

FAQs – UNHCR Refugee-led Innovation Fund

Who is eligible to apply?

Only organizations led by people with lived experience of forced displacement or statelessness are eligible to apply. This includes groups led by refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees, and stateless people. It is important to note that an organization is defined as a group of individuals working together toward shared goals, rather than an individual applicant. **We accept applications from existing organizations, both registered and unregistered, that are recognized within their communities thanks to their meaningful contributions.**

How do I apply for the Fund?

All submissions must be completed through our online application system, when the call is open.

The application form is available in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic. You are welcome to submit your proposal in one of these languages or any other language you are most comfortable with.

The system allows you to download the application form to draft your application offline. Please note, however, that the final submission must be completed online through the platform. Offline applications are not accepted as a final submission.

Can an organization that has previously applied for the Fund reapply in subsequent years?

Yes, organizations can apply for the Fund as many times as they want! We strongly encourage applications from organizations that applied in the past but were not selected. We value persistence and continuous refinement of innovative ideas! Applicants are advised to consider feedback provided, and to demonstrate how their new proposal has evolved or improved when submitting it again. In addition, previously supported organizations with completed projects that demonstrate measurable results are welcome to apply with new ideas or projects. If your organization still has an active project supported through the Fund, you are not eligible to apply for new funding.

How do you define a 'refugee-led organization'?

A refugee-led organization is defined as a group of people that is either:

- **Primarily led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons:** This means that more than half of the leadership roles within the organization, including decision-making positions, are held by individuals who are refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced, returnees, or stateless.

- **Or jointly/equally led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities:** This means that the organization has an equal distribution of leadership and decision-making roles between members of forcibly displaced or stateless communities and individuals from host communities.

Organizations meeting either of the criteria listed above are eligible to apply to the Fund.

Is there a limit to the number of proposals an organization can submit?

No, but only one idea should be submitted per online proposal 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.

Is there a preferred language for submissions, or are various languages accepted?

We do not have a preferred language for submissions and welcome applications in any language. Although our proposal form is only available in English, Spanish, Arabic, and French, organizations can submit their ideas in the language they are most comfortable with.

Are there any geographical restrictions on where the project can be implemented?

No, there are no geographical restrictions on where projects can be implemented. The Fund is open to innovative ideas from any location around the world, aiming to support communities affected by forced displacement and statelessness regardless of their geographical location.

What counts as innovation for the Fund?

For UNHCR, innovation is about developing creative, impactful solutions that address the real needs of forcibly displaced and stateless communities. For refugee-led organizations, innovation often involves context-specific approaches, whether adapting existing ideas to new environments, overcoming systemic barriers with resourceful strategies, or iteratively refining solutions to deliver measurable impact. The emphasis is on practical outcomes, with community ownership playing a central role. Placing refugees in the lead ensures that solutions are relevant, empowering, and transformative. Ultimately, innovation is not about novelty for its own sake but about achieving meaningful, lasting change.

For the Refugee-Led Innovation Fund, innovation is defined by impact and relevance, not by novelty alone. We recognize that in contexts of forced displacement or statelessness, innovation often means adapting or repurposing existing ideas in original and creative ways to address real, unmet needs within communities.

Innovation can take many forms, including:

- **Context-specific solutions:** Even if the solution is not new to the world, it represents a new approach to tackle a challenge in the specific context where it will be implemented. What matters is its relevance and potential to improve lives.
- **Overcoming barriers:** Refugee-led organizations often operate with limited resources, funding, and infrastructure. Innovation may mean finding practical, resourceful ways to overcome these constraints and deliver meaningful results.
- **Iterative progress:** Innovation can involve improving, scaling, or rethinking existing approaches to better serve forcibly displaced communities. Incremental changes that lead to measurable impact are just as valuable as breakthrough ideas.
- **Community ownership:** Perhaps most importantly, innovation lies in *who* leads the process. When forcibly displaced and stateless people themselves design and implement solutions, it shifts power, builds agency, and ensures that the outcomes are grounded in lived experience.

How will you select projects?

Once organizations submit their online applications (outlining the challenge, proposed solution, budget, and expected impact of their idea), these applications go through a four-phase selection process:

- **1) Proposal longlisting:** The Innovation Service reviews all submissions and identifies a long list of promising proposals.
- **2) Vetting and due diligence:** Confirms eligibility of applicant organizations. Verifies that at least 50% of organization leadership has experienced forced displacement or statelessness (supporting documentation required).
- **3) Pitch:** Eligible organizations present their ideas to UNHCR staff from the Innovation Service and relevant Country Operations and Regional Bureaux.
- **4) Final selection:** Shortlisted ideas are reviewed by the Fund's Steering Committee, composed of forcibly displaced and stateless individuals, representatives of relevant UNHCR divisions, and, when possible, donors. Final endorsements are made.

What is the assessment criteria?

