

Digital Economy Research Impact Initiative (DERII): Request for Proposal (RFP) for Causal Study on Digital Platform Work

1. Background

IDinsight is a mission-driven global advisory, data analytics, and research organization that helps global development leaders maximize their social impact. In 2023, we launched a five-year Digital Economy Research & Impact Initiative (DERII) focused on digital gig workers, funded by the Gates Foundation.

IDinsight released a literature review that outlines the current state of evidence in LMICs on workers working on **digital labor platforms in low-capital location-based sectors**, and conducted quantitative and qualitative descriptive studies in India, Indonesia, and Kenya.

Limited evidence exists in understanding 1) how platform work can be made more welfare-improving for gig workers through algorithmic changes and/or platform add-ons, and 2) the impact of platform work on labour outcomes, economic well-being, and financial inclusion.

To close the existing knowledge gaps, **we plan to offer 3-4 grants in the range of \$100,000 to \$500,000 to fund research projects in line with the criteria outlined below.**

Each grant should be used to fund a study producing **causal evidence** (though, exceptions for compelling descriptive evidence generation can be made on a case-by-case basis).

2. Scope of the studies

The studies must be focused on:

1. **Digital labor platforms** according to ILO's classification of gig work (e.g., 2-3 wheel drivers, domestic workers) where labor platforms automatically and algorithmically mediate worker assignment to customer.
2. **Location-based services** (e.g., transport services, domestic work, deliveries) or any online work that can arguably be conducted by an individual with smartphone ownership.
3. **Low-capital services** (excluding platforms which require investment into an expensive asset such as a car).

Studies on car driving will likely not qualify but exceptions can be made if it is demonstrated that these platforms are available for income-constrained populations (*e.g.*, Uber offers favorable terms on car rentals which makes car driving accessible to individuals who do not own cars). Job matching platforms are out of scope for this study.

Grants will be given to different research teams working in different contexts; however, to create coherence of the research findings, researchers who are given grants will be asked to collaborate with each other and synchronize measurements, where possible.

Preferences will be given to application that meet the following criteria

- **Methods:**
 - **Causal studies** with a descriptive component (*e.g.*, characterization of workers based on the platform administrative data)
 - Rigorous evaluation methods: RCTs or convincing quasi-experimental designs
 - Research that combines causal in-field experiments and a descriptive component (*e.g.*, descriptive study is a baseline for the causal study)
 - Samples should be preferably representative of the relevant population
- **Sectors:**
 - Researchers studying understudied sectors/platforms as identified in the literature review (*e.g.*, **women-dominated** platforms will be given preference)
- **Demonstrated connections with existing platforms via:**
 - Letter of collaboration or MOU signed with the partner (with explicit permission to publish the results), and/or
 - Access to administrative data
- **Timeline:**
 - Research project should start work within ~3 months after the contract signing
 - Preferences will be given to researchers who already have deep relationships with platforms and fleshed out ideas with promising interventions (*e.g.*, the platform already piloted an intervention and there are promising results)
- **Geography:**
 - Low- and middle-income countries (LMIC)
- **Themes:**
 - Research contains questions related to financial inclusion (*e.g.*, study of an embedded loan product)
 - Research themes are understudied (*e.g.*, impacts of algorithmic management on workers)
 - Research themes are grounded in **policy-relevant questions** and inform decisions for the platform partner
 - Interventions which are in-line with platform goals to ensure future sustainability
 - Research must include gender lens where relevant

3. Who's eligible to apply?

Researchers affiliated with universities or other research institutions.

4. Application process

Phase 1: Expression of Interest (2-3 pages maximum)

Step 1: Submit an **Expression of Interest (Eoi)** due **May 2nd, 2025** or sooner to terry.muthahhari@idinsight.org in **google doc format**

- Briefly describing
 - (1) Current work with platforms (sector, country, current work, timelines) and depth of collaboration
 - (2) Description of context/platforms
 - (3) Research questions and how the funds will be used
 - (4) Research design: sample selection, data collection methods, outcomes of interest, usage of administrative data
 - (5) Budget estimate
 - (6) Brief CV of researchers

Step 2: IDinsight may post questions/comments in your google doc to seek clarification, may suggest collaboration with other researchers and will let you know whether your team advanced to Phase 2 by **May 9th**.

