



USAID
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PVO RFA Consultation

For

USAID Office of Food for Peace



Recommendations

Workshop Report

June 2013

PVO RFA Feedback Workshop Report and Recommendations

Counterpart International offices

Crystal City

June 27, 2013

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I. Introduction

As a part of FFP's commitment to consult with the PVO community to improve their processes and ultimately the quality of FFP-funded programming, FFP requested that TOPS facilitate a consultation with PVOs to improve the Multi Year Development Food Assistance Programs RFA and country guidance documents. FFP has expressed their flexibility and openness to new ideas and has provided this opportunity for the PVO community to input their ideas into the RFA process. This consultation consisted of discussions, suggestions, and recommendations for improvement in two main areas:

- a. Content and structure of the actual RFA document and accompanying country specific guidance document, e.g. language used to clarify FFP requirements, integration across technical areas, etc.
- b. Issues around the RFA process, e.g. timing, in-country meetings, etc.

The consultation did not address issues related to the subsequent implementation of the project once awarded and did not discuss issues that are beyond FFP's control (e.g. USAID's new policy on external baseline and final evaluation requirements). While this workshop will develop some immediate recommendations for FFP, it is expected that this consultation will not end at this point and there will be further opportunities to clarify and develop recommendations in the future.

TOPS solicited feedback from FFP implementing partners through an initial set of interviews followed by written organizational feedback solicited through the TOPS FSN Network News e-newsletter. TOPS consolidated this feedback into one feedback document (Annex C: Consolidated Feedback) organized into 24 key topic areas, plus a number of Miscellaneous Comments.

Based on this information, TOPS developed draft recommendations to provide a basis for discussions in the RFA Feedback Workshop (Annex B: Draft Proposed Recommendations).

The feedback and consultation workshop was held on June 27th from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, at the Counterpart International offices in Crystal City. It was attended by 39 participants, representing the major implementing organizations, as well as USAID's Office of Food for Peace and Tufts University. This report contains the agreed recommendations to FFP, an agreed follow-up plan, plus all the documentation from that workshop.



II. Discussion Process

To enable a more efficient discussion process, the key topic areas for discussion from the Draft Recommendations Document (Annex B) were prioritized by group vote at the outset of the consultation. The top ranked and related topic areas were grouped into five new sections as follows:

- A) **Structure**, includes topic areas '1. Structure' and '8. Page Limit' from the Draft Recommendations for Discussion (see Annex B).
- B) **Process and Timing**, includes topic areas '11. Concept Paper', '12. In-country bidders meeting' and '13. Timing of the RFA process'.
- C) **Gender and cross-cutting**, includes topic areas '3. Adequate Gender integration' and '5. Clarity around weight given to cross-cutting issues'.
- D) **M&E, and Research and Learning**, includes topic areas '6. Research and Learning', and '9. M&E Plan'.
- E) **Balance between increased demand for guidance on approaches and not being too prescriptive and constraining PVOs from being innovative and creative**, is topic area 4.

Workshop participants were split into five groups – four groups at tables in the meeting room, and one group online. The draft recommendations for each of the above sections were discussed by all of the groups. Support for those draft recommendations or suggestions for changes were then fed back in plenary.

III. Key agreed recommendations for FFP

The following are the recommendations that the participants of this workshop agreed should be submitted directly to FFP (Topic area numbers refer to the list table in Annex A, II.).

A. **Structure** (Topic areas 1 and 8)

- 1) **Recommendation:** restructure the principle section of the RFA using these proposed three sub-sections as a guide:
 - **Organizational Understanding of the Food Insecurity in Country X and the Targeted Communities**
 - **Program Design;** and
 - **Ration Design and Application.**

The full detailed description of the recommended changes is included in Annex C: Consolidated Feedback, in the first section, page 21, entitled "Proposed changes to format to improve flow and clarity."



These changes should be made in consultation with PVOs and taking into account other suggestions made at this workshop (see Annex: A, Section III) A) Structure on page 10).

- 2) **Recommendation:** increase page limit by 5 pages to allow space for adequate response to the solicitation including descriptions of gender and other cross-cutting issue integration within the body of the proposal. Recommend that annexes consequently do not contain any activity, strategy or plan description (see also Recommendation C. below).
- 3) **Recommendation:** allow font size 10 for tables and text boxes.

B. Process and timing (Topic areas 11, 12, 13)

- 1) **Recommendation:** to not have a concept paper. Concerns were:
 - a. It would not be significantly cheaper or take less time to produce a good concept paper than a full proposal, as these projects are complex and multi-faceted and a short concept paper round would not allow a full enough description to allow FFP to determine the best candidates for funding
 - b. A concept paper round may just extend the total time from RFA release through to final submission.
- 2) **Recommendation:** that in-country bidder meetings are scheduled and should include local organizations and host country government staff as well as Mission and DC-based FFP staff. Remote access should be available for those organizations that are unable to participate in-country. Recommend DC-based meeting in addition to in-country meeting.
- 3) **Recommendation:** that the proposal submission date is moved so as not to clash with the December/January holiday season. Recommend that the submission date is brought forward before Thanksgiving or moved back towards the end of February/March, or preferably mid-April as per the Haiti schedule in FY12. Two reasons:
 - a. It is extremely non-family and staff friendly to be finalizing such large and complex proposals during the holidays
 - b. Many host government and local NGO offices can be closed for significant periods of time over the holiday period.

C. Gender and cross-cutting (Topic areas 3 and 5)

- 1) **Recommendation:** that evaluation points are allocated for gender integration and for other cross-cutting issues that FFP consider essential.



- 2) **Recommendation:** that all gender plans and activities are included in the technical section of the proposal; that requests for gender-related detail should not require duplication of detail in other parts of the proposal; and that the Gender Annex is restricted to other aspects, such as institutional capacity, policies, and supplemental gender information. Recommend that the PVO community further discuss and further refine what should be incorporated into annexes (see section IV. 3) below).
- 3) **Recommendation:** Regarding the requirement for a gender analysis within first year of program, if the PVO can demonstrate that it has recently carried out an appropriate gender analysis and has addressed gender effectively within the technical proposal, then this requirement can be waived. The Gender Annex can be used to demonstrate the satisfaction of this requirement.

D. **M&E, research, and learning** (Topic areas 6 and 9)

- 1) Research, Learning, and Knowledge Sharing. **Recommendation:** that FFP should clarify what level of funding can be allocated for research, learning, and knowledge sharing.
- 2) Research, Learning, and Knowledge Sharing. **Recommendation:** In addition to PVOs designing and implementing their own individual research agendas, PVOs and FFP could agree top priority research agendas that can be implemented across programs within countries so that coordinated research activities in different contexts can be implemented with FFP resources. TOPS is a mechanism that could be used for prioritizing and agreeing research agendas with FFP and providing additional funding through the small grants programs and possibly associate awards.
- 3) M&E. **Recommendation:** that the contractor carrying out the baseline and endline engages with each program implementer to design the baseline and endline to be more closely congruent with the particular design of their project and to ensure clarity as to what information is to be collected by the PVO and what information by the evaluator.
- 4) M&E. **Recommendation:** that PVOs should be able to suggest additional indicators to be included in the baseline and endline that the PVOs deem important to measure program outcomes.
- 5) M&E. **Recommendation:** that baseline should be completed within a timeline agreed with the implementing PVO and information collected shared with the PVO within 6 weeks of the completion of the baseline to allow for timely adjustments in program design to be made



based on that information.

IV. Recommendations for further follow-up by PVO community

The workshop participants recommended that further PVO consultation was needed for the following items (numbers refer to list of items in Annex A, II.):

3) Gender and cross-cutting

Recommend that the TOPS FSN Network Gender Task Force review and provide recommendations for what should be included in the Gender Annex based on the recommendation above that all Gender and cross-cutting activities and plans should be included in the technical part of the proposal and not in an Annex.

4) Balance between increased demand for guidance on approaches and not being too prescriptive and constraining PVOs from being innovative and creative. (Only discussed by some of the workshop groups)

There was a strong desire to discuss this issue and it is recommended that a future meeting is held to further define the context to the “balance” question specifically. TOPS to facilitate.

14) Linkages with other USG initiatives, particularly FTF and USAID Forward (Not discussed in workshop)

While this issue was not specifically discussed in the workshop, there were a significant number of comments and references to linkages and coordination with other USG initiatives during the workshop and in the consolidated feedback (e.g. resilience policy, CLA, etc.). It is recommended that a special meeting is held to discuss this issue specifically. TOPS to facilitate.

17) Yearly funding level over the life of the project (Not discussed in workshop)

There were several very consistent recommendations to allow project funding to operate on a bell curve, including one recommendation from the workshop for having a year zero in which a minimum level of actual project activities take place, but start-up activities, assessments, baselines etc. could be completed at a low level of funding. It is recommended that a further meeting is held for PVOs to discuss this and come to an agreed position to present to FFP. TOPS to facilitate.



