



USAID Espoir 2030 Haut-Katanga NOFO. No. 72066024RFA00003

Pre- Application Conference

April 02, 2024, in Kinshasa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pre- solicitation conference, hosted by USAID/DRC's Office of Acquisitions and Assistance (OAA) and USAID's Health Office, was designed to promote collaboration and accessibility for potential applicants interested in working with USAID funding. The conference featured the notice of funding opportunity "Espoir 2030 Haut-Katanga" restricted to local organizations.

The Espoir 2030 Haut-Katanga aims to contribute to the HIV epidemic control by providing HIV service delivery to priority populations in alignment with USAID and PEPFAR guiding principles and priorities. Applicants were advised to carefully read the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) documents, which included sections on funding details, eligibility restriction, the activity description to be performed, application submission process and the applications review criteria. The selection process will consist of three phases: submission of a technical proposal, a potential oral presentation, and co-creation with the apparently successful applicant.

Tips for first-time USAID applicants were provided, including the importance of SAM registration, distinguishing between SAM and UEI registration, strong partnership with local/international organizations is not prohibited, better understanding of local partner definition responsibilities is determinant for a successful implementation. The discussion put an emphasis on the activity goal, objectives, expected results but also on related to associated costs which include the indirect costs. The Office of Financial Management discussed the Fixed Amount Award Entity Checklist/Pre-Award Survey, which evaluates partners based on their organizational aspects, compliance verification through site visits, legal affiliation, capabilities, ethics, integrity, financial systems management, cash control, adherence to standards, and legal and fiscal compliance.

WELCOME ADDRESS

Office of Acquisitions and Assistance & Health Office

Mr. Greg Wang, Director of the Office of Acquisition and Assistance, welcomed participants to the Pre application conference. The purpose of the conference is to foster collaboration between potential partners interested in working with USAID funding and to understand the NOFO funding requirements. The conference highlighted a funding opportunity that focuses on supporting HIV/AIDS programming in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through partnerships with local organizations. USAID's Localization Initiative seeks to fund more local organizations and elevate local voices and leadership in their programming. This approach will lead to more sustainable development and systems change in the Democratic Republic Of the Congo. Mr. Wang encouraged attendees to ask questions and assured that USAID wants to be accessible and interested in working with local organizations.

Ms. Mieke McKay, Health Office Deputy Director encouraged attendees to familiarize themselves with the NOFO and to ask as many questions as possible and to get clarification on unfamiliar

acronyms or terms. The funding opportunity is part of the PEPFAR program, which supports HIV prevention, care, and treatment activities in specific areas of the country. Ms. McKay emphasized the importance of reading and understanding the lengthy NOFO documents and following the instructions provided for a successful application. She also encouraged partners to be creative and strategic in their partnership approach.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION AND HIGHLIGHTS

Health Office

Dr. Xavier N'Siesi, Health Bureau, USAID, provided an overview of the technical approach of the funding opportunity by detailing USAID Espoir 2030 program description. Here are key highlights from the presentation:

This builds on the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) five-year strategy that focuses on five pillars: equitable service delivery, sustainable response, public system, and security support, partnership, and data-driven interventions.

USAID Espoir 2030 Haut Katanga aims to allow comprehensive PEPFAR support for prevention, care and treatment, orphan and vulnerable infant programming to priority populations while strengthening the DRC health system in particular the data management and evaluation. USAID Espoir 2030 Haut Katanga responds to the PEPFAR and Agency priorities of increasing support provided through local partners.

The overall goal of this activity is to improve the response to HIV/AIDS to ensure sustained epidemic control in targeted geographic areas. This Activity will contribute to the reduction of DRC's HIV burden through decreasing new infections and HIV-associated morbidity and mortality in Haut Katanga selected health zones. The recipient will address the conditions that enable the uptake of HIV services to contribute to the worldwide goal of ending the HIV epidemic as a public threat by 2030. Key principles guiding the project include developing partnerships with local organizations; promoting diversity, equity, and gender inclusion, fostering innovation, ensuring environmental compliance, and partnering with the DRC government.

