RE: **USAID Notice of Funding Opportunity 7200AA18RFA00004 for Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER)**

Amendment: **05 – Clarification on Submission Guidelines**

Issue Date: **January 18, 2018**

Submission Instructions

Eligible organizations interested in applying for an award in response to this RFA are invited to submit a Concept Note via the LASER Application intake portal at https://usaid-hesn.forms.fm/LASER or http://www.hesn2.org/laser.

Concept Notes not submitted through these sites will not be considered.

It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure that all necessary documentation is complete and received on time. Concept Notes in response to this RFA must be submitted electronically in MS Word or PDF format and Excel for the budget and shall be due no later than **Jan 24th, 2018 at 5:00:00 p.m. EST.** Late Concept Notes will not be considered for award.

In developing the Concept Note, the applicant should carefully consider all information contained in this RFA, including the technical narrative instructions for the full application. The Concept Note must be based on the overall description of the funding opportunity described in Section A of this RFA. USAID may opt to exclude from further consideration any submission which is not within these parameters. Only applicants who have submitted a Concept Note will be eligible to submit a Full Application, if requested.

Electronic submissions ONLY. No direct email submissions. Only Concept Notes not submitted via the LASER Application intake portal(s) at https://usaid-hesn.forms.fm/LASER or http://www.hesn2.org/laser. will be considered.

1. The following revision addresses concerns/inquiries regarding possible scenarios of multiple submissions from an HEI.

On page 22 of the LASER RFA 7200AA18RFA00004 it notes that:

"**3. Other**

HEI applicants (organizational and/or proposed project director) are restricted to submitting one concept note as the lead applicant. If more than one application is received with the same lead HEI or has the same proposed project director, none of the applications submitted will be evaluated for consideration of award as they will be deemed non-compliant with the conditions of this RFA. HEI's can serve as sub-awardees or consortium members on multiple applications, however.

[END OF SECTION C]"

Via this amendment the preceding language and all related FAQs published in previous amendments related to that language are hereby deleted in their entirety and replaced with the following language:

"**3. Other**

HEI applicants (organizational and/or proposed project director) are restricted to submitting one concept note as the lead applicant.

- If more than one application is received with the same lead HEI identified as the Prime or that has the same proposed project director, USAID will seek written clarification from the relevant office(s) of sponsored programs regarding which concept note should be considered the official concept note submitted for review purposes. If clarification of the final lead application is not resolved within 2 business days, both applications will be deemed ineligible.
- Alternatively, a signed letter from an authorizing official within the university's office of sponsored programing can be submitted with concept notes by the submission date to clarify and verify that the applicant has the sole official support from the university.

The verified concept note will be accepted for evaluation and all other concept notes submitted by that HEI will be deemed ineligible for non-compliance with the conditions of this RFA. They will be notified accordingly via email.
Please note that HEIs can serve as sub-awardees or consortium members on multiple applications.

[END OF SECTION C]"

2. The following statement applies to submission of Concept Notes due January 24, 2018 by 5:00 PM EST.

On page 23 of the LASER RFA 7200AA18RFA00004, *Concept Note Format*, add the following:

"**Concept notes must be submitted in English. Non-English submissions will be deemed ineligible and will not be read.**"

[END AMENDMENT 05 OF 7200AA18RFA00004]

RE: **USAID Notice of Funding Opportunity 7200AA18RFA00004 for Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER)**

Amendment: **04 - Additional Questions and Answers December 06, 2017 - December 20, 2017**

Issue Date: **January 05, 2018**

Question 1: This RFA is being promoted as HESN 2.0. The current HESN has established a "Lab" at each university that has then developed a "Network" around a specific topic. Is this RFA looking for a Prime to oversee all Labs within HESN 2.0, or is this RFA seeking individual labs?

USAID Response:
The LASER Network that this RFA supports is composed of all the individual researchers and higher education institutions that the LASER Prime or Consortium recruits which have a verifiable interest/commitment to working with the LASER Prime to:

1) independently identify key development challenges;
2) convene key stakeholders to co-design and conduct high quality research activities to address those challenges, as well as others identified by USAID M/B/IO's;
3) translate the results of that research into development-relevant policy recommendations, program modifications, or implementation plans;
4) increase the human and institutional capacity of LMIC HEI's to serve as equitable partners in these activities.

This Network must be composed solely of researchers formally affiliated with an HEI and should include universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas) that have technical and sectoral expertise in the areas in which USAID works. Please see pages 10-11, 33 of the RFA for a more detailed description of the characteristics that this Network should have.

The LASER Prime is not currently envisioned to host individual "labs" around specific topics; rather, the LASER Prime will be responsible for partnering with a wide variety of institutions capable of working on the wide breadth of technical and geographic regions in which USAID works.

Question 2: How many "Labs" will be funded?

USAID Response:
USAID anticipates making one (1) Prime award under the LASER RFA. However, USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

Question 3: Are Canadian universities eligible to be part of the consortium? RFA specifically mentions LMIC HEI institutions as members of the consortium, but doesn't mention high-income countries?

USAID Response:
As indicated in the Eligibility Information Section (Section C), only higher education institutions (HEIs) are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement. Such institutions can come from anywhere across the globe.
Eligibility for LASER is not limited to developing country institutions. As noted in the RFA, "Only higher education institutions are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement. Consortia applications that include non-HEI organizations are allowed and encouraged; however, these applications should identify an HEI as the Prime recipient of the award. For purposes of LASER, higher education

institutions is defined as follows, consistent with guidance provided by USAID/E3/Education: "A tertiary education institution is an organization that provides educational opportunities that build on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialized fields. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialization. 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], etc." (page 22 of the LASER RFA).

Question 4: To what extent is the RFA focused on food security, in line with the recently released Feed the Future Research Strategy?

USAID Response:
The RFA is not focused on one particular sector area. Rather, the LASER RFA seeks an applicant who has the capacity to develop and support a Network that "contains the expertise needed to co-create research projects with USAID across all the major technical sectors and in all of the major regions in which USAID programs activities." (Page 11, LASER RFA).

Question 5: Page 5 of the RFA states "seeks to support an implementing partner...and 2) partner with USAID Missions, Bureaus, Independent Offices to address unique research needs identified by USAID." Are these research needs already identified by other bureaus within the agency?

USAID Response:
While USAID Missions, Bureaus and Independent Offices may have identified particular research needs within their portfolio, as indicated on page 11 of the RFA, USAID envisions that the selected Recipient will develop a network that "contains the expertise needed to co-create research projects with USAID across all the major technical sectors and in all of the major regions in which USAID programs activities". Any unique USAID research needs, in addition to those identified by the Recipient, will be discussed and established post-award.

Question 6: Will any preference be given to a set of countries, such as Feed the Future countries, in the evolution of the project?

USAID Response:
The current RFA is not focused on one particular geographic region over another. Rather, the LASER RFA seeks an applicant who has the capacity to develop and support a Network that "Contains the expertise needed to co-create research projects with USAID across all the major technical sectors and in all of the major regions in which USAID programs activities." (Page 11, LASER RFA). As the project evolves, it is possible that USAID areas of focus, or focus countries, might also evolve and impact the primary countries in which LASER work is performed moving forward. However, there is no preference in the evaluation criteria of the current RFA given for geographic expertise in one region over another. Rather, USAID seeks capacity to work in "all the major regions in which USAID programs activities."

Question 7: Who are the "local stakeholders" (USAID mission, local universities, others) who will identify and refine critical development questions and challenges. On page 10 it states that

development challenges will be done "independently" by network universities and affiliated researchers.

