

April 29, 2013

USAID/Lebanon

Title: University Scholarship Assistance Program V (USPV)

RFA NUMBER: SOL-268-13-000002

AMENDMENT NO. 1

The subject RFA is hereby modified to provide answers to questions received and amend certain sections of the RFA stated within the answers to the questions.

**Answers to Questions on program title: University Scholarship Program – (V)
Number: SOL-268-13-000002**

The document is prepared according to the following format: The RFA's questionable statements are referenced and quoted, with comments and/or phrasing of the questions.

1. Page 4 bullet 2 indicates that:

“Candidates pursuing a technical baccalaureate path are eligible to apply and the applicant must present details concerning outreach and dissemination in public technical schools as appropriate.”

What if the institution does not admit candidates pursuing a technical baccalaureate? What if in order for these students to be admitted they must take a preparatory year (other than English) at the end of which the institution assesses their eligibility for admission into the program?

Answer: If the institution does not admit candidates with a technical baccalaureate as per its applicable policies, then this cannot be imposed by the program. Even if technical baccalaureate candidates may still be eligible under USP at large, it is not “appropriate”, as per RFA language, to submit a dissemination plan to public technical schools. This applies as well to the RFA page five (5) third-bullet requirement. However, inability to attract technical school students because of applicable policies must be clearly presented in the application with clear reference to applicable policies.

If the institution has special eligibility conditions beyond the regular university preparation related to candidates pursuing a technical baccalaureate, then these conditions may be presented in the application for technical evaluation and justification. The university preparation focuses on intensive language and remedial classes. If the preparatory year offered to technical students is different, due justification must be presented in the application; this will be evaluated as part of the conditions for maintaining the scholarship.

2. Page 4 bullet 3: indicates that:

“Candidates must demonstrate that they have been enrolled at a public school for at least the last three years of their secondary education. Students who transferred to a public school during their last year of school education are not eligible to apply unless their transfer to public education is substantiated by proof of dire circumstances negatively impacting their financial capacity such as immediate family death affecting family income, bankruptcy or force majeure.”

What about students who have been enrolled at a public high school for the last two years?

Answer: All students who have been enrolled in a public school for less than the last three years of their secondary education, i.e. one year or two years, are not eligible to apply unless their transfer to public education is substantiated by proof of dire circumstances negatively impacting their financial capacity such as immediate family death affecting family income, bankruptcy or force majeure. The primary eligibility focuses only on students who have been enrolled through their high school years at a public school. Deviations will be authorized only as per above conditions.

3. Page 5 (In the middle):

“Procedures to finalize the selection of students while taking into strict consideration that USAID will provide specific guidance concerning gender and geographic considerations. Gender balance must be achieved in the final selection;”

When will this be shared?

Answer: Guidance will be shared with implementing partners during actual implementation of successful awards as part of substantial involvement.

4. Top of page 7:

“Admissions: Candidate students will be allowed to include up to three majors of their choice in the admission application with clear ranking. The students must provide as part of their admission application a rationale explaining their choice and their career ambitions.”

We usually do that during the interview process and not by asking for a written statement with the application. Is this practice acceptable?

Answer: No. The process must be documented in writing by the student at the time of filling an admission application.

5. Page 7, the Baseline Collection paragraph is not clear.

“Baselines Collection: After award, the awardee must duly collect relevant baseline information at the admission application phase related to academic performance, leadership engagement, community projects completion to enable the program to measure outcome and impact at the end of the project. The baseline information will serve as preliminary information to measure change and improvements in specific academic and leadership aspects related to the students. The applicant must demonstrate in the application annexes the sort of baseline information that will be solicited from the students’ candidates.”

Please explain further.

Answer: The applicant must submit an overview of the baseline information they will request from the student candidates at the time of initial admission that will help in evaluating outcomes and attributing results to USP. Illustratively, an applicant may propose to collect information about number of internships, community service projects or voluntary camps that a student was engaged in during high school years. By the end of the project, similar information under USP will have been collected measuring the number

of community service projects under USP. This will help reflect the progress a student made, compare results, and accurately attribute success to USP in making students more active.

6. Page 14 under “Monitoring and Evaluation”: Upon completion of the project, USAID expects that:

“At least 50% of the scholars have demonstrated an improved academic achievement of at least 5% on their cumulative average upon graduation compared to their initial first semester results;”

The academic reality dictates that the level of the academic courses be higher as the scholars advance in their academic path. We will be providing all necessary academic support to see that scholars keep on improving in their academic performance, but we need to take into account that with more advanced courses and community involvement, cumulative GPAs that start high cannot keep on improving.

