

**RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RELATED TO NOFO # 72049223RFA00001
USAID/Philippines' New Higher Education Activity**

1. Can USAID please confirm whether past performance references are required for sub-recipients, or only the prime applicant?

RESPONSE: Yes, sub-recipients' past performance references are required if the proposed sub-recipient will receive more than 20% of the total project cost, or has substantial contribution to the proposed award.

2. Can applicants use the standard USAID short form for PPRs, or does USAID have another preferred template for history of performance?

RESPONSE: Yes, applicants can use the standard USAID short form for PPRs or may provide alternative templates.

3. Would USAID consider making the Branding Strategy and Marking Plan a submission requirement for the Apparently Successful Offeror only?

RESPONSE: Branding and Marking Plan is required for all Applicants.

4. With regards to the \$3 million "Special Activities Fund" set aside noted on page 31 of the NOFO:
 - a. Is there a specific category under which the applicant needs to include this as one line item?

RESPONSE: The Special Activities Fund (SAF) should be kept as a lump sum.

- b. Or is the applicant able to break it out under multiple categories?

RESPONSE: No specific category, please keep it as a lump sum.

- c. Also, please confirm the \$3 million figure is inclusive of the related indirect costs. Applicants may have multiple indirect rates that would apply differently depending on the activities proposed during implementation, and it would be difficult to appropriately budget indirect costs for the Special Activities Fund otherwise.

RESPONSE: Please separate the indirect costs.

7. Under IR 1: Increased research, innovation, and entrepreneurship capacity of higher education institutions, do sub-IRs intend to provide interventions for specific sectors such as climate change and the "green" economy, health, agribusiness, manufacturing, and cybersecurity? Is it expected that the implementing partner would provide general support to universities in these areas for all disciplines? Innovation and entrepreneurship hubs are usually subject specific.

RESPONSE: The interventions do not need to be sector-specific. Applicants are expected to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. USAID encourages applicants to try and be responsive to priorities of the host government and USAID, as well as other local partners.

8. Could USAID specify whether the Draft Annual Implementation Plan on page 41 of the NOFO is for the first year of the project or a Life of Project plan? -

RESPONSE: The proposal should contain the general approaches to implementation for the life of the project, including overall targets and activities. The draft Annual Implementation Plan referenced is only for Year 1 of implementation.

9. Referencing the need to build on previous USAID investments and activities, we are unable to find annual or final reports on the STRIDE program more recent than the Annual report for 2019-2020. The 2021 final evaluation report details planned activities for 2020-2021 but does not provide a detailed report on activities. Given that the NHEA is intended to build upon STRIDE activities that occurred through mid-2022, could USAID kindly provide annual or final reports or other comprehensive activity reports for the 2020-2022 period so that applicants can be fully informed of the program's most recent activities and achievements?

Would USAID share a copy of the STRIDE final report, or a link to it, as it is not yet accessible on the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC)?

RESPONSE: Please see this link for the final report of STRIDE in the USAID website- https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZPWT.pdf . A copy has also been uploaded in the Development Experience Clearinghouse.

10. On page 25, USAID refers to "HEI-led and developed local labor market information systems..." in the context of past activities to build upon. Could USAID provide a reference to an activity report or evaluation of these activities?

RESPONSE: USAID/Philippines' YouthWorks has local stakeholders develop local labor market information systems with HEIs. Please see annual reports in the DEC.

11. On page 24, IR1 introduction, the NOFO indicates that the NHEA will support interventions that... "improve curricula and pedagogical approaches to align with local labor needs and provide student-centered learning;" among other activities. However, the results framework only appears to reference "*Improved curriculum for innovation and entrepreneurship*" (2.2) rather than more general efforts to improve curriculum and pedagogy in support of labor market participation.

Could USAID kindly clarify if it intends for NHEA to focus on an across-the-board approach to "improve curricula and pedagogical approaches to align with local labor needs and provide student-centered learning" and if so, under what sub-IR this should occur? Alternatively, if USAID intends that these improved curricula and pedagogical approaches should support result 2.2 only in the context of improved curriculum for innovation and entrepreneurship, could USAID please clarify this?

RESPONSE: The intent of the NHEA is to provide technical assistance to improve curriculums that will support the achievement of project goals. These improvements do not need to be confined to any specific IR or sub-IR. Applicants should propose relevant, innovative approaches and link these approaches to the overall goal and purpose of the activity. Therefore, curriculum improvements can both target very specific disciplines or sectors, as well as an overarching approach to improve capacity and offerings of higher education institutions.

12. Could USAID kindly provide a list of the eight already-established RIICs referenced in the RFA, or a link to such a list?

RESPONSE: Please see the STRIDE Final Annual Report ([link here](#)), or the STRIDE evaluation referenced in the NOFO.

13. Could USAID confirm whether a third-party firm is expected to conduct NHEA's performance evaluations over the life of the project?

RESPONSE: USAID intends to have a 3rd party performance evaluation for the NHEA.

