

AI for Humanitarian Action Open Call for Proposals

Please answer every question in the form for your application to be considered.

The most important part of your application is a project proposal that relates to developing artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) solutions which directly address existing challenges in one of the four AI for Humanitarian Action focus areas: Disaster Response, Human Rights, Needs of Women and Children, and Refugees and Displaced People.

We are interested in supporting projects which improve operational efficiency, enable new capabilities, increase beneficiary engagement, or involve rich data analysis for classification and prediction modeling.

Privacy: The information you provide will be used to verify eligibility and will be reviewed by Microsoft employees directly involved in the AI for Humanitarian grant selection process. If the specific grant includes access to partner technologies, your application will also be reviewed by the respective partner. Microsoft, or a grant partner may contact you as part of the verification process. Microsoft respects your privacy. To learn more, please read our [Privacy Statement](#).

Resources available to selected projects: Up to \$300,000 fair market value in Azure and data science services consisting of a combination of:

1. \$10K - \$75K Azure credit grant
2. Azure enablement engineering support (if needed)
3. Up to 300 hours of engagement by Microsoft Data Science and Analytics team members

Organizational Eligibility

Nonprofits, United Nations organizations and agencies, international organizations, research, academic, and governmental organizations are eligible to submit projects. Private sector organizations may be eligible to receive support if a nonprofit or humanitarian partner is directly engaged in the proposed project.

Selection Criteria

Project Design and Outcomes

- Proposal addresses an AI for Humanitarian Action focus area: Disaster Response, Refugees & Displaced People, Human Rights, or Needs of Women & Children.
- Project has a well-defined and scoped problem definition appropriate for AI or ML solutions.
- Proposed solution has relevancy to the nonprofit and humanitarian sector and potential for replication.

- If an AI/ML model is not to be initially built, the project brings valuable data to the humanitarian community.

Priority Areas for Spring 2021 Open Call

Aligning with Microsoft Philanthropies' priorities, AI/ML projects which fall under one of the four focus areas will be prioritized during our evaluation:

- Projects supporting organizations or populations in Africa.
 - Consortium based projects where multiple organizations are willing to share their data and outcomes.
- or**
- Skilling and livelihood opportunities to promote an inclusive economic recovery

Projects which do not meet a priority area will still be accepted and considered.

Data Readiness

Successful project proposals rely upon data readiness. Your organization will need to:

- Have access to relevant and labeled data.
- Have a completed data assessment and clearly estimated computing resource requirements.
- Provide details of any data sovereignty or privacy restrictions.
- Include in the proposal amount of data, and labeled data, available.

Team Composition and Preparedness

Delivery of successful AI for Humanitarian projects requires organizational readiness and expertise. Successful applicants will possess, or have a partner, with the expertise (e.g., CTO, Data Science) and organizational capacity (staffing, budget, technology) to ensure effective development, implementation, and sustainability of an AI solution.

Data Ownership and Privacy

Organizations receiving grants will maintain all project data in an Azure container dedicated to their own organization. Microsoft will access this data solely through the organization's Azure environment with permissions controlled by the grantee organization. The grantee organization will not be compelled to share any its Data with Microsoft via any other medium except for through this Azure Environment.

Intellectual Property Ownership

Organizations receiving grants will own and will retain ownership of all rights to any Machine Learning Model including any algorithms, models, modules or code embodied or incorporated therein (except for any Microsoft owned code or third-party code), and any and all intellectual property rights embodied therein (except for any third-party code). Microsoft will receive a non-

exclusive, perpetual, royalty-free, fully paid up, worldwide right and license to make, use, import, copy, edit, format, modify, translate, and create derivative works of any Machine Learning Model.

Process

Project proposals can be submitted from 23 March 2021 until 31 May 2021 using the [link](#) provided. In June and July 2021, we will reach out to the top prospects with clarifying questions and provide those organizations the opportunity to submit additional information. All projects will be decided and announced once the evaluation process is completed which is currently planned for the end August 2021. We will provide notification to all submitters of their evaluation outcome.

For selected project proposals, the following steps will occur:

1. Notification of project selection.
2. Establishment of a partnership agreement between the two organizations, identify project responsibilities, outcomes, and legal obligations.
3. Awarding of the agreed upon grant resources.
4. Provision of Azure onboarding services (if required).
5. Kick off with data science team (where applicable).
6. Project engagement.
7. Public communications of project outcomes.

