

Questions and Answers NOFO SFOP0005152 - “Improving Transparency – Strengthening Local Actors to Report on Crime and Corruption”

1. Is DOS considering canceling, postponing or otherwise modifying this solicitation in light of the escalating unrest and the safety concerns currently facing NGOs operating in Nicaragua?
 - At this moment INL Nicaragua is moving forward with this Notice of Funding Opportunity. We recognize the unique security situation in Nicaragua, and the additional harassment that some NGOs are facing in the country; however the topic is of even greater importance during this time. INL would appreciate the proposals to include a contingency plan to address the security situation. If there are any modifications in case of unrest and continued safety concerns, they could be negotiated once it is awarded.
2. What impact does DOS anticipate the current unrest will have on the ability of NGOs to design and/or implement this program, and what allowances might DOS make for any challenges that will be faced?
 - INL Nicaragua does not anticipate any impact on the design of the program; however, INL Nicaragua recognizes that there could be challenges during the implementation phase. If revisions to the approved scope of work are needed, INL Managua will work closely with the Grants Officer and the implementing partner to find a reasonable solution.
3. NOFO cover page 1: Assistance Type: Grant, however Section VI Federal Award Administration Information includes Substantial Involvement (for Cooperative Agreements only). Please clarify if grant is synonymous with Cooperative Agreement and the agency intends to award a Cooperative Agreement for this effort.
 - The assistance type for this NOFO is a grant. A grant is not the same as a cooperative agreement even though there are many similarities. INL Nicaragua in coordination with the Grants Office has monitoring responsibilities, but there will not be substantial involvement. The differences between a grant and a cooperative agreement are in the details of implementation (i.e., cooperative agreements come with “substantial involvement” from the federal agency). With a grant, the Federal awarding agency is awarding the recipient of the grant to implement the project but is not involved in carrying out the project activities.
4. Section VI, page 15: states that completed and signed SF 424 forms, submitted via grants.gov, however it also appears that applicants are required to register in SAMS Domestic, please confirm that applications for this NOFO shall be submitted via grants.gov
 - All grant applications should be submitted through grants.gov. Access to SAMS Domestic is required for the awarding process, and once awarded SAMS Domestic will be the home of the award file. All reports (quarterly, financial, and others required by INL), as well as any information relevant for the grant file will be uploaded to SAMS Domestic.

5. TAB C page 29: Budget Conditions and Restrictions, page 29, states that cost elements will not be reimbursed or allowable for Publication of materials for distribution within the U.S. Does this restriction apply Section VI, Reporting Requirements listed on page 36, please clarify.
 - The restriction is not applicable to the reporting requirements listed on page 36. The reports are submitted electronically via SAMS Domestic and also via email to the Grants Officer Representative.
6. Will INL allow applicants to use 10-point font for charts, tables and graphics in the proposal narrative?
 - INL recommends applicants follow the technical requirements. For charts, tables, and graphics included in the proposal, applicants may use a different size font. The text in the proposal should follow the technical specifications.
7. On pages 15-16 the NOFO describes what is required on the proposal cover page, including “name and number of the Target Themes to which the proposal responds.” Can INL clarify whether there is a list of specific Target Themes applicants should choose from (and if so, provide that list), or if applicants are meant to come up with their own Target Themes?
 - Applicants may come up with their own target themes as long as they respond to the proposal’s objectives and indicators.
8. On page 17, the NOFO states that “the recipient’s proposal should include the cost of an audit” and on page 29, that INL will consider budgeted line items for an “A-133 Audit or internal audit for the INL program (or prorated costs that is shared among other Federal Assistance grants/contracts).” For applicants that allocate the cost for an annual 2CFR200 Subpart F indirectly in accordance with their NICRA, does INL expect the applicants to also include the cost of a program-specific audit in the budget submission?
 - A program specific audit is recommended but it is only required for “A non-Federal entity that expends \$750,000 or more during the non-Federal entity's fiscal year in Federal awards, must have a single or program-specific audit conducted for that year, in accordance with the provisions of this part.”
9. On page 9, the NOFO lists example outcome and output indicators. Are applicants required to include all of these indicators as part of our proposal and M&E plan, or are they meant to be illustrative? If they are required, do the indicators have established definitions, or are applicants free to develop their own?
 - Applicants should provide indicators in their proposal. The indicators provided on page nine (9) of the NOFO are examples. As stated in the NOFO applicants “should propose appropriate outputs, indicators, and/or targets to fit the program’s objectives.”

10. On page 9, the NOFO states “certain terms included in the outcomes and indicators will need to be defined at the very beginning of the project so that it is possible to measure the change during and at the end of the project.” Can INL describe how they would like the applicant to define these terms and at what stage of the process the applicant should provide these definitions (within the proposal or post-award)?

- Please provide the definitions within the proposal, if possible.

11. On page 17, the NOFO lists the INL Pre Award Annual Survey as an attachment to submit with the proposal. Can INL please clarify whether all proposal applicants are required to submit a filled-out survey? There is no indication that selection of the awardee will be based on recipient risk, nor is it typical for a pre-award survey to be requested from applicants at the proposal stage, so we would like to confirm.

- Applicants must submit a filled out INL Pre Award Annual Survey in their proposal package.

12. On Page 6, the NOFO states that “a portion of the program design should be designated for rapid response activities due to the dynamic nature of work in Nicaragua.” Could INL provide more information on this requirement? For budgeting purposes, does INL recommend setting aside a pool of funds for staff time and/or activity costs? Given the consistent increase in physical and digital violence in the country, is there a percentage target for the budget INL could suggest?

- There are routine (weekly, monthly, etc.) activities that are carried out over the course of the project’s period of performance. These activities which go towards achieving the expected outcomes are required to be included in mandatory quarterly reports; however, INL sometimes requires more frequent reporting depending on the need to inform INL in the U.S. on relevant issues happening in Nicaragua that are related to the objectives included in this NOFO.

13. In the description of Objective 1 on page 7, the proposal lists a variety of mechanisms and tools to collect data on crime and corruption (surveys, citizen reporting tools, etc.). One of the activities listed is to quantify the monetary value of bribes, and on page 9 an example outcome indicator is “percentage of Nicaraguans that justify bribe payments to government officials.” Is INL specifically looking for applicants to implement activities to gather data on bribe payments, or is it open to include other types of data collected and reports produced related to issues such as (for example) violence or instances when Nicaraguans can’t access government services, etc.?

- Activities listed under Objective one (1) on page seven (7) are examples that applicants could include in their proposal. Applicants have the liberty to use those activities and/or develop their own set of project activities, as long as they are related to crime and corruption. We realize information transparency is broad but INL has specific interest in activities related to crime and corruption. The example you are providing regarding Nicaraguans unable to access government services is not related to the priorities listed under this objective.