



# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR ABSTRACT MANAGEMENT

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## **Foreword**

Abstract management is an important aspect of organising any research conference. In an endeavor to uphold the highest ethical standards, promote transparency and fairness and improve efficiency, the Scientific Committee of the 11<sup>th</sup> Zambia Health Research Conference present these standard operating procedures for abstract management. These standard operating procedures were developed following lengthy deliberations and analysis of lessons learned from past conferences. It is envisioned that these standard operating procedures would be a guiding document for abstract management for subsequent editions of the Zambia Health Research Conference. We implore our successors to embrace or amend these standard operating procedures as they too endeavor to deliver successful conferences of their own. Further, we call upon the health research community to take keen interest in the procedures articulated in this document. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of all members of the Scientific Committee and the National Health Research Authority in developing this document.

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## 1. Purpose of SOPS

The Abstract Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) outline the process for handling submissions, and reviews of abstracts for the Zambia Health Research Conference (ZHRC) organized by the National Health Research Authority (NHRA), hereinafter referred to as **Secretariat**. The ZHRC is a biennial conference that is a dedicated platform for disseminating research evidence, sharing best practices, and fostering the exchange of knowledge. These SOPs aim at improving efficiency, fairness, and transparency in the review and selection of abstracts for presentation at the conference.

## 2. Administration of the Abstract Management System

Abstracts will be managed using a web-based abstract management system such as the Oxford Abstracts Management System (OAMS) or any other system as guided by **Secretariat**.

The abstract management system will be managed by a minimum of 2 administrators as determined by Secretariat. Administrators shall have the following roles;

- i. Managing conference details in the system
- ii. Screening submitted abstracts
- iii. Registering and assigning reviewers
- iv. Communications with authors, reviewers and the committee making decisions on abstracts

## 3. Abstract submission

Abstracts will be submitted using an online form on the electronic abstract management system.

A submission link will be generated and shared with the public in the call for abstracts. All authors will be required to create an account or log in to an existing account. Once logged in, authors will have access to the submission form.

The submission form shall contain the following sections;

- i. **Author details** – This includes names, contact numbers and email, and affiliation of the author. One author may have more than one affiliation which should be completed in full. The form also allows the corresponding authors to add details of as many authors as have contributed to the abstract.

- ii. **Sub-themes** – In this section, the authors submitting the form will choose one theme that most aligns with their study from a drop down of themes of the conference.
- iii. **Type of abstract** – This section allows authors to declare whether their abstract is a scientific abstract or best practice abstract.
- iv. **Title, Introduction, Methods, Results and Conclusion** – These sections will allow the author to provide details of their abstract. The introduction to conclusion sections are what will be reviewed and graded by reviewers.
- v. **Author approval** – This section confirms that all the authors listed have approved the submission of the abstract.
- vi. **Permission to publish** – This section provides Secretariat with permission to publish the abstract in an abstract booklet if it is accepted for the conference.
- vii. **Ethical approval** – In this section, the corresponding author will be required to upload a copy of the ethical approval obtained for the study.

Secretariat, in consultation with the scientific committee, shall develop abstract submission guidelines for authors to adhere to in the development of abstracts.

**Any abstract that is not formatted according to the structure provided or contains sections other than those prescribed shall be discarded.**

Once all sections of the submission form are completed and the corresponding author has submitted the abstract, the system will generate a **unique identifier for each submission**. This unique identifier will be used to track the status of the submission and for communication purposes.

Upon submission, a confirmation email shall be automatically sent to all the listed authors.

**Any abstract that is not submitted through the online system (i.e. via email) will be deemed invalid and will not be considered for review**

#### **4. Selection of Reviewers**

Prior to review, the Secretariat shall register reviewers to the system. These reviewers shall be identified from the National Health Research Authority database. The Scientific committee may set a criteria for selection of reviewers.