Answer: The applicant’s interpretation, feasibility and deviations from the expected results must be presented in the technical application for evaluation. For instance, the applicant is encouraged to present information on what would be a reasonable cut-off GPA that any student who has a GPA equal or above that cut-off point, their GPA is not expected to improve anymore. A detailed justification must be presented. Also, if there is no expectation of improvement beyond the cut-off point, the applicant must present information about its expectation concerning sustaining performance.

The RFA is hereby amended as follows:

USAID hereby deletes the sentence on page 14 under Monitoring and Evaluation “Upon completion of the project, USAID expects that: At least 50% of the scholars have demonstrated an improved academic achievement of at least 5% on their cumulative average upon graduation compared to their initial first semester results;”

and replaces it with the following:

“At least 70% of the scholars have demonstrated at least a sustained academic average throughout the project lifetime as reflected in their cumulative averages or GPAs; for the purposes of this exercise “sustained” means that the cumulative average remains the same or within a four percent (4%) margin upwards or downwards compared to the initial average earned during the first regular semester”

7. Page 14 under “Monitoring and Evaluation”: Upon completion of the project, USAID expects that:

“At least 80% of the scholars have cumulative averages over 80% upon graduation;”

We believe this is far-fetched and hard to attain. It should not be binding to us. We will provide all types of academic and personal support that will normally yield better academic performance, but it cannot commit to the stated percentages and ratios.

Answer: The core principle of USP is merit coupled with focused attention and assistance by the program throughout its life until the student graduates. The applicant must present any interpretation, feasibility and deviations from USAID expectations in the application for technical evaluation.

8. Page 14, under “Monitoring and Evaluation”: Upon completion of the project, USAID expects that:

“At least 50% of the scholars will have assumed at least once a prominent position in their university based clubs or association by the time of graduation (such as club president or vice president);”

This is also far-fetched as we have a total of (101 clubs). Around 75% of those clubs are active; therefore, the expectations of the RFA are as such that we will populate all the clubs with USP scholars. How realistic and fair would that be? Therefore let us set an operational definition for “prominent position “ and state that scholars who play an instrumental and concrete role in the agenda setting,

decision making and initiative taking inside their clubs be considered as playing a prominent role in that respect.

Answer: The definition of prominent position is illustrative in the RFA and states “such as club president...” The applicant is encouraged to provide their actual interpretation of this statement within the application for technical evaluation.

9- **On page 13 of the RFA (first paragraph), it is stated that: “USAID will not cover the costs of personnel to undertake recruitment and selection”.** The recruitment in public schools (visiting more than 260 public schools in various and remote regions) is not done routinely. It is also very costly in terms of staff (six part-time staff members were hired on the USP (2) program for three months, in addition, the Associate Director of the Admission’s Office had to train them and accompany them during all recruitment visits).

Since this is not regular admission business, please let us know: a) if we can charge part of the recruitment and selection expenses on the program, b) if we can include it as cost share, and c) if we can contract non-university personnel for 2-3 months to help in recruitment.

Answer: The applicant may propose their recruitment approach in the application to be supported with due detailed justification. Such expenses can account towards the cost share. The RFA allows on page five (5) sub-awarding to a local Lebanese organization activities related to outreach, which include school visits.

10- **On page 13 of the RFA (second paragraph), it is written that: “Two positions are identified as key positions, irrespective of their level of effort and source of funding Both positions are considered to be equivalent to a Foreign Service national grade 11, Step 10”.**

Please clarify what is the equivalence of a Foreign Service national grade 11, Step 10.

Answer: This is to amend the RFA and delete the sentence "both positions are considered to be equivalent to a Foreign Service national grade 11, Step 10." This sentence shall be replaced by the following:

"both positions are considered to be equivalent to at least a senior management specialist, with a a masters degree at a minimum and seven to nine years of experience."

11- **On page 18 of the RFA (final paragraph), there is the following passage: “Services provided usually by university staff such as admissions, advising, orientation, clubs registration, registrar and transcript recording, or faculty assignments to regular students as part of the university regular academic work must not be charged towards the project. Only services that are provided uniquely to this project, and are not usually part of the university regular academic support, may be charged to USAID or accounted as cost share”.**

Please clarify if this means that we cannot cost share indirect costs, as is provided for in our Negotiated Indirect Cost Agreement (NICRA) with the US government that is based on salaries’ cost. If this is the case, it would prevent us from cost sharing a substantial amount in indirect costs. We would have to cover the cost of providing these services to the USP scholars, and in addition, we would still have to come up with 30% of total program costs as cost share contribution. **Kindly inform us if our interpretation is correct.**

Answer: this is to amend this paragraph to rectify a typo on page 18 of the RFA to read as following:

“Services provided usually by university staff such as admissions, advising, orientation, clubs registration, registrar and transcripts recording, or faculty assignments to regular students as part of the university regular academic work must not be charged towards the project. These aforementioned services, such as advising and faculty assignments may be counted as cost share. Only services that are provided uniquely under USP, and are not usually part of the university regular academic support, may be charged to USAID. All cost share items will be analyzed for cost containment, realism, effectiveness and suitability to the project. USAID recommends the cost share of customs and VAT if they are not exempt from them.”

