Issue Date:	**December 6, 2017**
Deadline for Question/Clarifications:	**December 20, 2017 at 12:00 PM Eastern Standard Time**
Closing Date:	**January 24, 2018**
Closing Time:	**5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time**

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

Ladies/Gentlemen:

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is seeking applications for a cooperative agreement from qualified U.S. and Non-U.S. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to fund a program entitled Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER). Eligibility for this award is restricted to organizations meeting the HEI definition references in Section A and the eligibility requirements in Section C of this NFO.

Subject to the availability of funds an award will be made to that responsible applicant(s) whose application(s) best meets the objectives of this funding opportunity and the selection criteria contained herein. While an award(s) is anticipated as a result of this notice of funding opportunity (NFO), USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

For the purposes of this NFO the term "Grant" is synonymous with "Cooperative Agreement"; "Grantee" is synonymous with "Recipient"; and "Grant Officer" is synonymous with "Agreement Officer". Eligible organizations interested in submitting an application are encouraged to read this funding opportunity thoroughly to understand the type of program sought, application submission requirements and evaluation process.

To be eligible for award, the applicant must provide all information as required in this NFO and meet eligibility standards in Section C of this NFO. This funding opportunity is posted on www.grants.gov, and may be amended. Potential applicants should regularly check the website to ensure they have the latest information pertaining to this notice of funding opportunity. Applicants will need to have available or download Adobe program to their computers in order to view and save the Adobe forms properly. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the entire NFO has been received from the internet in its entirety and USAID bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion process. If you have difficulty registering on www.grants.gov or accessing the NFO, please contact the Grants.gov Helpdesk at 1-800-518-4726 or via email at support@grants.gov for technical assistance.

The successful Applicant will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of the program objectives. Please read each section of the NFO.

Please send any questions to the point(s) of contact identified in section D. The deadline for questions is shown above. Responses to questions received prior to the deadline will be furnished to all potential applicants through an amendment to this notice posted to www.grants.gov.

Issuance of this notice of funding opportunity does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government nor does it commit the Government to pay for any costs incurred in preparation or submission of comments/suggestions or an application. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Thank you for your interest in USAID programs.

Sincerely,



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THIS NFO

ADS	Automated Directive Services
AO	Agreement Officer
AOR	Agreement Officer Representative
APS	Annual Program Statement
BEO	Bureau Environmental Officer
CDR	Center for Development Research
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
CRM	Climate Risk Management
DDL	Development Data Library
DEC	Development Exchange Clearinghouse
DUNS	Data Universal Numbering System
HEA	Higher Education Act
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESN	Higher Education Solutions Network
LAB	U.S. Global Development Lab
LASER	Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research
LMIC	Low and Middle-Income Country
LOC	Letter of Credit
M/B/IO	Missions, Bureaus, and Independent Office
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MSI	Minority-Serving Institution
MTDC	Modified Total Direct Costs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NICRA	Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
OMB	White House Office of Management and Budget
PIEE	Programmatic Initial Environmental Examination
PPI	Past Performance Information
RTAC	Research Technical Assistance Center
SAM	System for Award Management
STIP	Science, Technology, Innovation, and Partnership
RCE	Request for Categorical Exclusion
RFA	Request for Applications
TIN	Taxpayer Identification Number
U.S.	United States

SECTION A: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1. Introduction

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through the Center for Development Research (CDR) in the U.S. Global Development Lab (Lab) plans to invest in a five-year Cooperative Agreement with a Higher Education Institution (HEI)[1] to support a project entitled **Long-term[2] Assistance and SErvices for Research[3] (LASER).** This Cooperative Agreement aims to support the discovery and uptake of university-sourced, evidence-based solutions to development challenges. The Period of Performance will be 5 years, subject to performance and availability of funds. 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. 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. USAID anticipates that the remainder of the core funds will cover operating, management, and implementation costs of the LASER Award, including the management and support of a broad international network of researchers and HEIs available to identify and respond to key research questions.

Through LASER, USAID seeks to leverage and support international university networks, inclusive of universities from both the United States (U.S) and lower-middle income countries (LMIC), to improve development research opportunities, evidence generation, and uptake by development actors and policy makers. 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. **USAID specifically seeks 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.**

Additionally, USAID seeks to increase the human and institutional capacity of LMIC HEIs through LASER. This will occur as they engage in collaborative research opportunities with U.S. researchers and receive technical

[1] For purposes of this RFA, a higher education institution is defined as follows: "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."

[2] From the standpoint of CDR, "long-term" refers to research projects whose implementation (from awarding of funds to delivery of research products) ranges from approximately 1-5 years.

[3] The term research, as defined by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and referenced in the USAID Scientific Research Policy, refers to systematic and creative activities undertaken to increase the knowledge base, including understanding of humankind, culture, environment, and society, and the application of this knowledge base to devise new interventions.

assistance in research translation through the implementing HEI. Through the LASER-implementing HEI and its network, USAID will engage local[4] stakeholders to identify and refine critical development research questions and conduct research projects that address those questions. This is to ensure that the entire research system - from universities to policy-makers and civil society - will become engaged, capacitated contributors to the success of the research project. The resulting LASER network will not only generate new knowledge for USAID, but also leave behind a sustainable union of collaborating U.S. and developing country institutions. These collaborations will be characterized by equitable university partnerships, improved academic focus on development challenges, and stakeholders that are better equipped to use research to further their development outcomes.

The project will be linked to, and coordinate with, its sister project, the Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) (see Section 2: Background for description of RTAC). These projects will both contribute to USAID's Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN), a university-based programming portfolio which seeks to improve USAID's partnerships with universities as thought partners in solving today's greatest development challenges. LASER and RTAC address a clear need for increased collaboration between USAID and the international university community. LASER and RTAC allow for rapid access to scientific advisement, world-class evidence generation, joint ownership of and commitment to research, and effective translation of research results into actionable policy or program recommendations. LASER will meet this need through timely facilitation of USAID research partnerships with researchers that have deep technical and/or geographic expertise in areas relevant to the development research need. Additionally, LASER partnerships will be characterized by participatory engagement between USAID, local stakeholders, and the international research community. Ultimately, a successful LASER program fulfills CDR's Science Objective: Increase the use of scientific research for improved development outcomes, by creating a network of universities and researchers with increased understanding of USAID and expertise in solving development challenges.

2. Background- Global Development Lab and Research

Lab Mission

The Center for Development Research (CDR) is part of the US Global Development Lab (Lab) and supports the Lab's two-part mission to:

1. Produce breakthrough development innovations by sourcing, testing, and scaling proven solutions that impact millions of people; and
2. Accelerate the transformation of the development enterprise by opening development to people anywhere with good ideas, promoting new and deepening existing partnerships, bringing data and evidence to bear, and harnessing scientific and technological advances.

Lab Approach

The Lab operates under a set of guiding principles. The Lab aims to be:

- Open and Inclusive - Drawing upon the ingenuity of people from around the world.
- Evidence-based - Investing based on strong evidence of impact.
- Catalytic - Attracting the support of others to enable sustainable development solutions that reach massive scale.

[4] The term "local" refers to actors, organizations, and systems within USAID partner countries.

- Agile - Creating fast feedback loops that enable continuous learning and performance improvement.

Lab Objectives

The Lab is focused on Science, Technology, Innovation, and Partnership (STIP) as our primary tools to reach key development outcomes. We work across USAID and with the broader international development community to find innovative approaches and solutions. When a new solution or approach proves effective, we endeavor to mainstream it across USAID and with our partners to increase its impact. As such, the Lab's programming is aligned around five objectives:

- **Science:** Increasing the use of scientific research to improve development outcomes and make better policy and programming decisions.
- **Technology:** Advancing the use of enabling technologies and data-driven approaches to empower underserved communities and improve development effectiveness.
- **Innovation:** Increasing the adoption of high impact development solutions and the effective use of innovation models and design practices.
- **Partnerships:** Advancing the use of private sector engagement, new collaborative approaches, and cultivation of entrepreneurial ecosystems to accelerate and scale development impact.
- **Agency Integration:** Increasing the effective integration of STIP by Missions and Bureaus to advance USAID's sustainable development results and priorities.

The Lab recognizes the value of leveraging the international university community across the range of Lab objectives. We anticipate that CDR-led higher education mechanisms will contribute to all the major objectives of the Lab, in addition to the unique strategies and objectives of partner M/B/IO's across the Agency.

