

Agri-SME Evidence Fund Call for proposals – winter 2024/25

Application guidelines

December 2024



DIRECTED BY



FUNDED BY



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1. General information

What is the problem?

A majority of lower-income households in low- and middle-income countries live in rural areas and obtain their livelihoods from agriculture, with the activity contributing approximately 25% of GDP and 59% of total employment in low-income countries. Despite the sector's economic importance, agriculture receives a disproportionately low level of formal credit, resulting in an estimated \$65 billion financing gap for agricultural small and medium-sized enterprises (agri-SMEs) across sub-Saharan Africa.

Increasing access to finance for smallholder farmers and agri-SMEs has significant potential to improve rural livelihoods, strengthen food security, mitigate the effects of climate change, and create economic opportunities for women, youth, and other marginalised groups.

What are we doing to address the problem?

To expand the knowledge base within this sphere, the IGC and Aceli Africa have set up the Agri-SME Evidence Fund. This evidence fund is targeted to understand the mechanisms and impact of the flow of catalytic capital to agri-SMEs to improve livelihoods and environmental performance.

The evidence fund will build an evidence base to inform new thinking and practice among practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and funders around improving the functioning of financial and agricultural markets in sub-Saharan Africa. The deepened understanding of key issues is also the first step towards addressing barriers to agri-SME growth.

2. Research priorities

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund, funded by Aceli Africa, invites proposals for grants up to £100,000 (including overheads) that address research gaps at the intersection of **agriculture, finance, and SMEs**. Proposals that engage with two of these topics may be funded if the research question and findings are relevant to the research agenda (see [concept note](#) for more details).

Geographically, the priority countries are **Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia**. Research in other low- or middle-income countries may be funded if the research question and findings are relevant to our priority countries as well as the research agenda.

We encourage research proposals from researchers based in low- and middle-income countries, PhD students, and early-career researchers.

Research topics - We are interested in projects that focus on the following:

- Increasing the supply of loans to agri-SMEs
- Increasing agri-SMEs' demand for loans
- Understanding the impact of access to credit and technical assistance on livelihoods
- Understanding the role of enabling environments on credit markets

In addition, we aim to commission work that spans these areas while also focusing on themes such as gender, youth, food security and nutrition, climate and environment. We also prioritise creating research infrastructure and public databases that serve as public goods.

Project types - We are interested in funding the following:

- Exploratory research
This relates to preliminary research ideas, such as conducting background research, developing partnerships, visiting field sites, and collecting preliminary data. Funding for exploratory research should be used to support costs related to the researcher's travel and engagement with the relevant IGC country team (if applicable), practitioners, and/or policymakers, to develop a proposal for a pilot or full research grant proposals to submit to subsequent calls for proposals.

- Pilots and proof of concept

This relates to projects with a reasonably well-developed research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data before it can be scaled-up into a larger research study. New evidence from the pilot can lead to an adjustment or reformulation of the research question. Grant awardees are expected to engage with relevant policy stakeholders, implementation partners, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund team, and the relevant IGC country team (if applicable) for feedback during the pilot, to further shape their interventions and research design for scale-up.

- Fully developed research projects

This relates to fully developed research projects, regardless of budget. Not only must the research question be clear, but applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners (if applicable), and a clear and compelling research design. Proposals can be submitted for any type of research, and we encourage the use of a variety of approaches, including using secondary data. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation of research projects that have already started where new research opportunities arise. The expectation is that these projects will result in a paper publishable in a top economics journal and generate significant policy impact.

Research methods - We are interested in funding the following:

Quantitative research with strong counterfactuals and a sound research methodology. We also encourage qualitative research that is conducted in combination with quantitative approaches (mixed methods).

We will not fund projects that are a) purely qualitative, b) not grounded in sound economic research principles, or c) relevant only to middle- or high-income countries.

3. Contracting and eligibility

3.1. Contracting

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund requires researchers to submit proposals through a managing research institution/organisation (University, NGO, think tank, etc.). The IGC and its country offices do not count as managing institutions. As you submit your proposal through a managing institution, you must work in collaboration with the institution's relevant bodies and gain their approval prior to submitting the proposal and budget.

If a proposal is approved by the Agri-SME Evidence Fund, a contract will be raised between LSE and the managing institution, binding the institution to a number of legal requirements. It is therefore crucial that, to avoid any contracting delays, **you must collaborate with the managing institution to develop the project proposal and budget before submission and that they can adhere to the [LSE \(IGC\) Supplier Terms and Conditions](#).**

In addition, the authorised institutional signatory must be identified and provided in the proposal documentation. The authorised signatory is a person who has been given the right to sign legally binding contracts on behalf of the institution. This is important to provide at this stage when collaborating with the managing institution so as not to delay contracting of the project. Please note, the authorised signatory cannot be the project principal investigator (PI).

