

Updated October 9, 2020

Call for Proposals

Policy Research Centres on Artificial Intelligence for Development in Africa: Getting to responsible AI through research and policy development

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) invite proposals from independent policy research organizations from across the African continent that are committed to using research to inform and influence national-level artificial intelligence (AI) policies and research ecosystems. This funding opportunity will provide funding to two (2) AI policy research organizations representing distinct linguistic regions (anglophone and francophone).

The goal of this initiative is to enable African think tanks to inform and shape policies and strategies on Artificial Intelligence to support the adoption of responsible AI on the continent, and to ensure African experts have a voice in global fora.

This call is part of the four-year [Artificial Intelligence for Development in Africa](#) program, a joint endeavor between Sida and IDRC. AI4D Africa aims to foster the development of policies and regulations that support responsible AI in Africa; that is, AI applications that are inclusive, sustainable, ethical, and supportive of human rights.¹

For this initiative, we are using the [OECD definition](#) of an AI system as a “machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments. AI systems are designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy.”

¹ For more on ‘responsible AI development’ see the [Montreal Declaration for the development of Artificial Intelligence](#) with principles of responsible AI development that include: well-being, protection of privacy and intimacy, equity, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability, among others.

This initiative will support the two independent policy research institutions in Africa representing distinct linguistic regions (anglophone and francophone). This field and organizational capacity building initiative will ensure centres of policy excellence exist to provide evidence that informs legal, regulatory and policy frameworks on AI at national, regional and global levels. Specifically, the funds will contribute to the development of responsible AI through supporting new AI policy centres to:

- Develop high quality² AI policy research that convenes different perspectives on responsible AI policy issues and addresses different facets of AI policy (see below for policy areas) and the interplay of these issues locally, regionally and globally;
- Strengthen research centres' ability to inform and influence policy development and implementation on AI; and,
- Improve key aspects of organizational performance and institutional capacity to support AI policy subject expertise.

For this call, the working approach to responsible AI policy is about facilitating the development of public policies that promote the inclusive benefits of AI that will serve the population, while mitigating the potential costs and risks.

We encourage all applicants to read the background section below, and to have a look at the original [AI4D Program Proposal](#).

The deadline for submission of the proposal online is 23:59 EST on Nov 4, 2020.

AI4D Africa background context

Artificial intelligence (AI) applications are profoundly impacting our world. AI is a set of technologies upon which applications are being built and applied in almost every domain of social and economic life. Fuelled by the increasing availability of computational power, improved connectivity, and data, AI offers innovative ways to promote human development by spurring new start-ups, improving food systems, enabling higher quality education systems and tackling pressing health and climate challenges for many low- and middle-income countries in Africa. The resulting impact stands to be massive, if not revolutionary.

Across the continent, Africa has a burgeoning community of data scientists, machine learning specialists, and researchers who are exploring how AI can contribute to tackling local challenges. For instance, Agrix Tech, a Cameroon start-up rolling out in 2020, aims to help African farmers detect plant diseases and offer both chemical and physical treatments as well as prevention measures. And M-Shule in Kenya uses AI and SMS to deliver personalized, accessible education to primary school students across Africa. The enthusiasm and breadth of applications are

² IDRC views research quality as a function of four dimensions: integrity, legitimacy, importance, and positioning for use. See <https://www.idrc.ca/en/research-in-action/research-quality-plus>
Français: <https://www.idrc.ca/fr/recherche-en-action/qualite-de-la-recherche-plus>

witnessed in the highly popular [Deep Learning Indaba](#) and [Data Science Africa](#) events that bring together hundreds of practitioners from across the continent to learn and share.

Alongside the enthusiasm and potential of AI to help contribute novel solutions to local challenges, there is concern that if AI is applied in certain contexts without appropriate policies and safeguards, it triggers concerns such as how to protect human rights and ensure sustainable well-being, and not exacerbate existing inequalities. These risks increase in contexts where there is limited institutional capacity to govern and regulate AI to ensure the protection of fundamental rights like privacy, free expression, and security. The situation is also challenged by a context of vastly uneven distributions of infrastructure, resources, and talent that limit the capacity for citizens impacted by AI to have a voice in making decisions about what applications are developed, how, and for whom. As legal institutions and agreements supporting AI are still being formed, governments are not fully prepared to confront the deepening challenges of AI. Uneven resources and capacities, and lack of diverse voices in decision making, increases the likelihood of reinforcing existing structural inequalities and bias.

Furthermore, the most pertinent AI policy issues for Africa are distinct from those in other regions of the world. The diverse institutional, capacity, and connectivity landscape of Africa demands policy responses that are tailored to local conditions, and informed but not driven by experiences elsewhere. AI policy responses must be sensitive to this diverse policy landscape, responsive to rigorous evidence, and locally developed and owned.

