Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk and Resilience

Request for Proposals

The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk and Resilience (MRR Innovation Lab) is a virtual institute comprised of researchers around the globe that operates in support of USAID and Feed the Future. The mission of the MRR Innovation Lab to ***generate and transfer into action innovations that will bolster resilience, keeping rural individuals, households, communities and markets in positions of economic viability from which they can sustain and accelerate a path of inclusive agricultural growth.***

If you wish to apply for funding under this solicitation, you **<u>must</u>** submit a brief, one-paragraph letter of intent to basis@ucdavis.edu by 7 October 2019.

Letter of Intent: 5 PM U.S. Pacific Time, Monday, 7 October 2019

Full Proposal: Midnight, PST, Sunday, 17 November 2019

Questions on this solicitation may be directed to the BASIS/MRR Innovation Lab office (basis@ucdavis.edu or 530-752-7252).

A one-hour Twitter chat will be hosted by the MRR Innovation Lab on Tuesday, 24 September 2019 at 9 a.m. PST to discuss and to respond to questions from potential applicants. All questions and responses will be posted on the MRR Innovation Lab website for reference. If you have difficulty finding it, please reach out to the MRR Innovation Lab directly. Questions may be submitted in advance via basis@ucdavis.edu and/or @MRRInnovLab.

FULL PROPOSALS

The MRR Innovation Lab invites researchers to submit proposals for four-year research projects that support this mission. Proposals may request up to $750,000. Projects must include meaningful collaborations with researchers in the country where the country takes place.
If you wish to apply for funding under this solicitation, you must submit a one paragraph letter of intent no later than [date]. We anticipate a decision will be made by mid-December. We anticipate 4-8 proposals to be funded under this solicitation.

In addition to supporting high-quality research, the MRR Innovation Lab sponsors outreach activities that bridge the gap that often exists between evidence and policy/programming. MRR Researchers will be expected to work with the MRR Innovation Lab staff to distill themes and findings of research projects into a coherent, evidence-based voice for integration of results into policy and program design. MRR Innovation Lab researchers will be required to contribute their time and participate in these activities.

SEED GRANT PROPOSALS

Under this solicitation, we also invite researchers to submit proposals for seed grant funding that fall under the research priorities listed below. Seed grants are intended to allow researchers to determine the feasibility of an important and promising research idea, and to fully refine their ideas and strategies. Seed grant proposals should request no more than $40,000. In order to obtain full project funding following their seed grant, recipients will need to submit full proposals to the second MRR RFP that will be issued in October 2020.

We anticipate funding up to four seed grant proposals, with the expectation that up to two of these projects will result in fully funded research projects after the seed grant period. A seed grant proposal requires a 10-page narrative description, timeline, budget and PI qualification statement and c.v. It is not necessary to fulfill the other requirements for full proposals that are listed below.

Researchers preparing seed grant proposals should follow the letter of intent and full submission deadlines listed above.

ELIGIBILITY

Each proposal must identify at least one PI from a US-based university and one from a host-country institution. The MRR Innovation Lab will subcontract with the PI from the lead US university. This PI and his/her university will be responsible for negotiating and entering into sub agreements with all partner institutions and accounting to the MRR Innovation Lab for all program accomplishments, expenditures and reporting requirements. If for some reason this is not feasible or appropriate, please contact the MRR Innovation Lab to discuss whether an exception to this requirement is allowable.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Proposals should put forward a research plan that promises to add to our knowledge by addressing critical issues relevant to one or more of the following research priorities. You should make a strong case for how your work ties into one or more of these priorities and provide a clear and compelling explanation of how these research results will achieve development impact through future improved policy and program design.

Especially welcome is proposed research that is built up around the evaluation of innovative interventions designed to address the development challenges described below. We also welcome research that study the longer-term impacts of earlier interventions. As a Lab, we are also open to theoretically well-grounded studies, with credible identification strategies, that rely on observational or other data.

Following each research priority we list some illustrative areas of research. Note that the listed areas are not meant to be limiting, and we look forward to having you surprise with new ideas!

1. *Enabling Resilient Escapes from Poverty*

We have learned that enhancing material assets, social assets, psychological well-being or risk management can alter poverty dynamics. The next step is to learn how to exploit the synergies between these interventions in order to cost-effectively address deep-rooted rural poverty at the individual and community scales, especially in the wake of violence and civil conflict. Illustrative examples include but are not limited to:

- Psychological dimensions of shocks and poverty and solutions that enable resilient escapes from poverty;
- The linkage between poverty and resilience in conflict zones and/or areas of recurrent crisis;
- The synergies between building assets and securing assets with risk reduction mechanisms;
- Interactions between psychological and material assets and learn to effectively harness their synergies; and,
- Breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty through interventions that allow households to protect the human capacities of their children.

