

Global Development Awards Competition
Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development (ORD)
2025 Edition

GUIDELINES FOR ORD REVIEWERS

The Global Development Network (GDN) is a public international organisation that supports high-quality, policy-oriented, social science research in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), to promote better lives. Founded in 1999, GDN is headquartered in New Delhi (India), with offices in Clermont-Ferrand (France) and Arlington (USA). Our work spans the Global South.

Table of Contents

Background	2
Theme of the Competition.....	2
Focus Area of Submissions.....	4
Evaluation Stages.....	5
Timeline.....	6
Evaluation of Proposals	6
Application Structure.....	6
Selection criteria.....	9
Review of submissions	10
Platform.....	10
Conflict of Interest.....	14
Evaluation Process.....	15
Assignment Flow.....	17
Considerations.....	18



Background

The Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development (ORD) is a competitive research grant programme under the umbrella of the [Global Development Awards Competition](#) administered by the Global Development Network (GDN), funded under the Policy and Human Resources Development Fund (PHRD) trust fund managed by the World Bank, and generously supported by the Ministry of Finance, Government of Japan. This award programme identifies and funds outstanding research proposals in low-income or middle-income countries¹ with high potential for excellence in research and clear policy implications for addressing development issues.

Theme of the Competition

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

"The importance of digitization in health care has been increasingly recognized since the outbreak of COVID-19. Implementation in society (including utilization of innovative technologies) needs to be accelerated in the world, including developing countries"

[Japan's Global Health Strategy](#) (2022:2)

Digital health is a cultural transformation of traditional healthcare. Digital technologies offer powerful tools to improve access, affordability, and quality of health services. Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are often at the forefront of innovation in this space, offering valuable lessons to the global public health community on how to do more with less, impacting health outcomes, behaviour and knowledge among the most marginalised communities. The right combination of research and research-led implementation can help scale innovations to benefit larger groups, or it can enable impactful innovations to travel and be adapted across different health systems.

In 2025, the Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development (ORD) invites social science researchers based in LMICs to submit proposals that focus on building empirical evidence and actionable knowledge capable of transforming the pursuit of universal health coverage through digital solutions. Research should

¹ Press [here](#) to visit the list of countries which are recognised as low- and middle-income countries by the World Bank

illuminate how digital solutions impact the pursuit of universal health access across LMICs.

In parallel, the 2025 Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project (MIDP) will support existing (i.e. ongoing) NGO-led projects engaged in the development, implementation or evaluation of digital solutions in support of universal healthcare delivery in underserved areas.

Together, these awards bridge the gap between knowledge and real-world impact, advancing inclusive health systems.

GDN encourages the submission of projects that are either gender-specific or gender-transformative but requires that all projects be designed to respond to gender concerns.

Under the ORD 2025, GDN will be accepting proposals from early-career researchers focusing on the topic above. Examples of research questions include (but are not limited to) the following:

- How do mobile health platforms impact healthcare access and health outcomes for marginalised populations in fragile and conflict-affected settings?
- What are the socioeconomic impacts of telemedicine on reducing healthcare barriers for women and informal workers in rural LMICs?
- Can AI-powered diagnostic tools be adapted for use on low-cost devices (e.g., older smartphones) to detect common diseases in remote settings?
- What are the key privacy, security, and equity challenges in national digital health data systems, and how can policy frameworks address these issues to enhance human security?
- What are the factors which enhance/inhibit effective integration and scale-up of innovative digital technologies and solutions within the health systems?
- What governance mechanisms and regulatory functions are needed to ensure the responsible use of digital technology/AI in the context of UHC?
- How do mobile health applications influence mental health support and chronic disease management for displaced populations in humanitarian crises?

Adherence to one of the questions above does not increase chances of success - these are examples. Researchers are urged to focus on their own interests within the 2025 topic. Proposals must, however, demonstrate policy relevance, originality, and clear methodologies, along with a direct and well-articulated link to the call topic. Research must align with [human security principles](#), emphasising the protection and

empowerment of individuals to ensure freedom from health-related risks and vulnerabilities.