Tips for Success from Microsoft's Selection Committee

[Explain specifically how AI/ML techniques will help solve the humanitarian problem addressed.](#)

In our first open call for proposals, the number one reason proposals were declined for funding was that the proposed idea did not have a clear and specific artificial intelligence or machine learning component. Many of these declined proposals casually included the words “artificial intelligence” or “machine learning” without explaining at any depth how these techniques would address their humanitarian challenge or how they would be superior to conventional approaches. Proposals that demonstrate an understanding of the data science techniques needed in detail will score higher in our review.

[If your proposal requires more basic needs for Microsoft technology than artificial intelligence and machine learning, consider contacting our Tech for Social Impact team](#)

Microsoft offers grants and discounts for eligible nonprofits across our cloud products including Azure, Dynamics 365, and Microsoft 365, as well as for industry-specific solutions like Fundraising and Engagement. More information is available here: [Nonprofit Solutions & Technology | Microsoft Nonprofits](#)

[Ensure your data is labeled or you have a plan to make it labeled.](#)

Labeled data is extremely important in machine learning and artificial intelligence applications. In a labeled data set, each observation is tagged with one or more labels identifying certain properties, characteristics, or classifications of objects. This is usually done by a human. Having a labeled data set is often required for appropriately training a machine learning model. For example, if you are trying to build a model to identify crop types based on aerial images of agricultural land, you would need not just access to the images themselves, but to have each one labeled for your machine learning model to be trained to recognize future images (potato, corn, cassava, etc.). If you do not currently have a labeled data set, we strongly advise that you provide a plan to label it. Proposals with existing labeled data or a plan to label their data will score higher in our review.

[Think through your resource needs.](#)

Generally, Microsoft provides grant resources for AI for Humanitarian Action projects in three ways: 1) Azure credit for cloud data storage and model processing, 2) volunteer consulting hours from Microsoft Data Scientists, and 3) Azure enablement support to help grantees get started in Azure. Most of our grants are for two years. Please use this Azure calculator to estimate the cost of your Azure needs for **two years**: [Pricing Calculator | Microsoft Azure](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

I don't have a project that's completely data ready, should I still submit?

Yes, please do. In some cases we've been able to provide additional assistance to organizations which have identified impactful projects and have access to the appropriate data, but require some technical assistance to be ready for modeling.

Is cash available for the grants?

Grant recipients will be provided with Azure credit and significant data science resources. Grant recipients are expected to be able to provide the internal human resources needed to support the project.

What does the IP language mean?

All models created belong to the grant recipient. We highly encourage recipients to open source their completed models to better assist the rest of the humanitarian community, but we understand this will not be appropriate in all cases. Regarding the language back to Microsoft, this just ensures that any learnings about how a solution is developed can be applied to future humanitarian projects by Microsoft employees.

What is Azure enablement and engineering?

Some grantees need additional assistance to help deploy Azure based on their grants. We can bring Microsoft partners to assist and help an organization administratively establish their Azure tenant or deploy models into their operational environments.

Can I just send my data to Microsoft for modeling?

All data must be in an organization's Azure environment, and not directly shared with or owned by Microsoft. Our data scientist will be provided User access to your tenant for data analysis and modeling.

What do you mean about providing data to the humanitarian community?

We are also interested in providing grants to organizations which may have collections of data sets impactful to the humanitarian community but need cloud credits and engineering support to make them available. For such grants, there would not be direct data science support, but the data could be impactful for other projects.

How are you ensuring the protection of data? Who will own the data?

Our approach to privacy is grounded in the Microsoft Privacy Standard and the Microsoft Security Development Lifecycle. Third-party audits and certifications validate our rigorous technical development standards and help ensure that privacy and data protections are systematically implemented. For example, Microsoft was the first major cloud provider to incorporate the first international code of practice for cloud privacy, ISO/IEC 27018.

What steps has Microsoft taken to ensure ethical uses of its AI technology?

Our work is grounded in six ethical principles that guide the development and use of AI across our organization:

- Fairness: AI systems should treat all people fairly.
- Reliability and Safety: AI systems should perform reliably and safely.
- Privacy and Security: AI systems should be secure and respect privacy.
- Inclusiveness: AI systems should empower everyone and engage people.
- Transparency: AI systems should be understandable.
- Accountability: People who design and deploy AI systems should be accountable for how their systems operate.

For more information, please visit [Microsoft AI principles](#).

How do I estimate my Azure needs?

Please use the [Azure Pricing Calculator](#).

What do you mean by labeled data?

To train data models, data scientists need data that has already been tied to outcomes. For example, in a classification model to find pictures of cats, there needs to be some photos with a cat already identified. For prediction-based modeling, there needs to be data sets available that are linked to an already existing outcome.