3.2. Eligibility

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund gives equal opportunity to researchers from all over the world, and proposals are assessed on quality and the evaluation criteria outlined in this document. However, please see below some guiding principles.

- 1 A researcher from any country is allowed to apply for a research grant.
- 2 A single researcher can be included in more than one proposal during the same call for proposals with different proposals. A single institution is allowed to submit multiple proposals. If multiple proposals are submitted, the researcher and/or institutions involved should have the capacity to conduct the research according to the proposed timescales.
- 3 The Lead PI of a proposal must hold or be currently pursuing a PhD. Co-PIs generally should have the same qualifications, but candidates with a master's degree can be considered.

- 4 For fully developed research projects, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund will not fund projects over GBP 100,000 (including overheads), and our average project value is 60,000.
- 5 The Agri-SME Evidence Fund will not fund projects that are a) purely qualitative, b) not grounded in sound economic research principles, or c) relevant only to middle- or high-income countries.
- 6 Applications that are in line with the Evidence Fund research priorities, empirically rigorous, advance our knowledge about inclusive growth policy, and have strong value for money are favoured.

4. Review process

4.1. Evaluation criteria

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund gives equal opportunities to researchers from all over the world, and research proposals are assessed based on their ability to show empirical rigour, relevance to inclusive growth policy, and value for money. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund will not fund projects that are a) purely qualitative, b) not grounded in sound economic research principles, or c) relevant only to middle-or high-income countries.

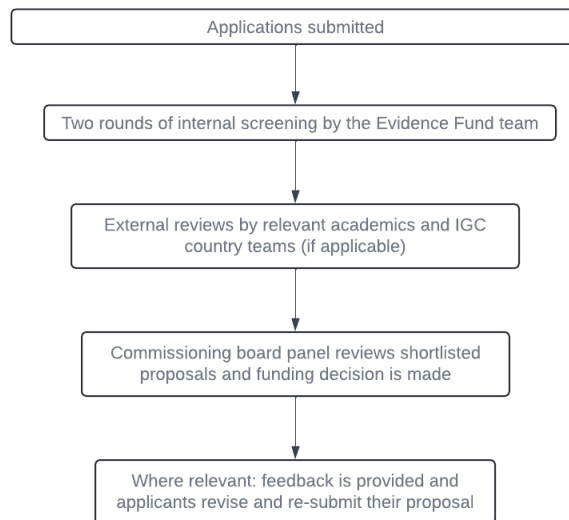
The main criteria against which proposals are evaluated are as follows:

- 1 **Alignment with research priorities:** Does the research question address the research priorities identified in the [concept note](#)?
- 2 **Alignment with geographical priorities:** Is the project located in one of our priority countries (Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia)?
- 3 **Quality of research design:** This captures the academic rigor and quality of research design. Only projects that can demonstrate methods likely to produce valid and reliable results are considered.
- 4 **Policy impact:** The potential for direct policy or practitioner impact from the research, reflecting both the importance of the policy target and the current and future engagement with relevant policymakers and practitioners.
- 5 **Academic impact:** This entails the potential for research to advance scientific understanding of a particular issue, by significantly contributing to the existing literature and being published in a high-profile economic journal.
- 6 **Engagement with local institutions:** The Agri-SME Evidence Fund prioritises proposals that involve local researchers, use researchers embedded in a ministry or government agency, and/or partner with local institutions or practitioner organisations.
- 7 **Value for money:** This involves scrutinising the budget and considering whether it is cost-effective. Key questions to consider: is the budget proportional to the task? Could the same results be achieved more inexpensively? Do the costs reflect local market rates?

4.2. Review of proposals

Each proposal that is submitted during the call for proposals undergoes a rigorous assessment by multiple parties. First, there are two rounds of internal screening conducted by the Agri-SME Evidence Fund team to identify proposals that fit the themes and goals of the Evidence Fund. Proposals that pass the screening are then reviewed by external academic reviewers, and, where relevant, IGC country teams. As a next step, successful proposals are evaluated by a commissioning board which is made up of relevant researchers. Where relevant, applicants might be asked to revise and re-submit their proposal based on feedback from the commissioning board.

Aceli Africa will receive an ex-post opportunity to ensure that all approved proposals fit their agenda before funding decisions are finalised.



Source: IGC

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund strictly adheres to rules of impartiality during its evaluation process and conflict of Interests provisions are in place to ensure that decision-making happens fairly and transparently. All reviewers and commissioning board members that have a conflict of interest are not involved in any stage of the decision-making process on those proposals.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application by the end of March 2025.

