

Question & Answer for NOFO

Facilitating a multi-organizational approach to formalizing artisanal and small-scale gold mining

Funding Opportunity # (SFOP0008190)

1. Question: In Section A.2, under Objective 2, the NOFO states that for the selected organization will "lead the partners in the design and development of one or more projects...." Could the DoS clarify that the expectation is that these partner organizations are the ones who design the projects and implement them? If not, would the developed project(s) be released as RFAs/RPS for proposed offerors to bid on?

Answer: It is anticipated that this cooperative agreement will pay for the design. Presumably, a rough outline of the design will be agreed upon by the partners and then this award will pay consultants to flesh out the design.

2. Question: Will selection as the implementor of this NOFO, preclude the selected organization from future opportunities (i.e., any or all future project/projects) developed through this award?

Answer: This is a question for the partners but is likely to be an issue as long as the grantee continues in the lead capacity. In its application, an organization could certainly include its in-house personnel for design of the elements for which it has expertise, even beyond the rough outline to a more detailed project ready for implementation. The successful applicant would be eligible for additional funding under the award. The successful applicant would not be eligible for future funding opportunities for projects in which it had a direct role in designing.

3. Question: Can offerors propose in their submission a plan/process narrative that outlines how they would address a conflict-of-interest firewall process between the implementing team on this award and the organization's business development and implementation teams who might pursue the future project(s) developed?

Answer: Yes, and this would help with the previous question.

4. Question: The NOFO references both projects and activities, for example in this statement on page 4, Section A.2: "Once the partnership is in place, OES plans to incrementally fund specific *activities* under *projects* developed under this partnership that will focus on reducing mercury use and release." Could you please define the difference in these two terms? Is this statement suggesting that projects will be milestone-based awards such as Fixed Amount Awards (FAA) or have "Options" for additional work?

Answer: Although the OES Mercury Program is funding the set-up of this umbrella partnership, we won't be funding implementation of the activities related to supply chain, law enforcement, and security. There are other agencies whose mission and expertise is more in line with those activities

Question: In Section A2, can DOS please expand on the “enabling activities” requested under Objective 3?

Answer: The applicant is encouraged to think through what needs to be in place for the various partners and implementers to work independently but with an appropriate level of communication and coordination. Enabling activities could also be first steps towards the mercury reduction piece of the project, e.g. mercury inventories, etc.

5. Question: In Section A2, Objective 3, the NOFO states: “Applicants are encouraged to create a budget that estimates general costs for enabling activities, desk reports, etc., for operation in a developing country...” Is this budget being requested as part of this application or will the budget be a deliverable during implementation?

Answer: It is difficult to develop a budget for mercury reduction activities without knowing the location of the project or the specific activities. This suggestion in the NOFO is one way the applicant could demonstrate experience in design and implementation of projects to reduce mercury use in ASGM, especially important if they anticipate doing this work in-house. Another way would be to select a sub-awardee that has this experience.

6. Question: In Section A3, there are no expected results for Objective 3. Can DOS confirm that this is intentional or elaborate on expected results for Objective 3?

Answer: Since Objective 3 is project-specific, it's difficult to specify expected results, but under A.5. Output 3, we require the number of tons of mercury indicator be included in the project design. Along these lines, we will be adding “final approval over the project design” to A.6. substantial involvement section to make sure that the project design and its indicators are appropriate.

7. Under Section D, pages 11-12 the NOFO states “The project should have a designated Project Director who will be expected to have lead responsibility for communicating with OES. Note the location where key staff will be based.” Can DOS please confirm that the term “key staff” mentioned in Section D, page 11-12, is deemed “key personnel” and thus subject to substantial involvement (per ADS 303.3.11).

Answer: Yes. The project should have designated project director. Proposal should provide the key personnel involved in the different components of the program. The substantial involvement in a was provided in the funding opportunity section A.6.

