

Understanding the PRO-WASH & SCALE Applied Research Award

Question Responses

On April 1, 2024, the PRO-WASH & SCALE Award released a request for applications (RFA) for our applied research award. Extreme climate related events are increasing in frequency, severity, and duration throughout the world. The impacts of these events are not distributed equally, with larger impacts felt by the more marginalized communities, such as those living in poverty, and particularly those in emergency settings.

The purpose of this RFA is to address priority evidence gaps in enhancing climate resilience in emergency settings within a subset of PRO-WASH & SCALE's focus sectors: agriculture, natural resource management (including watershed management), hygiene, sanitation, water, markets, and livelihoods.

As part of the RFA process, PRO-WASH & SCALE solicited questions in writing via email about the funding opportunity from interested parties to be submitted no later than April 12, 2024, at 5:00 PM ET. This document responds to relevant questions submitted before the deadline.

1. **We would like to know whether we are eligible to submit our research document for this opportunity. Do you have a template for developing our concept note?**All information related to this grant can be found on our website [here](#). Eligibility criteria is outlined there under section C.
2. **Please provide more details on the following: Applicants must show proof of a Unique Entity Identifier with the US government or show proof that they have started the application process in the USG systems.**
The Unique Entity Identifier is the official government-provided number, like a tax ID number, that's used to identify businesses eligible for federal grants, awards, and contracts. UEI became effective since April 4, 2022. Please see more information on the government's website [here](#). It can take months to get registered and it is mandatory for Save the Children to be able to issue a grant, so we advise starting early.
3. **We are interested in the Applied Research Award 3 but we would like to know who we will sign the contract with. Will it be with BHA or with Save the Children?**
The contract will be with Save the Children US.
4. **We are pleased to respond to your advertisement (RFP) though we need some clarification from you on two issues.**
 - i. Do you have a specific area/geographical area to work in?
 - a. Please see the geographic area [here](#)
 - ii. Can we apply as a consortium of three organizations?
 - b. Yes

5. Can we apply as a private organisation?

Yes. Please see [Section C of the RFA](#) for more information.

6. Can we have a consortium with an NGO from xx country [country redacted], we will carry out research in both countries.

Yes.

7. Can Single organization apply for more than one projects with different partners?

Yes

8. We would like to know if it is possible to apply for this RFA in order to conduct research for a current BHA activity that focuses primarily on nutrition and expires in December 2024, although it also had a food security component that ended in December 2022. Would it be feasible to carry out further research in this field after the award expires? Additionally, we are thinking about applying for and conducting research in a future BHA activity that is scheduled to begin in June 2024.

We will consider the application if the work proposed fits within the parameters outlined in the RFA.

9. Can we apply for this grant call in partnership with a university?

Yes

10. Could you provide more context on the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities in emergency settings that the grant aims to address?

We expect that the applicants will describe briefly the specific challenges faced by the communities where they propose to carry out this research (See section B4 of the RFA for more information). We also recommend you consult the sources referenced in the RFA for more information on the challenges as well as documents and background documents such as [Climate and Environment Charter of Humanitarian Organizations](#), [Climate Centre](#), resources on climate & humanitarian aid on the [ALNAP site](#), [IASC Resources on Climate and Humanitarian Aid](#), [Reliefweb.org](#), as well as data and reports made available by Governments, International Organizations, NGOs, private sector, donors, academic, and research partners.

11. Are there particular success stories or interventions that PRO-WASH & SCALE considers exemplary in enhancing climate resilience in emergency settings?

We recommend that you consult search engines, cluster websites, as well as the resources listed above (IASC, Climate Centre, ALNAP, Reliefweb.org, as well as documents from National Governments, International Organizations, NGOs, private sector, donors, and academic and research partners) to see which interventions may have been successful in other contexts. PRO-WASH & SCALE does not promote a specific approach as we believe that the context, need, and humanitarian situation should drive the intervention.

12. How does PRO-WASH & SCALE envision the role of innovative technology or approaches in addressing the outlined challenges?

Both innovative technology and/or innovative approaches are welcome as well as promising, or proven resources/practices for enhancing the climate resilience in emergency settings. Please see Section F. Research Application Evaluation Criteria to understand how we will score the applications.