4.3. Awards

Successful applicants will be issued an award letter which contains details of the funding after which contractual agreements are drawn up. Incorrect information on the application form, costs which do not adhere to Agri-SME Evidence Fund guidelines, and negotiations with institutions regarding the [LSE \(IGC\) Supplier Terms and Conditions](#) can all lead to contracting delays.

5. Submitting your application

5.1. Instructions

Please follow these steps in submitting your proposal:

- 1 Read these application guidelines to help you complete your application. This guide contains useful information covering budgets and remuneration, project deliverables, and grant management.
- 2 Seek approval from and collaborate with your institutional research department to build and finalise the project proposal and budget ensuring adherence to the Agri-SME Evidence Fund's budget and funding conditions found in this document.
- 3 Complete the online Agri-SME Evidence Fund proposal form.
- 4 Submit the completed online proposal form by **23:59 GMT on 2 February 2025**. Late applications will not be considered. Applications without budgetary information will not be considered for funding. Make sure you save your work as you progress on your application.
- 5 After submitting your online application form, you will receive a short questionnaire from us that allows us to get to know you a little bit better. Please ensure you fill this out as well. It will not take more than 2 minutes of your time

5.2. Submission guidelines

- The proposal form contains word limits for each section which you are expected to comply with.

- Any supplementary information such as tables, charts, graphs or letters of engagement are not required as part of the application form and should not be submitted/emailed. Please use specific sections in the proposal form to describe your design in simple language within the word limit.
- Please refer to IGC's [Resources for Applicants](#) webpage for examples on how to design a strong research design.
- For institutionally managed projects, researchers must develop the proposal and budget with their pre-awards department (or equivalent), whose approval must be provided prior to submitting a final proposal.
- Applications that are submitted late, incomplete, submitted in the incorrect format, or do not include a budget breakdown will not be considered for funding.

Please email igc.spear@lse.ac.uk with any technical queries and agri-sme-evidencefund@theigc.org with any thematic queries.

6. Guidelines for completing the proposal form

6.1. Project summary

Project title, summary, and confidentiality

The focus of the summary should be the motivation and policy impact of the research. It should be approximately 300 words in length. It should include: the primary motivation of your study; a concise description of your research question; a non-technical summary of the research design; and the policy relevance of the project and the expected impact.

If your project is successful and it is not flagged as confidential, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund would like to upload the short summary on the IGC website.

Start and end date

We strongly advise researchers to select a project **start date between 1 May and 15 June 2025** to allow time necessary for funding decisions to be made, researchers to be notified, and the contracting process to be completed before a project is due to begin. This enables the first payment to be made, and allows for the fieldwork, etc. to start later at the discretion of the researcher. The **end date** of the project (i.e., the date on which the final deliverable is due for submission to the IGC) cannot go past 30 September 2026.

6.2. Participant information

Management body

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund requires contracting research projects by an **institution** rather than an individual researcher as it is the most streamlined and efficient contracting method. We encourage prospective applicants to notify their managing institution in advance so they are aware of the involvement from the outset and can streamline the contracting process. The IGC and its country offices do not count as managing institutions. Institutions can include universities, think tanks, NGOs, etc.), and are the ones who will manage the grant funds.

If any of the Principal Investigators are affiliated with an institution, you must check if the institution can manage the project. The managing institution is responsible for overseeing project spend in line with the approved budget. The managing institution is also responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted as outlined within the approved proposal and that outputs are delivered on time. You will be asked to provide contact details of the institution's approved signatory in the proposal form, as they will be signing the contract on behalf of the institution. Managing institutions will be required to review and accept contracting terms and conditions, including proposal budgets and overhead allocation. Please ensure that the Pre-Award grant managers at your institution review and approve the proposal before submission.

For these contracts, the full project budget (inclusive of individual and project expenses) is split into payment milestones each of which is tied to one or more outputs. Payments are made to the institution upon final approval of all outputs in each milestone. Please note that if the project is approved, the IGC will need to undertake a full Due Diligence Assessment, where the institution will be required to submit various documents as evidence of financial and operational compliance.

An institutionally managed project can have an overhead of up to 15% of the project cost and will need to submit a Final

Financial Statement as one of the outputs at the end of the project to confirm actual spend. If the project uses sub-contractors, the total amount of overhead charged **cannot exceed 15% across the multiple contracted parties**. The full budget of the project will be paid via milestones, and at least 30% of the budget is linked to the final milestone to ensure final deliverables are submitted and approved by the project end date.