Focus Area of Submissions

Note that digital health technologies must contribute to sustainable development in the targeted areas, ensuring continued use and impact beyond the research or project period. Additionally, continuous updates for new devices and applications are crucial for long-term sustainability, and, if possible and applicable, digital health innovations should be applied to support climate change adaptation and resilience efforts.

Access and Equity: The digital divide in healthcare, across both geography and demographics, prevents vulnerable populations from benefiting from digital health innovations. Projects should focus on improving access to healthcare services and reducing health disparities in underserved communities. This can include connecting patients and providers with digital tools, expanding healthcare infrastructure, reducing financial barriers, and developing targeted interventions for marginalised communities.

Behaviour and Attitudes: Projects that aim to modify individual or collective behaviours and attitudes that impact health outcomes. This could involve using digital tools to promote healthy habits, providing incentives for behaviour change. It also includes shifting attitudes and beliefs related to health by reducing stigma and discrimination and promoting positive attitudes towards health-seeking behaviours.

Empowerment: Projects that aim to empower individuals and communities to take control of their health and well-being. This could involve providing health education and information, promoting self-care practices, and supporting community-led health initiatives.

Knowledge and Awareness: Projects that focus on increasing understanding and awareness of health issues. This could involve developing educational materials, providing training to healthcare workers, or using digital tools to disseminate health information. It also includes raising awareness of specific health issues or promoting health literacy through public health campaigns and working with community leaders.

Systems and Capacity: Strong health systems are crucial for effective digital health implementation. Projects should focus on strengthening health systems and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare delivery. This can include implementing digital health information systems, improving supply chain

management, and strengthening the capacity of individuals, communities, or health systems to address health challenges. Public-private partnerships are essential to promote the effective use of digital technology, and involving private companies with excellent technology in universal healthcare delivery is a key focus.

Social Norms: Projects that aim to transform social norms that influence health behaviours and outcomes. This could involve using digital media to challenge harmful traditional practices, promoting positive social norms around health, and empowering communities to advocate for change.

Technology and Data: Projects that focus on developing or implementing new technologies and improving the collection, analysis, and use of health data to improve health outcomes. This could involve creating mobile health apps, developing telehealth platforms, or using artificial intelligence to improve disease surveillance and diagnosis. It also includes developing digital health information systems, using data to inform public health interventions, or promoting data sharing and collaboration among healthcare providers.

Evaluation Stages

- Eligibility screening
 - The eligibility screening of proposals will be done on a rolling basis by GDN.
- 1st Level Review by Lot 1 reviewers
 - Lot 1 reviewers have 2-10 years of research experience, with a track record of work and publication in the theme
 - The selected Lot 1 reviewers, junior researchers, conduct a first assessment of proposals on the basis of the ORD selection criteria and from the normalised ranking, a shortlist is extracted.
- 2nd Level Review by Lot 2 reviewers
 - Lot 2 reviewers have over 10 years of research experience, with a track record of work and publication in the theme.
 - The selected Lot 2 reviewers, senior researchers, review the shortlisted proposals from the 1st level review against the same ORD selection criteria.
- Validation of finalists by the Panel Organiser
 - Out of the Lot 2 reviewers, the Panel Organiser is selected based on

their professional experience, upon demonstrated availability for this additional task.

- This individual will approve the final ranking after taking into consideration all comments and (normalised) scores. Normalisation and ranking will be done by GDN.

Timeline

Reviewers will comply with the timeline defined for their assignment, which is expected to be:

□ Lot 1: First level review

Between **June 23 to July 16**, with up to 10 proposals per reviewer, a minimum of 3 reviews per proposal. This number might differ depending on how many applications are received and how many reviewers are selected.

