

## Request for applications: Technical assistance for large private enterprises to tackle the gender digital divide

This WiDEF request for applications invites large private sector enterprises to apply for technical assistance to scale solutions to help close the gender digital divide. Successful enterprises will be provided with bespoke technical assistance to scale products, services or approaches that can significantly increase women's access to and usage of the internet in the context of the digital economy. This call for proposals seeks to accelerate proven solutions addressing the barriers women face to using the internet including availability and affordability, relevant products and tools, literacy and digital skills, and safety and security.

We welcome applications from enterprises working in different sectors, digital and other, who have the potential to significantly increase digital inclusion for women. These could include those working in the digital sector (e.g. mobile network operators, internet providers, OTT (Over the Top) service providers, fintech) or those working in specific sectors where they are addressing or aspire to address key barriers to digital inclusion for women (e.g. education, agriculture, health).



### 01. Objective

Women make up almost half of the world's population, however only 65% of them use the internet<sup>1</sup>, and even fewer have a smartphone or use digital services, leaving a large untapped market for service providers such as internet providers, digital and financial services providers, and others whose services can be accessed online.

The private sector has a critical role to play in unlocking the opportunity that participation in the digital economy presents for women. WiDEF seeks to work with the private sector to address the barriers women face to accessing and using the internet, scaling solutions that are both commercially and socially beneficial. When women thrive, societies, businesses and economies thrive.

Announced by the White House in March 2023, WiDEF is a joint effort between USAID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate progress on closing the gender digital divide. WiDEF funds, supports and advocates for the scaling of proven solutions that bridge the digital gap for women, focusing on evidence-based approaches that improve women's livelihoods, economic security and resilience. WiDEF employs a feminist development approach, prioritizing the voices of women and marginalized groups.

CARE, Global Digital Inclusion Partnership, and the GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation Inc. ("GSMA Foundation") have been selected to manage WiDEF, and will identify, fund, and accelerate investment in proven solutions to close the gender digital divide. This Request for Applications for Technical Assistance is being issued by the GSMA Foundation pursuant to a Grant and Cooperative Agreement between USAID and GSMA Foundation as an element of WiDEF.

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1. [ITU Facts and Figures 2023](#).



## 02. Opportunity

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WiDEF invites applications for technical assistance from large, private sector enterprises<sup>2</sup> to scale a proven solution that can have a substantial impact on the digital inclusion of women.

Applicants will be expected to clearly articulate how their solution<sup>3</sup> accelerates the **digital inclusion of women to close the gender digital divide**, enabling equitable access and usage of the internet by women, girls and marginalized populations including disabled, indigenous, LGBTQI+, and rural women.

This open, competitive award will provide the selected private sector companies with bespoke technical assistance to optimize and scale a solution that:

1. Drives digital inclusion for women through meaningful access to and use<sup>4</sup> of accessible digital technology, particularly smartphones and the internet.
2. Significantly closes the gender digital divide in their context.
3. Is commercially sustainable and scalable.

WiDEF will provide selected applicants with technical assistance for up to two years to support their efforts to address the gender digital divide. This assistance will be focused on helping to unlock opportunities to significantly close the gender digital divide rather than supporting ongoing “business as usual” activities. This bespoke support will be provided by the WiDEF Consortium and third-party suppliers engaged by WiDEF. No direct financial support will be provided to applicants as part of this WiDEF funding round.

A non-exhaustive list of examples of the types of bespoke technical assistance support includes:

- Research (e.g. to understand barriers and needs of underserved segments of women to inform actions to better reach and support these women with specific products/services).
- Evaluation (e.g. of existing products or services for women to inform changes/replication).
- User testing/design of specific approaches/services to ensure they best meet the needs of underserved women.
- Product adaptation/iteration (e.g. through analysis of service usage data, user feedback and further design research).
- Business modeling/supporting for scaling planning.

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2. Defined as those with 250 or more employees.

3. A solution can be a product, service or approach that enables women’s access to and use of the internet, for which there is credible evidence that it can increase women’s digital inclusion.

4. The United Nations defines meaningful access as a level of connectivity that allows users to have a safe, satisfying, enriching and productive online experience at an affordable cost.” For more information about meaningful access and use visit [United Nations Universal Meaningful Digital Connectivity Targets](#).



## 03. WiDEF priority areas

This call for applications is focused on accelerating the digital inclusion of women and closing the gender digital divide in low- and middle-income countries. The gender digital divide is a function of complex, inter-related factors, such as structural inequalities and 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 of the four core WiDEF priority areas:

<b>1. Improved access to affordable devices and online experiences</b>	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.
<b>2. Increased availability of relevant products and tools</b>	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.
<b>3. Elevating digital literacy and skills</b>	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.
<b>4. Enhancing safety and security</b>	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 gender-disaggregated data, research, and gender analysis to (a) 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) track and benchmark change.



