Partnering with Vital Strategies to find their next Project Director, Cause of Death Assistant (CODA) Consortium Lead

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POSITION: Project Director, CODA, Consortium Lead
DEPARTMENT: DFH_Data for Health
REPORTING TO: Vice President, Civil Registration & Vital Statistics (CRVS)
LOCATION: Johannesburg, South Africa
START DATE: ASAP

Background

Vital Strategies, headquartered in New York City, is an international public health organization. Our programs strengthen public health systems and address the world's leading causes of illness, injury and death. We work in more than 70 countries, supporting data-driven decision-making in government, advancing evidence-based public health policies, and mounting strategic communication campaigns. Vital Strategies' priorities are driven by the greatest potential to improve and save lives. They include non-communicable disease prevention, tobacco control, road safety, food policy, environmental health, civil registration and vital statistics, and overdose prevention. Our programs are concentrated in low- and middle-income countries and cities in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific. Please visit our website at www.vitalstrategies.org to find out more about our work.

About the Cause of Death Assistant project (CODA)

The Cause of Death Assistant (CODA) is a three-year initiative to design and test an AI-powered tool for cause of death assignment in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). CODA will address critical data gaps by improving the accuracy and timeliness of mortality data at both facility and community levels. The initiative is implemented by a consortium of global partners, with Vital Strategies serving as a CODA Consortium and Research Agenda Lead. Other consortium partners include an Algorithm Development Lead, an IT and Software Development Lead, and two Leads working on improved Minimally Invasive Tissue Sampling (MITS) protocols. Governance will be provided by a Governing Board and technical rigor overseen by a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC will convene Technical Working Groups (TWGs) to respond to specific technical demands encountered in the development of CODA and will be heavily involved in building research agendas. The project will be implemented in two phases: 1. Prototyping and 2. Experimentation (with phase 3 on piloting and product release to be undertaken as part of an anticipated follow-on grant). It is anticipated that by the end of the project, CODA will be positioned for adoption by countries, supported by regional Centers of Excellence (COEs) in Africa and South Asia.

About the Role

The Project Director, CODA Consortium Lead, will provide oversight to the coordinated development of the Cause of Death Assistant (CODA). This role blends consortium management with technical program leadership, ensuring that AI development, software engineering, and user-centered research are seamlessly integrated. The Lead will be responsible for aligning algorithm developers, platform/software vendors, and subject-matter experts, while ensuring product development follows a robust lifecycle, meets performance standards, and is ready for pilot testing in real-world settings. This includes leading the development of a unified vision, a critical path product development roadmap, and a unified work plan sufficient to deliver project goals.

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The Project Director, Consortium Lead, CODA, will report to the Vice President, Civil Registration & Vital Statistics (CRVS). This role will require close partnership with the Governing Board, consortium partners, Centers of Excellence, the Scientific Advisory Committee, and Technical Working Groups to ensure that CODA research meets international standards, informs product development, and accelerates adoption at scale. Consortium members will not report to the Project Director but will be expected to abide by a consortium member agreement to be developed and signed early in the project cycle. Internally, the Project Director, Consortium Lead, CODA, will be supported by the Principal Technical Advisor, Research, a Senior Project Manager, and a Project Associate to accomplish the project objectives.

Duties and Responsibilities

Consortium Leadership & Management

- Provide overall leadership in consortium management, ensuring effective collaboration across multiple partners.
- Identify trade-offs and prioritize action steps, balancing product development objectives and the timeliness of product production.
- Convene and manage consortium governance bodies (Governing Board, Scientific Advisory Committee, Technical Working Groups), ensuring decision rights and accountability are clear.
- Oversee the development of the CODA research agenda, aligned with project goals, user needs, and donor priorities.
- Coordinate with consortium leads, COEs, and experimental sites to ensure quality and timeliness in the implementation of project activities.
- Drive progress toward the successful pilot testing of CODA in real-world settings in a follow-on activity.
- Serve as inaugural Chair and permanent Secretariat of the CODA Consortium Governing Board, convening regular meetings as agreed.
- Ensure advice and input from the Scientific Advisory Committee and an independent group of global donors and other stakeholders is communicated to the Governing Board.

Product Development

- Lead the development and implementation of a unified project roadmap, technical work plan, and critical path milestones.
- Serve as day-to-day coordinator across AI, Technology Development, MITS Development, Centers of Excellence, and global stakeholders.
- Maintain strong, collaborative working relationships with AI and Technology Leads.
- Align the work of AI algorithm developers, software/platform vendors, MITS developers, and other subject-matter experts (e.g., SAC Members).
- Ensure product development follows a robust lifecycle, meets defined performance standards, and is ready for pilot testing in real-world settings.
- Lead the development of a consortium proposal for funding of pilot testing as a follow-on grant.

Skills and Ability

- Solid background in software product development cycles, particularly in the health and healthcare sectors.

- Strong and up-to-date familiarity with AI and LLM applications in health diagnostics, including an understanding of AI/ML development lifecycle (data collection, training, validation, deployment, monitoring).
- Comprehensive project leadership skills, with the ability to make sound, informed judgments.
- Demonstrated understanding of cause of death assignment or health information systems is a plus.
- Demonstrated ability to manage cross-functional teams across technical, research, and programmatic domains.
- Ability to navigate diverse interests and build consensus.
- Familiarity with agile product development, human-centered design, and change management is a plus.
- Familiarity with ethical and regulatory frameworks for health data in LMICs.
- Strong written and oral communication skills.
- Strong interpersonal skills.
- Ability to build strong, ongoing, impactful relationships across a diverse range of cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds.
- Demonstrated commitment to an inclusive working and learning environment.

Experience

- Minimum 15 years' experience in software development, with significant leadership (management, coordination, oversight, governance) in multi-country/multi-partner projects.
- Proven track record of leading multi-partner or consortium-based initiatives across diverse geographies.
- Experience managing complex technology development programs, ideally in AI/ML, digital health, or software engineering.
- Experience working in low- and middle-income countries and on projects with strong data components.
- Experience in team management and staff supervision; strong interpersonal skills.
- Prior experience working in or with government ministries that focus on public health.
- Experience in implementation research.
- Experience coordinating with donors and high-level stakeholders, with the ability to translate technical progress into strategic reporting and decision-making.
- Prior experience working in or with government ministries that focus on public health.
- Prior experience supporting pilot testing, evaluation, or scaling of digital or AI-based solutions in real-world or low-resource settings.
- Experience with AI, digital health, or technology-driven public health interventions will be an advantage.

Other

- Other Duties as assigned by the VP of CRVS.
- Convene and supervise the organization of annual consortium meetings and any necessary high-level ad hoc convenings as required.
- Must have valid work authorization in South Africa at time of hire.

Working Conditions and Physical Requirements

- This is a full-time position ideally based in Johannesburg, South Africa, and will be employed locally through an Employer of Record.
- We offer competitive salaries aligned with local market conditions, along with comprehensive benefits.
- Travel will be required internationally up to 15% of the time.
- The candidate must be willing to work and be flexible with colleagues across different time zones.

Qualifications
- Minimum of a Master's degree in a relevant field (e.g., Computer Science, software product engineering, software product project management).

How to apply

Interested applicants should submit the following by e-mail to **vaneshree@ngorecruit.com** quoting reference number: **NVS001**
- A CV in Word or PDF format (please include 3 references).
- A 1-page cover letter outlining how your skills and experience align with Vital Strategies' mission and the unique qualities you will bring to this role.

Application Deadline: **5 December 2025**

Interested applicants are encouraged to apply ASAP. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

For more information about Vital Strategies, visit their website and social media pages: Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn.