



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Development Innovation Ventures (DIV)

We encourage **thoroughly** reading this document and all material on our [website](#) before submitting an application. The DIV team receives a large volume of inquiries every day.

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1. Introduction to USAID

a. What is USAID?

USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development, the “Agency”) is the world’s premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID’s work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience. The purpose of foreign aid should be ending the need for its existence, and we provide development assistance to help partner countries on their own development journey to self-reliance – looking at ways to help lift lives, build communities, and establish self-sufficiency.

USAID demonstrates America’s good will around the world; increases global stability by addressing the root causes of violence; opens new markets and generates opportunity for trade; creates innovative solutions for once unsolvable development challenges; saves lives; and advances democracy, governance, and peace.

USAID works in numerous [sectors](#) and [countries](#). USAID’s headquarters is in Washington, D.C. In most countries or regions where USAID operates, a “Mission” affiliated with the U.S. Embassy leads USAID’s work there.

b. What is the U.S. Global Development Lab at USAID, and how does DIV relate to it?

DIV was created in 2010. In 2014, USAID created the [U.S. Global Development Lab](#) (“the Lab”) to serve as an innovation hub. The Lab is DIV’s organizational home at the Agency. Within the Lab, DIV is in the [Center for Development Innovation](#).

c. What is the USAID ADS?

The USAID ADS (Automated Directives System) is the Agency’s Operational Policy. The ADS outlines the organization and functions of USAID, along with the policies and procedures that guide programs and operations. It consists of over 200 chapters organized in six functional series: Agency Organization and Legal Affairs, Programming, Acquisition and Assistance, Human Resources, Management Services, and Budget and Finance. The information is regularly updated to align USAID’s policies with the latest U.S. Federal Government regulations, USAID Administrator policy statements, and other overarching guidance that applies to all programs. As the Agency’s Operational Policy, the ADS applies to DIV. It is publicly available, in full, [here](#).

2. Applying to DIV

a. Before Applying

i. I'm thinking about applying to DIV. Where should I start?

We are excited that you are thinking about applying to DIV! We strongly encourage all applicants to review DIV's [website](#) for information regarding the grant program and our selection criteria. When you are ready to apply, you can access the online application through our [How to Apply page](#).

ii. How does DIV select grantees?

DIV reviews applications on a rolling basis, in the order they are received. The specific criteria and process to review applications are outlined in the [Annual Program Statement \(APS\)](#).

iii. What types of innovations are likely to be competitive?

Anyone can explore the portfolio of current and past DIV winners [here](#). Strong DIV applicants demonstrate a thorough understanding of DIV's model, especially the emphasis on rigorous evidence of impact, cost-effectiveness, and pathways to scale.

iv. What types of projects are not likely to be competitive?

Listed below are common examples of projects that are not likely to be competitive:

- Development interventions with limited **potential to scale** or **evidence of impact and cost-effectiveness** - e.g., building schools, constructing orphanages
- Innovations that lack a focus on customers or end users at the “**base of the pyramid**,” with limited wealth or access
- **Intermediaries with an indirect impact** - e.g., incubators, accelerators, conveners
- Basic scientific research - e.g., pharmaceutical testing before full regulatory approvals; lab testing of a prototype **with no field testing**
- Planning or diagnostic tools that are difficult to directly connect to measurable development impacts
- Innovations with **limited potential for expansion** to other contexts
- Innovations with an **unclear theory of change** - e.g., investigative journalism

v. I have a great idea, but I would love DIV's input on whether it's a good fit. Can I talk to someone to get input on whether my innovation is a good fit?

Unfortunately, no. Due to U.S. Government procurement rules that require fair competition, we are unable to comment on specific innovation ideas or proposals and whether they would be a “good fit” before an application is submitted.

vi. How selective is the DIV program?

The DIV program is highly selective. Selection rates vary according to the number of applications received, but DIV selections each year typically followed the trends below:

- **Over 1,000 applications** submitted
- **Only about 100 of those 1,000 applicants move beyond the initial review stage and into the due diligence stage**, where the DIV team reviews proposals in further depth.
- **Only about 25-35 of the 1,000 applicants receive DIV grants** after the full evaluation process.

b. Eligibility

i. Who can apply to DIV for a grant?

Almost anyone! DIV accepts applications from U.S. and non-U.S. organizations, nonprofit and for-profit entities, as long as the project is in a [country where USAID provides funds to development efforts](#). Participation of foreign government organizations under the DIV APS is possible only through an approved sub-award agreement with a prime recipient (see [ADS 303.3.21](#)).

ii. Does my project have to work in a specific country or region? Are there countries or regions in which DIV cannot fund?

DIV is open to projects in any [country where USAID provides funds to development efforts](#). Since there are countries without USAID Missions or those that have Regional Mission coverage, the physical presence of a USAID Mission in country is not required for a proposal from a particular country to be eligible. For a small number of countries, the application processing timeline can be longer than normal due to special requirements for providing U.S. foreign assistance to operate in that country. The DIV team will inform promising applicants from a country with these special requirements.

iii. My organization is based in the U.S. Am I still eligible for a DIV grant?

Yes, if your organization meets the eligibility requirements outlined in the DIV [Annual Program Statement](#).

iv. Is DIV only interested in technological or product innovations?

No, DIV is an open innovation program that supports creative solutions to any global development problem. Innovations funded by DIV include products, services, applications of new business or delivery models, and production processes.

v. Does my organization have to undergo a financial audit to apply?

No, in most cases, you do not have to undergo a financial audit to apply, even if you have never received funding from USAID before. However, in some cases, the Agency may require a financial audit. If you move past the initial review stage of our application process, the DIV team will inform you what is required.

vi. Do I need a referral or letter of endorsement from a USAID staff member or the USAID Mission(s) relevant to my proposal?

No. Letters of support from USAID Missions or Bureaus are NOT required or requested. However, upon award, DIV grantees may be expected to coordinate with USAID Missions and Bureaus as appropriate. The application form includes a field where applicants can note the USAID staff member who referred the applicant to apply. A USAID staff referral does not guarantee an application's success.

vii. Does whether or not my organization has received funding from USAID in the past matter for my eligibility?

No. You are eligible to apply to DIV, regardless of whether you have previously received funding from any part of USAID, including DIV. Note that, if you have received funding from other parts of USAID in the past, DIV may contact the relevant USAID staff member who managed that grant or contract to understand the nature of that work and your performance. Note also that approximately 70% of DIV applicants and 50% of DIV portfolio organizations are "new to USAID," meaning they have never received funding from USAID before.

viii. Does my organization have to contribute to project costs to be eligible?

No, applicants are not required to contribute to project costs. However, applicants are encouraged to leverage other resources for the projects and the type, amount, and source should be described in the application where we ask applicants for their proposed "cost-share." We ask for this to understand what resources an applicant proposes bringing to the project that will not be financed by DIV grant funding. Our objective in doing so is to understand the total value of resources for the proposed activities so we can understand the full cost of your innovation and the significance of DIV funding in relation to other resources.

The cost-share does not need to be other funding; it could be labor hours that are not funded through DIV support or it could be equipment/machinery already owned or donated, which you will use to perform proposed activities.

In the application form, cost-share is the additional value of resources that you propose bringing on for the project, ***in addition to*** the amount of DIV funding requested. For example, if your total project costs are \$1,000,000 and you are requesting \$600,000 from DIV, then your cost-share would be the

difference: \$400,000.

Please note that voluntary committed cost-share becomes a binding requirement of the award if accepted by USAID.

c. Funding

i. What stage and funding amount should I apply for?

Applicants can apply for any stage. Stages are determined by the maturity of the innovation and proposed activities. The DIV team can adjust the stage and funding amount requested during the review process.

ii. If I receive funding at one stage, can I enter into a higher stage automatically?

No. All applicants, whether or not a previous DIV winner, must complete the full application process to receive a higher stage of funding.

iii. Are there specific activities for which DIV funding cannot be used or for which funding is more difficult to use?

Yes, there are a small number of specific activities or costs that USAID cannot fund or can only fund in specific and special circumstances, governed by rules in our [ADS](#).

After an application is selected for DIV funding, it moves into the award “negotiation” process to finalize the grant agreement with USAID. During this process, USAID conducts a "cost analysis" to examine preliminary budgets from the applicant to determine compliance with federal regulations. During this process, the DIV team will flag if there are any expenses that USAID is unable to support, or those which may require further administrative approvals. The list below outlines three common categories of expenses that may present challenges.

(1) Ineligible Commodities are goods and services that a DIV grantee cannot procure with U.S. Government funding. Specific examples include:

- Military equipment
- Surveillance equipment
- Commodities or services for support of police or other law enforcement activities
- Abortion equipment and services
- Luxury goods
- Gambling equipment
- Weather modification equipment
- Goods or services from ineligible suppliers, including any firms or individuals who do not comply with the requirements in Standard Provision, "Debarment, Suspension and

other Responsibility Matters" and Standard Provision, "Preventing Terrorist Financing" for [US-based](#) and [non-US](#) organizations.

These restrictions apply to all sub-agreements under the DIV award. The restrictions do not apply to commodities or services that the recipient provides with private funds as a part of a cost-sharing requirement or with "program income" generated under the DIV award (typically applicable to for-profit grantees).

(2) Restricted Commodities are goods and services for which additional supplementary approval from USAID is required. Specific examples include:

- Agricultural commodities
- Motor vehicles
- Pharmaceuticals
- Contraceptives and Condoms
- Pesticides
- Used equipment
- Fertilizers

(3) Special Situations may also arise, depending on how the applicant proposes to use DIV funding. Common examples include:

- **Construction** is prohibited under the grant agreements used by DIV
- Activities or goods that could have an **impact on the environment** (e.g., pesticides) may require additional approvals or restrictions on the use of funds. Every grant receives an "initial environmental examination" prior to award finalization. If certain activities or goods are determined to have an impact on the environment, then those activities or goods might require further approvals or paperwork or be excluded entirely.
- **Activities in certain countries** might require further approvals by USAID, which could lead to a longer award finalization process and possibly additional restrictions on how funding can be used. This includes the listed countries for "special notification" of Congress, as identified in the annual Appropriations Act and countries with special security concerns, such as a recent coup d'état.
- **Equipment over \$5,000** (e.g., motor vehicles) may necessitate that you provide the DIV team evidence that you have reviewed the options available and selected the best value.
- **Purchase of real property** is prohibited under the grant agreements used by DIV
- **Source and nationality of goods and services** may also be stipulated in the award agreement you receive from USAID. One example is the "Fly America Act," which stipulates considerations for how to book program-funded travel through U.S. and non-U.S. air carriers.

iv. Does DIV have guidance regarding acceptable overhead (percentage) for our proposed budget?

No, DIV does not have a maximum regulated percentage of overhead (indirect costs) associated with selecting grant applications. We accept applications from any type of organization, many of which have diverse indirect rates. Applications that are selected for funding based on the merits of the ideas proposed and the project team (as determined by the selection criteria in our Annual Program Statement) will later be subject to a cost analysis by USAID's procurement team to understand the basis of costs claimed in the application. The purpose of this analysis is to validate and finalize the requested budgetary sum. For additional information on NICRA (Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement) for non-profit organizations, visit this USAID [website](#).

v. Can DIV funding be allocated for salary support?

Yes, DIV funds may be spent on personnel. Such costs are allowable.

vi. Can DIV funding be used to formally establish my NGO or business?