13. What are the priority areas for innovation and research identified by USAID in the context of climate resilience?

We cannot speak for USAID but recommend that you consult core USAID documents such as the [USAID Climate Strategy 2022–2030](#) and [USAID PREPARE Initiative](#), as well as resources on [Climatelinks.org](#).

14. How does the grant define "context-appropriate" solutions, and can you provide examples?

"Context-appropriate" solutions refer to interventions and strategies that are tailored to the specific socio-cultural, economic, and environmental context of the target community or region. These solutions consider local norms, culture, climate risk, beliefs, practices, resources, and constraints to ensure relevance, feasibility, and sustainability. Some examples can be found on the [Climatelinks.org site as well as on Climate Centre](#), [ALNAP site](#), [IASC Resources on Climate and Humanitarian Aid](#), [Reliefweb.org](#), as well as data and reports made available by Governments, International Organizations, NGOs, private sector, donors, academic, and research partners.

15. Are there any constraints or limitations in the scope of research or interventions considered under this grant?

The constraints and limitations are outlined in the RFA.

16. How should proposals integrate gender and social inclusion considerations into their research methodologies?

PRO-WASH & SCALE recognize that gender and social norms deeply impact and influence multi-sectoral interventions and behaviors. As such, gender and social inclusion are cross-cutting issues that should be integrated into each step of this activity, including the composition of the project team. Leveraging of local expertise in climate adaptation should also be incorporated, wherever possible, in the study design.

Any proposed data collection and analysis must be disaggregated by sex and age. Applicants are encouraged to propose further disaggregation (e.g., by disability or ethnic group) as appropriate for their research questions, methodologies, and contexts. Applications are encouraged to propose their own methodologies or approaches. The application should also demonstrate how the proposed methods will explore a deep understanding of relevant gender inequalities experienced by girls, boys, women, and men in the project context as it relates to the specific activity questions.

The exact methods of how that can be carried out will depend on the research methods proposed by the study team.

17. Can you provide more details on the expectations for leveraging local knowledge and expertise within proposals?

Leveraging of local expertise in climate adaptation should also be incorporated, wherever possible, in the study design. F. Research Application Evaluation Criteria lays out the expectations and the scoring of the RFA.

18. What are the most critical evidence gaps in climate resilience that this grant aims to address within its focus areas? Can you clarify the types of evidence gaps that are particularly pressing in the context of climate resilience in emergency settings? Are there specific thematic areas within climate resilience that are under-researched or particularly critical according to recent findings?

Please see resources such as [Climate and Environment Charter of Humanitarian Organizations](#), [Climate Centre](#), resources on climate & humanitarian aid on the [ALNAP site](#), [IASC Resources on Climate and](#)

[Humanitarian Aid, Reliefweb.org](#), as well as data and reports made available by Governments, International Organizations, NGOs, private sector, donors, academic, and research partners to identify potential gaps to respond to in your application.

19. How does PRO-WASH & SCALE define "emergency settings," and are there certain types of emergencies that are prioritized?

We do not prioritize certain types of emergencies. We do take a broad definition to emergencies. This can include complex/protracted crises, sudden-onset or slow-onset disasters, public health emergencies, or large-scale displacement.

20. What role do emerging technologies or data analytics play in understanding and addressing climate resilience in the context provided?

Since we are asking the applicants to respond to the RFA and propose a context, rationale, approach and objectives, we ask you to look at what role emerging technologies or data analytics play in what you propose, should you decide it is relevant and important to include.

21. What constitutes a "promising resource/practice" for enhancing climate resilience, and are there preferred domains (e.g., agriculture, WASH)?

Please see B3 for focus areas. The proposed research activity must include at least two technical areas, at least one from Focus A and at least one from Focus B. We seek proposals where a multi-sectoral approach enhances the research, offering deeper insights and practical value. There is no preferred domain among those listed.

22. How do you measure the effectiveness of interventions in these contexts, and what benchmarks should proposals aim to meet or exceed?

We recommend that you consult USAID Evaluation Guidance. You may find this resource of interest: <https://www.usaid.gov/evaluation/usaid-program-effectiveness>, among others.

