Connected Society Innovation Fund
Frequently Asked Questions

The Connected Society Innovation Fund is a new Fund for the GSMA, launched in October 2018. The GSMA have provided as much clarity around the Fund as possible in the Connected Society Fund Term & Conditions document (also referred to as the CS Fund Term Sheet). However, where our language or intentions may have left you with questions, we have done our best to address these with the answers below.

If you have further questions, please contact CSfundmanager@gsma.com.

Fund Purpose & Structure

1. Is the Fund supporting a connectivity solution for the end-consumer or for the mobile network operator?

   The Fund is looking to support solutions that will reduce the Total Cost of Ownership for mobile network operators (MNOs) to deliver coverage in the unconnected rural areas. The aim is to create mobile internet access for people in these areas in an affordable and commercially sustainable way.

2. What is meant by a turnkey solution?

   By "turnkey solution" we mean a solution that provides all the necessary elements of the RAN that are required to operate sites and interconnect them to the MNO partner's core network. These elements include but are not limited to: the mast/tower, the BTS/NodeB, backhaul equipment, antennas/amplifiers/cabling, energy source, fences and other security components, cabinets, controllers (BSC, RNC or other required gateway).

   The supplier undertakes all responsibility from design through build, completion and commissioning and interconnection of the solution.

3. Is any particular area of innovation favoured across the five focus areas specified?

   No, the most important factors for us are that the innovation reduces the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and is scalable. Obviously, solutions that can demonstrate innovation in several of the specified areas will score higher as long as they still achieve the key criteria of reduced TCO and scale.

4. Why is this Fund only focused on solutions for Ghana and Uganda?

Research by the GSMA and others[1] indicates that the digital divide is highest in sub-Saharan Africa, with half the mobile subscribers not yet on the internet at the end of 2017 and marked disparities between urban and rural populations, the young and mature, women and men. Within this region, we have selected two countries where we have MNO partners interested to participate. This is the first Connected Society Innovation Fund, and our ambition is that innovations trailed through this Fund may be replicable in similar environments across the region and in other regions.

5. Why would I be contracting with both the GSMA and an MNO partner?

    The Connected Society Innovation Fund is a GSMA Fund, enabled by support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Successful applicants to the Fund will therefore contract with the GSMA Foundation for Mobile Development (a US 501(c)(3) entity) to receive a grant.

    The GSMA has enlisted MNO partners in Ghana and Uganda. The solutions supported by this Fund will be connected to the core network of one of these operators who will take on the ownership and running of the selected sites once they are deployed. These MNO partners are motivated to see the innovations succeed, since they will enable them to connect the unconnected in a commercially viable way. Grantees of the Fund will contract with the designated MNO partner in their project country, once the solution is awarded by the fund panel, to allow the process of commissioning the sites.

6. Which MNO would I be contracting with for which country?

    Information about the MNO partners for each country will be released prior to the proposal application stage. The GSMA encourages applications for both countries.

7. Are there any technical requirements or specifications that I should be aware of?

    These solutions will be interconnected with the core network of one of the partner MNOs working with the GSMA. The detailed technical requirements to enable this will be released at the proposal application stage.

8. When will I know the target area in the country?

    Information about the pre-defined target area in each country will be released to eligible applicants at the start of the proposal application stage.

9. How and why has the target area been defined?

    The GSMA has developed a mapping tool to identify a geographic area that is unconnected but with sufficient economic potential to host profitable sites. However, these areas will be representative of the unfavourable conditions that prevail in rural areas of other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (low density population, difficult

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[1] GSMA, The Mobile Economy 2018 & World Bank, Digital Dividends 2016.

terrain and access, poor existing infrastructure such as electricity or roads).

10. How many sites do I need to cover within the target area?

There is no quota on the number of sites you should reach within the pre-defined targeted area. However, innovative solutions that maximize population coverage and minimize TCO will be preferred, regardless of the number of sites required.

11. What will I be expected to report on in terms of metrics or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)?
The GSMA will provide a list of KPIs to be reported by grantees during the entire duration of the pilot. The complete list of KPIs will be shared at the application proposal stage. This list will contain classic indicators such as:
- Unique active users in last 7 days
- Number of calls
- Drop call rate
- Data volume transferred UL and DL
- Connection throughput distribution

12. Is there a quota for the number of grants in each country?

No. As indicated in the CS Fund Term Sheet, the Fund has a total value of £900,000 GBP and expects to make up to 4 grants. However, we may revise the total number of grants we make based on the applications we receive.

