

FAQs – UNHCR Data Innovation Fund

Am I eligible to apply?

If you work for UNHCR, yes! (See further details in the ‘who can apply’ section above.) If you are on a short-term contract or will be leaving the operation soon, we still encourage you to apply, but we expect you to note plans of how the project’s implementation would be managed after your departure. For interested parties outside of UNHCR, we’d recommend [engaging with UNHCR in your country of relevance](#) and exploring partnership possibilities. If you are a refugee-led organization, you are welcome to apply to the [Refugee-led Innovation Fund](#).

Do I need to have a fully-fledged project or idea?

Not at all. Innovation is a process, not a technology product or an already built solution. Teams continue to develop their ideas throughout the duration of the Fund, following the [Data Innovation Roadmap](#) to refine ideas, test solutions, and redesign processes.

What counts as innovation for the Fund?

We assess the innovativeness of an idea on the basis of the extent to which it represents a creative and new approach for leveraging emerging technologies – such as artificial intelligence – to benefit communities. Ideas may be new to UNHCR, new to the context, or new to the world.

What kind of ideas are you looking for?

Kindly refer to the areas of exploration outlined above for more details about the thematics we might prioritize. The Fund remains open to innovative ideas to tackle data challenges that fall outside the suggested areas. See [a full list of currently supported projects here](#) to get inspired.

What should I do if I’m not sure which Fund to apply for?

Please apply for the Fund you consider most relevant to your idea by consulting the “[Unsure which Innovation Fund to apply to?](#)” sheet. As part of the review process, UNHCR Innovation may assess whether a proposal is better suited to receive support from one of the other Innovation Funds. We will let you know if this is the case, but it won't negatively affect your submission.

How will you select projects?

Proposals are reviewed and assessed by UNHCR Innovation according to the assessment criteria (see below). Then, longlisted proposals are reviewed by technical experts from HQ and RBs, who score proposals against these same criteria. Finally,

teams whose proposals are shortlisted will be invited to pitch their ideas to the Steering Committee, who will make a final decision.

What is the assessment criteria?

Proposals are scored on the basis of their:

- **Innovation:** Proposed idea is [highly creative, novel or original](#). It represents a new approach for UNHCR, locally or globally, to solve an important challenge that has been clearly identified. Projects should not be duplicative of efforts already in development or implementation within UNHCR and will tackle a well-defined scope.
- **Impact:** Proposed idea demonstrates the potential to positively impact or add value, directly and indirectly, to the lives of forcibly displaced and stateless people and those who host them, in the short and/or long term, alongside the potential for valuable learning for UNHCR and broader audiences.
- **Engagement:** Proposed idea emphasizes a co-design and age, gender, and diversity (AGD) approach with communities and users; identifies what role communities, users and partners/stakeholders are playing in the joint design and implementation of the project; and/or develops UNHCR's internal capacity in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Partnerships with refugee-led organizations, community-based organizations, and/or locally based expertise is highly encouraged.
- **Implementation details:** Viability of the project has been well thought through, considering timelines, resources, and objectives, with sustainability as a key factor from the outset. Mitigation measures for potential risks have been taken into consideration.

Is there a limit to the number of applications my team can submit?

No, but only one idea should be submitted per form, with each submission focusing on a different challenge/opportunity. You should focus on quality over quantity. Consider investing more effort in your top idea, rather than submitting multiple applications.

What approvals and requirements do I need to meet?

UNHCR Innovation requires applications to be endorsed by the relevant senior manager at the duty station, and sometimes relevant regional/HQ entities if necessary (e.g. if your project is a cross-border initiative or requires inputs from different divisions, etc.) prior to submission. You must identify a primary focal point and build a multifunctional team (MFT) that includes at least one Programmes/Resource Management colleague who will support both proposal development and implementation.

How much funding can teams apply for?

Innovation Fund project budgets range between 25,000 and 125,000 USD. We recommend that your proposed budget does NOT exceed the ceiling of 125,000 USD. We strongly encourage teams to submit responsible budgets that aim for maximum impact with value for money, particularly paying attention to an adequate balance between operational and support costs and ensuring efficiencies with ongoing work. If further resources are required, joint fundraising can take place to support projects with a larger scope.

Does the funding impact a UNHCR operation's OL?

Depending on the implementation modality chosen by the project team, the operationalization of the approved budget will be discussed and determined. This may include an OL transfer, where required, and/or charging expenditures to UNHCR Innovation PTEO codes. For more information read our [Programme 101 advice sheet](#).

How does the funding work programmatically?

Funding will be available for implementation after the budget is cleared by the relevant Innovation Programme lead and Programme Officer and approved by the Head of Innovation, taking into consideration that projects can run up to 18 months. Options for delivery include Project Partnership Agreements, Direct Implementation, or a blended approach, which also covers procurement of goods and services. The financial resources available should not be used to cover existing staffing, however, they may – to an extent – be used to bring on board temporary consultants. Assessment of each project's requested workforce will be done on a case-by-case basis. For more information, read our [Programme 101 advice sheet](#).

What can the funding be used for? What can't it be used for?

We are committed to maintaining a high degree of flexibility, with the aim of ensuring that the funding can be used in the most suitable manner for the exploration and testing of your team's proposed idea or solution. We understand that activities may need to be adjusted or modified as necessary, but it is crucial that the funding is still employed for the explicit purpose of this specific proof of concept or pilot testing. For this reason, costs related to workforce will be assessed on a case-by-case basis with consideration of the rationale associated with the proposed costs. Additionally, the Fund cannot be used to cover costs that form part of regular programming unless they are well justified and are essential to the implementation of the project, or any purchases and activities that do not directly contribute to the testing of the idea.

How does the Fund monitor and evaluate initiatives, and what are the reporting requirements?

Both the Fund and its supported teams need to collect evidence and measure project progress and impact. Each project will receive technical guidance to design an appropriate M&E framework with multi-method combinations of quantitative and qualitative success measurements and milestones to capture the impact of the innovation process. To measure progress and achievements accurately, each project will provide quarterly reports and a detailed end-of-project report. For more information, read [our M&E advice sheet](#).

How can a team ensure successful implementation of their project?

To ensure successful iteration and learning during the project duration, teams should have the following skills/resources:

- **Agility:** Teams are not overfocused on specific technology solutions or tools, but rather prioritize innovation in processes, optimization, user-centred interactions, and relationship-building to foster organizational change and systems thinking.
- **Participatory design focus:** Teams actively involve forcibly displaced communities, implementing partners, other counterparts and, most importantly, potential direct users to ensure they equally contribute across all steps.
- **Inquisitive mindset:** Teams conduct thorough, ongoing research on their proposed idea, changes, and trends – to identify and explore similar solutions in the private sector/humanitarian contexts.
- **Time:** Allocation of time is key to advancing project goals.

How can I get in touch with other questions?

For any other questions or feedback, please contact us at hqinlab@unhcr.org. For specific questions on programmatic, resource management and project control (e.g., transfer of funds and operationalization of approved budget) matters, please email hqinnov@unhcr.org with [Programme Management] in the subject line.