USAID Response:
The "local stakeholders" will be specific to each research question but may include entities like government, universities, community groups, or individuals. The word "independent" refers to the expectation that, as a recipient of a Cooperative Agreement (assistance) award, USAID will support a Prime partner as they create and execute a workplan based on their own ideas to the extent that those ideas align with the goals and objectives of the overall LASER award. For example, pg. 12 of the RFA states:

"USAID seeks to support a Prime partner who also has independent [not previously directed by USAID] interest in discovering and outlining key research questions and challenges in development that could be addressed through research activities or methodological improvements in the practice of development research. USAID has learned that research has greater uptake and impact when interested stakeholders are consulted early and often in question identification and refinement. The extent of that consultation is often research-topic-dependent and can range from phone calls with targeted individuals, to large, multi-party convenings. With this understanding, USAID has particular interest in supporting a Prime partner that:

- *Incorporates stakeholder (particularly local stakeholder) involvement in the identification and/or refinement of research questions;*
- *Convenes development actors, stakeholders, and network institutions to identify key, unresolved development challenges and proposes research solutions where warranted;*
- *Assists USAID M/B/IO's in uncovering and refining questions of interest based on M/B/IO-identified research needs, paying special attention to principles of good development; and*
- *Develops scopes of work that may be used for research calls to the LASER Network to address these identified and refined research questions."*

Question 8: The network is supposed to contain expertise to co-create projects in all major sectors and in all major regions of the world. And yet funding is only 2-4 million a year with 70-60% of this for project management/administration. That limits research awards to 1-2 million a year for all sectors and in all regions of the world, correct?

USAID Response:
Contingent on availability of funds, that is a reasonable estimate of funds available for research awards based on anticipated CDR core funds, yes. However, USAID hopes that (contingent on availability of funds) additional funds will become available from other USAID M/B/IOs who would be interested in funding their own priorities in partnership with the LASER Network. That is why the overall ceiling of the LASER award is slated to be up to $70M and why Core management funds are directed to establish a Network that "contains expertise to co-create projects in all major sectors and in all major regions of the world."

a) To what extent is the success of LASER as a research initiative dependent on buy-ins from USAID regional and country missions?

USAID Response:

USAID anticipates that LASER could function solely and successfully on CDR-core funds in pursuit of the research and development outcomes outlined in the LASER RFA. However, USAID hopes that the capacities and expertise leveraged by the LASER consortia will be of broader interest to the entire USAID community and therefore will result in significant buy-ins from both USAID/Washington and USAID Missions/Regional bureaus. This is why the overall ceiling of the LASER Award is set to be up to $70M (to accommodate potential future buy-ins). The extent to which those buys-in materialize will be contingent on the availability of funds, needs/interests/priorities of the Agency at the time, and the quality and expertise offered by the LASER Network once awarded.

b) To what extent will the lead HEI for LASER be expected to use core funding to support research of identified critical issues?

USAID Response:

The balance of resources expended for identification of critical issues vs research activities is left to the applicants to propose. However, please keep in mind that "of the expected $2-4M in annual core funds, USAID estimates that approximately 30-40% of the yearly core funding will be dedicated to support recipient-directed identification of crucial development research questions and subsequent design, solicitation, and execution of research activities. (Page 5 of LASER RFA)"

With respect to other funds that may be leveraged by the lead HEI to accomplish the objectives see page 22 of the LASER RFA which states, "USAID will not require a specific percentage of applicant's budget to be cost share. Applicants will NOT be deemed ineligible for review if they do not propose cost-share. However, USAID looks to support strong partners who leverage their capabilities towards development challenges and cost-share is highly encouraged as a means to extend the development impact of the application, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.306. Therefore, applications that contain cost-share will be looked upon favorably when competing applications approach technical equivalence. Cost-share levels will also be considered in the cost evaluation. Such funds may be mobilized from the recipient; other multilateral, bilateral, and foundation donors; host governments; and local organizations, communities, and private businesses that contribute financial and in-kind support to implementation of activities."

c) To what extent will funding for this research be expected to emerge from other USAID sources of funding, such as country missions, foundations, etc.?

USAID Response:

Per page 5 of the RFA, "The anticipated budget includes a ceiling of $70,000,000 (estimated up to $14,000,000 per year). Under that ceiling, and subject to the availability of funds, core funds from LAB/CDR are anticipated to be $10,000,000- $20,000,000 over five (5) years ($2,000,000 - $4,000,000 per year) with any additional funds beyond that coming from other Centers within the Lab as well as other USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Independent Offices (M/B/IOs) based on their programmatic needs." This means that the remaining potential $50,000,000 to $60,000,000 of Award ceiling could potentially emerge from other USAID bureaus, missions, or independent offices interested in "buying into" the LASER mechanism (contingent on availability of funds and agreement on project scopes and alignment with the Cooperative Agreement objectives).

d) Will this USAID program require local governments' commitment in the form of scholarships, matching funds, or other?

USAID Response:

The LASER RFA does not require a specific commitment on behalf of any specific local government at this time because it is not yet known in which locales the proposed work would be performed, or if this type of commitment might be appropriate. However, as noted on page 22 of the RFA, " USAID looks to support strong partners who leverage their capabilities towards development challenges and cost-share is highly encouraged as a means to extend the development impact of the application, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.306. Therefore, applications that contain cost-share will be looked upon favorably when competing applications approach technical equivalence. Cost-share levels will also be considered in the cost evaluation. Such funds may be mobilized from the recipient; other multilateral, bilateral, and foundation donors; host governments; and local organizations, communities, and private businesses that contribute financial and in-kind support to implementation of activities." In this regard, an applicant could propose that their approach relies on partnership with certain governments that have indicated intentions to provide specific commitments (such as scholarships) in support of their proposed project approach; this could be demonstrated via signed memoranda of understanding submitted under the Attachments section as outlined on page 29 of the RFA.

Question 9: The consortia partners can come from HEIs, but other partners are not required to be higher education institutions (p10). But on p 11, it states that the LASER network can support only researchers affiliated with an HEIs.
a) Are Consortia Partners different from institutions/researchers in the LASER Network?
b) Does a partner have to be a university or can it be an individual researcher?

USAID Response:

a) Yes, Consortia Partners are different from institutions/researchers in the LASER Network. These could be NGO's, private organizations, or other HEI's that join together with the Prime applicant to provide specific elements or capabilities to ensure successful achievement of the goals of this award, including the subsequent formation and management of the LASER Network. "… 'Consortia' should be limited to organizations that will receive formal subaward budgets and/or scopes of work based on the applicant's proposed technical approach and cost application and should not include those organizations that are going to be included in the LASER Network and available for potential future work (pg 10 footnote 7)."

b) The Prime must be a Higher Education Institution (HEI), additional ***consortia partners or subawardees*** *are not required to be higher education institutions. However, the LASER Network that is formed by this consortia must be composed solely of researchers formally affiliated with an HEI and should include universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas) that have technical and sectoral expertise in the areas in which USAID works. Please see pages 10-11, 33 of the RFA for a more detailed description of the characteristics that this Network should have.*

Question 10: Who are "local stakeholders" (USAID mission, local universities, others) who will identify and refine critical development questions and challenges. On page 10 it states that development challenges will be done "independently" by network universities and affiliated researchers.

USAID Response:

Please see the answer to question #7 in this Amendment.

Question 11: Can research RFAs only be issued to researchers in universities in the consortia?

USAID Response:
As stated in question 9, the LASER Network is not the same thing a consortia of organization that join with the Prime to administer the award. USAID seeks to support a Prime partner (or consortia) to solicit and fund research proposals from the LASER Network in response to research calls that address questions that the Prime and / or USAID have identified and refined (LASER RFA pg 12). The LASER Network should be characterized by inclusive recruitment via rolling or periodic open admission process to promote the inclusion of new members and expertise, with eligibility and ultimate approval subject to review by the Recipient and USAID. USAID may also elect to recommend researchers, universities, and / or institutions to be considered for inclusion in the Network (RFA pg 11).. The Prime's application will be evaluated to "The extent to which the proposed Network implementation plan has the capability for rapid initial stand-up, recruits universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas including LMICs) that have expertise in each of USAID's major technical sectors and geographic areas."

Question 12: Does the concept note need to identify key personnel?

