the contractor.

VI. Guiding principles and values

The consultant will be asked to observe the procurement guidelines of the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) which are observed by the ISC.

The consultant will be asked to observe the ISC core values (see Box) in its approach to and execution of the study.

1. Excellence and professionalism: The Council will deliver work of the highest quality and professional standards. It will be precise in articulating scientific understanding, including its uncertainties, and rigorous in ensuring that what is communicated reflects the best contemporary scientific findings.
2. Inclusivity and diversity: The Council will promote access to science and its benefits for all, rejecting discrimination in all its forms. It will include perspectives and approaches from all parts of the world, and improve the participation of women and early career scientists in international science.

3. Transparency and integrity: The default position for the Council's governance and decision-making processes will be openness and transparency, except where confidentiality is strictly required. The actions of all those acting on its behalf must demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity.
4. Innovation and sustainability: The Council will identify, attract and learn from new talent and new ideas. It will stimulate new approaches, put forward new solutions and embed the principles of sustainability in its own policies and practices.

VII. Profile of the consultant

It is expected that the consultant will be an individual or a small team of experts, at the same or different institutions, if complementary skills are available. The consultant(s) should have knowledge of the landscape of (transdisciplinary) social science research on environmental change and transformations to sustainability, as well as demonstrated experience in knowledge synthesis and the study of science. Experience of international, North–South scientific collaboration and English language proficiency are essential.

VIII. Deliverables

The consultant will be required to produce the following deliverables, in the English language:

1. A draft final concept note outlining the initial scope of and approach to the study A timeline with milestones for activity during the study, including the desk study, any interviews with projects/funders, etc. to ensure mutual agreement before work commences.
2. Presentation of interim and final findings/results to the programme funders.
3. A substantive report or reports oriented to policy and stakeholder audiences interested in knowing more about the state of knowledge on transformations to sustainability and how best to support solutions-oriented research on transformations to sustainability, in terms of programme design. The full reports are to be complemented by executive summaries.
4. A publicly oriented virtual event (e.g. webinar, conference) to communicate and discuss the findings of the work.
5. Powerpoint presentation with graphic illustration of the findings/results, as appropriate, for use by the programme funders.
6. Proposals/concepts for an innovative, non-academic outreach product, e.g. podcast, video, comic strip, exhibition, brief.

IX. Schedule

The timeframe for the study is approximately 15 months (with a definitive end date of 31 December 2022).

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 Jun 2021: | Request for expressions of interest |
| 30 Jun 2021: | Deadline for expressions of interest |
| Jul 2021: | Exploratory discussions with shortlisted candidates |
| 15 Aug 2021: | Selection of consultant and agreement on terms |
| 1 Sep 2021: | Launch of study |

1 June 2021

30 Sep 2021: Agreement on initial concept note (see Deliverable 1)

31 Nov 2022: End of study

X. Budget and payment

The budget foreseen for this study, including VAT, is 40,000 EUR.

An advance of 50% will be made on conclusion of an agreement; a second payment of 30% may be made after 6 months; and the balance paid on approval of the final deliverables.

The consultant(s) will work from their own home/office, on their own computer.

The ISC will arrange and pay for any required travel, if necessary and agreed in advance, based on the ISC Travel Policy and COVID-19-related conditions permitting.

Production or technical costs for outputs/deliverables will be covered from another budget but should be costed in any bid.

XI. Structure of the expression of interest and submission guidelines

Expressions of interest must be received by 30 June 2021 and should include:

1. Cover letter explaining the interest of the consultant(s) in this mission.
2. Tentative study plan (e.g. 3 pages), covering:
 - The consultant's understanding of the mission
 - The proposed initial approach to the study, including possible methodologies, work plan and deliverables
 - The expertise and role of the expert(s) to be involved.
3. Indicative budget.
4. Short CV of the expert(s) with details of relevant experience.

Expressions of interest should be submitted to Sarah Moore at the ISC (contact details below). The ISC will invite shortlisted candidates to an exploratory discussion in July, before making a final selection.

XII. Selection criteria

1. Qualifications of the expert(s) (competence and experience)
2. Feasibility and appropriateness of the study plan and proposed approach
3. Appropriateness of the budget

XIII. Contacts

Questions about this request for proposals may be addressed to Sarah Moore at sarah.moore@council.science