Recommendations include designing activity to achieve the identified intermediate results, considering opportunities for collaboration with local partners, addressing gender disparities and reducing inequity services among populations, innovating in activity approaches, respecting environmental considerations, and maintaining strong partnerships with the DRC government.

Questions & Answers

Question: In one of the slides Kinshasa was mentioned. Was it a typo?

Answer: *Yes, that was a typo. And it will be corrected before sharing the slides.*

Question: Question on rapid start up? It was not mentioned in the presentation.

Answer: *We are looking for the most creative and convincing approaches to achieve the desired results. Start-up is the key to achieving results according to the PEPFAR concept. So it's important to do it as quickly as possible to avoid delays and any gaps. As stated in the NOFO, we would like to see how you will be able to innovate in implementing the award.*

Question: The Zones mentioned during the presentation, are you referring to Health Zones or Zone as a province?

Answer: *According to the PEPFAR approach, we cover 3 provinces: Kinshasa, Haut Katanga, and Lualaba. The geographical area where the project will be implemented for this NOFO is the Haut-Katanga province. Additionally, this project will intervene in 3 health zones: Sakania, Kopolowe, and Panda.*

Question: What is the project about?

Answer: *The outline information about the project offer can be found in the NOFO (Section A) with*

details in each page.

Question: Could USAID authorize a local organization to form a consortium with an international one, with the former being the prime and the latter the subrecipient, based on their experience and capacity?

Answer: *Sure. It is advised to the local organization to liaise with International one to help them build their capacity. We anticipate that they would work together to supplement each other's skills and capacities while implementation. Prime should be a local organization performing at least 50% of the work, while the subrecipient can be an International entity.*

Question: What is the expected target?

Answer: *The targets are annual according to the COP. While it's possible to set them in advance, doing so might not accurately reflect those of PEPFAR. Since they are dynamic and evolving, the only consistent targets are the ones specified in the NOFO for the first year.*

Question: What is the eligibility criterion? Is the opportunity granted to everyone regardless of the funding they have already received?

Answer: *Eligibility criteria is mentioned in Section C of the NOFO. The NOFO is limited to local organizations. The merit review criteria no. 3 under section E provides emphasis on experience and understanding in the targeted health zones and province.*

Question: You have planned 15 million funds for the implementation of this project. According to the eligibility criteria, will you give everyone a chance regardless of the amount of funds they have previously managed?

Answer: *The NOFO documents clearly state the eligibility criteria based on the ranges of funds that the organization has already managed in the past.*

Question: How should synergy work with the various USAID projects as mentioned in the presentation?

Answer: *The synergy with different USAID projects, as mentioned in the presentation, should function by coordinating efforts, sharing resources, and leveraging expertise across various initiatives. The goal is to maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts in the fight against diseases.*

Question: In our experience in Haut-Katanga, when a local organization joins forces with a private sector, especially mining companies, it is strictly forbidden to include the government side in budget expenditure under any circumstances. So when it comes to the implementation part, will the government entities be budgeted for?

Answer: *The partnership with the government should not be seen solely as a reimbursement of transport and catering costs... Sometimes, the government provides technical expertise and advice, and everything we do has to go through the government. So it's necessary to have support at the governmental level. Our collaboration is multidimensional. And the service we receive is supported, not paid for. While we can't pay these agents who intervene in our activities, we may support them.*

Question: Can international organizations lead the consortium?

Answer: *No. This NOFO is restricted for local entities (as defined in section C) only*

Question: What should be the percentage of funding

Answer: *There is no set percentage but the applicant must allocate at least fifty (50) percent of the cost of award performance incurred for personnel must be expended for employees of the prime/local entity.*

Question: Is it possible to develop a research activity to find out the seroprevalence of mining sex workers?

Answer: *Within the framework of project implementation, large-scale surveys cannot be carried out except if it is conducted by the PNLS. But operational (small-scale) research is encouraged and must have the prior approval of the person in charge of the project.*

Question: Does it matter if the organization applying is located in Haut-Katanga, where the project will be implemented, or does the geographical location not matter as long as the organization has good experience in the field?