19) *Commodity budgeting* (Not discussed in workshop)

It is recommended that the TOPS FSN Network Commodity Management Task Force review this item and develop recommendations.

V. Topic areas without agreed recommendations

The following key Topic areas generated in the pre-workshop consultation were not discussed during the workshop and there are no agreed recommendations, although TOPS recommends the following.

a) For the following Topic areas where there was no clear focus or common themes in the consolidated feedback, TOPS recommends that they are discussed at a future meeting if there is sufficient interest from the PVO community and there is a member of the PVO community that is willing to take the lead:

- 2) Integration between different technical areas*
- 7) Sustainability*
- 10) Technical areas that are insufficiently addressed*
- 15) Geographic focus*

b) There were a number of questions seeking clarity on the following two Key topics. TOPS recommends that these questions and clarifications are pursued through other channels, perhaps including the FACG if appropriate, by interested PVOs:

- 16) Types of funding and budgets*
- 18) Community Development Funds*



Annex A: FFP RFA Feedback Workshop Notes

July 1, 2013

Held at Counterpart International offices

These notes are a verbatim record of written feedback from the different discussion sessions of the FFP RFA Feedback Workshop. No attempt has been made to edit these notes (except where the note needs clarification to be understood), so that they remain a true record of what the different groups produced.

I. Positive aspects of the FFP RFA

There are several areas where the PVO community would like to see improvement of the RFA documentation and process; however these have been progressively improved over the years and are already good documents. What the positive things the PVO community likes about the present FFP RFA documentation and process?

- country-specific information and guidance
- multi-sectoral integration
- contracting out the Bellmon
- providing the # of awards
- Q and A section
- focus on food insecure populations and DRR
- feedback to FFP taken seriously
- knowing the RFA schedule in advance
- technical resources identified in RFA
- knowing the spirit of ambition in the RFA
- increased focus on resilience and local capacity building
- electronic submission
- gender integration taken seriously and is not an afterthought
- specifics of how proposal should be presented (font number, pages) helps with clarity of presentation
- focus on research and learning
- having a diverse source of funding
- focus on nutrition and integrated focus on nutrition.
- linkage between agriculture and nutrition is very important
- Title II programs positive points: Work with poorest people and offer them the opportunity to improve their lives (in others, sometimes thought that poorest are beyond help)
- flexibility on cost-share
- youth focus
- feedback mechanism. Get the draft and have sufficient time to give feedback and can tell feedback is incorporated. (Sufficient time on both sides)



II. *Prioritization of key topic areas.*

A vote was held to prioritize which of the 19 key topic areas (below) to address today

Key Topic	Vote	Key Topic	Vote
1) Structure	15	11) Concept paper	14
2) Integration between the various technical areas	5	12) In-country meeting	1
3) Gender	9	13) Timing of RFA process	14
4) Balance of guidance and how much freedom to innovate	10	14) Linkages with other USG initiatives	5
5) Cross-cutting issue clarity	7	15) Geographic Focus	0
6) Research & learning	9	16) Types of funding and budgets	4
7) Sustainability	6	17) Yearly funding levels	1
8) Page limit	4	18) Community development funds	2
9) M&E	11	19) Commodity budgeting	2
10) Technical areas that don't get enough mention in document	1		

It was agreed that certain key topics naturally fit together and so as to facilitate the discussion key topics were grouped into new sections as follows:

- A) Structure (1, 8)
- B) Process and timing (11, 12, 13)
- C) Gender and cross-cutting (3, 5)
- D) M&E, research & learning (6, 9)
- E) Balance of guidance (4).

III. *Topic group discussion feedback*

Clarifying comments by consultant in *italics*.

A) Structure

Group 1:

- conduct IEE between award and only including a baseline quick snapshot in proposal
- agreed the 3 section suggested restructuring is a good starting point (*meaning recommendation 1a*)
- add a 4th section entitled “consortium management” (roles of consortium members and management structure)



- recommend another analysis session between Tim and PVOs.

Group 2:

- Agreed with recommendation 8a and delete 8b
- Recommend font size 10 for tables and text boxes
- Research could be a sub-section under program design and separated from activities

Group 3:

- Annexes should be evaluated – impacts page limits
- Charts and tables 10pt font
- Expand page limits, to integrate cross-cutting issues and therefore reduce annexes
- Support proposed restructuring (*recommendation 1)a.*)
- *Work on providing* guidance on what goes into an annex.
- No separate sustainability section - Sustainability fully integrated into activities.

Group 4:

- We recommend the structure proposed in the feedback document
- The scoring/weighting needs to be broken down by sub-sections
- Page limit needs to be increased

Online group:

- Support restructuring recommendation
- Aspects of program design missing - program design section
- gender - redundant if separate section included
- exit strategies, early warning, environment - can that be included as a separate section of the proposal or an annex?
- M&E
- Restructuring may result in not increasing page limit
- Increased number of cross cutting sectors may require page increase (don't go above 40 pages)

B) Process and timing

Group 1:

- One month notification minimum – concept paper
- Evaluation criteria – more discussion
- Full proposal at least 45 days *after concept paper accepted*



- Timeline: Forecast, then RFA country guidance, then in-country meeting (include PVOs, host country official), then 30 days, then concept note. Between short list on concept note at least 45 days until full proposal
- Short turnaround for documentation
- Remote linkages
- Simultaneous DC *and in-country meeting*
- Timing considerations – holidays
- Participation of host country officials
- Accept recommendations 11, 12, 13.

Group 2.

- Disagree with concept paper round reasons:
 - With title II would not be enough space to go into detail with such complex issues
 - Would not reduce costs for PVOs—still need a team, go out to the field
 - Most times concept papers do not receive feedback
- However, concept note round would help smaller PVOs
- In-country meeting (ICM) in agreement generally - public meeting gives quick feedback.
- However consultation with PVOs can/should occur before RFA is issued (FSCF)
- ICM allows Q&A that can lead to mod of RFA, esp. for local partners who might not see RFA issued and gives a forum where local partners are featured
- Agree with changing timing to not cover the holiday season
- Consider how solicitation timing impacts the implementation of the baseline – calculate backwards based on the lean season

Group 3.

- Concept note: is a good idea if it can be reviewed quickly and a reasonable level of info required.
- More advantageous to simplify the RFA and not have a concept note. Concept note would elongate the process
- Have in-country and DC-based meeting. (cost vs. inclusion of local organizations and ministries, make web access and provide transcripts)
- Further analysis of timing regarding:
 - Concept note
 - Hiring
 - Commodity call forwards
 - Time between award date and expected date
- Overall: No concept paper, yes on in-country meeting particularly with local partners and including FFP; yes, a change in due dates and timing. A desire to get holidays back.



- some concern with in-country meetings. Considerations: can smaller PVOs go?

Group 4

- Strongly disagree with the need for a Concept Paper. The programs are very complex and a lot of details will be missing. Some of the assessments may not be completed before the concept paper submission. Besides, it will increase the timeline also. How will those be evaluated?
- While the country specific guidelines are being developed, there should be some way of PVO input in to the nature of the problem and the kind of approaches that will be affecting the problem, process.
- In-country meeting, agree but FFP, Washington should be present in the initial and also any follow on meeting.
- The meeting must take place 2-4 weeks after the RFA is issued.
- Recommend February or March submission but program should start at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Online group

- Concept paper round - not recommended (increase competition, extend length of proposal development, to challenging to get SOs into short page limit); FFP not discussing
- In-country bidding meeting - agree that it would be helpful
- Timing of RFA - submission date (not working over holidays); length shorter if draft is out and final doesn't change significantly; FFP release earlier

C) Gender and cross-cutting issues

Group 1:

- there should be snapshots of crosscutting issues such as gender, environment and any other cross-cutting issues required in the RFA. Should be more thoroughly addressed after the award through assessments, etc.
- gender and other cross-cutting issues are integrated into design with gender assessment post award
- Specify the required indicators, but do not limit *so that PVOs can add extra indicators as necessary*
- Gender should not be a superior IR or SO
- Need to review WEAT appropriateness
- *Support recommendation 3)a and 3)c*



Group 2:

- gender attached to a higher-level objective with gender indicators
- need vs. cost of collecting gender indicators
 - FTF indicators
 - FFP needs to have standard gender indicators
- Other cross-cutting, e.g. resilience, needs clearer guidance and supported by clear strategy
- Support recommendation 3) b. with gender included in proposal

Group 3:

- Gender and cross cutting
 - annex should only include additional info addressing policies
 - gender annex should demonstrate how it is integrated into all activities

Group 4:

- Recommendation 3a: agree
- Recommendation 3b: agree
- Add, guidance on gender should be consolidated. Make sure that there is no redundancy—either annex or integrated into proposal but no redundancy
- Recommendation 3c agree
- Recommendation 3d standardize gender indicators
- there are still questions around Women's in Agriculture Empowerment Index
- Recommendation 5 agree
- But clarify the intent behind cross cutting issues

