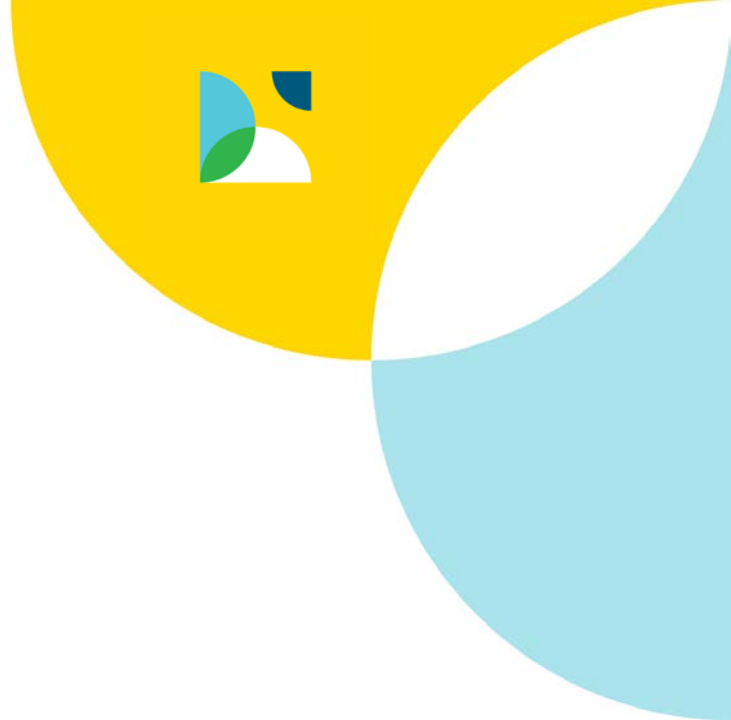# Lacuna
Fund

Our voice on data

Dr. Hannah Kerner
Assistant Research Professor, University of Maryland
ML & Domestic Strategy Lead at NASA Harvest

HARVEST

Why Fund in Agriculture?

- Advances in machine learning, remote sensing, & other technologies have enabled progress in a variety of tasks globally
  - Prediction of crop types
  - Condition and yield estimation
  - Livestock management
  - Field boundary delineation
- Data, not methods, remains the obstacle to building beneficial ML applications worldwide
  - Lack of ground truth labels in Global South
  - Lack of datasets to address unique challenges in mapping smallholder farms (e.g., intercropping, agroforestry, etc.)
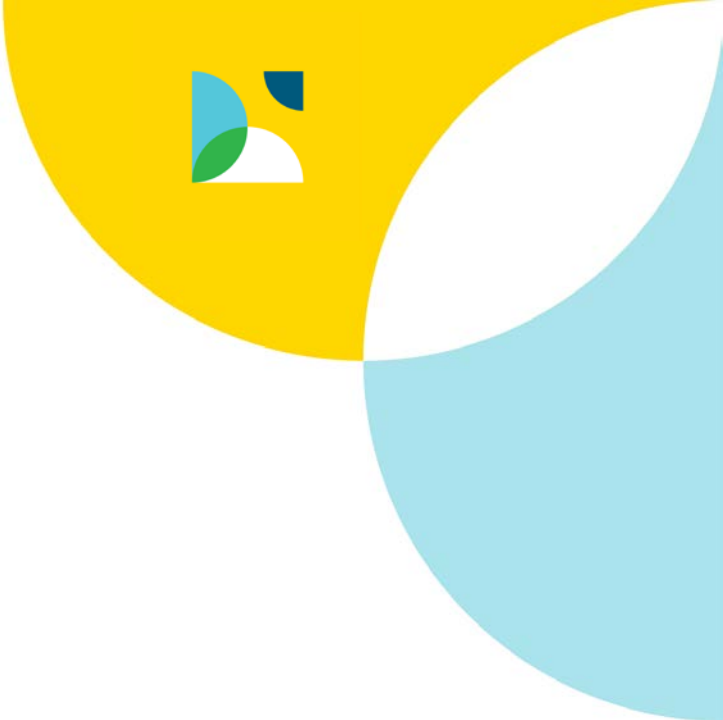
Vision

"What do we hope to achieve through this RFP?"