13. Can I apply to deploy a solution in more than one country?

Yes. If you have a solution that you think would be applicable for both countries (when tailored to the specific conditions in that country and the technical specifications of the MNO partner), you can indicate this in your Expression of Interest. If you are eligible to proceed to the proposal stage, we will request you to submit two proposal applications, one for each country.

Eligibility

14. Must I have an existing operation in either Ghana and Uganda to be eligible?

No. But if you do not have an existing operation in your preferred project country you will need to explain how you will set up a local entity to operate and be able to demonstrate that you can still deploy a solution within the project timeframe.

15. If I have an innovation but cannot provide the full turnkey solution, would I be ineligible?

We recognise that many organisations will not be able to provide the full solution alone and that they will need to work in consortium with other suppliers. You do not

need to have the full consortium established to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI). However, in your EOI submission we will want to know whether you have existing relationships with organisations that may be part of your consortium. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will need to provide evidence of formal partnerships or consortium arrangements in your proposal application.

16. Can the GSMA help me identify suitable partners to deliver aspects of the solution?

    If there is an aspect of your solution for which you don't have a partner established or known, we propose that you explore potential collaborations as early as possible. In the interests of transparency and fairness, The GSMA cannot be seen to support an organisation to find partners for their solution. However, if there is sufficient interest from potential applicants to secure partners, the GSMA may facilitate an open and transparent means for interested parties to make themselves known to one another.

17. If my innovation has been trialled in another market, would I still be considered?

    Yes. An innovation that has been trialed in another market and/or for a different purpose but one that could be tested in this context, would be considered as long as it can demonstrate that it is innovative in this context, has reduced TCO and potential for scale.

18. If I cannot support user-adoption through my current or anticipated consortium, should I look for an additional partner that can support this aspect?

    The GSMA recognises that user-adoption is fundamental to a successful technology solution being sustainable. All MNOs rely on revenues from users to off-set the costs associated with operating and maintaining a site. As such, applications to the CS Innovation Fund that can include activities to support user-adoption will be scored favourably. However, this activity is not mandatory. The focus of this Fund is on creating a technology solution that can reach the unconnected and is innovative and scalable. This should be the primary focus of your proposal. The Connected Society programme works with MNO partners and other stakeholders to promote user-adoption and will be providing advisory support to partners on this aspect once the projects are approved.

Completing the Expression of Interest (EOI)

19. Can I complete my EOI using the word document and email it rather than completing online?

    Please submit your application via the online form. If you are having difficulties doing so, please email us at CSfundmanager@gsma.com.

20. Can the GSMA provide feedback on a draft EOI?

We do not have the capacity to review EOIs prior to submission and can only provide phone consultations on a 'best effort' basis. If you have specific questions about your EOI submission, please email us at CSfundmanager@gsma.com.

21. Can EOIs be submitted in a language other than English?

    EOIs and proposals must be submitted in English.

Financial and Matching Requirement

22. Will the grant be disbursed in local currency or GBP?

    The grant will be disbursed in British Pounds Sterling (GBP).

23. For the match funding, can we apply funds that have already been spent on project/hardware development?

    No. Funds for the matching component can be either in-kind or in cash and cannot have been spent before the notification of grant award. Furthermore, match funds must also be spent by the completion of the grant.

24. Are there any restrictions on where a financial match contribution comes from, such as another donor?

    Yes. Grantees may not use other DFID/UK aid funds toward the match as the grant itself comes from this organisation. Matching funds from other donors or investors will be accepted.

25. Is there a required proportion between cash versus in-kind sources of matching contribution?

    There is not a specific requirement. However, the match should not only come from in-kind sources, and applicants using in-kind sources should have an appropriate balance. Please refer to the CS Fund Term Sheet for more information

26. Can an organisation invest more than the required matching contribution?

    Yes. As identified in the CS Fund Term Sheet, the required match is a minimum.

27. How is financial health assessed?

    We will look at an organisation's annual accounts, revenues and other relevant financial information to assess their financial health. Some of this will take place at the EOI stage and some more detailed assessment will take place if you are invited to submit a proposal.