

RFA #2019-016 Q&A #1 Transcription

Carl: Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, everybody. Thank you for joining the Q&A call for the RFA on openIMIS that was just released. This is the first Q&A call. The second Q&A call is for a few hours later. For those wondering if you need to join both, the content that will be presented will be the same. We will just be responding to questions received. So, if the questions are the same, then the answer should be the same. What we just wanted to do is to provide an opportunity for you all to ask any questions for clarification on the RFA and to make sure everybody was clear as to processes and expectations and how we can work together. So, the RFA was released last week and we're using our Open Application Process that we have been using with Digital Square for this which means that you'll use our website applications.digitalsquare.io for submission of applications and concept notes. The applications and concept note submissions are public and can become commented on by people within the community, and the idea behind this is to encourage cooperation and identify opportunities to work together that you wouldn't necessarily have identified otherwise. To begin I'm Carl Leitner, the Technical Director for Digital Square and I'm here to help answer some of the technical or programmatic questions. We also have Paris Jones on the line who is supporting this from the operational and contracting side.

To give a little bit of background, Digital Square has been supporting openIMIS as it transitioned from a closed source software into an open source software and has gone through a change in the underlying software architecture to be more compliant with HL7 FHIR standards, the modular framework, rather than a monolithic framework and that work has been initiated under tenders issued by GIZ as well as a prior funding cycle of Notice C1 from Digital Square. You can see in this roadmap some sense of a timeline of where we are within the modularization. There's a lot of work yet to be done, but significant work has already been done in terms of setting up the monolithic architecture linking to a HL7 FHIR data store and starting some of the claiming module workflows within the HL7 FHIR standard. In this RFA, we're looking to continue and build upon that work as well as introduce new functionality through new modules and linked to other data services or build other data services such as through fraud detection. The aim is that we hope to award or begin the contracting process in November, with anticipation of December/January to begin, and completion of work over by late summer of 2020. There are three main components in the RFA. The first is the continuation of the modernization of openIMIS, which was in a MS. NET and we're moving to Python. The main language for the modernization again linking quite strongly with HL7 FHIR server. Here in this scope of work, what we're really looking for is to work on the modules that have not been taken up. These modules are documented on the openIMIS wiki to more or less extent. There are also issues and feature requests for these as well. During this RFA process, if you are interested in working on one of these modules, such as the beneficiary enrollment module, linkages to the formal sector, or the CRVS, you can find information on the wiki, more detailed than what was in the RFA, but you can also use the wiki for asking questions and asking for clarification or further information on the expected work. The wiki is a living document and we should use it in such a way. Other things that can be considered under this work stream are other administrative tasks such as batch processing or other things to be considered.

The next set of work packages are those that came out of requests from Nepal. Though these are Nepal-specific functional requests, we would intend that these features be developed in a way that can be applicable to more than one country. And particularly, you'll see that there are configurable workflow

packages for enrollment and claim management, and the idea is that there may be multiple schemes that require different workflows within a country or across multiple countries and to ease the configuration of these enrollment schemes through user tools that don't require developer input. Another large request coming from Nepal is the detection of fraudulent claims and automatic claim processing using machine learning or other AI appropriate technologies. The third major component is the linkages to the accounting system and mobile payment gateways to which there are a number of potential options out there which we can discuss. To give a little bit of context, there was a recent Joint Learning Network meeting in Nepal, where they reviewed the business processes and developed a process matrix. openIMIS fulfills several of those business processes, but not all of them. So again, we would consider applications that help to make openIMIS functionally complete with that against that process matrix. And finally, we would want to consider linkages of openIMIS to other components of openHIV, and particularly facility registry to ensure that we can easily cross reference medical records. HMS systems and facilities listed there with those that are an openIMIS as well as a product registry. So, ensuring that the products referenced in an insurance claim are using the national or global identifiers so that we can better track and plan for commodity utilization.