Transformative datasets that address common needs and move ML for agriculture in Africa forward.

Tell us the dataset you see a need for, why you're the team for the job, how you'll deliver a quality product, and who is likely to benefit from the dataset.
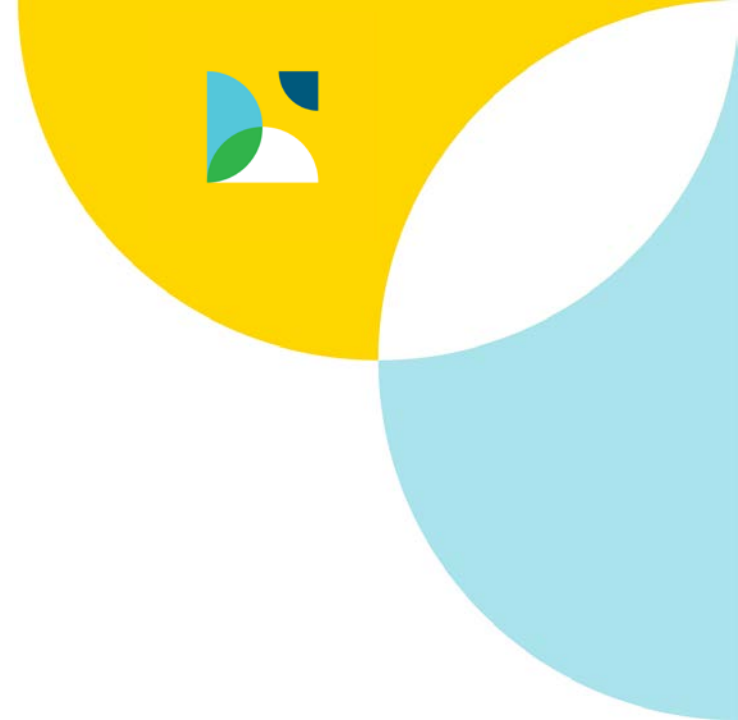
We fund datasets – not end to end solutions.

Think of your proposal as a proposal on behalf of a broader community that will use the dataset you create.

Eligibility

"Can I apply?"

Applicants should:

- Be non-profits, research institutions, for-profit organizations, or teams of such organizations.
  - There can be only **one "lead" applicant** – partners should be structured as sub-contractors.
  - Mission related to social good

- Be **headquartered in Africa** or have a **substantial partnership** with an organization(s) headquartered in Africa.

- Have necessary expertise and be able to obtain national approvals.

Needs

"What are you funding?"
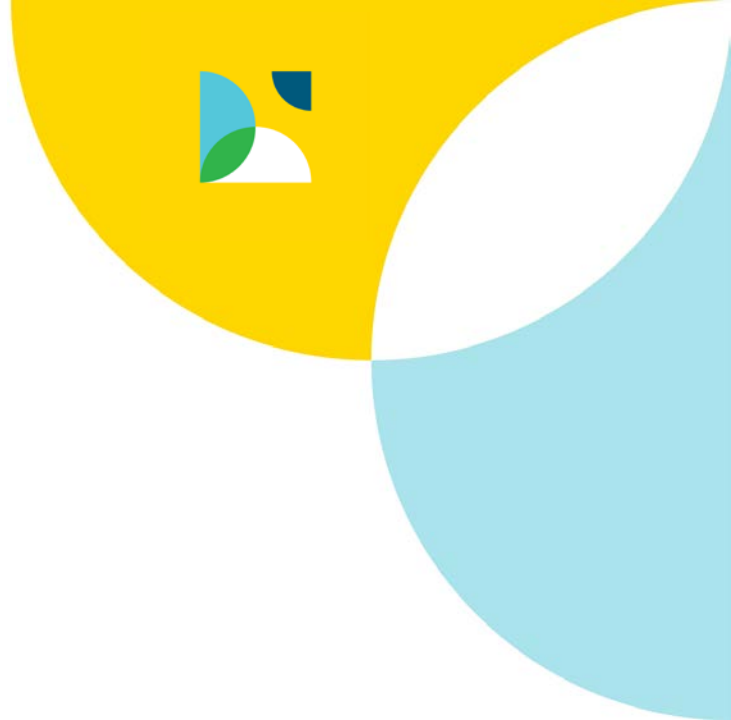
We see needs in:

