Higher Education Scholarships Phase Two (HES-II)
NOFO Number: 72026822RFA00001
Questions & Answers

1. Can you provide the current CDCS for Lebanon?

   USAID Response: The current USAID/Lebanon CDCS can be found at the following link: https://www.usaid.gov/lebanon/cdcs. The document is also attached as Annex IV in Amendment 1 to NOFO.

2. What Lebanon universities have American accreditation?

   USAID Response: As stated in the NOFO, the requirement for eligible applicants is for educational institutions in Lebanon that meet standards comparable to those required for American accreditation.

3. Who is/are the incumbent (s) grantees?

   USAID Response: As this is a new opportunity of funding, and not a follow-on to a previous award, there is not an incumbent(s).

4. We are having a problem finding incumbent reports in the Development Experience Clearinghouse website. Can you provide those documents?

   USAID Response: USAID/Lebanon's portfolio of programs includes previous scholarship programs, however this program is a new opportunity, is not an incumbent award and is not a follow-on to a previous program. You may find reports from previous USAID scholarship programs on the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) here:

   Higher Education Scholarship (HES) and University Scholarship Program (USP) 7 documents:

   - HES Report
   - USP7 Report
   - USP7 Report

5. Can you clarify the basis (regulatory) for a nine-year grant vs a five-year grant which USAID awards?

USAID Response: The duration for a nine-year program is within the 10 year limitation as prescribed in ADS 303.3.14. The length of the award was determined based on the needs of the program, specifically that four cohorts of students will enter the scholarship program. So as to not interrupt or end any cohort's studies early, and allow for the full academic length of a degree to be completed, the program was designed for nine years.

6. Can you clarify the basis of choice of instrument and how it meets the requirement of a grant vs contract?

   USAID Response: The selection of instrument for this action has taken into consideration that USAID's focus under this award is on providing financial support/assistance to a prime recipient, not on acquiring property or services for the direct-use or benefit of the Agency. The selection of instrument has been made in accordance with ADS 304.

7. Page 7, Section: 1.1.a. Student Eligibility. Sentence: Parents must not earn any substantial subsidy to cover educational costs. For purposes of USP9, parents must not earn an educational subsidy that covers at least 25 percent of the annual university tuition fee at the least expensive partner university.
   Our understanding is that the 25% should be calculated on the basis of the actual value of the tuition (set in USD) and real value of the subsidy given that subsidies are often provided by employers in LBP, which renders most current recipients of educational subsidies eligible for the HES II scholarship. Please advise if USAID has a different understanding concerning how the 25% should be calculated given that the tuition is in USD and subsidies are often paid in LBP.

   USAID Response: The 25% percent must be calculated on the actual value in LBP of the tuition set by the university. For example, if the tuition is $10,000 and the university is applying an exchange rate of LBP4,000 for $1 then this means the actual value for the tuition is LBP40 Million. Therefore, the 25% of the actual tuition should be LBP10 Million. This requirement will be applied every year with updated calculations (changes at the university's applicable exchange rates and the updated subsidies by the government or other employers).

8. Page 7, Section: 1.1.a. Student Eligibility. Sentence: USP9 implementing partners must provide a brief economic analysis conducted by an expert consultant to justify the threshold for the total annual parental income.
   We recommend that instead of requiring an expert consultant that the university manages the justification, directly, especially that the university already adopts measures to set its financial need assessment guidelines for the university at large and has in-house expertise.

Please advise if USAID is amenable to removing the expert consultancy requirement enabling the university to provide its justification based on its practices and established financial aid guidelines.

USAID Response: USAID agrees to remove the expert consultancy requirement to allow the university to provide a justification based on its own practices and established financial aid guidelines. Please see Amendment 1 to the NOFO on page 8.