Online Group

- Gender should be part of evaluation criteria
- Redundancy issue - objective or highlighted theme? Standard indicators for gender would be helpful. More guidance on what goes into annex.
- Women's empowerment in agriculture index - takes a long time to integrate into baseline interviews
- Gender should be weighted more heavily
- Gender analysis - should this be included as part of needs assessment? More guidance needed.
- Which cross cutting areas does USAID really want to see? What kinds of outcomes and indicators are they looking for, if any?
- More guidance on what DRR should look like
- More cross cutting areas from resiliency - literacy, environment



D) M&E research & learning

Group 1:

- Recommend knowledge-sharing across awards in- and include in budgets
- Have a year zero with minimal start-up costs and focus on baseline and formative research
- Anything mandated research-wise in RFA, then state it, otherwise don't be prescriptive
- agree with recommendation to have dialogue with baseline contractor and ability to add indicators to standard indicators
- FFP highlight/prove all required indicators and PMP indicators

Group: 2

- M&E
 - well-developed in RFA but RFA not fully reflecting new USAID policy and M&E and should be clarified in future RFAs.
 - MvsE: ongoing activities vs. periodic activities. Baseline:mid-term:final eval.
 - Risk of external baseline etc. will lead to less PVO involvement
 - does need to be a consultative process
- research and learning
 - define a budget mark and parameters for R&L
 - trade-off of direct benefits to vulnerable vs. our learning
 - however also very beneficial to look and learn

Group 3

- R&L guidance should be more aligned with USAID CLA approach
- Rec 6a should be "research, Learning AND knowledge sharing"
- Agree with 6b – coordinate learning agenda at country level (who? how?)
- Recommend 5% of budget for r&l
- 'SAREL' type RFP for R&L
- TOPS Associate award to facilitate learning
- If food aid reform, (food → LRP/\$N) should be prioritized on learning agenda

Group 4

- Recommendation 6a agree but specify % of resources
- Recommendation 6b: Like but PVOs would like to have intellectual flexibility on research ideas
- Recommendation 9a Agree



- Recommendation 9b Disagree. It is probably not practical to complete baseline within 2 months
- the PVO should complete full M&E plan within the proposal even if baseline and endline are being outsourced
- share baseline report with the implementing partners within 6 weeks of completing

Online Group

- timing of baseline? Will it hold up implementation time. Timing included in RFA
- USAID preference on whether they approve local research approval
- USAID's preference on international or local based research organizations
- innovations: USAID should have more recommendations on innovations
- can the RFA confirm that internal learning and budgeting for activities

D) Balance of guidance

Group 2

- heavily prescriptive – good for setting standards, but discourages innovation, more like an RFP than an RFA
- saves PVOs from submitting a technical approach that FFP does not support

Group 3

- clarity on threshold issues
- FFP identify approaches that will not be approved



Annex B: Draft Proposed Recommendations for discussion

June 27, 2013

In much of the feedback provided for this consultation from PVOs, there are comments requesting FFP to define what is acceptable to them. Where appropriate in the draft recommendations below, I have turned this around so that the recommendations are defining what we the PVO community thinks should be acceptable. There are several places in the statements below where I have either made a suggestion or have put the letter 'x' (both in red) where I feel that we should finalize a figure or statement.

The recommendations below are to provide a starting point for discussion and are based on, what I hope is, an intelligent and informed reading of the comments and is also guided by the telephone discussions I have had with several PVO staff over the last 2 weeks. In some sections I have not made any recommendation as I did not feel that I heard a strong enough consistent message in the feedback to be able to distill a common recommendation.

The first recommendation below on restructuring the RFA completely is included as it seemed to be such a well thought through suggestion, in my opinion, that I wanted to put it on the table for discussion by the whole PVO community.

1) Structure of RFA document

- a. Revise the RFA format to improve flow and clarity as per first suggestion in the consolidated feedback document. This will reduce redundancy and provide a more logical flow to proposals making them easier to write, read and understand, and consequently easier to score by reviewers. By reducing redundancies it will also free up space within the page limit to expand on issues such as gender, technical integration, etc.

2) Improvement of integration between different technical areas

No specific recommendations for this section, as I could not draw out a common theme from the feedback. However, we may well want to discuss this as it is critically important to the success of the complex multi-faceted programming that we implement with Title II funding. See comments.

3) Adequate Gender integration

- a. Assign specific number of points for gender integration in the technical evaluation criteria (also see 5) a. below).
- b. Provide guidance as to specific content of Gender Annex. Recommend that Gender Annex is restricted to highlighting additional institutional capacity, policies and supplemental gender



information and not used to describe the gender plan or activities. All gender plans and activities should appear in the technical section of the proposal.

- c. Requirement for a gender analysis within first year of program. If the PVO can demonstrate that it has recently carried out an appropriate gender analysis and has addressed gender effectively within the plan then this requirement can be waived. The Gender Annex can be used to demonstrate the satisfaction of this requirement.
- d. Require FTF gender indicators as required indicators.

4) Balance between increased demand for guidance on approaches and not being too prescriptive and constraining PVOs from being innovative and creative

- a. FFP should outline priority or preferred objectives and outcomes for the program based on the Food Security Country Framework and relevant USIAD Country Strategy documents. Within those broad parameters applicants should be allowed to propose their assessment of the most effective strategies and approaches to achieve those objectives and outcomes. FFP should identify approaches that they will not fund which evaluations have shown to be harmful or ineffective within the country context.
- b. Where there are standard approaches that FFP does require to be utilized (e.g. PM2A), these should be clearly stated as such and links to official guidance provided.

5) Clarity around what weighting is given to cross-cutting issues such as resilience and gender

- a. FFP should assign specific number of points for cross-cutting issues according to FFP's assessment of importance (also see 3) a. above), and state that in the Technical Evaluation Criteria.

6) Research and learning

- a. PVOs and FFP should clarify the level of risk they are jointly willing to take when researching innovative approaches. PVOs recommend that up to **x%** of program resources should be acceptable to be allocated to research and learning activities.
- b. PVOs and FFP should agree top priority research agendas that can be implemented across programs within and between countries so that coordinated research activities in different contexts can be implemented with FFP resources. TOPS is a mechanism that could be used for prioritizing and agreeing research agendas with FFP and providing additional funding through the small grants programs and possibly associate awards.

7) Sustainability

No specific recommendations for this section. See comments.

8) Page limit



- a. It is recommended that page limit be increased by **5 pages**, in particular to ensure adequate description of gender and other cross-cutting issue integration.
- b. Revising the RFA format as recommended under 1) a. above will lead to reduction of repetition and redundant information and enable the present page limit to be sufficient.

9) M&E Plan. With external baseline and endline being contracted out, how can the M&E plan be linked effectively to those external evaluations?

- a. It is recommended that the contractor carrying out the baseline and endline engages with each program implementer to design the baseline and endline based on the particular design of their project, and to ensure clarity as to what information is to be collected by the PVO and what information by the evaluator.
- b. The baseline should be completed within **2 months** of the start of the project and information collected shared with the PVO within **1 month** of the completion of the baseline to allow for timely adjustments in program design to be made based on that information.

10) Technical areas that are insufficiently addressed

No specific recommendations for this section. See comments.

11) Would a concept paper round be a useful change

- a. It is recommended that FFP moves forward with investigating how a concept paper round could be implemented. The PVOs recommend that FFP consult with them on scoring criteria that enable a concept paper to be developed that significantly reduces the costs and time relative to the costs and time needed to develop a full proposal. FFP should also consult with PVOs on the timing of the concept paper round to enable the RFA process to be completed in a timely fashion.

12) In-country bidder meeting

- a. The PVOs recommend that such meetings become part of the standard RFA process, provided that it is a fruitful meeting where substantive dialogue takes place and that it is not just a one-way listening process for PVOs. Timings of such meetings need to be provided in the RFA announcement and the meeting should take place **x months/weeks** after the RFA is released.

13) Timing of RFA process

- a. Shift the RFA process earlier to have a submission date prior to Thanksgiving or later, as with the Haiti RFA, with a mid-April submission. Not only is it extremely difficult to have to work over the holidays, but many overseas offices and Governments basically close for 2 or more



weeks at the critical time just prior to submission.

14) Linkages with other USG initiatives, particularly FTF and USAID Forward

- a. Where FFP and the USAID Mission are clear on such coordination, it needs to be explicitly spelled out in the Country Specific Guidance what the expectations on coordination/collaboration are.

15) Geographic focus

No specific recommendations for this section. See comments.

16) Types of funding and budgets

No specific recommendations for this section. See comments.

17) Yearly funding levels over life of project

- a. FFP should allow flexibility within the constraints of the overall program budget to allow funding levels to vary from year to year, in particular to follow a bell shape curve. Low in the first year as activities start up, and low in the final year as project activities wind down – this is particularly important as we look at issues of sustainability.

