

## Call for Proposals 6 Covid-19 Recovery

May 19, 2022

The global Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in devastating losses. Beyond the loss of over 6 million lives globally, there have been severe setbacks in different dimensions of human capital, from health to education to labor market outcomes. Individuals have been affected at all stages of the lifecycle, leading to not only a decline in current welfare but potential scarring effects that alter their long-term trajectory. In most regions, more vulnerable populations such as poorer people and minorities have been disproportionately affected. Reversing these losses and ensuring a robust recovery will require innovative and timely interventions.

Since 2012, the World Bank's [Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund](#) (SIEF) has funded five open, competitive calls for proposals for impact evaluations in low- and middle-income countries focused on early childhood development and nutrition, basic education, health systems, or water and sanitation. The current portfolio has 85 [evaluations](#) spread across 35 countries, and these evaluations are a mix of government, NGO, and researcher-implemented programs.<sup>1</sup> SIEF-funded evaluations have led to [peer-reviewed publications](#) in top research journals, such as the Lancet and the American Economic Review, and as well as [citations and profiles in mainstream media outlets](#), such as National Public Radio, the Economist, and the Guardian. These evaluations have also had large [policy footprints](#), including at national scale.

Continuing SIEF's approach of matching scientifically rigorous research methods with pressing policy challenges, the focus of this sixth call for proposals is Covid-19 recovery. In particular, SIEF aims to fund evaluations that examine innovative interventions that enable individuals in low- and middle-income countries recover from human capital losses incurred as a result of Covid-19. Given the enormity of the losses and the urgent need for remedies, this call will prioritize interventions that have the potential for high impact within a short amount of time.

SIEF will offer up to \$400,000 per evaluation and expects to fund approximately 10-12 evaluations in this funding round. With the increasing use of cheaper forms of data collection, such as administrative data, phone surveys or online assessments, we expect to fund many evaluations below the maximum grant size.

The rest of this note provides details on the objective for this call for proposals, describes eligibility criteria, and provides an overview of the selection criteria and overall screening process.

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<sup>1</sup> From 2007-2012, SIEF stood for the *Spanish* Impact Evaluation Fund, which had a similar mandate and funded 42 completed evaluations.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

SIEF will use this call for proposals to meet two primary objectives that advance SIEF's core mandate of supporting evidence-based policy design in low- and middle-income countries.

### **OBJECTIVE 1 Building evidence on high-impact interventions for Covid-19 recovery**

Covid-19 has reversed important the human capital accumulation gains made in recent years. There is an urgent need for scalable interventions that can help reverse these losses, within the constraints of government capacity and budget. There is little evidence, however, on how to make large gains in a short duration and at scale. This call seeks to address this gap. Further, to understand not only what approaches work, but also when and why they work, SIEF is still interested in [nimble evaluations](#) that use experimental methods to uncover *how* to do things, not just what to do. Similarly, iterative experimentation may be necessary to quickly identify interventions that are not working and to reoptimize their design and assess impact before the end of a year. Therefore, this SIEF call will prioritize evaluations that build in iterative experimentation into their research designs, along with high frequency reporting of results.

### **OBJECTIVE 2 Facilitating successful matches between researchers and operational teams**

As in previous calls for proposals, SIEF will use the screening process to match operational teams with interested external researchers if the teams have not already identified a research collaborator. During a first phase of screening, researchers will fill out a short application, where they outline their designs for evaluations either for their own projects or for specific questions generated by a set of World Bank financed projects that appear in the [appendix](#) to this call for proposals. Then after vetting by SIEF, operational leads can choose a research team to collaborate with during the second phase of screening, when a full proposal is required. An exciting new feature in the process this year is that SIEF will host a virtual matchmaking conference where World Bank teams will have the chance to engage with research teams that pass the first screening phase in order to facilitate fruitful collaborations.

## WHO AND WHAT ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

### **Who is eligible?**

SIEF welcomes proposals from researchers within and outside the World Bank. That said, because SIEF is a Bank-executed trust fund, each full proposal must be submitted by a World Bank regular employee who serves as the task team leader (TTL) and the award is made to the TTL's unit. These task team leaders provide fiduciary oversight for SIEF funds and, at the same time, increase the likelihood that governments engage with evaluation results. They also ensure that both intervention and evaluation designs will deliver evidence that countries will find useful.