The main criteria to be followed during the selection process will be:

- **Challenge framing (15%):** The proposal must clearly define the specific challenge the organization aims to address. This includes demonstrating a strong understanding of the issue within its context, supported by insights gathered from the experiences, needs, or perspectives of community members. The challenge should be both relevant and significant, whereby solving it would lead to tangible improvements for displaced or stateless communities.
- **Innovation (30%):** The proposed idea must be highly creative, novel, or original, representing a fresh approach for refugee-led organizations to address challenges within their communities, either locally or globally. Projects may draw upon existing ideas tested in other contexts, provided they demonstrate points of difference, thereby not replicating or simply continuing efforts already implemented.
- **Community leadership and participation (20%):** The idea emphasizes co-creation methods and an Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) approach. It clearly identifies the leading role of communities, users, and partners/stakeholders in the design and implementation of the project.
- **Implementation details (15%):** The viability of the project will be thoroughly considered, including timelines, resources, objectives, and sustainability from the outset. It includes measures to mitigate potential risks, ensuring a sustainable impact.
- **Impact/sustainability/scale (20%):** The idea should demonstrate the potential to significantly benefit or add value, both directly and indirectly, to the lives of refugees, displaced, and stateless individuals, as well as their host communities, in both the short and/or long term. It should also show potential for sustainability beyond the funding period, either through community ownership, partnerships, or integration into existing systems. When possible, the idea should present a clear pathway toward further scaling or replication in other contexts.

Only applications that receive a score of 80% or higher will be invited to proceed to the next phases of the selection process.

Can you help with our application?

UNHCR's Innovation Service offers support to organizations invited to develop full proposals. We can help applicants produce the required materials and ensure that proposals are compelling and meet the Fund's criteria. Our aim is not only to guide organizations through the application process but also to make this a valuable learning opportunity, enhancing their ability to articulate and plan innovative projects effectively.

Does the Fund focus on a specific technology, theme, or impact area?

No. The Fund stresses the importance of ensuring people who have experienced forced displacement are able to frame the challenge themselves and lead the design of solutions.

Our organization has a new idea, but we've never tried anything like it before. Can we still apply?

Yes, you can apply whether or not you've previously tested your idea. Bear in mind that applicants are required to outline an idea that they want to explore in their context, and that they believe will lead to lasting positive change. This approach allows emergent ideas to surface from ongoing dialogue with their communities.

How much funding is each organization eligible to receive?

The maximum financial support applicants can apply for is 45,000 USD (equivalent in local currency) over a maximum period of 24 months. The disbursement of these funds will be completed in instalments, with the amounts of each installment being determined by a capacity assessment exercise prior to signing the Partnership Agreement. The disbursement of instalments is contingent upon the verification that project milestones have been achieved, ensuring that the project is progressing as planned before further funds are released. The funds are disbursed in local currency.

What costs are covered by the Fund?

All costs related to project activities can be covered by the Fund, including procurement of goods and services as well as personnel/staffing costs needed to advance the aims of the project. Office costs, if they can clearly be linked to the project, can also be covered. The funding cannot be used for purchasing goods or services for personal use or overhead costs.

What is the project implementation period?

After the various phases of the selection process, endorsed organizations will sign an Innovation Partnership Agreement with UNHCR, stipulating a support period of up to 24 months.

Our organization does not have a bank account. Can we still apply?

Yes, you can still apply even if your organization does not have a bank account. This Fund is committed to empowering communities with groundbreaking ideas, regardless of their current operational capabilities. We will explore programmatic modalities together with UNHCR teams locally to ensure the funds reach your organization, enabling you to implement the project.

Can individuals apply for the Fund?

No. Applicants must apply as a team, usually as part of an organization led by displaced or stateless people.

Can private sector companies apply for the Fund?

No, this Fund opportunity is exclusively open to not-for-profit organizations led by persons with lived experience of forced displacement or statelessness.

Does the Fund accept joint applications from two or more organizations?

The Fund welcomes and encourages multi-stakeholder proposals. We recommend one organization take responsibility for submitting the joint expression of interest and the full proposal, ensuring to include the names of the partner organizations in the application. The maximum funding available for any project – whether led by one organization or several – is 45,000 USD (equivalent in local currency).

What are the reporting requirements for funded projects?

Supported organizations are required to report project performance and financial management during project implementation. The Innovation Service supports the development of results-based frameworks and provides tailored support to organizations for performance and financial reporting.

When can applicants expect updates during the selection process?

All applicant organizations will be informed about the status of their application within three months of submission of their proposals.

Organizations that are invited to develop full proposals will be informed of subsequent timelines for updates accordingly.

Can I use artificial intelligence (AI) to help write my application?

We discourage the use of AI tools to write your application. While AI can be a helpful assistant for tasks like research or brainstorming, the Refugee-led Innovation Fund emphasizes the importance of refugee-led, locally tailored solutions. If you would like to use AI to improve your proposal, here are some tips to consider:

- Ensure the final proposal reflects the unique voice and perspective of your organization and the communities involved in the project design and implementation.
- Focus on AI as a tool to complement your proposal narrative and plans, not to create them on your behalf.

Please note that proposals entirely generated by AI will be disqualified.

How many organizations are supported by the Fund each year?

The number of organizations supported by the Fund varies each year, as the selection is based on merit. Each application is assessed against the Fund's objectives and criteria, including challenge framing, innovation, community leadership and participation, feasibility, and potential impact. Only those proposals that clearly align with the Fund's goals and that demonstrate innovative approaches within their specific context are selected for support. On average, between 15 to 25 projects are funded per year.

I have other questions related to the Fund. Who do I contact?

We would love to hear from you. Please contact us at innovationfund@unhcr.org