USAID Response:
While the RFA does not explicitly require applicants to name key personnel in the concept note phase, the qualities and strengths of the proposed key personnel to support the LASER prime are considered in the evaluation of Concept Notes so it is likely that applicants who propose a strong group of key personnel will be evaluated more favorably in this criteria than those applicants who do not fully address key personnel or their management plans.

Specifically, on page 27 of the LASER RFA under the "Concept Note Format" section, USAID indicates that applicants should use their Concept Notes to describe, "How the relevant strengths of the Prime and any partner institutions, including institutional resources, relationships, and past experience, will contribute to accomplishing the goals of this RFA." Further, on page 33 of the LASER RFA under "SECTION E: REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS" section, USAID indicates that "The following criteria will be used to evaluate both the concept notes and the full applications. Applicants are highly encouraged to develop their concept notes with these criteria in mind." As noted under Factor 2 (Management Approach), USAID indicates that it will be evaluating applicants on "The extent to which proposed personnel have the appropriate background, knowledge and skills in research and international development to successfully reach program goals and objectives."

Question 13: Can institutions/individual researchers join multiple consortiums?

USAID Response:
Yes, individual researchers and institutions are both eligible to join multiple consortiums. There is nothing in the RFA that precludes researchers or institutions from being included in multiple applications as potential consortia members. The only exclusion relates to the lead submissions as follows:

"HEI applicants (organizational and/or proposed project director) are restricted to submitting one concept note as the lead applicant. If more than one application is received with the same lead HEI or has the same proposed project director, none of the applications submitted will be evaluated for consideration of award as they will be deemed non-compliant with the conditions of this RFA. HEI's can serve as sub-awardees or consortium members on multiple applications, however." (Page 22, LASER RFA).

Question 14: Faculty in many low-middle income country higher education and research institutions are overwhelmed with teaching duties. The time that they can spend developing ideas, research strategies, and supervising high quality research is limited. Will this USAID program support faculty from these countries to spend about 1 year working in U.S. institutions, perhaps in the form of a sabbatical?

USAID Response:
USAID recognizes that there can be a wide array of barriers to access/success for our faculty and research colleagues in developing countries. There is nothing in the LASER RFA that would preclude an applicant from proposing 1-year sabbaticals for developing country researchers as a part of their approach to accomplishing the objectives outlined in this RFA.

Question 15: An important part of the research in these countries is applied with little hypothesis-driven research. In contrast, a lot of the research that we do in the U.S. is fundamental. Will this USAID program support helping countries develop hypothesis-driven research? In other words, will it support participation of U.S. researchers in training partner country researchers on grantsmanship and hypothesis generation?

USAID Response:
As part of USAID's efforts in accelerating local potential with individual researchers and universities in developing countries, "LASER is designed to achieve these outcomes through an emphasis on building strong, equitable partnerships between USAID, U.S. universities, and LMIC institutions of higher education. Specifically, the LASER cooperative agreement is intended to build international research collaboration opportunities through participation of LMIC institutions in the LASER network, direct technical assistance to network LMIC institutions, and engagement of local stakeholders in problem identification, research, and translation processes (as indicated on page 10 of the RFA). Such efforts to build individual and institutional capacity may very well include training partner country researchers on grantsmanship and hypothesis generation, as part of a broader effort to also addressing the objectives under this RFA.

Interested parties are also encouraged to continue to check grants.gov for additional USAID solicitation opportunities that might be relevant to the type of project that is proposed in this question. Specifically, (contingent on the availability of funding), USAID/CDR envisions releasing an "Science, Technology, Innovation and Partnership Annual Program Statement (STIP APS)" in early 2018 with a CDR APS addenda that will invite U.S. universities to partner with developing country universities to identify and develop solutions, focused on capacity-building, to address human and institutional gaps and weaknesses in the current local research ecosystem.

Question 16: Many institutions in these countries do not offer Doctoral degrees. Will this program support leadership and mentoring training of students that will become advisors of PhD students and of faculty that need to earn PhD degrees with the objective of developing PhD programs at their institutions? Will this USAID program fund U.S. faculty to serve as Adjunct Faculty and travel to leverage the creation of PhD programs?

USAID Response:

"Through LASER, USAID seeks to improve the generation, translation and utilization of development-relevant research." (RFA, page 10). USAID anticipates accomplishing that objective through "the creation and/or expansion of a broad network of universities and university-affiliated researchers to: 1) independently identify key development challenges; 2) convene key stakeholders to co-design and conduct high quality research activities to address those challenges, as well as others identified by USAID M/B/IO's; 3) translate the results of that research into development-relevant policy recommendations, program modifications, or implementation plans; 4) increase the human and institutional capacity of LMIC HEI's to serve as equitable partners in these activities."

While it is possible that an applicant may propose supporting either PhD development programs or adjunct faculty travel and support as a portion of their approach to addressing these objectives (particularly objective #4 above), it is not likely that an applicant that proposes to do those activities exclusively will be evaluated favorably in the application review process. Instead, USAID anticipates that applicants that propose well-rounded responses to all of the evaluation criteria outlined on pages 33-34 of the RFA will be evaluated most favorably.

Interested parties are also encouraged to continue to check grants.gov for additional USAID solicitation opportunities that might be relevant to the type of project that is proposed in this question. Specifically, (contingent on the availability of funding), USAID/CDR envisions releasing an "Science, Technology, Innovation and Partnership Annual Program Statement (STIP APS)" in early 2018 with a CDR APS addenda that will invite U.S. universities to partner with developing country universities to identify and develop solutions, focused on capacity-building, to address human and institutional gaps and weaknesses in the current local research ecosystem.

Question 17: Many researchers in these countries do not speak English. Despite existing technical translation services, this still inhibits their ability to publish in high quality refereed journals. Will this USAID program fund international researchers in the specific task of writing high quality research articles in English?

USAID Response:

As noted on page 5 of the LASER RFA, "As part of the Cooperative Agreement, USAID will support a recipient to identify new research questions, fund research activities, translate research results into development impact, and build capacity of local higher education institutions and researchers. USAID seeks to support a recipient with a defined plan to achieve these goals, with the specific details and workplan proposed by the recipient, in consultation with USAID." Applicants should propose the best approaches possible for partnering with USAID to accomplish these objectives; there is nothing in the RFA language that would preclude applicants from including funding to support international researchers with the specific task of writing high quality research articles in English as part of a broader effort to translate research results and build capacity.

Question 18: Equipment and instrumentation in some of these institutions is obsolete or non-existent. Will this USAID program support the purchase of equipment and instruments? Will this program partner with other Global Development Lab supported activities such as Seeding Labs to leverage investment opportunities?

USAID Response:
While there is nothing in the LASER RFA that would preclude applicants from proposing to provide equipment or instruments in support of capacity development as a part of their planned approaches/a portion of their proposed budgets, the purpose of the RFA is broader than JUST equipment or supply purchases. LASER aims to "support an implementing partner whose workplan includes the creation, engagement, and/or growth of a large, international network of university researchers, centers, and institutes across disciplines that can 1) independently identify and address new and impactful research questions with high relevance to the international development community AND 2) partner with USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Independent Offices (M/B/IOs) to address unique research needs identified by USAID." (Page 5 of the LASER RFA).

Interested parties are also encouraged to continue to check grants.gov for additional USAID solicitation opportunities that might be relevant to the type of project that is proposed in this question. Specifically, (contingent on the availability of funding), USAID/CDR envisions releasing an "Science, Technology, Innovation and Partnership Annual Program Statement (STIP APS)" in early 2018 with a CDR APS addenda that will invite U.S. universities to partner with developing country universities to identify and develop solutions, focused on capacity-building, to address human and institutional gaps and weaknesses in the current local research ecosystem.

Question 19: Many low-middle income countries are in tropical and subtropical regions that produce indigenous products as potential jobs with potential markets. Will this USAID program support the creation of commodity focused research laboratories where individuals from different countries can work and benefit entire regions, as opposed to single countries?

USAID Response:
The RFA does not preclude applicants from proposing research projects that will benefit entire regions as opposed to single countries.

Please also see USAID's response to question 16 in this amendment as it relates to specific focus projects.