Even though the situation is dynamic, and there is plenty of innovation happening in the continent, there is a shortage of experts able to provide rigorous, evidence-based policy guidance on AI and related domains. There are also very few organizations with a specific research orientation on AI policy issues. Moreover, with a limited pool of highly educated experts to draw from, it can be difficult to retain top caliber personnel focused on public policy work, without competitive salaries that provide researchers with real opportunities to build careers. Policy consultation often seems to occur in a seemingly ad hoc manner and may be indicative of broader trends in AI policy across the global South. This means that policymaking is proceeding without the guidance or input of experts who understand the technical, legal, social, political and economic implications of AI.

For AI policy development, African states need experts who are monitoring policy environments and generating data and analysis relevant to the context. These experts are best placed to recognize policy windows, pay attention to the frontier of the issues, and sustain engagement with policy processes. IDRC's experience of supporting think tanks across the global South has demonstrated that public policies work best when they are designed and implemented by actors embedded in the environment. The availability of data and analysis of local environments, driven by local expertise, is what undergirds responsive local policy making in the global South.

Sida and IDRC have a four-year partnership to support policy, innovations, and expanded leadership that will spur responsible AI development in Africa. The vision of the program is one where AI empowers Africans to have a more inclusive, prosperous, and greener future. The AI4D Africa program includes a dedicated policy research and development stream that will fund two policy research organizations to foster the development of policy and regulations that support responsible AI in the continent.

Approach

The aim of the AI4D Africa initiative is to ensure that policymakers across Africa can find and leverage state-of-the-art, objective and high-quality AI-related policy research that will inform decision-making on key responsible AI policy issues. In turn, this will allow communities across the continent to benefit from the opportunities that AI offers, including improved health, agriculture, governance, education and economic prospects, while being shielded as much as possible from the potential harms of AI.

To this end, the approach of the AI policy centres program is to provide financial support for implementing a responsible AI policy research agenda, mentorship, and capacity building, along with knowledge networking opportunities that will support broad-based responsible AI policy research organizations in Africa. The program will facilitate:

Policy development on artificial intelligence: Facilitate responsible AI policy and regulatory development. This means that:

- Research and policy leaders can provide suggestions for effective regulatory frameworks for AI technologies and applications;
- Research/policy incentivizes responsible AI innovation ecosystems, and fosters skills and applications to harness the promise of AI; and
- Research outcomes help develop appropriate norms and standards based on local environments.

Research-to-policy capacity development: To achieve sound policy development, the key is to strengthen research and policy capacity to produce credible and legitimate research that convenes different perspectives on AI. This means that:

- Policy research leaders understand salient AI policy and regulatory issues and understand the implications of different approaches and can stay on top of emerging legislation that could undermine responsible AI;
- Research teams convene a broad range of skill sets/expertise including governance and politics; technology and technology policy analysis skills; qualitative and quantitative research; data governance and data analytics, and social science research that captures the complexity of socio-economic, political, and gender-related issues; and
- Research teams facilitate and/or draw together experts on AI policy locally/nationally and regionally.

Organizational development: To achieve improvements in research capacity and policy development, the key is to strengthen institutional and organizational capacity to support AI policy subject expertise. This means that:

- Institutions can draw in and sustain resources that support world-quality research expertise; and
- Systems are strengthened to support high quality research and researchers, and research institutions can keep talent and offer competitive packages.

The desired outcomes include credible research, strong organizational performance, high quality research and policy planning capacity with demonstrated impact on AI policies and improved policy engagement.

Policy research areas

Policy and research themes can include (but are not limited to):³

- Enabling beneficial AI research and development
- Economic impacts, labor shifts, inequality, and technological unemployment
- Accountability, transparency, and explainability
- Surveillance, privacy and civil liberties
- Fairness, ethics, and human rights
- Diversity and gender equality
- Data capacity, analytics, protection and governance
- Political manipulation and computational propaganda
- Human dignity, autonomy, and psychological impact
- AI safety

Funding and duration

AI4D Africa will allocate up to CAD1.25M for each winning policy institution for three years.

Eligibility and requirements

This call for proposals is open to established research organizations from eligible countries⁴ from across the African continent with strong research and policy engagement track records in

³ See: <https://futureoflife.org/ai-policy-challenges-and-recommendations> for more information on each policy area.