□ Lot 2: Second level review

Between **July 28 to August 18**, with up to 10 proposals per reviewer, a minimum of 3 reviews per proposal (the workload on each reviewer may vary).

□ Panel Organiser

Between **August 20 to August 21**, to approve the final ranking upon reception of all normalised scores and ranking provided by GDN.

Evaluation of Proposals

Application Structure

Each proposal is structured with the following sections, with guiding questions (in italics) for the applicants to follow and reviewers to consider in their assessment:

I. General Information

- a. Proposal basic information
- b. Contact details for the project

- c. Abstract of the research proposal - up to 400 words
 - i. *Accurately summarise the overall context, rationale and policy relevance of the proposed study.*
 - ii. *Describe the importance of the study within the context of the theme.*
- d. Summary of the team's research expertise - up to 300 words
 - i. *Explain how team members beyond the PI complement the team, in terms of academic and research management expertise (if applicable)*
 - ii. *Describe the experience team members have in working together*
- e. Research institution - up to 200 words
 - i. *Brief description of the research institution where the PI is based and how the proposed research might fit in its research focus or the research focus of research units within it.*
 - ii. *Experience of the institution in supporting internationally funded projects, and the size range of international research grants administered by the institution*

II. Research Proposal Information

- a. What is the Research Question you propose to explore? - up to 300 words
 - i. *What is your research question?*
 - ii. *What are the specific issues to be addressed within the overall context of the competition theme?*
 - iii. *What are the objectives of the study?*
- b. State of the Art (Literature review) - up to 500 words
 - i. *What is known, from existing literature, about the specific question you are asking?*
 - ii. *What aspects of the topic remain unexplored in the literature, and why?*
 - iii. *How does it differ from existing studies on similar issues?*
- c. Relevant research experience in the chosen topic - up to 300 words
 - i. *Have you developed or published previous work on similar issues?*
 - ii. *How does this research fit in with your recent or current research priorities and achievements? How does it advance it?*

III. Methodology

- a. Research design and proposed methodology – up to 3000 words
 - i. *Outline the research design to answer the research question.*
 - ii. *Describe the methods to be employed and the reason for this choice.*
 - iii. *Highlight the innovativeness and originality of the chosen research design.*
- b. What data (qualitative and/or quantitative) do you need to carry out the project? – up to 300 words
 - i. *What data is already available?*
 - ii. *What access issues do you foresee with regard to data yet to be collected?*

IV. Policy Implications

- a. What specific development policy challenge does the proposed research focus on? – up to 400 words
 - i. *What specific policy outcome(s) does the proposed research aim to advance, directly or indirectly?*
 - ii. *What is the geographical focus of the project, and its broader relevance beyond the immediate geographic focus of the study proposed (if applicable)?*
- b. How does the proposed research project aim to address the policy challenge(s) identified above in the previous question? – up to 400 words
 - i. *What strategies are currently being used to address these challenges (if any)?*
 - ii. *How will your research project build on existing knowledge/work?*
 - iii. *In what ways are policy actors currently engaged with this challenge?*

V. Ethical Considerations

- a. What ethical challenges might the project pose, directly or indirectly? – up to 500 words
 - i. *How might the project impact the specific vulnerability of stakeholders involved or affected by the project?*
 - ii. *What ethics clearance framework and process will the research be regulated by? (Please specify relevant institutional or*

national ethics review processes, if any, that the researcher needs to comply with as part of his/her affiliation.)

VI. Section 5: Budget

- a. Budget narrative – up to 300 words
 - i. *Link the use of funds to the research project as it is structured with the timeline.*
 - ii. *Please explain the choices you made in building the budget and the rationale for the proposed allocation of funds.*
- b. Is the proposed project receiving funds from a third party? – up to 300 words
 - i. *If yes, please state basic grant information on this funding (sources, amounts and project duration).*
 - ii. *What financial or in-kind support is the proposed study likely to receive from the institution of affiliation or other establishments?*

VII. Timeline

VIII. Details of the Research Team

IX. References

Selection Criteria

Each review consists of:

- 1) Scoring (1 to 5, 5 being the highest) each proposal against the criteria
- 2) Comments to complement the quantitative evaluation for each criterion
- 3) Indication of recommendation to advance to the following stage
 - a. Lot 1 Reviewers – Yes/No to “Should this proposal advance to the next stage?”
 - b. Lot 2 Reviewers – Yes/No to “Is this proposal among the top 3 you have reviewed?”