## 04. Eligibility

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We invite applications for technical assistance that meet the following criteria:

- The applicant is a large private sector enterprise (with >249 employees).
- The solution is focused on digital inclusion and closing the gender digital divide.
- The applicant clearly articulates how it aims to scale a proven solution to effectively address barriers preventing women from accessing and/or using the internet in the proposed location, while mitigating any potential negative impacts.
- The solution integrates at least two of the WiDEF priority areas above, in addition to generating gender-disaggregated data and insights.
- The applicant is able to provide evidence<sup>5</sup> that the solution can increase women's adoption or increased usage of the internet and internet-enabled products and services, and help close the gender digital divide
- The proposed solution can be commercially sustainable and scalable.
- A demonstrated commitment to supporting gender equality and the inclusion of underserved customers.<sup>6</sup>
- A presence in the country and/or local partnerships to deliver the solution on the ground.
- The applicant is able to clearly articulate where technical assistance is required and how it will be used to deliver the proposed impact.
- The applicant must agree to meet the commitments defined in Section 7.

WiDEF strongly encourages applications from firms with female leaders/founders or board members, and a good representation of women at all levels of the company.

### US government sanctions

Please note, as a U.S 501(c)(3) organization, the GSMA Foundation is obliged to comply with the sanctions, laws and regulations of the United States and other sanctions regimes as may be applicable. These sanctions and laws and other legal or regulatory regimes may restrict the GSMA from distributing assistance to certain entities or regions. Prior to contracting, selected applicants will undergo additional sanctions/regulatory compliance screenings.

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5. For example, results from a pilot or evaluation showing traction of a product or service by women customers; external research or insights from the same market or from another market that could feasibly be adapted in your chosen market and solution.

6. For example: commitment to gender equality in the enterprise's strategy; efforts to ensure diversity in the workforce; or implementation of existing products or services that seek to reach women.



## 05. Eligible countries

Projects may be delivered in all countries where USAID operates<sup>7</sup> excluding Afghanistan, Burma, China, Cuba, Haiti, Jordan, Syria, Venezuela.

At least 50% of technical assistance will support solutions implemented in sub-Saharan Africa.



## 06. Selection process and key dates

Stage	Timeline	Description
Application	17 July to 12 September 2024	Applications open.
Application review and shortlisting	September to October 2024	Applications will be reviewed against eligibility and selection criteria for shortlisting.
Follow up with shortlisted applicants	October to November 2024	Shortlisted applicants will be asked to respond to questions raised by the WiDEF team while reviewing their application and provide background/due diligence documents required to finalize their application.
Shortlisted applications shared with Selection Panel	December 2024	An independent panel of experts will appraise the applications based on submitted materials and background checks.
Contracting stage	Commencing December 2024	Successful applicants will be invited to the contracting stage with the GSMA Foundation.
Implementation	January 2025 onwards	Applicants will implement their projects with technical assistance from WiDEF.

7. Please visit [Where We Work | U.S. Agency for International Development \(usaid.gov\)](https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work).



## 07. Commitments from selected applicants

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The following commitments are required from the winning applicants for the project duration:

- A nominated Project Manager plus time and resource allocation for team members identified in the application, with clear roles and responsibilities tied to key project milestones.
- C-Suite senior executive endorsement with regular project oversight.
- Sharing of relevant data and insights with WiDEF for analysis and to generate impact statistics as well as in accordance with the Gates Foundation Open Access Policy.<sup>8</sup> This includes, at a minimum, reporting against agreed Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) indicators and providing high level impact data for two years after the completion of the technical assistance support.
- Compliance with quarterly and annual reporting requirements throughout the project period.
- Sharing of learnings and best practices from the project implementation to contribute to ongoing iteration of the solution as well as for case studies, blogs and impact reports.
- Consent to have agreed data and insights from the project and technical assistance shared as part of WiDEF learning outcomes and advocacy activities.
- Collaboration with the WiDEF team and external technical assistance providers selected and contracted by WiDEF.

Successful applicants will be expected to sign an In-kind Services Agreement setting out the terms of the partnership with WiDEF and project to be delivered (which will also include agreements on the sharing of project data and its protection).

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8. Please visit the [Gates Foundation Open Access Policy](#)



## 08. How to apply

To submit an application, please review and respond to the questions below in the WiDEF Technical Assistance Round application form available on [wedef.global](https://wedef.global). Please submit your application before September 12, 2024, at 11:59pm BST/UCT. 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 prior to or after submission.