Strategically, CDR believes that outcomes associated with these pathways will be best achieved by improving use of research at USAID and accelerating local scientific potential through building strong and equitable research partnerships with higher education institutions in low and middle-income countries (LMICs)[5]. Through the planned solicitations described below, the Lab will partner with USAID M/B/IO's to integrate research across the USAID Program Cycle: in strategic planning, project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and learning/adapting. This will involve matchmaking between the research needs of a given USAID M/B/IO and the capabilities of the broader research community. Additionally, the Lab endeavors to partner with other development actors and leverage external resources to overcome barriers that local researchers and institutions face in conducting and using research. This could involve direct support to local researchers, institutions, or regional associations. This may also involve working with USAID Missions to assess local research potential and helping to unlock local resources (i.e. from host country governments or private sector) or fostering partnerships across regions (including other developed and developing countries).

[5]The USAID Research Policy defines capacity development in the context of research as "a process of change in which people and organizations improve their potential to design, manage, support and conduct research and to engage with stakeholders to ensure that research is used to inform policy and evidence-based practice. Capacity development also extends to the enabling environment for research which includes a country's policy for supporting and funding science, how it prioritizes areas for research and how it uses evidence in decision making." As such, it is important to consider capacity development at three levels: individual, institutional, and enabling environment.

Just as USAID seeks to work with a diversity of stakeholders in addressing key development challenges, the Agency also seeks to ensure inclusive participation within the landscape of university-led programming. This includes representation from female researchers, minority-serving institutions (MSIs)[6], and institutions from LMICs. Given their perspectives and relationships with local beneficiaries and stakeholders, these groups are uniquely well-positioned to identify contextually-relevant research questions and solutions, as well as promote the translation and uptake of research findings to support policy/decision-making. To achieve these objectives, the Lab envisions launching a suite of new research-based programming in FY 2018 under the university-based HESN portfolio. CDR is tentatively planning and preparing three solicitations, outlined below, with LASER being the focus of the present Request for Applications (RFA):

1. **Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research (LASER) -** CDR envisions expanding our support of long-term research efforts (typically > 1 year) that address specific development needs via the LASER Award. Through LASER, USAID will leverage the intellectual prowess, knowledge, and in-country experience of our university partners to co-create research solutions to pressing development challenges. The LASER implementing partner will be responsible for supporting a large and varied network of university researchers, organizations, and faculty (in the U.S. and in USAID partner countries) to partner with USAID missions, bureaus, and independent operating units (M/B/IO's). Through the LASER Prime and Network, CDR will engage local stakeholders to identify and refine critical development research questions and then fund research projects that address those questions so that the entire research system - from universities to policy-makers and civil society - can be engaged, educated, and contribute to the success of the research project. Co-creating research projects with USAID and other development actors will help researchers maximize their impact by addressing questions that are pressing and actionable to development actors and are primed for translation to development practice or policy. The resulting LASER network will not only generate new knowledge for USAID, but also carry forward a sustainable union of collaborating institutions. These collaborations will be characterized by equitable partnerships with developing country universities, improved academic focus on development challenges, and stakeholders that are better equipped to use research to further their development outcomes.

2. **Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) -** The envisioned RTAC contract will provide timely research-based technical assistance that facilitates USAID's capability to make quick, evidence-based programming decisions by leveraging the technical expertise of the higher education community. Anticipated activities include: creation of evidence-to-action policy briefs, and technical reports; strategic research agenda setting and research activity consultations; coordination of university-based researchers for expert panels or convenings and sector-focused trainings; and provision of other emergent technical assistance support. CDR anticipates that the successful RTAC Prime will establish and maintain a network of individual graduate students, faculty, and researchers with current academic affiliations. Those interested in participating in this network would apply directly to the RTAC Prime. These individuals

[6] The USAID MSI Program's mission is to facilitate an environment where U.S. MSIs become USAID partners by successfully competing for USAID awards and by engaging in U.S. foreign assistance activities. The USAID MSI Program provides support to minority-serving U.S. higher education institutions interested in USAID programs and activities and promotes the interests, capabilities, and experience of MSI's within USAID. MSI's include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). For more information on MSI's please follow this link - https://www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/universities/minorityserving-institutions.

would then be available to serve as individual technical advisors, via subcontract agreements, upon whom USAID can call on for support across a wide variety of technical sectors as needed.

3. **Science, Technology, Innovation and Partnership Annual Program Statement (STIP APS) -** Expanding on our initial set of HESN awards, CDR will seek to engage the international academic community broadly across STIP programmatic emphases. CDR envisions publishing an Annual Program Statement (APS) in which CDR, the Lab, and other USAID M/B/IO's would be invited to submit addendums or specific priorities in support of cross-cutting development challenges that can be tackled by a "whole of university" approach with university partners. Universities and/or university-containing consortia (including private sector, foundations, etc.,) would then have the opportunity to respond to specific addendums, stating how they would work across sectors and with in-country partners to develop and test interventions that could change the curve of development.

3. LASER Scope

Desired Program Outcomes

CDR anticipates that LASER will contribute to development impact through successful achievement of the following three major program outcomes:

- **Generate Targeted Evidence through Innovative Research Approaches:** Through LASER, the Lab will support research that responds to priority questions identified independently by the implementing partner and through consultation with USAID M/B/IO's across the Agency. Beyond traditional, single sector questions, e.g. water, environment, or energy, this research programming could also focus on integrated, cross-sectoral questions to fill knowledge gaps that traditional sector-based USAID research programming structures may not fully address. These research questions could include many interrelated development challenges such as (but not limited to): the impact of water availability on wildlife conservation and ecological services or the interrelationship between land-tenure rights and countering violent extremism. The area of programming could also involve funding tools and methods to conduct development research with more agility, speed, and accuracy. Consistent with the Lab's approach to in-country engagement and co-creation, research questions and resulting research teams should maximize and leverage expertise/insight from in-country partners, beneficiaries, and end-users at all stages of the project (from design to dissemination of results).

- **Facilitate the Translation of Research to Impact:** 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.

- **Accelerate Local Scientific Potential:** 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. Likewise, LASER is also designed to allow USAID M/B/IO's to easily fund the LASER Recipient to address research questions of mutual interest, particularly through the involvement of LASER network institutions within the LMIC of interest where possible.

Desired Program Activities

Through LASER, USAID seeks to improve the generation, translation and utilization of development-relevant research. Recognizing the inherent value of universities to such efforts, USAID expects to enter into a Cooperative Agreement to support 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.

This Cooperative Agreement will support the efforts of at least one (Prime) implementing partner HEI or consortium[7] with similar goals and a defined plan on how to achieve them. While the Prime must be a Higher Education Institution (HEI)[8], additional consortia partners or subawardees are not required to be higher education

[7] A "Consortia" application in the context of this RFA refers to applications that are submitted on behalf of multiple organizations aiming to collaborate as the primary conveners or organizations of the overall LASER Network. Consortia applications are welcomed under this RFA; however, one eligible entity must still be identified as the Prime Recipient (see eligibility requirements in Section C). The other consortia partners will serve as subawardees to the Prime (if the relationship is monetary in nature) or as thought partners/advisors to the Prime (if the relationship is non-monetary in nature). The Prime recipient will be responsible for managing and coordinating its partners as it seeks to achieve the goals stated above. In this context, the definition of "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.

[8] For purposes of this RFA, higher education institutions are defined as follows: "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."

institutions. CDR recommends the use of consortium or subawardee arrangements when the addition of these organizations strengthens specific elements or capabilities within the application. It is important to note, however, that the LASER Network that this consortia subsequently supports must be composed solely of researchers formally affiliated with an HEI.