2. *Financial and Agronomic Innovations for Inclusive Growth and Resilience:*

Research brought forward a series of index insurance innovations that can promote *Resilience-Plus*.[1] We have also learned that insurance is no magic bullet, and we need a next generation of innovations to make index insurance more effective, and to open the door to a broader set of tools that allow individuals to flexibly blend financial (savings, credit and insurance) and agronomic instruments to manage the risks that threaten their resilience. Illustrative examples include but are not limited to:

- Better models of crop identification and predictions of crop yields and losses for use in the design of high-quality agricultural index insurance;
- Price or revenue insurance;
- Using insurance to unlock credit for smallholder farmers;
- Improve the salience and availability of index insurance for women farmers;
- Innovation and evaluation of a set of flexible financial instruments that blend indexed savings, credit and insurance contracts;
- Develop and test instruments for managing idiosyncratic risks (especially those risks that weigh heavily against women's assets); and,
- Explore the complementarities between on and off-farm livelihood activities, as well as financial and agronomic risk management technologies including stress tolerant seed varieties and techniques and investments in soil and water management.

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[1] *Resilience-Plus* is the notion that improved risk management can have a two-pronged impact by enabling households to: (i) Be resilient in the sense that they can manage adversity without compromising the well-being they would have had without the shock; and, (ii) Prudentially invest and improve their expected future level of well-being over what it otherwise would have been.

3. *Resilient Systems for Broadly-based Agricultural Growth*

Prior research makes clear the power of relaxing system-level constraints, and yet we also know that market and other social systems can bypass men and women in vulnerable phases of their life cycle. Finding ways to supersede these tradeoffs and create systems that are competitive and inclusive is warranted. Illustrative examples include but are not limited to:

- Tapping into social networks to resolve systemic information problems (without deepening existing disadvantages with regard to inclusiveness);
- Design and targeting of learning subsidies so that they do not bypass women and their networks;
- Using IT solutions, farmer groups and contract farming mechanisms to encourage smallholder commercialization by creating more competitive markets for small-scale farmers that offer them better prices for inputs and outputs and better-quality inputs; and,
- Stabilizing public finance, perhaps through risk facilities that integrate sovereign and individual risk, to make it more effective in stabilizing markets and communities.

Across all our research priorities, we also encourage projects that include deliberate learning objectives related to gender, youth and nutrition either as a primary focus of the research or as a relevant cross-cutting issue(s).

DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

Across all our research priorities, we also encourage projects that include deliberate learning objectives related to gender, youth and nutrition either as a primary focus of the research or as a relevant cross-cutting issue(s).

While the MRR Innovation Lab is a research organization, our goal is to achieve concrete development outcomes through research. A proactive and joint effort between individual researchers and the MRR Lab can help ensure not only that its social science research reaches its full impact by being incorporated into development policy and programs, but also that this impact is demonstrable and measurable. Please submit concrete indicators of what types of policy and programming recommendations you will generate, and what steps you will take in order to increase the likelihood of adoption of the recommendations.

In your annual activity plans (described in under "PI Responsibilities") you will need to provide explicit accounting of any citations of your research in policy debates, type and level of policymaker engagement, and all outreach and education efforts made to get your research integrated into ongoing dialogue. This can include citations in ongoing policy debates, donor activities, or other development efforts. You should also identify any participation in, or collaboration with, ongoing efforts by other parties, and the ways in which the findings from your research help inform the process.

You should provide a clear set of ultimate impact goals, as well as benchmarks that can be achieved in each year of the project. You will be asked to report on specific progress towards these benchmarks at the end of each year. You will also be asked to provide reporting on all training and outreach activities.

COLLABORATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

As a collaborative research support program, at least one principal investigator must come from a US institution and one must come from a host-country or regional organization. The US institution should be prepared to act as the primary contracting institution, subcontracting with other institutions as needed. Please demonstrate the history of collaboration among partners, specific strategies for involvement of PIs, clear distribution of labor, and primary avenues of interaction between researchers. In addition, the proposal should identify they ways in which they will contribute to building the capacity of their developing country partners, including both training and institutional capacity.