18) Community Development Funds

- a. There is significant lack of clarity over CDF and what that funding can be used for and how flexible it can be and whether it counts in the calculation of the 202E ratio. PVOs recommend that CDF should be able to be **used interchangeably with 202E, ITSH and monetization funds** as appropriate for programmatic priorities and responding to emergencies.

19) Commodity budgeting

- a. FFP should provide commodity formats in standard Excel format as well as on the FFPMIS as not all staff involved in developing the commodity budgets have access to the FFPMIS.
- b. FFP should work with PVOs to develop formats that satisfy FFP's needs as well as provide PVOs with planning tools for their needs.

20) No further recommendations for remaining sections. Though please review comments



Annex C: Consolidated feedback on FFP RFA

TOPS RFA Feedback Workshop June 27, 2013

Note: all the feedback from different organizations has been cut and pasted into the sections below so that related comments can be easily read together. No attempt has been made to edit any of the feedback. Within each section, feedback from different organizations is separated by a dashed line “-----”. The section numbers are purely for ease of referencing comments and no attempt has been made to prioritize or favor certain comments over other comments. The sections below correspond roughly to the sections from the guidance document. At the end there are some additional sections that contain additional comments that were submitted.

All typos, grammar and spelling errors were cut and pasted from the originals!

Content and structure of the actual RFA document & accompanying country specific guidance document.

1) Overall RFA Structure Comments

One organization proposed a major restructuring as follows.

Proposed changes to format to improve flow and clarity: While the format proposed in the RFA is presented as “guidance” it is understood that reviewers are using checklists that correspond to each of these sections which places significant pressure for us to organize our proposal in this way. However the format really lacks a logical flow and creates a lot of redundancy. It could be greatly improved for function, clarity and efficiency that should aid both USAID and the submitting organizations. Right now the format for the principle section of the proposal, *Program Description and Design*, is as follows: 1. *Adherence to Country-Specific Information*; 2. *Linkage between Food Insecurity in the Region and Program Design*; 3. *Technical Sector Interventions*; and 4. *Program Design*.

As presented it creates a high degree of redundancy and does not present a logical flow based on the MFR (Managing for Results) methodology that USAID would like organizations to adhere to. All four sections above require you to present your program design in each of the sections even though program design is the last section. This is very redundant. We spend a lot of time trying to say the same thing in a slightly different ways rather than using time and space presenting the challenge



and subsequently a logical and compelling design. As presented, the guidance also really does not ask applicants to clearly present the challenge based on their understanding of the underlying problems in a way that contextualizes, deepens, builds upon or even challenges assertions made by USAID in the RFA. A more sensible, efficient and direct layout would be comprised of three sections:

1. Organizational Understanding of the Food Insecurity in Country X and the Targeted Communities; 2. Program Design; and 3. Ration Design and Application

1. Organizational Understanding of the Food Insecurity in Country X and the Targeted Communities

- The organization in this section should summarize their unique understanding about the fundamental barriers that are keeping populations in a state of food insecurity.
- If the country level guidance has already predetermined the SO (and possibly IRs), then this section should be organized around those results (example: health, resiliency, agricultural productivity) and the interconnectedness of these challenges
- This problem statement should also logically help lay the groundwork and build the case for the proposed results and interventions reflected in the results framework under the program design section so that the reviewer can easily follow the organization's logic.
- By asking each organization to also explain these issues not just in general or regionally for the proposed targeted communities USAID is now gaining insight into how much groundwork and research each organization has actually done in preparation for the proposal.
- By doing this you are already adhering to the country-level information and laying the groundwork for the linkage between food insecurity in the country and targeted communities and the program design.

2. Program Design

- The Results Framework should be introduced and explained first. This, after all, is a reflection of the overall organizational design and proposed response to the problem laid out in the first section.
- The framework should align (at the level) with that which is proposed in the RFA guidance. If IRs or particular intervention areas are also reflected in the RFA guidance, it should be reflected in the results framework. If the framework diverts from the guidance in any way, the submitting organization should explain why.
- The Intermediate Results (if not provided in the guidance) and lower level results, along with the narrative under these sections, are really the presentation of each organization's unique understanding of the causal linkages necessary to achieve improved food security. The nature and content under these IRs/LLRs should logically flow from the problem statement section above deepening and further clarifying for USAID the organization's interpretation of what is most critical for changing the conditions.
- It should clearly demonstrate the proposed pathway to achieve improved food security in alignment with the SOs proposed by USAID.
- Because the problem statement section is organized in a similar way, it's much easier for the reviewer to see if each organization's argument is logical, coherent and responsive to the barriers as articulated.



- Technical sector interventions are explained through your program design under each LLR and therefore a separate section is redundant and unnecessary. The LLRs are really where the rubber meets the road. This is where each organization should explain the interventions they will undertake to achieve the result. The organization’s technical capacity and understanding of the technical issues should be reflected here.
- Under the appropriate LLR or LLRs, it should be explained what food distribution will contribute to the result which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section
- A subsection of the design section should be used to explain geographic selection and rationale or perhaps it should have a section of its own under *Program Description and Design*.

3. Ration Design and Application

- Food distribution is unique to MYAPS. Unfortunately, the rationale/approach of the design and approach to distribution often gets divided into various sections or missed altogether. It merits a section as part of the program design as it is often the largest intervention (financially speaking) USAID is making and it should be clear how that resource is being used to achieve results.
- Under this section, each organization should explain how the ration design was developed.
- As a note to reviewers: They should be careful of not taking a strict “nutritionist” approach to evaluating ration design. There are often several factors that have to be balanced in designing a ration including – nutritional value, incentive value, local context/experience, simplifying distribution based on packaging sizes, bellmon analysis, etc. These issues should be clearly explained here and an overall balance between them achieved. Reviewers should avoid being too “technical” in critiquing simply one element (such as critiquing marginal issues such as slightly too many or too few calories, fats micronutrients) when this is not the only factor that needs to be considered. In other words, reviewers should be careful to consider **all factors** involved when assessing the ration design.
- Size of ration should not be the only consideration but the period of distribution within a community, amount of time a given household will receive a ration, and explanation and rationale for entry/exit criteria. Often times the focus is simply on the size of the ration in considering whether or not too much or too little food is being given without considering the overall quantity entering and for what given period of time. This can be just as important as or even more important than the ration size alone.

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- Issuance of RFA and Country Specific Guidance: FFP in collaboration with USAID should consider issuing separate RFAs for each country that include Country Specific Guidance as the timing, resources, and technical parameters for each proposal may differ considerably, even though there will be consistencies among the RFAs. Those sections that are consistent can be boiler-plated into RFAs, while specific country-related information can be added into appropriate sections.

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- A better explanation of the general FFP strategy on DFAPs would be helpful. While there is country context, differences between the Haiti and Zimbabwe DFAPs made them feel like they were from different donors.
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- Where multiple awardees are a possibility, USAID should include at least a generic results framework within the RFA so that if multiple awards are granted, the individual MYAPs share common objectives. The current MYAPs within Mozambique are not similar. Key advantages of this recommendation: Enhances interagency learning, improves coordination between partners because results are shared, and allows expansion of creative and learning between partners because lessons learned can be easily shared among partners.
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- Solicitation information: How does FFP determine whether to provide only country specific information versus a food security country framework? The FSCF provides a much more in-depth description of what FFP is interested in seeing in applications, and is therefore much more preferable.

2) *The extent to which integration between different technical areas could be improved, e.g. SOs, indicators, etc.*

- a) The overall program strategy should include a brief description outlining how and to what extent the program Strategic Objectives will be integrated throughout program implementation to achieve food security outcomes. Descriptions of SOs, IRs, and activities should also show how and to what extent strategies, activities, and achievements will contribute to other SOs and IRs, and to those in the same SO or IR. This integration should also be included as a component within the Results Framework showing how various SOs, IRs, and activities are linked. As appropriate, within M&E plans, allow for output and other lower level indicators to support more than one IR or SO. Ensure that staff and management plans enable implementation of integrated strategies and activities coordinated to maximize contributions from various sectors. Examples might include: a home gardening activity lead by health staff requiring training by agriculture staff; or a productive safety-nets activity lead by DRR staff involving protection of potable water sources in the event of flooding, requiring technical assistance from health staff with a WATSAN specialization. However, this has implications for budgeting, as it would mean accounting for staff with different specializations outside of their usual program element. For example: staff who would usually be charged to agriculture and natural resources, being charged to health and nutrition.

To encourage greater integration between SOs and to reduce the current complexity of budget preparation, we would recommend that FFP remove the requirement to budget for individual line items by each of the 14 program elements and replace it with a requirement to budget for individual line items by each SO. We believe that this will reduce the stove piping that may occur when awardees are required to break down a budget line item into such detailed technical areas. We understand FFP's interest and requirement for partners to account for expenditures related to each of the 14 program elements. However, we would like FFP to consider the option of only requiring this type of accounting to take place as part of accounting and reporting process for actual expenditures as opposed to requiring it as part of budgets.