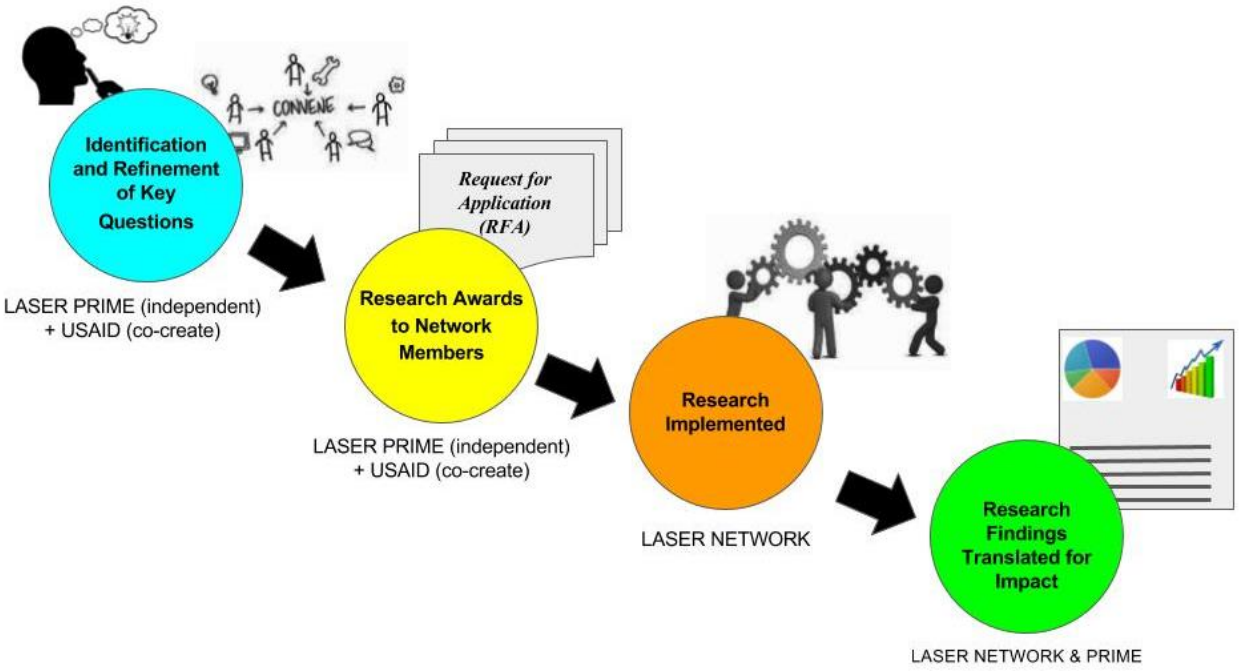


Figure 1: LASER Process. This diagram outlines the relationships and process that USAID seeks to support to identify crucial unresolved questions in development research, fund the resulting research activities, and translate the results for impact.

Specific LASER activities that USAID seeks to support under this Cooperative Agreement include:

1. **Formation and curation of a technically and geographically diverse network of individual university researchers, centers, and institutions.** USAID seeks to support a 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 of the major regions in which USAID programs activities. Because social science and business perspectives are critical to ensuring that the outcomes of development research activities are taken up by communities, the LASER recipient should include social science and business experts in the network.
    b. 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.
    c. Network management plan that allows for research collaborations and proposals to be effectively designed, executed, managed and accounted for in a timely fashion. Emphasis on representation from a diverse group of researchers either as lead researchers or as research team members,

including female researchers and researchers from MSIs and LMICs. The Network management plan should also develop intra-network relationships that accelerate the research potential of LMIC Network members and promote enduring independent research and thought leadership capacity of participating LMIC higher education institutions and researchers beyond the life of the award.

2. **Identification of key questions in international development research.** USAID seeks to support a Prime partner who also has independent 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:
    a. Incorporates stakeholder (particularly local stakeholder) involvement in the identification and/or refinement of research questions;
    b. Convenes development actors, stakeholders, and network institutions to identify key, unresolved development challenges and proposes research solutions where warranted;
    c. 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
    d. Develops scopes of work that may be used for research calls to the LASER Network to address these identified and refined research questions.

3. **Funding research awards to Network members**. USAID seeks to support a Prime partner 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. USAID anticipates that the LASER Prime will 1) use core funds to issue research calls to the LASER Network that address research questions that were identified by the LASER Prime and 2) collaborate with USAID M/B/IO's to issue USAID-funded research calls to the LASER Network that address research questions of USAID interest in collaboration with the LASER Prime. It is expected that the Prime establish a standard operating procedure to:
    a. Solicit Requests for Applications (RFAs) from its network of researchers/universities for each research activity;
    b. Review and select the most appropriate RFA response. When addressing needs identified by USAID M/B/IO's, the recipient should select the most favorable applications, based on evaluation criteria established in collaboration with the USAID M/B/IO, for final review and approval by the funding M/B/IO. Once selected, the Prime should issue the appropriate subaward documents to enable work to begin through the identified university/research partner.
    c. Incorporate research translation and dissemination planning from project start, including budgeting for appropriate communications, publications, data repository, journal publication costs, and any other resources needed to ensure the data are accessible and have maximum impact.
    d. Maximize participation of in-country/host partners to promote local involvement while accelerating local scientific potential. This is envisioned to include technical assistance or training

to LMIC researchers, institutions, or other organizations to increase local capacity to manage and execute rigorous research awards (as needed).

e. As needed and appropriate, design, organize, manage, and award prizes (specifically Innovation Incentive Award prizes pursuant to Section 7034(d)(4) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, FY17, and other relevant authorities) and prize-like competitions designed to support research, acceleration, and innovation consistent with the purpose of this RFA.

4. **Translation and dissemination of research findings.** Translation includes creation of products such as policy briefs, presentations, or other media with relevant political/social contexts and actionable policy or programmatic recommendations. USAID seeks to support a Prime that proposes core functionality focused on supporting and building the capacity of LASER researchers in creating policy or practitioner-friendly outputs. These should allow for easy uptake and utilization of the information in the context of the development practitioner's work. This could include, but is not limited to:
    a. Core-funded technical writers/communicators who could either directly translate primary research into policy-relevant documents, presentations, or other media for researchers or build the capacity of individual researchers or institutions to complete this work independently;
    b. Trainings, small convenings, or media events to disseminate research findings and/or help policy makers or practitioners apply research findings;
    c. Development and support of a LASER public portal (website) that showcases the translated media materials in an open and accessible way. This could be the same portal through which the Prime solicits researchers for their network, announces subaward RFA announcements, and publishes other research outputs like primary literature and research data[9];
    d. Coordination with the sister-project RTAC, to the extent that such coordination facilitates the completion of mutual translation/communication objectives.

4. Substantial Involvement by USAID

Consistent with *§ 200.24 Cooperative Agreement* and the USAID Automated Directive Services (ADS) *303.3.11 Substantial Involvement and Cooperative Agreements*, USAID anticipates "substantial involvement" throughout the duration of the LASER Award. For LASER, USAID specifically anticipates reserving the right to approve the Recipient's Implementation Plan (Workplan), approve any changes to Key Personnel as laid out in the application/initial award, and engage in Agency and Recipient "joint collaboration and participation."

Specifically, USAID expects to be involved in the solicitation, selection, and execution of the Recipient's subawards managed through the award. In collaboration with the USAID Agreement Officer Representative (AOR), USAID M/B/IO Activity Managers and technical experts are expected to participate in technical review and evaluation of applications (when desired by the M/B/IO), give final approval for subawards, review progress reports, and monitor the technical quality and achievements of activities. With respect to core activities proposed by the recipient, USAID expects to approve Annual Workplans, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) plans, and Key Personnel. Detailed breakdown of the envisioned division of roles and responsibilities between the

[9] Per USAID's Development Data Policy and the Public Access Plan, the research data, peer-reviewed publications, and technical manuscripts must also be deposited into or registered with USAID's Development Data Library (DDL) and the Development Exchange Clearinghouse (DEC).

Recipient and USAID is as follows:

1. Subaward solicitation of Requests for Applications (RFAs):
    a. Role of USAID AOR (Substantial Involvement)
        i. Collaboratively, with the Recipient, identify topics of solicitation; and
        ii. Review (and approve as needed) RFA solicitation documents.
    b. Role of Prime Recipient:
        i. Collaboratively, with USAID, identify topics of solicitation;
        ii. Prepare solicitation documents. At a minimum, documents will include a clear description of the objectives, selection criteria, eligibility requirements, and appropriate deadlines. They will also request information on how the subrecipients will address gender inequality and environmental/climate issues (as applicable) in their activities. Where appropriate, they will state any expected cost share requirements of subrecipients;
        iii. Distribute and advertise solicitation. The Recipient will advertise the solicitation within the Network to inform appropriate groups who might be interested and have the organizational capability and geographic presence to effectively implement the program; and
        iv. Receive applications submitted in response to all solicitations and verify their responsiveness to the minimum criteria established for each solicitation, including prioritizing applications for USAID review and approval.
2. Review and Selection Process:
    a. Role of USAID (Substantial Involvement):
        i. Assist with selection of subawardee when funded through M/B/IO buy-in;
        ii. Approve Prime's selection of subawardee(s).
    b. Role of Prime Recipient:
        i. Determine eligibility of applicants to receive subaward;
        ii. Evaluate each application against identified evaluation criteria;
        iii. Select one or more applications that represent the most likely to successfully achieve the desired outcome and present the application(s) to USAID for review. As a consideration, the Prime should look highly on applications that leverage existing equipment, programs, data, and other resources;
        iv. One or more representatives from the Recipient will participate in any necessary technical reviews and will summarize discussions and key points; and
        v. Prepare a budget analysis to determine reasonable costs
3. Execution of subawards/subcontracts:
    a. Role of USAID (Substantial Involvement):
        i. Provide administrative and financial support as needed by Prime Recipient;
        ii. Approve all formal subawards.
    b. Role of Prime Recipient:
        i. Determine financial viability and that accounting procedures meet the General Accepted Accounting Principles for selected applicants;
        ii. If requested by a USAID M/B/IO, provide technical assistance to upgrade the capacity of recipients to receive and manage USAID funds;

iii. Include USAID-defined requirements and processes for data collection and reporting as defined in ADS 579; and
iv. Execute subawards for successful applicants, including monitoring compliance and all relevant standard provisions with the requirements.