14. Page 60 states that USAID expects "an assessment of impact of the program in assisting USAID in meeting targets, as well as any unmet targets and the reasons for them" in the final report. Can USAID please clarify whether an impact evaluation will be conducted by an external evaluator, or whether USAID anticipates an impact evaluation to be conducted by NHEA?

RESPONSE: While USAID intends to have a 3rd party performance evaluation (which may include an impact evaluation), the NHEA may also conduct studies on how its performance and activities contribute to the desired outcomes.

15. In the background section of the NOFO, USAID references the low level of qualification of university and college instructors and faculty (p.6). Could USAID confirm that NHEA's results framework does not encompass general improvement of faculty qualifications except in the context of Sub IR 1.1 *Increased research, innovation and entrepreneurship capacity for faculty and staff in HEI's*?

RESPONSE: See response to question number 11.

16. On page 29, the NOFO states that "The applicant shall propose metrics, tools and targets as well as qualitative and quantitative ways to gather data that shall inform USAID and its key stakeholders of progress.... All these shall be incorporated in a draft Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan to be submitted with the proposal." However, on page 32 it states that "Expected performance indicators, targets, baseline data, and data collection shall be included by the recipient in the monitoring, evaluation and learning plan to be submitted post award, and subject to approval of USAID." Please confirm that the targets should be submitted in the MEL plan post award and once the implementing partner meets with key stakeholders in the co-development workshop to validate and finalize the work plan, which will then drive the MEL plan.

RESPONSE: Applicants shall draft a proposed MEL plan to be incorporated with the application, which will be validated and finalized during the co-development workshop.

17. Section D.6(d) notes that the cost share (5% total estimated cost) should be budgeted for each itemized line item. However, the budget template provided in Annex 1 presents cost share as an annual estimated cost in one row. Will USAID confirm that applicants should budget for cost share as a single estimated annual figure, reflective of the budget template provided in the NOFO?

RESPONSE: USAID confirms applicants should budget for cost share as a single annual figure, reflective of the budget template provided in the NOFO.

18. On page 35, Section C.2, "Cost sharing or matching" requires that applicants must provide 5% of the projected total estimated amount in cost share. We agree with the need for partner buy-in and believe leveraging would better promote USAID's goal of sustainable development and localization, given the limitations of management demands surrounding cost share. The same goal can be accomplished via leverage and without the extensive cost share documentation requirements, which can be burdensome for local partners, especially government counterparts or local higher education institutions that may have limited resources and bandwidth.

Rather than requiring cost sharing/matching, would USAID consider requiring leveraging from applicants, which still fulfills the goal of sustainable development while promoting equitable participation from new local partners?

RESPONSE: Cost share is required. Applicants are also encouraged to propose additional sources of funding that would address the development objectives as leverage.

19. On page 46, the NOFO states that "The applicant must provide information regarding its recent history of performance for all its cost-reimbursement contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements involving similar or related programs, not to exceed five awards..."

Would USAID kindly consider increasing the number of awards to 10? This will allow applicants to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their history of performance, along with that of key partners.

RESPONSE: No.

20. RFA Reference: D. 5. G
Page Number: 41

Question: Can USAID/Philippines please provide offerors with Annex B: Climate Risk Screening of the CDCS?

RESPONSE: Please see <https://www.usaid.gov/philippines/cdcs/climate-change-analysis>

21. RFA Reference:D.5.G

Page Number: 41

Relevant RFA Language: Required Annexes [not included in page limit]. The following are the required annexes, and should be lettered (e.g. Annex A, Annex B, etc...)

- Draft Annual Implementation Plan (for validation during co-development workshop)
- Draft Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan (for validation during co- development workshop)
- Organizational Chart
- Curriculum Vitae of Key Personnel (up to 3 pages each) and other pertinent staff (management and technical personnel) named in the Organizational Chart
- Letters of Commitment from Key Personnel
- Draft Sustainability Plan
- Draft Communications Strategy Plan, including Branding Strategy and Marking Plan
- Draft Climate Risk Management Plan
- Draft Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Action Plan

Question: Will USAID consider allowing the Draft Communications Strategy Plan (including Branding Strategy and Marking Plan), Draft Sustainability Plan, and Draft Climate Risk Management Plan to be submitted by the Apparently Successful Applicant?

RESPONSE: These plans should be submitted together with the proposal, as it will indicate the ability of the applicant to understand and be responsive to the requirements in the areas under consideration (i.e. branding and marking, sustainability, and climate risk management.)

22. RFA Reference: E.2

Page Number: 50

Relevant RFA Language: History of Performance will be reviewed as part of the AO risk assessment process for satisfactory and relevant performance but will not be scored.

Question: Under Section E.2, page 50, it states “History of Performance will be reviewed as part of the AO risk assessment process for satisfactory and relevant performance but will not be scored.” Could USAID please confirm that the History of Performance should be submitted within the cost volume since it will be reviewed as part of the risk assessment and technical evaluation?

