

Displaced Livelihoods Initiative

Proposal Tips

This reference document aims to help applicants strengthen their proposals by ensuring they align with our thematic and methodological priorities, while avoiding common pitfalls. We encourage all applicants to review these recommendations carefully before submission to ensure their proposals meet the competitive standard for consideration.

While exceptions to the guidance provided here may apply in rare cases, we encourage you to reach out to us at displacement@poverty-action.org before submitting your proposal to discuss any specific circumstances.

General Guidance

The Displaced Livelihood Initiative's mandate is to generate and share new evidence on the impacts of livelihoods programs for displaced populations and host communities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). As outlined in our [Call for Proposals](#), DLI is most interested in proposals that create generalizable learning on program effectiveness, identify the mechanisms underpinning programming, and address potential barriers to impact, in line with our five priority areas: resilience; entrepreneurship; wage employment; social cohesion, inclusion, and norms; and rights and regulations. As you prepare your proposal, we suggest clearly explaining how your project will contribute to these goals.

Reference the academic literature

Engage with relevant, rigorous evidence, particularly from field experiments. Use this to demonstrate how your research will advance existing knowledge. Please link this literature to your research question, methodology, outcomes of interest, and impact. A key question that our board will want to understand from your proposal is how it builds on the existing evidence base to answer open, policy-relevant questions.

Include only eligible costs in your budget

Justify your budget by clearly aligning it with your proposed research design, ensuring that expenses directly support the execution of your research activities.

Don't include intervention implementation costs, salaries for researchers based in high-income countries, or results dissemination costs. For more information, see our [Application Instructions](#).

Assemble an eligible research team

All proposals, except Evidence Use proposals submitted by Refugee-led Organizations, must include at least one researcher primarily affiliated with a university, who either holds or is pursuing a PhD in a relevant field. We consider this necessary because one of our expectations is that projects will eventually publish results in peer-reviewed journals.

Detail other expertise your team has, including relevant experience conducting rigorous evaluations, experience conducting research in the specific context, lived experiences of displacement, and interdisciplinarity, as appropriate.

Match the grant category to the proposed research project.

Ensure the proposed project directly aligns with the scope of the grant category. Don't select the grant category primarily due to budget considerations.

Guidance by Grant Type

I. Full Proposals

Full study grants are for rigorous impact evaluations that aim to assess the causal effects of an intervention, program, or policy. While most of the impact evaluations DLI will fund will be randomized evaluations, studies that use rigorous quasi-experimental methods will be considered when a randomized evaluation is not possible. We will also consider requests for supplementary funding for ongoing studies, or funding to measure the long-term impacts of completed studies.

Ensure funding is committed for intervention implementation

DLI's full study grants evaluate the impacts of an intervention run by an external implementing partner (e.g., an NGO, government, multilateral, etc.). Ensure that intervention implementation costs are committed or secured. DLI does not fund these costs except in extremely rare cases necessitated by the research design. These unallowable costs include:

- Any costs the implementing partner would have otherwise incurred to implement the program or policy being tested
- Any costs associated with refining or developing new approaches that will be adopted by the implementing partner if proven effective

DLI may consider supporting additions or alterations to the program that are required to answer the proposed research questions, but that the partner has not implemented in the past and will not implement in the future (e.g., a placebo intervention).

Include power calculations

Include complete power calculations and ensure a robust study design by considering factors like sample size, effect size, adoption rate, population variance, and randomization level to strengthen statistical power. If testing multiple primary outcomes, account for multiple hypothesis testing corrections in your power calculations.

For more information about our power calculation requirements, please see our [Application Instructions](#).

Clearly describe the theory of change

When reviewing proposals, DLI looks for a clear and detailed theory of change that outlines the program's key components and (if applicable) how they work together to achieve the intended outcomes.

Detail the specific pathway(s) through which the intervention would have an impact on outcomes of interest. In doing this, we recommend referencing literature relevant to the program's theory of change.

Detail the project's policy contribution

DLI is particularly interested in evaluations of programs and policies that make a meaningful contribution to policy debates around displacement. Proposals should include a compelling case for the project's expected policy impact, as well as a thoughtful dissemination plan that highlights existing relationships with dissemination partners and/or identifies partners you plan to engage in the future.