4. Management of subawards/subcontracts
    a. Role of USAID (Substantial Involvement):
        i. Review and approval of final technical deliverables provided by subaward/subcontract recipients to the Prime recipient[10].
    b. Role of Prime Recipient:
        i. Track the timelines and completeness of submissions of both financial and technical reports;
        ii. Collect and review reports with data results from subrecipient and submit them to USAID;
        iii. Assist subrecipients in meeting financial reporting requirements; and
        iv. Coordinate with the AOR and USAID M/B/IOs in the event of administrative or financial issues related to the subawards;
        v. Ensure appropriate USAID branding and marking, USAID Development Data policy, Public Access plan guidelines, and all other required provisions of the Cooperative Agreement are followed.
5. General Program Oversight
    a. Role of USAID (Substantial Involvement):
        i. Review and approve the annual Workplan and Workplan Budget (to be disaggregated by sub-activities/buy-ins so that work and budgets can be tracked at the M/B/IO level);
        ii. In collaboration with USAID M/B/IO's, the Recipient, and other stakeholders, monitor technical quality and objective achievements of subawards;
        iii. Conduct post-Award monitoring activities (regular phone calls with the AOR, site visits as needed, etc.); and
        iv. Provide guidance to the Recipient on budgetary issues such as subaward/subcontract funding.
    b. Role of Prime Recipient:
        i. Participate in meetings, events, and partnership activities that enhance the ability of the recipient to effectively manage the award; and
        ii. Complete reporting requirements and participate in Award monitoring activities.

5. Management and Key Personnel

The Prime recipient will maintain appropriate contracting, financial, and quality assurance systems and structures for implementing the project. These systems will be designed to contain costs and provide an optimal balance between research question identification, research subawards/subcontracts, and research translation activities. Applicants are requested to propose specific key personnel for the positions listed below in addition to a comprehensive staffing plan that demonstrates a balance of skills that will support the achievement of LASER's objectives and results. The staffing pattern should reflect the minimum number of highly experienced technical

[10] When merited by appropriate intellectual input into research design and/or manuscript drafting, USAID staff should be listed as co-authors on primary literature.

staff sufficient to conduct activities anticipated under this award. The staffing level and pattern may be modified over time if needed to provide effective support to field programs as they evolve. USAID understands that some of the LASER functions (i.e., logistics of stakeholder meetings, technical support, communications, etc.) may be managed by subcontractors/subawardees proposed as a part of the application or post-Award. Any changes to the Key Personnel identified below will require USAID approval.

A total of four (4) key administrative LASER personnel are envisioned: the Program Director, Technical Director, Knowledge Management and Performance Monitoring Team Leader, and Research Translation / Communications Specialist.

Program Director (FT): The Program Manager will have overall responsibility for coordination of all project activities and staff. They will have principal responsibility for representation of the project to USAID. They will be responsible for strategic direction and management, as well as mobilizing research networks and relevant assets within and across development partners. They ensure that resources are allocated and used in compliance with agreement requirements, applicable USG regulations, and appropriate standards and procedures. They will cultivate open and collaborative management relationships with the project team at USAID/Washington, as well as with the sister project RTAC.

Experience and qualifications for the LASER Program Director noted as follows:

- Master (Ph.D. preferred) degree in international affairs, public administration, public policy, or a related field. Ph.D. in other fields accepted with experience in managing development-related projects;
- Minimum ten (10) years' experience in a senior-level management position leading, managing, and implementing development-relevant projects with research components, preferably within a university context or with university partnerships;
- Minimum of five (5) years of supervisory experience required;
- Experience interacting with U.S. government agencies with experience managing U.S. government awards (contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements) strongly preferred.

Technical Director (FT): The Technical Director will be charged with primary management of the LASER research network, ensuring appropriate representation of female researchers, and researchers from MSIs and LMICs in the LASER network. They will also develop/promote opportunities for these subsets of researchers to participate in calls for RFAs. They will be responsible for managing day to day relationships with USAID M/B/IO's, Network members, and CDR. They will oversee the process instituted for research problem identification with primary responsibility for negotiating mutually beneficial project descriptions. They have primary responsibility to ensure the timely drafting, issuance, management, and reporting of subawards and/or contracts issued under the Cooperative Agreement. In the fulfillment of these responsibilities, it is anticipated that the Technical director may serve a managerial role with other staff hired as necessary. They should also be able to act for - or represent - the Project Director as necessary.

Experience and qualifications for the LASER Technical Director noted as follows:

- Ph.D. in natural sciences, social science, international affairs, public administration, public policy, quantitative methods, or a related field is required; or Master's Degree in other fields accepted with 5 years of experience in managing development-related research projects;

- Demonstrated success in managing multiple, development-relevant, research projects and successfully taking them to completion;
- Minimum of one (1) year of overseas field experience conducting research in one or more developing countries strongly desired;
- Must have facilitated research collaborations, with experience facilitating agreements with governments, private sector, or civil society preferred;
- Minimum of three (3) years supervisory experience.

Research Translation and Communications Lead (FT): Research Translation and Communication Lead will be responsible for identifying and promoting cutting-edge research and analysis translation techniques (both quantitative and qualitative) from the public and private sectors. They will ensure that LASER project data are mined systematically to generate and promote innovations and lessons that improve ongoing programming even as research and evidence are in the process of publication. They will create documents, presentations, trainings, and other outputs as necessary to promote effective translation of research learnings into formats that will inform USAID policy and practice and manage the communications strategy to make these learnings widely disseminated and used.

Experience and qualifications for the Research Translation and Communications Lead noted as follows:

- Master's Degree (or higher) in international affairs, public administration, public policy, communications, public relations, marketing, or a related field required;
- Demonstrated experience in supporting and creating a wide array of public media including, but not limited to: press releases, web materials, marketing videos, print media, graphic design and social media. Experience with science writing and science communication is strongly preferred;
- Demonstrated experience managing and/or facilitating events, small convenings, and forums of experts preferred;
- International experience is preferred.

Knowledge Management and Performance Monitoring Specialist (FT): The Knowledge Management and Performance Monitoring Specialist will be responsible for structuring, cataloguing, organizing, and disseminating research outputs including primary research, datasets, and research translation products. This includes ensuring that LASER research documents and datasets are on USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) and Data Development Library (DDL) as required by USAID policy. Additionally they have responsibility for the LASER MEL Plan (see below) and managing performance metrics outlined in the Cooperative Agreement as well as those written in subsequent individual projects co-created with USAID M/B/IO's. It is anticipated that the Knowledge Management and Performance Monitoring Lead work closely with the Research Translation specialist in the fulfillment of these activities.

Experience and qualifications for the Knowledge Management and Monitoring and Evaluation Lead noted as follows:

- Bachelor's Degree (or higher) in international affairs, public administration, public policy, program evaluation, quantitative or qualitative methods, or a related field required;
- Minimum of three (3) years of experience leading monitoring and evaluation support for projects of similar size and scope to this proposed scope is required

6. Performance Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan

USAID seeks data and information to improve program performance and the effectiveness of the programs and activities to inform planning and management. Within two months of award, the Recipient will be asked to present an overall Performance Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan to the AOR for approval. This Plan should include indicators and benchmarks as well as program learning questions that will be tracked throughout program implementation and used to modify administration as needed. Through biannual and annual reporting, the Recipient will be asked to report on achievement of indicators and progress towards meeting benchmarks. USAID will provide access to virtual reporting platforms as appropriate and provide instructions for the Prime as to how indicator and data shall be provided. The Recipient will include a process to track and share subaward deliverables and budget and pipeline updates with USAID. It is expected that, as one of their learning components, the Recipient will identify areas of effectiveness and best practices in establishing research partnerships with USAID M/B/IO's and translating research findings into usable formats and disseminate findings to the broader development community.

The plan must contain the components outlined in ADS 201 section 201.3.4.10: A. Activity MEL Plan. In addition, applicants are highly encouraged to utilize the MEL principles described in USAID's Monitoring (https://usaidlearninglab.org/content/monitoring-toolkit), Evaluation (https://usaidlearninglab.org/evaluation), and Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) (https://usaidlearninglab.org/cla-toolkit) toolkits in the preparation of their MEL plans. Specifically, within the MEL plan, it is suggested that the Prime Recipient:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the Theory of Change underlying their proposed activities. A theory of change is a description or illustration (diagram) of how and why the project purpose is expected to be achieved through the proposed implementation plan.