While only World Bank task team leaders can submit full proposals to SIEF, each proposal must have at least one experienced researcher dedicated to the evaluation.<sup>2</sup> This researcher can be a current staff member of the World Bank or can be an external researcher who will eventually be hired as an individual (as a World Bank short-term consultant) if the proposal turns out to be successful. The section on *How to apply* below details how researchers can be paired with World Bank task team leaders.

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<sup>2</sup> An experienced researcher is someone who has successfully completed an impact evaluation in the past.

No universities or research organizations or firms can participate in SIEF's call for proposals, as it is not a procurement process. Moreover, if a researcher collaborates with a task team leader on a proposal, any organization, firm, or institution that also compensates that researcher will *not* be eligible to be contracted as a vendor or receive any payments from the World Bank for any evaluation activities. Instead, a vendor will be selected competitively according to World Bank procurement rules. For researchers accustomed to applying for grants that go to their respective institutions, this is an important difference to be aware of.

### **What is eligible?**

Given the multi-faceted impact of Covid-19, a broad range of projects may be funded for evaluation under this call. Below is a *non-exhaustive list of examples* of the impact of Covid-19 on different outcomes and potential pathways to recovery. For this call, SIEF is particularly interested in proposals to evaluate interventions where the expected impacts are large.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the results must be available within a short time frame such that they can be useful immediately, not for the next pandemic and not for when a country can devote significant additional investments to the given sector. For example, interventions that need to be delivered over an entire school year to show any impacts may not fit into the timeline of this call. Quasi-experimental evaluations of data that shed light on the recovery from past health emergencies, epidemics, and pandemics, such as Ebola, H1N1, and SARS, would also be of interest.

- **Early childhood development:** Investments in early childhood have high returns because they are the foundation for all later investments. Higher food insecurity, closure of preschools, and disruption in vaccinations and other services occurred across different countries, threatening the development of young children. Early evidence indicates a decline in general development as well as cognitive, motor, language, socio-emotional development in young children. Proposals may evaluate programs that seek to restore children's access to early childhood development "production inputs" and reverse these declines; they can also test interventions that aim to build skills and school readiness quickly in this age group.
- **Education:** Long school shutdowns have resulted in severe learning losses. Effective interventions that provide evidence on how to remedy learning losses quickly (that is, that do not require an entire school year to materialize) are much needed so that children do not fall even further behind even after they have returned to school.
- **Health:** During the pandemic, both children and adults accessed routine health services less frequently, and non-COVID health issues have been largely neglected, reversing years of progress made on controlling both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Projects may evaluate interventions aimed at helping individuals resume using health services or may directly target other health outcomes.
- **Mental health:** With long periods of isolation due to lockdowns and overall heightened stress, Covid-19 has affected the mental health of different age groups, including school aged children,

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<sup>3</sup> As an example of an easily scalable, cost-effective intervention implemented by government with large effects, this working [paper](#) by Ganimian, Muralidharan and Walters (2021) finds that adding a half-time worker doubled net preschool instructional time and led to 0.29 $\sigma$  and 0.46 $\sigma$  increases in math and language test scores, and reduced stunting and severe malnutrition.

and adults, especially women. Interventions that promote recovery from depression and anxiety and improve social-emotional skills and other dimensions of mental health are of interest.

- **Employment:** Covid-19 has hindered youth employment and adult employment for low-skilled workers. We are interested in interventions that help improve the employment prospects of those most affected.

SIEF requires that all evaluations that receive funding fulfill all criteria listed in Table 1.

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**TABLE 1 CRITERIA THAT ALL APPLICATIONS MUST MEET**

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If short applications and full proposals do not have all the following 14 elements, they will not be considered for SIEF funding.