Applicants receive the anonymised comments and have the opportunity to revise their proposals between phases. It is expected that all comments submitted are respectful and contribute to the professional development of the applicants, regardless of the quality of their proposal.

Lot 2 reviewers (second level review) will not have access to the comments from the 1st level reviewers, but the applicants will provide a reaction to their comments.

The criteria for the ORD category are as follows:

□ Academic Quality

- Quality of the research question formulated
- Quality of methodology and methods chosen to answer the research question
- Quality of literature review
- Originality and Innovativeness
- Ethics

□ Clarity of the Links to Policy

- Link to specific development outcomes
- Specific relevance to policy process

□ Feasibility

- Timeline
- Budget
- Research team

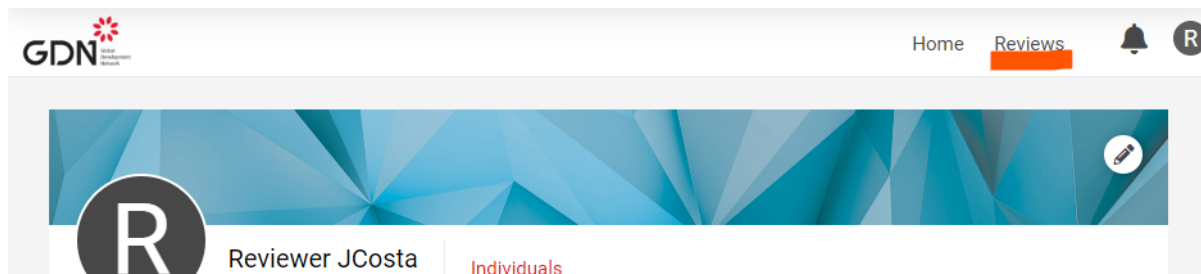
Review of submissions

Platform

Reviewers will be conducting the reviews through the same online platform used to submit the application to act as Reviewer: (www.gdn.int/gdac/2025/apply).

You will receive an email for every proposal assigned for you to review, and you will have a “Review” tab on your portal once you log in.

Once you log in, please press “Reviews” at the top right of the screen:



From there, you will have a quick overview of how many reviews have been assigned to you and if these are pending or waiting for you to check for any Conflict of Interest (from the number of the box "Pending") and those you have completed (box labelled "Completed"). At the bottom of the page, you will find a table that was developed to help you compare the scores of the different reviews you have been accepted before submitting them:

ORD ASSIGNED REVIEWS

2

Pending

2

Completed

OVERVIEW OF ACCEPTED ORD REVIEWS

1-3 of 3

	#	Applicant	Application ID	Status	Research question	Methodology	Literature review
<input type="checkbox"/>							
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Tyler ORD Application	2022-1113 Individuals	Draft			
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Tyler ORD Application	2022-1113 Individuals	Completed	1	--Select one--	--Select one--

To check if you have a Conflict of Interest (or continue a review), press the "Pending" box, and you will be presented with a list of the proposals assigned to you. Under the column "Activity status", you will see which stage it is at: *Draft* if you have already declared no Col or *Conflict of Interest*, or if it is waiting for a reply on that matter.