2. Propose an evaluation framework: The Prime Recipient should propose an evaluation framework, following the principles outlined in USAID's Evaluation Policy, that integrates with their monitoring plan to assure that the needed data will be collected throughout the life of the award. This framework should include proposed definitions of success, evaluation questions to be answered, and processes for ensuring that potential external evaluators are able to contribute to and receive information from the planned implementation approach. USAID will verify that the planned evaluations appropriately address the goals and outcomes of this RFA and are appropriately represented in the budget.

3. Outline an adaptive learning approach: The Prime Recipient should outline the administrative processes that they will employ to ensure that award monitoring and evaluation data is utilized to adapt and improve award implementation with respect to maximizing the impact of program outputs. USAID retains the right to approve of any changes made in workplan implementation resulting from this process.

Performance indicators of interest to USAID will address the:

- Description of the researchers responding to individual RFAs (disaggregated by sex, geography (U.S., LMIC), and institution type (MSI, non-MSI));
- Success of the research question identification process;
- The number and bibliographic characteristics of primary research articles resulting from research funded through LASER;

- Research translation products created by LASER. These are documents and presentations designed to make primary literature more accessible and relevant to policy makers, development practitioners, and the public. Examples include policy briefs, 1-pagers, literature reviews, trainings, etc.;
- Financial resources applied to LMIC human and institutional capacity building
- Individuals or higher education institutions in developing countries for whom the Prime has provided capacity-building support as it relates to generating, translating, or disseminating research products; and
- Instances where LASER outputs are used by development actors (government officials, donors, private organizations, etc.) to inform, validate, or modify policy and/or activity implementation

[END SECTION A]

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SECTION B: FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

1. Estimate of Funds Available and Number of Awards Contemplated

Subject to funding availability, USAID anticipates providing up to $70,000,000 in total USAID funding over a five (5) year period (estimated up to $14,000,000 per year). Within that amount, and subject to the availability of funds, core funds from **CDR/HESN 2.0 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/IO's) based on their programmatic needs. 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. USAID anticipates that the remainder of the core funds will cover operating, management, and implementation costs of the LASER Award, including the management and support of a broad international network of researchers and HEIs available to identify and respond to key research questions. All final funding amounts are subject to availability of funds each year. USAID intends to award **one Cooperative Agreement** pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity. **USAID reserves the right to fund more or fewer applications than that estimate.**

2. Start Date and Period of Performance for Federal Awards

The period of performance anticipated herein is five (5) years. The estimated start date will be upon the signature of the award, currently estimated to be June 27th, 2018 (subject to change).

3. Substantial Involvement

USAID specifically anticipates reserving the right to approve the Recipient's Implementation Plan (Workplan), approve any changes to Key Personnel as laid out in the application/initial award, and engage in Agency and Recipient "joint collaboration and participation." USAID is expected to be involved in the solicitation, selection, execution, management, and program oversight of subawards managed through this award. Specifically, USAID M/B/IO's are expected to participate in technical review and evaluation of applications, give final approval for subawards/contracts, review technical and progress reports, and monitor the technical quality and achievements of activities. A detailed breakdown of division of roles and responsibilities between the Recipient and USAID can be found within the program description in Section A, under Substantial Involvement by USAID.

4. Title to Property

Property title under the resultant agreement shall vest with the recipient in accordance with the requirements of 2 CFR 200.310-316.

5. Authorized Geographic Code

The geographic code for this program is 937 (the United States, the recipient country, and developing countries other than advanced developing countries, but excluding any country that is a prohibited source) for the procurement of commodities and services.

6. Purpose of the Award

The principal purpose of the relationship with the Recipient under the subject program is to transfer funds to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation of the objectives herein which are authorized by Federal statute. The successful Recipient will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of the program objectives and the efficient and effective administration of the award through the application of sound management practices. The Recipient will assume responsibility for administering Federal funds in a manner consistent with underlying agreements, program objectives, and the terms and conditions of the Federal award. The Recipient using its own unique combination of staff, facilities, and experience, has the primary responsibility for employing whatever form of sound organization and management techniques may be necessary in order to assure proper and efficient administration of the resulting award.

[END OF SECTION B]

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SECTION C: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants

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." In accordance with 2 CFR 700.13 no funds will be paid as profit to any for-profit entity receiving or administering Federal financial assistance as a recipient or subrecipient. USAID welcomes applications from organizations which have not previously received financial assistance from USAID. Applicants must have established financial management, monitoring and evaluation processes, internal control systems, and policies and procedures that comply with established U.S. Government standards, laws, and regulations. The successful applicant will be subject to a responsibility determination assessment (Pre-award Survey) by the Agreement Officer (AO). The Recipient must be a responsible entity. The AO may determine a pre-award survey is required to conduct an examination that will determine whether the prospective recipient has the necessary organization, experience, accounting and operational controls, and technical skills – or ability to obtain them – in order to achieve the objectives of the program and comply with the terms and conditions of the award.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

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.

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]

SECTION D: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. 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.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

The application process is a two-stage process (detailed below).

Stage One: Concept Note

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, 2017 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.

Concept Note Format
Concept notes are limited to 5 typed pages. Applicants shall use a page format of 8.5 inch by 11 inch with 1-inch margins and line spacing of 1.5 lines. Applicants must use Times New Roman font, size 11 or a similar size typeset. A page in the application which contains a table, chart, graph, etc., not otherwise excluded below, is subject to the 5-page limitation. Information submitted as part of the Concept Note over 5 pages, and not specifically excluded in the notes below, will not be evaluated.

Specifically, the Concept Note must include the following:

1. **Cover page** (not to exceed **1** page): Must include the following information (not included in 5 page limit):
    a. Title of Proposed Program;
    b. Institution Name and address of Prime HEI;
    c. Lead point of contact & alternate point of contact for questions pertaining to the application (contact name, telephone number, and email information);
    d. Other Organizations: Name and Country Location for any partners considered as Consortia Partners or official Subawardees to the Application. Note: This list should be limited to organizations joining the lead HEI in implementing LASER and who will receive formal subaward budgets and/or scopes of work based on the applicant's proposed technical approach and cost application. The list should not include those organizations or individuals who are going to serve as a part of the ensuing LASER Network.
2. **Program Concept Note** (not to exceed **5** pages): Using the structure outlined for the full technical narrative, please summarize the proposed technical approach and highlight how that approach will achieve the goals, purposes, and characteristics described in this RFA. Please pay particular attention to:
    a. How the applicant proposes to engage, partner with, and/or build the capacity of researchers or institutions in LMIC's to participate in research problem identification, funding, and translation; and
    b. 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.
3. **Concept Note Budget Summary** (not to exceed **1** page, not included in 5 page limit): Budget summary table detailing major anticipated program expenses and stating the total funding requested from USAID as well as the total funding anticipated to be secured by the applicant from its own or other sources (state sources, amounts and type of additional support for the proposed program. Budget is to be in US dollars (US$)).
4. **Appendix to the Concept Note** (Optional, not to exceed 1 page) List of all HEI-affiliated individuals or organizations proposed to be included in the initial LASER Network.

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.**

Stage 2: Full Application

Applicants are expected to review, understand, and comply with all aspects of the RFA.

Preparation of Applications: Each Applicant shall furnish the information required by this RFA. Applications shall be submitted in two separate parts: (a) Technical Application, and (b) Cost/Business Application. Applicants who include data that they do not want disclosed to the public for any purpose or used by the U.S. Government except for evaluation purposes, should mark the title page with the following legend: "This application includes

data that shall not be disclosed outside the U.S. Government and shall not be duplicated, used, or disclosed – in whole or in part – for any purpose other than to evaluate this application. If, however, a grant is awarded to this Applicant as a result of – or in connection with – the submission of this data, the U.S. Government shall have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the resulting grant. This restriction does not limit the U.S. Government's right to use information contained in this data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained in sheets {insert sheet numbers}" and, mark each sheet of data it wishes to restrict with the following legend: "Use or disclosure of data contained on this sheet is subject to the restriction on the title page of this application."

Applicants should retain for their records a copy of the application and all enclosures which accompany it.

Application Submission Procedures
All applications must be submitted electronically through the LASER Application Intake portal found at either https://usaid-hesn.forms.fm/LASER or http://www.hesn2.org/laser. ***Please not that full applications submitted without invitation will not receive consideration.***

All applications received by the submission deadline will be reviewed for responsiveness to the RFA and the application format. It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure that all necessary documentation is complete and received on time. Successful applicants from the concept note phase (approximately 10 applicants anticipated) will be given a deadline for the full application when they receive the request for the full application (USAID anticipates sending requests for full applications within 60 days of Concept Note submission).

Late applications will not be considered for award. No additions or modifications will be accepted after the submission date. USAID is not responsible for late or incomplete submissions.