Question 20: Research is only one part of the picture. For that research to be meaningful, it needs to translate in the mid-term into business and the creation of jobs. Will this USAID program support entrepreneurship as a research outcome/output?

USAID Response:
USAID agrees that research is "only one part of the picture." It is for this reason that USAID/CDR has identified "Facilitate the Translation of Research to Impact" as one of our three major desired outcomes from the LASER project. As noted on pages 9-10 of the RFA, "Through LASER, the Lab will support programming that helps make research actionable so that development actors understand and apply research into their development work. This outcome represents an extension beyond the generation of research to the subsequent translation and use of research. Research findings and knowledge products are often not effectively applied to development problems. The Lab seeks to fill this gap by facilitating synthesis and translation of research, increasing access to research results, and promoting greater communication between researchers and other actors involved in development. This will involve activities that help identify and refine research questions through stakeholder consultations prior to initiation of a research activity, to

ensure that the activity is responding to a demonstrated need and the outputs will be articulated and formulated in usable ways. Involving stakeholders early will facilitate translation of the research to impact through dissemination meetings, policy briefs, new standard operating procedures, etc., while strengthening the capacity of participating individuals and institutions to purposefully serve as drivers for research-to-impact. Additionally, the Lab seeks to promote activities related to knowledge management, communications, and/or convening around research products and the policies or practices that those products inform."

The RFA does not preclude applicants from proposing the translation of research to impact through acceleration of social entrepreneurship/creation of a viable workforce as an outcome. However, it is not likely that an applicant that proposes to do those activities exclusively will be evaluated favorably in the application review process. Instead, USAID anticipates that applicants that propose well-rounded responses to all of the evaluation criteria outlined on pages 33-34 of the RFA will be evaluated most favorably.

[END AMENDMENT 04 OF 7200AA18RFA00004]

RE: **USAID Notice of Funding Opportunity 7200AA18RFA00004 for Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER)**

Amendment: **03 - Clarification Statements on Question and Answer Period, Appendix References, and LMIC Functional Link; Questions and Answers December 06, 2017 - December 20, 2017**

Issue Date: **January 03, 2018**

Clarification Statement re: Question and Answer Period:

USAID received many phone inquiries and requests for meetings during the question and answer period. Per directives on pages 1 and 22 (Section D) of 7200AA18RFA00004, all questions were to be submitted per the following:

> *Agency Point of Contact Trenae Bonner, Acquisition & Agreement Specialist, tbonner@usaid.gov*
> *Questions and Answers: All questions regarding this RFA should be submitted in writing to the e-mail address listed above as the Agency Point of Contact with a cc: to Roderick Watson, Agreement Officer, rwatson@usaid.gov. Questions regarding this RFA should be submitted via email no later than December 20th, 12pm EST to provide sufficient time to address the questions and incorporate the questions and answers as an amendment to this solicitation. Any information given to a prospective Applicant concerning this RFA will be furnished consistently to all other prospective Applicants as an amendment to this RFA, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective Applicant.*

Any inquiries received after this deadline, via phone, or outside of these guidelines did not and will not receive a response. To maintain fairness during this open and competitive process, questions submitted within these parameters were compiled and answered in a public format via amendment to the RFA. USAID will not be answering any additional questions but refers you to these amendments in hopes that they clarify your concerns. Thank you and we welcome all eligible and interested parties to apply here.

Appendix References

The only reference provided by USAID for the RFA is Appendix A – Past Performance Information.

Throughout the LASER RFA and the Questions and Answers, there are several references to an "Appendix B". Please replace all references to USAID's major technical sectors and geographic areas "Appendix B" with the following links:

Overview of USAID's Technical Sectors: https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do
Overview of Where USAID Works: https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work

With this Amendment, consider all references to "Appendix B" to have been removed in their entirety and replaced with the preceding references.

LMIC Functional Link

The link included in the response for the question clarifying the LMIC definition was not functional. The complete link is http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm and has been updated in the response to question 8 in the Technical/Clarifying section of Amendment 01 below as well.

TECHNICAL/CLARIFYING:

Question 1: Does USAID require applicants to name key personnel in the concept note submission?

USAID Response:
While the RFA does not explicitly require applicants to name key personnel in the concept note phase, the qualities and strengths of the proposed key personnel to support the LASER prime are considered in the evaluation of Concept Notes so it is likely that applicants who propose a strong group of key personnel will be evaluated more favorably in this criteria than those applicants who do not fully address key personnel or their management plans.

Specifically, on page 27 of the LASER RFA under the "Concept Note Format" section, USAID indicates that applicants should use their Concept Notes to describe, "How the relevant strengths of the Prime and any partner institutions, including institutional resources, relationships, and past experience, will contribute to accomplishing the goals of this RFA." Further, on page 33 of the LASER RFA under "SECTION E: REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS" section, USAID indicates that "The following criteria will be used to evaluate both the concept notes and the full applications. Applicants are highly encouraged to develop their concept notes with these criteria in mind." As noted under Factor 2 (Management Approach), USAID indicates that it will be evaluating applicants on "The extent to which

proposed personnel have the appropriate background, knowledge and skills in research and international development to successfully reach program goals and objectives."

Question 2: If USAID requires applicants to name key personnel, are CVs required? If CVs are required and/or allowed, will USAID confirm that they may be included in the appendix which will not count against the total page limit and/or the current page limit of the Appendix?

USAID Response:
CVs are not required at the concept note phase. See answer #1 for additional information.

During the full application phase, per page 27 of the LASER RFA, applicants will be required to submit 2-page resumes for each proposed key personnel if they are invited to submit full applications, "Applicants should provide 2-page (max) resumes of the proposed management team through hyperlink or as attachments. Longform academic curriculum vitaes (CV) should be summarized in resume form." These 2-page resumes will NOT count against the 20-page Appendix Limit noted on pages 29-30 of the RFA in the Appendix section.

Question 3: On page 11 of the RFTOP. In Figure 1: LASER Process, USAID lays out a process that illustrates key roles for the Prime, USAID and the Laser Network. In the third circle - entitled Research Implemented, only the Laser Network is noted. In this figure 11 and in the terminology, "Laser Network" does USAID include the Prime?

USAID Response:
Please note that this is not a "Request for Task Order Proposals (RFTOP)"; rather this is a "Request for Application (RFA)."

Regarding the role of the Prime in the third circle of this diagram, yes, the Prime is involved in that they are responsible for the management and oversight of the subawards issued to accomplish the research. Additionally, researchers associated with the Prime are allowed to be a part of the LASER Network, propose research solutions, and receive subawards to implement research projects.

Question 4: Depending on which entity is awarded the contract, it may be that the Prime includes a diverse group of researchers that could serve as lead researchers or as research team members, will a Prime be excluded from implementing the research?

USAID Response:
No, the Prime will not be excluded from having its own researchers apply for consideration as potential implementers of research projects under LASER. Please see the answer to question #3 above.

Question 5: On page 14-15 of the RFTOP, USAID outlines the role of the Recipient and USAID. Since USAID is substantially involved in the Review and Selection Process, will the Recipient be eligible to receive subawards, assuming that the process is transparent, open and meets other Selection Process Standards.

USAID Response:

If the process is transparent, open and meets other standards as indicated in the eventual Cooperative Agreement, the Recipient will be eligible to receive subawards. Please see the answer to question #3 for additional information.

Question 6: On page 16, in the experience and qualifications, will USAID allow for a J.D. in lieu of a Ph.D. and/or Master's Degree for the Program Director and the Technical Director, plus the other related experience?

USAID Response:
Yes, any terminal degree (PhD, JD, MD, etc) will be accepted provided that the proposed person has the appropriate expertise and experience necessary to successfully fulfill that role.

Question 7: On Page 23 and 24 of the RFTOP, the Concept Note is described. Will USAID please confirm that the Concept Note uses the structure outline for the full technical narrative in Section 3 on pages 26-28, specifically from 3.a. -3.b.iv. and does not include #4-6 (Institutional Capacity, Past Performance and the Attachment Section)?

