



Building Economic Inclusion via the BIUe Economy (BELUU) Innovation Grant - Request for Applications (RFA)

Summary: The BELUU program invites civil society organizations, private sector entities, advocacy groups, financial services and technology providers actively present in Tuvalu, Nauru, Marshall Islands and Palau to apply for the BELUU Innovation Grant! This initiative is co-funded and supported by the U.S. Department of State and Taiwan under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taipei Economic Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO). The Innovation Grant provides funding to pilot or scale up projects, products and services that meet the needs of underserved women entrepreneurs, young professionals and youth. The Innovation Grant is open to any project, product that serves and supports women. These may be activities that may utilize digital financial services or digital platforms and tools because of their potential to reach underserved rural women at scale. Organizations wishing to apply should [submit an application to this form](#) on or before November 30, 2022. Applicants submitting proposals after the deadline will not be considered. Full guidelines, eligibility criteria, and submission requirements are provided below.

I. Program Background

BELUU's Goal and Approach is to enhance women's capacity to shape and thrive in a more connected business environment, demonstrating the benefits of inclusive development, women's economic empowerment (WEE), and democratic values that foster participation from all key stakeholders. Initially, the program will target the creation of an enabling environment for WEE by fostering the growth of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Private Sector Entities (PSE) via a Community of Practice (CoP) that results in improved networks, knowledge exchange, and increased capacity to further WEE in their country contexts. In partnership with the U.S. Department of State and Taiwan under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taipei Economic Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) and CoP, Grameen Foundation (Grameen) establishes an Innovation Fund. Approximately 17-19 grantees (Innovators) shall be selected from a pool of unlimited applicants from the CSO, PSE, and individual entrepreneurs or young professionals. To assist Innovators in achieving the outcomes of their projects, Grameen, through a Technical Assistance Facility, will match them with consultants drawn from a deep and broad roster of local, regional, and global consultants, including executive volunteers from Grameen's Bankers without Borders™ (BwB) network. The



BELUU project aims to reach a total of 56,047 people – this includes beneficiaries of each Innovation Grant project – including 100 women and men leaders of CSOs/PSEs, 6,031 women and youth entrepreneurs and their male counterparts, and 49,956 community members.

II. What is the BELUU Innovation Grant?

The BELUU Innovation Grant is an award and funding facility providing financial and technical assistance in Tuvalu, Nauru, Marshall Islands, and Palau to pilot or scale up projects, products and services that meet the needs of underserved women entrepreneurs, young professionals, youth groups and entrepreneurs for their business growth and resilience. Each country shall have at least one (1) Innovation Grant recipient. The Innovation Grant is open to any project or product that serves and supports women or youth. These may include products or services that utilize digital financial services or digital platforms and tools because of their potential to reach underserved rural and urban women at scale. Each funded Innovation project will last 6 to 18 months. The objective of the Innovation Grant is as follows:

- ❖ **Contribute to the building of an enabling environment for WEE** by fostering competition, and enhancing the capacity of country-level stakeholders from civil society and the private sector to offer gender-transformative access to services that improve the growth and resilience of women's businesses in blue and green economic sectors.
- ❖ **Support women to succeed in their local economy** by facilitating their access to necessary skills, mentorship, resilience planning for business and other external shocks, access to resources like financial services, market entry points and networks, by partnering equitably with women entrepreneurs and the civil society, private sector, and public organizations that are active participants in the market ecosystem.
- ❖ **Increase underserved women entrepreneurs' access to financial products and services for business growth**, through the development of financial products and services that enable them to start new businesses, expand their existing businesses, or effectively sustain their existing businesses through crises and shocks.

Key Expected Results of the Innovation Grant Exercise - The BELUU project expects that in total, all of the grant Innovators' combined projects will result in the following key outputs:

At least 100 male and female leaders and staff of CSOs and PSEs will directly receive support from the Innovation Grants.

The combined reach (direct and indirect beneficiaries) of all selected Innovative Grant projects should be at least 6,131 female entrepreneurs and their households. 30% of these beneficiaries shall be youth (ages 15-24), and at least 40% will be from rural areas.



Project Duration - Each funded Innovation will run for 6 to 18 months.