Answer: *Any local organization with the required expertise, regardless of its geographical location, is eligible, Section C.1. However, please see section E for the merit review criteria regarding understanding and experience working in the targeted province and health zones*

Question: The application can be submitted in French or only English?

Answer: *Per Section D.3, the application must be submitted in English. The applicant may submit an application in a French version along with the English version.*

SELECTION PROCESS, MERIT REVIEW, CRITERIA AND INSTRUCTIONS

Office of Acquisition and Assistance:

OAA provided an overview of the selection process. The deadline for submitting questions is April 5, and the deadline for submitting applications to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is **May 17, 2024**. Participants were advised to carefully read the entire NOFO document, which is divided into several sections.

- **SECTION A: Funding Opportunity description** Provides detailed information on objectives, illustrative indicators, and other details on USAID expectations on activities outcome.
- **Section B: Federal Award Information:** Provides general information on funding amounts, period of performance (award renewal requirements, award's anticipated start date, substantial involvement and other provisions
- **Section C: Eligibility Information :** Outlines the criteria for being qualified as a local entity and definition of a local organization, the pre-award Risk Assessment and highlights that construction is not authorized under this award.
- **Section D: Application and Submission Information:** Provides details on points of contact and where to send questions and applications (drcoaa@usaid.gov), instructions on application content and compliance.
- **Section E: Application Review information :** Give details on selection process and criteria used to evaluate applications.
- **Section F: Federal Award Administration Information :** Describes the requirements and expectations for administering the activity award and gives the list award's provisions.
- **Section G: Federal Awarding Agency Contact(s) :** Lists award's points of contact, drcoaa@usaid.gov. **Section H): Other Information:** Provides additional details and other instructions. The selection process consists of three phases.
 - **Phase 1:** requires applicants to submit the technical application and summary budgets, performance history, certifications, and assurances.
 - **Phase 2:** the selected applicants, if many are required to, make an oral presentation. This phase can be skipped if there's only one selected candidate, the process will move directly to the following phase.
 - **Phase 3:** is the co-creation of milestones and detailed budget with the apparently successful applicant

Implementation.

The technical approach is an important aspect that must be addressed in the application, including how the proposed strategies and approaches align with the program description and objectives. The management approach criteria consider the qualifications and experience of key personnel, the expected level of effort, roles, and responsibilities, and the use of personnel with appropriate expertise. Organizational capacity, experience, and ability to achieve goals are also evaluated.

Budget, SF-425, certificates, and assurances will be checked for compliance and completeness. Performance history will also be evaluated.

When submitting the application, certain documents and elements must be included, such as the cover page, executive summary, technical approach, draft AMELP, staff management plans, resumes and references, budget information, SF-425 form, and certifications. If there is any confusion or questions, it is recommended that they be submitted in writing before the deadline.

Question: What is the meaning of AMELP?

Answer: *AMELP stands for Activity Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning Plan*

Question: Would you be able to assist us if we are unable to create the UEI#?

Answer: *Given that there are many applicants, we will not be able to assist individual organizations in registration. There are videos available through www.sam.gov in different languages accessible to all for better guidance.*

Question: What's the NOFO's chronology?

Answer: *16 days after posting the solicitation, USAID organizes a Pre-application conference to exchange information with the applicants. And April 5, 2024 is the deadline for submitting any questions. USAID plans to take 10 calendar days to post a question and answer amendment along with pre-application conference details. The applicants will have a month to review the amended NOFO to submit an applicant.*

Question: And if the deadline for submission arrives without obtaining SAM registration.

Answer: *If you have a solid technical application, USAID can assist in giving you more time in order to obtain the SAM registration. But remember that without SAM registration we cannot award any organization, that is the USG policy.*

Question: Is it okay to partner with International NGO and local governmental organizations as much as possible?

