

# Media Advisory Group Concept

## Background

KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme (KWTRP) seeks to engage with the media as part of its public engagement responsibility to disseminate research. The overall aim in media engagement is to create and enable sustainable relations between researchers and the media to ensure accurate reporting of science and research findings. With increased media platforms-a thriving social media and online engagement culture, there is a growing interest in science/research and in turn an increased space to tell the research story. In addition, the KWTRP Media Engagement Strategy seeks to empowering science journalists and equally building internal capacity of research teams to engage with the media. This strategy seeks add the element of elevating the use of media voices into our media engagement strategy through the creation of a Media Advisory Group (MAG).

## Concept

Over the years KWTRP has successfully adopted the use of advisory groups as one of the engagement initiatives that provides the inclusion of the public voices into research, for decision making and influencing how research work is done. This is with the aim of having people centred research. The media engagement in the programme has also evolved from the traditional dissemination of research to the deepening of the existing relationships with journalists through capacity building initiatives, workshops, media tours and an active WhatsApp engagement that ensure constant engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased scrutiny by the public and the media on research processes. This is further compounded by 'alternative truths' pushed by those seen to be against science i.e. the antivaxxers movement. The Media Advisory Group seeks answer to the call to include different media and public voices into our research process. We will pilot this initial MAG with the aim of creating a multidisciplinary team that will include both media teams and members of the public to provide advice to our various research teams related to the COVID-19 response in KWTRP.

## Objective

The overall objective of the MAG is the inclusion of media voices in research activities to provide insights in communication initiatives through the MAG's collective experiences. To stimulate research discourse with the public; through generation of dissemination of research knowledge

## The approach will include the following;

- Capacity building of the MAG through clinics, workshops and tours of the various research activities and processes including; clinical trials, laboratory procedures, data management, community engagement etc.
- Participation in COVID-19 related research activities to provide in-depth reporting and insights using different media platforms.
- Pre-testing of media messages and engagement initiatives for both media and public on research milestones.
- Encouraging the MAG to use their platform to clarify existing public misinformation of COVID-19 related research work.
- Participation in research related activities and milestones to improve communication and dissemination of research information.
- Pointing out areas of public concern and providing feedback to the programme researchers through their experiences in the process.

## **Composition**

The team will include

- a) 3 senior mainstream science journalists from local, national and international media.
- b) 2 general reporting journalists
- c) 3 Social media practitioners
- d) 2 research leaders who are influencers
- e) 2 members of the public drawn from an agreed set of publics

## **Formulation of the team**

The engagement team will be tasked to send out a call to the specified groups through the existing programme channels. The call will include specifics on the required qualifications i.e. number of years as a practising science journalists and evidence provided to meet the expected criteria and the benefits to the team including training. After which the team will be vetted for inclusion to the MAG.

The advisory group will be on a voluntary basis with no expected remuneration apart from the compensation for time and reimbursements according to the laid out KWTRP policies and procedures. The team will also be allowed to include this in their CVs.

## **Composition and Activities**

- The MAG will serve a two-year renewable term.
- They will meet 4 times a year with 2 physical meetings and 2 online meetings which shall be facilitated by KWTRP.
- They will be required to undertake a two-day training on research and familiarisation of programme activities and their terms of reference. Subsequent trainings will be organised as part of the benefits.
- After the initial inception meeting, they will be required to decide on the leadership and communication channels to adopt throughout their tenure.
- Evaluation of the performance of media initiatives through agreed matrices.
- Provide feedback for specific media strategies.

## **Expected deliverables**

- Agreed number of publications or digital reporting by the journalist teams involved in the MAG
- Active involvement in communication campaigns involving COVID 19 research by the Programme
- Hosting of researchers in designated online or broadcast platforms.
- Providing quarterly reporting of the performance of programmes media initiatives.
- Bi-annual reporting of the team evaluating their MAG experiences

## **Expected Outcomes**

- Increased participation and improved public understanding of COVID 19 related research.
- Increased accountability of researchers to the public.
- Enhanced appreciation and respect for researchers by the public.
- Public support of emerging research initiatives in Africa.