Phase 2: Request for Proposals (RFP)

- Step 1: Each team whose Eoi is selected based on the eligibility criteria outlined above will be requested **to develop a full application using the attached questionnaire (Appendix A)** and submit it to terry.muthahhari@idinsight.org by **May 31st, 2025 (23:59 EST)**. Proposals should be **submitted in google doc** formats to ease collaboration.
- Step 2: Collaborate with IDinsight researchers to further refine study design/research themes. This will involve IDinsight researchers reviewing design documents and discussing potential questions and suggestions concerning the research agenda and study design with the applicants in a conference call.
- Step 3: **Selected teams receive the decisions by June 27th, 2025**. Selected teams will need to complete a due diligence form as a requirement for proceeding to contracting.

5. Reporting process

- IDinsight team/researchers meet about every 2 months for 0.5-1 hour to discuss progress/arising challenges/initial findings.

- Researchers submit a working paper to IDinsight within 5 months after finishing the last round of data collection.
- IDinsight provides feedback/reflections on the written output.
- **Researchers publish a working paper** (available to the public and linked on IDinsight's website within 7 months after finishing the last round of data collection).
- Researchers seek publications in academic journals and publish within ~2 years after finishing the last round of data collection.

Appendix A - Application Form

The application form **must** be submitted in the following format with all questions answered in this order. We prefer submissions using *Google docs*, but accept *Word* format as well.

1. Brief introduction/Motivation (max 250 words)
1. Connection to the existing literature review/body of knowledge on gig workers (250 words)
2. Description of context/platforms (max 250 words)
3. Research questions and how the funds will be used (max 250 words)
4. Research design
 - a. Sampling/Randomization strategies (max 250 words)
 - b. Power calculations for RCTs with clearly outlined assumptions or Margin of Error calculations for descriptive studies (max 250 words)
 - i. Anticipated effect sizes and whether they are reasonable based on context/literature
 - ii. Incorporation of take-up and whether it's reasonable
 - iii. Inclusion of clustering, if applicable
 - c. Data collection methods (max 250 words)
 - d. Outcomes of interest (max 250 words)
 - i. Heterogeneity
 - e. Usage of administrative data (max 250 words)
 - f. Data quality assurance (max 250 words)
 - g. Demonstration of gender-sensitive research practices and inclusion of women (max 250 words)
 - h. Ethics (max 250 words)
5. Description of research connections with platforms and proof of working relationship and intent to collaborate (max 250 words)
6. Timeline of research activities which includes the completion and publicizing the working paper
7. Budget breakdown
 - a. Data collection cost (including research participant compensation, if applicable)
 - b. Research staff
 - i. Salaries
 - ii. Travel

- c. Intervention cost, if applicable
- 8. CVs of researchers demonstrating work in similar sectors
 - a. Roles and responsibilities for each researcher
- 9. Supporting documentation on collaboration between researchers and platforms which explicitly states willingness to publish results of the study and **agreement to conduct specific research activities** (e.g., MOU, intent to collaborate/share data, NDA, etc.)

About IDinsight

IDinsight is a mission-driven global advisory, data analytics, and research organization that helps global development leaders maximize their social impact. We tailor a wide range of data and evidence tools, including randomized evaluations and machine learning, to help decision-makers design effective programs and rigorously test what works to support communities. We work with governments, multilateral agencies, foundations, and innovative non-profit organizations in Asia and Africa. We work across a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, education, health, governance, sanitation, and financial inclusion. We have offices in Dakar, Lusaka, Manila, Nairobi, New Delhi, and remote. For more information, please visit idinsight.org.

About Digital Economy Research Impact Initiative (DERII)

The Digital Economy Research Impact Initiative (DERII) is a five-year initiative (funded by the Gates Foundation) to study the digital economy and its welfare implications on gig workers using platforms that provide location-based services in three countries – India, Kenya, and Indonesia. The full research report from the three countries is available [here](#).