PENDING

1-2 of 2

<input type="checkbox"/>	#	Application ID	Activity Type	Activity Status	Project Name	Principal Investigator	Affiliated Institution
<input type="checkbox"/> Open	1	2022-1113 Individuals	2nd Review	Draft	Blah Blah	Test	Test
<input type="checkbox"/> Open	2	2022-1113 Individuals	2nd Review	Conflict of Interest	Blah Blah	Test	Test

For the Col process, you will be presented with a menu like the one below, where the basic information of the application will be presented, namely the Principal Investigator and the Project Title.

Take note that you can still recuse yourself later once you check the full application.

2022-1113 Individuals (Review_second_stage)



Activity Type: 2nd Review

Press the button labelled "Actions" on your top left corner and then open "View Grant in Split Screen" in order to have access to the application.

APPLICATION DETAILS

- > Program - 2022 Global Development Awards Competition
- > Category - Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development (ORD)
- > Principal Investigator - Test
- > Project title - Blah Blah

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Please excuse yourself from reviewing this proposal if you fall under any of the following situations:

- (Personal or Professional) Relationship with the applicant(s)
- Financial benefit from the project.

Please reach out to GDN (awards@gdn.int) if you have any questions about a potential conflict of interest prior to starting the review of the application you were assigned to.

Save Draft

No Conflict

Conflict Declared

After you declare that no Col exists, you will have access to the full review rubric as below with additional instructions on the Portal to guide you through the process.

2022-1113 Individuals (Review_second_stage)



Activity Type: 2nd Review



INSTRUCTIONS:

- To view the application alongside the review form (recommended), please click on the "Split Screen Application View" button directly below. Then you will have the application on the left side and the review rubric on the right side. (Otherwise, please click the 'Application Summary' button at the bottom of the rubric for a PDF of the application.)
- Please refer to the Call for Proposals and Terms of Reference for the Grant Program before starting the review process
- Once the submit button is clicked, there is no way to go back and edit the review. So please use the 'Save Draft' button until you are comfortable with your completed review
(Feel free to finalize all of your pending reviews with 'Save Draft' and then 'Submit' them all at the same time when you are finished with them all.)

Split Screen Application View

* Quality of the research question

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- * Is the research question clear and focused?
- * Does it set forth an analytical task, as opposed to a descriptive one?
- * Is the question rhetorical?

--Select one--

* Quality of methodology and methods chosen to answer the research question

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- * Does the proposal identify a clear methodological approach to answering the research question?
- * Is the methodology proposed appropriate to the task set forth by the research question?

Please note that the field for you to introduce your comments per review criteria will be presented only after you add a score, as you can see below.

* Quality of the research question

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- * Is the research question clear and focused?
- * Does it set forth an analytical task, as opposed to a descriptive one?
- * Is the question rhetorical?