12. On page 7 of the RFA, it is stipulated that ‘applicants must clearly reflect in their application the total number of scholars...who will enroll in: three years programs... four year programs ’ and on page 9 ‘scholars enrolled in four year programs must not exceed 25% of the total number of scholars expected under the program’.

At our university, the program duration does not fit into strict categories. Depending on course load of full time students (above 12 credits), all programs generally take between 3 or 4 years. Would it therefore be possible to consider all majors as four years?

Answer: program duration should be commensurate with the posted duration of each program as per university catalogue, applicable university policies and taking in consideration that students must make normal progress towards graduation. The normal time required for a 90-95 credit is typically three years. If deviations are considered by the applicant, then the applicant should clearly justify the deviation. The deviation will be evaluated accordingly for being justified, reasonable and cost effective.

13. Furthermore, on page 7 of the RFA, it is indicated that ‘applicants must clearly reflect in their application the total number of scholars expected to enroll under the program including the expected number of scholars who will enroll in: three year programs, three year programs with teaching diplomas, three year programs with intensive language, four year programs, and four year program with intensive language.’ How about students who want to enroll in three year programs with intensive language and with teaching diploma? And students enrolling in four year programs with intensive language and with teaching diploma?

Answer: the applicant may provide detailed information concerning additional breakdowns related to intensive language and other combinations they deem appropriate within the scope of this RFA. Guidance concerning university preparation year is clearly posted on page nine (9) of the RFA. The applicant must ensure though that any proposed combination (preparation, degree and teaching diploma) must lead to graduation within the project lifetime. The applicant is encouraged to reflect how any deviations from the proposed numbers that may occur during actual implementation will be managed, and how cost savings as required on page (11) of the RFA will be addressed.

14. On page 7 of the RFA, there is a paragraph entitled Baselines collection stating that ‘the awardee must duly collect relevant baseline information at the admission application phase related to academic performance, leadership engagement, community projects completion to enable the

program to measure outcome and impact at the end of the project.’ How will change and improvements be assessed? Qualitatively? Quantitatively?

Answer: This is a matter that needs to be developed by the applicant in line with the proposed monitoring and evaluation approach and based on the expected outcomes of the project, at least as reflected on page 14 of the RFA.

15. On page 8, it is stated that ‘major and minor option taking in consideration that USAID will not cover the cost of additional semesters’. Can you confirm that by this it is meant that USAID will cover the cost of additional courses, if the duration of study is not increased i.e. if students take the courses for their minor requirement on top of their course load each semester without delaying their graduation date?

Answer: USAID confirms that what is meant is that USAID will not cover the cost of additional semesters; i.e. any additional semesters to complete a minor degree that will be required beyond the normal graduation date. As for additional courses taken without extending the graduation date, the applicant must present its plan concerning eligibility and costs implications on USAID as required on page eight (8) of the RFA, for it to be considered.

16. On page 8 it is mentioned that ‘USAID must not have been charged the substantial cost of too many courses that will not count towards the new degree’. Can you please specify how many courses are meant by too many courses? Is there a maximum number of courses that USAID will pay for in the case of change of major for poor performance?

Answer: it is USAID preference not to pay for any course that will not account towards the degree as this is not cost effective and leads to wasting tax payers’ funds. The maximum number of courses will be determined on case by case basis taking in account the permissible course load of the student during year one, the university policy concerning paying for courses above 12 credits, and policies of course transfers. Accordingly, it is up to the applicant to determine what would be a reasonable number of “wasted” courses.

17. In page 10, it is stated that ‘housing offered in private apartments outside of University supervision or sponsorship is strictly forbidden’. Would it be acceptable if the housing in adjacent apartments is offered in the vicinity of the university and a resident is recruited (either through financial or in-kind remuneration) to supervise and implement rules?

Answer: Yes. USAID guidance does not relate solely to the housing location, but more importantly to ensuring that university supervision is in place. Accordingly, the applicant must demonstrate how university supervision and sponsorship will be ensured in “adjacent apartments”. What is strictly forbidden is having private housing outside of university premises and having these apartments outside of university control and its direct supervision.