USAID Response:
Yes, the body of the Concept Note should be structured according to the full Technical Narrative (sections 3a-3b.iv). However, please note that within this structure, applicants are asked to "pay particular attention to...how the relevant strengths of the Prime and any partner institutions, including institutional resources, relationships, and past experience, will contribute to accomplishing the goals of this RFA" (pg 23 of the RFA). So, while applicants are not asked to draft stand-alone sections on Institutional Capacity or Past Performance, elements of these sections should be addressed in Concept Note. The Attachment section of the full RFA is not required for the Concept Note.

[END AMENDMENT 03 OF 7200AA18RFA00004]

RE: **USAID Notice of Funding Opportunity 7200AA18RFA00004 for Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER)**

Amendment: **02 - Clarification Statement on Question and Answer Period, Questions and Answers December 06, 2017 - December 20, 2017**

Issue Date: **January 03, 2018**

Clarification Statement re: Question and Answer Period:

USAID received many phone inquiries and requests for meetings during the question and answer period. Per directives on pages 1 and 22 (Section D) of 7200AA18RFA00004, all questions were to be submitted per the following:

Agency Point of Contact Trenae Bonner, Acquisition & Agreement Specialist,

tbonner@usaid.gov

Questions and Answers: All questions regarding this RFA should be submitted in writing to the e-mail address listed above as the Agency Point of Contact with a cc: to Roderick Watson, Agreement Officer, rwatson@usaid.gov. Questions regarding this RFA should be submitted via email no later than December 20th, 12pm EST to provide sufficient time to address the questions and incorporate the questions and answers as an amendment to this solicitation. Any information given to a prospective Applicant concerning this RFA will be furnished consistently to all other prospective Applicants as an amendment to this RFA, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective Applicant.

Any inquiries received after this deadline, via phone, or outside of these guidelines did not and will not receive a response. To maintain fairness during this open and competitive process, questions submitted within these parameters were compiled and answered in a public format via amendment to the RFA. USAID will not be answering any additional questions but refers you to these amendments in hopes that they clarify your concerns. Thank you and we welcome all eligible and interested parties to apply here.

TECHNICAL/CLARIFYING:

Question 1: What is about maximum and minimum duration of each project?

USAID Response:

As noted on page 8 of the LASER RFA, USAID envisions expanding its "support of long-term research efforts (typically > 1 year) that address specific development needs via the LASER Award". Implementation of these long-term research efforts will be typically between three and five years.

Question 2: Is there a minimum and/or maximum number of partners? Can these partners come from countries other than our own country and the USA?

USAID Response:

There is no minimum or maximum number of partners to meet for this RFA. However, as noted in the Technical Evaluation Criteria section (page 33), applicants will be evaluated on, "The extent to which the proposed Network implementation plan has the capability for rapid initial stand-up, recruits universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas including LMICs) that have expertise in each of USAID's major technical sectors and geographic areas (see Appendix B) AND demonstrates an individual and institutional capacity strengthening approach that fosters and leverages a high rate of inclusion and engagement of female, MSI, and LMIC researchers / HEIs in the network to result in sustainable engagement amongst members of the Network following the end of the award."

Partners can come from countries other than the country of the higher education institution applying for the RFA and the United States.

BUDGET/COST:

Question 1: What is about project budget (max and min values)?

USAID Response:
As noted in Section A1 of the RFA, "The anticipated budget includes a ceiling of $70,000,000 (estimated up to $14,000,000 per year). Under that ceiling, and subject to the availability of funds, core funds from LAB/CDR are anticipated to be $10,000,000- $20,000,000 over five (5) years ($2,000,000 - $4,000,000 per year) with any additional funds beyond that coming from other Centers within the Lab as well as other USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Independent Offices based on their programmatic needs.

Question 2: Is it possible to have investment in the budget of this project? The construction of a building or office, for example?

USAID Response:
USAID does not envision allowing construction under this Cooperative Agreement.

[END AMENDMENT 02 OF 7200AA18RFA00004]

RE: **USAID Notice of Funding Opportunity 7200AA18RFA00004 for Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER)**

Amendment: **01 - Questions and Answers December 06, 2017 - December 20, 2017**

Issue Date: **December 22, 2017**

TECHNICAL/CLARIFYING:

Question 1: What is the anticipated number of awards available? It is blank on the FOA.

USAID Response:
USAID anticipates making one (1) award under the LASER RFA. However, USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

Question 2: I was wondering if this topic might be of interest for applying for funding under the above cooperative agreement announcement?
I have an ongoing USAID supported project on the evaluation of a vaccine for the prevention of Rift Valley Fever in livestock in Tanzania and will end Sept, 2018. Therefore, I am looking for additional funding opportunities preferably to do research in developing countries and since I have an infrastructure established in Tanzania, I would like to stay there at the Sokoine University of Agricultural (SUA) with my collaborator – my idea, would be to continue research at SUA, where we have an ABSL 2 large animal holding facility and the virology lab, was thinking about research project to improve the health of livestock and livestock dairy products as a source of food for Africa. My idea would be that we do a preliminary study to collect baseline data on say 1000 goat, 1000 cattle and 1000 sheep to determine their health status and quantify the amount and quality of dairy products from the these animals. The SUA large animal holding facility would be used to do health assessment and dairy product evaluations and selected diagnostic test to

determine the health of the animals, like estimates of parasitic and bacterial infections would be done in the virology lab and other observation like weight estimates, volume of milk, pregnancy rates, abortion rates, time required to develop to a mature animals or an animals of offspring bearing age, age for being ready for slaughter, etc could all be done in the holding facility. Then after a year or so, these same animal would be treated based on the result of monthly health examinations, fed with different type of available local food, etc, This is not at all the entire scope of my idea as I would plan to invite other institution with expertise in large animal health, including veterinarian, animal nutritionist, etc. If this approach was successful, then the idea would be to establish 4 or 5 animal health clinics in Tanzania and make available to the owner of the livestock to bring their animal for health check every so often as a community outreach program with the overall goal of improving the quantity and quality of food rich in protein that will improve animal and human health – then we would do an assessment once or twice a year to see if animal health was improving– this could be extended to poultry also – am thinking this would be about a 5 year project - 2 year as a controlled experimental study on the SUA campus and then establish animal health clinics, say at least 4 in Tanzania and then evaluate the use of the clinic and assess the outcome on the quantity and quality of the animal health and as a food source – overall outcome, if it works as a model in Tanzania, then we expand to other countries in Africa. This proposed project will provide the critically needed source of food, especially protein that is one of the most important challenges in the future that is required to sustain the health of the people throughout the African continent.

USAID Response:

LASER is not intended to support individual researchers. Rather than supporting one specific research problem/project, LASER aims to, "support an implementing partner whose workplan includes the creation, engagement, and/or growth of a large, international network of university researchers, centers, and institutes across disciplines that can 1) independently identify and address new and impactful research questions with high relevance to the international development community AND 2) partner with USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Independent Offices (M/B/IOs) to address unique research needs identified by USAID." (page 5 of the LASER RFA, emphases added in response).

Question 3: Is plant sciences considered a high enough priority in the LASER RFA? I could not see any mention there or agriculture; plant sciences or food sciences.

USAID Response:

As noted in the Technical Evaluation Criteria section (see page 33 of the LASER RFA) applicants will be evaluated on, "The extent to which the proposed Network implementation plan has the capability for rapid initial stand-up, recruits universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas including LMICs) that have expertise in each of USAID's major technical sectors and geographic areas (see Appendix B) AND demonstrates an individual and institutional capacity strengthening approach that fosters and leverages a high rate of inclusion and engagement of female, MSI, and LMIC researchers / HEIs in the network to result in sustainable engagement amongst members of the Network following the end of the award." In addition, applicants will be evaluated on, "The extent of the Applicant's current available scientific and research core competencies, unique institutional resources, and global reach (as relevant to the current RFA) will support the achievement of LASER's objectives and results." Applicants who feature expertise in only one technical area or are limited in their geographical scope are not likely to be

competitive under this RFA.