8. Question: In Section D, under Management Plan, DOS requests CVs of key staff. Can DOS please confirm that there is only one key staff required on this program or is this the applicant's decision?

Answer: This will be at the applicant's discretion as it will likely depend on how their application is envisioned and structured.

9. Question: In Section D, regarding point 9 of the requested documents, NICRA, is DOS requesting that the NICRA be submitted as a separate PDF document from the cost narrative?

Answer: Yes

10. Question: In Section D, Narrative Components, DOS requests many components within a 10-page response. Could you please consider allowing the "one- to two-page work plan matrix" to be submitted as an annex that does not count against the 10-page limit?

Answer: We can't change this language but imagine you could submit a more detailed workplan as an annex.

11. Question: With respect to the work plan matrix provided on page 12, can DOS please confirm that applicants can use a different format?

Answer: Yes

12. Question: Per the Objectives in Section A.2, the project requires significant involvement of partners. Does DOS have specific partners that they would like for the applicant to work with? Is DOS requesting a mix of local and international partners? Will partners' time and effort expected to be voluntary or to be reimbursed under this program?

Answer: Yes, there are specific partners that have already indicated interest in this approach. They are all international agencies or governments. It is expected that their time and effort will be voluntary. However, we anticipate that this award will support hiring consultants or NGOs that will do the design work under those partners' oversight.

13. Question: In Section E.1 Criteria, Budget, the NOFO says, "The committee will also review the budget components in order to assign up to 20 points for the overall program budget and cost-effectiveness." However, the bullet points below that section assign 25 points: budget appropriateness (15 points) and cost-effectiveness (10 points). Can DOS please clarify?

Answer: Please change to 10 and 10. Thanks for pointing this out.

14. Question: The NOFO notes that required indicators include “2 additional indicators developed during the project design process.” Should the proposal include proposed indicators that respond to this? Should the indicator table include illustrative indicators for future designed projects (in support of Objective 3, implementation)?

Answer: It's difficult to propose indicators for an unidentified ASGM location. But illustrative indicators would go towards the applicant's expertise in this area.

15. Question: As an overarching question, the program seems to focus on designing follow-on projects specifically for mercury abatement. But, the background section the NOFO suggests that this should be linked to greater focus on improving ASGM conditions worldwide, not just regarding mercury abatement. As such, should the potential projects required under objectives 2 and 3 focus on mercury abatement specifically, or should/can they focus on broader activities to strengthen the enabling environment for improved ASGM?

Answer: The projects designed under objective 2 need to include all the elements discussed in the NOFO, not just mercury abatement. Under objective 3, the more detailed design and potential implementation needs to be on mercury abatement.

16. Question: How much will the awardee be expected to focus on generating thought leadership on program results versus implementing the required projects? Does DOS prefer that we focus on one more than the other (i.e., thought leadership more or project implementation more)?

Answer: Thought leadership and facilitation are key for this to work. There are a lot of unknowns as your questions point out.

17. Question: Page 10 specifies what must be included in the proposal narrative as part of the maximum of 10 pages, namely the executive summary, org capacity and past performance, program strategy, M&E plan, and management plan. Other sections describe additional required pieces that do not count against the 10-page maximum, such as the past performance reference on page 11 and the work plan matrix on page 12. May we add the pieces that do not count toward the page maximum as appendices and reference them in proposal narrative?

Answer: Yes

18. Question: According to the required format on page 10, the proposal must use Times New Roman 12-point font. Does this also apply to any tables, figures/graphics, and text boxes we may include, or may we use a smaller size font for these elements?

Answer: Only applies to the proposal. Tables, etc. can be a different size and font.

19. On page 11 under part b, the third bullet reads “demonstrate experience in project development.” Could you please be more specific about the meaning of “project development” in this context? Do you mean overall projects implemented/project management across the organization or projects implemented as components of larger programs, such as sub-grants or associate awards?