DIV supports organizations and companies – including many early-stage ones – in piloting, testing, and scaling an innovation with high potential for impact, cost-effectiveness, and scale. DIV cannot support the process of formally registering your NGO or business and instead expects that you have registered your organization or business prior to award. However, DIV funding can play an important role in supporting your organizational growth, even at these early stages.

Note also that if an application advances to the due diligence stage for closer review, the applicant must be registered in the U.S. Government's [System for Award Management](#) (SAM) site to continue in the DIV review process. If you are not registered in SAM, please follow the online instructions. You will need a DUNS number, and an Employment Identification Number (EIN) or Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN). At this moment in time, DIV is unable to help initial applicants with registering in SAM, but the DIV team will be able to support applicants selected for closer review.

d. Application Process

i. When can I submit my application? Is there a deadline?

DIV accepts applications 365 days a year. There is no deadline.

ii. Where do I submit my application?

All applicants must submit an application via the online application portal, but you may [download a Word version of the application](#) to work offline prior to submission. We will only review one application per project/project team. The application instructions and process are outlined on the DIV [website](#).

iii. Does my application have to be in English?

Yes. Unfortunately, we do not have the ability to review applications submitted in languages other than English.

iv. Can I submit more than one application per round or more than one at the same time?

Yes. We accept more than one application at a time from an organization, as long as each application is unique and for a separate innovation. For example, an applicant can submit one application for an energy project and another for a separate agriculture project. However, multiple applications cannot be submitted for the same project. If DIV receives multiple submissions of the same or substantially similar application, we will review the first submitted application.

v. Can I make updates to my application after submission?

No, you will not be able to update an application once it has been submitted. We highly encourage you to download a Word version of the application to work offline prior to submitting the application online.

vi. Will I have to submit a longer “full application” at some point after the first submission?

No, DIV applicants do not have to fill out a longer “full application” after the first submission.

As outlined in the Annual Program Statement (APS), if an applicant moves into the due diligence phase, then DIV may request tailored information and materials. DIV may engage with the applicant in a variety of ways, such as: interviewing the applicant, requesting supplementary materials that further outline the technical approach and how it responds to DIV’s criteria, contacting other funders or partners of the applicant, engaging internal USAID or external experts to review the application, and any other information-gathering to fully evaluate the application. Supplementary materials may include an initial budget, financial model, proposed milestones, and implementation plan. DIV may assist the applicant in developing these materials.

vii. How will I know the status of my application? How can I inquire about the status?

- **Confirmation of DIV’s receipt of your submitted application:** After submitting your online application, you will receive a confirmation email from DIV with your application number. You will receive an automated email when the status of your application changes with any of the following: Submitted, Review in Progress, Diligence, Intent to Award, or Declined. You may check the status of your application by logging into the DIV Community Portal with the username and password you established during the online application process.

- **Outcome of DIV’s initial review of your application:** DIV reviews applications through a multi-step process. Once we complete our preliminary review, we may request written answers to questions, a phone interview, or reject an application. We aim to complete preliminary application reviews within 4-8 weeks after submission. Applicants will receive a response to this initial application within 1-2 months of submission.
- **Final rejection or “Notice of Intent to Award”:** If you pass the preliminary application review and move into DIV’s due diligence phase, then you will exchange emails and calls with the DIV staff assigned to your application. DIV staff will review your materials and determine what further information is needed for a funding recommendation to be made. The due diligence process takes 2-5 months, depending on a variety of factors, such as the proposal’s technical complexity. DIV may reject an application at any time during the due diligence phase, and you will receive an email with comments explaining the reasons behind the rejection decision. If your proposal is recommended for funding, then you will receive a Notice of Intent to Award. The process to negotiate and finalize the award can take 3-5 months.

viii. Will I receive feedback on my proposal if you reject it?

No, not necessarily. While we would like to provide every applicant with thorough and thoughtful feedback, due to the large number of applications we receive, we provide feedback on a case-by-case basis.

ix. Can I re-submit a proposal after it has been rejected?