SUPPORT OF USAID OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

The MRR Innovation Lab is funded in support of the US Government's Feed the Future Initiative and the related Global Food Security Act (GFSA) of 2016. The Global Food Security Research Strategy calls for a "pipeline of innovations, tools and approaches designed to improve agriculture, food security, resilience and nutrition priorities in the face of complex, dynamic challenges." Projects might also connect with USAID initiatives (such as PEPFAR).
Each USAID mission has its own set of strategic objectives, priority value chains and programming. We encourage you to explore your proposed country of study on the USAID website and the individual mission website to show how your activities relate to ongoing work at mission. A clear plan of outreach to and interaction with the mission throughout the life of the project is required. If you would like to work with the relevant mission in the preparation of your proposal or on your research activities, this would be especially valued.

Research proposals should ultimately be focused on achieving global and/or regional impacts, however research and capacity development activities will be carried out in the proposed research countries. While some exceptions may be made, field-based research activities will take place in Feed the Future target[2], Feed the Future aligned[3] or resilience focus countries as indicated by USAID.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please send a letter of intent by October 7, 2019 to basis@ucdavis.edu. Letters of intent should include names of researchers, country of research, which theme the research will address, a few

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[2] Feed the Future target countries include: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda.
[3] "Aligned countries" are those in which the U.S. Government supports ongoing agricultural development programs but are not designated as target countries. This can be determined through a review of the relevant USAID mission strategy.

lines describing the research topic. We request this information in order to permit us to line up appropriate referees for each proposal.

Proposals must be submitted in electronic format to the MRR Innovation Lab (via basis@ucdavis.edu), and must contain the following elements:

Requirement	Description
Title Page	List Principal Investigators (include name, title, institutional address, phone, fax, and email), total project budget, and funds requested.
Abstract	Not to exceed 200 words.
Narrative Description	Not to exceed 20 double-spaced pages. In addition to detailing the intellectual context and proposed research methodology, the narrative description should take care to describe the policy relevance of the research and how the project will contribute to host country research capacity. It should also detail how the project contributes to USAID objectives and initiatives as discussed above.
Anticipated Outputs	Including dissemination activities targeted at policy makers as well as academic publications.
Anticipated Impacts	Including measurable indicators of the potential development impact of the research.
Timeline	A schedule or timeline of activities over the life of the project.
Budget	A budget for the life of the proposal that gives detail for each institution as well as an overall budget summary. The budget should also clearly describe how you will meet the matching requirements described below.
Summary of Qualifications	One paragraph summary of both US and host country PI's qualifications.
Curricula Vitae	Curricula Vitae for Principal Investigators.

BUDGET GUIDELINES

An indicative budget must be submitted using the template provided at [web URL]. Line items are provided as guidelines, but are not comprehensive. The budget must be broken out by yearly expenditures and estimated matching contributions must be included. Each proposal must include a budget for each institution participating in the activity, providing accurate institutional costs and negotiated administrative rates. Individual institutional budgets are necessary to monitor US-based and host-country expenses.

Travel to Annual Technical Committee Meetings

All project PIs will be members of the BASIS Technical Committee, which meets once per year. The purpose of these meeting is to provide peer feedback on BASIS research, and to lay the foundation for synthetic activities that draw together the policy messages from the different BASIS projects. All research budgets need to provide for annual travel expenses for both US and host country PIs. For planning purposes, assume that the meetings will be held in Davis, California. In practice the meetings will be held in either the US or another country, depending on the location of PIs and visa, cost and other considerations. For budget estimation purposes, budget for four technical meetings - two in Washington DC and two in Davis, CA over the life of the award.

Open Data Requirements

ADS 579 USAID Development Data discusses requirements, roles and responsibilities regarding the submission of datasets in machine readable format to USAID's Development Data Library. Recipients will be required to develop and maintain a process to ensure that data identified for release under this mandate are vetted for legality of release, removal of personally identifiable information and other security considerations.

Matching

The MRR Innovation Lab requires that each research project match a portion of their budget with nonfederal funds or contributions. All projects must provide indicative matching figures for their projects in the templates provided. Providing matching funds of 10% or more over the life of the project is strongly encouraged.

Please provide the budget in an excel format. You may also include a PDF version of the budget.

SELECTION PROCESS

A review panel comprised of the MRR Innovation Lab Director, Associate Director and at least two independent reviewers will score proposals based on the above criteria. The Lab's Board of Directors will then select which proposals to fund, paying attention to both quality and portfolio balance in regional and thematic terms.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate each proposal.

