

## **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 **must** submit a brief, one-paragraph letter of intent to [basis@ucdavis.edu](mailto:basis@ucdavis.edu) by 15 March 2021. All researchers who submit a letter of intent are invited to submit a full proposal.

#### **Letter of Intent: 11:59 PM U.S. Pacific Time, Monday 15 March 2021**

*Submissions for the Letters of Intent should be submitted via the following link:*

<https://mrr.piestar-rfx.com/feed-the-future-innovation-lab-for-markets-risk-resilience/106>

#### **Full Proposal: 11:59 PM, PST, Monday, 19 April 2021**

*Full proposal submissions with complete application materials should be submitted via this second link: <https://mrr.piestar-rfx.com/feed-the-future-innovation-lab-for-markets-risk-resilience/107>*

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

The MRR Innovation Lab invites researchers to submit proposals for research projects that support this mission (proposed research must be completed no later than June 2025). Proposals may request up to \$750,000. Projects must include meaningful collaborations with researchers in the country where the country takes place. We anticipate a decision will be made by mid-May, with work commencing in October 2021. We anticipate 4-6 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.

## ***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.

## ***GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES***

While we will look for research that has regional and/or global learning, we consider the specific country of research as an important factor. In particular, we encourage research that focuses on resilience focus countries<sup>1</sup>. We also welcome research in Feed the Future focus countries<sup>2</sup>.

Research in countries where USAID is not active cannot be funded. Each USAID mission has its own set of strategic objectives, priority value chains, and programming. We encourage you to explore your proposed country of research through both USAID/Feed the Future materials, as well as the individual mission strategies. Please note that the relevant USAID mission will need to provide concurrence for successful awards.

## ***RESEARCH PRIORITIES***

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

The lab aims to be methodologically wide-ranging. We welcome research based on the evaluation of innovative interventions designed to address the development challenges described below. We also welcome research that studies the longer-term impacts of earlier interventions, and we are open to theoretically well-grounded studies, with credible identification strategies, that rely on observational or other data. We are also open to theoretical modeling that sheds new light on the working of complex systems, as well as econometric and other methodological work that informs our thinking on how to conceptualize and measure central concepts such as risk and resilience.

Prospective researchers are invited to review our [currently active projects](#). As a lab we strive to not only fund the most innovative research, but also to keep some balance in our research

---

<sup>1</sup> Resilience countries include: Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda.

portfolio across the topics listed below. Following each research priority we list some illustrative areas of research, highlighting a few that are under-represented in our portfolio. Note that the listed areas are not meant to be limiting, and we look forward to having you surprise us with new ideas!

### ***1. Enabling Resilient Escapes from Poverty***

We have learned that enhancing material assets, social assets, psychological well-being and/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:

- Poverty and resilience in conflict zones, areas with resource-related conflict, or areas of recurrent crisis;
- The synergies between building assets and securing assets with risk reduction mechanisms;
- Innovations that explore the potentially synergistic interaction between psychological and material asset buildings through ‘graduation’ or other approaches; and,
- Definition, measurement and estimation of resilience using panel (and other forms of) data.

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

Research brought forward a series of index insurance innovations that can promote *Resilience-Plus*.<sup>3</sup> 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:

- Innovation and evaluation of risk management approaches that synergistically blend savings, credit and insurance;
- Innovation and evaluation of smart premium subsidies for micro-, meso, or sovereign-level insurance contracts;
- Innovation and evaluation of packages of financial and other technologies (e.g., seed varieties or agronomic practices) designed to improve the level and stability of small holder economic well-being;
- Improve the salience and availability of index insurance for women farmers;

---

<sup>3</sup> *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.

- Enabling the adoption of climate smart agriculture, including tools that unlock credit for investment by smallholder farmers and improve the access to timely and relevant information for decision-making;
- Digital credit and other IT-based innovations that can improve credit access for all smallholder farmers, especially women; and,
- Measuring the quality and impact of sovereign insurance programs.