Answer: The successful applicant will be responsible for pulling together design efforts addressing each of the objectives. Therefore, it will be important to demonstrate experience with project development so that the overall project design is cohesive and includes the critical design elements for a well-designed project.

20. Section D.5 on page 15 notes that awards may not fund para-police, with the examples of militias, neighborhood watches, and security guards, and partner government and civilian government salaries. Do these restrictions include other community oversight mechanisms, such as official local committees to oversee mining site safety and potential stipends or other incentives for committee members? Even with this restriction, is it possible to suggest that such mechanisms be necessary for formalizing the ASGM sector, even if this program itself will not fund such mechanisms?

Answer: Yes, those restrictions are for our OES Mercury Program funding. But these kinds of mechanisms can be included in the project design.

21. Question: Does OES have a preference for whether the proposal is designed to operate in a single country or in multiple countries/a sub-region?

Answer: The successful applicant will be working with the partners to choose an operating site for which a project will be designed under this cooperative agreement. It will be important to choose an area that is small enough to work successfully in, so likely to be a single country and possibly a specific region in that country.

22. Is there any additional information on the distinction between Objectives 2 and 3 and the specific goals envisioned for each?

Answer: Since we are hearing similar questions from others, I will be preparing an answer to be shared more broadly. We will notify those who have signed up for such notifications under grants.gov.

23. Question: Distribution of the funding amount

Is the proposed funding amount of USD 490,000 meant to be assigned exclusively to the development of the model for international organizations to work together in a voluntary partnership, **or** are the funds meant to be used to i) develop the model **plus** ii) the actual execution of the proposed projects and their related activities? If the latter were to be true, in what proportion are the funds allocated?

As we see it, one thing is funding the development of the model and planning of all its projects (MOU, theory of change, budget, Gantt activity diagrams, evaluation framework, and indicators for each project), and another is funding the development of the model and in addition funding the execution of the specific projects and activities proposed within the model. We raise this question because one of the suggested indicators indicated within the brief is "Number of tons of mercury prevented from use in the ASGM sector" and this evidently the only way to determine this result is to actually execute a specific project.

Answer: The funding is meant to cover the costs for the facilitator (the awardee) to work with several international agencies to design a project that includes all the elements described in the NOFO. Part of this process will include developing a list of priority locations for the project but the facilitator would not be the decision maker. So we don't know at this point where the project (or projects, since we hope to use this model to develop multiple projects) will be. We anticipate that this effort would require less than half of the total funding and that the remaining funds would be used for mercury specific activities within the project design. Which is why we include the number of tons of mercury as a specific indicator to be included in the project design.

24. Question: Regions of high ASGM activities

Do we as participants specify a particular country or region?

Answer: No, but if this model for ASGM project design proves useful, we hope to issue NOFOs in the future that will be specific as to the location and more clearly defined as to the kind of activities - which will certainly involve mercury reduction as an objective.

25. Question: We understand that a proposed budget (with the \$490k ceiling) should include funding for enabling activities. To what extent does DOS expect the budget to also include funding to initiate implementation of the selected projects, or would you expect funds raised in the course of the project to support project launch and implementation?

Answer: We expect that this cooperative agreement will cover costs associated with:

- *providing a framework for the international agencies that have expressed interest in this concept to work together.*
- *designing a project for a specific country that includes the elements outlined in the NOFO (so beyond just environmental, to include law enforcement, security, etc.) We expect the grantee will pay for those design costs, most likely by paying consultants chosen by the agencies. Another question to be worked out is how detailed the design should be. Once a general design is developed, it is up to each international agency to find funding to further develop and then implement the project.*

- *on-going efforts to coordinate between the international agencies as implementation starts. We envision various entities working somewhat autonomously (getting their own funding, hiring implementing agencies, etc.) but there needs to be good communication and coordination among everyone.*
- *with remaining funds, further designing and implementing the mercury-related parts of the project. If an applicant doesn't have this capability in-house, they could contract it out.*