Research staff and project staff

The main responsibilities and contact details of the research and project team (i.e. principal, co-investigators, research manager, research assistant etc.) should be outlined here. Researchers who do not have a personal website should attach a CV or resume (max. 2 pages). Every project should have a principal investigator. Education status along with fee rates for the principal and co-investigators must be outlined here.

If the daily fee rate for anyone costed on the budget is over £65 per day, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund will need to review their CV and check this against the [IGC Pay Matrix](#).

6.3. Research theme and country focus

Research theme

Select which of the Agri-SME Evidence Fund research themes are addressed by your project. An ideal project under the Evidence Fund touches on all three themes. Proposals that engage with two of these topics may be funded if the research question and findings are relevant to the research agenda (see [concept note](#) for more details).

Project that only address one of the themes are not eligible for funding.

Country focus

Identify which country will be the focus of your project. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund's priority countries are **Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia**. Research in other low- or middle-income countries may be funded if the research question and findings are relevant to the research agenda. If your project is not located in one of our priority countries, explain how the findings of your project can be relevant to our priority countries.

If your project focuses on multiple countries, please list them in order of relevance. Also indicate if you have discussed the proposal with an IGC country team.

6.4. Academic innovation and research design

Use the first question in this section to state the main research question(s) and explain how this project will push the frontier of existing knowledge. Please assume the reader has no prior knowledge of the subject matter or literature. Ensure that your research question is written clearly and concisely. Explain why your research question is novel, and present evidence to support this by citing existing literature and how you will build on it. Please limit your answer to a maximum of 500 words.

Use the second part of this section to provide details on the project's proposed research design, methodology and context. This should include information on planned surveys, any use of external providers, and research assistants. This section is restricted to 1500 words. Any supplementary information such as tables, charts, graphs or letters of engagement are not required as part of the application form and should not be submitted/mailed.

Use the third part of this section to explain your project aligns with the Agri-SME Evidence Fund research themes. Please consult the [concept note](#) for more information on the Evidence Fund's research agenda. Please limit your answer to a maximum of 500 words.

Please use these sections in the proposal form to describe your design in simple language within the word limit.

6.5. Activities and data collection

In this section, select the type(s) of activity the project relates to, methodology (if it involves empirical analysis) and source of data. This section will give us an overview of the proposed research design and methodology.

6.6. Policy engagement and planned stakeholder activities

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund has an overarching aim of taking research into policy and we take policy or practitioner impact very seriously. This is how most of our research projects are evaluated. Most of the projects that achieve impact have researchers who looked at how they will engage with policymakers or practitioners from the start. Use this section to outline if there is an established primary counterpart or stakeholder for this project and reflect on IGC's involvement prior to the project being submitted. Researchers are expected to define the stakeholders to whom this project responds and/or is directed towards; describe how this project opportunity was identified; and if relevant, detail the way in which you have engaged or are planning to engage with policy or practitioner stakeholders, particularly with regards to the project design, implementation and dissemination. This section is restricted to 500 words.

6.7. Relevance to inclusive growth policy and inclusivity markers

In this section, highlight the relevant inclusivity markers as they relate to the project.

6.8. Financial information

Budget breakdown

All proposals should provide a detailed budget breakdown, which is included in your online application form, *which must be developed in collaboration with the managing institution*. Information on the different cost categories and tips for completing the template is found in *section 7 - budget guidelines* of this document. Please read carefully through those instructions before filling out this section.

In all budget categories, applicants should bear in mind that '**Value for Money**' (VfM) is one of the Agri-SME Evidence Fund's core evaluation criteria. Proposals will be evaluated against VfM criteria covering the following:

- **Economy:** budgets will be scrutinised to consider whether they are of optimum quality and quantity of output to warrant the value assigned, including consideration over the relative costs for fees, surveys, travel etc. Where necessary, the Commissioning Board could recommend alterations to the budget prior to approval and again under programme coordinator review, if costs do not adhere to Agri-SME Evidence Fund guidelines.
- **Efficiency:** projects will be reviewed to consider the expected quality and quantity of outputs, as well as their relevance for policy and academic influence.
- **Effectiveness:** the intended project outcomes will be considered to ensure that the maximum possible outcomes are achieved relative to cost. This component of VfM will also consider projects' wider potential for impact related to growth policy.
- **Equity:** proposals will be evaluated without any discrimination based on a person's characteristics or any other aspect of a person's identity, socioeconomic situation, or geographical location. Each research proposal is treated and reviewed under the same standards and where possible the Agri-SME Evidence Fund will prioritise investment in those that seek to engage local researchers. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund is committed to fund projects that promote inclusive growth and address socioeconomic disparities.