18. It is mentioned in page 13 of the RFA that ‘USAID will not cover the costs of personnel to undertake recruitment and selection’. Who would then be responsible for carrying out visits to 240 public schools in addition to public technical school, given that the workload of the current recruiter focuses mainly on institutions in the greater Beirut, and private institutions?

Answer: This is to amend the above statement on page 13 of the RFA as follows: “USAID will not cover the costs of personnel to undertake recruitment and selection, if these personnel are already part of the admissions office or are benefiting at the university from any student employment benefits; otherwise USAID may cover the costs of personnel if these personnel are serving uniquely on USP and were recruited only for the purpose of expanding the recruiters base”.

The applicant must provide a detailed justification of the proposed recruitment strategy, staffing and associated costs. Opportunities to cost share or sub-award outreach work are clearly highlighted in the RFA.

19. On page 13, it is stated that ‘overall management costs including direct and indirect costs may not exceed 7% of the total USAID program funding’. Does this include management costs charged to USAID and cost share?

Answer: The statement is related to total USAID program funding, i.e., USAID share. This cap does not relate to the cost share.

20. On page 5, it is mentioned that ‘at least 240 public schools’ must be reached through direct visits (other than technical public schools). What if the number of students to be recruited is around 20? Can we accordingly scale down the number of schools to visit, while of course ensuring geographical balance? Similarly, this will also reflect on the target number of applications to be received.

Answer: the number of students to be recruited relates to internal considerations to the host university such as its capability, space availability and logistics, and financial considerations. However, the project is a national project offered to all public school students alike, and hence cannot be scaled down in terms of school visits. Scaling down other steps related to selection, short-listing, interviewing and applications may be considered by the applicant proportionally to the number of students intended to be recruited. However, at least 240 public schools must still be reached through direct visits. This must be clearly presented as required on page five (5) of the RFA related to the selection steps guidance.

21. On page 9, “applicants must clearly indicate in their application whether the title to property of laptops belongs to the scholars or to implementing partner”. In case the property belongs to the scholar, what should the implementing do if the student drops out of the program?

Answer: This is a matter that needs to be considered by the applicant and presented in the application as required on page nine (9) of the RFA as part of the “conditions of laptop ownership”.

22. It is stipulated on page 14, that ‘staff costs shall be proportional as well to the number of scholars enrolled during the last year of the program; i.e. if only 15 scholars are enrolled during the 6th year out of the 60 scholars (25% of the student population) then the implementing partner shall charge only 25% of the supporting staff cost to that respect’. However, logistically, it seems rather complicated to hire a staff member and then reduce her/his salary rate according to the number of students. Is there another way to interpret this sentence?

Answer:

“Support staff costs shall be proportional as well to the number of scholars enrolled during the last year of the program.” Example one: if only 15 scholars are enrolled during the 6th and last year out of an initially enrolled 60 scholars, the 15 remaining scholars at university represent 25% of the initial total student population. Thus, the student population decreased by 75%. Accordingly, the cost of support staff shall be reduced proportionally to the reduction in student numbers as following: support staff who were at 100% level of effort initially will be reduced by 75%, and will be serving at 25% level of effort only. Support staff who were serving on 50% initially will be reduced as well by 75% and will become serving at a 13% level of effort. Example two: If the number of students initially was 60 and the estimated remaining number of students during the 6th year is 30, then the student population reduction is by 50%. Hence, staff at 100% level of effort initially will serve during the sixth year only at 50%, whereby staff serving on 50% initially will become serving at 25%. The reduction in level of effort applies only to the last year of the program implementation for support staff.

23. On page 10 there is the following statement about summer semesters: ‘all regular programs that do not require mandatory summers will be offered a nine-month stipend only irrespective of enrollment during summer’ then ‘summer expenses will be covered only in the following cases: Up to one semester only for majors that require less than 95 credits and do not require mandatory summers as per the university course catalogue etc...’. Is it right then to assume that in the second case, it is allowed to provide stipends, housing and book allowance though the summer is not mandatory?

Answer: The sentence is clarified as follows: as reflected on page ten (10), “summer semesters expenses” refer to tuition and housing expenses only excluding stipends and book allowances. There is a specific section concerning stipends and book allowances on the same page. Stipends are already lucrative and will not be offered to students who wish to take non-mandatory summers. Book allowances must follow the guidance provided on page ten (10) under the section related to “stipends and book allowances: Book allowances are offered for two semesters per year for all programs that do not require mandatory summers; and up to three semesters per year for programs that require mandatory summers.”