23. Are there specific combinations of technical areas within Focus A and B that are currently underrepresented in research or practice but are critical for enhancing climate resilience?

We ask applicants to provide the justification for selecting certain technical areas and part of the applicants' work is a quick literature scan to see what the most recent available evidence in the area(s) is where you propose to work.

24. In terms of methodology, what approaches are seen as most effective in integrating interdisciplinary research across these focus areas?

The most appropriate methodologies and approaches are those that are the most appropriate for the research questions that applicants propose and that use a good understanding of research methods, the context, and secondary data to inform the selection of methods.

25. How should proposals navigate the selection of geographic areas when multiple regions present similar needs and opportunities for impact?

Applicants will need to determine in which area their organization can be the most successful for this call.

26. Can you provide guidance on operational feasibility considerations, especially in contexts with security concerns or accessibility issues?

Given the wide range of potential operating environments, PRO-WASH & SCALE cannot comment on feasibility considerations.

27. Are there specific tools or resources available to help identify and prioritize geographic areas based on existing USAID/BHA-funded emergency food security projects?

Each applicant can use search engines to find reputable information and data that will be relevant to the research questions and geographies that they propose. We recommend that you consult also the Where We Work | Humanitarian Assistance | U.S. Agency for International Development (usaid.gov) site for more information on BHA's geographic scope.

28. What types of methodologies or approaches have been found most effective in previous PRO-WASH & SCALE or similar projects for generating actionable insights?

The most appropriate methodologies and approaches are those that are the most appropriate for the research questions that applicants propose and that demonstrate a good understanding of research methods, the context, and secondary data to inform the selection of methods. We are open to a wide range of approaches- human centered design, participatory research methods, qualitative methods, quantitative methods, mixed methods etc. What is most important is that the methods you propose correspond to the type of questions you are asking. We recommend that you consult research methods guides that are freely available online and consider consulting some of the resources on the [USAID Learning Lab | site](#). site.

29. How can proposals ensure the ethical considerations, especially in vulnerable communities, are thoroughly addressed and monitored throughout the research?

We ask researchers to consult research handbooks and reference documents, particularly those with sections on working with vulnerable populations or humanitarian settings to ensure that you build in appropriate ethical considerations. You may also find some of the resources like USAID's Safeguarding resources and the Ethics for Humanitarian Innovation (<https://higuide.elrha.org/ethics/toolkit/>) of use.

30. In terms of using existing/secondary data, are there specific databases or resources that PRO-WASH & SCALE recommends or provides access to for applicants?

We recommend that you use your understanding of the context along with web-based searches to identify the secondary data that would be most appropriate for the contexts where you are proposing to undertake the work. We do not provide access to any data.

31. Given the fixed amount and single award, how critical is the scalability of proposed interventions in the evaluation process?

We are not expecting that interventions be scalable beyond the life of the grant.

32. Can you provide insight into the typical competition level for this type of award and any tips for making a proposal stand out?

The number of applications for previous awards has varied greatly and therefore we cannot predict a "typical" level. To be considered, an applicant must submit the required attachments per the RFA.

33. How flexible is the funding with respect to reallocating budget items as the project progresses, considering unforeseen challenges or opportunities?

The funding will follow the US Government's Standard Provisions for Fixed Amount Awards and therefore is quite flexible.

34. What are the most common challenges applicants face during the research design finalization phase, and how can these be mitigated?

35. How should applicants plan for the potential need to adjust research methodologies or focus areas in response to initial findings or stakeholder feedback?

Please use your previous experience in conducting research to estimate the level of effort and flexibility that you typically need to incorporate in stakeholder feedback and make adjustments to tools or sampling. Likely the more information you know about your context, the better your research design will reflect this.

36. What level of detail and specificity is expected in the inception report, particularly regarding strategy, roles, and responsibilities?

Inception reports will be expected to include the final research question(s), methodology, timeline, list of key deliverables, roles, and responsibilities for the study.

37. Are there examples of past deliverables that were particularly effective in engaging the target audience or influencing practice and policy?

Yes, you can find examples of past deliverables on [Resource Library | Food Security and Nutrition Network \(fsnnetwork.org\)](#). Typically, we find that deliverables that are well written, organized, and easy to read are appreciated. Deliverables must be useful and applicable to USAID partners and the broader community of practice.