<p><b>1 Causal impact</b></p>	<p>All evaluation designs must aim to estimate causal impacts of an intervention or set of interventions. These evaluations must be quantitative studies. Although we acknowledge that qualitative research may provide important supplementary evidence, SIEF funds cannot be used for these kinds of analyses. Most studies in SIEF’s current portfolio are randomized control trials. While SIEF does consider applications with quasi-experimental designs, the onus will be on applicants to convey that all the necessary conditions for credible inference will be satisfied in the proposed country context.</p>
<p><b>2 Relevance for SIEF’s core themes</b></p>	<p>SIEF funds evaluations in four core domains: education, health, early childhood development and nutrition, and water and sanitation. For the purposes of this call for proposals, education can include education activities targeting skills of adult learners as long as these activities can eventually be linked to the country’s education system.</p>
<p><b>3 Human capital outcomes affected by Covid-19</b></p>	<p>The intervention under evaluation must seek to improve an outcome that is directly relevant for human capital, for example, learning outcomes, adoption of a health service, employment, etc. These should be human capital outcomes that have declined during the pandemic, as opposed to outcomes that were low prior to the pandemic and for which there is no evidence on how they were affected by the pandemic.</p>
<p><b>4 World Bank client country</b></p>	<p>The evaluation must take place in a World Bank client country. For a list of these countries, see <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
<p><b>5 Funding only for evaluation</b></p>	<p>SIEF funds can only finance evaluation activities – ensuring compliance to the evaluation design, data collection, data management and analysis, and writing and other forms of dissemination. Funds cannot go towards implementation of the</p>

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	intervention under evaluation. Intervention design would be counted as an implementation activity, not an evaluation activity.
<b>6 Secured funds for implementation of intervention</b>	When writing the full proposal, teams should have already secured financing for the intervention under evaluation.
<b>7 Implementer with experience and necessary permits</b>	The implementer of the intervention under evaluation should have experience implementing the intervention– even if in a pilot stage – when teams submit the full proposal. The implementer should also be in a position to obtain any necessary permits and approvals to implement the intervention in the proposed country context.
<b>8 Interventions with potential for immediate scale and affordability</b>	Interventions under evaluation should have the potential to scale in the country context immediately, and they should be affordable with a country’s current expenditures. This call is not for interventions that will be difficult to implement because of capacity constraints.
<b>9 Researcher with evaluation experience</b>	The researcher proposed to lead the evaluation must have successfully completed an evaluation in the past.
<b>10 Collection of cost and implementation fidelity data</b>	All SIEF-funded evaluations must collect cost data on the intervention under evaluation using the ingredients method. Teams must also collect data on the implementation fidelity of interventions under evaluation. Collection of this type of data must be included in the evaluation budget.
<b>11 Data access</b>	World Bank task team leaders of SIEF-funded evaluations must submit any data collected partially using SIEF funds to the <a href="#">World Bank’s MicroData catalog</a> within 6 months of data collection. After submission, research teams can have private access to the data for a period of two years after the end of data collection, after which they need to make the data available for licensed use. All data must be made publicly available within 4 years of data collection.
<b>12 Timeline</b>	Given the urgent need for evidence and the duration of the funding window, this call has strict timelines. All deliverables for evaluations funded under this call must be submitted by October 2023. There will be no extensions.
<b>13 Research ethics</b>	All team members must obtain human subjects certification and approval from either a local or university research ethics review board before starting any evaluation activities.

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<b>14 Meaningful dissemination to research subjects</b>	Dissemination must go beyond research papers, policy briefs, presentations to the government, and presentations in academic conferences. All research subjects must learn about the results of the evaluation in a format that is physically and conceptually accessible to them, whether this happens in person at community events or via the distribution of materials. This type of dissemination must be included in proposed budgets.
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While all evaluations that receive SIEF funding must fulfill the criteria listed in Table 1, SIEF will use the criteria in Table 2 to prioritize funding.

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**TABLE 2 PRIORITY CRITERIA FOR ALLOCATING FUNDING**

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Proposals that meet any of the following 9 criteria will be given priority for funding, both on the extensive margin (acceptance) and the intensive margin (final amount allocated). Evaluation designs that do not meet at least 3 of these criteria will not be eligible for the maximum funding amount of \$400,000.