- Crop and animal agriculture, including datasets that contribute to:
  - Field boundary identification
  - Crop type classification
  - Yield estimation
  - Pasture carrying capacity and/or early warning systems for forage availability and depletion in pastoral lands
  - Issues related to pastoral migratory patterns and anticipated conflicts with crop farmers
  - Prediction of the best locations to establish forage banks
  - Forage and livestock resource management in managed ecosystems

We see needs in:

- Labeled datasets that contribute to a range of use cases:
  - Agricultural practices (e.g. ploughing, harvesting, grazing, burning, irrigation, etc.)
  - Soil health data and related labels
  - Pest and disease labeled datasets for all crop types
- Your idea here!

Selection

"Should I apply?"

"What are you looking for?"

Proposals should:

- Demonstrate the **team's qualifications and knowledge** of data quality and standards needed for the use case.

- Clearly articulate **what gap the new dataset will fill** and **what advances it will enable**.

- Be feasible to complete within **6-15 months**, considering the impacts of COVID.

- Range from **$20-100k for small to medium projects** or up to **$500k for large, transformational projects**.
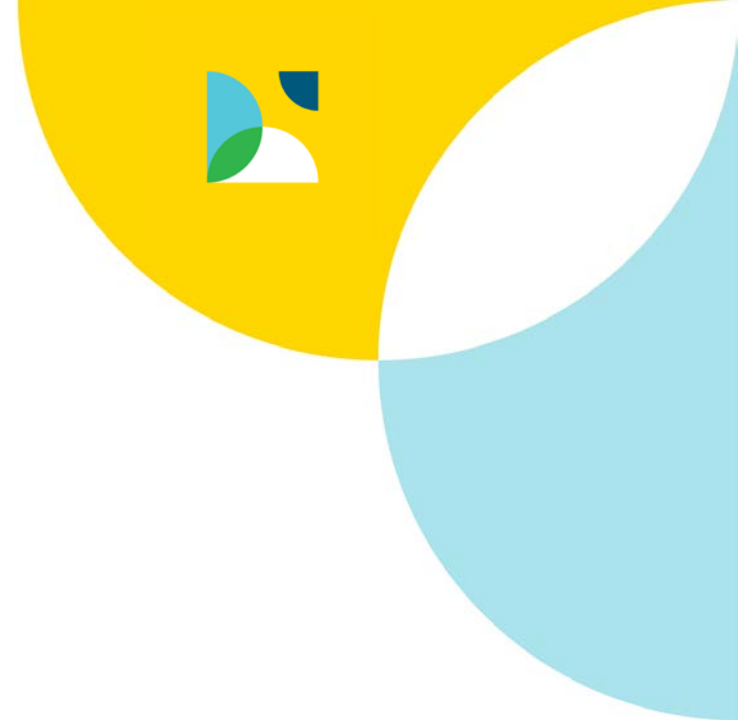
Criteria

- **Quality** of proposed methods and team qualifications

- Potential **transformational impact** of the dataset

- **Novelty**, accounting for and/or using existing datasets and methods

- **Equity** dimension of proposed use cases

- **Feasible** in relation to budget, timeline, and scope proposed

Criteria (cont.)

- Be **open source** (with very limited exceptions) and be widely accessible
- Follow **ethics and privacy** best practices
- Be **locally** developed and owned
- Plan for future **sustainability**

