Early Stage Innovation Application Process & Guidance
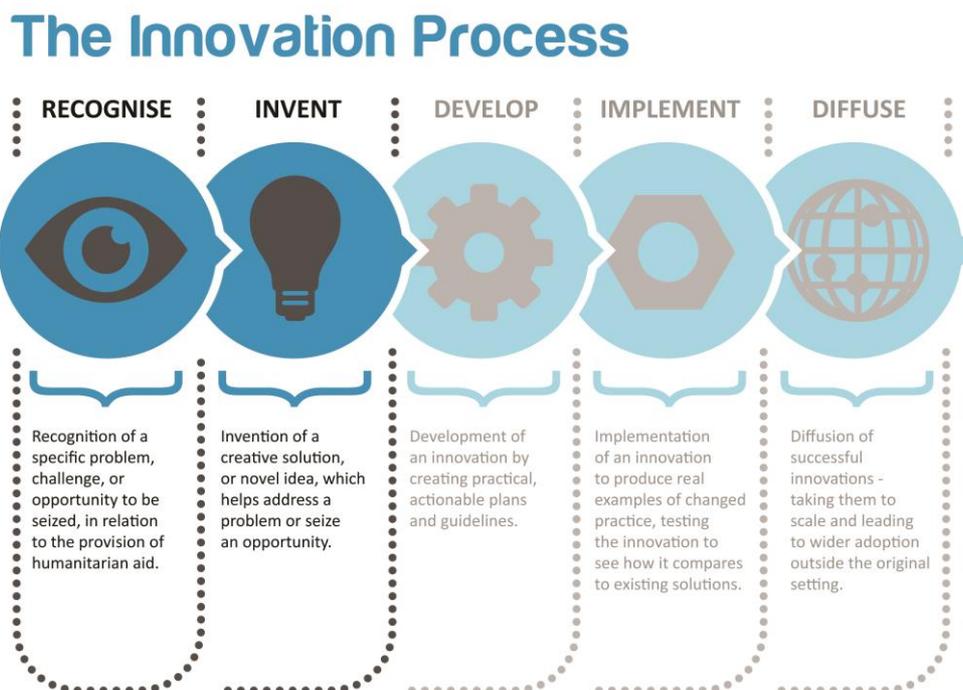
A) What and How

The Early Stage Innovation facility supports organisations with up to £20,000 to explore a bright idea that has the potential to improve humanitarian action. Grants are available at the first two stages of the HIF's innovation process:

1. Recognition – of a specific problem, challenge, or opportunity, in relation to the provision of humanitarian aid. At this stage, the focus is on making sure you are clear about the problem. It is essential to understand the needs and challenges of affected communities, and the view of the potential users of any new innovations that might develop.

2. Invention – of a creative solution, or novel idea, which helps address a problem or seize an opportunity. Projects at this stage should be looking to stimulate new ideas and imagine creative solutions. This might be achieved by accessing new knowledge, or working with a range of actors to find new ways to improve assistance to those affected by crises. Understanding user needs and co-developing solutions is key.

To gain a better understanding of the types of ideas we do and don't fund, please click here.

Applications can be submitted all year and are reviewed regularly. We do not accept applications by email; all applications should be made online through our grant management system.

For **first time applicants,** please register here and apply here.

For **applicants who have applied to our facility online previously,** please follow this link to log in and apply

NOTE: you cannot access this online facility until 19 August 2015.

B) Eligibility
Lead applicants can be a:
(a) Non-profit institution such as a non-governmental organisation
(b) Public or governmental institution
(c) Academic or research institution
(d) Private companies. NOTE: Private companies must be partnered with one of the above.

The lead applicant must:
- Have legal status and be registered in the country(s) in which the project will be carried out.
- Not act as an intermediary but be directly responsible for the preparation, management and implementation of the project proposed.
- Present signed audited financial statements and reports.

While it is possible for a single organisation to make an application to the HIF, we strongly encourage consortia applications that bring together a range of actors.

Consortia Requirements
Consortia must be able to demonstrate through their members:
- Relevant operational experience of humanitarian programming.
- Experience in the area of research and development.
- Understanding and ability to adhere to International Humanitarian Principles. and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

The HIF encourages financial or in kind contributions from all applicants towards their project.

C) Selection Criteria
Initial screening of proposals will look at basic criteria:

Is your project 'humanitarian'?
The aim of your project must be to improve humanitarian practice. Guided by the Global Humanitarian Assistance's definition we see "Humanitarian aid" as:

> "The aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations."

We do not accept applications for projects that are to be applied in wider development contexts.

There is no geographic restriction as to the origin of an applicant.

Is your project Innovative?
The term 'innovation' can be understood in many ways. To apply for a HIF grant, you should be able to answer 'yes' to the following questions:

- **Have you identified a challenge that needs addressing or an opportunity for innovation in a humanitarian context?**
- **Are you creating a specific solution or idea which addresses the opportunity or need?**

Your approach must contribute to addressing the challenge areas in humanitarian response in an innovative way or attempting to solve these issues with an innovative solution. The longer term goal is improving the performance of humanitarian aid relative to existing practice.