Question 4: Is an international research institute like CIMMYT (http://www.cimmyt.org/) able to apply? (our headquarters is in Mexico but we have offices all over the world. We are an international agricultural research institute (not for profit) – part of the CGIAR network http://www.cgiar.org/)

USAID Response:
As indicated in the Eligibility Information Section (Section C), "only higher education institutions are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement…" For purposes of LASER, higher education institutions is defined as follows, consistent with guidance provided by USAID/E3/Education: "A tertiary education institution is an organization that provides educational opportunities that build on secondary education, providing learning activities 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], etc." Because this RFA is restricted to higher education institutes,only those international or independent research institutions that offer, or are officially associated with, a recognized educational or training program (not inclusive of informal extension services) will be considered as "higher education institutions".

Question 5: My proposal idea is to build the gender in agricultural research capacity in sub-Saharan countries. It is very hard for our national agriculture research partners to recruit gender and agricultural experts as many universities do not offer this as a specialization. Moreover, the countries are not teaching qualitative or participatory research methods so there is an over reliance on quantitative methods only in agricultural research (and this limits in-depth gender understanding). Even when sex disaggregated data is collected, many scientists struggle to fit the results within the literature/theory as they are not trained in this and thus considerable capacity building and guidance is required.

USAID Response:
Thank you for sharing your proposal idea. If you are interested in applying for this opportunity, please follow the instructions for submitting a Concept Note starting on page 23 of the LASER RFA.

Question 6: I would like to send a proposal for LASER but am currently not affiliated with any academic institution. I have, however, applied to a number of fellowships, including at Harvard and Stanford, for next year. Please let me know how the proposals work: would these institutions be appropriate partners from which to send a proposal or are you looking for more developing country based institutions?

USAID Response:
As indicated in the Eligibility Information Section (Section C), only higher education institutions (HEIs) are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement. Such institutions can come from anywhere across the globe.

Eligibility for LASER is not limited to developing country institutions. As noted in the RFA, "Only higher

education institutions are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement. Consortia applications that include non-HEI organizations are allowed and encouraged; however, these applications should identify an HEI as the Prime recipient of the award. For purposes of LASER, higher education institutions is defined as follows, consistent with guidance provided by USAID/E3/Education: "A tertiary education institution is an organization that provides educational opportunities that build on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialized fields. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialization. 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], etc." (page 22 of the LASER RFA).

Question 7: In terms of country eligibility, can middle-income countries like the Dominican Republic participate in this funding mechanism?

USAID Response:
Higher education institutions are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement. Such institutions can come from anywhere across the globe. Please refer to question #6 for additional information related to this question.

Question 8: I am hoping that you might please clarify the meaning of the acronym LMIC, which is of critical importance to defining eligible partners within LASER.

The solicitation states that it supports university networks between the US and LMIC. The acronym LMIC, however, has two different definitions within the document. If the first definition below is correct, then it stands to reason that Gabon, Africa (as one of two types of middle-income countries) would be eligible.

- **In the acronym list (p. 4) and on p. 7, LMIC is defined as "low and middle-income countries."**
- **On page 5, LMIC is defined as "lower-middle income countries."**

USAID Response:
*Thank you for identifying the editorial error on page 5. For the purposes of this RFA, LMIC is defined as low and middle-income countries. With regards to the list of countries that is categorized as an LMIC (low and middle-income countries), applicants may refer to the definition set by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which can be found **here**.*

Question 9: Would research networks in upper middle-income countries, specifically Gabon, be eligible for LASER?

USAID Response:
As indicated in the Eligibility Information Section (Section C), only higher education institutions (HEIs) are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for the LASER agreement. Such institutions can come from anywhere across the globe. Consortia applications that include non-HEI organizations are allowed and encouraged; however, these applications should identify an HEI as the Prime recipient of the award. (Please refer to question #6 for additional information related to this question.)

Question 10: Would they be eligible if networks of researchers from a lower-middle income country were also incorporated into a program?

USAID Response:

As noted in the Technical Evaluation Criteria section (see page 33 of the LASER RFA) applicants will be evaluated on, "The extent to which the proposed Network implementation plan has the capability for rapid initial stand-up, recruits universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas including LMICs) that have expertise in each of USAID's major technical sectors and geographic areas (see Appendix B) AND demonstrates an individual and institutional capacity strengthening approach that fosters and leverages a high rate of inclusion and engagement of female, MSI, and LMIC researchers / HEIs in the network to result in sustainable engagement amongst members of the Network following the end of the award."

Question 11: First, LMIC is defined in two different ways in the RFP, first as "Lower Middle Income Countries" and second as "Low and Middle Income Countries." As you know these are not the same categories. Could you please clarify which group USAID has in mind as the target partner population?

USAID Response:

Please see response to Question 8.

Question 12: If an organization bids (and wins) a LASER contract as either a prime or sub, would that undermine that organization's chances for a successful bid on RTAC? Related, given that RTAC seems to mainly have a sub-contracting function, does USAID envisage it as a university-based activity or will bidding be open to USG contractors?

USAID Response:

LASER was released as a "Request for Application (RFA)." Accordingly, if an ultimate LASER award is made it will be made as a Cooperative Agreement (and not as a contract). Currently, RTAC is envisioned to be released as a "Request for Proposals (RFP)." Final eligibility has not yet been determined for the potential RTAC RFP; however, interested parties should continue to check fbo.gov for potential updates and postings.

Question 13: Please clarify the eligibility requirements and restrictions concerning submission of a concept paper. Is the eligibility specific to a legal entity as defined by DUNS/TIN/SAM(CCR) identifiers or is it representative of a larger network? Specifically, The Texas A&M University System is comprised of 11 distinct educational institutions and 7 agencies, each is designated a separate legal entity by the State of Texas and the U.S. Federal Government. Per the Federal NICRA, each is classified as a public institution of higher education, They are also each designated a distinct Texas State Agency.

A major portion of the USAID activities to date have been led by Texas A&M AgriLife Research. Would Texas A&M AgriLife Research be deemed eligible for review if one of the other A&M System Members also applied for LASER?

USAID Response:
As indicated in Section C3, "HEI applicants (organizational and/or proposed project director) are restricted to submitting one concept note as the lead applicant. If more than one application is received with the same lead HEI or has the same proposed project director, none of the applications submitted will be evaluated for consideration of award as they will be deemed non-compliant with the conditions of this RFA. HEI's can serve as sub-awardees or consortium members on multiple applications, however." This means that multiple submissions may not be received and deemed eligible by the same legal entity (for example, multiple academic departments within one University). However, multiple universities within one state-wide university system are eligible to submit individual applications (one application per individual university within the system is permissible, provided that unique Project Directors are also submitted for each application).

Question 14: Regarding the USAID LASER NFO, I would like to clarify the text on page 11:
"Specific LASER activities that USAID seeks to support…
1. Formation and curation of a technically and geographically diverse network with the following characteristics:

a. Contains the expertise needed to co-create research projects with USAID across **all the major technical sectors and in all the major regions** in which USAID programs activities."

Is the text in bold above ("…across all the major technical sectors and in all the major regions…") a STRICT requirement, in that the Concept Note should describe research expertise in all 11 technical sectors, and in all 6 major regions? Or can there be emphasis on one or two technical sectors and regions?

USAID Response:
Please see response to Question # 3

Question 15: Are we, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, Delft, The Netherlands (Dutch institution) is eligible to submit our proposal together with the US university?

USAID Response:
Please refer to question #6 for the answer to this question.

Question 16: Are HEIs from OECD countries eligible? And, could you provide us with a complete list of countries that USAID categorizes as LMIC?

USAID Response:
Please refer to questions #6, #8 for the answers to this question.

Question 17: Is it USAID's intention to make one or multiple awards through this mechanism?

USAID Response:
Please refer to question #1 for the answer to this question.