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

Market systems that deliver inputs and take away outputs from smallholder farmers can be thin and slow to develop, poorly integrated over space, and vulnerable to collapse. Fixed costs of information, high transport costs and commodities with “hidden traits” are some of the reasons behind these market system imperfections. Some of these may invite regulatory or other policy response. Research in this area might explore:

- Regulatory or other solutions to the problem of counterfeit or low-quality inputs that undercut market development;
- Smart learning subsidies that resolve systemic information problems and help build a market, especially for risk management technologies that only occasionally (or stochastically) reveal their benefits;
- IT solutions, farmer groups or contract farming mechanisms that encourage smallholder commercialization by creating more competitive markets for smallholder farmers;
- Instruments to improve market integration over space, improving price stability for both producers and consumers;
- Stabilizing local purchasing power and economic growth in the face of shocks, perhaps through risk facilities that integrate sovereign and individual-level risk management instruments; and,
- The impact of anticipatory risk management and disaster-response strategies and planning at the sovereign level.

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 the 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<sup>4</sup>, Feed the Future aligned<sup>5</sup> or resilience focus countries as indicated by USAID.

### ***SUBMISSION GUIDELINES***

Letters of intent should include names of researchers, country of research, which theme the research will address, a few lines describing the research topic. We request this information in order to permit us to line up appropriate referees for each proposal. All researchers who submit a letter of intent are invited to submit a full proposal.

Submissions for the Letters of Intent should be submitted via the following link by 15 March 2021: <https://mrr.piestar-rfx.com/feed-the-future-innovation-lab-for-markets-risk-resilience/106>

Full proposal submissions with complete application materials should be submitted via this second link by 19 April 2021: <https://mrr.piestar-rfx.com/feed-the-future-innovation-lab-for-markets-risk-resilience/107>

Proposals must contain the following elements:

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Title Page</b>	List Principal Investigators (include name, title, institutional address, phone, fax, and email), total project budget, and funds requested.
<b>Abstract</b>	Not to exceed 200 words.
<b>Narrative Description</b>	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.
<b>Anticipated Outputs</b>	Including dissemination activities targeted at policy makers as well as academic publications.
<b>Anticipated Impacts</b>	Including measurable indicators of the potential development impact of the research.

---

<sup>4</sup> Feed the Future target countries include: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda.

<sup>5</sup> “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.

<b>Timeline</b>	A schedule or timeline of activities over the life of the project. For the purpose of the timeline, you may anticipate work beginning in October 2021.
<b>Budget</b>	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.
<b>Summary of Qualifications</b>	One paragraph summary of both US and host country PI's qualifications.
<b>Curricula Vitae</b>	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.

#### **Subawards**

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. If you plan to make subawards as part of the implementation of your research project and you already know the institutions you will be providing funding under this award, please note the institution's name and DUNS number in the budget. If you have not determined the collaborating institution at this point, you may put "Institution 1" or similar in place of the institution name.

#### **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 Funds**

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.

Depending on the number of proposals received, proposals may be pre-screened by the MRR Innovation Lab management team using the criterion listed below to be sure the proposals meet basic eligibility requirements and minimum qualifications. All proposals that pass this preliminary screening will be assessed by two external reviewers, who will evaluate proposals based on technical merit and potential for policy integration and adoption. The reviewers will be asked to provide detailed commentary and recommendations in their reviews. These reviews will be prepared anonymously and be submitted to the MRR Innovation Lab Board of Directors, which will make the final selection decisions, paying attention to both quality and portfolio balance in regional and thematic terms.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate each proposal.

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Possible Score</b>
Technical Merit of Proposal <sup>6</sup>	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

---

<sup>6</sup> 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.

## ***PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION***

In addition to funding research, the MRR Innovation Lab 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<sup>7</sup>.

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 alignment with the mission’s strategic objectives.

While these approvals are being acquired, 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.

---

<sup>7</sup> Researchers are directed to USAID’s “ADS 579 – USAID Development Data;”

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](mailto:tlchiu@ucdavis.edu) or 530-752-7252.**