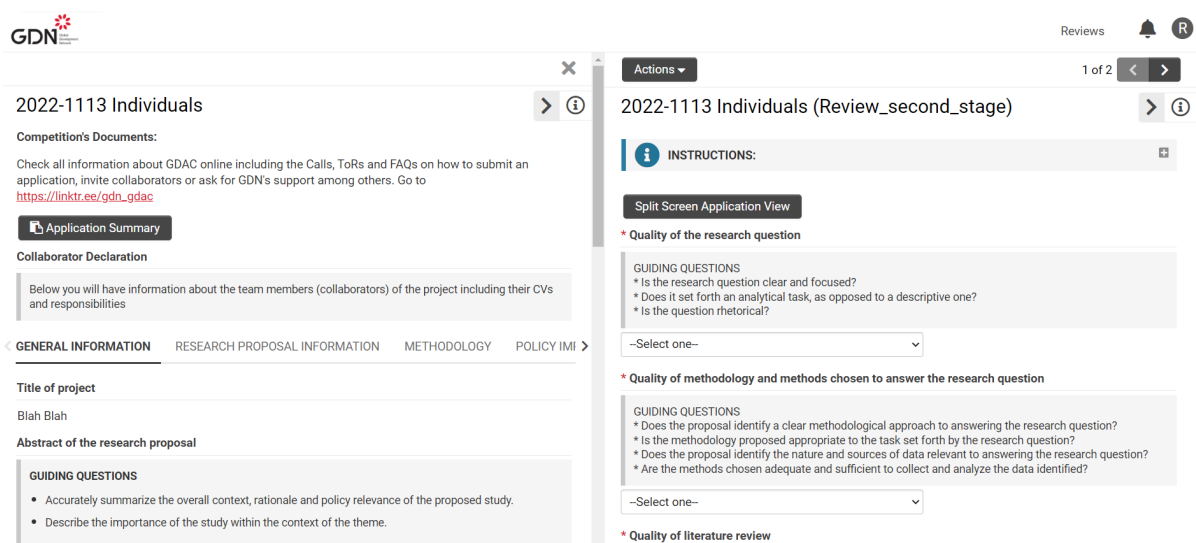
1

* Please, explain the reasons for the given score

Save Draft

Submit

You may check the proposal with the review rubric on the same screen if you press the “Split Screen Application View”. You may as well download the entire application if you press the “Application Summary” button.



The screenshot displays the GDN application review interface. On the left, the proposal details for '2022-1113 Individuals' are shown, including a 'Competition's Documents' section with a link to 'https://linktr.ee/gdn_gdac', an 'Application Summary' button, and a 'Collaborator Declaration' section. Below this is a navigation menu with tabs for 'GENERAL INFORMATION', 'RESEARCH PROPOSAL INFORMATION', 'METHODOLOGY', and 'POLICY IMI'. The 'GENERAL INFORMATION' tab is active, showing the 'Title of project' as 'Blah Blah' and an 'Abstract of the research proposal' with 'GUIDING QUESTIONS' such as 'Accurately summarize the overall context, rationale and policy relevance of the proposed study.' On the right, the 'Review_second_stage' view is shown, featuring an 'INSTRUCTIONS' section and a 'Split Screen Application View' button. Below this are three review rubric sections: 'Quality of the research question', 'Quality of methodology and methods chosen to answer the research question', and 'Quality of literature review'. Each section contains 'GUIDING QUESTIONS' and a dropdown menu for selection.

Please remember to click “Save Draft” while you are working so that the portal saves your work, and do not submit it until the very end, so that you can compare scores and make any edits without our intervention.

Conflict of Interest

The first and most important step to ensure transparency and fairness in the entire evaluation process is for you to state if you have any Conflict of Interest. This might be the case if you are a family member or close collaborator of an author, or you have some history with the author. If you feel your relationship with the author undermines the impartiality of your assessment, please abstain from the review by ticking the box in the top right corner and providing a short justification. In case of doubt, please contact us. We can easily reshuffle the reviews to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

Evaluation Process

Keep in mind that all comments you will enter will be shared with the ORD applicants regardless of the success of their application!

We believe that even if they do not succeed in this competition, they should have the opportunity to improve their project. Your comments are important and must be respectful and considerate of the time and work invested, irrespective of their capacity and of the outcome.

For each proposal, you will have to submit a score from 1 to 5 against each of the review criteria, together with a clear narrative justification for the score.

*** Quality of the research question**

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- * Is the research question clear and focused?
- * Does it set forth an analytical task, as opposed to a descriptive one?
- * Is the question rhetorical?

1

*** Please, explain the reasons for the given score**

For each of the criteria, please consider the following review question, which should be addressed throughout the application clearly and aim to give a coherent score across all your assignments.

Consider that a criterion should have only been given a maximum score (5) if it has addressed all the review questions.

