



USAID | AFGHANISTAN

Request for Information Number: RFI-306-19-OED-01

Date of Issue: March 11, 2019

Closing Date for Submissions: March 25, 2019

Closing time: 17:00 Eastern Standard Time (EST)

Notice Type: Request for Information

Subject: USAID/Afghanistan Request for Information on Co-Creation of Higher Education Partnerships

To: All Interested Respondents/Parties:

The United States Government, represented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Mission in Afghanistan, is publishing this Request for Information in order to obtain information and input from all interested entities on higher education partnerships developed through a co-creation¹ process. The information will be used to help make planning decisions and influence activity design to improve future development outcomes, and is published in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 10 and FAR 15.201(e).

This announcement is a Request for Information (RFI), issued solely for information and planning purposes, and does not constitute a Request for Applications (RFA) or a Request for Proposals (RFP). Responses to this RFI are not applications or official proposals and will in no way be deemed to form any binding agreement with the RFI issuing authority. Please do not submit applications, proposals, or resumes as they will be discarded. Proprietary information should not be sent. USAID may use any information provided without incurring any obligation. USAID reserves the right to, or not to, incorporate any, some, or none of the comments received from this RFI into any subsequent solicitations or design documents.

This RFI will not be construed as a commitment by the U.S. Government to issue any solicitation, award any grant, or pay for any information submitted as a result of this request. Responders are solely responsible for bearing all expenses associated with preparation and submission of the response to this RFI.

It is the potential applicant's responsibility to monitor the site for the release of any further information. It should be noted that responding to this RFI will not give any advantage to any organization in any subsequent procurement. All types of organizations and firms are strongly encouraged to provide information/comments. Any information submitted in response to this notice is voluntary.

¹ Co-creation is defined by USAID as a collaborative process that brings together people in a workshop session to create solutions to specific development challenges. When using co-creation, USAID teams work alongside partners, stakeholders, potential implementers, and end users to collaboratively define the problem, identify new and existing solutions, build consensus around areas for action, and/or refine plans to move forward with programs and projects. As its name implies, co-creation relies on collaboration with a diverse set of actors, allowing for a more equitable distribution of both the responsibility and ownership of outputs across all partners.

All responses must be submitted electronically in Annex 1 in English to Contracting Officer Amy McQuade at kblaidooaoed@usaid.gov. No questions will be accepted. Responses to this RFI will be accepted through March 25, 2019 at 17:00 EST. No basis for claims against the U.S. Government shall arise as a result of a response to this request for information or from the U.S. Government's use of such information. FAR Clause 52.215-3 REQUEST FOR INFORMATION OR SOLICITATION FOR PLANNING PURPOSES (OCT 1997) is attached and made part of this RFI. USAID is not responsible for any costs incurred in responding to this RFI.

Thank you for your interest in USAID/Afghanistan programs and we look forward to your comments.

Best,



Amy McQuade
Contracting/Agreement Officer

52.215-3 Request for Information or Solicitation for Planning Purposes (Oct 1997)

(a) The Government does not intend to award a contract on the basis of this solicitation or to otherwise pay for the information solicited except as an allowable cost under other contracts as provided in subsection 31.205-18, Bid and proposal costs, of the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

(b) Although “proposal” and “offeror” are used in this Request for Information, your response will be treated as information only. It shall not be used as a proposal.

(c) This solicitation is issued for the purpose of: “Requesting Comments” to the concept for a new program.

Request for Information
USAID/Afghanistan Office of Education
Co-Creation for Higher Education Partnerships

Background

The primary purpose of programming in education by USAID is to achieve sustained, measurable improvements in learning outcomes and skills development. The principles laid out in the USAID Education Policy support the vision that partner country education systems must enable all children and youth to acquire the education and skills needed to be productive members of society.

The priority areas illustrate key areas that are critical to supporting countries on their journey to self-reliance:

- Children and youth, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, have increased access to quality education that is safe, relevant, and promotes social well-being.
- Children and youth gain literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success
- Youth gain the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society.
- HE institutions have the capacity to be central actors in development by conducting and applying research, delivering quality education, and engaging with communities.