Criterion	Possible Score
Technical Merit of Proposal[4]	25 Points
Broader Applicability and Synthesis	5 Points
Collaboration and Capacity Building	20 Points
Policy Integration and Outreach	20 Points
Contribution to Feed the Future Objectives and Initiatives	15 Points
Potential for Development Impact	15 Points

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to funding research, AMA sponsors policy-oriented outreach activities that integrate the themes and findings of its research projects into a coherent, evidence-based voice about policy priorities and programming options. Proposals must demonstrate the capacity and a tentative plan to engage with local policymakers and work toward the adoption of policies that emerge from the research findings. The proposal should also explain the anticipated outreach strategy, including targeted audiences, specific activities, timeline, and benchmarks for measuring impact.

Additional expectations of selected grantees:

- At the initiation of each project, the PI will be responsible for coordinating with the MRR Strategic Communications Manager to prepare a short brief that summarizes his or her project for a lay audience. As results emerge, PIs will be expected to cooperate on at least one additional brief.
- Researchers will participate when possible at dissemination events hosted by MRR (1-2 over the life of the project). The MRR Innovation Lab will be responsible for event associated costs, so they do not need to be included in the proposal budget. Examples of such events include webinars and workshops.
- Researchers will attend annual technical committee meetings (details below under "Budget Guidelines"). Expenses related to these meetings should be included in your proposal budget.
- Researchers will comply with USAID's Open Data Policies and include expenses related to compliance in their proposal budget[5].

After a selection decision has been made, they will be subject to a brief review by USAID headquarters to confirm appropriate budget and that the proposal's scope is within the overall MRR Innovation Lab mandate. In addition, all selected proposals will be submitted to the relevant USAID mission offices for their review, feedback and concurrence. Activities will not be allowed to begin until we have received mission concurrence. We invite you to, as appropriate, engage USAID missions during the proposal preparation process to ensure buy-in.

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[4] Contribution to policy-oriented poverty alleviation research, contribution to MRR themes; relevance of sites chosen for themes/topics selected; appropriateness of research methodology; qualification of researchers, and feasibility of research design, schedule and budget.
[5] Researchers are directed to USAID's "ADS 579 – USAID Development Data;"

While these approvals are being acquired (estimated 30 days from date of selection), research teams will be expected to cooperate with the MRR Innovation Lab's dedicated Policy Engagement Coordinator to conduct stakeholder mapping, theory of change identification and creation of a stakeholder engagement plan. This plan will likely include activities throughout the life of the project, including regular workshops and meetings with stakeholders and outreach events at the conclusion of the research. The research team will be expected to conduct outreach activities in the country of the research. The MRR Innovation Lab will reserve funding for larger regional and global dissemination activities. While we anticipate planning activities will incur no costs, we will expect you to reserve some budget, as appropriate, to implement a national stakeholder engagement plan.

The PIs of approved projects will be responsible for submitting an annual report, annual work plan, and other brief reports to be approved by the MRR Innovation Lab. Assuming satisfactory progress on the research project (including timely submission of required reports), annual funding allocations to each program will follow the budget developed at the beginning of the project. However, because the MRR Innovation Lab is itself subject to annual budgetary approval, it is possible that a change in research funding will be necessitated in the event that the core budget from USAID declines below projected levels. Such changes will be negotiated with each PI and major budget reallocations will be subject to the approval of the Board of Directors.

REQUIREMENTS OF FEDERAL FUNDING

Any recipients of funding under this solicitation will be required to comply with USAID's Standard Provisions for US Nongovernmental Organizations. For any subawards made with non-US sub-recipients, the recipient must include the applicable "Standard Provisions for Non-US Nongovernmental Organizations."

ADS 252 Visa Compliance for Exchange Visitors dictates strict rules regarding bringing students from overseas to the United States for training. Note that this applies to graduate students employed as research assistants. Our current understanding is that any non-US citizens (excluding green card holders) that will be brought to the United States for training would be required to use a USAID-sponsored J1 visa with a two-year return requirement. In addition, special permission is required if you propose to support a foreign national who is not from a Feed the Future country. If you have any questions regarding this requirement, please contact the MRR Innovation Lab. In addition, if you're planning to propose short courses or formal training in either in the US or overseas (ADS 253), please get in touch with us so we can determine the applicability of any relevant requirements.

The full ADS documents provide additional information about the compliance requirements and exceptions to these requirements.

If you have any questions or would like any clarification/guidance on the applicability of different USAID provisions, please contact the MRR Innovation Lab Associate Director, Tara Chiu, at tlchiu@ucdavis.edu or 530-752-7252.