Academic quality		Review questions
1	Quality of the research question formulated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the research question clear and focused? • Does it set forth an analytical task, as opposed to a descriptive one? • Is the question rhetorical?
2	Quality of methodology and methods chosen to answer the research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the proposal identify a clear methodological approach to answering the research question? • Is the methodology proposed appropriate to the task set forth by the research question? • Does the proposal identify the nature and sources of data relevant to answering the research question?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the methods chosen adequate and sufficient to collect and analyse the data identified?
3	Quality of literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the proposal discuss the relevant secondary sources? Does the review of the literature justify the research project? Does the proposal discuss what the research project adds (or aims to add) to the literature?
4	Originality and Innovativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the case for the originality of the project convincing? Is the project also innovative, in the combination of questions and methodology?
5	Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the proposal adequately identify and discuss the ethical implications of the proposed study? Does it identify at-risk groups that might be involved or affected by the research? Does it devise strategies to control for ethical risk? Does it identify a specific research ethics clearance framework and process of reference?
Clarity of the links to policy		Review questions
6	Link to specific development outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the proposal identify a specific policy challenge, goal, or specific domain, it aims to shed light on? Does it specify what outcomes the project aims to support?
7	Specific relevance to the policy process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the proposal describe what phases of policy work it aims to focus on, i.e. the formulation and/or validation and/or operationalisation and/or evaluation and/or communication, or other specific aspects?
Feasibility		Review questions
8	Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the timeline realistic? Does it take into account enough time to kick-start the project? Does it take into account the time needed for receiving and integrating external feedback at different stages? Is fieldwork, if relevant, well balanced with deskwork?
9	Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the budget reflect the nature of the project proposed? Does it reflect the proposed logic and timeline of implementation? Does it reflect the proposed division of labour within the research team? Does it include provisions for unexpected costs and delays? Does it show support from the institution(s) of affiliation, for example, through in-kind contributions?
10	Research team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the PI have sufficient experience to lead the project and the team?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the skillsets of team members match the nature of the project, including in terms of experience in the relevant research methods? Does the team have sufficient experience to carry out the proposed fieldwork? Are roles and responsibilities distributed adequately?
Recommendation to advance to the next stage	
1st Level Reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please let us know if, based on your overall assessment, you would recommend this proposal to advance to the next stage of the review process. <i>Take note that the applicant will have the chance to revise their application based on your comments (and from all other reviewers) at the Second Level review.</i>
2nd Level Reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please indicate if this proposal is among the top 3 you have reviewed to help the Panel Organiser confirm the 3 finalists from the category, next to the normalised scores

Assignment Flow

- I. General assessment of the proposals for Conflicts of Interest (CoI)
 - a. In case you identify a potential CoI, signal it immediately in the respective field with a brief explanation
 - b. Contact the Awards team at awards@gdn.int to potentially have another proposal assigned to you
- II. Review each application, online or offline (you may download the applications) – take note that all comments and scores must be submitted online
- III. Input your scores and comments per criterion
 - a. Keep in mind that all comments will be shared with the applicants, and these should be constructive and respectful
- IV. Reassess all the scores to ensure that there is a coherent scoring ranking used across all your assignments
- V. Inform the Awards team (at awards@gdn.int) that you have concluded all your assignments
 - a. The Awards team will check all your scores and comments to assess if these follow the guidance given, namely to ensure these are constructive and respectful
 - b. The Awards team might lightly edit your comments if any issues are identified

- VI. The Awards team will send you a survey for evaluation of the entire process for feedback and improvement of the competition
- VII. The Awards team will send you a prefilled "Payment request" based on the number of proposals assigned to you, where you must fill in your bank details for the payment to be processed

Considerations

Please do not use the comments on each criterion to directly criticise or just commend the team on their work, but instead provide them with guidance on what needs improvement and what should be included/considered to overcome any shortcomings.

Applicants will have a chance to revise their applications between stages, considering the comments provided by each reviewer, made available anonymously.

Your assignment will be considered completed only after all your reviews are assessed by the GDN team to ensure/confirm compliance with the instructions given regarding the evaluation process and quality of your outputs. Your payment, therefore, will take place only when and if the deliverables are considered acceptable. Please be aware of this fact and be prepared to revise your comments as the GDN team will be reviewing them on a rolling basis throughout the length of your assignment.

