



BASIS AMA INNOVATION LAB REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS: Building Resilience and Assets for Food Security

The BASIS Assets and Market Access Innovation Lab is a virtual institute comprised of researchers from around the globe who operate in support of USAID's Bureau for Food Security. The goal of BASIS is to build resilience and assets for food security by designing and rigorously testing financial technologies and other complementary innovations that lay the foundation for inclusive agricultural growth. In this round of proposals, BASIS will give special priority to USAID [Feed the Future](#) focus countries¹ (see details on scoring preference in this document).

Letter of Intent: 5 PM U.S. Pacific Time, Friday, 15 November 2013

Proposal: 5 PM U.S. Pacific Time, Friday 11 January 2014

Questions on this RFP may be directed to the BASIS office (basis@ucdavis.edu or 530.752.7252).

Overview

BASIS invites researchers from US universities to submit proposals for research projects that may go no further than 30 September 2017. Project awards are expected to average approximately \$700,000, and we expect to award approximately four proposals. Projects must be collaborative and have genuine linkages with researchers in the country where the research takes place, and contribute to capacity building in the host country. Proposals must be submitted by 11 January 2014 and final selection decisions will be made by 1 February 2014. Project implementation may begin immediately at that time, though please allow some space in your proposed timeline for the contractual process with your university.

If you wish to apply for a grant, you must submit a one paragraph letter of intent no later than 15 November 2013.

¹ See the [Feed the Future](#) website for a current list of Feed the Future focus countries. As of the release of this RFP on 15 October 2013, Feed the Future focus countries include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Rwanda, Senegal, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Please note that as a result of the 2012 coup in Mali, the Feed the Future website indicates that the United States Government is "reassessing its non-humanitarian assistance" in the country. Please consult BASIS via basis@ucdavis.edu before submitting a proposal for a research project in Mali.

In addition to funding research, BASIS 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. BASIS-funded researchers will be required to contribute their time and participate in these activities. Principal Investigators should anticipate participating in one or two activities over the life of their project.

ELIGIBILITY

Each proposal must identify at least one PI from a US university and one PI from a host-country institution. BASIS will subcontract with the PI from a US university. The US PI and his or her university will be responsible for negotiating and entering into sub-agreements with all partner institutions and for accounting to BASIS for all program accomplishments, expenditures and reporting requirements.

RESEARCH THEMES AND AREAS OF INQUIRY

Proposals should put forward a research plan that promises to add to our knowledge by addressing critical issues around identifying pathways from rural poverty. BASIS's current portfolio of research projects is comprised of impact evaluations that focus on two themes:

1. Financial instruments for risk management and resilience; and,
2. Interventions that reduce barriers to adoption of improved agricultural technologies

We welcome new proposals that would deepen this portfolio of research, especially projects that evaluate interventions specifically designed to improve women's access to risk management, financial and/or agricultural technologies, for example, getting inputs into the hands of women.

While we welcome proposals that fall under these existing themes, we strongly encourage proposal submissions for research that would deepen our understanding of poverty dynamics, especially insights and evidence that would assist the design of comprehensive social protection systems that protect the assets of chronically poor households as well as enable them to build and leverage these assets in pursuit of more resilient and rewarding livelihoods. Proposals might focus on impact evaluations of innovative graduation strategies or more basic research on fundamental mechanisms that constrain upward mobility.

COLLABORATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Collaboration and capacity building are central to the BASIS collaborative research support program. All proposals should be a genuine collaboration with a host-country researcher. Proposals should describe 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 to peer research collaboration, BASIS seeks to promote collaboration and capacity building at additional levels. One such level is academic. Academic collaboration and capacity building can take place through student training. While not always feasible within the context of a specific research program, training for host country nationals is especially encouraged. Please be specific about the planned number of students to be trained, location of training, and efforts that will be made to recruit women and developing country nationals. Be specific about your plans for recruiting students, how they will participate in the program, their anticipated funding, and anticipated outcome (degree, *etc.*).