Application Process

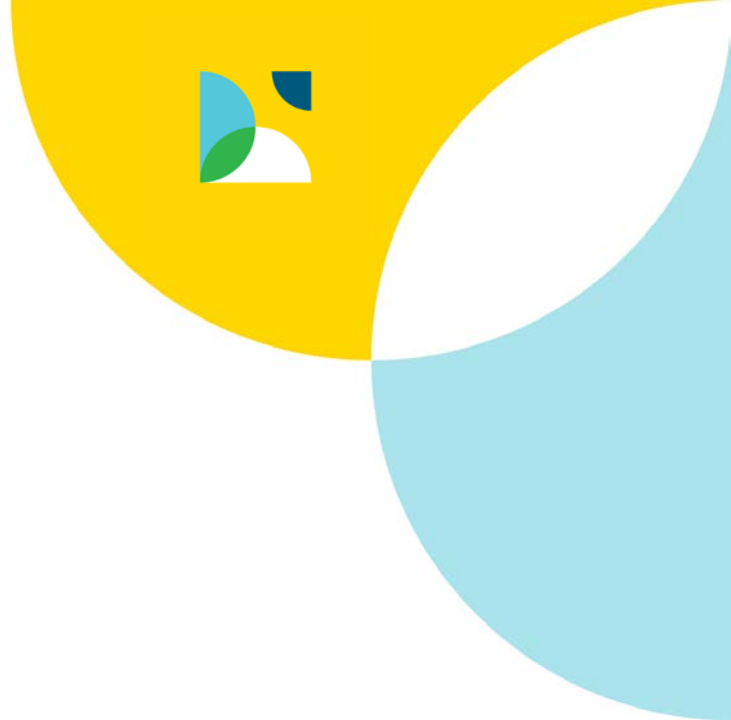"Now what?"

Application Components

- Applications are accepted only through the **portal** (access through website "Apply" page)
- Apply in either **English** or **French**
- Completed application includes
  - Information form
  - Proposal narrative
  - Budget (including budget assumptions) and deliverable timeline
  - Due diligence self-reporting

Timeline

- **August 3:** Q&A released.
- **September 3:** Proposals due.
  - *The Secretariat conducts an initial screen and the Technical Advisory Panel meets to select proposals.*
- **Mid-October:** All applicants notified of status.
- **Late October:** Finalization of arrangements with selected applicants.
- **Late Fall:** Work begins.
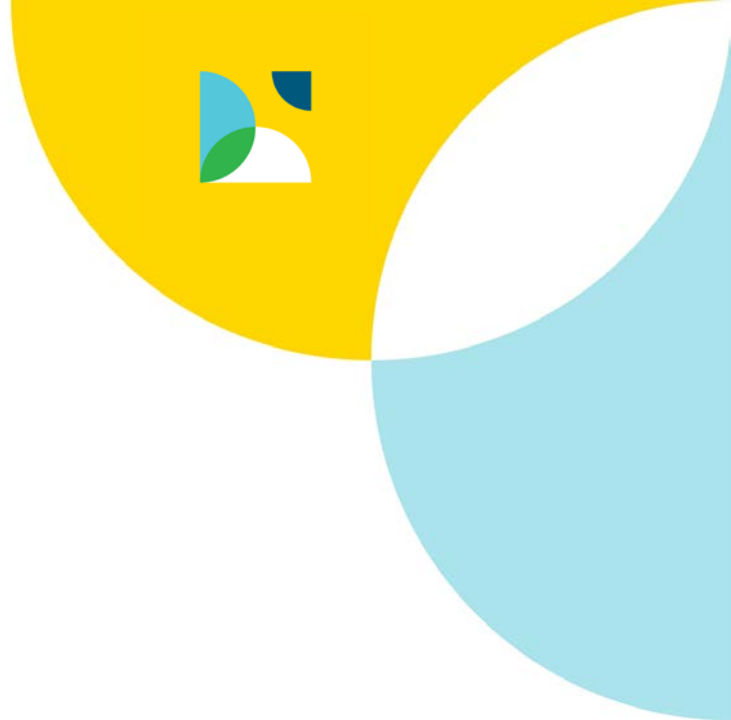- **6-15 months later:** Datasets are released!

See the RFP for specifics!

It is the **authoritative source of information** on the call. The document has further details on exact eligibility and selection criteria as well as specific information to include in your proposal narrative.

Upcoming Opportunities

- The Fund will release a request for proposals related to **natural language processing (NLP) in Africa** in September (exact date TBA)

- The Fund will also release a request for information on **health and COVID-related datasets in low and middle income contexts globally.**

Join the newsletter on the Fund's website to be notified when both are released.

Questions?