How do we define underserved women entrepreneurs? By underserved women entrepreneurs, we are referring to any women owners of micro, small, or medium enterprises who currently have limited access to finance, due to long distances to financial institutions; inability to meet collateral, documentation, or Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements; lack of financial products meeting their business needs; or any other related barrier. These are women who may also lack the proper social support systems or access to information that will enable them to make better decisions for their business.

III. Who is Eligible to Apply for the Innovation Grant?

Any locally active or registered CSO, PSE, and business entrepreneurs in Tuvalu, Nauru, Marshall Islands, and Palau providing projects, advocacy work, and services to women and youth. These include:

- ❖ Entrepreneurs (Could be individuals or Groups)
- ❖ Development non-profit organizations
- ❖ People's Organizations
- ❖ Farmers' Associations
- ❖ Cooperatives
- ❖ Microfinance Institutions
- ❖ Financial service providers (FSPs)
- ❖ Technology service providers
- ❖ Social Welfare Organizations
- ❖ Civic Clubs or Professional Organizations
- ❖ Civil Society Organizations
- ❖ Academic institutions (ex. Colleges, Universities)
- ❖ Established Traditional Organizations

Partnerships (consortiums) of 2 or more organizations are also eligible to apply -

Innovation Grants also encourage formation of a partnership. In a partnership, the Lead Applicant for the Innovation Grant must meet all the eligibility requirements and take responsibility for overall coordination, monitoring the budget, and compliance of the grant reporting and evaluation needs. These partnerships could be strategic engagements between organization and financial intermediaries; between technology providers and CSOs; between financial institutions and membership organizations with a built-in customer base; or any other partnership arrangement applicants think would be fruitful, providing impact to our target beneficiaries.



Types of Products and Services prioritized in the BELUU Innovation Grant - Innovators will be encouraged to propose projects at the intersection between WEE and climate resilience, COVID-19, food security, gender based violence (GBV) and/or digital technology. Projects could thus propose to do the following:

- ❖ Strengthen women's collective enterprises working in the blue and green economies through training, financing, networking and/or mentoring. For example but not limited to: traditional and life skill projects such as traditional food preservation or beauty products made from traditional herbs; agriculture related products such as taro, noni, or pandanus products, sustainable projects related to handicraft businesses such as shell and giant clam farming; and goods/crafts made from local trees and other resources; and lastly, products made from recycled materials.
- ❖ Support women to use remittances for businesses focused on clean energy solutions.
- ❖ Train women in savings groups to mobilize resources for coastal restoration efforts.
- ❖ Support women entrepreneurs to link to financing programs, such as the Taiwan ICDF-supported Relending Program in Palau or Kora Fund in Marshall Islands.
- ❖ Support upscaling, professionalization, or digitization of CSO-led microfinance schemes
- ❖ Work with Financial Service Providers (FSPs) to design emergency loans and accessible savings to improve resilience.
- ❖ Educate and link savings groups to microinsurance providers, including parametric index insurance that can reduce small scale producers' exposure to climate change.
- ❖ Improve FSPs' client data collection and analysis, to improve inclusive lending activities.
- ❖ Support FSPs to digitally link to women's savings groups, to enable access to formal loans.
- ❖ Improve digital literacy of women entrepreneurs so they can join e-commerce platforms, digitize recordkeeping, use mobile money, access digital knowledge platforms, etc.
- ❖ Provide Technical and Vocational Education opportunities, including in sustainable agriculture, organic gardening, fish processing, solar panel installation/repair, etc.
- ❖ Mentor women micro-small enterprises to capitalize on specific business opportunities that have emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ Enable women micro-small enterprises to capitalize on indigenous knowledge (handicrafts, agriculture, published instructions aimed at transferring knowledge, etc.)
- ❖ Improve coordination and linkages between WEE and GBV prevention and referral services.
- ❖ Conduct boys education and/or household gender dialogues with men about how women's entrepreneurship improves overall household economic security and resilience.
- ❖ Improve and ensure data collection, monitoring, and advocacy about the impacts of national laws and policies affecting women's enterprise.