Next is the openIMIS community support to ensure that requests that are coming in from the community to support new implementations are managed well, that we have good means to ensure the connections from the local to the global level, and ensure that any customizations developed in-country or for a specific insurance scheme or payer can be readily brought back to the core software for sharing to the larger community. We are aiming for an expansion of the openIMIS footprint and with that, we need to ensure that we have proper communities. Some of the things that we discussed on the left, you have the HL7 FHIR financial module, which describes the main FHIR resources that we will be looking at or the modernization, and each of these fire resources is a data model for different parts of the health financing or health insurance system and have API's that can be used interact. On the right, we see an illustration of OpenCRVS and its linkages to the health systems, and in particular, you'll see not just the vital events data like the birth and death, but looking up from a CRVS, we have the National Population registers and the social safety net program. What we want to ensure is that we can link the openIMIS to these registers and the lists of people enrolled in social protection programs. Finally, just to give an overview of the timelines, currently we are in the concept note development phase, which is open through August 23. Anybody who is interested in submitting a full application is required to submit a concept note by August 23, at which point Digital Square will review those concept notes to make sure that they're in scope and meet some of the minimum criteria of what we expect (open source, etc.). After that review phase, we go into the application creation phase, starting on September 2 which has three parts. The first part is the preliminary application which must be submitted within approximately two weeks to indicate that you do want to move on from the concept note phase, or to identify if several content notes merge together one primary application for those concept notes, then we'll have a comment period for a week, which allows other people to review and comments on applications. I would also encourage you all to review others concept note applications and comment on those. Finally, after the comment period closes you have approximately two weeks for the application finalization phase. From there, the applications will be sent to the Peer Review Committee for Digital Square, which will provide technical review of the applications as well as ensuring that the high-level budget is aligned with the proposed work. As I mentioned before, we intend to make decisions the latter half of October/early November with the Digital Square Governing Board as concept notes go forward and then begin the contracting phase in November.

Q: You presented three major work streams for moving forward with openIMIS. What is the proportion of the budget which should be allocated to each?

A: There is no set proportion that should be allocated for each. These are different areas and work streams. One thing that I would suggest that you do is, if you want to submit something for more than one work stream or even within one stream significantly different chunks of work like maybe proposing two modules, that those in the budgeting be broken up into separate work packages. That makes it easier for us to better align the available resources with the proposed funding.

Q: It seems that the balance between A and B, and on the other side, C is not easy to reach. The more we take on depending on the modules on the way we move forward, the impact for the implementers may be very different.

A: I understand that there are challenges and one potential way to address that is in the concept note and application phase, that you work closely with other submitters to define that structure. We're looking for your inputs in the application phase on the best way to approach that. I think we also have to see this in the context of the whole project that we're working in. Now the funds that are being released in this call are additional funds which are on top of what we're doing anyway and the basic structure that we have established with three tenants last year still continues. Next year we'll have to find ways on how to continue that thing so that will be a community building part. What we're doing here now is just additional things. You could pick a topic which you think is interesting, develop something for this, and we choose from those applications that we get. I don't think we are imagining that the available funding is going to cover all of the work outlined in A, B, and C. What we would want to do is identify the strongest submissions as well as align that with the priorities and the other work so there will have to be some tradeoffs made.

Q: If I understand correctly, the initialized approach from last year is still valid and in the situation where we would continue. It's not a revolution, it's more like, let's move on and see what's the next target for it.

A: Correct. If you want to think of this diagram, you could propose module X, you could propose module Y, but it should all fit in with that same roadmap and same technical direction that was agreed upon. If there's a need to review, I think that's an appropriate thing to do. openIMIS is not taking a waterfall approach for development, it's an agile iterative approach. So, I think that's completely appropriate. In terms of the broad structure, we always have a guideline through the JLN documents on the wiki so they do have a good blueprint that was discussed with insurance companies from Africa and Asia and I think that is a very good structure already of what is being done in companies and organizations that do insure health. So, we should align and if you comply to that, I think that's a very good process. After August 23rd is when you would be interacting with the implementers so we can really provide you with information in terms of what it would mean in terms of implementation of the modules that you would propose to develop. I think in the co-creation process, we can make sure that what is being developed is implementable and what is required here or in other places where it's implemented, would be done in the modules.

Q: So that also means that the scope for module is not yet fixed, so we will probably not be able to make a close offer. I mean, it's probably more to be ranges that are very open. And one of the topics for the formal sector mentioned. Do you see the formal sector instances as a separate instance or running in

the same instance? I mean, in the country, you would have individuals or families, on the same database or application software platform.

A: I can speak to the example from Nepal where it could possibly be both. It could be the formal sector running on one instance separately and the informal sector continuing on the way it's working right now. So that's one scenario or given if the policy changes, then it could be one administration, one institution running both schemes. They might want to put it in one instance or if we can have a way that for the user it looks like one instance, but it's actually two separate ones. If we can figure out a way that would also be fine, but it could be that the same institution runs two or it could be two different institutions, as indicated in Tanzania.