- b) USAID should provide more specific guidance on the FANTA strategy and FS framework vis-à-vis the USAID Resilience framework. We recommend that USAID Reconcile the DFAP guidance with USAID resilience and FtF guidance, with a preference for the USAID resilience framework. There



is an increasing amount of supplementary guidance references – policies and strategies, best practices, meta evaluations... a lot of material to digest. This is definitely an uphill challenge for PVOs, particularly newer ones to the DFAP proposal process. There are also other USAID tools and approaches, such as Facilitation, Collaborate, Learn, and Adapt (CLA) that are directly applicable to DFAP development. We recommend that USAID ensure to compile and cite the specific policies and approaches preferred, and incorporate this into the DFAP guidance.

- c) Additionally, key government stakeholders should be involved in USAID’s RFA assessments and analysis so they are well aware of the proposed program. Key approaches, issues, policies, or policy frameworks should be included in the CSG.
- d) The Country Specific Guidance should provide an analysis and modify the PM2A approach so that it is aligned with the target country government strategies. In the case of Zimbabwe last year, some government officials were not even aware of the program, and were not supportive of a blanket feeding approach.
- e) The latest Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition presents new guidance and findings on integrating agriculture and nutrition. Additionally, other institutions such as IFPRI and World Bank have developed ag/nutrition frameworks to demonstrate these linkages. CRS recommends the inclusion/adoption of these concepts and tools to provide guidance on how to better improve nutrition through nutrition-specific agricultural programs and interventions.

- f) Use of Technical Studies to Justify Technical Approaches: As and where appropriate, integrate key findings from FAFSA 2, Tufts Exit Strategy Study, and PM2A IFPRI field studies in Burundi and Guatemala as/when available. Provide the key findings from these (or other) studies that will be used in determining the validity and appropriateness of program approaches in the guidance and provide links to the studies themselves so that they can be referenced by the applicant where appropriate.

- g) More transparency about what approaches they like and don't like would be helpful. From FFP-funded documents, we learned FFP doesn't like protection rations. But we've also heard in passing that FFP may not be sure about Care Groups. Also, the recent RFAs have mentioned Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, but we understand that FFP may not be in love with FMNR but more the general approach to sustainability. This is not laziness or unwillingness on our part to read the literature. It's wanting to know, from the many ideas in the literature, where FFP stands.

- h) The IPTT design process allows for ensuring greater integration between the different technical areas.

3) *Problems with ensuring that gender is integrated adequately throughout all the sections of the proposal. Does the possibility of a separate gender Annex benefit our ability to describe that integration or does it actually perpetuate the view that gender is an add-on?*

- a) Gender constraints should be addressed throughout all aspects of the proposal, and the applicant will show how men, women, boys and girls will be empowered through the implementation of each program component in accordance with the USAID Gender Equality and



Female Empowerment Policy. In addition a section of the proposal (This could be an annex, or separate section of the proposal) should outline specific gender-focused activities including: (1) plans to carry out a preliminary gender analysis to determine gender constraints that must be addressed by the program, and a final gender analysis to assess program achievement in addressing gender constraints; (2) how gender- focused interventions will be included in the detailed implementation plan; and (3) plans for gender training activities for awardee, partner, and key stakeholder staff based on findings of the preliminary gender analysis. Key indicators to be measured through the gender analyses will be included in the M&E plan.

- b) The guidance on gender should be consolidated into a single section instead of several references and annexes. Key policies and literature should be mentioned.
 - c) Gender as a cross-cutting theme (pg 10) - FFP should be clear on their expectations on the level of integration within activity descriptions and how it should be presented in the proposal narrative, just to make sure PVOs provide FFP with what they want to see. Including a paragraph such as the Lessons Learned paragraph on pg 14, 1st paragraph would be useful. Increasing the page length allowed for the descriptions of the technical interventions would also enable applicants to improve gender integration and expected impact in activity descriptions.
 - d) There is also specific gender objective required in section 3. Technical Interventions, and a gender sub-section included in section 4. Program Design. USAID should consolidate these two requirements into one cross-cutting section on gender to reduce redundancy. This section can be used summarize approaches through a gender lens, and more specifically state gender objectives or cross cutting strategies. If more space was allocated to the Technical approach, this would be an area where additional text could be added, and reduce the need for an annex.
 - e) Gender annex requirement. More guidance is needed for the expected content of the gender annex. This should be reserved for highlighting additional capacity, partner policies, and supplemental information, but not adding onto the proposal strategy. It would be useful to set a page limit so that applicants are assured that USADI will read the annex.
 - f) Gender indicators should be required. We recommend including the FtF Gender indicators in required indicators.
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- g) Highlighting gender as a cross-cutting issue and requesting for an annex without awarding any specific points within the review is not supportive of the intend. Specific points (e.g. 5) should be awarded for Gender Integration to ensure that there is an adequate focus. This is especially in-line with the finding that Women Empowerment significantly contributes to the reduction of malnutrition. There should be reference to this within the RFA. Furthermore it would be useful to incorporate standard use of the WE Index within the RFA.
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- h) All Title II programs are required to integrate gender into their program as a cross cutting objective. The gender objective must appear in the .. ." Please clarify if there should be a separate gender objective or is it permissible to have gender as a cross cutting theme that is incorporated into the Results Framework? Should it have its own IRs, impact, outcome and output indicators?



- i) The country guidance does not discuss gender issues but instead references the RFA, which is not context specific. Yet the RFA asks applicants to give a context specific gender approach. Gender is therefore not integrated into the country guidance; this gives the impression that gender issues are not core to the development problem and solution and therefore reinforces the idea that gender is an add-on. Also, it would be helpful for implementers to know what the mission's gender strategy is for that specific country and the country guidance would be a good place to do that.
- j) In response to the question about the gender annex: it may be too soon to tell if the gender annex option contributes to the idea that gender is an add-on. However, there is a risk in allowing for the gender plan -- which suggests that it includes specific activities - to be discussed in an annex, because these activities may easily then be left out of the budget. Perhaps the annex is more appropriate for elaborating only on activities already mentioned in the main text or documenting background information on the gender context in more detail than what can fit in the main text. The decision needs to be reflected in the page limits.
- k) The draft RFA states: "all Title II development food aid programs are required to complete an in-depth gender analysis within the first year of implementation, in a way that best ensures the results of the analysis will be incorporated into the design and implementation of the programs." We are concerned that this is overly prescriptive and could result in funds being spent unnecessarily. What if a PVO has already conducted a gender analysis in the area or can demonstrate that it has a thorough understanding of the gender dynamics in country? Will a PVO be required to expend resources to create a new study? We recommend that the language be modified to state that a PVO will be required to conduct an analysis if the program design does not adequately reflect strong gender programming.

- l) Gender is not adequately addressed in terms of the guidance to developing relevant activities and approaches as well as the resources for M&E, specifically standard indicators.
- m) The requests for gender-related information are duplicated in sections 3 and 4. It's probably most appropriate in Technical Interventions, given that the guidance requires us to include a cross-cutting objective, and by implication activities associated with it.
- n) The RFA could benefit from more detailed information on how gender should be cross-cutting. Developing standard indicators for gender, in line with other technical areas, would be helpful.

4) How can FFP balance the desire from many PVOs for greater guidance on approaches and a desire to know what approaches FFP supports, with not being too prescriptive and constraining PVOs from designing projects that are innovative and creative?

- a) USAID and FFP should outline priority or preferred objectives and outcomes for the program within the Country Specific Guidance based on the Food Security Country Framework, the best analysis, and relevant USAID Country Strategy and Policy documents. Within those broad parameters, USAID and FFP should allow applicants to propose the most effective and efficient strategies and approaches to fulfill those objectives and produce those outcomes. USAID and FFP should make available a set of lessons learned regarding approaches that would be ineffective, inefficient, or harmful within the country context including findings from previous



evaluations and from the FAFSA 2 (see below), and clearly indicate that it will not fund those approaches. In short, rather than list approaches they may fund, USAID and FFP should list the approaches they will not fund, and allow the applicant to develop an effective strategy based on what they believe would be the best means to achieve the USAID/FFP priority objectives and outcomes.

- b) What is needed is not more detailed prescriptive information but a format that is less confusing and allows for greater clarity. See suggested restructured RFA above

- c) USAID should indicate specific problems, justifications, and specific data, and clearly state the specific outcomes, impacts, and results to be achieved. USAID should provide more sectoral guidance on what it wants to see in the proposals, especially if there are specific technical requirements, partners, targets, and geographic areas they are expecting to see in the proposals submitted. More references should be made to learning from TOPS. However some level of creativity also needs to be left to the applicants as to how results will be achieved.
- d) In the Zimbabwe RFA, FFP included prescriptive programming that was broad and not necessarily helpful when designing the program. For example, PM2A was included but was not initially recognized or supported by the Go.
- e) USAID should provide guidance on its expectation for consortium and alliance composition, and the extent to which USAID Forward is applied in the target country. For example, in Zimbabwe USAID Forward was emphasized, however it is not clear that local organizations were supported in the award decisions.

