



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Technical Leadership Bidder's Conference

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Summary Transcript of Proceedings

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Introduction

Joseph Hewitt (JH): Welcome to the Technical Leadership APS conference sponsored today by the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation in the Bureau for Democracy Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance. My name is Joe Hewitt and my role is to moderate the conversation today. I'd like to extend special thanks to those joining us by phone. We know joining by phone can be difficult. We will do our best to make you feel like you are here in person.

I want to say just a few things preliminarily. To prevent interference, we would appreciate if you would turn off your mobile devices and not just put them on silent. Because we are from the bureau of Democracy Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance for the humanitarian part, if you need to step out there is a key for the restroom at the reception desk. Now I'd like to introduce my colleagues here, Michelle Linder, Kirby Reiling, Neil Levine, and Ousmane Faye. Neil Levine, CMM Director will now provide some opening remarks.

Neil Levine (NL): Thanks Joe and good morning. I am extremely pleased to be here. This gathering and the issuing of this Technical Leadership (TL) Annual Program Statement (APS) marks a milestone for the office. I will talk a bit about CMM—our mission and the TL agenda and where this program statement fits in. Thanks to the staff who worked on this and you being here today—these events don't happen on their own.

My job is to set the context. The best way to understand CMM is that we occupy the nexus between policy development, academia, and practitioner experience. We are unique—we are given license by the agency to probe the cutting edge of the development sector and conflict. We have a lot of autonomy and we are charged to be current with thinking in academia. We accumulate best practice in the implementing community, and put that knowledge at hands of our field staff, and implementing partners, and create knowledge. Our job is first the creation of knowledge—and the also the dissemination and inculcation of that knowledge. The tip of the spear is the TL mission.

A bit about how we are set up—we are a staff of 15 with a Budget of \$3.5 million core. We do five things. First is work with field missions and what we call technical assistance—consult on program design, evaluation, and assessment. We visit to field for three to four weeks for assessment. Second is the TL agenda—building the latest thinking and practice in conflict. Number three is act as interagency liaison. We are engaged with regional bureaus at State, functional bureaus, the military and other federal agencies. 90% of that is with State and NSC staff. Any given day we are involved on agency policy committees in a supporting role. The fourth area is training. We train every FSO will serve as a crisis stabilization officer in the field of conflict analysis and programming. We have done a basic course for years and are moving to an advanced course. The fifth area is public outreach—think tanks, college campuses, Congress and press to convey the message about USAID's approach to conflict.

Now, regarding technical leadership, if you go to our website (available at http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/conflict/), you will find our toolkits, which are 30-40 page publications that are topical in nature on themes like forests and conflict, minerals and conflict and so on. This was our first generation of materials. We did that research in two ways: either we identified experts and directly commissioned studies which we would edit and release, or we would form strategic partnerships around town and around the country—that is a more hands off relationship. So, direct commissioned work and strategic partnerships was the first generation.

This TL APS marks the next generation. Our job is to identify a topic most relevant to where we are right now and where we're going. A hockey reference—to quote Wayne Gretzky, who said, "you have to skate to where the puck is going to be." In other words, what is the next horizon of emerging issues? We have to get a jump on those areas and explore critical frameworks of analysis, look at the lexicon and start manufacturing solutions in advance of them cropping up. So we bring to you and the American public an approach of asking—here are the problems, what are ways to understand and respond to these areas of concern for us? This speaks to where USAID is as an institution. This is a new time for us—we are extremely excited about the opportunity to partner with folks we have not done business with and to grow existing partnerships. I am delighted to do this, I think this is the future of CMM, and happy to be here with you this morning. Hopefully, we will get great proposals. We want you to make our job difficult, such that we get excellent proposals. Thank you.

Joe Hewitt: Thank you Neil. What I am going to try to do is very quickly walk through the broad stroke details of the TL APS. I understand lots of you are probably very familiar with it. As Neil laid out there are 3 broad goals. Foremost is advancing the thought leadership role that CMM plays in USAID. Second, the TL APS provides a mechanism that offers a competitive structure. We think it will encourage creative ideas and help us identify gaps in our knowledge. Third, finally, and this is important, we are trying to encourage partnerships with organizations and institutions that we don't always work with. We realize there is innovative work with

organizations who do not have a history of partnership—we are trying to reach them and get new ideas into our workstream. Total funding for this first APS is \$700,000. We anticipate roughly 8 grants or agreements in the range of \$50,000 to \$200,000. I want to emphasize these are rough estimates and will depend on the range of ideas we receive.