Yes, you may submit a new application to DIV if the new submission includes significant changes from the previous application. Many applicants re-submit an application to DIV taking into consideration any feedback provided by DIV or significant new development with the innovation.

3. For DIV Grantees

a. What does DIV provide?

- **Patient, flexible grant funding.** We offer the most patient form of capital (grants) and build in as much flexibility as we can into our grant award structures, to accommodate the continuous iteration of your innovation and strategy for scale.
- **Dedicated support team.** We assign each portfolio organization to a support team – a dedicated grants manager to help navigate USAID and how to work with the U.S. Government, and a portfolio manager to ensure you receive the support you need, from impact assessment to business strategy and follow-on funding.
- **Acceleration support.** We understand that grant funding for the innovation alone is not enough. In addition to ongoing grant support, we have an Acceleration program to help grantees understand, identify, and address barriers to scale and connect you to targeted

services to meet specific growth objectives. This includes access to our network of partners, including a wide variety of funders and investors.

- **Global exposure.** As part of USAID, we offer a communications and external engagement platform with international reach and a brand with global recognition. DIV has also developed a strong track record and reputation since its founding in 2010.
- **Extensive global network.** As part of USAID, we facilitate your connections to its technical experts in [every sector](#), embassies and USAID Missions (country offices) in [more than 100 countries globally](#), and other funders, such as [Grand Challenges for Development](#) and financial institutions partnering with USAID's loan guarantee mechanism, the [Development Credit Authority](#) (DCA). Relationships with Missions can be particularly valuable, as they manage USAID's relationships with governments, typically with relationships at the most senior levels, such as Ministers of Health and Education. Likewise, as part of the broader U.S. Government development and innovation community, we can also facilitate connections, where appropriate, to the [Overseas Private Investment Corporation](#) (OPIC), the [U.S. Small Business Administration's innovation and technology programs](#), and the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#).

b. What is the relationship between DIV and grantees?

USAID determines the details of grant awards on a case-by-case basis. Grantees may be responsible for the following activities and documentation during the project:

- Providing ongoing updates of progress and submitting regular reports according to the requirements outlined in the award agreement
- Conducting ongoing assessments and a final evaluation of the project
- Providing financial reports in accordance with the requirements of the agreement
- Requesting approval for any changes in project objectives and project staff
- Notifying USAID when receiving additional funding from another source for this or any related project
- Briefing USAID personnel in Washington and in-country on project progress and outcomes
- Complying with USAID branding requirements
- Mutual agreement on any additional provisions

c. What acceleration support does DIV provide its grantees?

In addition to the ongoing engagement from your dedicated portfolio support team, you'll have the opportunity to tap into acceleration resources and services. By leveraging technical expertise from within the Agency as well as external partnerships, we provide an array of services, tools, and financing opportunities to innovators who demonstrate a need and whose participation could accelerate their innovation's scale.

Examples of such support include:

- **Business Diagnostics/Needs Assessment.** Short-term, customized diagnostics/needs assessment to better understand your needs as an organization and where you may face challenges as you grow, and prepare you to address them strategically.
- **Expert Connections.** Get connected with subject matter experts with formal or informal relationships with USAID.
- **Communications Support.** Work with communications specialists to refine your stories to become more relevant to your customers, funders/investors, and other key stakeholders.

d. Does DIV take board seats with its grantees?

No, we are not permitted to take board seats. However, we may observe board meetings, if a portfolio organization and DIV believe that would be mutually beneficial. DIV also certainly welcomes grantees to share any board meeting materials and/or read-outs from meetings, as appropriate.

e. If I win a DIV award, how do award payments work? Do I get one big payment or multiple smaller ones? Do I have to provide receipts showing what I spent funding on in order to get paid? Do I have to achieve certain accomplishments before getting paid?