Question 18: The University of Connecticut is in the process of developing a collaboration with the Vietnam National University (VNA) and a series of affiliated research NGOs in Hanoi that would focus on academic exchanges and enhancement of research in environmental, social, human rights and health issues. Is there the opportunity within the LASER grant for an application that would focus on a bilateral relationship with UConn and VNU? Are there other USAID programs in which this developing relationship would fit?

USAID Response:
Consortium applications are welcome, especially those involving LMIC universities. However, USAID seeks to fund a partner who will create a global network of researchers to address development challenges. As such, applications that propose a geographically restricted network are not likely to be successful. Please refer to questions #3, 6, 9, and 10 for the answer to this question. With respect to other USAID programs, we suggest you visit to https://www.usaid.gov/vietnam to find specific contacts.

Question 19: the LASER solicitation indicates that only Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are eligible to apply to serve as the Prime for Laser. Are the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine considered a HEI?

USAID Response:
No, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS) are not considered an HEI. For purposes of LASER, higher education institutions is defined as follows, consistent with guidance provided by USAID/E3/Education: "A tertiary education institution is an organization that provides educational opportunities that build on secondary education, providing learning activities 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], etc." NAS utilizes volunteer researchers and experts from other institutions, the public, and the private sector, to provide input on challenges of interest to the Academy, but conducts no research and has no formal educational programs of their own. Please refer to questions #4 and #6 for more information related to this question.

Question 20: I've been reviewing the LASER Program Request for Applications on behalf of a group of researchers here at the University of California, San Diego. Our center is involved in interdisciplinary research and education program to remedy global environmental impacts from cultural, behavioral, economic and science perspectives. Sustainable seafood (food security) and coastal protection are big issues around the world and very much in our "wheel-house." However, we are concerned that we may not have research collaborators in your "lower-middle income countries (LMIC)' that may inhibit our ability to complete a proposal by the deadline. Could you send a list of countries that meet your definition?

USAID Response:
Please refer to questions #3 and #8 for additional information related to this question.

Question 21: CIP, an International Agricultural Research Center (IARC) and member of the CGIAR consortium, is designated by USAID as a Category 1 Public International Organization (PIO) under

ADS 308 (which sets forth USAID's mandatory policies and required procedures on assistance awards to PIOs). Could you kindly verify that should CIP participate as a sub-awardee under a prime applicant/HEI, in accordance with ADS 303.3.21 (c) "for sub-awards to PIOs", it would be subject to the terms and conditions contained in the "Standard Provisions for Cost-Type Awards to PIOs in ADS 308"?

USAID Response:
Yes, according to ADS 303.3.21 (b), a subaward to a PIO would be subject to ADS 308mab "Standard Provisions for Cost-Type Awards to PIOs."

Question 22: Would a proposal that includes all major technical sectors but is limited to the sub-Saharan Africa region be considered responsive to the funding opportunity announcement, or are you considering only those proposals that include all of USAID's major regions?

USAID Response:
Please refer to question #3 for the answer to this question.

Question 23: How is it envisioned that LASER will leverage or engage with PEER/PIRE awards, which share similar goals on a university to university basis?

USAID Response:
It is currently envisioned that LASER (once awarded) will be a part of the university-based portfolio of higher education programs managed by USAID's Global Development Lab (Lab)'s Center for Development Research. The Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) program is also a part of this portfolio that specifically supports individual researcher-to-research partnerships. USAID anticipates that some of the PEER researcher's institutions would apply to participate in the LASER Network once it's established by the LASER awardee. As such, the Lab envisions that projects supported by PEER could ultimately transition into broader research questions or projects of interest for the LASER program. Finally, USAID envisions that research and approaches coming out of both the PEER and other CDR higher education programs will help complement and leverage the research coming out of the LASER program.

Question 24: How is LMICS to be defined? Can the network include institutions that are not LMICS? (Is it inclusive of or exclusive of?) Does it matter if the implementing partners are LMICS?

USAID Response:
- *Please see answer #8 for the definition of LMIC.*
- *Yes, the network can include institutions that are not LMICs (yes, it is "inclusive of" and NOT "exclusive to".)*
- *As per page 10 of the LASER RFP, ": LASER is designed to achieve these outcomes through an emphasis on building strong, equitable partnerships between USAID, U.S. universities, and LMIC institutions of higher education." Accordingly, USAID anticipates that LMICs will be involved in the implementation of LASER, but, the RFP does not prescribe that LMICs are the only eligible recipients".*

Question 25: There seems to be significant overlap in the scope outlined for LASER and RTAC, particularly around building a network and translation of research to policy and programming impacts. Other than the different in duration of research projects (over one year, under one year), are there other differentiators between these two programs that should be noted?

USAID Response:
While a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the potential Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) has not yet been released, it is currently envisioned to serve as a "sister" program to the LASER implementing partner in that both programs would be enabling USAID to better leverage the academic expertise of the university community globally. LASER is envisioned to leverage the intellectual and research capacity of both researchers and university networks/platforms in a co-creative fashion whereas RTAC (if released/awarded) is envisioned to primarily support individual researchers in a more traditional consultancy type model. As such, it is expected that the LASER implementing partner will simultaneously propose and implement their own research program while also addressing USAIDs research agenda whereas the RTAC Prime will be responding exclusively to short-term needs and requirements identified by USAID.

Also please refer to the answer to Question #12.

Question 26: Will the names of institutions requested to submit full applications be made public after Stage One?

USAID Response:
No. Submission of concept notes and proposals are considered to be proprietary. Protection of a respondent's intellectual property is standard business practice and it is USAID's intent to maintain procurement integrity throughout this process.

Question 27: I'd to inquire about the possibility/eligibility of my university (Deraya University) participation in the Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER) program, since we are a private higher education institution based in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

USAID Response:
Yes, Deraya University is eligible for application. See question #6 for more information.

Question 28: USAID concentrates on 11 sectors. Is the intent of this Program (Long-term Assistance and Services for Research – LASER) to touch on all 11 sectors or can the focus be limited to a narrow scope such as 'Agriculture and Food Security' systems or a combination of 'Agriculture and Food Security, and Environment and Global Climate Change'?
USAID Response:
Please see the response to question #3.

Question 29: How great is the emphasis on inclusion of women and minority groups in the management and technical processes?

USAID Response:
Gender equality and strengthening the role of women in developing countries is a central tenet to USAID's development goals and a necessary component of every operating program. To this end, USAID strongly recommends the inclusion of women in all aspects of project design and execution and will give preference to concept note applications that make those efforts of inclusion clear. As noted in the Technical Evaluation Criteria section (see page 33 of the LASER RFA) applicants will be evaluated on, "The extent to which the proposed Network implementation plan... demonstrates an individual and institutional capacity strengthening approach that fosters and leverages a high rate of inclusion and engagement of female, MSI, and LMIC researchers / HEIs in the network to result in sustainable engagement amongst members of the Network following the end of the award."

Question 30: What does a successful conclusion to this phase of the LASER program look like?

USAID Response:
With respect to a successful submission to the Concept note phase of the LASER application: As stated on page 22 of the RFA "Within 60 calendar days following the submission deadline, USAID anticipates requesting full applications from applicants who meet the evaluation criteria outlined in Section E of this RFA and who best demonstrate their ability to achieve the stated goals of LASER. USAID currently anticipates requesting full applications from approximately 10 Concept Note submissions, but reserves the right to request more or fewer full applications depending on the total number and quality of Concept Notes submitted as well as the availability of funds. A request for a full application does not constitute a promise of funding."

A successful LASER program will successfully implement their Performance, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan as outlined in section A6 of the RFA, as related to the overall program objectives as outlined in section A3.

Question 31: Do we need to include a letter of intent from collaborators at concept note stage?

USAID Response:
No, letters of intent are not required at the concept note phase.

Question 32: Is the Prime institution or consortium eligible to apply for funding in response to LASER-issued RFPs?

