



## TRANSFORMATIONAL FUNDING: ROUND 1

### Request for Applications

#### INTRODUCTION

Despite global recognition of the importance of digital inclusion to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, one third of the world's population - mostly women - remained offline at the close of 2023. At the same time, as more women are brought online, we must ensure that women's inclusion in the digital ecosystem is safe, secure, accessible, and equitable -- or we risk amplifying a different kind of digital divide that reinforces offline power imbalances in online spaces. The gender digital divide has a direct and negative impact on global development and the goal of creating inclusive global societies and economies. It also emphasizes the need to recommit and strengthen efforts that bring together two powerful forces for global change: women and digital technology. This shared vision has led to the establishment of the Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) by USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which was officially announced by the White House in March 2023.

WiDEF is committed to closing the gender digital divide by scaling proven, evidence-based solutions that improve women's livelihoods, economic security and resilience, and shifting the trajectory of digital ecosystems so that women and marginalized populations, including youth and young women; disabled, indigenous, LGBTQI+, and rural women, have equitable access to safe, affordable, and meaningful online participation. It is well-accepted that women's empowerment is critical to sustainable development. Yet, the gender digital divide continues to erode progress in women's equality and economic security as digital advances leave over a billion women, girls, and marginalized populations on the far side of digital inclusion, including digital financial inclusion. Without a major shift in how the gender digital divide is conceptualized and addressed, the gap will persist and grow, resulting in women lacking access to critical information, services, and opportunities, further exacerbating existing gender inequalities.

#### INVITATION

WiDEF invites local entities in the countries where USAID operates to submit applications for grants to scale existing solutions that have made measurable progress toward closing the gender digital divide in their contexts and contribute to transformative approaches to digital inclusion. WiDEF will support entities that are rooted in the communities in which they seek to affect change and have demonstrated successful approaches to advancing gender equality and/or digital

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inclusion for women, girls, and marginalized populations, such as persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.

This funding aims to scale proven solutions that have demonstrated, through credible evidence, that the solution:

1. Drives digital inclusion for women through meaningful access to and use of accessible digital technology, particularly smartphones and the internet.
2. Significantly closes the gender digital divide in their context.
3. Is economically sustainable and scalable.

The gender digital divide – and the digital exclusion of marginalized populations – is a function of complex, inter-related factors, such as restrictive social norms that often limit women’s use of digital technology and exacerbate symptoms of this divide. Eligible applications need to articulate the most prominent barriers facing the communities they aim to support and how they will address at least two core WiDEF priority areas:

**Improved access to affordable devices and online experiences:** Increase women’s access to the internet and internet-enabled devices, and ensure that devices, digitally enabled services, including digital finance, and data are affordable, reliable, secure, and accessible, including for users with disabilities.

**Increased availability of relevant products and tools:** Design, develop, and provide access to relevant products and tools (interfaces, voice technologies, applications, digitally enabled services) that meet women’s needs and facilitate women’s demand for and use of mobile devices and applications, particularly smartphones, internet, and other technologies, especially for income-generation purposes.

**Elevating digital literacy and skills:** Strengthen women’s digital skills and literacy, including media literacy, so that they can fully and safely access digital services, and participate and lead in digital spaces, including the digital economy.

**Enhancing safety and security:** Address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including gender-based online harassment and abuse, and strengthen safeguards for digital user protection, including on consumer financial protection, data protection, cyber security, fraud, and risk mitigation.

Additionally, all applications need to commit to **generating data and insights:** Expand collection and responsible use of required sex-disaggregated data, research, and gender analysis (a) to better understand and address social norms and systems that influence gender disparities in technology adoption; (b) as a precursor to inform gender-equitable design of and activities related to digital policies, protocols, platforms, products, and services; and (c) to track and benchmark change.



## ELIGIBILITY

Both local nonprofit and for-profit local entities are eligible for grant funding. Successful applications will propose:

- A solution that advances digital inclusion broadly and aims to integrate and scale a proven solution to effectively address gender constraints and close the gender digital divide.
- Specific integration of at least two of the core priority areas above, in addition to generating data and insights.
- Clearly articulate which components of their existing or proposed programs are scalable across different contexts, and which are specific to the location/context of their pilot/current program.
- Entities must have, or be able to adopt, gender-based violence mitigation policies for all digital inclusion activities.
- Entities need to meet USAID Eligibility Requirements (**see Appendix A**).

Preference will be given to women-led organizations proposing feminist, gender transformational solutions and entities with a demonstrated track record of supporting gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized populations. At least 50% of award funding will support entities in sub-Saharan Africa.

### *If selected:*

- **Shortlisted applicants will be informed by August 2024.**  
WiDEF will conduct a due diligence assessment of all shortlisted applicants with particular focus on governance and internal controls, safeguarding, ability to deliver, financial management and management of downstream partners.
- **Final determinations of funding recipients is expected by October 2024.**
- **Awardees consent to** having project data and insights shared among WiDEF learning outcomes and advocacy activities and agree to the Open Access policy of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to ensure prompt and wide dissemination.



## CONCEPT NOTE GUIDELINES

To submit an application, please review and respond to the questions below in the [WiDEF Round 1 Submission Form](#) on [widedf.global](http://widedf.global). Please submit your application before May 6, 2024, at 11:59pm Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). We will only accept submissions in English. We are not able to accept incomplete proposals, proposals submitted after the deadline, or to offer direct feedback on proposals. We look forward to receiving your submission.

### Summary (1000 characters maximum)

Briefly explain why your proposed program should be selected.