All registered reviewers will then be prompted to create an account or log into an already existing account. Once logged in, reviewers will have access to the abstracts assigned to them and the review form.

#### **5. Screening of abstracts**

Upon closure of the submission portal, secretariat will screen the submitted abstracts to determine their adherence to the submission guidelines.

Any abstract that does not satisfy the guidelines will be rejected at this stage. Secretariat shall produce a report on the screening exercise that will be presented to the scientific committee.

#### **6. Abstract review**

Once screened, all abstracts will undergo a systematic anonymous review process to ensure impartiality. Each abstract will be allocated a minimum of three reviewers to ensure objective scoring

Abstracts will be reviewed based on criteria set by the scientific committee.

Administrators shall send weekly reminders to reviewers to complete their reviews by the review deadline.

Reviews of all abstracts should be completed within one month of the closure of the submission portal.

#### **7. Responding to comments**

Through the abstract management system, reviewers will be able to make comments on abstracts assigned to them for authors to address.

Administrators will be responsible for communicating to authors whose abstracts have comments advising them to make amendments to their abstracts and resubmit to Secretariat.

All amendments to abstracts should be done through the abstract submission portal within a period of 72 hours.

Once amendments have been made to abstracts, authors shall resubmit them through the system and reviewers will once again review the abstracts and score them before decisions on the outcome of the abstracts can be made.

## **8. Evaluation of abstracts**

The evaluation criteria shall be determined by the scientific committee.

For each evaluation criterion, reviewers shall score the criterion using the following scale:

0 to 3 where; 0 is poor; 1 is fair; 2 is good and 3 is excellent.

Based on these ratings, the system will calculate the average score for each abstract.

Average scores shall be determined for the following outcomes:

- i. 0 – 1.49 = Definite rejection
- ii. 1.50 – 1.99 = Accepted conditionally (Author must respond to the reviewer’s comments)
- iii. 2.00 – 3.00 = Definite acceptance (Author may be required to respond to minor comments)

Average scores shall also be determined for the following formats of presentation:

- i. 1.50 – 1.99 = recommended for poster presentation
- ii. 2.00 – 3.00 = recommended for oral presentation.

## **9. Decision Committee**

Once the review process is complete, a temporal subcommittee will be constituted as guided by the scientific committee to validate the process. Chairing of this committee will be determined by the scientific committee. Secretariat will produce a report of the decision committee proceedings.

## **10. Notifications to Authors**

Secretariat shall communicate to authors on the status of their abstract that is, whether it has been rejected or accepted for either oral or poster presentation.

**Notifications to authors should be done within a period of 3 days after the committee has made decisions on reviews.**

Authors whose abstracts have been accepted for oral presentation shall be advised to send their PowerPoint presentations to Secretariat at least one month before the conference.

### **11. Orientations**

Secretariat will organise virtual orientation sessions with the Zambia research community and other interested participants on how to develop quality abstracts and use the abstract submission system.

Secretariat shall also organise orientations with reviewers on how to evaluate abstracts using the abstract management system.

The frequency of these orientations shall be determined by secretariat in consultation with the scientific committee.

Secretariat shall produce resources to support authors and reviewers. These resources shall be distributed via various media including but not limited to social media, conference website and chat-bot.

### **12. Abstract Booklet**

An abstract booklet shall be developed comprising all abstracts that have been submitted and accepted for presentation at the conference.

The abstract booklet will be disseminated within two weeks of acceptance notifications being sent to authors.

The abstract booklet shall be printed one month before the conference. It will also be made available on the conference website and conference App.

### **13. Amendments to the SOP**

Any amendments to these SOPs must be approved by the conference scientific committee and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

Amendments will be made available on the conference website and other communication channels.

### **14. Conclusion**

These SOPs for abstract management provide clear guidelines for the submission, review, and selection of abstracts for the Zambia Health Research Conference. Adherence to these procedures ensures a fair and transparent process for all participants involved