Answer: *There is no prohibition in partnership with any International NGO as long as the prime recipient is a local organization and performs at least 50% of the work. Partnering with local governmental organizations will require prior authorization from USAID. Please note that local governmental organizations are not eligible to apply for the NOFO.*

Question: Is the financial assessment of the local organization eligibility criterion done before or after the award funding?

Answer: *The financial risk assessment is done to the Apparently Successful Applicant before the award. It is part of a local organization's risk assessment.*

Question: Would you apply the same rigor to your assessment of local organizations as you do to international ones?

Answer: *It is important to note that Risk assessment is done to International organizations as well. For instance, if there is an international organization that received an award in less than 5 years, the assessment won't be as deep as for the one receiving USAID funds for the first time. We may review audit and financial reports, as well as their past experience and performance.*

In most cases, international organizations that received prior United States Government assistance will not need the same level of risk assessment as local organizations based on the fact that they already have demonstrated capability to responsibly implement a USAID award. USAID is willing to help new local organizations in building their capacity and to comply with USAID regulations and policy.

Question: Will answers to questions be sent individually or to the whole group?

Answer: *If you have any questions, please send directly to drcoaa@usaid.gov and all questions will be put together and answered and posted to www.grants.gov in order for all applicants to have access to the information.*

Question: Why can't the local organizations use the NICRA for indirect costs?

Answer: *It is not prohibited for local organizations to use NICRA. However, obtaining a NICRA requires an extensive amount of time and effort through the submission information such as detailed audit reports, cost details, etc.*

The 10% de minimis rate can be elected to be used by an organization instead for Indirect Charges without any burden of proof.

Here is the link about the process of obtaining indirect cost rate agreement for US-based organizations:

<https://www.usaid.gov/partner-with-us/resources-for-partners/indirect-cost-rate-guide-non-profit-organizations>

USAID/DRC is not interested in negotiating NICRA rates with non-US organizations at this time.

Question: We heard that the de minimis indirect cost rate will increase to 15%. What is the update?

Answer: *It is in the rulemaking process. If it is approved, it will be updated through Code of Federal regulation changes. As of now, USAID can only consider the 10% de minimis rate.*

TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME USAID APPLICANTS

This session presented some tips and solutions for first-time applicants to USAID and the requirements and processes that need to be followed when submitting an application. One key requirement is **SAM registration**, which stands for System for Award Management. This registration is required for all applicants, and it is recommended that you begin the process as early as possible, as the federal government has a backlog of registrations that can cause delays. In addition, it is important to distinguish between SAM registration and Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) registration. The UEI number is required for sub-awards or contracts and should be obtained prior to SAM registration through www.sam.gov, more information on how to work with USAID can be found at www.workwithUSAID.gov. It is recommended that you read the solicitation carefully and follow the instructions provided.

Partnerships with international organizations are also encouraged. These partnerships may involve collaboration on specific project activities or obtaining technical assistance and advice. However, there is a limit on the amount that can be allocated to the international organizations as per [ADS 303mab \(RAA27\)](#).

Eligibility criteria for local organizations are outlined in Section C of the NOFO. It is important to carefully read these criteria to ensure that your organization is qualified. In some cases, an international organization that establishes an office or regional office in the country of performance may not be considered a local entity.

When preparing the application, it is important to clearly identify key personnel and their roles and

responsibilities. While specific qualification requirements were not included in the solicitation, the applicant is expected to propose highly qualified individuals. Leaving key personnel positions as "to be determined" should be avoided, and it is recommended that the personnel be identified and proposed in the application.

The evaluation criteria for the application include technical approach, management and key personnel, and organizational capacity. It is critical to carefully read and understand each criterion. Each and every word in the merit review criteria should be reviewed and understood properly. A few examples were provided of how a technical approach shall be balanced with logical, feasible, grounded in the DRC context and challenges, and reflect high-impact and innovative interventions as well as apply the guiding principles. The technical approach is considered the most important criterion, followed by management and key personnel, and then organizational capacity.

Forms, certifications, and assurances are required as part of the application process. SF 424 forms can be found on www.grants.gov, and it is important to follow the instructions provided and ensure that all required information is provided. Grants.gov also includes instructions on how to fill out SF 424 forms. Signatures should be included where required, and it is recommended that you review the instructions before completing the forms to avoid any problems.