#### 1. Problem statement (2500 characters maximum)

- How does the gender digital divide affect gender equality and women's economic empowerment in your context?
- Are certain women or population groups more excluded than others, and if so, why?
- How do social norms currently affect women's digital inclusion?

#### 2. Solution and approach (5000 characters maximum)

- Please describe your solution, where it will be delivered, who it will target, how it will be scaled, and how it advances the goals of WiDEF. Why will your program be successful?
- How have the intended participants of the initiative informed your solution or program design?
- Will the program support marginalized populations? If so, which ones and how?
- How will your organization mitigate the risk of and respond to online and offline gender-based violence and/or other potential unintended consequences from your intervention?

#### 3. Past program success (2500 characters maximum)

- What measurable results have your program achieved to date?
- How did you involve women and marginalized communities in previous program design and deployment?

#### 4. Enabling Environment (2500 characters maximum)

- Please describe the geographic, social, and regulatory environment of the proposed program, including available infrastructure.



- Which external factors pose the biggest risk to success? How will you overcome them?

#### 5. Expected Results (5000 characters maximum)

- What does success look like for this program? How will you know that your program has improved the digital inclusion of participants and/or women's livelihoods, economic security, and resilience?
- Please list 5-7 key performance monitoring indicators and any specific tools you plan to use to track program results.

#### 6. Funding request (2500 characters maximum)

- Please describe the funding support required and what activities it will be used to support.
- How will this project be financially sustained beyond the period of the grant?
- Are there other high-potential funders and partners for this initiative? Match funding is not a requirement.
- Please submit a high-level budget using the template provided in Appendix B.

#### 7. Team (5000 characters maximum)

- Please explain why your organization has the right combination of capabilities, experience, and commitment to execute this program.
- What kinds of technical assistance would your organization benefit from in addition to funding to ensure the greatest level of success?
- Please include short biographies of the Initiative leader and 1-2 key staff.

#### 8. Compliance

Proposals need to include the following processes and documents:

- Signed and uploaded certifications from the USAID Eligibility Checklist in Appendix A
- Certification that all information contained in the proposal is truthful and accurate.



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **Where do I apply?** Please visit the [WIDEF Round 1 Submission Form](#).
- **How can I learn more?** WIDEF will conduct at least three informational webinars on the WIDEF website to answer any open questions about the RFA and to assist applications with USAID guidelines.
  - March 26, 2024 at 10 am Bangladesh Timea
  - March 26, 2024 at 10 am Central African Time
  - March 27, 2024 at 10 am Pacific Daylight Time

WIDEF staff will not be able to respond to individual questions about the RFA and process. Questions may be sent in advance to [learnmore@widedf.global](mailto:learnmore@widedf.global) before March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, at 11:59pm Eastern Daylight Time. Questions and responses will be published online by April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 11:59pm Eastern Daylight Time. Webinars will be recorded and posted with frequently asked questions on the [WIDEF website](#).

- **What is the expected award amount per grant?** Awards will be granted between \$500,000 and \$1,500,000. Please specify the total needed budget in the application form.
- **What is the expected funding duration of awards?** 18-24 months.
- **How many proposals can one organization submit?** Entities may only submit one proposal in which they are the prime; entities may be proposed as a sub-recipient on multiple proposals.
- **Who is ineligible for funding consideration?** The following entities are not eligible to apply for funding as the lead organization but can be a member of the consortium. Eligible applicants are able to have partnerships with such entities when it strengthens the value proposition of their application:
  - Large enterprises as defined by USAID (above [249 employees](#))
  - University or academic organizations
  - Government, government-owned agencies (or appointed government agencies)
  - UN agencies and multilateral organizations
  - Non-governmental organizations (NGOS) that are not local entities by USAID definition
- **Can WIDEF Round 1 local entity awardees sub-grant to other organizations?** Local entities may apply for subawards under this RFA with further sub-grantees of any type such as other local entities, regional organizations, locally established partners and non-local entities. However, local entities may not sub-grant more than 50% of the award to any type of non-local entity (i.e. US, European or locally established partners).



## APPENDIX A: USAID Eligibility Checklist

- All countries are eligible, excluding Afghanistan, Burma, China, Cuba, Haiti, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Venezuela; entries from India are ineligible for Round 1 funding as WiDEF will be launching India-specific funding opportunities in late 2024/early 2025.
- Organizations need to fit the following USAID Local Entity criteria:
  - Is legally organized under the laws of a country that is receiving assistance from USAID;
  - Has its principal place of business or operations in a country receiving assistance from USAID;
  - Is majority-owned by individuals who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of a country receiving assistance from USAID; and
  - Is managed by a governing body, the majority of whom are citizens or lawful permanent residents of a country receiving assistance from USAID.
- Entities have, or are in the process of obtaining, a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).
- Entities are familiar with applicable sections in the Mandatory and Required-as-Applicable Standard Provisions for Non- U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations and sign and upload the necessary Recipient and Solicitation Standard Provisions certifications as part of the application.

**Note: A formal due diligence review will be conducted on shortlisted proposals.**



## APPENDIX B: Budget Template

Description	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	TOTAL
Salaries & Benefits			
Professional services			
Travel			
Equipment & Supplies			
Program Costs			
Other Direct costs			
Sub-awards and contracts			
Monitoring and Evaluation*			
<b>Total Direct Costs</b>			
Indirect Costs			
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	-	-	-

\*MEL expenditures should equal or exceed 5% of total direct project budget.