9. Page 9, Section: 1.1.C. Program Dissemination, Shortlisting Procedures And Selection. Sentence: School visits are the most favored approach for public schools. Therefore, the applicant must reach at least 240 academic public schools per recruitment year through direct visits, and at least 30 technical public schools.
   Concerning the technical school visits, we recommend removing the requirement of visiting at least 30 schools given that earlier recruitment experience is not positive to that respect. It is recommended to reduce the number of such visits, less than 10 if possible.

   USAID Response: USAID has removed the requirement of visiting at least 30 schools. Please see Amendment 1 to NOFO on page 9.

10. Page 9, Section: Student Application Package. Sentence: (1) Essay 1: Student reflection on their leadership qualities and why the student qualifies for the scholarship, (2) Essay 2: Student rationale justifying the choice of major and career aspirations, and (3) Essay 3: An overview in Arabic of the student's household financial situation, written by their parents/guardians as part of their financial aid application.
    Earlier experience shows that these essays, while complementary to the application and enrich its content, are not necessarily reliable tools for selection given that they may be written by others. We consider that the interviews remain one of the primary sources of information along with the official supportive documents needed to determine financial need and academic merit. Will USAID reconsider the number and type of essays required for submission by each student?

    USAID Response: USAID will not reconsider the number and types of essays required for submission by each student. The three essays are still required to be submitted by applicants.

11. Page 11, Section: 1.2.a. Tuition. Sentence: Tuition based on the 2021-2022 rates will be applicable for the duration of the program for all cycles.
    Would it be possible to fix the tuition rate per cohort rather than for the duration of the entire program? In this case the applicable tuition per cohort for the duration of its

enrollment will be fixed based on the applicable tuition during the year of recruitment of that particular cohort. Please advise.

USAID Response: Tuition based on the 2021-2022 rates will be applicable for the duration of the program for all cohorts, unless the tuition rates decrease, then the university will reduce the tuition rate for scholars at the same rate. Please see Amendment 1 to NOFO on page 11.

12. Page 12, Section: 1.2.b. Housing and Transportation Allowance. Sentence: Innovative approaches to calculating the transportation allowance. The allowance is suggested to be as per applicable Government of Lebanon (GOL) rates.
    Given the recent change in the applicable GOL rate from an initial 8,000 per day to a revised 65,000 LBP/day, and given that transportation allowance is paid in real USDs using the official exchange rates, we consider that linking the transportation allowance under the current circumstances as per applicable GOL rate is no longer reasonable. The GOL rate is recommended to be used for comparison purposes only. Please advise if this is acceptable.

    USAID Response: USAID has removed the following from Page 12, Section: 1.2.b. Housing and Transportation Allowance: "The rates must not substantially deviate from the GOL rates per month at all times." The GOL rate will be used for comparison purposes only and the proposed transportation allowance will be subject to approval by USAID. See Amendment 1 to NOFO page 12.

13. Page 13 & 58, Section: 1.4.a. Proposed Majors & VIII. List of Majors and Supportive Documents. Sentence: Additionally, the applicant must update its list of majors, within the first eighteen months of implementation, through a labor market survey that may be supported administratively and financially by USP9. The mandatory survey may be completed within the first eighteen months; however, the program is encouraged to complete the study earlier within the first six months to update its list of majors as of the first cycle of recruitment. Within eighteen months of implementation, the Recipient must submit the results, findings and recommendations of the initial labor market surveys if any, the conclusions from the discussions with the professional orders and any recommendations affecting the proposed list of major. The AOR will review and make a final determination of allowable majors under USP.
    We recommend either removing this requirement given the current economic meltdown, or extending its completion until either after the first couple of cohorts are recruited, or until an economic recovery plan for the country is approved by the World Bank defining economic sectors that will be set as national priority. Completing the survey as currently proposed in the NOFO, under the current circumstances, may not provide meaningful

information from participating sectors to provide relevant direction to the scholarships and choice of major. Please advise.

USAID Response: USAID does not agree to make the requested change and the requirement will remain as is stated in the NOFO.