Proposals that meet the basic eligibility will then be assessed against the following selection criteria:

All proposals will be assessed against the following selection criteria with equal weighting:

- Impact
- Approach
- Feasibility
- Team

1. Impact
The HIF funds innovations that respond to significant challenges within the humanitarian field. We want to understand the potential impact of your project. Please explain the importance of the specific issues you plan to address, where possible supporting this with evidence. We are keen to see references to literature reviews, case studies, specific demands by practitioners and beneficiaries, or other forms of evidence that highlight the opportunity you see.
Our priority is to support innovations that demonstrate the potential for scale up, replication or transferability elsewhere within the humanitarian sector. Therefore please indicate how widespread the effect of your project could be, and the ideas you have for achieving this.

2. Approach
Innovation is a creative process, and it also requires a rigorous approach to designing, testing, learning, and building evidence for what works and what doesn't work. We refer to this as your methodology.

In particular for the **Recognition stage** please explain how you will test out your ideas about a specific need and deepen your understanding of it.

It is important that you are able to make evidentially robust statements about the performance of the innovation. Your proposal must explain what performance criteria and indicators you will be using for the innovation. These criteria are what will enable you to judge whether your innovation has been successful or not, and to compare the performance of your innovation with existing practice.

Working effectively with your partners is critical to the success of your innovation. Therefore please include in your proposal how you intend to collaborate.

If the innovation doesn't progress as you had planned, we are interested to know your organisation's exit strategy (i.e. how will you incorporate changes in your progress to affect longer terms plan) and also how you intend to capture and share the lessons learnt for the maximum benefit of the humanitarian community.

3. Feasibility
We expect to see a convincing implementation plan outlining how project activities will be effectively delivered on time and to budget.

We need a clear timeline of all the activities planned, and an understanding of how each activity supports the project's objectives. Given the need to be flexible in these kinds of processes, please also explain what the key decision points are in your timeline for making substantial changes to the project plan.

Special attention will be given to how the proposal represents value for money. We believe that taking risks is an inherent part of the innovation process. Your application should highlight the risks your project entails and what the mitigation strategies are for each. We are open happy to take risks with our funding, however this must be the right kind of risk, and not put affected populations in harm's way, or lead to the misuse of funds.

It is important to be collecting information to monitor and report on the project deliverables throughout. At any time you should be able to answer questions about the progress of the project on an output level.

4. Team
The project team should be capable of carrying out the work and have a relevant track record which supports the project proposal. In particular applicants should be able to demonstrate an understanding of how to bring new practices into operational contexts.

When you apply, you should provide documentation detailing your teams operational/research experience.

D) Required information
You can download the application templates and questions via our online platform.

The following documentation must be uploaded onto the application platform before submitting:

•   Detailed budget information, including applicant's/consortium's financial and/or in kind contribution if any (use template provided)
•   Proposed work plan
•   Short summary of applicants'/consortium's previous work and experience (1 page

E) Review Process

Early Stage Innovation project application will be reviewed by the HIF team on an ongoing basis – See timeline on the Recognition and Invention website pages.

Applications will not be considered for full evaluation if:

•   The application is incomplete
•   Requested documents are not uploaded
•   The proposal exceeds the maximum duration/value allowed
•   The applicant, project or costs are not eligible

An evaluation of the quality of proposals, including the budget and the capacity of the applicant, will then be carried out in accordance with our selection criteria. The projects will be screened and referred to selected members of the HIF Grants Panel for final approval.

F) Risk tolerance and 'innovation failure'

Attempts at innovation carry an inherent risk of failure. As such, it is not expected that all innovations funded will prove successful. However, it is expected that any failure will be a result of the innovation itself rather than from poor management and research design.

In this sense, projects will not be evaluated solely on the success / failure of the innovation. Consideration will be given to the processes and outcomes of the project. However, and crucially, the risk associated with the potential "failure" of the innovation/project should not be borne by the beneficiaries. Applicants have a responsibility to ensure beneficiaries' lives and livelihoods are not put at risk as a result of the project.

G) Monitoring and Learning

Expectations for monitoring, learning and research activities
Responsibility for the various activities contributing to the learning and knowledge sharing activities will be divided between the grantees and the HIF team. Expectations will vary depending on the size of the grant, as outlined below.
For the Early Stage Innovation projects we would expect to see some form of systematic learning effort, outlined as part of a learning plan developed at the outset of the project. At project completion, grantees are encouraged to complete and document an After Action Review. These activities can be supported by guidance

from the HIF team where necessary.

The details of specific approaches will need to be specified for individual grants at the outset of projects. Applicants are encouraged to think creatively about the best ways to generate relevant evaluative learning over and above the basic reporting requirements set out in this paper. For more information on monitoring, evaluation and learning, HIF applicants are advised to look at the monitoring evaluation and learning note on the website.

Building credible evidence around the performance of the innovation:

While this is more relevant at the Implementation and Development grant stages, it is important that grantees start considering two areas related to information collection and analysis at the early stages of the innovation as these will be essential at a later stage in their innovation process:

(1)   Monitoring and reporting on the project deliverables and systems; answering questions about the progression of the project on an output level.
(2)   Establishing an approach to make evidentially robust statements about the performance of the innovation (and particularly how the innovation compares with current practice).

H) Early stage innovation applications should refer to the following documents before applying:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Guidance on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)
- Key questions to ask yourself before applying