- f) I think for the most part the existing guidance on approaches is sufficient, but FFP should provide some additional guidance on areas of “interest” e.g. Gender/WE, Knowledge Management, Collaboration with FTF, etc. Providing excessive guidance and “standardization” will reduce the “creativity and innovation” of PVO designs. This would reduce the review process to a comparison of costs effectiveness, rather than seeking quality proposals and implementers.

- g) Approaches: We don’t think it’s necessary for FFP to specify approaches. However, when there are established approaches that FFP has endorsed or developed, such as PM2A, it would be useful to be given an indication of whether these should or should not be used. In the Zimbabwe solicitation there is no mention of the PM2A Technical Reference Materials. Should they still be used in program design, or has this approach been abandoned? Has (or will) the guidance be updated?
- h) Technical Interventions (RFA p. 9,10): The list of details required in the discussion/description of the proposed technical interventions gets longer every year. This has created two issues:
 - i) it makes it increasingly challenging to answer all the questions within the page limit;



- ii) the structure appears to suggest that each of these points needs to be addressed per activity. However, some of them (such as gender) are cross-cutting, and would be better addressed as separate sections within the proposal.

5) Is there clarity around what weight is given to such cross-cutting areas such as resilience and gender in the assessment of proposals?

- a) One of the significant challenges of designing a project to respond to this type of RFA is placing appropriate priority on different programming. Perhaps providing more details on the specific priorities and weighting against them? In addition to the traditional sectoral areas, expectations in terms of gender and resilience, including what if any weight they will give to those cross-cutting themes when scoring the proposal are needed.

- b) FFP should provide a separate set of evaluation criteria to cover how well the applicant has integrated cross-cutting criteria that address USAID policies. These would include gender, youth, resilience, and local capacity building. A certain number of points should be shifted from other elements to these cross-cutting issues separately from the Program Design as they are important, yet may not carry sufficient weight in the current evaluation process. In addition, quality of integration of various program elements (SOs, IRs, and activities) should be given more attention under Program Design.

- c) Not always. One way to address this is to recommend that an issue be a cross-cutting result if USAID believes it to be that critical and important. It is possible to have other cross-cutting “themes” or approaches that are simply reflected under a number of LLRs that don’t necessarily merit having the position of a result.

- d) Clarity is better as far as what approaches are desired is better; weighting is not necessary unless USAID feels one sector or aspect of the program is a lot more important.

- e) No, Page 16 only makes reference to general program design, but not to specific areas of the design. We could propose to allocate specific points to gender.

- f) Activities (RFA p. 3): Is the list of activities tailored to the specific solicitation or a standard list FFP list? The way they are presented suggests that they all have equal importance. However, we recognize that some elements should be given greater emphasis than others, e.g. WASH is typically a smaller element of FFP programs, and is dependent on the specific context. Could this weighting/prioritization be recognized in the RFA?

- g) Evaluation Criteria (RFA p. 16): It would be useful if the scoring were broken down in more detail. Presumably our proposals are scored according to sub-sections, rather than the three broad areas outlined in the RFA.
- h) Technical Lead (CSI p. 2): The CSI seems to prescribe a very specific project structure, with the use of a technical lead for marketing. It is not typical to require applicants to adopt a specific



partnership configuration. No explanation is given as to why this one technical area is singled out. Applicants should be free to demonstrate their capacities based on whichever partnership approach they believe to be best.

6) Is the guidance around research and other program learning clear? How could it be made clearer? What about the funding of these initiatives?

a) The need to test out new approaches and promote program learning and innovation is important. However, little information is provided within the current guidance regarding the best ways to do this. In addition, it is not clear how much can or should be budgeted for this research. FFP should develop more detailed guidelines and examples of research or learning activities would be considered valid initiatives, and some indication of acceptable amounts to budget for this. For instance, in some Title II solicitations, substantial portions of the budget have been devoted to research and learning, yet it is not clear from the current guidance what the acceptable budget level would be. Also, there should be a reference to TOPS funding mechanisms such as small grants and associate awards that could supplement project funds for such initiatives. Links to descriptions of these grant mechanisms and application guidelines should be provided.

b) See suggested restructured RFA above.

c) Another issue that is often not clear is level of risk USAID wants organizations to take in order to innovate. The message is often that they do want new and innovative thinking but through issues comments it appears they want you to have all the answers or not stray too far from what is convention. You can't have it both ways in the extreme. What is the threshold of risk USAID is willing to assume to try things in perhaps ways that the reviewing "expert" is not accustomed to or has not experienced? We understand the need to critique and question the logic of approaches but sometime reviewers assert that it won't work because they haven't seen it work or want a certain level of assurance that demonstrates a high degree of risk aversion which results in a low level of innovation.

d) It would be more helpful to better understand FFP's priorities for conducting additional research. USAID states that the emphasis is on increasing the "body of evidence-based learning from Title II" yet the purpose of the research is rather open-ended. To ensure that the research is relevant and useful, it would be helpful to have more guidelines of specific areas of interest/priority and standards on how the research should be conducted.

e) In addition, it would be helpful to understand if there are certain budget parameters which FFP would like applicants to follow related to the amount/proportion of M&E funds which would be expected to go towards research and learning activities such as those described in the RFA.

f) More guidance on USAID expectations and learning priorities in the target country would be appreciated in this section in terms of research and learning priorities for FFP and the percentage of the budget that should be dedicated to research and learning as well as M&E.

g) This was a new section in the FY13 guidance. While this was appreciated, additional space is needed to adequately describe a research and learning agenda, the partnerships, and how it will



link to the program.

h) Page 11/12 only makes limited reference to this issue. This is an ongoing weakness in the existing guidance. Implementing partners get frequently “reviewed” on these issues (especially Knowledge Management), but there is little guidance on this topic. In general it would be helpful to identify some key areas of interest for learning within FFP and what structures existing to foster KM sharing. Also, how USAID will be coordinating and disseminating learning and knowledge management issues where there are more than one MYAP in a country.

i) Some of the examples presented as innovations seem random. Are they specific to the context? Should they be considered as a recommendation?

j) Does USAID have a preference of international (US-based), local, or in-house research capacity? Given that some of the recent research that USAID has commissioned on food aid and Title II programming has utilized US universities the suggestion is that these institutions are preferred.

k) The solicitation leaves the learning outputs very broad. It would be useful if the outputs were specified further, e.g. published research papers, conferences, etc.

7) Is sustainability addressed adequately, if not how can it be addressed more effectively?

a) All program strategies, approaches and activities should integrate exit strategies. Program element descriptions should all include the specific pathways to achieve sustainability of the activities, strategies or outcomes by the end of the project. Indicators for program elements should include those measuring performance on reaching exit strategy and sustainability goals. If a local partner to the program will carry on the strategy, approach, or activity after the end of the project, a description of how this will be done should be included as part of the program element description. A separate Sustainability Strategy is not needed.

b) In general this is usually addressed adequately. It is typically a sub-section under the program design. It would be fantastic, however, if FFP could allow a portion of funds to be used for post sustainability study and allow for this to be part of the overall proposal design.

c) More guidance is needed to ensure there is a mutual understanding of sustainability. Is it sustainability of impact or sustainability of DFAP activities? Are we looking at sustainability of all components, social impact, environment, economic. Environment is thoroughly addressed through the IEE; however what about other sectors? With the resurgence of ‘resilience’, FFP should clearly distinguish the connection between sustainability and resilience. Is a sustainable livelihood resilient and vice versa? Additional research and sharing is needed on how impact and activities have been sustained, and this should be included in the guidance.

d) Evidence of sustainability of the applicant’s approach should be highly emphasized and valued in the scoring criteria



e) Guidance of sustainability is sufficient.