<b>1 Focus on disability</b>	SIEF is seeking to fund evaluations that focus on improving human capital outcomes for individuals with disabilities.
<b>2 Focus on poorer populations</b>	While all projects must be in World Bank client countries, projects that focus on particularly poor regions or groups within a country will receive priority.
<b>3 Validated tools for measuring outcomes</b>	SIEF will give preference to projects where tools used for measurement of outcomes have been validated in that context
<b>4 Nimble evaluation design</b>	Studies with a nimble design will also be given priority, particularly in contexts where implementation fidelity may be a challenge. Please see SIEF's previous call for <a href="#">proposals</a> for more information. A successful application, for example, might propose to quickly test different implementation approaches in a first nimble stage and then move on to test impacts on learning in a second stage.
<b>5 Substantial prior experience working on the topic and/or in the context</b>	SIEF will prioritize evaluations that are informed by a deep knowledge of the opportunities and constraints around an issue in a given country as they are likely to be more impactful. For example, the team may have conducted extensive pilots or completed a different evaluation in the same setting.
<b>6 Use of baseline data beyond the evaluation</b>	Evaluations that propose to use baseline data to refine the intervention under evaluation or to shed light on other policy-priorities in the proposed country context will be given priority.

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<b>7 Co-funding for evaluation</b>	As SIEF funding may not be sufficient to cover the costs of many evaluations in data-scarce environments, evaluations that already have secured co-funding at the time of the full proposal will be given priority.
<b>8 Identified decision that depends on the evaluation</b>	SIEF aims to finance evaluations that answer questions that a real (rather than hypothetical) policymaker has posed. That is, SIEF will prioritize evaluations that will inform an already identified decision that a policymaker has to make in the future.
<b>9 FCDO-priority country</b>	Given that the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office is the largest contributor to SIEF, proposing to conduct an evaluation in a FCDO-priority will earn increased priority during screening. These countries include the following: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, West Bank and Gaza, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

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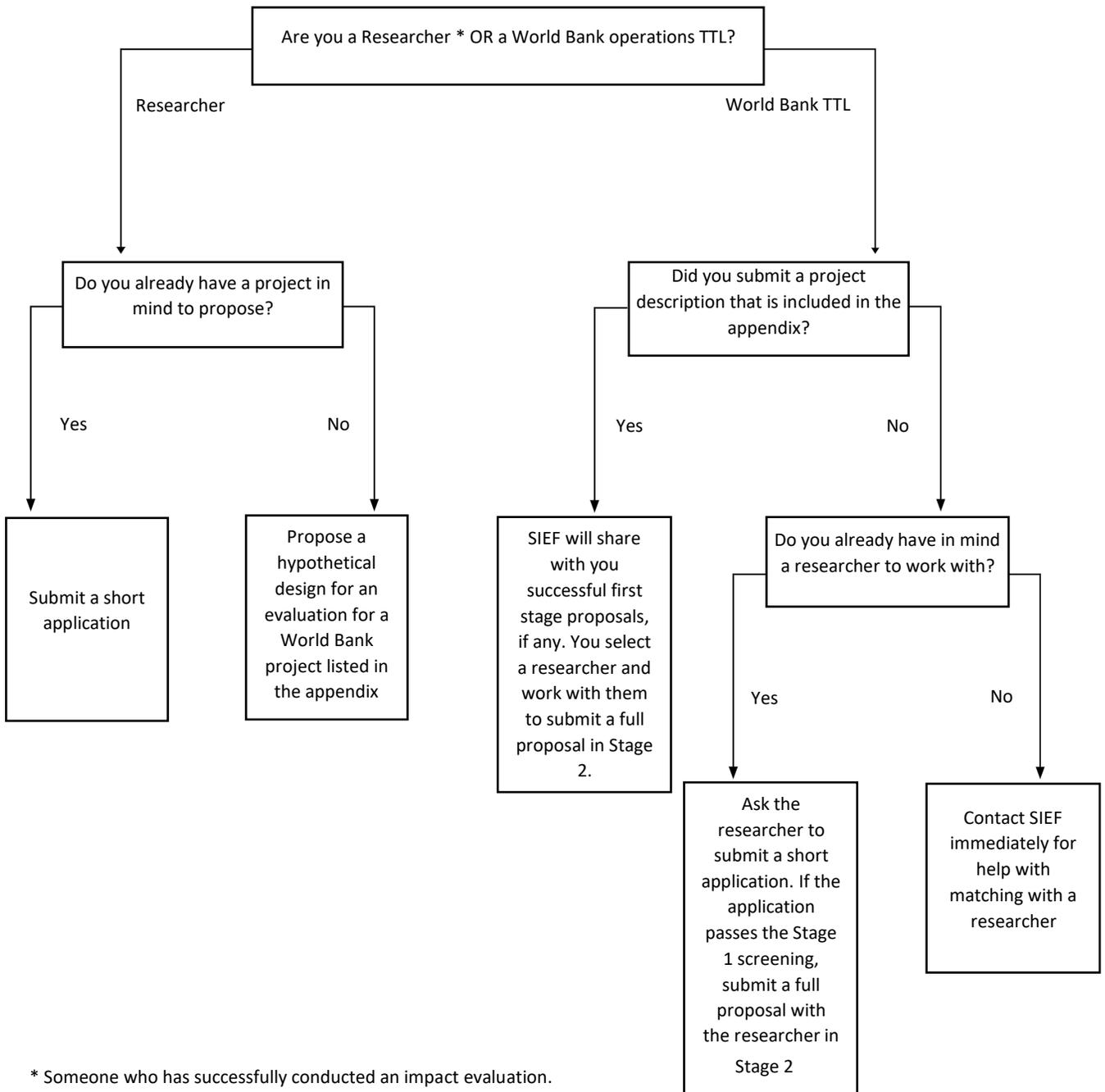
## HOW TO APPLY