Unnecessarily Elaborate Applications – Unnecessarily elaborate brochures or other presentations beyond those sufficient to present a complete and effective application in response to this RFA are not desired and may be construed as an indication of the applicant's lack of cost consciousness. Elaborate artwork, expensive visual and other presentation aids are neither necessary nor wanted.

Content and Format of Application Submission
In accordance with 5 CFR 1320, which implements the Paperwork Reduction Act, USAID requires an electronic submission of the application. **If invited to submit a full application,** applicants must submit the following forms IAW Applications for Federal Assistance, as follows:

(1) SF-424 - Application for Federal Assistance,
(2) SF-424A –Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs,
(3) SF-424B – Assurances – Non-Construction Programs, and
(4) Certifications, assurances, and other statements

Technical Application Format (Full Application Stage)
The technical application should be specific, complete, and presented concisely. The application should demonstrate the applicant's capabilities and expertise with respect to achieving the goals of this program. Technical applications should take into account requirements of the program and evaluation criteria found in this RFA. Pages in excess of the stated limitation will not be considered. The technical application section is

comprised of factors relating to the applicant's ability to perform in accordance with the scope outlined in Section A. The response must demonstrate a clear understanding of the work to be undertaken, the applicant's proposed approach to completing that work, and the responsibilities of all parties involved in the proposed approach.

Technical applications are limited to 20 (twenty) pages (any pages beyond 20 will NOT be evaluated). Technical applications shall be written in English on Letter size (8.5" x 11" paper) and typed using Minimum 11 font size (12 preferred) with each page numbered consecutively, and submitted in a recent Windows-compatible version of MS Word (version 2000 or later) or PDF format. Spreadsheets must be unlocked MS Excel (version 2000 or later) format. Applications must be legible. Pages that contain a table, chart, graph, etc. that are not otherwise excluded below are subject to the 20 page limitation. Double sided pages count as 2 pages. To facilitate the review of applications, narrative portions of applications should be organized in the same order as they appear below and, if possible, they should be merged and submitted to USAID as one, combined PDF document:

1. **Cover Page (1page):** The cover page shall include:
    a. Name and address of Prime HEI;
    b. Title of proposed program; total dollar amount of funds requested;
    c. Point of contact with the authority to negotiate and sign on behalf of the applicant. The person's name (both typed and his/her signature), title or position in the organization, email and postal addresses, telephone and fax numbers should be included.
    d. (if applicable) A summary table that lists the Prime HEI and any proposed Consortium partners (organizations that will partner with the lead in implementing LASER) as well as the percentage of overall program activities of each partner.
2. **Executive Summary (1 page):** Provide a concise summary of the Applicant's program description, program methodology and expected results.
3. **Technical Narrative (15 pages)**
    a. Approach: Please describe your proposed plan to accomplish the following technical needs:
        i. Formation and curation of a technically and geographically diverse network of university researchers, centers, and institutions
            1. Internal processes for advertising, selecting, tracking, and allocating costs for individual projects under the Award, as well as tracking M/B/IO requests and Network member participation in responding to USAID needs
            2. Plan to ensure participation of females and individuals from MSI and LMIC institutions.
            3. Ability to support and strengthen capacity of local researchers and LMIC higher education institutions.
            4. Process to ensure researchers and organizations can be continuously added to the network and invited to apply for various research opportunities regularly and as needed. (USAID reserves the right to suggest participants or organizations for potential inclusion the Network).
            5. List of proposed initial Network members in the application package (See required attachments below). This list should include universities and researchers (U.S.-based and overseas) that have technical and sectoral expertise in the areas in which USAID works. Organizations and individuals included in this list must have a verifiable interest/commitment to working with the Prime Recipient

should the Applicant be the successful Award winner. If a university is listed in one application as a potential Network member, that does not preclude that university/organization from submitting their own application as Prime Recipient or being listed as a partner in a separate consortium application.

ii. Identification of key research questions: Applicants should describe an approach to identifying key development challenges and proposing research solutions to address those challenges. Applicants should discuss how they will involve other development actors, local stakeholders (e.g. impacted communities, government officials), and Network institutions in this process. This process should account for:
    1. Applicant-driven identification of key research questions that have been insufficiently addressed in international development research
    2. Assistance to USAID M/B/IO's in the discovery and refinement of development research questions related to their specific development needs

iii. Funding of research awards to Network members:
    1. Development or use of a digital system (IT based) and process to solicit and receive targeted expressions of interest/applications from Network members, in response to both USAID M/B/IO's research interests and applicant-driven identification of key development research questions.
    2. Plan to provide logistical and facilitative support in preparation of project description documents as co-created between an M/B/IO and the selected researcher.
    3. Plan to provide ongoing operational support to the researcher and M/B/IO throughout the execution of the PD including; travel documentation, financial management, communications, quarterly reporting to CDR, and any management of any other required approvals as directed by USAID.

iv. Translation of research findings into policy briefs with relevant political/social contexts and actionable policy or programmatic recommendations:
    1. Expertise and approach in translating technical research findings into non-technical, easy to understand formats and actionable recommendations in consultation with the researcher and the USAID M/B/IO.
    2. Approach to preserving LASER outputs on an easily accessible repository (potentially in collaboration with RTAC) to support Agency employees, Missions, and others in translating research to action.
    3. Plan to coordinate with successful RTAC Applicant to cross-post and distribute research results, policy documents, and recommendations on the established RTAC website.

b. Management Plan: Applicants must provide a management plan that reflects their organizational structure, detailing how their proposed approach will be managed. This should include details about the administrative and technical aspects of the management of this approach. If applying as a Consortium, please outline the specific role of each organization in the Consortium. The Management Plan should include the following sections:

i. Proposed Management Team: Applicants must submit details about the proposed management team (including but not limited to the Key Personnel), including background, qualifications, and past experiences that demonstrate the individual's ability

to successfully fulfill the designated role. Applicants should provide 2-page (max) resumes of the proposed management team through hyperlink or as attachments. Long-form academic curriculum vitaes (CV) should be summarized in resume form.

ii. Proposed first-year implementation plan: Applicants must propose an implementation plan that will allow for rapid initial stand-up of the organization and the associated network. Applicants must provide a proposed first-year implementation plan in matrix format which describes proposed activities such as the launch of RFAs, convenings, outreach and network expansion, etc. and when they will take place. First-year implementation plan, inputs, outputs, and measurable outcomes should be realistic and achievable within the proposed budget and timeframe and reflect a grasp of the necessary steps to ensure efficient, effective execution of program activities. The plan should also allow for the Prime to quickly respond to evolving USAID research needs.

iii. Proposed data management plan, including a process to ensure that data and corresponding intellectual works are made public through USAID DDL and the DEC, respectively.

iv. Monitoring and Learning Plan: As part of the review process, applicants will be evaluated on the extent to which the application proposes a monitoring, evaluating, and learning plan that facilitates adaptive program management. In this section the applicant must:

1. Outline the processes that they will employ to ensure that award monitoring and evaluation data is utilized to adapt and improve award implementation;
2. Describe their plan to identify best practices in establishing research partnerships with USAID M/B/IO's and translating research findings into usable format;
3. Delineate their approach to dissemination of findings to the broader development community.

4. **Institutional Capabilities (5 pages):** Applicants will be evaluated based on institutional capabilities and competency. If applying as a consortium, the relevant contributions of all partner members should be included in the context of how they increase the ability of the Prime Applicant to successfully achieve the stated work plan. Please include:
   a. 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;** and a
   b. Concise description of the Applicant’s capacity to identify prospective partners (higher education institutions, NGOs, businesses and government), build viable and sustainable partnerships, and engage and/or work to strengthen local stakeholders and higher education institutions. USAID is especially interested in capacity to develop strong linkages and capacity-building support for a diverse group of local organizations (including minority-led organizations) and individuals that can increase the likelihood that research products can be taken-up and disseminated to local decision-makers.
5. **Past Performance (1 page):** An Applicant’s history of performance can serve as an indicator of the quality of its future performance. The Applicant should summarize their success in implementing programs of similar size and scope, including: quality of product or service (including consistency in meeting goals and targets), schedule (including timeliness of performance), cost control, business relations, and management of key personnel. This can include a description of both the Prime and any consortium member/partner experience. This section should summarize the more detailed past

performance information provided in Section 6c (see Attachments section below) and as such should not exceed 1 page.