8) Is the proposal page limitation sufficient to describe the proposed design, or should it be increased? If so what would be the ideal length and why?

a) At least 5 additional pages are needed to ensure adequate attention to: SO integration, cross-cutting elements, and adequate descriptions of program elements that include sustainability/exit strategies, integration of program activities, research and learning, and cross-cutting elements.

b) Under a proposed re-organized format as suggested above, the page limit should be more than adequate as it removes the redundancy thereby allowing more space to explain & detail both the challenges and solutions.

c) Space is not adequate to describe complex multi-sectoral strategies with cross cutting strategies. There is not enough room to justify and describe all SO and cross cutting strategies in adequate detail, draw linkages, cite evidence and lessons learned, and present partners. CRS recommends that an additional 5 pages should be added to the technical interventions section.

d) Past performance section - Two pages for past performance is insufficient, especially when trying to describe a large consortium of international and local partners. The page length should be 4 pages. Applicants should also be able to submit past performance tables as a required annex.

e) It is not clear if USAID reads additional annexes apart from what is required. Given the limited space in the technical narrative, it is helpful to provide supplemental information in an annex. Additionally, there is insufficient space to describe the program exit strategies in the technical narrative. This information should be provided in an annex.

f) Based on my experience 35 page limits for the technical approach is sufficient (max), especially as additional information can be provided in the annexes.

g) Length: Given that PVOs are often asked to provide more information at the issues letter stage, or are forced to include valuable information in annexes given the page limits, we request that the program description and design section be expanded beyond 35 pages.

h) Submission: The draft solicitation requires that all text in tables and charts be in 12 font. We request that this be changed to 10 font.

i) Format: The page limit, particularly for the Program Description and Design section, is not sufficient. Requests for additional information are added each year but are not complemented with the space needed to adequately address it.

9) M&E plan. Now that the baseline and end line are being contracted out, how can the proposal M&E plan be linked effectively in to those external evaluations?



- a) In the M&E plan section, FFP should provide a full description of the likely timeframe of the external evaluation activities and what they will measure. As part of this, the applicant should be asked to indicate any time constraints, such as the advent of hunger seasons, which would require baseline studies to be conducted by a certain date. FFP should also then indicate clearly what types of activities can be implemented prior to an external baseline, and what cannot be implemented. Finally, FFP should clarify the specific M&E activities the applicant should plan to carry out and budget for, including the anticipated timing and parameters (i.e. indicators to measure, reports to be submitted, etc.).

- b) It is critical for the baseline and endline to stem from the results framework. If there are multiple MYAP partners there may/should be concurrence on the higher level indicators but not necessarily on the lower level indicators as proposed interventions and contexts based on geographic locations may differ. As such, USAID needs to consider one of two options: 1) have the contractor work with each MYAP partner to customize the baseline and endline based on the unique design and needed information OR 2) Provide resources to the partner organizations within the MYAP to collect any additional information needed that is unique to the particular design. Either way, the contracting partner and MYAP partner will need to work closely on the baseline/endline design together and the contractor and USAID needs to recognize that there will need to be flexibility and some variation on some of the information needed as organizational design and approach will vary.
- c) It is also important that USAID does everything it can to ensure that baseline assessment are made in a timely manner so that program start up is not delayed.

- d) End line evaluations of existing Title II programs need to be conducted and reported in time to be used to inform program design.
- e) CRS would like to see greater prominence give to the incorporation of ICT solutions so that USAID/FFP's position on this issue is clearer. *Justification: We do not want to be placed a competitive disadvantage through the inclusion of ICT4D investments in a submission.*
- f) CRS requests greater clarity regarding the statement that "Subject to the availability of funds, the baseline and final evaluation will be conducted by external evaluation firm contracted and centrally managed by USAID/FFP." *Justification: If funds are unavailable for FFP to conduct baseline and final evaluations, how will funding be provided to the implementing partner to undertake such assessments? How will partners ensure the assessments are conducted on time? Additionally, the baselines also need to monitor yearly process indicators, and not only impact indicators. CRS recommends that the full M&E plan and PMP are included in the proposal and budget to ensure a cohesive presentation of the program. Conducting an external baseline and endline can be negotiated at a later stage.*
- g) CRS would like to see a clear statement that it is possible for implementing agencies to use their own logic models so long as the theory of change is clear and aligned with USAID/FFP's intentions. *Justification: At the moment three different logic 'models' (1. IRs, sub-IRs and sub-sub IRs noted in the TIPS document; Outputs, Outcomes and Impact; 3/ Impact and Monitoring indicators) are noted in the RFA which is unhelpful and potentially very confusing.*



- h) Annual surveys need to integrate the key (baseline and end line) indicators to ensure that trends are monitored within the program.

- i) M&E: FFP should provide an updated template for the IPTT to reflect how it wishes information to be presented (differentiating between beneficiary based information and population based). FFP should also indicate desired level of indicators as in the past, the number (and associated cost for data collection) has increased substantially. While we understand that USAID wants to reduce the number of indicators, when programmatic, cross-cutting, environmental, etc. are all taken into account, the length is still an issue. We would also appreciate understanding the review process, as it would appear that there may be multiple stakeholders conducting reviews, and they may not always be on the same page.
- j) FFP must be very clear on when organizations can start activities in relation to the baseline and when that baseline will occur. These decisions influence everything from staffing needs to the development of our detailed implementation plan. Can the PVO enter a community once the data is collected there (even if all data collection is not complete)? Can FFP provide a timeline as to when the data will be collected and by community? Given the potential delays and meeting agricultural cycles, this is a critical, critical point. The idea has been raised before, but it may still be worth discussing – could the baseline be done before the RFA (feeding into the RFA itself?) – which would allow for program implementation to occur more quickly?
- k) FFP should clearly note what information will be collected by the baseline contractor and what will be collected by the PVO. This will allow for budgets to accurately reflect anticipated costs (e.g., if there are a number of gender indicators, or program specific indicators, who will be responsible for collecting this information?)

10) Technical Areas that are insufficiently addressed?

- a) It would be helpful if USAID could provide more guidance on how Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) should be incorporated into DFAP programs; there has been very little guidance in the past on this. There are essentially two different ways of incorporating DRR/resiliency into FS programs, namely (1) Making it a cross cutting initiative (e.g. LAUNCH in Liberia & WALA in Malawi). It is best seen as a cross cutting initiative particularly when there are large-scale shocks/natural disasters which have major impact on food security (e.g. draught, disease, agricultural pests, etc.). The problem with this approach has been as cross cutting initiatives they are inadequately funded, staffed, owned, and measured (i.e. M&E is a weakness). The other approach is (2) Make DRR a stand-alone option (e.g. PROSHAR in Bangladesh). Challenge with this approach is a lack of integration with other SOs.
- b) Also, with respect to DRR, there is not a lot of clarity between implementing partners and USAID as to focus of DRR, namely whether it should be focused on large scale disasters and/or smaller shocks as well that undermine food insecurity. Also, should we focus on mitigation and preparation for disasters or resiliency or both?



- c) Resilience: Developing standard indicators for resilience, in line with other technical areas, would be helpful.

- d) Market Analysis (CSI p. 2): applicants are required to conduct a rigorous market analysis. How does USAID want us to include/demonstrate this? Guidance should be given as to whether including a value chain study as an additional annex will be scored/evaluated.
- e) Needs Assessment: Similarly to above, the proposal format allows only a small space to describe Linkage between food insecurity & program design. Applicants often invest heavily in conducting a broader needs assessment. Guidance should be given as to whether including a needs assessment as an additional annex will be scored/evaluated.

- f) FFP should include guidance that requires water and WASH activities to be more explicit in DFAP design, especially in light of the release of the USAID Water and Development Strategy 2013-2018. Given the importance of WASH, FFP should indicate how much should be allocated to WASH to have a long-term impact on nutrition.

- g) Education and literacy are core cross cutting issues to address food security and resilience, and are explicit in USAID’s Resiliency strategy. Moreover there has been a lack of focus on school-based interventions in Title II program development. This sector should figure more prominently in DFAP design.

Issues around the RFA process

11) Would having a concept paper round be a positive change in process?

- a) It is not clear that a two-stage proposal process starting with a concept paper would work because previously FFP felt that concept papers would not provide enough information to evaluate the quality of a proposal. FFP would need to clarify the quality criteria it requires in order to short-list a proposal, and then determine whether that could be addressed adequately within 5-7 pages. Short-listing tends to make most sense when there are many applicants. However, there are usually very few and much self-selection due to the size and complexity of these programs.

Nonetheless, we could see advantages to FFP offering a concept paper round. A two-stage process might be worthwhile for applicants who apply for more than one country and are short-listed in only one, thus enabling them to focus on that one country and develop a better proposal. If a two-stage process were introduced, we would recommend that within a 3-month proposal preparation period, applicants are given 30-days to prepare a concept paper; then the short-lists are provided after 15 days, and 45-days are given for preparation of full proposals. We would also recommend submission of a comprehensive budget in lieu of a full detailed budget with the concept note.



- b) Yes. As this is a huge undertaking and investment for organizations, this could be helpful in saving USAID and partners both time and resources. However, it will be important to carefully consider the approach to the concept vs. proposal. Basically, what level of information will be sufficient in the concept to demonstrate competence, understanding and desirability of approach. From the organizational investment standpoint, a concept should not be sufficiently detailed that it would require field work in order to give an even playing field for those organizations that may not have a presence in the particular target region (or even perhaps target country). If USAID wants increased competition, new thinking and design, then the concept paper phase could serve this purpose and remove potential bias based on organizational presence. Obviously, organizational experience in the country and region should be considered but perhaps only at the proposal stage. Additionally, one of the most frustrating situations is when there are no recipients in a priority country for reasons that are beyond the merits of the proposal/program design. Ideally having a concept paper phase will help ensure that only those submitting agencies that have a good chance at winning a bid are in the running.

