



USAID | NICARAGUA

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Amendment Issuance Date:

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Closing Date and Time for Submission of Applications:

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Nicaragua Time**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWER FOR NFO 524-17-000004/Lifting Nicaraguan Voices (LNV)

SUBJECT : Notice of Funding Opportunity Number: NFO 524-17-000004, Amendment No. 01

Activity Title: Lifting Nicaraguan Voices (LNV)

Dear Prospective Applicants:

The purpose of Amendment 01 is to provide answers to questions received regarding subject NFO.

Thank you for your interest in USAID programs.

Sincerely,

Ross Hicks
Agreement Officer

USAID RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR NFO 524-17-000004

1. **Question:** USAID just released an RFA for capacity building of civil society organizations in Nicaragua. Can USAID please confirm that there will be funding for this opportunity?

USAID Response: USAID receives its budget on an annual basis, and incrementally funds awards based on the availability of funding. USAID/Nicaragua anticipates funds under the FY 2017 omnibus appropriations bill. However, USAID cannot speculate on any future funding levels.

2. **Question:** On NFO page 8, Section C Program Description states that “a minimum of 55% of the overall project budget must go to Nicaraguan civil society in the form of grants or in-kind support.” Will USAID please confirm that technical assistance and in-kind grants are acceptable forms of in-kind support?

USAID Response: The minimum of 55% of the overall project budget refers to grants or in-kind support (which will be proposed by the applicant), but EXCLUDES technical assistance.

3. **Question:** NFO pages 10 and 12, Section C, indicates in the italicized NOTE section the anticipated dollar value of resources to be devoted to Components 1 and 2 respectively. Is USAID requesting that the applicant indicate the level of resources by Component in the Cost Application?

USAID Response: Yes, USAID is requesting that applicants indicate the level of resources by component in the Cost Application.

4. **Question:** NFO page 12, Section C, states that the applicant should propose funding levels and timing for each innovation tier. However, NFO page 31 Section D 5.3 states that “Technical applications must not make reference to specific costs or detailed pricing information.” Will USAID please clarify how they would like the funding levels for each innovation tier presented?

USAID Response: Yes, given that funding levels and timing are critical to assessing whether applicants understand the multi-tiered approach, USAID requests that applicants propose estimated funding levels and timing for each innovation tier in the technical application.

5. **Question:** NFO Page 17, Section A.F, states that the "life-of-project and annual workplans" should be finalized within 60 days of award. However, NFO page 50, Section F.3.9, states that the "initial work plan" should be submitted within 4 weeks of award. Will USAID please clarify the due date for the Year 1 work plan?

USAID Response: The initial work plan must be submitted to USAID 4 weeks after award.

6. **Question:** NFO page 19, Section B.3.3, states that “the AOR will approve all international travel under this award.” Can USAID please confirm that, per OMB Uniform Guidance, prior international travel approval is no longer required?

USAID Response: Prior International travel approval is no longer required under Assistance Instruments. However, the absence of prior written approval on any element of cost will not, in itself, affect the reasonableness or allocability of that element.

7. **Question:** Page 29 of the NFO states that 12-point Times New Roman font should be used in the Technical Application. However, it does not provide a font size requirement for graphics. Will USAID please confirm that 10-point font may be used in tables, charts, and text boxes to ensure readability?

USAID Response: All graphics must meet the standards, including colors and typefaces, identified in USAID’s latest Graphic Standards Manual, which can be found at: <https://www.usaid.gov/branding/gsm>.

8. **Question:** NFO Page 29, Section D.5.2, states that “the entire Technical Application shall not exceed 35 pages exclusive of Annexes and other pages not subject to the page limitation indicated”. The page counts are given as:
Executive Summary - 2 pages
Technical Approach - 21 pages
Project Management - 3 pages

Will USAID please indicate how the additional 9 pages should be allocated?

USAID Response: Applicants may allocate additional pages in the technical application, NOT TO EXCEED 35 pages, as they determine, including by expanding the established page counts per section identified on Page 29 of the NFO or by adding new sections. The 35 page maximum is required for the technical application and excludes annexes.