6. **Attachments (includes supporting information for the technical narrative as needed) (be concise; 20 pages maximum)** Required attachments include:
    a. **Memorandum of understanding** (if applicable) from each consortia partner[11] that conveys the partner's support for the program and the ways in which the partner will participate in and advance the implementation of the program. For the purpose of this RFA, consortia is defined as a single prime recipient organization that intends to partner with (i.e. issue subawards to) other organizations or entities to accomplish specific elements of the proposed approach. This memorandum of understanding should contain the following:
        i. Identify the name of the Consortium and its constituent members.
        ii. Identify the Prime Recipient of the Consortium who will have the authority to negotiate with the Government on behalf of the Consortium and who will represent the Consortium in dealing with the Government on administrative and financial matters.
        iii. Identify management and organizational structure of the Consortium (how decisions will be made, who has the authority to vote on what issues if voting is expected).
        iv. Describe procedures for disbursement of Government funds among Consortium members (i.e. issuance of subawards).
        v. Identify procedures for handling proprietary information and intellectual property rights.
        vi. Identify a procedure for dispute resolution among members, to include recourse if a member of the Consortium fails to comply with the agreement.
        vii. Discuss procedures for admitting new members into the Consortium and circumstances under which existing members may leave the Consortium.
    b. **List of all currently agreed-to Network Partners** to include: higher education institution name, researcher name (if applicable), address, and technical and/or sectoral expertise. Please include a statement indicating that verifiable commitments exist from those HEIs and/or researchers to serve as subawardees on relevant work. Please disaggregate list of individual researchers by sex, institution type (MSI vs non-MSI), and geography (LMIC vs non-LMIC) (NOTE: all potential Network Partners must be clearly notified that agreeing to be listed as Network Partners on an application in no way indicates a guarantee of future funding under the application, even if the application is successful.)
    c. **Past Performance Information** (<1 page per contract/award): USAID must evaluate the risks posed by Applicants before making an award in accordance with the principles established by USAID and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (see 2 CFR 200.205). The Applicant must describe all its cost-reimbursement contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements, **involving similar or related programs,** during the past three years using the attached Past Performance Information (PPI) Template (see Appendix A in Section H of this RFA). If the Applicant has not served as the Prime for **a relevant contract or agreement** in the past three years, the Applicant may submit the PPI form for any relevant contracts on which the Applicant has served as a sub-contractor/subawardee in the past three years (please note this clearly on the submission). Performance information will be used for both the responsibility determination and best value

[11] The MOU for the consortia (if applicable) should be limited to organizations that will receive formal subaward budgets and scopes of work based on the applicant's proposed technical approach and cost application and should not include those organizations who are going to be included in the LASER Network and available for potential future work.

decision. In addition to the information supplied by the Applicant, USAID will utilize existing databases of contractor performance information (including the Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS)) and the Contracting Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS) to assess past performance when possible. USAID reserves the right to contact the references provided and to solicit additional information from other sources if and when the LASER Agreement Officer finds the available information to be insufficient for evaluating an Applicant's performance.

d. **Branding Strategy and Marking Plan** (max 5 pages)
    i. The application should include a well-defined Branding Strategy describing how the program, project, or activity is named and positioned, promoted and communicated to beneficiaries and cooperating country citizens, and identifies how donors will be acknowledged.
    ii. The application should include a well-defined Marking Plan, which details the public communications, commodities, program materials, and other items that will visibly bear the USAID identity.

Cost Application (Full Application Stage)

The Cost or Business Application portion of the Full Application shall be submitted separately from the technical application. Certain documents are required to be submitted by an applicant in order for the AO to make a determination of responsibility. The following sections describe the documentation that applicants for an Assistance award must submit to USAID prior to award. While there is no page limit for this portion, applicants are encouraged to be as concise as possible, but still provide the necessary detail to address the following:

1. Include a budget with an accompanying budget narrative which provides, in detail, the total costs for implementation of the program your HEI is proposing.
    a. The budget must be submitted in Excel format with unlocked cells to enable USAID to check the formulas and calculations included.
    b. In addition, a summary of the budget must be submitted using Standard Form 424 and 424A.
    c. The following major line items with a budget narrative must be included. Each major line item must be supported by detailed breakdowns of each expected sub-expense under that line:
        i. Personnel
        ii. Fringe Benefits
        iii. Anticipated Travel
        iv. Equipment
        v. Supplies
        vi. Other
        vii. Total Direct Costs
        viii. Indirect Costs
        ix. TOTAL COSTS
    d. The breakdown of all costs associated with the program by Recipient and any identified consortium partners or subawardees.
    e. A detailed level of effort estimate must be included for 4 key personnel. Other non-key personnel costs should be estimated based on the estimated number of full- and part-time staff needed to successfully enable the applicant to complete the major technical needs identified in Section A3.

f. Please provide a breakdown of all anticipated other direct costs (i.e. the amount, type, and unit cost with as much detail as possible). Note: The AO may request additional detailed budget information, particularly for responsibility determination, following notification to an applicant that it is under consideration for an award. If necessary, the AO may conduct discussions to verify cost data, evaluate specific elements of costs, and examine data to determine the necessity, reasonableness and allocability of the costs reflected in the budget and their allowability pursuant to the applicable cost principles. The AO may require other information to determine responsibility and cost efficiency.

2. A copy of the latest Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) for the Prime (if your organization has such an agreement with the US Government);
3. Applicants which do not currently have a NICRA from their cognizant agency may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely **or** applicants may submit the following information in support of their proposed indirect cost rate:
    a. Copies of the applicant's financial reports for the previous 3-year period, which have been audited by a certified public accountant or other auditor satisfactory to USAID;
    b. Projected budget, cash flow and organizational chart; and
    c. A copy of the organization's accounting manual.
4. Required certifications, assurances, and other statements[12]. These forms include:
    a. Part I – Certifications and Assurances
        1. Assurance of Compliance with Laws and Regulations Governing Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs
        2. Certification Regarding Lobbying
        3. Prohibition on Assistance to Drug Traffickers for Covered Countries and Individuals (ADS 206)
        4. Certification Regarding Terrorist Financing, Implementing Executive Order 13224
        5. Certification Regarding Trafficking in Persons, Implementing Title XVII of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013
        6. Certification of Recipient

    Part II – Key Individual Certification Narcotics Offenses and Drug Trafficking

    Part III – Participant Certification Narcotics Offenses and Drug Trafficking

    Part IV – Representation by Organization Regarding a Delinquent Tax Liability or a Felony Criminal Conviction

    Part V – Other Statements of Recipient
        1. Authorized Individuals
        2. Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN)
        3. Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number
        4. Letter of Credit (LOC) Number
        5. Procurement Information
        6. Past Performance References
        7. Type of Organization
        8. Estimated Costs of Communications Products

[12] Required only for applicants who are invited to submit a full application. Please see https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/303sad.pdf for more information on these certifications, assurances, and other statements.

Part VI – Standard Provisions for Solicitations

1. Branding Strategy – Assistance (June 2012)
2. Marking Plan – Assistance (June 2012)
3. Conscience Clause Implementation (Assistance) – Solicitation Provision (February 2012)
4. Prohibition on Providing Federal Assistance to Entities that Require Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements – Representation (May 2017)

F. **Prime applicants that have never received a Cooperative Agreement, grant or contract from the U.S. Government are required to submit a copy of their accounting manual.**

G. Cost Sharing: The Applicants should estimate the amount of cost-sharing resources to be mobilized over the life of the agreement and specify the sources of such resources, and the basis of calculation in the budget narrative. Applicants should also provide a breakdown of the cost share (financial and in-kind contributions) of all organizations involved in implementing the resulting Cooperative Agreement. It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure that all necessary documentation is complete and received on time.

H. DUNS Number and System for Award Management (SAM). USAID may not award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements. Therefore each applicant at the full application stage is required to:

i. Be registered in SAM before submitting its full application;
ii. Provide a valid DUNS number in its application; and
iii. Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. It also must state that the Federal awarding agency may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the Federal awarding agency is ready to make a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

Funding Restrictions: USAID policy is not to award profit under assistance instruments. However, all reasonable, allocable and allowable expenses, both direct and indirect, which are related to the agreement program and are in accordance with applicable cost principles under 2 CFR 200 Subpart E. of the Uniform Administrative Requirements may be paid under the anticipated award. Construction is not eligible for reimbursement under this award. Further, the award does not allow for the reimbursement of pre-award costs.

Other Information: Award will be made to a responsible applicant whose application best meets the requirements of this RFA and the selection criteria contained herein. Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government, nor does it commit the Government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of a concept note or full application. In addition, final award of any resultant award cannot be made until funds have been fully appropriated, allocated, and committed through internal USAID procedures. While it is anticipated that these procedures will be successfully completed, potential applicants are hereby notified of these requirements and conditions for award. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant; should circumstances prevent award of a Cooperative Agreement, all preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

[END OF SECTION D]

SECTION E: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Review and Selection Process

The application will be evaluated in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth below and must be evaluated as technically acceptable in each area in order to be eligible for award. In each criteria area, the application will be scored (adjectival) and ranked on how it meets the evaluation criteria set forth. **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.**

Within 60 calendar days following the submission of the Concept Note, USAID anticipates requesting full applications from applicants that meet the evaluation criteria outlined below **AND** 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.**

Within 45 calendar days following the submission deadline for the full application, USAID anticipates responding to selected applicant(s) with technical and cost questions, following which the applicant(s) will have the opportunity to submit revised applications. USAID will then hold a final review of the application(s) and anticipates notifying the successful Applicant within 45 calendar days of receipt of revised applications.