The application process will proceed in two stages.

### Procedure for Stage 1

In the first stage, researchers fill out a [short application](#). This short proposal will help us assess the overall suitability of the evaluation design for the proposed country context. We want the evaluation to be technically viable; at the same time, we want the resulting evidence to be useful where it is produced. At this stage, researchers do not need to be matched with a World Bank team. These short applications will be due **June 17, 2022**. Figure 1 below outlines the application procedure for this stage.

Figure 1: Procedure for Stage 1



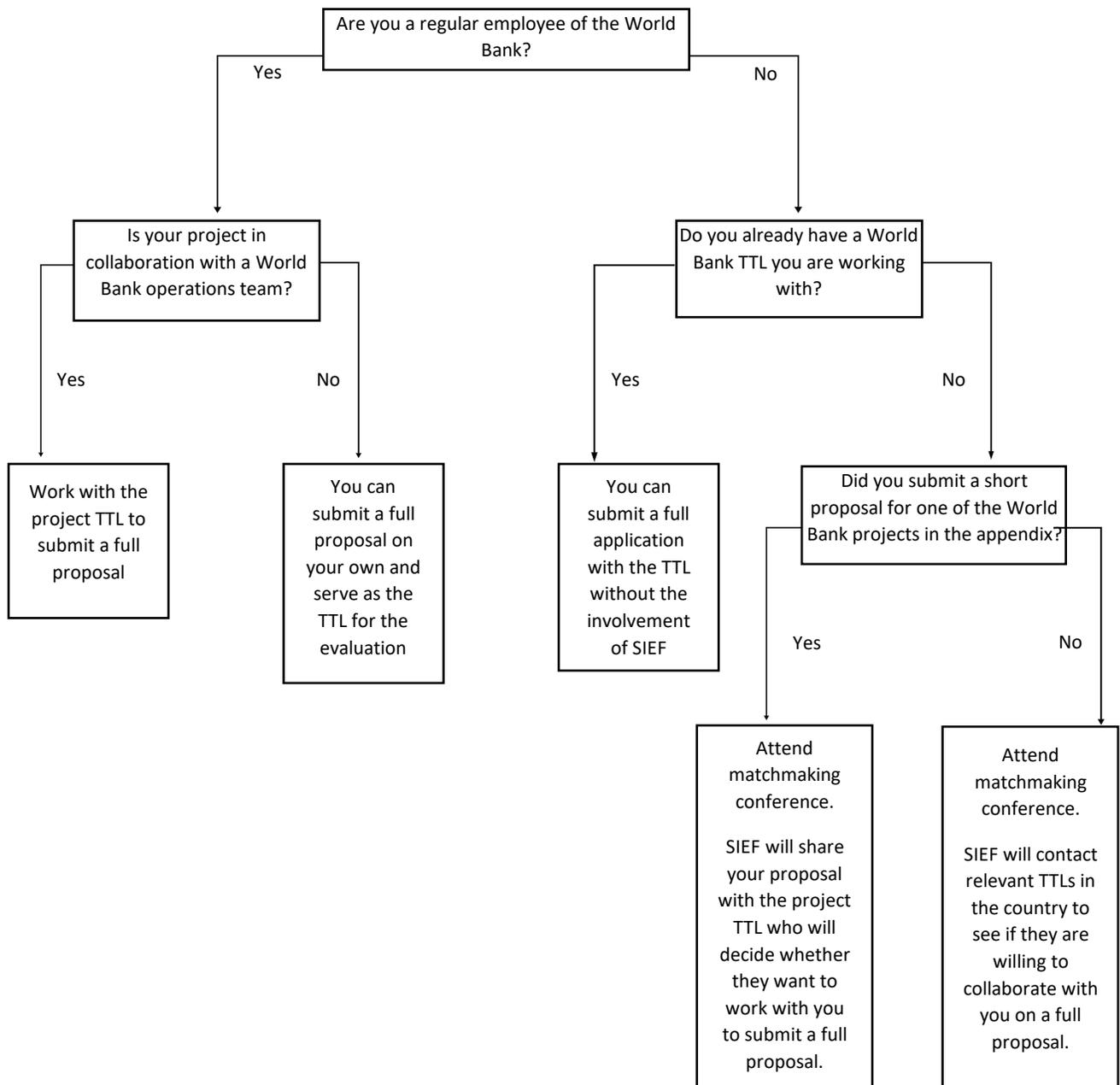
## Procedure for Stage 2

After the first stage screening, SIEF will invite successful teams to submit a full proposal. These proposals will be due **September 2, 2022**. SIEF will make funding decisions by early October 2022.

Since all SIEF-funded evaluations must have a World Bank Task Team Leader, in this stage external researchers (any researcher who is not a regular employee of the World Bank) will need to be paired with a World Bank TTL who will ultimately submit the full proposal to SIEF. Researchers currently employed as short-term consultants by the World Bank are considered external researchers.

*Figure 2: Procedure for Stage 2*

**This flowchart only applies to researchers that have a successful first stage application and have been invited to submit a full application in the second stage.**



### Matchmaking conference

To facilitate matching between researchers and World Bank teams, SIEF will organize a conference and invite researchers that pass the first screening and are not yet matched with a World Bank team to showcase some of their recent research. The conference will give World Bank teams the opportunity to learn about potential evaluation approaches that may be applied to their projects and give the two parties an opportunity to build rapport and explore potential collaborations. This conference will be virtual and will occur in **July 2022**.