38. How can applicants best balance the depth of research with the need for deliverables to be accessible and engaging for a non-technical audience?

As this action research is being undertaken specifically to provide useful information that practitioners can apply to their work, it will be important for the research team to not only possess technical and research skills but be skilled in communicating those results and findings clearly to a broad audience.

39. What resources or support does PRO-WASH & SCALE offer for the development and dissemination of creative deliverables, such as videos or podcasts?

PRO-WASH & SCALE will not be available to provide support for deliverables such as videos or podcasts. These costs will need to be incorporated into the grant budget.

40. How are milestones determined and agreed upon, and what flexibility exists for adjusting milestones due to unforeseen challenges?

Milestones are agreed upon between the successful applicant and PRO-WASH & SCALE. There is flexibility to adjust.

41. What are common reasons for delays in payment approval, and how can applicants mitigate these risks?

Incomplete, poor quality, or tardy deliverables are a common reason that payments are delayed.

42. Are advance payments available to support initial project activities, or are payments strictly reimbursable based on incurred expenses?

This award will be issued as a fixed amount award and therefore payments are based on the agreed-upon milestone table and are not advances or reimbursements.

43. How should proposals demonstrate the efficient use of requested funds to maximize impact within the stated budget ceiling?

Applicants should budget the funds that their organizations require to complete the proposed work.

44. In the context of potential funding adjustments, how open is the funding process to negotiating budget items post-selection but pre-award?

PRO-WASH & SCALE encourage grantees to submit final budgets in their first round of application to ensure that further adjustments do not need to be made.

45. Can you clarify the process for organizations that are in the process of obtaining a UEI but do not have one at the time of application?

Organizations that do not have a UEI number will need to provide proof of application to the US government.

46. What advice do you have for first-time applicants from developing countries to ensure their applications meet all eligibility and compliance requirements?

Pay close attention to the eligibility and application requirements contained in the RFA, including the requirements set out in section F3 of the RFA to ensure a complete application.

47. How does the Technical Review Committee weigh different components of the proposal, such as innovation versus feasibility?

Please see section F. Research Application Evaluation Criteria of the RFA.

48. Can you offer insights into the pre-award assessment process, particularly for organizations new to USAID grants?

The pre-award assessment tool is an internal tool that Save the Children uses to assess grantee's ability to manage subawards. It asks standard questions about an organization's internal policies and procedures.

49. For the developing country preference, how should collaborations between institutions from developing and developed countries be presented to align with this criterion?

The developing country preference refers to the location of the research study.

50. What resources or support does PRO-WASH & SCALE offer to applicants, especially those from non-English speaking countries, to meet the language and formatting requirements?

PRO-WASH & SCALE requests that grantees budget for these requirements themselves, as we do not have funds available beyond the grant.

51. How strict are the formatting requirements, and what are common pitfalls to avoid in ensuring compliance?

We ask that applicants adhere to the requirements in the RFA.

52. In terms of appendices, what level of detail is expected in demonstrating past performance and relevance to the proposed project?

Applicants should include any past performance experience directly relevant to their proposal.

53. Can you provide guidance or templates for the budget preparation to ensure alignment with PRO-WASH & SCALE expectations?

Please see the [templates provided on the website](#) for guidance.

54. What are the most common mistakes or oversights in the submission process, and how can applicants ensure their proposals are successfully received and considered?

Applicants should carefully review the required attachments and section F3 of the RFA to ensure a complete application.

55. For past performance reviews and samples of deliverables, what criteria do evaluators use to gauge relevance and excellence, particularly concerning innovation and impact?

It will be up to applicants to demonstrate, through their understanding of the scope of the RFA, the relevance of any past performance reviews and samples of deliverables.

56. How should applicants approach the budgeting for indirect costs, especially if they do not have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with any U.S. government agency?

Applicants should consider applying the de minimis rate to indirect costs.

57. Are there any common pitfalls or errors in the submission process that applicants should be particularly vigilant about?

Applicants should ensure that they have read and understood the requirements in the RFA.

DISCLAIMER

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