14. Page 24, Section: 2. Component 2 Refugee Scholarship Support – Phase II (RSS-II): Component two. Sentence: The HES-II project will offer degrees and/or certificates for refugees who have completed secondary education in Lebanon during the year of recruitment for this scholarship.
    Our understanding is that, based on the "and/or" statement, offering certificates to refugees is a matter to be determined by the applicant and hence is not a mandatory requirement to be proposed in the application as an educational option to refugees. Please advise if this understanding is accurate.

    USAID Response: That is correct that offering certificates to refugees is an educational option that an applicant might wish to add and is not a mandatory requirement.

15. Page 25, Section: 2.1.b Enrollment Approach. Sentence: The list of proposed majors must be annexed to the program description including undergraduate degrees and certificate programs.
    Same as above. Please advise.

    USAID Response: The requirement to include the list of proposed majors as an annex to the program description is not optional and is a mandatory requirement of the NOFO

16. Page 26, Section: 2.1.d Comprehensive Scholarships. Sentence: All of the USP9 conditions governing tuition, housing and transportation allowance, stipends and book allowances, orientation and integration, student employment, and summer semesters are applicable and must be followed under the refugee scholarship support component.
    Our understanding in this case, unlike the earlier HES, the stipend for refugees will be set at $400 similar to the USP9 component. Please advise if this is accurate.

    USAID Response: That is correct that all scholars irrespective of their nationalities must receive $400 each as a monthly stipend.

17. Page 27, Section: 3.1.A. Key Personnel. Sentence: The applicant must submit Statements of Qualifications (SOQ6) for each key personnel position.
    Does USAID have a required or recommended SOQ template that may be shared to ensure consistency in presenting the information?

USAID Response: USAID does not have a required SOQ template. As per the NOFO on page 27, The SOQ lists prior positions and employers (including contact information for at least (3) recent references within the past seven years). The SOQ: (1) will clearly explain why the individual is suited for the proposed position; (2) will demonstrate that the proposed personnel possess the skills, knowledge and experience to function as proposed key personnel position on the project team; (3) will include items normally associated with CVs or resumes i.e. list of all previous employers & positions occupied, academic qualification, and main achievements; (4) provide market value determination of the proposed position.

18. Page 31, Section: 4. Crisis Modifier. Sentence: Entire section.
    Please clarify whether it is expected to define specific crises that may impact the direct scholarship beneficiaries and/or the university and require redirecting resources to supporting the beneficiaries/university, or if the aim of the crisis modifier is to identify potential crises that require redirecting some funds completely away from scholarships to supporting a completely different set of activities.

    USAID Response: The crisis modifier is to allow for the activation of a separate, rapid response fund to be provided to the Recipient to address any crisis that may directly impact the scholarship beneficiaries and/or the university. This may include responding to urgent needs through changes in geographical focus, types of activities, or partners that could be activated at any time during the period of the award, including within the first year of the award. Therefore, included in this agreement is a Crisis Modifier as a budget item that will allow the release of separate, rapid response funds to the Recipient and its partners responding to urgent needs and/or windows of opportunity activities. It is not expected that any applicant includes specific crises that may impact the direct scholarship beneficiaries and/or the university. The applicant must include in the Program Description and detailed budget submitted by the applicant only the language that is included in the NOFO on page 31 without further detail or explanation required.

19. Page 35, Section: 3. Substantial Involvement - iii. a Data Quality Analysis (DQA). Sentence: The DQA is due after the first reporting period that follows the approval of the MEL Plan. Data Verification in response to the DQA is due following one reporting period after the completion of the DQA.
    Please advise whether the applicant is expected to conduct the DQA, commission a third-party consultant, or if the DQA will be undertaken by the Mission's monitoring and evaluation contract?

USAID Response: The DQA will be conducted by the USAID/Lebanon's third party independent monitoring and evaluation contractor.

20. Page 39, Section: General Content and Form of Application. Sentence: 10 point font can be used for graphs and charts. Tables however, must comply with the 12 point Times New Roman requirement.
    Can tables use as well font 10, especially that the application requires a large number of tables that take much of the 25-page limit (list of majors, conditions to maintain the scholarship, risks mitigation, English placement, etc.). Please advise.