If your project is funded by the Agri-SME Evidence Fund and we have approved the submitted budget, Agri-SME Evidence Fund rules do allow for some flexibility in shifting funds between budget lines over the lifetime of the project but you are advised to seek further guidance from the Evidence Fund team in advance. Please note, that institutions will need to justify any shift of funds between budget lines in the 'Final Financial Statement' submitted at the end of the project.

6.9. Project outputs

The proposal form will **automatically create a default milestone schedule** based on the information you provide in your application. Changes to the milestone schedule can be considered in exceptional circumstances during the project's contracting stage.

It is the principal investigator's responsibility to notify the Evidence Fund team of any project delays or research plan changes as soon as possible. Failure to do so may lead to payment delays and even threaten overall project success.

Providing accurate and detailed information in the application form will allow us to better match grant disbursements to your needs and to match payments to major blocks of research activity. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund will disburse funding directly to the managing institution. Disbursement of all funds will be conditional upon the quality review and approval of all deliverables.

Payment schedule

A default schedule will be set for all Agri-SME Evidence Fund research projects based on their duration and budget, adhering to IGC policies.

- **First milestone:** Project Influence Plan, IRB approval/Updated Proposal form. If project funds are needed early, the IRB approval can be assigned to the second (interim) output.
- **Interim milestone:** Progress report(s). Researchers are expected to submit a progress report every 6-9 months from the due date of the first output, including for pilot and exploratory projects.
- **Final milestone:** Final Report/Working Paper, Policy Brief, Blog Post, Project Influence Report, Final Financial Statement. The due date of the final outputs needs to correspond with the end of the project.

Type of outputs

Agri-SME Evidence Fund funded projects are required to submit outputs over the course of the project lifecycle. Templates [for each of these documents](#) can be found on the IGC website. More information on the various outputs is summarised below.

Output	Description
IRB approval	For any research involving human participants, and/or data relating to identifiable human subjects, researchers are required to complete a research ethics review and provide proof of the approval and/or exemption from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that conducted the review.
Project Influence Plan (PIP)	The Project Influence Plan seeks to identify which mechanisms and steps the project will employ to influence policy or practitioners. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund is trying to better understand the way in which the policy contexts and engagement affect the impact of research on practitioners or policy, which requires us to better understand the intended policy or practitioner influence of each project. The information for the PIP will be drawn from the proposal form automatically.
Progress report	An interim report that summarises all project activities related to the intervention and the research completed during the reporting period, submitted every 6-9 months. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a description of any materials produced, • policy communication activities undertaken, • objectives met, and challenges faced, and if/how they were resolved.
Blog post	A blog is an opportunity to introduce innovative research and policy ideas to a wider audience beyond academia, while deploying more sophisticated analyses than are normally handled by the press. The blog should be shared as a word doc (as a .docx file) and may include insights on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the context of the research question (the extent and scale of the problem) • a description of the study design • a non-technical discussion on the results achieved scope of the policy implications or remaining open questions

<p>Policy brief</p>	<p>A two to four-page document that draws from your research to provide guidance or recommendations addressing a particular policy problem, either within a specific country/region or globally. The brief should be written for a policy audience, i.e. brief, bulleted, or sectioned, attractively presented, and non-technical. A typical brief may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • description and significance of the problem, • evidence of the scope of the issue/factors contributing to the issue, • description of your research and how it addresses the problem, • recommendations for policy, and • implementation issues for recommendations (i.e., political, economic, environmental, etc.)
<p>Final report</p>	<p>The final report is comprehensive and aimed at presenting your research project in detail, with a high degree of clarity and credibility, to policy and academic audiences.</p> <p>Researchers may select ‘final report’ as their final deliverable ONLY IF a working paper is not appropriate. Reasons for not choosing a working paper may include:</p> <p>the nature of the research is such that it is not suitable for publication in an academic journal (i.e., qualitative or descriptive research, or highly specific policy-oriented research that does not have significant academic value), or the award is for early-stage research that will not generate results by the end of the contract.</p>
<p>Working paper</p>	<p>A published or working paper that is being, or has been, submitted to an academic journal. Content for a working paper must include a main report, annexes, and a bibliography, and must be suitable for publication on the IGC website. A typical final report may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduction detailing the purpose of the research, the intervention, evaluation questions, and policy significance • literature review • the model • evaluation design • sampling design • data collection • results • policy implications and recommendations, and conclusion
<p>Project Influence Report (PIR)</p>	<p>The Project Influence Report (PIR) seeks to assess the extent of stakeholder engagement, internalization and feedback related to the project. It reflects the outcomes outlined in the Project Influence Plan (PIP) at the beginning of the project. The PIR asks for information across several policy implementation and local engagement indicators. In addition to support reporting, PIR data is used for analysis to improve the Agri-SME Evidence Fund’s ability to achieve impact on policy discourse. It also asks for updated information to act as a project summary on the IGC website.</p>
<p>Final Financial Statement (FFS)</p>	<p>A statement providing actual project expenditure against budget at the end of the project. This will need to be submitted and approved before funds can be released for the final outputs. This is only relevant for institutionally managed projects.</p>

6.10. External funding

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund asks that you provide details of any funding that you have applied for from other funders on this project. These applications could be pending, awarded, or rejected. If your project is successful, we will confirm that the other funding required is still in place.