## HOW PROPOSALS WILL BE ASSESSED

Proposals will be assessed on the extent to which they fulfil the required criteria in Table 1 and the priority criteria in Table 2. A team of reviewers consisting of the SIEF program manager and individuals with expertise in impact evaluation and SIEF's themes will make these assessments. These reviewers will not be allowed to apply for SIEF funding through this round nor can they be current collaborators of anyone who is applying.

## SIEF DELIVERABLES

It is important for both researchers and World Bank task team leaders to be aware from the outset that *SIEF funding does not come for free; there are specific deliverables that teams must submit throughout the evaluation process*. These deliverables listed in Table 3 help the SIEF program ensure that its criteria for funding evaluations (Table 1) are being met. They also help advance principles of research transparency within SIEF's portfolio and will eventually serve as global public goods for both the broader research community and consumers of evidence among those working to accelerate human capital accumulation in low- and middle-income countries.

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**TABLE 3 SIEF DELIVERABLES**

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### Getting started

1	<b>Approval of the relevant World Bank country director</b>	Concept Note with approval of relevant World Bank country director is required. For researchers in the World Bank's Development Economics Research Group, email approval from the relevant country director would suffice.
2	<b>Registration of evaluation in a trial registry</b>	For example, teams can register their evaluation in the American Economics Association <a href="#">RCT registry</a> .
3	<b>Plan for cost data collection</b>	All teams must submit their plan for collecting data on costs of the intervention under evaluation. These plans should follow the ingredients method, and costs would ideally be collected in real time, as the intervention is implemented. For more information, see <a href="#">SIEF's brief on costing</a> .

