

GIF Request for Proposals for Innovation and Learning projects 2023-24

October 2022

1. Background

Better Cotton is the world's largest cotton sustainability programme. Better Cotton's mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Through our network of field-level partners we have trained over 2.5 million farmers - from the smallest to the largest - in 23 countries in more sustainable farming practices. Nearly a quarter of the world's cotton is now grown under the Better Cotton Standard. We have also united the industry's stakeholders behind our efforts, from ginners and spinners to brand owners, civil society organisations and governments.

The Better Cotton Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF) was established in 2016 to support Better Cotton programme partners working with farming communities in smallholder contexts. In the 2021-2022 cotton season, our funding supported more than 1.7 million cotton farmers and nearly 900,000 workers in India, Pakistan, China, Mozambique, Mali and Turkey.

And that is the This document serves as the Request for Proposal (RFP) for 'Innovation and Learning Projects, for season 2023-24. This RFP should be read together with the [GIF Vision and Mission](#) and [GIF Guidelines](#)

2. Themes for *Innovation and Learning* applications

The Innovation and Learning RFP seeks solutions that will help Better Cotton and its Programme partners to accelerate positive impact for farmers participating in the Better Cotton programme in a smallholder and medium farm context. We define innovation broadly; we would consider any solution that has the potential to achieve impact more effectively than existing approaches as 'innovative'. Solutions could include new operational processes, field interventions (including alternative implementation models for Better Cotton projects), research or any other approach that results in palpable benefit for the farming community.

Applicants should focus on one of the following themes in their proposals:

1. **Increased income/livelihoods – *How can Programme Partners better support farmers to market their cotton? What livelihood activities make the most income for farming families?***

We want cotton farming families and communities to enjoy a better income from cotton. We do not want farmers to become dependent on Programme Partners for marketing their cotton, but we do think partners could give farmers better support in accessing price information and negotiating with brokers. We are seeking proposals that will help farmers make more profit at the point of sale.

Many of our Programme Partners support farming families in accessing credit to start small businesses. There is a lack of information about what improvement to the family's income these different businesses make. We would like the various schemes mapped, along with data on profitability. The research could focus on a group of partners or a geographical area. We would also welcome a mapping of small business schemes supported by non-Better Cotton partners that have improved incomes in any of our programme states/provinces.

2. Gender – *How can Programme Partners measure changes in decision making among women project participants?*

Better Cotton’s 2030 strategy and revised Standard (to be finalised 2023) put much emphasis on ensuring that women can equally benefit from Better Cotton’s programmes. One key indicator showing that women are meaningfully participating would be a shift in the balance of decision making. However, measuring that shift is challenging. We are looking for organisations that are experts in working on gender roles and power dynamics and could support our Programme Partners and/or train one of our country teams in how this measuring should be done

3. Decent work - *How can Better Cotton and its Programme Partners foster better working conditions for farmers and workers?*

Informal work arrangements, lack of formal labour oversight and prevailing challenges related to collective bargaining, occupational health and safety, forced labour, child labour and discrimination, among others, are common to the agricultural sector and cotton farming. We are seeking innovations and promising new approaches that can support Better Cotton and its partners to deliver on our promise to promote decent work at farm-level. We are particularly interested in scalable community-based labour monitoring and remediation approaches, to strengthen oversight and protection of workers at farm level.

4. Increasing adoption of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) - *How can Better Cotton and its Programme Partners accelerate farmer’s adoption of good practices by leveraging the role of Lead Farmers?*

Farmers learn best from their peers and progressive farmers need to be supported in their desire to try new things. Lead Farmers are ideally positioned to play this role, but they face many challenges. Changing practices sometimes require a leap of faith that comes with risks such as reduced yields. We are therefore looking for deeper farmer training models that provide significant support and incentives to Lead Farmers to learn, test, trial, monitor and demonstrate the benefit of good practices to their peers. This could include direct cash payments to Lead Farmers to support their time and effort, as they act as “living labs” for their communities and run demonstration plots on their cotton fields, or any other safety net, such as crop insurance.

5. Climate Change adaptation - *How can Better Cotton and its Programme Partners support farming families to adapt to their changing climates?*

No Better Cotton country is immune to the climate crisis. The countries where Better Cotton works with smallholders are particularly hard hit. Programme Partners are eager to support farmers to better cope with extreme weather events but do not always have the required capacity to recommend suitable climate-smart practices. We are interested in any proposals which will support smallholder farming communities to withstand their unpredictable and changing weather.

6. Application process and key dates

In the first round, applicants must submit a completed application form [here:](https://bettercottongif.smapply.io/prog/innovation_and_learning_fund_2023-24)
https://bettercottongif.smapply.io/prog/innovation_and_learning_fund_2023-24

Applications will be assessed according to: capacity of applicant, relevance to GIF vision and mission, quality of project design, adoption and scalability potential, and sustainability.

Shortlisted applications will move to a second round where they will be invited to a call to discuss their idea in more depth.

Those that are successful at this stage will be recommended for approval by the GIF Field Innovation and Impact Committee (FIIC). There will be approximately €500,000 available for this Fund for the season 2023-24.

What	When
Launch GIF Innovation & learning RFP 2022-23	28 th October 2022
Applicants submit their application	4 nd December 2022
Shortlist applications	December 2022
1:1 meeting with shortlisted applicants to go through their proposal	February 2023
Field Innovation and Impact Committee (FIIC) meeting to approve project applications	March 2023
Decision communicated to applicants	April 2023

If there is any query regarding the RFP, please contact gif@bettercotton.org

Annex 1: Better Cotton Standard System

The Better Cotton Standard System is Better Cotton's holistic approach to sustainable cotton production which covers all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. The Better Cotton Standard System is designed to ensure the exchange of good practices, and to encourage the scaling up of collective action to establish Better Cotton as a sustainable mainstream commodity. A critical component of the Better Cotton Standard System is the [Better Cotton Principles and Criteria](#), which lay out the global definition of Better Cotton through seven guiding principles. By following these principles, Better Cotton Farmers produce cotton in a way that is better for themselves, their communities and the environment.

The [Better Cotton Assurance Programme](#) involves farmers participating in a continuous cycle of learning and improvement. It is the primary mechanism for assessing whether farmers can grow and sell Better Cotton. Within the programme, farms are differentiated into smallholders, medium farms and large farms.

A licence is awarded at producer level (Producer Unit or Large Farm) when Better Cotton Principles and Criteria's core indicators are met. Farmers must first reach a set of Core Indicators that ensure that the cotton grown meets the standards for pesticide use, water management, Decent Work, record keeping, training and other factors. At the same time, farmers are encouraged to develop further through Improvement Indicators. Improvements are measured through a questionnaire and receive a score based on their answers. The high scoring farmers are rewarded through extended Better Cotton licence periods.

For further details, read *The Better Cotton Assurance Programme*, *Better Cotton Theory of Change* and *The Better Cotton Standard System* (refer Annex 2)

Annex 2: Further reading

Better Cotton Theory of change

<https://bettercotton.org/resources/bcis-theory-of-change/>

Better Cotton Standard System

[Better Cotton Standard System - Better Cotton Initiative](#)

Better Cotton Farmer results

[Better Cotton Farmer Results - Better Cotton Initiative](#)

Better Cotton Annual reports

[Better Cotton Reports - Better Cotton Initiative](#)

Better Cotton Gender strategy

[Better Cotton Gender Strategy - Better Cotton Initiative](#)

Better Cotton Chain of Custody (CoC)

[Better Cotton Chain of Custody: Connecting Supply and Demand](#)