6.11. Terms and conditions

The LSE (IGC) Supplier Terms and Conditions are available on the IGC website [here](#).

7. Budget guidelines

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund requests a detailed budget breakdown to be submitted within the online application form. The proposed project budget will be scrutinised, and applicants should keep in mind that value for money is a key evaluation criterion. More information on what the Agri-SME Evidence Fund means by **value for money** can be found in section **6.8. Financial information** of this document.

If your project is institutionally managed, you must work in collaboration with your finance/research departments to develop the budget in line with Agri-SME Evidence Fund budget guidelines and your institution's research project cost recovery policies.

Budgets should be submitted in **Great British Pounds (GBP)** and include line by line information of all expected costs to be incurred on the project. Any budgetary requirements tied to the funding will be shared in the award Appointment Letter. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund performs a thorough review of all project costs and budgets may be subject to negotiations.

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund does not allow for changes to budgets post project approval to account for exchange rate fluctuations.

As per the LSE (IGC) Supplier Terms and Conditions of the award, institutions will be contractually bound to keep accurate and systematic accounts, files and records (which must clearly identify the basis upon which charges have been calculated), and which can be made available for audit as required.

7.1. Fees for project personnel

All funded projects will be expected to follow funder, LSE, and IGC procurement policies. Goods and services should be competitively procured by the project team with 3 quotes sourced for contract values in excess of £8k. Lump sum expenses under £8k should be disaggregated as much as possible to allow the team to conduct VfM checks. Any line over £50k requires a formal tender process.

Research staff fees

Proposals can include Principal and Co-Investigator remuneration where this is not covered by other sources. If the investigator is undertaking work as stated in the proposal *in addition to* the normal duties associated with his or her role in the institution, then these fee days should be accurately reflected in the budget. However, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund is also required to manage approval of project budgets from a value for money perspective. Therefore, proposals that contain fee days for Principal and Co-Investigators over 22 days may not be viewed as representing value for money; the situation depends in part on the PI's current remuneration and the country of residence. In summary:

- If the PI is a full-time academic on a salaried position based in a developed country (US/UK/EU, etc.) they are not allowed to claim any fees. Only under extreme circumstances will we consider exceptions to this policy.
- If the PI is a full-time academic based in a low- and middle-income country, they can claim fees up to 22 days, but usually fewer under Value for Money considerations.
- If the PI is a PhD student or a post-doc, regardless of location, there is no limit for fee days that can be claimed. However, these are subject to review under the Value for Money evaluation criterion.

The main responsibilities and contact details of the research and project team (i.e., the principal, co-investigators, research manager, research assistant etc.) should be outlined here. Researchers who do not have a personal website should attach a CV or resume in the related budget line on page 10 of the form (max. 2 pages). Every project should have a Principal Investigator. Education status along with fee rates for the principal and co-investigators must be outlined here. As noted above, the PIs generally hold or are currently pursuing a PhD. This is a strict requirement for Lead PIs and advisable for Co-PIs.

Other project staff fees

Proposals can also include fees for other project staff such as research assistants/associates, project managers, data specialists, etc. Research assistant and personnel days should be in proportion to the length of the project and reflect the true extent of workdays.

Daily fee rates

Fee rates should comply with the guidance and figures set out in the [IGC Pay Matrix](#). Please specify in the budget the daily rate for each individual claiming fees on the project and the expected number of days worked.

Employment benefits

For all fees that are part of the budget, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund will not provide additional funds for employment benefits over and above the fee rate. Institutions are allowed to charge their own employee and employer's oncosts to the project and can include these in the daily fee rates when submitting the proposal (ensuring that these are also in line with the IGC Pay Matrix guidelines).

7.2. Data collection

Data collection costs refer to any costs related to the gathering of data such as conducting surveys, field work, data subscriptions, etc. It can include enumerators' salaries, subsistence, training, accommodation, transport, materials or other related costs that are essential for the successful completion of the data collection activities. All data collection costs should be justified in the budget template.