The APS is designed to get proposals related to our 8 TL workstreams. They are laid out in detail in the APS. I won't review them here in interest of time; I will say it is important proposals speak to one of these 8. We have identified 3 focus areas—issues on social and institutional resilience; environment and conflict—with a focus water and climate change; and programming effectiveness in conflict environments. We realize proposals are likely related to one or more of our 8 workstreams but for proposals dealing with one of these focus areas, there is money set aside specifically for these 3 areas.

A quick overview of the timeline. The APS was issued on February 1, and the closing date is April 1. The application review process will extend from April through approximately June. Notification of awards, pre-award surveys, agreement letters—we expect to be complete in roughly August. Note that review can take as much as 6 months or longer in some cases. I'll stop there and give Ousmane Faye an opportunity to make remarks.

Ousmane Faye: Thank you for your interest in the program. As you heard from Joe and Neil's presentations, this is a program with a great deal of interest for the government. I would also like to introduce our colleague Chandra Johnson-Thornton [who is the point of contact for any questions related to the solicitation].

Briefly, our role as the contracting office is to receive your applications and go through the review process. We go through cost parts of the application, and we share the technical part with the technical office [CMM]. If any comments come up, we will ask you to respond to them, and there will be a deadline. We will work with you throughout the process, including any questions on technical or costs issues—we work with you until the close-out of the award. We are here to answer your questions as best as we can. Also, after this meeting, all of the questions and the responses, will be posted to Grants.gov, so when you get back to your offices, you will have an opportunity to focus again on these. This is also an opportunity to share this information with those who were not present. Now, without further ado, we will turn over to questions.

Joe Hewitt: Let me say a few things regarding Q & A. This is an opportunity to get clarification on details of the APS and we will try to alternate between people in the room and on the phone. Because it may be difficult to hear, we will try to repeat them and make sure everyone on the phone hears everything. Finally, in the interest of being fair and open, we cannot comment on the extent to which ideas measure up against evaluation criteria in the APS. We can't tell you how good ideas really are—all we can do is clarify evaluation criteria or any other component of the APS. Forgive us in advance if our responses are clipped—it is in the interest of preserving

fair and open competition. With that, let's start with questions from someone on phone. And then we will alternate.

Questions and Answers

Note: Questions and Answers below are not an exact transcript. They have been edited to facilitate reader comprehension.

Question #1: Thank you for the introduction. I thought I'd read in the [APS], that there was time for a second round of proposals after April 1 that would go in a category for later review. Is this true?

Answer (Hewitt): No, we do not anticipate a second round of proposals after April 1.

Question #2: And, secondly, could you say something about the evaluation of grant effectiveness, i.e. what are the reporting requirements on grant outcomes?

Answer (Levine): This is not really a procurement question, but rather an implementation question. Generally, that tends to be negotiated as part of a workplan or part of the proposal. So, generally, if it includes field work, there might be quarterly or semi-annual reporting. But, the method of evaluation flows from the nature of the work. See section 5.4 of the APS.

Question #3: What is the period of performance on awards?

Answer (Hewitt): Given the funding range that we expect of \$50,000 to \$200,000 per award, our expectation is that the period of performance would likely be 2-3 years. We recognize that the APS does not specify the amount, and there are no fixed requirements for the competition specific to period of performance.

Question #4: What priority do you place on mechanisms for disseminating findings, e.g. workshops or other tools that facilitate use of findings?

Answer (Hewitt): See the evaluation criteria in section 3.2.1 of the APS. Beyond the evaluation criteria, I can't offer more on that front.

Question #5: Will you accept proposals to collect primary data, or does it need to be that grantees will use secondary data?

Answer (Hewitt): Yes, data collection is allowable, as explicitly stated in the APS in section 3.2.1, page 17.

Question #6: Are there any countries that are “out of bounds” for funding?

Answer (Hewitt): Certain countries and entities are barred from receiving funding under U.S. Law. Otherwise, this is simply a question of relevance to USAID programs.

Additional information provided after the bidder’s conference by USAID’s Office of General Counsel: Section 7007 of USAID’s appropriations legislation prohibits the use of funds for assistance to the governments of Cuba, North Korea, Iran, and Syria. In addition, pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, as well as USAID’s appropriations legislation, other restrictions on assistance to a country or to the government of a country may be applicable. Reliance on notwithstanding authority, if available, relevant waiver authority or changes in factual situations may result in the lifting of these restrictions.

Question #7: What are allowable costs under the APS?

Answer (Faye): Based on the program description, you elaborate your budget. That budget will be reviewed. If there are any concerns with your budget, we will contact you.