    USAID Response: USAID has removed "Tables" however, must comply with the 12 point Times New Roman requirement" and has added "10 point font can be used for graphs**, tables** and charts." Please see Amendment 1 to NOFO on page 39.

21. Page 59, Section: Institutionalization Plan. Sentence: Within one year of implementation, the Recipient must finalize the institutionalization plan initially and illustratively proposed in the application in response to the NFO, that will provide all details needed to institutionalize specific components of the scholarship, including any intended use of possible funding provided by USAID for that purpose. The document will be reviewed, edited and ultimately approved by the AOR.
    Please advise which institutionalization plan is required, and pursuant to which section in the NOFO. We could not identify any such requirement in the NOFO as part of the application package.

    USAID Response: USAID has removed the Institutionalization Plan section from the Amendment 1 to NOFO. Please see Amendment 1 to NOFO on page 59.

22. Section A.I page 6: All scholars will have completed internships or USAID-focused research upon project completion.
    Can you clarify the nature of USAID focused research, will USAID be providing and facilitating these opportunities?

    USAID Response: USAID-focused research is related to students performing internships at any USAID funded project. USAID has removed USAID-focused research. Please see Amendment 1 to NOFO on page 6.

23. Section A.II.1.1.c page 9 Guiding principles: The applicant is asked to reach 240 public schools through direct visits and at least 30 technical public schools.
    Given that there will be two partners, can these visits be split between the partners to avoid redundant visits?

USAID Response: This requirement cannot be shared, and each implementing partner is responsible for reaching out to all public schools. Note that visits to technical schools have been removed as a requirement (ref. Question 9 above).

24. Section A.II.1.1.d page 11 item 4 "Shifting from face-to-face learning to online learning due to exigent circumstances" under Selection contingency plan.
    It is not clear what item 4 "Shifting from face-to-face learning to online learning due to exigent circumstances" has to do with having a selection contingency plan. Kindly clarify.

    USAID Response: Shifting from face-to-face learning to online learning would require changes that are not included in a face-to-face learning mode, such as housing, transportation allowance, provision of internet accessibility, etc…

25. Section A.II.1.4.a Page 16 item "Undergraduate degrees offered as mandatory prerequisites for graduate studies such as biology major as a prerequisite for medicine are not allowed."
    Section A.II.1.4.b Page 19 USAID will not cover the cost of any course that will not count towards the degree, such as, but not limited to pre-medical courses or the cost of any post-graduation academic such as internships, further studies, specific additional professional programs, graduate studies, colloquium preparation, registration in syndicates and orders."
    Can we confirm that since a partner university has no specific program that is a "mandatory prerequisite for graduate studies." i.e. the core pre-med courses can be taken in multiple disciplines, So as long as we meet these two criteria, we can include a program in our program list?

    USAID Response: The requirement remains that undergraduate degrees offered as mandatory prerequisites for graduate studies such as biology major as a prerequisite for medicine are not allowed. USAID also will not cover the cost of any additional course that is not required as part of an authorized and approved degree within the terms of the program. However, students may opt to take any course they need as an elective within the undergraduate degree approved for the scholarship program.

26. Section A.II.1.4.a A.I indicates that refugees must be legally residing in Lebanon, while A.II.2.1.a asks how we will conduct academic and financial need assessment of refugees, "especially for those who may not have the necessary paperwork or proper documentation related to their status…"
    Please clarify the contradiction between the condition of "refugees must be legally residing in Lebanon" and the selection consideration taking into account that "especially for those who may not have the necessary paperwork or proper documentation related to their status" (because they would have to have clear status to be legally residing in Lebanon.)

USAID Response: The latter is not related to the residency permit, but it is related to the documentation for academic and financial status. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the two requests. There might be a refugee applicant that is legally residing in Lebanon but might lack documentation related to the financial and academic status in her/his country of origin.