2. Criteria

A. Technical Evaluation

USAID will conduct a merit review of all applications received that complies with the instructions in this RFA. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated in accordance with the following criteria shown in descending order of importance with factors 1 and 2 being more heavily weighted than 3:

Factor 1) Technical approach:

- The extent to which the proposed approach will successfully achieve the major goals of 1) identifying key development challenges, 2) co-designing and conducting high quality research activities to address those challenges and others identified by USAID M/B/IO's, and 3) translating the results of that research into development-relevant recommendations.
- 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.

Factor 2) Management Approach:

- The extent to which the applicant proposes a monitoring, evaluating and learning plan that 1) facilitates adaptive program management and 2) fulfills USAID reporting requirements, including USAID's open data and research policies and practices.
- 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;

Factor 3) Organizational Capabilities and Past Performance

- 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
- The extent to which the Applicant's past performance demonstrates success in implementing programs of similar size and scope, including: quality of product or service (including consistency in meeting goals and targets), schedule (including timeliness of performance), cost control, business relations, and management of key personnel.

B. Cost Evaluation: Cost is less important than the technical evaluation and is not weighted; however, the cost applications of the highest ranking technical applications will be evaluated. **Although a specific percentage of cost-share is not required, applications that include cost-share will be looked upon favorably when applications reach technical equivalence.** Other considerations are the completeness of the budget narrative and application, adequacy of budget detail and consistency with elements of the technical application. In addition, the organization must demonstrate adequate financial management capability, to be measured via a responsibility determination. The application with the lowest estimated cost may not be selected if award to a higher priced technical application offers a greater overall value to the Government. All evaluation factors other than cost or price, when combined, are significantly more important than cost. However, estimated cost is an important factor and the estimated cost to the Government increases in importance as competing applications approach technical equivalence, and may become the deciding factor when technical applications are approximately equivalent in merit. Proposed costs may be adjusted, for purposes of evaluation, based on results of the cost analysis and its assessment of reasonableness, completeness, and credibility.

[END OF SECTION E]

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SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

1. Federal Award Notices

Award of the agreement contemplated by this RFA cannot be made until funds have been appropriated, allocated, and committed through internal USAID procedures. While USAID anticipates that these procedures will be successfully completed, potential applicants are hereby notified of these requirements and conditions for the award. The AO is the only individual who may legally commit the Government to the expenditure of public funds. No costs chargeable to the proposed Agreement may be incurred before receipt of either a fully executed Agreement or a specific, written authorization from the AO.

2. Administrative & National Policy Requirements

For U.S. organizations, 2 CFR 700, 2 CFR 200, and ADS 303maa, Standard Provisions for U.S. NGOs are applicable. For non-U.S. organizations, ADS 303mab, Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. NGOs will apply. For complete copies of 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 700, please also see ADS 303.4 and 303.5.

3. Reporting Requirements

Quarterly financial and biannual performance reporting are required. The types and frequency of financial and programmatic reports are detailed in 2 CFR 200. Additionally, awardees must submit copies of reports and other information to USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) and must register datasets on the Data Development Library (DDL) according ADS 579, as instructed by AOR.

Financial Reporting: In accordance with 2 CFR 200.327, Standard Form 425 (SF-425) and SF-425A (available at http://whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_forms/) are used to report accrued expenditures. Reporting periods are calendar quarters. Quarterly financial reports are due no later than 30 days after the end of each calendar quarter (January 30, April 30, July 30, and October 30). Bi-annual reports are due no later than 30 days at the end of each half fiscal year (usual due dates = April 30 and October 30). The final report is due no later than 90 days after the completion date of the entire award.

Performance Reporting: The Recipient will be provided with access to an electronic reporting platform to report performance progress for the program under the award. The Recipient will use this platform to monitor and track indicators as reviewed and agreed to with USAID on a biannual basis consistent with the principles of adaptive management described previously in Section A.6 of this RFA. A general bi-annual performance report template, in addition to the indicator reporting, will be provided by the AOR.

Program Income: No Program Income as defined in 2 CFR is expected. In the event that program income shall arise during the performance of the award it shall be used in accordance with 2 CFR 200.307 for U.S organizations or, for non-U.S. organizations, the provision "Program Income", and as directed by the AO and AOR.

Branding & Marking: The branding and marking plan shall be in accordance with 2 CFR 700.16 for U.S. organizations and the provision entitled Marking and Public Communications under USAID Funded Assistance". For more information on Branding Strategy and Marking Plan, please visit: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/320.pdf.

***Environmental Compliance*:** Activities within the scope of the categorical exclusions listed in 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2) do not require additional review once the Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO) confirms the applicability of categorical exclusions to specific activities. CDR has a signed Programmatic Initial Environmental Examination (PIEE) that documents that many of the proposed activities under LASER will be covered under 22 CFR Section 216.2(c)(2) as follows:

(i) Education, technical assistance, or training programs except to the extent such programs include activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.);

(ii) Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings. Activities outside of the scope of the approved categorical exclusions will require additional environmental review pursuant to 22 CFR Section 216.3.

Any new LASER activities or activities that fall outside of the scope of the approved PIEE for this Award will be reviewed by the BEO before work is approved.

Climate risk management (CRM) is the process of assessing, addressing, and adaptively managing climate risks. For USAID's purposes, climate risks are potential negative consequences on projects or activities due to changing climatic conditions. The goal of CRM is to both render USAID's work more climate resilient (i.e., better able to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to changing climate conditions and withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from disruptions) and to avoid maladaptation (i.e., development efforts that inadvertently increase climate risks). The Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE) on environmental impact analysis also incorporates climate risk considerations. The goal of CRM is to identify: 1) all climate risks that will be addressed through program design, 2) climate risks that will be addressed through implementation to the furthest extent possible, and 3) assess the need for further analysis later in the program cycle in order to further manage climate risks.

The AOR for any award will be responsible for initiating additional environmental review as appropriate, based on the specific planned activities under the award. The AOR will work closely with the Lab Program and Strategic Planning Office budget POC and with the Lab BEO to ensure that all activities either conform to the categorical exclusions listed in 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2) or undergo separate environmental review.

***Ensuring an Inclusive Approach*:** Throughout the implementation of this Cooperative Agreement, the Recipient must ensure an inclusive approach to both the selection of participants in the LASER network and the execution of research and translation of the research findings. Such actions should include (but are not limited to):

- Developing a plan to recruit female researchers and researchers from MSIs and LMICs to the LASER network, as part of the Recipient's implementation plan;
- Ensuring that gender concerns have been identified (if applicable) and incorporated into research questions, as they are identified/refined;
- Incorporating gender concerns into research findings and program performance indicators (as appropriate)

Such considerations will be taken into account in evaluating applications, as described in the technical evaluation criteria above.

[END OF SECTION F]

SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT(S)

Trenae Bonner
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[END OF SECTION G]

SECTION H: OTHER INFORMATION

- USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the concepts and subsequent applications submitted.
- Past Performance Information requested should be submitted using Appendix I – Past Performance Information (PPI)Form

CERTIFICATIONS, ASSURANCES, OTHER STATEMENTS OF THE RECIPIENT AND SOLICITATION STANDARD PROVISIONS

The required certifications, assurances, and other statements required for submission can be retrieved at from the USAID ADS at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/303mav.pdf . All solicitation provisions in the aforementioned document apply to this Notice of Funding Opportunity and subsequent Requests for Application.

[END OF SECTION H]

[END OF 7200AA18RFA00004]

APPENDIX A: Past Performance Information (PPI) Form

1.	**Contract Number:**
2.	**Contractor (Name and Address):**
3.	**Type of Contract: Negotiated _____Sealed Bid _____Fixed Price _____** **Cost Reimbursement _____ Hybrid (explain) _____**
4.	**Complexity of Work: Difficult _____Routine _____**
5.	**Description, location, and relevancy of work:**
6.	**Contract Dollar Value: _____ Status: Active ____Completed _____**
7.	**Date of Award: _____** **Contract Completion Date (including extensions): _____**
8.	**Type and Extent of Subcontracting:**
9.	**Name, Address, Telephone Number, and E-mail Address of the Procuring Contracting Officer and/or the Contracting Officer 's Representative (and other references—e.g., Administrative Contracting Officer —if applicable):**