Almost all DIV awards are grants, and the vast majority are structured as Fixed Amount Awards (FAAs). FAAs are a simplified grant structure offering an improved customer service experience for new partners who have never worked with USAID. All DIV awards are structured with milestones, where DIV and the applicant organization mutually negotiate ambitious but achievable objectives for the proposed work. Payments are disbursed in tranches, when these milestones are completed and approved by DIV. In this way, our awards allow for a “pay for results” structure that provides flexibility for the grantee to iterate during award implementation.

f. Do I have to publicly advertise USAID as the source of DIV funding? What are the branding requirements if I win a DIV grant?

We are proud to support our grantees and look forward to success through our grant funding. We encourage grantees to highlight USAID where appropriate, such as when you highlight other funding partners. We work with grantees individually to determine a mutually agreeable plan to highlight our support of their model. For instance, if grantees are concerned about the perception of USAID support limiting the market potential of their product among their identified target market, we are happy to highlight our involvement only where it would be most useful to the grantee.

g. Who owns intellectual property developed during a DIV grant?

Under the terms of our agreements, DIV grantees have ownership of the intellectual property (IP)

developed under the award, and USAID obtains a broad license to use such IP. For patentable IP, if the grantee fails to pursue patent protection, the U.S. Government has a right to step in to seek such protection. However, USAID has never exercised these "march in" rights. The grantee is free to exercise full ownership rights to the IP, unless the agreement provides otherwise.

h. For evaluation-focused projects, what requirements are there about open data access, evaluation registration, etc.?

DIV is committed to ensuring that the DIV-supported research is rigorous, ethical, and transparent. All DIV-funded evaluations must submit, prior to start of implementation, a finalized evaluation design that includes key questions and hypotheses, outcomes of interest, sample sizes and power calculations, and planned analysis. DIV, in consultation with the researchers, may choose to publicly release the evaluation design. All research involving human subjects must be registered with the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB), as outlined by [USAID's protection of human subjects policy](#).

Completed evaluations must be submitted to the Agency's [Development Experience Clearinghouse](#) (DEC), USAID's online repository of USAID-funded technical and programmatic materials. Each completed evaluation must include an abstract; a 2-5 page summary of the purpose; background of the strategy, project, or activity; main evaluation questions; methods; findings; conclusions; and annexes. Datasets—and supporting documentation, such as codebooks, data dictionaries, scope, and methodology used to collect and analyze the data— compiled under USAID-funded evaluations must be submitted to the [USAID Development Data Library](#), USAID's public repository of Agency-funded, machine-readable data. The data should be organized and fully documented for use by those not fully familiar with the project or the evaluation. Researchers may request a delay of such submission, which may be approved at the discretion of DIV.

i. What is required to be published on USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse?

The [Development Experience Clearinghouse](#) (DEC) is USAID's online repository of USAID-funded technical and programmatic materials. DIV grantees must submit to the DEC any intellectual works created as a result of the DIV grant. Intellectual works describe the planning, design, implementation, evaluation, and results of development assistance activities that are generated during the life cycle of the grant (more examples of what should and should not be submitted to the DEC can be found [here](#)). Grantees should submit materials to the DEC once approved by the grant manager, but may request a delay, which may be approved at the discretion of DIV.

4. Partnering with DIV

a. Does DIV partner with others?

Yes, absolutely! DIV leverages a large network of partners to source ideas, evaluate proposals, support the growth and development of our grantees, and share lessons learned to support evidence-driven innovation in global development.

b. On what does DIV partner with others?

DIV partners in many ways, such as co-funding grants, sourcing proven solutions, conducting due diligence, sharing learnings, and providing tailored services to accelerate growth and impact. To learn more about how we partner, check out the [Partners](#) page on our website.

c. What are the mechanisms for partnering with DIV?

DIV partners in a variety of ways. For example, informally, we stay in touch with a variety of other funders. Formally, we at times procure support from partners, such as to provide technical assistance to our portfolio.

d. What are some examples of DIV partnerships?

We partner with a variety of external partners, such as the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), as well as internal USAID partners, including the Bureau for Global Health and Missions in India, Zambia, and others around the world.