9. **Question:** NFO page 29, Section D.5.1, states that "a draft approach for the baseline assessment will be included as an appendix to the application." However, an approach to the baseline assessment is not included in the required annexes listed under Section D.5.2 on NFO page 30. Will USAID please confirm that a draft approach to the baseline assessment is a required annex and, if so, specify its page limitations and contents?

USAID Response: Applicants should include the draft approach for the baseline assessment as part of the draft MEL plan, making the MEL plan 7 pages-maximum. This information should be included as an annex to the Technical Application as specified in the NFO, Section D.5.2

10. **Question:** Per NFO pages 29, Section D 5.1 Technical Application Format, USAID requests that the applicant propose a level of effort and funds to conduct a baseline assessment. Will USAID please confirm that this information should be presented in the budget and not in the Technical Application?

USAID Response: Applicants should propose a level of effort and funds to conduct a baseline assessment in the Cost Application

11. **Question:** NFO page 29-30 Sections D 5.1 references "the draft approach for the baseline assessment to be included as an appendix to the application." Will USAID please confirm that this is part of the Draft Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Plan with a page limit of 5 pages, as indicated on page 30, and not to be presented as a separate annex?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 9 above.

12. **Question:** NFO page 30, section D.5.2 requests a one-page "Geographic Strategy" in an annex. This is not elaborated elsewhere in the NFO. Will USAID please provide guidance on what should be included in the geographic strategy? Will USAID please confirm that the geographic strategy should be included as an annex rather than in the technical narrative?

USAID Response: This is an error. Applicants should NOT submit a "Geographic Strategy".

13. **Question:** NFO Page 34 states in the first paragraph “The Cost/Business application is also to be submitted in Microsoft Excel 2000 or Excel 2003.” Would USAID consider allowing use of any or all of Excel 2016, 2013, 2010, or 2007 in addition to versions 2000 and 2003 for cost application submission?

USAID Response: The cost application can be submitted in Excel 2016, 2013, 2010 or 2007.

14. **Question:** NFO page 36 6.11 Cost Application Format, Compiled Financial Statements, shall we assume that the last sentence (fragment) should be deleted.

USAID Response: Yes, last sentence should be deleted.

15. **Question:** NFO Section H, page 54, can USAID confirm if USAID/Guatemala or USAID/Nicaragua requirements are to be followed during closeout?

USAID Response: All USAID/Nicaragua necessary requirements are to be followed.

16. **Question:** The Grants.gov procurement portal lists two Lifting Nicaraguan Voices grant opportunities, one under opportunity number 524-17-000004 and the other under opportunity number 54-17-000004. Both opportunities appear to be identical. Will USAID please confirm that both posts are in fact for the same opportunity, and if so, clarify which is the correct opportunity number?

USAID Response: The correct opportunity number is 524-17-000004.

17. **Question:** Will USAID please share USAID’s multi-tiered innovation grant model?

USAID Response: A three-tiered staged finance model is used to maximize cost-effectiveness and minimize the risk of testing new ideas. Please refer to this link for more information: <https://www.usaid.gov/div/model>.

18. **Question:** On page 30, the NFO states that the application may not exceed 35 pages. The breakdown of page limits per section (also on page 30), adds up to 40 pages. Can USAID please clarify the page limit for the application?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 8.

19. **Question:** On page 4 of the NFO, USAID references the 2016 rapid assessment of civil society and 2015 mid-term performance evaluation of on-going civil society support activities. We cannot find either of these on the USAID DEC. Can these please be made available?

USAID Response: The key challenges and findings from the 2016 rapid assessment of civil society are detailed in the “Background and Problem Statement” on Page 4 of NFO. The 2015 mid-term performance evaluation was determined to be sensitive and will not be shared. Please refer to your own expertise on working in Nicaragua to inform the application and reference the Background and Problem Statement of the NFO.

20. **Question:** On both pages 15-16, and on page 31 in the Qualifications for Key Personnel sections, The Grants Manager qualifications state S/he must have ‘a minimum of five years of experience managing grants’ and later states S/he “must possess grant management experience of at least three years”. Can USAID please clarify the requirement for the number of years?