⁴ Eligible countries include Anglophone and Francophone countries in sub-Saharan and North Africa. These include: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi*, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic*, Chad*, Comoros*, Democratic Republic of the Congo*, Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea*, Eritrea*, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon*, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau*, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya*, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali*, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe*, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia*, South Africa, South Sudan*, Sudan*, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia*, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe*. Note: Applications from organizations based in countries marked with an * are eligible but may be subject to a further stage of review within IDRC before approval.

the subjects that are critical for responsible AI. Only institutions that meet the eligibility criteria outlined here should submit proposals for possible funding.

To be eligible, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Possess a track record of research and analysis on the governance of digital technologies, and experience with developing and giving input on digital policies and regulations in a national and/or regional context. This includes experience with the cluster of issues that intersect with AI and the digital ecosystem;
- Applicants must demonstrate subject area expertise in at least three of the main AI policy and research themes listed in [Policy research areas](#) above and show capacity and drive to augment work in other critical areas. Given the complexity of AI policy issues, this precludes institutions that focus exclusively on one sector or policy issue; and
- Be committed to using research to inform national (and regional) public debates and to create spaces for discussion and new ideas.

Final decisions will be based on selecting one Centre from each linguistic category.

Institutions must at the minimum:

- Be legally registered in the country of operation;
- Have and provide audited financial statements;
- Have a Board of Directors and a chief executive that is accountable to the Board;
- Have ethics protocols in place for research;
- Have the ability to convene researchers from other countries in the region;
- Be a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization;
- Not depend exclusively on the government for funding;
- Carry out policy-oriented research;
- Carry out “multi-sector” research on advanced technology policy issues that brings together social and economic policy issues.

Organizations must be currently existing policy research organizations. Funding will not be provided for the creation of new centres/think tanks, nor to centres created for the purpose of applying for a grant from this initiative.

Submission and review process

The call for proposals will be submitted via baobab.ai4d.ai. You will need to create an account, which will allow you to access to your application as many times as you need until you decide to submit. You will also need additional information and documentation to complete the proposal, including examples of your research and policy work and the CVs of your research team.

The proposal and all requested supporting materials must be submitted through baobab.ai4d.ai **no later than 23:59 EST on Nov 4, 2020.**

The review process will consist of the following steps:

- Verification of eligibility requirements and proposal completeness: IDRC will review all submitted proposals to ensure they meet eligibility requirements and all necessary materials. Incomplete proposals or those that do not meet the requirements will not be considered. This includes the submission of complete three year budget using the IDRC Excel Budget Template, available on the IDRC public website: <https://www.idrc.ca/en/resources/guides-and-forms>. If your application does not include a complete budget in the above template, it will not be considered.
- Review of proposals: a team of external reviewers will evaluate eligible proposals. Each eligible proposal will be evaluated by at least three reviewers. Proposals will be ranked based on scoring and subsequent discussion.

Evaluation criteria

IDRC will consider the following criteria in the evaluation of all proposals and reserves the right to reject proposals based on relevant policy or legal considerations.

Review criteria	Percentage of score
<p>I. Organizational experience and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research team has the necessary expertise and partners to conduct the activities and research proposed • Experience/years of working on AI policy, or related, issues, with significant achievements. • Fit between proposed research agenda and the organization’s mission. • Demonstrated research quality (output, citations, research metrics) that addresses numerous facets of advanced technology policy. 	20%
<p>II. Policy research</p> <p>Proposals must demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear understanding of and justification for the top research priorities, and how the research priorities are relevant to the themes of this call. • Clearly articulated objectives that are relevant and feasible, and a strong justification for the proposed approach, methodology and techniques. • Overall logic of the proposed methodology must be sound and appropriate for the given objectives, and demonstrate a multidisciplinary approach to the research. • A clear articulation of how the proposed approaches and interventions are appropriate and relevant to research users. • Strong considerations of gender and inclusion in research design, questions, strategies to reduce bias, and ensure an inclusive approach. <i>This is critical for the proposal overall, and a poorly articulated gender and inclusion strategy will impact the score of the application.</i> • A clear articulation of the ethical considerations of the research. Evidence that structures and systems, including ethics boards, are in place to deal with ethical, 	45%

<p>legal, and socio-economic implications of proposed research, and that proposed approaches demonstrate strategies for oversight that are rights-based, ethical, inclusive and sustainable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and coherent focus on capacity development. • Clear communications strategy to extend the impact of the research and results. • Clear articulation of results and the metrics to gauge them. • Clear and appropriate project management plan that is tied to budget. 	
<p>III. Policy engagement experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of national and regional policy engagement and influence as well as regional and global experience. Applicant must be able to show regular policy engagement with target audiences, including policymakers, media, and civil society organizations. • Neutrality and ability to convene a broad spectrum of views, with a strong commitment to expand your research portfolio, engage broader perspectives on AI policy issues, and improve organizational performance. 	25%
<p>IV. Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and coherent • Appropriate for the proposed activities • Aligned with management plan 	10%

Key dates

Activity	Date
Call for proposals release date	Sept 28, 2020
Deadline to submit questions to Q&A 12:00 pm EST	Oct 13, 2020
Q&A answers posted	Oct 16, 2020
Proposal submission deadline	Nov 4, 2020
Final selection	Nov 18, 2020

Final considerations for the proposal, budget and other documentation

After the winning proposals are selected, IDRC will follow up regarding technical and administrative considerations. Please note that the technical selection of a proposal does not guarantee that it will be funded.