In addition to student training, academic collaboration and capacity building can take place through curriculum development and support. Again, while not always feasible or appropriate, research projects at times have the opportunity to support curriculum development within host country academic institutions (including faculty training). Please specify any plans to teach short courses, work on curriculum development or other similar activities that will enhance the development of host country academic institutions.

Beyond academic collaboration, many BASIS projects offer opportunities to build capacity and collaboration with other stakeholders in research projects. Financial market projects, for example, may have opportunities to collaborate and build capacity with banks or insurance companies. In addition, many projects will include training and capacity building activities for producer households (*e.g.*, training in financial literacy or the use of new technologies). Please be specific regarding the nature, timing and estimated size of proposed training activities.

POLICY INTEGRATION AND OUTREACH

In addition to contributing to knowledge, proposals should demonstrate the capacity and a plan to engage with local policymakers and work toward the adoption of policies that emerge from the research findings. Applicants should show a plan for involving policy makers in various stages of research design and implementation; and show plans for disseminating findings to policy community, conducting outreach to USAID Mission, and for encouraging incorporation of research findings into policy formulation.

The proposal should also clearly explain outreach strategy, including target audiences, specific activities, timeline, and clear benchmarks for measuring impact. Please be

specific about how this project relates to ongoing debates, research or programs in the relevant country, the expected contribution of the research, and how this can be measured. This can include both in country debates as well as donor processes such as Poverty Reduction Strategies (a World Bank activity), Millennium Challenge Corporation compact development, USAID mission programming, or other donor policy-related initiatives. For those projects that cannot be directly tied to ongoing policy initiatives, applicants should clearly explain the potential value of the research, and their plan for ensuring that the results will inform ongoing development strategies. Annual activity reports will ask for concrete indicators of how research is being used in policy and programming.

In some instances projects may be more relevant to a broader, global context than any individual country. In this case, the proposal should develop an outreach plan for this constituency.

SUPPORT OF USAID OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

USAID is both a donor and partner of BASIS. BASIS research thus needs to be complementary to the food security and agricultural development objectives of USAID, particularly the Feed the Future (FtF) initiative. Research in countries where USAID is not active cannot be funded, and research in Feed the Future focus countries is strongly preferred. This preference for work in FtF focus countries is reflected in our proposal scoring criteria. The major USAID initiatives and objectives with which proposed research projects should connect are:

- **Feed the Future:** Feed the Future is the over-arching U.S. government global hunger and food security initiative. Its goal is to reduce poverty and under-nutrition. You can find both the full FtF Guide, as well as the research strategy, at www.feedthefuture.gov. While the scoring criteria give strong preference to research in Feed the Future focus countries, any proposals to conduct research in non-FtF countries must clearly outline how outreach will be conducted to inform future program design and policy interventions for FtF countries.
- **USAID Mission Strategic Objectives:** 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, and show how your activities relate to ongoing work at the Mission. A clear plan for outreach to, and interaction with, the Mission throughout the life of the project is required.
- **Other USAID Initiatives:** Projects might also connect with USAID initiatives, including PEPFAR, Global Climate Change and Food for Peace.

We encourage researchers to familiarize themselves with the current priorities of USAID, and design programs with them in mind. The proposal should clearly explain

complementarities between the research program and ongoing USAID goals and activities, in both Mission and Washington offices. Research projects that build up against specific USAID programs are especially valued.

DEVELOPMENT IMPACT AND IMPACT INDICATORS

While BASIS is a research organization, our goal is to achieve concrete development outcomes through research. A proactive and joint effort between individual researchers and the BASIS AMA Innovation 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. These can include, but are not limited to, initial and follow up meetings with local stakeholders, academic and non-academic outputs, and a clear strategy for dissemination of results to parties with the potential to implement them.

In your annual activity plans (described in the next section) 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.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION & RESPONSIBILITIES

Reporting requirements will include an annual work plan and budget, an annual activity report summarizing results and accomplishments, impact analysis and results monitoring, trip reports (one per trip), research outputs and summaries, brief quarterly updates, and research updates as needed.