Applications will be scored against the following criteria:

Criteria	Weighting
Impact of solution and approach	20%
Quality of evidence	20%
Clarity and justification of request for technical assistance	20%
Organizational capacity to deliver	20%
Sustainability and scale of solution	20%

Additional points will be awarded to those organizations who have a track record on delivering digital inclusion for underserved population groups and gender balance in their organizations and where there is an enabling policy environment for the proposed solution.

*We look forward to receiving your submission.*

### Application form preview

The following information will be requested on the WiDEF Technical Assistance Round submission form:

#### Basic information

- Name of company
- Company address
- Country incorporated/registered
- Company size is >249 employees Yes / No
- Name of solution
- Country(ies) where solution will be implemented
- Name of the CEO
- Name, job title, email address of the Point of Contact
- Name of founder(s) and co-founders
- Name of board members

## Summary (200 words maximum)

Briefly explain why you are applying. Why should your firm be selected? How will the proposed technical assistance accelerate the digital inclusion of women?

## Problem statement (150 words maximum)

**What is the challenge to women's digital inclusion that your solution is seeking to address?**

Please include the following:

- What are the **specific barriers women face** to adopting and using the internet in your context? How do **social norms** currently affect women's digital inclusion?
- Are certain **women** or population **groups** more **excluded** than others, and if so, why?

## Solution and approach (250 words maximum)

**What is it that you are proposing (product, service or approach) to address this challenge?**

Please include the following:

- Please **describe your solution**, including: **what** it is, **where** it will be delivered, **who** it will target (e.g. which segment of the female population is it targeting), **what stage** is it at, how it will be **scaled** and **how it advances** the **goals** of WiDEF.
- What are you seeking to achieve?
- How will the solution support women and/or marginalized populations? If so, which ones and how?
- How does this solution align with your enterprise's strategic goals?

## Evidence base for your solution and approach (150 words maximum)

**What evidence do you have that this solution is effective in addressing the gender digital divide?**

Please include the following:

- What have you **achieved to-date** with this or a similar solution or approach?
- What **evidence** do you have **that this solution can drive digital inclusion** of underserved populations, especially women? This can be from your own data and insights or from another source.
- Have the intended users/participants informed your solution or program design (and if so how)?

## WiDEF core priorities (tick all that apply – minimum of two)

**Which of the following WiDEF core priorities will be addressed by the solution that this technical assistance will support?**

- **Improved access and affordability:** Increasing internet and device access for women, ensuring affordability, reliability, security, and accessibility for users with disabilities.
- **Relevant products and tools:** Designing and providing tools that meet women's needs and facilitate their use of technology.
- **Digital literacy and skills:** Strengthening women's digital skills and literacy, including media literacy.
- **Safety and security:** Addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence and strengthening user protection.



## How will your solution address the selected priority areas? (150 words maximum)

### Support request (200 words maximum)

#### What technical assistance do you need to optimise your solution to reach women at scale?

Please include the following:

- What is the **gap or challenge** that technical assistance support from WiDEF can address? Why is this support needed? What does it unlock that would not be possible otherwise?
- **Describe the support** you would ideally like from WiDEF. Which type of support and over what timelines?
- **How will you use it** to reach women at scale?

### Enabling environment (100 words maximum)

Please describe the **geographic, social, policy** and **regulatory enabling environment** for the proposed solution, including available infrastructure and other elements that may support or hinder implementation.

### Expected Results (150 words maximum)

#### What does the success of this solution look like? How will you track progress?

Please include the following:

- **How** will you know that your **solution is driving the digital inclusion** of women to improve their livelihoods, economic security, and resilience?
- What would be the near-term and long-term reach and impact of the intervention?
- Please list **5-7 key performance indicators** and any specific tools you plan to use to track results of the optimized solution and its commercial viability.

### Measuring success

WiDEF has two indicators that all awardees must measure:

1. Number of individuals participating in WiDEF funded activities (gender disaggregated)
2. Number of individuals with increased internet use through WiDEF supported activities (gender disaggregated)

Will you be able to **track and share this required data** over the course of the project? **(y/n)**

### Project delivery (200 words maximum)

#### How will you ensure delivery of the solution that the technical assistance will support?

Please cover the following:

- Please explain **why your organisation** has the right combination of capabilities, experience, and commitment to leverage this technical assistance opportunity and significantly impact the gender digital divide.
- What commitments/budgets/resources have been secured to ensure delivery of the solution that the technical assistance is supporting?