IV. Financial & Technical Assistance Provided to BELUU Innovation Grant Winners

The BELUU Innovation Grant will award funding and technical support to 17-19 innovator applicants. Innovation Grant winners will receive both financial assistance and technical assistance to implement their proposed projects/activity pilots. The specific amount provided to each applicant will be based on their Innovation Pilot Budget.

All applicants may choose from any of the two grant funding categories. Each will have a set timeline, maximum budget, and corresponding scope of activities. Applicants are encouraged to choose the funding category based on their organization/individual capacity, experience in fund management and past project implementation with similar or same grant size. Below is a summary requirements for each grant category.

Category 1: Small to Medium 10,000 to 15,000 USD	Category 2: Large 40,000 to 55,000 USD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This category is suggested for applicants who are in the pilot or transition stage including individual entrepreneurs - must provide evidence of promising ideas and capable resource teams or experience for individuals. Must be able to provide appropriate strategy to track impact and cost effectiveness. Team must have a clear plan and/or linkage with partners, team members, and other requirements to bring the innovation to a larger scale; with plans of inviting other funding support agencies. ● Minimum funding request is at 10,000 USD and a maximum of 15,000 USD. ● Small and medium entities or organizations as well as individual entrepreneurs are encouraged to apply under this category. ● Period of implementation is from 6 to 10 months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This category is suggested for for applicants at scaling-up stage or organizations experienced in managing larger grants that wish to explore an new innovative project - should have demonstrated evidence of prior grant management and potential. Must have clear steps to build management and operational capacity. There should also be a commitment to continued monitoring of social outcomes and implementation costs to ensure ongoing learning and improvement. ● Minimum funding or budget request is at 40,000 USD and maximum of 55,000 USD. ● Large and primed organizations with previous grant management experience are encouraged to apply under this category. ● Period of implementation is from 12 to 18 months.



The BELUU team will provide technical assistance to Innovation Grant (Prize) winners in the implementation of their Prizes (projects) through four main areas:

1. **Local WEE Consultants** - Recruited and supervised by BELUU, consultants stationed in each country will monitor the grantees' progress and provide in-person coaching and support throughout the project.
2. Grantees will have direct access to the results of the **BELUU Stakeholder Mapping Report** which informs grantees on the current challenges, barriers, and opportunities for women entrepreneurs and youth in the four countries. This includes one-on-one support from the BELUU team or technical assistance to include such information as part or as an activity in the markets or value chains they serve. All applicants are encouraged to read the mapping report before developing their Innovation Grant Application.
3. BELUU will provide technical assistance to Prize Winners during the implementation of their Innovation Grant projects through the BELUU team's technical staff, and through either **Grameen's Bankers Without Borders** program or the Technical Missions of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in the four countries. This includes but is not limited to working closely with Prize winners to conduct training, support on reporting, design their final project work plans, monitoring and evaluation plans prior to the kick-off of your project, and other necessary topics.

About Grameen's Bankers without Borders (BwB) Program - Bankers without Borders volunteers are private sector experts from top U.S. and international companies in the finance, investment and data analytics sectors who will provide free short-term technical assistance support to Innovation Grant winners according to the interests and needs of the Grant winners. For example, a BwB volunteer can assist an organization to develop a business model for a financial product, to set up a data analytics framework to measure the success; or to support applicants to set up a social media and communications strategy. For more information see www.bankerswithoutborders.com.

V. General Guidelines

- ❖ Project proposals must be aligned with sections or themes in the BELUU. Proposal should clearly state *what the problem is, how it affects poor and vulnerable groups, and how the proposed innovation provides a solution.*
- ❖ The proposal must exhibit novelty in implementation or improve a current process with potential to address the identified challenge and with a clear value proposition that resonates with the target stakeholders. The proposal must also be viable and sustainable and expected outcomes must result in positive changes for the target beneficiaries.



- ❖ The proposed project must have an implementation approach that reflects a clear understanding of existing efforts to address similar problems and the barriers to success.
- ❖ Applicants or implementing entities will be assessed based on competence, experience with women and youth groups, resource, compliance, and good governance conditions. Applicants must present relevant expertise as well as capacity to achieve success, with clear roles, responsibilities, and time commitments to ensure smooth implementation of project plans.
- ❖ Applicants must have the ability to engage effectively with partners in government, private sector, and/or community leaders.
- ❖ All proposals must be gender-responsive, gender-sensitive following safeguarding protocols.