At the initiation of each project, the PI will be responsible for preparing a short brief that summarizes his or her project for a lay audience (see the *BASIS Brief* series on Publications page of the [BASIS web site](#)). At least one additional brief should be prepared as project results come in. As mentioned above, PIs will be asked to present their projects to relevant meetings of policy makers, including the AMA Workshop series in Washington, D.C.

The PIs of approved projects will be responsible for submitting an annual report, annual work plan, and other brief reports to be approved by BASIS. 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 BASIS AMA Research Program 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 subject to the approval of the BASIS Technical Committee. Major budget reallocations will also be subject to the approval of the Board of Directors.

The USAID mission in the country in which the research will be conducted will be consulted before research can begin. Researchers themselves must obtain any visas or other permissions required by host-country governments. All grant awards will be made conditional on obtaining all required clearances.

BUDGET GUIDELINES

An indicative budget must be submitted using the template provided on the BASIS [“Information for Researchers” website](#). Line items are provided as guidelines, but are not comprehensive. The budget must be broken out by yearly expenditures (according to the federal fiscal calendar) 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. It is preferred that at least 50% of your budget be spent supporting activities in the country of your research. Budgets should be on a federal fiscal year calendar (each year starting 10/1/201X and concluding on 9/30 of the following year).

Travel to Annual Technical Committee Meetings: All project PIs will be members of the BASIS Technical Committee. The Committee meets once per year 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 travel expenses for both the US and host country PIs to attend the annual Technical Committee meetings. 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.

Matching: BASIS requires that each research project match a portion of their budget with **non-federal funds or contributions**. All projects must provide indicative matching figures for their projects in the templates provided. Providing matching funds of \$100,000 or more over the life of the project is strongly encouraged.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please send a letter of intent by **15 November 2013** to basis@ucdavis.edu. Letters of intent should include names of researchers, country of research, which theme the research will address, a short description of proposed research, etc. 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 BASIS AMA Innovation Lab (via basis@ucdavis.edu), and must contain the following elements:

Requirement	Description
Title Page	Must include a list of Principal Investigators (include name, title, institutional address, phone, fax, and email), total project budget, and funds requested from BASIS AMA Innovation Lab.
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. All projects must end by 9/30/2017.
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. Budgets should be laid out according to the federal fiscal calendar (each year from 10/1 to 9/30 of the following year).
Summary of Qualifications	One paragraph summary of both US and host country PI's qualifications.

SELECTION PROCESS

A review panel comprised of the BASIS Program Director, the USAID Project Officer and three independent reviewers will score proposals based on the following criteria:

Criterion	Possible Score
Technical Merit of Proposal ²	25 Points
Broader Applicability and Synthesis ³	5 Points
Collaboration and Capacity Building	20 Points
Policy Integration and Outreach	20 Points
Contribution to USAID Objectives and Initiatives	15 Points
Development Impact & Impact Indicators	15 Points
Non-Feed the Future Focus Country	Deduction of 15 Points

It is important to note that in recent funding windows, proposals that did not score at least 80 points on average were unsuccessful. While this score is not an official cutoff, this should provide guidance for proposal development. For example, a proposal that does not focus on a Feed the Future priority country, and is therefore subject to a deduction of 15 points, must be nearly flawless in order to remain competitive and to be seriously considered by the Board. Please take this into consideration during proposal development.

The BASIS Board of Directors will then select from the top-rated proposals to ensure a project portfolio that is balanced for regional coverage and complementarities. Prior to announcing project awards, BASIS will communicate with USAID Missions to notify them about the proposed research activity and solicit their input regarding synergies with on-going activities and Mission strategic objectives.

² Contribution to policy oriented poverty alleviation research, contribution to AMA themes; relevance of sites chosen for themes/topics selected; appropriateness of research methodology; qualification of researchers, and feasibility of research design, schedule and budget.

³ Additional points will be given to projects that have broader regional or global applicability. Proposals should also identify opportunities for synthesis with other research findings or for cross-regional comparisons, and provide information on how results could be used in other contexts.