RESPONSE: Yes, History of Performance should be submitted within the cost volume and it will be reviewed as part of the risk assessment and technical evaluation.

23. RFA Reference: A. 3 Background, A. 4 Cross Cutting Considerations. A. 5 G Required Annexes

Page Number: 27, 41

Relevant RFA Language: “GESI will be a cross-cutting theme in all stages of higher education and will be maintained throughout activity implementation”

Question: Can USAID kindly provide the mission-specific gender strategy if it is available for offerors to reference?

RESPONSE: The gender strategy in the CDCS was drafted in 2018/2019, and the data is considered obsolete following the impacts of the pandemic. USAID is currently updating its gender data for its strategy review. Applicants are advised to source more current data on gender.

24. RFA Reference: A.3

Page Number: 31

Relevant RFA Language: Up to 10 percent (or \$3 million) of total USAID investment in the NHEA may be set aside for special activities that may not be covered by the program description or the annual implementation plan, as long as proposed activities are aligned with the overall program purpose or objective of the activity.

Question: Can USAID please confirm that Offerors are allowed to budget less than 10% of the total cost for the Special Activities Fund?

RESPONSE: It is advised that applicants budget the full amount for the Special Activities Fund, in case there is a need to utilize it. Not accounting for the full \$3 million and distributing this to other areas may impact those areas if there is a need to maximize the Special Activities Fund.

25. On page 40, the NOFO specifies a limit of two pages per curriculum vitae (CV) for each key personnel. However, on page 41, it says CVs can be "up to 3 pages each." Please confirm that CVs can be up to three pages.

RESPONSE: CVs must be up to 2 pages only for each proposed personnel.

26. RFA Reference: D.5 Technical Application Format

Page Number: Pg. 40 and pg. 41

Relevant RFA Language: Pg. 40: A two-page (maximum) Curriculum Vitae should be included for each of the identified key personnel, to be attached as an annex and not counted against the page limit. Pg. 41: Curriculum Vitae of Key Personnel (up to 3 pages each) and other pertinent staff (management and technical personnel) named in the Organizational Chart.

Question: Can USAID please confirm that CVs must be no more than 3 pages as stated on page 41?

RESPONSE: Please refer to response on Question No. 25.

27. The NOFO requests several cost documents from the applicant (e.g. Representations and Certifications, NICRA, etc.). Are these items required from proposed subrecipients/contractors, or only from the prime applicant?

RESPONSE: Representations and Certifications and NICRA (if applicable) are required from Prime Applicants. Please note the Apparent Successful Applicant will need to ensure appropriate clauses flow down to and representations are made by their subpartners during the award process.

28. USAID has stated on page 38 that there is a 5MB limit per file. Is there a MB limit per email for electronic submission?

RESPONSE: Yes there is a MB limit per email for the electronic submission. The RFP will be amended to read:

Each email transmission with attachments must not exceed 5MB. In addition, for an application sent by multiple emails, the subject line must also indicate whether the email relates to the technical or cost application, and the desired sequence of the emails and their attachments (e.g. "No. 1 of 4", etc.). For example, if your cost application is being sent in two emails, the first email should have a subject line that states: "[NOFO number], [organization name], Cost Application, Part 1 of 2".

29. On page 46, Section 6. g. states that UEIs must be provided for all proposed sub-recipients. Given experiences with delays, if a partner has applied and made all efforts to follow-up on incident reports, can they still be considered a part of the proposal, with their final inclusion pending securing a valid UEI?

RESPONSE: Yes, they may be included as they continue to pursue UEI registration.

30. Can USAID confirm that RAA31 for US NGOs is not applicable? –

RESPONSE: RAA 31 will be included in the amendment.

31. Section D.4 page 38 states *"USAID's preference is that the technical application and the cost application each be submitted as consolidated email attachments, e.g. that you consolidate the various parts of a technical application into a single document before sending it. If this is not possible, please provide instructions on how to collate the attachments."* In the case that consolidation is not possible, is there a limit on the number of attachments per email for the electronic submission?

RESPONSE : Refer to response No. 2.

32. Would USAID consider changing the font requirement for tables from 12 point to match the 10-point font requirement for graphs and charts?

RESPONSE: Requirement for tables remain for 12-point font. Yes, tables may utilize 10-point fonts.

33. RFA Reference: D.3

Page Number: 37

Relevant RFA Language: 10-point font can be used for graphs and charts. Tables, however, must comply with the 12 point Times New Roman requirement.

Question: Would USAID consider revising the table font size to 10-point to allow for a cleaner and more concise presentation of information? Specifically, this would align with instructions on page 41, which states that the Cost Volume should be as concise as possible.

RESPONSE: See response to page 32.

34. On page 41, Branding Strategy and Marking Plan is listed as an annex to the technical application. Similarly, it is listed on page 47 in the section for the business application. Please clarify whether this should go in the technical or cost application or both.

RESPONSE: The Branding Strategy and Marking Plan is to be attached to the Technical Application.