VI. Other Expectations of Grant Winners

Organization Leverage Recommendations - All Innovation Grant applicants are encouraged to present organization resource capacity as leverage in in-kind or cash to better facilitate and support the Prize grant provided by BELUU. These can be in the form of staff time, materials, technology development costs, and other similar material costs and resources that go to developing or implementing your innovation. It may also be in the forms of cash or actual matching or existing non-federal funding. Some examples of in-kind leverage would be considered eligible are:

1. If you have already done or will do the technology development for your innovation with your own funds, and are seeking funds from BELUU to pilot test it, you can count the technology development as leverage.
2. If you have already done or will do the focus group discussions/market research to refine your innovation with your own funds, and are seeking funds from BELUU to pilot test it, you can count the market research costs as leverage.
3. If you have already piloted your Innovation in a small geographic area and are seeking funding to scale it up, the costs of the pilot in the small geographic area can count as leverage.
4. The cost of staff indirectly supporting the project but not included in the project budget (for example headquarters management staff).

Knowledge-Sharing and Communications - The BELUU program expects Innovation Grant winners to document some pieces of learning from their implementation; participate in BELUU training workshops, and learning exchange events to disseminate their learning to a wider audience; and participate in the development of case studies on their Innovation which will be shared with a wider audience.



Eligible Costs - The following costs are considered eligible and may be included in an applicant's Innovation Grant request to BELUU:

- ❖ Eligible costs must be necessary and incurred by the applicant during the project period.
- ❖ Costs must be identifiable and verifiable, and be recorded in the accounting records of the applicant, and consistent with the organization's policies and procedures.
- ❖ Costs should be in compliance with the fringe benefit, tax and social security laws of implementing countries and agreement terms: Tuvalu, Nauru, Marshall Islands and Palau.
- ❖ Costs must be reasonable, justified, and demonstrate sound financial management, in particular regarding budget management and efficiency.
- ❖ Technology, training, workshop/meeting, staff, travel, printing and market research costs directly related to the implementation of the project are eligible.
- ❖ Training for the employees of the institution applying for the grant is also eligible as long as it has been demonstrated that it will link directly to the project output. *Unrelated trainings are not eligible.*
- ❖ Investment costs directly attributable to the project, relating to research and innovation.
- ❖ Staff costs related to management oversight, administrative support; and office rental costs directly required for project implementation are eligible. These overhead and administrative costs should be justified and not make up the entirety of the project.

Ineligible costs - The following costs are considered ineligible and may not be included in the applicant's grant request to BELUU.

- ❖ Loaning funds.
- ❖ Loan guaranteeing funds, or any other provisions for losses or debts.
- ❖ Costs declared by the applicant which are already being paid through a grant financed from another donor or included in the leverage costs.
- ❖ Purchase of a vehicle (old or new).
- ❖ Land development building, renovations, or construction costs.
- ❖ Purchase of any alcoholic beverages, gifts, tokens for bribes, or other unapproved "morale events."
- ❖ Gym services, spa services, health or social club dues or initiation fees.
- ❖ First class or charter travel, travel for companions, or other "excessive" travel costs.
- ❖ In-flight phone charges (unless used for an emergency or for a justifiable, critical business issue).
- ❖ Fines and penalties, including moving violations (i.e. tickets) and credit card late fees.
- ❖ Any costs not related to the implementation of the project.



VII. Process of Application & Selection Criteria

Applications should be submitted via an online application management system on or before the application deadline for submission of initial application is on: **November 30, 2022, 6:00 PM Palau Time.**

Submitting Questions - Anyone with questions about the Innovation Prize process or application should email **BELUU@grameenfoundation.org** with the email subject - Inquiry: BELUU Innovation Grant.

Announcement of Shortlist of Candidates - Applicants are encouraged to express interest and submit their Initial Application as early as possible. Shortlisted applications for grant candidates will be asked to complete a detailed full application form to support the final review process. Deadline for the duly accomplished full application will be provided during the decision for the shortlist. Decisions will be sent via email together with the full application forms and required templates.