USAID Response:
Researchers from the Prime or consortium institutions are NOT excluded from participating in the ensuing LASER Network research requests. The LASER Network should be characterized by "Inclusive recruitment via rolling or periodic open admission process to promote the inclusion of new members and expertise, with eligibility and ultimate approval subject to review by the Recipient and USAID. USAID may also elect to recommend researchers, universities, and / or institutions to be considered for inclusion in the Network" (see page 11 of the RFA).

Also please see the response to question #2.

Question 33: Is the research intended to be carried out by local partners in-country only or can any network partner implement the research?

USAID Response:
Please see the response to question #10.

Question 34: How does USAID define "network" for the purposes of LASER?

USAID Response:
The LASER Network that this RFA supports is composed of all the individual researchers and higher education institutions that the LASER Prime or Consortium recruits which have a verifiable interest/commitment to working with the LASER Prime to:

1) *independently identify key development challenges;*
2) *convene key stakeholders to co-design and conduct high quality research activities to address those challenges, as well as others identified by USAID M/B/IO's;*
3) *translate the results of that research into development-relevant policy recommendations, program modifications, or implementation plans;*
4) *increase the human and institutional capacity of LMIC HEI's to serve as equitable partners in these activities.*

This Network must be composed solely of researchers formally affiliated with an HEI and should include universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas) that have technical and sectoral expertise in the areas in which USAID works. Please see pages 10-11, 33 of the RFA for a more detailed description of the characteristics that this Network should have.

Question 35: Given the diversity of research questions that could arise from the Missions, will there be a common thread(s) defined globally/thematically by USAID?

USAID Response:
See the response to Question #3.

Question 36: While recognizing that the RFA calls for "projects [...] across all the major technical sectors and in all of the major regions in which USAID programs activities", is there any prioritization of either technical sector or geographic region for LASER?

USAID Response:
See the response to Question #3.

Question 37: Page 22 of the RFA states: "HEI's can serve as sub-awardees or consortium members on multiple applications, however." Is the same true for non-HEI research organizations?

USAID Response:
Yes, they may serve in the same capacities.

Question 38: Does USAID have a current list of lower-middle income (LMIC) countries? Please provide the list.

USAID Response:
Please see the response to question #8

Question 39: If there are HEIs in low-income countries or upper-middle income countries with strong research capabilities, is it acceptable to include those in the consortium?

USAID Response:
Yes, please see the response to question #6 and #7.

Question 40: Will second tier subawards be allowed in this project? Will LMIC sub-awardees be able to subaward to partners themselves? What kind of funding mechanisms will be allowed out to partner organizations?

USAID Response:
Yes, second tier subawards can be proposed. There is nothing in the LASER RFA that precludes LMIC Prime or sub-awardees from proposing that they may also issue sub-awards. Any subsequent subawards granted under the Award would be subject to the same provisions and regulations as the Prime Cooperative Agreement and are subject to USAID approval before award.

Question 41: Is there an emphasis on building research capacity in Universities as institutions or is the focus more on strengthening faculty capacity for research?

USAID Response:
Yes. From Section A of the RFA: "As part of the Cooperative Agreement, USAID will support a recipient to identify new research questions, fund research activities, translate research results into development impact, and build capacity of local higher education institutions and researchers."

Question 42: Can this grant fund PhD/ graduate students or post-docs in the US or in LMIC partner universities?

USAID Response:
LASER is intended to bring development solutions to a wide variety of development questions. To the extent that training, stipends, bursaries, etc. are within the identified sub-awarded project scope, support for these efforts would fall under appropriate use of funds.

Question 43: Are there known countries or regions that will be emphasized or that should be focused on?

USAID Response:
Please see the response to question #3.

Question 44: Are there known sectors/topic areas that will be emphasized or that should be focused on?

USAID Response:

Please see the response to Question #3.

Question 45: Does the lead have to be a US based institute?

USAID Response:
No.

Question 46: Your definition of HEI states that may include public or private universities, colleges, research institutes, and training institutes. However in other parts of the document you mention that Prime applicant has got to be a University. Are non-degree awarding research institutes that provide PhD and Post-doctoral opportunities eligible?

USAID Response:
For the purposes of LASER eligibility, higher education institution is the defining criteria, not university. As referenced in question #4, because this RFA is restricted to higher education institutes, only those international or independent research institutions that offer, or are officially associated with, a recognized educational or training program (not inclusive of informal extension services) will be considered as "higher education institutions".

Question 47: Our organization APHRC started in 1995 as a fellowship program of the Population Council, with funding from Rockefeller Foundation. The goal was for the program to become an independent regional entity in five years and for it to bring African scholars together to undertake research that would inform home-grown policy response to development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. In preparation for its independence from the Population Council, APHRC was registered in the State of Delaware, USA, in April 1999. Subsequent to this registration, APHRC obtained tax exempt status in June 2001 under Section 501(c)3 of the US Internal Revenue Code. In 2001, APHRC, Inc. registered in Kenya as a branch of the US-registered entity and subsequently entered into an agreement with the Government of Kenya for the establishment of its headquarters in Kenya. This agreement with the Government of Kenya provided the Center with diplomatic status, including exemption from all forms of taxes in Kenya, both for the Center and its expatriate employees. The Center has established its head office in Nairobi, Kenya, from where it coordinates all its work across sub-Saharan Africa. All the Center's operations are in sub-Saharan Africa.
Would our registration make us ineligible - we do not offer degrees but we offer PhD and postdoctoral opportunities within our networks including through the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA)

USAID Response:
Please see the response to Questions #4 and 46.

Question 48: Page 5 lists the focus of the LASER program as "lower-middle income countries," whereas page 7 lists it as "low and middle income countries." Could you please clarify which economic classification(s) LASER intends to focus on?
USAID Response:
Thank you; please see the response to Question 8.

BUDGET/COST:

Question 1: Is there a maximum management fee/shared cost/overhead limit (e.g. our overhead/shared costs are 15% and many funds from donors have a 10% cap)

USAID Response:
A maximum management fee/overhead limit has not been established for this RFA. However, please note on page 22 of the LASER RFA that, "USAID looks to support strong partners who leverage their capabilities towards development challenges and cost-share is highly encouraged as a means to extend the development impact of the application, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.306. Therefore, applications that contain cost-share will be looked upon favorably when competing applications approach technical equivalence. Cost-share levels will also be considered in the cost evaluation."

Question 2: Should the proposed budget be based off the core funds available from LAB/CDR ($2-4M/year), or should the budget also include additional funds from USAID M/B/IOs up to the anticipated budget ceiling of $14M/year?

USAID Response:
The proposed budget should be based off of the core funds available from LAB/CDR ($2-$4M/year). Any additional funds made available from USAID M/B/IOs post-award would be negotiated and added to the awards via buy-in at a later date (within the overall estimated approved ceiling of the Award, $70,000,000).

Question 3: On page 5, the proposal states, "USAID estimates that approximately 30-40% of the yearly core funding will be dedicated to support recipient-directed identification of crucial development research questions… " Could you please confirm whether "core funding" refers to the total amount of funding from LAB/CDR less the prime university's indirect costs?

USAID Response:
"Core funding" refers to the total amount of funding the Lab/CDR intends to dedicate to the LASER project (contingent on availability of funding) inclusive of the Prime university's indirect costs.

Question 4: Given the range of potential funding amount from $10,000,000 to $20,000,000 in core funds from LAB/CDR with the possibility of up to an additional $50 million from Missions, does USAID have a recommendation for the total amount applicants should propose in the Budget Summary?

USAID Response:
Per page 5 of the LASER RFP, " core funds from LAB/CDR are anticipated to be $10,000,000-$20,000,000 over five (5) years ($2,000,000 - $4,000,000 per year)." USAID recommends that applicants plan accordingly and submit applications that are based on yearly total project costs between $2,000,000 and $4,000,000. For a 5-year proposed project, this means the total estimated cost for core (CDR-funded) expenses could range between $10,000,000 and $20,000,000 over the life of the project.

(Any additional funds beyond those "core" costs would be determined post-award and would be budgeted and negotiated accordingly at that time.)

[END AMENDMENT 01 OF 7200AA18RFA00004]