Q: The changes that are necessary for the formal sector are really deep into the model. So, if we need to host both ways of working on the same instance, the workload can be very different.

A: We can find a way around it because we could define it as a one-person family. From the architecture point of view, I think the preferred option for the software is to integrate into one package and just do modifications on modules. It would be a risk to split it up into two different forks of the same software so I would really prefer to have it integrated into the same package.

Q: Okay so this requires the modules not to be competing. I mean, to be compliant between each other, correct?

A: It would mean that having claims module, for example, which is going to be ready very soon, be capable of doing both. Right now, it's only doing the performance sector and with the proposal if you want to work on that, you would propose a way forward on how to expand the claims model to do both of the things.

Q: The reality is that up to now in the process, the new platform was not allowed to change the database structure too much in the sense that the current implementation had to remain fully working and so if we introduce things like formal sector, this is more risky on the database structure and so it may impact the current implementation of openIMIS.

A: I think that will be at least one new object to the database structure. If you add attributes to the database table -- the queries that are already existing.

Q: What's exactly the difference between the current community building efforts, the tenders, the role of GIZ and what is asked for in work stream three – how is it complementary or different from what is already happening?

A: Package 3 is the same for the community building and that continues the way it is right now, but it will give the option to propose something which you cannot have funds from right now. If someone from outside comes with a good idea to give them funds to set up a training module or training platform or whatever, that doesn't exist yet just provide additional means of doing something, just to supplement that relevant community. More development-focused community building, as well as making the linkages between the implementation communities and the developer communities, ensuring that those are strong. So, for example, you already have a contract and if you have a very good idea of what to do but we couldn't do it within time allocated to the current contract, you could propose something that you want to do in addition, and get it done with additional funds through this call.

Q: So, for the application are you looking more for people that will fit on one output rather than a big application that will include all?

A: You're welcome to submit either one. What we're asking though is if you submit a proposal that has multiple work streams, that those are budgeted appropriately. One example is that let's say you submit a proposal with five different work streams in them. Four of them might be something that the PRC and the governing board want to go forward with but the fifth one is not necessarily, so ensuring that we can balance available resources with a priority level.

Q: You want to be able to pick one specific stream out of the proposal if you think it makes sense?

A: If there are dependencies and work streams, like we need to do work stream A before we can do work stream B, then please make sure that's clear. You always have to be aware that the first step is to submit some topics that you're interested to work on and maybe some ideas. And then some have overlapping ideas and it's time to discuss. Maybe we can draw on the two proposals and you could join with someone else. It will depend on the next three weeks.

Q: One of the points is that you target to a different direction. So, the first one would be to keep openIMIS working and as a standalone tool. And then you have the other possibilities to externalize and enter an interface the system with other system such as CRVS and so on. What is the most important? Is it to keep something you can employ out of the box, or should we insist more on the openIMIS of the software and try to integrate it?

A: The prioritization hasn't been set yet and so I think it's a little bit difficult to answer. I don't think that at this stage one work stream is viewed as being a higher priority than the others. There's lots of priorities, unfortunately, and we have to figure out what is going to move us the furthest along based on the applications that are submitted.

Q: The way to answer the offer could be quite different. If you want to make it interoperable with other systems, you may want to gain resources from the people knowing those systems. And if you are insisting on developing features within the tool, then you probably require more development.

A: I suspect that we will see concept notes that are submitted from experts in the other systems and potentially looking for a partner pair that knows openIMIS, so be on the lookout for that during the concept note phase. If you're interested in these linkages to the other systems but don't have that expertise, you can put that in your concept note saying that you're looking for a partner to work on this and we can do our best to help identify a potential set of partners or resources that you can draw on. I think we have a good experience with the last Notice C call last year. The teams who got together through that partially came from the other communities and we managed to integrate them and the way we're operating with them right now is perfect.

Q: Can Digital Square select only a part of our application?

A: Potentially. For example, what's happened in the past, when an application was submitted for more than the available funding and that application was viewed as high, but it was only partially funded. In that situation, a couple of things can happen, but the main idea is that Digital Square would try to identify additional resources to work on that proposal. So, it really depends if it makes sense and it's feasible for that non-fully funded work package to be partially funded or not.