USAID Response: The Grants Manager should have at least three years of grants management experience and at least five years working with grants and supporting civil society.

21. **Question:** Can USAID please clarify that local NGOs should be non-exclusive as it is not in their best interest to go exclusive?

USAID Response: USAID does not require that arrangements between the prime recipient and with sub-recipients be exclusive. Please also see USAID response for Question 38 below.

22. **Question:** On p9, the NFO indicates that implementers will issue “large scale” (result 1.2) and “medium scale” (result 1.3) multi-year subawards. Could USAID please clarify what it means by “large scale” and “medium scale”?

USAID Response: The applicant must propose at least two different types (large-scale and medium-scale) multi-year subawards based on their expertise and knowledge.

23. **Question:** On pp. 10 and 12, USAID notes a range of resources (\$3.5 to \$4.5 million and \$1.5 to \$2.5 million respectively) to be dedicated to Project Components 1 and 2: do these amounts include only sub-grants, or do they also include additional expenses allocated to these components?

USAID Response: These amounts only refer to sub-grants.

24. **Question:** Can any assistance (technical or sub-grant) under Component 3 be considered part of the 55% minimum described on p. 34, or is this minimum limited to Components 1 and 2?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 2 above.

25. **Question:** P. 10, Special Considerations: “USAID requests an illustrative selection and implementation plan for the grants program.” Is this plan to be included in the Technical Approach or as an Annex?

USAID Response: The illustrative selection and implementation plan for the grants programs shall be included in the Technical Application, subject to the 35 page maximum.

26. **Question:** P. 19, Substantial Involvement: 2.CFR.200 does not require USAID approval for international travel – would USAID consider removing this from the Substantial Involvement section?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 6 above.

27. **Question:** Can USAID clarify what types of in-kind assistance would count towards the 55% sub-grant minimum described on p. 34?

USAID Response: The applicant should propose the types of in-kind assistance but should be aware that USAID expects that most of the 55% (program budget) to be in the form of grants to support Nicaraguan Civil Society.

28. **Question:** P. 29, Sec. 5.1. includes the following instructions: *A draft approach for the baseline assessment will be included as an appendix to the application.* However, the list of annexes included on p. 30 does not specify the baseline assessment approach as one of the required annexes. Should the baseline assessment approach be included in Annex i., *Draft Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning*?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 9 above.

29. **Question:** According to pp. 29 and 30, the pages included in the technical application are: Cover Page, Table of Contents, Executive Summary (max. 2 pages), Technical Approach (max. 21 pages), Project management (max. 3 pages). In total, this is 28 pages. Can USAID please indicate where the remaining four pages of the 35 page limit should be allocated?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 8 above.

30. **Question:** Regarding Annex v., *Geographic Strategy*, can USAID provide further detail as to what type of information should be included in this annex?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 12 above.

31. **Question:** On p. 32, the NFO indicates that a budget for each program year with accompanying detailed budget narrative is required. Is a separate budget narrative required for each program year?

USAID Response: Applicants must submit just one budget narrative for the five-year program that explains each element of cost with sufficient detail in order for the Agreement Officer to determine cost reasonableness. The budget narrative should be organized using the same structure as the budget.

32. **Question:** On page 10, the NFO states, “The applicant should include a draft methodology for assessing which CSOs are capable of diversifying funding streams to reduce donor dependency...” Would USAID like to have this draft methodology presented as an annex to the proposal, or should this draft methodology be discussed exclusively in the technical narrative?

USAID Response: Applicants should include this as part of its technical application subject to the 35 page limit.

33. **Question:** On page 29, the NFO states “A draft approach for the baseline assessment will be included as an appendix to the application.” However, this draft approach is not listed in the required annexes on page 30. Would USAID please confirm that this draft approach for the baseline assessment should be included as an Annex?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 9 above.

34. **Question:** On page 30, the NFO state that “any application over 35 pages will not be evaluated.” Can USAID confirm that the Cover Letter, Table of Contents, and Acronym List are not counted against this page limit?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 8 above.