Question #8: What is the desirability of proposals that build partnerships between different entities, universities, etc.? For example, if my university were to partner with another, how would that affect our proposal?

Answer (Hewitt): The evaluation criteria do not explicitly speak to that issue of partnerships. The organization and team capabilities refers to aggregate capabilities of the proposing team.

Question #9: Should the application amount include the typical university overhead amount?

Answer (Faye): Whatever overhead you have with USAID or any government institution should be applied, and we will accept that.

Question #10: In the area of water and conflict, are you primarily interested in inter-state or intra-state conflict?

Answer (Hewitt): The APS does not explicitly state a preference for inter-state or intra-state conflict. I would only remind you of the relevance criteria in section 3.2.1.

USAID clarification provided after the bidder’s conference: The APS does not explicitly rule out proposals that examine inter-state conflict, but it does state that “DCHA/CMM seeks to support projects aiming to generate knowledge regarding (a) how water governance/management

affects conflict dynamics ... with an emphasis on understanding *intrastate and local contexts* [emphasis added].”

Question #11: The APS says, “The total amount of funding for the first year is approximately \$700,000.” What does that mean?

Answer (Hewitt): The APS solicitation is designed, contingent upon availability of funding, such that there is a new competition each year. To put it a different way, it should not be interpreted that the \$700,000 is only for the first year of proposals in this competition. The \$700,000 available for this solicitation is for the proposals that come in under this competition, whether they are for a one year project or a multiyear project.

Question #12: Would it would be acceptable to propose a project of 2 to 3 year duration with a maximum of \$100,000?

Answer (Hewitt): Yes, the APS does not specify a set period of performance. Given funding levels for projects \$50,000 to \$200,000 our expectation from CMM’s own experience is that most projects would be around 2 or 3 years. How you allocate funds across years of multiyear is dictated by the technical activities you propose to carry out. Your cost application and narrative should justify this in terms of technical activities you propose to complete across years of your project. There is no exact number I can give you for each year of a multiyear project. It is determined by what you need to complete deliverables.

Question #13: There is a paragraph in the APS for the technical narrative to outline the goal of USAID. Could the proposer request information from USAID—either CMM or other offices—that would support data-driven analysis with information not always part of the public domain? If the proposal is in part looking to assess existing practices carried out by USAID or other offices, is it acceptable to request support from CMM or other offices for help getting the data needed? I ask because things like internal assessment of effectiveness of activities or M&E is not easily or always available to outside sources.

Answer (Faye): We cannot provide this type of data pre-award. All people need equal access to information.

Cont’d Answer (Levine): Regarding post-award, this question is interesting and puts us in a novel position, insofar as there is some data we could provide, and other data we couldn’t provide, but we would not be able to communicate about this until the award is made. We need to research our USAID policy to find an appropriate response, which we will post. In the meantime, do note many relevant resources would be available on the Development Enterprise

Clearinghouse (<http://dec.usaid.gov>). USAID's practice is to make all evaluations available on the DEC, so there is answer there. Beyond that, it depends.

Question #14: The APS says there is a maximum of key personnel, or 5%, whichever is greater. Could you clarify that statement?

Answer (USAID): *[Due to communication difficulties during the bidders' conference, this response has been clarified after the event.]* The APS states in section 5.4, that key personnel are "limited to 5 positions or 5% of the recipient's total team size, whichever is greater." In other words, applicants can submit a maximum of 5 key personnel. There is no minimum. Remember that not all personnel on a project are "Key Personnel." For projects with 119 or fewer personnel, then the maximum number of key personnel positions is 5. However, for example, a 200 person project would have a maximum of 10 key personnel.

Question #15: Would it be possible to provide illustrative examples with corresponding hypotheses that would be relevant?

Answer (Hewitt): No, I am afraid not. Please read the APS and note the footnotes, which were selected purposefully with the hope that it would be helpful to applicants.

Question #16: Is it acceptable for an organization to submit more than one proposal?

Answer (Hewitt): Yes.

Question #17: I saw no cost sharing requirement in the APS. What would be a reasonable amount?

Answer (Faye): If there is no requirement stated, it is not required and you don't have to worry about it. But feel free to cost share.

Question #18: Are there prohibitions against working with local organizations in places like Burma?

Answer (Linder): If there are any legal restrictions within the U.S. Government against assistance to a particular country, or entity (e.g. terrorist group), then we would need to consult with our legal team.