HE plays a crucial role in preparing young Afghans to be future leaders in Afghanistan's economy, civil society, and government. While the HE system has made gains since 2002, it still does not sufficiently educate or adequately prepare students to be employable members of the private sector or government due to challenges related to access, quality, and education system management. Additionally, the system lacks the resources and capacity to continue improving without significant donor support.

The tertiary enrollment rate in Afghanistan is one of the lowest in the world, with a gross enrollment rate of only ten percent.² Outdated curricula that do not meet employer needs and under-qualified faculty members constrain delivery of high quality-education. International higher education trends are increasingly moving toward active student-centered learning (SCL) and outcome-based education (OBE), but the current teaching at Afghan higher education institutions (HEIs) is largely teacher-centered pedagogy and passive student learning. Recognizing the need to improve the higher education system in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is prioritizing national curriculum reform; quality assurance; development of management information systems; improvement of student affairs systems, and standardization of research. However, the MoHE's inefficient, centralized system management structure limits its capacity to support these reforms.

For the purpose of this RFI, higher education institutions are defined as organizations that provide educational opportunities that build on secondary education, providing learning activities

² UNESCO, 2018, available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/country/AF>

in specialized fields. Tertiary education includes what is commonly understood as academic education but also includes advanced vocational or professional education. This may include public or private universities, colleges, research institutes, training institutes, including teacher training institutes.

For the purpose of this RFI, a higher education partnership is defined as an agreement between at least one U.S. higher education institution and at least one developing country higher education institution working together towards mutually agreed upon goals. Partnerships could be in multiple forms, including networks, consortiums, system to system, or individual institutions. For this RFI, a higher education partnership is further defined as an institutional partnership, not a partnership between individual faculty members.

Potential Purpose/Objectives

To address these challenges stated above, and to support MoHE priorities, the purpose of USAID's higher education programming in Afghanistan is to increase the employability of Afghans by (1) increasing access to HE institutions; (2) improving the quality and relevance of HE programs; and (3) enhancing the management capacity of the higher education system and institutions to deliver improved education services. USAID seeks to incorporate feedback from a wide range of sources in order to improve the program design of new HE activities for the greatest impact in the following areas (not listed in order of importance):

Potential Objectives for Programming

Objective 1: Access to HE increased

Illustrative sub-results and activities:

- Strengthen the capacity of public and private higher education institutions to enroll more students.
- Increase scholarship opportunities to those who do not have the financial capacity to access higher education.
- Increase opportunities for, and remove barriers to, women's enrollment in higher education institutions.
- Work with higher education institutions to design flexible hours of instruction and online education options to create a less burdensome course schedule for students.

Objective 2: Quality and relevance of education improved

Illustrative sub-results and activities:

- Curricula updated and standardized, based on international standards and relevant industry best practices.
- Strengthened HEI-industry linkages to ensure that curricula better reflect the needs of Afghan workplace demands.
- Quality assurance mechanisms established and implemented for curricula and teaching quality.
- Workforce development and internship programs developed and implemented, with a clear path to employment after graduation.

- Academic staff capacity developed in curricula design and student-centered pedagogy, with an emphasis on innovation and best practices.

Objective 3: Management capacity and sustainability of the MoHE and Afghan HEIs enhanced

Illustrative sub-results and activities:

- Management information systems developed and implemented to enhance MoHE and HEI internal and external accountability and transparency.
- MoHE human resource management, procurement, financial management, and student statistics systems strengthened.
- MoHE and HEI staff capacity developed to improve management of the educational institutions and enhance the quality of teaching, learning, and research.
- Professional Development Centers/Centers of Innovation/Research Institutes institutionalized to strengthen and facilitate high-quality research, and provide enhanced teaching and learning methods.

Throughout these objectives, USAID is seeking new ways of thinking that could complement and/or replace development modalities in HE - ones which are developed through co-creation to offer the promise of new innovations in technology, processes, techniques, and partnerships to maximize impact. In order to most effectively consider whether and how HEIs, the broader development community, and USAID interests align, USAID seeks extensive communication with prospective partners to jointly explore and define key challenges and problems, and then jointly develop promising solutions to those issues through a co-creation process.