Full Application Form - Shortlisted applicants will be asked to complete all sections of the application form. Copies of these files will be provided once a decision on the shortlist is provided. These files include the following:

- ❖ Have an official representative of your organization sign Annex I: Submission Letter.
- ❖ Answer all questions in the full application form in Annex II: Concept Note;
- ❖ Provide a basic workplan and budget for their activities in Annex III: Work Plan & Annex IV Budget; and
- ❖ Provide supporting documents in Annex V : Supporting Documents (Ex.certificate of registration, certificate of compliance with the tax authorities, etc.)

All annexes must be completed in order for the application to be reviewed. These questions cover all the information BELUU Team needs to know and no additional documentation or proposal documents are allowed. All applications should be completed in English. Applicants are advised to start compiling their supporting documents early since they may take time to receive from your headquarters office and scan.

Application Selection Process - All Innovation Grant applications received will go through the following three-step selection process:

- 1) **Application Pre-Screening:** BELUU Team pre-screens all applicants to confirm they meet the eligibility criteria and have submitted complete applications, and have



demonstrated the previous ability to reasonably carry out what they have proposed in their applications.

- 2) **Short-listing:** An Advisory Committee composed of impartial technical experts in the financial services and related development sectors reviews and shortlists most promising applications. To ensure transparency, the names of applicant organizations will be removed from all reviewed applications and no one whose organization is eligible to apply for the Innovation Prize will be a member of the Advisory Committee.
- 3) **Final Selection:** Final selection of Grant winners will be completed by Grameen technical teams.
- 4) **Signing Award Agreements:** Selected Grant winners will sign a formal legal agreement with Grameen Foundation in order to implement their project. In case a grant winner/innovator fails to sign the agreement, Grameen shall select the next highest-scoring application to receive the Prize (grant funding).

Announcement of BELUU Innovation Grant Winners: There will be two rounds of announcement of winners. This will allow proper time for the selection/advisory committee to review the proposal application, request for amendments if necessary and provide general guidance to prize winners. Here is the schedule of announcements. **Note: These are subject to change upon the discretion of the selection committee.**

- ❖ **First Round: January 30, 2023**
- ❖ **Second Round: March 31, 2023**

Specific Selection criteria:

Table below shows the expected criteria for both initial and full application.

Criteria	Description	Maximum Points
Technical Approach		
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation responds to the needs and constraints of women entrepreneurs and youth for financial services for business. Innovation will have a significant positive impact on the financial health and resilience of women entrepreneurs and their businesses. Innovation will have a significant positive impact on the earning potential and size of women’s businesses. 	15



Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation is something new that has not been implemented before or been piloted at sufficient scale. 	15
Scalability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation will benefit a large number of women and youth during the funded project period or afterwards. • Innovation has the potential to develop a viable business model for scaling over time. 	15
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation will continue to be available to users after the project period. • Innovation will continue to be used after the project period. • The applicant organization has demonstrated the ability and willingness to sustain products and services after donor-funded pilot periods in the past. 	15
Project Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed project approach or methodology is well thought-out, highly feasible and likely to succeed in the local context. 	10
Individual / Organizational Capacity		
Experience	The applicant/consortium of applicants has implemented similar projects, advocacy work in the past, and has the knowledge, experience and skills to address challenges that may arise in project implementation effectively.	15
Organizational Footprint	The applicant/consortium of applicants have the combined management, technology, financial and infrastructure resources to carry out the project they proposed to do.	15
Cost Evaluation		



Value for money	The project demonstrates sound value for money. Costs for all activities are reasonable based on general market rates. The amount of staff included on the project budget is reasonable based on the activities proposed. The items included in the project budget are useful to achieve the project's goals and objectives.	PASS/FAIL
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Minimum requirements for proposal to be evaluated

- ❖ Complete Application Form, including the 'Declaration Letter' duly signed by the applicant's legal representative.
- ❖ The strategy and project objective proposed by the applicant are aligned to the BELUU Program objective.
- ❖ Application proposes a clear methodology, action plan, and project team members..

* End of RFA document.