Please note, you are required to let us know the size of the sample you will be surveying. This is to put the cost of the survey into context so a value for money judgement can be made.

Survey staff salaries

Proposals can include salaries for field/survey staff. Please describe in the budget how many field staff will receive a salary, the number of expected days' work, and the daily rate. Please also provide a justification that explains how their time will be spent on the project.

Survey staff travel

Proposals can include travel costs such as transport, accommodation, food, etc. for the field/survey staff working on the project. Please identify for each travel cost, how many field staff this covers, the number of days/units, and daily rate or unit cost. Please also provide a justification for the travel that will be undertaken. Any travel-related expenses of the research team should be included in the **travel expenses for project team** section of the budget.

Materials

These include the sub-headings a) tech equipment rental, b) tech equipment purchase, c) stationery, d) communications, and e) data purchase/subscriptions. Proposals can include cost of data collection tools such as rental or purchase of tech equipment such as tablets, the use of stationery items such as pens and paper etc. and communication related costs such as network provider charges. Other categories such as data purchase/subscription and incentives for data collection purposes also need to be categorized separately according to the template. Please provide a description of the item, the quantity and cost of each material, and what data collection activity will be carried out using those materials.

Training

Proposals can include costs for training of staff conducting the data collection. Please provide a description and breakdown of the training costs and clarify what the training is for. Any training for project personnel like research assistants should be included in 'other' under the **events/dissemination section** of the budget.

Other

Please use this section in the budget to specify any data collection costs for the project that are not covered by the aforementioned categories. This can include a monthly subscription for specialised software, etc. Please ensure that you provide details and a justification for each of these costs.

7.3. Events / dissemination

Proposals can include event costs and other related costs to disseminate the research findings and facilitate engagement with policymakers. Research teams are encouraged to liaise with IGC country teams in planning their dissemination efforts, particularly where teams have contacts relevant to the research findings.

Please ensure that the event costs of catering, conference package, venue hire, and marketing/advertising are provided separately with justifications for each of these costs. Capacity building costs such as training research assistants, training for policymakers etc. can come under the 'other' sub-section.

7.4. Travel expenses

Travel expenses may cover project related travel of the research team, i.e. the principal and co-investigators, research assistants, project managers, etc. Travel expenses for field and survey staff should be included in the *data collection* section of the budget.

Please consult the [IGC travel policy](#) when composing your detailed budget for your application to ensure that it is in line with Agri-SME Evidence Fund guidelines.

Flights

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund contributes towards air travel (both international and domestic) for **standard economy class** travel only, across the most cost-effective route between country of location and country of destination, booked reasonably in advance of the travel dates. Business flights will not be reimbursed by the Agri-SME Evidence Fund. If the traveller plans to travel on a ticket other than standard economy, they must provide a standard economy class quote for the exact same itinerary.

Please specify in the budget what the flight route is (to/from), the number of flights/travellers on that route, and the cost of the flight. If the flight price is particularly high, please include appropriate rationale.

Other travel

For other transportation costs, please include the mode of transport, the number of travellers, and the anticipated cost. More information about the different transport categories (i.e. car, train, taxis, public transport, etc.) can be found in the travel policy. If public transport is not being used, please provide an appropriate rationale.

Accommodation and subsistence

The travel policy includes **accommodation and subsistence** rates for travel to IGC partner countries. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund will only contribute to travel expenses that are in accordance with the rates specified in the [IGC travel policy](#). For guidelines on accommodation and subsistence rates in non-IGC partner countries, applicants should follow the [HMRC World Wide Subsistence Rates](#).

Miscellaneous

Travel expenses such as **visa costs** and **vaccinations** can be included as direct costs when the traveller is a non-fee earning participant on the project. Otherwise, these costs should be incorporated into the daily fee rate.

7.5. Equipment

Procurement must achieve value for money and be conducted in a fully transparent manner. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund expects that researchers and institutions provide their own IT equipment to carry out its project activities and does not normally contribute funds for tools of trade. If there is a strong case for charging the Agri-SME Evidence Fund for IT equipment on this project, strong justification needs to be provided.

In the event that the Agri-SME Evidence Fund sanctions funds to be spent on IT equipment such as laptops, tablets, computers, etc. this will be limited to either a case for renting the equipment or charging the Agri-SME Evidence Fund the value of the equipment for the period it will be used during this project by applying an accelerated 3-year depreciation rule (50 – 30 - 20) to the full cost of the equipment. For example, if a £400 laptop will be used for the project for 1 year, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund may contribute £200 towards the purchase of that laptop. If the full cost of the equipment is charged to the project, a rationale needs to be provided in the budget template. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund does not guarantee funding towards cost of equipment and will determine if it represents clear value for money.