Co-creation brings together participants to create solutions to specific development challenges. When using co-creation, USAID teams work alongside partners and potential implementers collaboratively to define the problem, analyze programmatic objectives, identify new and existing solutions, build consensus around areas for action, and/or refine plans to move forward with programs and projects. As its name implies, co-creation relies on collaboration with a diverse set of actors, allowing for a more equitable distribution of both the responsibility and ownership of outputs across all partners.

Request for Information

Through this RFI, USAID/Afghanistan seeks ideas, comments, and information from the public on HEI partnerships to be formed through USAID-facilitated co-creation that will assist in developing a portfolio of programs that will most effectively achieve the objectives described above. USAID/Afghanistan asks that the public submit short (less than 10 pages) submissions that outline recommendations or other information pertinent to higher education partnerships to be developed through a co-creation process. Please also provide your name, title, organization, and contact information in the response. USAID/Afghanistan requires the use of the response template (Annex 1). USAID reserves the right to potentially issue subsequent RFIs on this topic that target more specific questions or approaches.

RFI Submission Instructions

Respondents must use the response template at the end of this RFI (Annex 1). Respondents are encouraged to copy and paste Annex 1 into a new document, provide their responses in that document, and email that document with the file name saved as “HE Afghanistan Co-Creation - RFI-[Respondents last name]-[Respondent’s institution].” Please see Page 1 of this RFI for submission date and contact information.

Annex 1

USAID/Afghanistan/Office of Education Request for Information (RFI) Response Template

The total length of the RFI submission cannot exceed ten pages and must be submitted using 12 point Arial font, 8.5 x 11-inch paper (letter-sized), single-spaced, with one-inch margins, no graphics, with each page numbered consecutively. If the submitter has produced relevant reports, those reports may be included, but only as embedded links.

Name:

Title:

Organization:

Email:

USAID/Afghanistan is interested in responses to the following specific questions. Respondents are encouraged to review the questions and include responses to the most relevant questions in their submissions. Respondents do not need to respond to all the questions listed below:

1. Based on your experience in developing higher education institutional partnerships for human and institutional capacity building:
 - a. What have been the most important factors or best practices that facilitated the initiation of these partnerships?
 - b. What challenges or barriers did you face in your higher education partnerships or other programming involving HEIs? Please describe how these challenges or barriers affected your partnership/programming and how you addressed these challenges/barriers.
2. How have you engaged non-HEI organizational partners (i.e., industry, NGO, private sector, or government ministry) to enhance partnerships between U.S. and developing country HEIs, and accelerate HEI and HE system capacity building?
 - a. What did these partnership structures look like? How were these discussion initiated?
 - b. At what stage of partnerships formation were these non-HEI entities engaged?
3. What characteristics/best practices have enabled your past HEI partnerships to strengthen higher education systems or have broader impacts at scale, including at the local, sub-national, and/or national levels?
4. What characteristics of an HEI partnership are necessary to develop the sustainability of local institutions and systems that are less reliant on external/non-Afghan-funded support?
5. USAID/Afghanistan is considering pursuing a co-creation design process with selected applicants. Co-creation is defined as a collaborative process that brings together people in

a workshop session to create solutions to specific development challenges. When using co-creation, USAID teams work alongside partners, stakeholders, potential implementers, and end users to collaboratively define the problem, identify new and existing solutions, build consensus around areas for action, and/ or refine plans to move forward with programs and projects. As its name implies, co-creation relies on collaboration with a diverse set of actors, allowing for a more equitable distribution of both the responsibility and ownership of outputs across all partners. Please explain your experience (if any) and interest in co-creation.

6. How can USAID use innovation in cross-cutting principles, such as gender and youth, to create more effective HE programming?
7. In addition to the specific questions, requested above, please outline below any general program recommendations, relevant context, existing capacities, or other information pertinent to the design of future USAID/Afghanistan HE programming relevant to its objectives and programming areas as noted in the RFI that you would like to share here.