35. **Question:** Based on the complex management need associated with the program, would USAID consider increasing the Project Management Section from three to six pages?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 8 above.

36. **Question:** Would USAID consider excluding graphics from the 35 page limit?

USAID Response: The technical application must not exceed 35 pages exclusive of annexes and other pages not subject to the page limitation indicated on Page 29 of the NFO. Therefore, the content of the technical application is subject to the 35 page limit. Please see USAID response to Question 8 for more details about page count.

37. **Question:** Per page 8 of the RFA, which stipulates that the implementer must dedicate 55% of the total resources of the program to Nicaraguan civil society, can USAID please specify what constitutes in-kind contribution? For example, do in-kind contributions include technical training and local staff salary time provided by the prime organization?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 27 above.

38. **Question:** Could USAID please confirm whether or not it discourages the use of exclusive teaming agreements or exclusive letters of commitment between local partners and prime organizations?

USAID Response: USAID does not encourage or discourage exclusive teaming arrangements or exclusive letters of commitment between local organizations and prime organizations. Please also see response for Question 21 above.

39. **Question:** Per page 30 of the RFA, is the geographic strategy specific to Nicaragua or is it intended to include the Latin American region as well?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 12 above.

40. **Question:** Can USAID clarify if there was any CSO database created for Nicaraguan CSOs for the purposes of USAID Forward initiative and if USAID will be willing to share the list of CSOs with the implementers?

USAID Response: USAID expects applicants to understand working in the Nicaraguan context.

41. **Question:** Can USAID please share the most recent FSN and LECP scale for Nicaragua?

USAID Response: Annual Basic Salary Rates for Locally Engaged Staff (Córdobas) follows:

Clerical personnel: C\$107,472 – C\$257,217

Administrative personnel: C\$188,736 – C\$489,297

Professional personnel low-level: C\$385,595 – C\$616,955

Professional personnel mid-level: C\$462,759 – C\$972,336

Professional personnel high-level: C\$ 886,618-C\$1,775,084

42. **Question:** Can USAID please clarify if the cost-share explanation, on page 22 of the RFA is a suggestion or a requirement? Given the diminishing funding opportunities available to local implementers, how does USAID envision implementers meet the cost share requirement mandated or suggested by the award especially if the implementing partners are concerned about maintaining political and business neutrality when seeking cost share sources? Given these challenges, will USAID consider removing or reducing the cost share requirement?

USAID Response: USAID determined a suggested cost-share of 5% for the recipient of the award. The details of the cost-share arrangement will be discussed once awarded.

43. **Question:** Is USAID willing to share the final report of the December 2016 rapid response assessment referenced in the Background Problem Statement?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 19 above.

44. **Question:** Can USAID clarify the term “large scale subawards” used in the Result 1.2: Support Core Democracy Stakeholder section specifying the monetary and technical scale of such subawards as well as the number of such subawards?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 22 above.

45. **Question:** Can USAID clarify the term “medium scale subawards” used in the Result 1.3: Support Civil Society Advocacy section specifying the monetary and technical scale of such subawards as well as the number of such subawards?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 22 above.

46. **Question:** What is the anticipated start date of this activity?

USAID Response: The anticipated start date of this activity is October 2017.

47. **Question:** Can USAID clarify its anticipated role in the development of selection criteria as described under Component 1?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 25 above. Furthermore, the applicant is expected to propose the anticipated role, as described on Page 10 of the NFO.

48. **Question:** Per page 32 of the NOFO, can USAID please amend the Microsoft Excel and Word requirements to allow cost applications submitted using Word and Excel 2016?

USAID Response: Please see response for Question 13 above.

49. **Question:** What are USAID’s expectations for coordination with the Nicaraguan government on this program? Is there an expectation that the program would be widely branded?

USAID Response: Once awarded, USAID and the implementer will discuss Branding and Marking guidelines and expectations for coordination with the Nicaraguan government.

(END OF QUESTIONS & ANSWERS)

[END OF AMENDMENT 01]