7.6. Subcontractor(s)

If you are using a third party to carry out work on the project, those costs should be included in the *data collection* or *events/dissemination costs* sections of the budget template. Please provide a breakdown of the activities and associated costs that the subcontractor will implement for the project. Please include the name of the supplier or write 'supplier TBC' if you have not yet chosen your preferred supplier.

You should justify in the budget why you have chosen that particular supplier and whether you have undertaken a competitive procurement process, demonstrating that this represents value for money. For any service (such as a firm hired to conduct a survey) included in the budget which amounts to £8k or more, researchers must obtain at least 3 competitive quotes in order to ensure value for money. Any line over £50k requires a formal tender process. For auditing purposes, the principal investigator/institution should retain all receipts from all service providers.

7.7. Overhead

If a project will be administered through an **institution**, overhead can be paid but is **capped at a maximum of 15%** of the total direct costs specific to the project. Please note that the Agri-SME Evidence Fund defines an institution as an organization occupying a physical space where it is located, and that actively incurs costs (such as rent and services) which are consistent with overhead charges. The project budget should reflect this as appropriate. Please note that only institutions can apply for an overhead. Please note, 3rd party sub-contractor costs should be removed from the direct costs before calculating your institutional overheads (which must not exceed 15%). 3rd party overheads, if applicable, should be included in the sub-contractor section of the budget. Overhead can be split across multiple institutions but cannot cumulatively total more than 15% of all project costs.

Annex 1 – Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I need a PhD to apply?

The Lead PI of a proposal must hold or be currently pursuing a PhD. Co-PIs generally should have the same qualifications, but exceptional candidates with a master's degree can be considered.

2. Do you fund researchers who are not engaged at top universities or who are not local (where applicable) to the country of research focus?

Yes, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund gives equal opportunity to researchers from all over the world, and proposals are assessed on the evaluation criteria outlined in this document: thematic alignment, geographical focus, research quality, academic impact, policy impact, local stakeholder engagement, and value for money. However, we particularly encourage researchers based in low- and middle-income countries, PhD students, and young untenured faculty to apply.

3. Can we apply if we work for an NGO, and not an academic institution?

Typically, no. IGC has funded projects in the past where an NGO collaborates with an academic institution, but we have rarely funded projects purely with NGOs as the lead institution. We would strongly encourage you to collaborate with an academic or research centre partner.

4. Can a single institution submit multiple proposals?

Yes, an institution can submit multiple proposals.

5. Can a single researcher be included in multiple proposals?

Yes, a single researcher can be included in multiple proposals.

6. Can a research assistant be hired?

Yes, RAs are allowed to be added to a project budget. Rates for RAs and all others claiming fees must coincide with the [IGC Pay Matrix](#).

7. Do you pay per diems?

No, the Agri-SME Evidence Fund is unable to pay per diems. It does, however, fund expenses if they have been budgeted for in the proposal, and only if original receipts are presented. Please refer to the [IGC Travel Policy](#) for further details.

8. We are applying for other sources of funding or have already received other funds. Is it still possible to apply?

Yes. The Agri-SME Evidence Fund encourages applicants to indicate budget priorities in their proposals under the section regarding 'financial information'. In the event that the Agri-SME Evidence Fund is unable to fund the entire project, it will then be easier to identify which modules are essential. Applicants who have secured or aim to secure other funding are also welcome to apply for only partial funding for their project from the Agri-SME Evidence Fund. In this scenario, applicants should make clear what proportion of overall funding for the project is being requested from the Agri-SME Evidence Fund.

9. Do we need prior engagement with the respective IGC country team and stakeholders?

Prior engagement with IGC country teams is not a requirement.

10. Does the Agri-SME Evidence Fund consider research proposals that aim to contribute empirically but not theoretically to a particular topic? Or conversely proposals that contribute theoretically but don't have empirical analysis?

The Agri-SME Evidence Fund rarely funds proposals that are purely theoretical. The majority of projects that the Agri-SME Evidence Fund funds do not have mathematical models. Most funded projects are based on microeconomics, and it is rare for the Agri-SME Evidence Fund to fund projects based on macroeconomic questions. Proposals based on purely empirical questions are welcomed.

11. How methodologically intensive do the proposals need to be? Can the proposal be just a research idea or does it have to be detailed with descriptions of the data and methodology that one intends to use?

Proposals must contain a clear description of how the researchers plan to execute the project. It cannot just be a research idea or a research question. It should have other substantial details on how to answer that research question through empirical research.

12. Is research design necessary if you are using secondary data?

Yes, research design is important if you are using primary or secondary/administrative data. Your research design should explain how you are going to use the data and analyse the data.