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4	<b>Plan for collection of data on implementation fidelity</b>	All teams must submit their plan for collecting data on the implementation fidelity of the intervention under evaluation. Much of this data will likely be collected as part of cost data collection activities.
5	<b>Documentation of human subjects certification and relevant research ethics approval</b>	All members of the research team, as well as the World Bank's task team leader, must receive training in human subjects research. The evaluation designs and protocols for data collection, storage, and analysis must also receive approval from a relevant institutional review board (IRB) and/or a local research ethics body in the country under study.
<b>Baseline</b>		
6	<b>Baseline data and documentation</b>	SIEF teams must submit baseline data and documentation to the World Bank's MicroData catalog. As poorly documented data will sit in a queue for a lengthy period of time and generate multiple back-and-forths between the research team and catalog staff, it is important that research team <u>properly document their data at the time of data collection</u> . See Table 1 for when this data should be submitted.
7	<b>Baseline report</b>	While this report can set the context and be used for policy dialog, the report must also include the following: statement of final designs for the intervention and evaluation, balance tables comparing all experimental arms, updated power calculations, and a plan for analysis. Registered reports and pre-analysis plans may in many cases serve the same purpose as the baseline report.
8	<b>Updated plans for the collection of data on costs and implementation fidelity</b>	Many things can change between when SIEF makes its awards and the start of an intervention, and the research team has likely spent more time in the field learning about how the intervention will be implemented. It is important that these changes and new discoveries be reflected in the team's plans for collecting data on costs and implementation fidelity. This should include any draft forms that may be required for collecting this information (e.g. time use surveys or interview questions).
<b>SIEF monitoring</b>		
9	<b>Brief updates every 3 months</b>	SIEF-financed teams fill out a short form with updates on the progress of field work and any changes to the evaluation design or timeline. Teams can also report on any interim findings, publications, presentations, or policy impacts that might have resulted from their evaluations.

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Endline		
10	<b>Endline data and documentation</b>	SIEF teams must submit endline data and documentation to the World Bank's MicroData catalog. See Table 1 for when this data should be submitted.
11	<b>Endline report</b>	This report should include <i>at a minimum</i> a description of the intervention and evaluation designs; a measure of compliance; information on the sample, including evidence of any differential attrition across experimental arms; information on the development of instruments used to collect data used to measure impact; a presentation of average treatment effects without any covariate adjustment aside from indicators for stratifying variables and baseline values of the outcome variable; heterogeneous treatment effects by strata; a description of the methodology used to collect data on costs and implementation fidelity; a discussion of estimated intervention costs and implementation fidelity; and a table that lists all ingredients used in the intervention, their units, quantities, allocations (if less than 100% to the intervention under evaluation) and values (in local prices and PPP-adjusted US dollars).
12	<b>Cost data and documentation</b>	All cost data and any forms used to collect this information (for example, time use surveys or interviews) must be submitted to SIEF.
13	<b>Implementation fidelity data and documentation</b>	All data on implementation fidelity and any forms used to collect this information must be submitted to SIEF.

### TIMING

This call has strict timelines. All deliverables for evaluations funded under this call must be submitted by October 2023. Below are the key dates for this funding round.

### TABLE 4 TIMELINE

<b>May 2022</b>	Call for proposals is released
<b>June 2022</b>	<a href="#">Short application</a> due from researchers on <b>June 17</b>
<b>July 2022</b>	Successful teams invited to submit full proposals in early July Matchmaker conference in mid-July
<b>September 2022</b>	Full proposals due from World Bank TTLs on <b>September 2</b>

<b>October 2022</b>	SIEF awards announced to units of applying World Bank TTLs by early October
<b>October 2022- October 2023</b>	Submission of deliverables to SIEF unlocks funding
<b>October 2023</b>	Final SIEF deliverables due

**CONTACT**

For any questions that are not answered in this call for proposals, please send an email with “SIEF Call 6 query” in the subject line to [siefimpact@worldbank.org](mailto:siefimpact@worldbank.org).