- a. *Final proposals and budgets.* Prior to finalizing a Grant Agreement, IDRC reserves the right to request any revisions to the submitted proposal application and budget. A

revised proposal and/or budget with the necessary revisions must be returned in a timely manner to IDRC. Any required revisions will be communicated at the time of selection.

- b. *Administrative finalization.* Administrative considerations must also be satisfactory. Should your application be selected, the following documentation is required:

Proposed budget:

- The amount of an IDRC grant is based on the forecasted costs of the project at the exchange rate between the working currency of the project and the Canadian dollar **at the time the project is approved.**
- Budget notes are an essential part of IDRC's due diligence and form an integral part of the approval process. The rationale and support for arriving at each budget figure allows IDRC to understand the activities to be undertaken, their impact on project costs, and the reasonability of the cost estimates.
- Without appropriate budget details that clearly support the cost estimates, the grant approval process and any subsequent financial reporting and payment cycles may be delayed. Delays in funding can impact project outcomes.
- Please note that when the law limits banking transactions by Canadian financial institutions in a particular country, [IDRC will not undertake any form of programming in that country that results directly or indirectly in Canadian funds flowing to it.](#)
- **All applicants will need to include in their proposed budget funds to support annual audits.** These audits will be conducted by an external, independent and qualified auditor, to be carried out in accordance with international standards issued by International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB). IDRC, Sida as well as the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) reserve the right to further audit these grants. The auditors will produce an annual audit memorandum, which shall contain the audit findings, and which will state which measures have been taken because of previous audit and whether measures taken have been adequate to deal with reported shortcomings. A Management response including an Action Plan regarding any findings shall be produced by the organisation that was the subject of the audit and submitted together with the audited financial report and the management letter. Further details will be communicated to successful applicants
- Please [see Section D: Proposed Budget and Timeline](#) for more information on budget categories and allowable expenses.

Bank Information:

- If your application is selected, you will need to complete the Tax and Banking Information Form – [Canadian Supplier](#) or [Supplier Outside of Canada](#)

Institution:

- If your application is selected, and this is the first time the lead institution is receiving IDRC funding, you will need to complete the [Institutional Profile Questionnaire](#)

Corporate documents:

- In order for IDRC to enter into an agreement with your organization, IDRC must be satisfied that your organization has independent legal status (or 'legal personality') and is capable of contracting in its own right and name. In the event that you have no prior grants with IDRC and to help us make this determination, you will need to provide a copy of the legal documentation by which your organization was founded or created in the location in which it is based. Such legal documentation obviously varies depending on the location and the type of organization.

Government approval

- Letter of approval from government authority (if required)

- c. *Country clearance requirements* - IDRC has conducted general agreements for scientific and technical cooperation with a number of governments. These agreements establish the framework for IDRC cooperation with that country by defining the rights and obligations of both IDRC and the government. As such, the applicant institution may be required to obtain country approval in accordance with these agreements prior to receiving funding from IDRC. This requirement applies only for selected applications. IDRC reserves the right to not pursue the funding of a selected project if the country approval is not secured within six months after IDRC officially announces approval of the project, as this would jeopardize the timely completion of the initiative.
- d. *Reporting requirements.* As a general rule, as an IDRC grantee, you will be required to submit at least two documents annually (possibly more depending on any of the above): an interim technical report, which marks the project's technical progress, and a financial report, which outlines the financial status of the project. These are usually submitted at the same time. Grantees must also submit final technical and financial reports as a condition for receiving final payment from IDRC after the project is completed. The grant agreement will spell out project-specific milestones, and payment schedules linked to agreed outputs.

Any selected applicants shall be required to sign IDRC's standard Grant Agreement, as amended by IDRC from time to time. Furthermore, IDRC reserves the right to cancel the process at any time without prior notice and/or at its discretion to grant all or none of the awards under this process. The grant agreement will provide a schedule for submitting interim and final technical and financial reports.

Inquiries

If you have any questions about this call for proposals, please contact IDRC at AI4DAfrica@idrc.ca.