Additional information provided after the bidder's conference by USAID's Office of General Counsel: Presently, there are statutory restrictions on assistance to Burma, as well as OFAC sanctions. Thus, to be able to work with local organizations in Burma, reliance on notwithstanding authority, if available, and an OFAC license would be required. As regulations and statutes do regularly change, for the latest information, please refer to the website of the

Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control, available at <http://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/offices/Pages/Office-of-Foreign-Assets-Control.aspx>.

Question #19: In terms of sharing our research, can it be shared through other means beyond USAID's, e.g. academic journals, etc. Does it have to be *only* through USAID?

Answer (Hewitt): Your findings must be shared with USAID, but you are free and in fact encouraged to disseminate through other channels.

Question #20: If you receive an award, would there be restrictions on an opportunity to apply for future technical leadership solicitations?

Answer (Hewitt/Levine): No formal plans have been laid out for future competitions, so we cannot now say definitively whether there will be restrictions on current awardees. Judging by other APSes in other areas, in those competitions we have allowed grantees to make decisions to re-apply. On other cases, there are opportunities for follow-ons. But we cannot say definitively now what the rules will be.

Question #21: Regarding past performance, is previous experience with USAID required or preferred?

Answer (Hewitt): No. No preference is given for organizations that have previous experience working with USAID. Now, if you have had experience with USAID, you should reference that under past performance. But there is no preferential weight given, and that is consistent with our desire for new and old partners.

Question #22: Regarding application method, in section 4.1 the APS says application through Grants.gov is not required, but in the FAQ section, it says it is required? What is the application method?

Answer (USAID): It seems we are inconsistent. We apologize for the contradiction. We will produce guidance to clarify the preferred method of submission. CMM's intent is to make the application process easy and to not set a bar that prevents good ideas/proposals from reaching USAID.

Additional information provided after the bidder's conference: Per section 4.1 of the APS, all applications must be submitted electronically (MS Word or searchable PDF, not scanned) to the Agreement Specialist at cthorton@usaid.gov. This is the final guidance. Therefore, availability of [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) during the proposal writing process should not interfere with production of the technical narrative as required by the terms of the APS in section 3.1.1. Standard forms for the

cost application can be downloaded irrespective of registration at http://grants.gov/agencies/forms_instruction_information.jsp

Question #23: Is there a preference for multiple proposals from a single organization, or a single unified proposal per organization?

Answer (Hewitt): The answer is that it depends upon consideration of the evaluation criteria. The extent to which the proposal meets criteria on relevance and impact should be driving that decision—they account for a larger percentage of evaluation scoring. If it were the case that multiple could be combined for a better proposal, then the organization would want to make a strategic decision accordingly. If you can better meet the criteria with separate proposals, do that. Nothing is inherently better one way or the other. Our preference is for high-quality proposals, regardless of funding levels.

Question #24: Can this proposal be an add-on for another preapproved proposal from another multinational organization? If so, are there limits on what activities can be referenced?

Answer (Hewitt): There is no explicit restriction on follow-on our cost shares. The question is whether it meets the evaluation criteria spelled out in the APS. For example, it needs to be relevant to one of the 3 areas or 8 TL workstreams and have a clear potential to contribute to USAID's project programming.

Question #25: My question is about the role of USAID. The APS says applicants should describe the role of USAID in their proposals. Can you provide more guidance? Would it be limited to CMM or other offices? Is there an upper threshold?

Answer (Hewitt): It depends. We have no expectation about the "right" level of role for USAID. It all depends on the technical details of the work. It does not have to be CMM.

Question #26: As follow-up [to #25], I am worried about expecting too much of USAID. Is there an upper threshold of how much we can expect?

Answer (Levine): Thank you for the question. I don't have a clear answer. Do refer to page 24 on substantial involvement. That includes regular briefings of USAID, and assistance with evaluation. For example, USAID now has PPL/LER, so an evaluation might involve them. In the past, CMM has had both very hands-on relationships, as well as very hands off relationships. So, we have no fixed preference, and it depends on Substantial Involvement.

Question #27: Could you clarify what constitutes a complex or fragile environments?

Answer (Hewitt/Levine): We cannot provide any more information beyond what is already provided in the APS and in the USAID Policy on the Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency referenced in that section.

[[No further questions]]

Joe Hewitt: There are no further questions.

Michelle Linder: Thank everyone for your patience with the phone. Our intent is to reach beyond Washington. We wanted to meet that demand. We have a small piece of paper at the door here—please sign in so we can have a record of who was here today.

Joe Hewitt: I would like to say again thank you and for all of your questions. We wish you the best in putting together your proposals. Remember a summary of these proceedings will be on grant.gov with the solicitation. With that, I will adjourn the meeting. Have a great weekend.