For Applicants facing difficulty downloading different forms, please work with your IT to download them as Adobe files. And if they are still not working properly, reach out to us before the due date for question, Apr 5, 2024 at 18: 00.

Past experience and past performance are two separate considerations. Past experience refers to an organization's experience in performing similar activities, while past performance evaluates how well an organization performed in those activities. It is important to distinguish between the two and provide relevant information in the application.

It is recommended to review Section D of the solicitation for more details on what is expected for each element, such as the technical approach, work plan, monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan. NOFOs provide guidance on what information must be submitted in the application. USAID incorporated a table showing the required number of pages under Section D.4, to help applicants in the submission process. If there are uncertainties, errors, or concerns, it is important to raise them through the designated question-and-answer channels. USAID is committed to being flexible and addressing any questions or clarifications that applicants may have.

Selection Process: 3 Phases

- Phase I: Budget summary - USAID certification or Governmental certification required, see Section D.
- Phase II: Oral presentation of highly-rated applications for those who meet the selection criteria.
- Phase III: Co-creation/ Co-development of detailed budget done with the apparently successful organization.

Question: How will payments be made for the project?

Answer: *Payments will be made based on milestone achievements. The details of the payment scheme will be determined through the co-creation process.*

FIXED AMOUNT AWARD ENTITY CHECKLIST/PRE-AWARD SURVEY

Office of Financial Management

USAID/DRC's Office of Financial Management presented the Fixed Amount Award Entity Checklist/Pre-Award Survey. The presenter mentioned that reaching this level indicates that the team has passed a certain stage where they are satisfied with their work and approach. Organizational aspects were highlighted and the team emphasized the importance of site visits to

verify compliance. Legal affiliations, skills, personal ethics, and integrity were key factors considered in the evaluation process.

Distinguishing past performance from past experience was critical in assessing organizational capacity. The partner's financial system is examined, including bank account management, signatories, check handling, cash control, and compliance with financial standards.

The integrity of the partner's financial system will be assessed through factors such as regular audits and engagement with local authorities. The management of cash and advances was discussed, particularly in relation to exchange mechanisms and the promotion of consensus. Certification and compliance with various standards, including gender and ethnicity considerations, were considered important. Sharing information with the contracting team and submitting a technical proposal was emphasized, as the report would be reviewed by the contracting team leader.

Question: Since it is a Fixed Amount Award, does it involve spending and reimbursement afterwards?

Answer: *No, milestones are set at the initial stage and it is developed with the selected applicants at phase 3 during Co-creation.*

Question: In case we do not make it till the end of the process, Will we be contacted about why our application is not validated?

Answer: *Notification and debriefing will be provided as per ADS 303.3.7*

Question: Concerning the UEI number in the consortium, do other organizations need to have it?

Answer: *Yes. Sub-recipient's organizations must have a UEI number.*

Question: Is there an existing list of organizations that are blacklisted so we can sort out which ones to partner with?

Answer: *Yes. Please check the organization name through www.SAM.gov, UN list, Department of State terrorism list, and OFAC, before partnering with them.*

CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, Ms. MaKay thanked everyone for their participation. The goal is to ensure the submission of high-quality applications in response to their solicitations. The representative concluded by expressing appreciation and anticipation for the receipt of applications.

Ms. MaKay continued her closing remarks by emphasizing that the applicants are the experts who possess the knowledge and experience in HIV epidemic response and prevention programming and encouraged them to be creative in addressing the challenges of the HIV response. Further, in the selection process. If there are several strong applicants, oral presentations may be required to have the opportunity to discuss and understand the most highly rated applicants' proposed programs before making our selection determination.

Deadlines for submission of written questions and the complete application package have been emphasized as critical. All application materials must be in English. The meeting concluded by urging participants to consider these factors when responding to the opportunity with innovative programming and creative partnerships for HIV control.

ANNEX

Presentation slides