II. Pilot Proposals

Pilot study grants are intended to lay the groundwork for future impact evaluations. They are for studies with clear research questions, identified interventions, and established partnerships, but which require substantial upfront investments in design, measurement, and/or implementation before a full impact evaluation can be designed and a full study proposal can be submitted.

Describe how piloting will lead to the design of a future rigorous impact evaluation

Identify a specific program for evaluation with an established implementing partner. Clearly outline the pathway to a future rigorous impact evaluation, describing how the pilot will serve as a foundation for that evaluation.

Define appropriate pilot research activities

Define research activities that align with the funding category, such as A/B testing, testing intervention uptake for power calculation refinement, developing new measurement strategies or instruments, analyzing existing data, piloting survey questions, refining research logistics with the partner, or developing/collecting new data to inform the evaluation.

Don't propose purely intervention piloting activities, like implementing or refining the intervention itself. Focus on activities that test research methods, designs, or tools.

If you are randomizing, provide power calculations and/or a clear explanation for why you are randomizing

Our pilot grants are intended to help prepare for larger-scale, rigorous impact evaluation by addressing feasibility questions. We typically do not fund pilot studies that plan to draw causal conclusions. However, if you plan to randomize in your pilot study for logistical piloting or other reasons, please provide a detailed justification in your proposal and provide power calculations.

Don't apply for a pilot grant if you plan to evaluate a program and publish the results. We recommend applying instead for a full study with a clear impact evaluation design and power calculations.

III. Exploratory Proposals

Exploratory funding is designed for PhD students and junior researchers in LMICs, supporting early-stage research activities such as analysis, partnership building, and study design to prepare for a future impact evaluation. These projects are not expected to make causal claims.

Highlight a clear path toward a future impact evaluation

Include a detailed description of how this initial work will lay the groundwork for a rigorous future evaluation, including the specific activities you intend to conduct.

IV. Infrastructure and Public Goods Proposals

Infrastructure and public goods grants support the creation of publicly accessible tools, measurement techniques, or panel data that generally facilitate future rigorous impact evaluations. We particularly welcome proposals that address barriers to research in hard-to-reach or under-researched contexts, or on under-researched topics.

Show how the project would be a “public good”

Demonstrate how your project qualifies as a “public good,” and how the data or tools may be leveraged by others for future work by other researchers and/or practitioners. We expect that tools, methods, data, etc. produced under these grants will be made available for public use.

Show how the project would contribute to future field experiments and/or important policy debates

Demonstrate how future impact evaluations may leverage the project. In most cases, our infrastructure and public goods grants can be used to inform or improve future impact evaluations. Past projects supported by our team have included panel surveys, survey tools, and collecting data on displaced populations immediately before a major policy change. For instance, a [panel study in Bangladesh](#) developed a sampling frame used in subsequent randomized evaluations, while a panel in Lebanon created a publicly available [WhatsApp surveying tool](#).

V. Evidence Use Proposals

These grants will be earmarked for RLOs and researchers with lived experience of displacement to apply for support with evidence use, policy engagement, or research dissemination activities. This could include support to map evidence, primarily from impact evaluations, to their existing programming, create evidence-informed theories of change, leverage evidence for policy advocacy, and host events to share research findings.

Explain how activities will drive policy engagement and evidence use

Clarify how the proposed activities will directly contribute to policy engagement, evidence dissemination, or uptake of results for program design from rigorous impact evaluations. Describe how your activities will fill a gap in the use of evidence in policy and practice.

Specify the evidence you use to influence policy and practice

Describe the specific evidence base from rigorous impact evaluations that you are intending to help partners apply, including how your activities will lead to more use of this evidence in policy and practice.

VI. Conference Travel Proposals

These grants would support the participation of researchers with lived experience of displacement to attend academic and policy conferences related to displacement or economic development more broadly. Priority will be given to applicants and conferences with direct links to DLI's priority research themes.

Explain what you plan to present or learn

When reviewing these proposals, we will seek to understand how you plan to engage at the conference including if you have been selected to present, and if not, what you expect to contribute and learn from attending.