- How will this project be **sustained and scaled** beyond the period of the support from WiDEF?
- What **risks** have you identified (e.g. project delivery risks and potential negative impacts on women and marginalised groups)? How will you overcome them?
- Are you working with partners for the successful implementation of your solution? If so, who are you working with and in what way?

## **Team (150 words maximum)**

### **Who will be on the team to deliver the solution?**

Please cover the following:

- Who is the **senior sponsor**?
- What **departments and/or external partners** would be involved? What would their role be?
- Please include **short biographies** of the project lead and 1-2 key staff

## **Compliance (Y/N)**

- Company registration documents available on request
- Willing to enter in an agreement with the GSMA Foundation
- Committed to delivering solution supported by technical assistance provided
- Willing to share data and insights
- Data will be gender disaggregated
- Certification that all information contained in the proposal is truthful and accurate

## **Other (150 words maximum)**

**Please provide any other information that you feel might be relevant for your application that is not already covered above. This could include, for instance, gender representation within the company or organizational commitments to gender equality beyond what is already included in this application.**



## 09. Additional information

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### *Document input/attachment section*

#### — **How can I learn more?**

WiDEF will conduct at least three informational webinars to answer any open questions about the RFA and to assist applications with USAID guidelines.

- Wednesday, 31 July 2024 at 10 am Bangladesh Standard Time
- Wednesday, 31 July 2024 at 10 am Central African Time
- Wednesday, 31 July 2024 at 10 am Eastern Daylight Time

WiDEF will not be able to field individual questions about the application and process.

- **Questions** may be sent in advance to [LearnMore@widedf.global](mailto:LearnMore@widedf.global) **before 5 August 2024, midnight BST/UCT.**
- Questions and **responses will be published online by 14 August 2024, midnight BST/UCT.**
- Webinars will be recorded and posted with frequently asked questions on the [WiDEF website](#).

#### — **What is the expected duration of the technical assistance?** From 6 months to two years.

#### — **What is the value of the technical assistance being provided?** Bespoke technical support worth between 50,000USD and 150,000USD will be provided by third-party suppliers engaged by WiDEF. Members of the WiDEF consortium team will also provide additional technical assistance support. No direct financial support will be provided to applicants as part of this WiDEF funding round.

#### — **How many proposals can one organization submit?** Each entity may only submit **one proposal**.

#### — **Who is ineligible for funding consideration?** The following entities are not eligible. However, eligible applicants are able to have partnerships with such entities when it strengthens the value proposition of their application:

- Governments, government-owned agencies (or appointed government agencies)
- UN Agencies and multilateral organizations
- Non-profits/NGOs
- Enterprises with fewer than 249 employees (MSMEs)
- Universities or academic organizations

— **Which countries are eligible?** Projects may be delivered in all countries where USAID operates<sup>9</sup> excluding Afghanistan, Burma, China, Cuba, Haiti, Jordan, Syria, Venezuela. The list of currently eligible countries is provided below. Any updates to this list will be shared on the WiDEF Round 2 FAQ page.

Africa	Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean	Europe and Eurasia	Middle East
Angola	Bangladesh	Brazil	Albania	Egypt
Benin	Cambodia	Colombia	Azerbaijan	Libya
Botswana	India	Dominican Republic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Morocco
Burkina Faso	Indonesia	Ecuador	Greenland	Tunisia
Burundi	Indo-Pacific	El Salvador	Moldova	Yemen
Cameroon	Kazakhstan	Guatemala	Serbia	Iraq
Central African Republic	Kyrgyz Republic	Honduras	Armenia	Lebanon
Chad	Laos	Jamaica	Belarus	West Bank and Gaza
Cote d'Ivoire	Maldives	Mexico	Georgia	
Democratic Republic of Congo	Mongolia	Nicaragua	Kosovo	
Djibouti	Nepal	Panama	North Macedonia	
Eswatini	Pakistan	Paraguay	Ukraine	
Ethiopia	Philippines	Peru		
Ghana	Thailand			
Guinea	Uzbekistan			
Kenya	Timor-Leste			
Lesotho	Vietnam			
Liberia	Sri Lanka			
Madagascar	Turkmenistan			
Malawi	Tajikistan			
Mali				
Mauritania				
Mozambique				
Namibia				
Niger				
Nigeria				
Republic of Congo				
Rwanda				
Senegal				
Sierra Leone				
Somalia				
South Africa				
South Sudan				
Sudan				
Tanzania				
The Gambia				
Uganda				
Zambia				
Zimbabwe				

9. Please visit [Where We Work | U.S. Agency for International Development \(usaid.gov\)](https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work).