- c) A CN phase would lengthen what is already a very long process. Timing would need to be adequate for assessments and the development of the CN. Additionally, significant effort and design need to be put in to a CN and budget estimate.
- d) FFP should consider whether it has the human resources level to review a large number of CN since the simplicity of a CN will lower the barriers to entry than a full RFA. There are concerns that there will not be sufficient information in a CN to fully evaluate all applicants.
- e) However, if evaluation of the CN is clear, this might save organizations the cost of developing a full proposal if they are eliminated earlier. Additionally, USAID should provide interim feedback to applicants if invited to develop a full proposal. EFSP, GTIP, Farmer to Farmer are examples of where having a CN phase seemed to work.
- f) We recommend the full RFA be released first so that all applicants have a clear understanding of what the full proposal requirements will be. The CN requirement could be one section. FFP should ensure expectation on the level of specificity, detail, and data are realistic for the time and page limit for these CNs. The process needs to be very clear.
- g) Scoring criteria should be very clear for the CN and the full proposals. We recommend the CN scoring be heavier on the capability and past performance evidence that than project design if FFP expects a short turn-around, and hopes it will reduce the costs of full proposal development through this additional step.
- h) With or without the CN phase CRS would still appreciate the draft RFA, and also recommends that USAID provide more guidance or notifications if it anticipates the final RFA may significantly differ from the draft.

- i) It certainly would reduce the amount of effort that is put-in by a number of agencies and teams to compile applications. I think a concept paper round would be welcome, however I'm also worried about the increasing turn-around time by USAID. If the concept paper round will delay approval process further, I would advise not to proceed with the proposed.



- j) Concept paper: A concept paper round would not be a useful addition to this process. Given the multi-sectoral nature DFAPs the amount of work necessary to put together the concept paper would not be sufficiently reduced to as to offset the increased competition likely to be generated by creating an easier entry.

12) In the recent Haiti process, there was an in-country meeting with potential bidders, GoH and FFP. Is that a model that could be beneficially extended to other countries in the future?

- a) Yes. FFP and USAID should also consider if other relevant local stakeholders should be included.

- b) Based on further consideration, yes, it could be helpful to hold an in-country meeting; however, it is important that the bidder’s informational meeting is held earlier so it actually provides potential applicants useful information to help them determine whether or not they should apply and to form any necessary partnerships. In the past, such informational meetings have usually been held just weeks before the deadline unduly creating an advantage for those who may be more integrated and established so the same players have all the advantage. If the meeting is held only weeks before the deadline, NGOs need to have already decided whether or not they will apply and committed human and financial resources to the proposal development effort if they have any reasonable expectation of completing the proposal on time. In addition, if FFP provides responses to questions posed at such meetings or via another Q&A process, it is important that the responses be provided early enough in the RFA process that they can be usefully incorporated into the decision making and design processes.

- c) Yes. This is a good idea; it is used by EU in Burundi and all partners (PVOs as well as Government) appreciate it. It provides an opportunity to clarify verbally terms of the RFA and lingering issues and follow up with minutes.
- d) The FFP team in Washington DC should be present in-country during the consultation phase. This will increase the likelihood of clearer messages being given to the applicants. Additionally, the teams from Washington should also consult with the host country government as it is a significant theme in the RFA.

- e) I thought this was a “standard”. If not it should be mandatory.

- f) Meetings to discuss the guidance are useful and we encourage their continuance. However, in-country meetings may favor organizations already in country (or add to the expense of a PVO considering applying). If USAID holds such a meeting, we encourage it to be a fruitful conversation and not a listening session, where USAID is in a position to provide responses on questions, and that full notes be posted by FACG and on grants.gov.

- g) Consultation: Following on from the comment above, it would be good if FFP were more transparent about the consultation process for CSI or FSCF design. Additionally, after the



solicitation is designed, an in-country meeting such as in Haiti would also be useful to address questions and comments as expeditiously as possible.

13) Is the timing of the RFA and the implementation year appropriate? If not, what would be better

- a) Based on additional input, it would be very helpful if the RFA process started earlier and ended before Thanksgiving or by early December, or if the RFA came out after New Year's. The current schedule with the deadline in January means that many NGO staff must work over the holidays (typically Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years!) or staff are simply not available. In addition, local government and partner NGO offices are closed over the holidays and this can make it challenging to collect all of the data, interviews, documentation, etc., needed to complete proposals. Also, it would be good to ensure that the timing is such that submitting agencies have time to prepare a decent proposal after the final RFA is released (and don't have to make decisions on assessment visits, go-no go, etc. based only on the draft which might change, making those decisions moot or not as good/on track as they could be). In addition, here are we at in regards to Implementation Year syncing up with fiscal year? Will reports follow implementation year dates or FY dates?

- b) The timing the RFA is problematic because the development takes place over Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year, which are important holidays for the majority of staff. CRS is in favor of keeping the draft RFA phase; however would appreciate the schedule that the FY13 Haiti DFAP was on - the draft RFA was released in December with a final submission date of mid-April.
- c) The opportunity to present the proposal to USAID at the time of submission and allow for some Q&A would be welcome and could help the process.
- d) FFP should indicate that there is flexibility with program start dates based on country specific seasonal calendars and proposed programming activities.

- e) It is my understanding that FFP will be dropping the IY concept and align to the USAID reporting year and schedule. We are in support of one time cycle for both PREP and ARR.

- f) More context assessment done by FFP, or else more time for NGOs to do it themselves after the final RFA is out.

- g) DFAP RFAs should be released prior to the close-out of similar USAID grants so that the transition process of outgoing grants can be rolled into the startup process of the new DFAP. Coordination would allow for applicable results, processes, and systems within beneficiary communities (e. g. health councils, marketing boards) to be seamlessly transferred to the next awardees.

- h) Information on funding sources should be known at the time of the RFA to prevent wasted resources on redoing budgets or creating strategies (monetization plans if there will be no



monetization). On page 4, it states that “CDF may be made available for Zimbabwe, and if so, the CDF may be used in lieu of monetization.”

- i) There should be sufficient time to conduct a Q&A and allow the responses to feed into the respondent’s strategy. ALL questions should be answered in writing and shared through the FACG and grants.gov.

- j) Timing: given that most organizations do not work for some or all of the holiday period, it would be warmly welcomed if FFP moved the forward for final submission prior to December 25. Also, given the time it takes to collect all the relevant information and liaise with key actors, if draft documents (CSI, FSCF, BEST, RFA) could be released earlier we would be better able to develop stronger proposals.

- k) Guiding information: It would be extremely useful to have access to previous evaluations to inform design of new projects in follow-on countries. In some cases FFP has timed the evaluations and solicitations to allow for this (Niger CSI p. 6), but this is not always the case. Given that FANTS will be responsible all evaluations FFP should schedule appropriately to allow applicants access to this information through the Development Experience Clearinghouse. Also, the Niger CSI referred to an Office of Inspector General audit that was useful in informing design. If this type of audit it typically conducted it should be made available to applicants. Finally, any other method whereby the lessons of previous USG investment can be made available to new applicant would enhance the responsiveness of all proposals.

Other comments:

14) Linkages with other USG initiatives

- a) There is little reference to FTF e.g. interact with other US Government initiatives such as Feed the Future (FtF). In reality there is significant collaboration requirements for FFP and FTF programs and a drive to streamline reporting according to high level FTF indicators. FTF reporting requirements need to be incorporated into the RFAs and IPTT design process.

- b) Linkages to FtF or other USG funded program - Specific requirements regarding linkages to FtF and/or other USG-funded programs should be provided if the Mission and FFP are already clear on how they want coordination to happen. If FFP is leaving the analysis and design of coordination open to the proposing organizations to work out, then it that should be stated.

- c) Governance and USAID Forward are increasingly important in program design and evaluation criteria, as well as in the USAID Resilience framework. As such, USAID should more definitively address governance issues in the Country Specific Guidance analysis and expected results and indicators.

- d) USAID needs to think about priorities under USAID Forward and how they relate to the MYAP. Two important issues are increasing Local Capacity Building and the other is increasing USAID’s



US partner base. These are tactics but underlying these is the what should be most important - building a process that ensure that the best ideas win and not necessarily the best positioned organization. We've been on both ends of this spectrum. Certainly having a known quantity that has established relationships cannot be overlooked. However, an overreliance on positioning crowds out new thinking and approaches.

15) Geographic focus

- a) One additional important issue is to inform applicants if there is the possibility that the geographic focus will change after the submission deadline. For example, in the past, RFA guidelines have indicated that an applicant had to work in 4 geographic areas and had to prepare a proposal to work in all 4. Then, after the awards were announced, it was determined that the 4 would be divided in half and 2 recipients were awarded cooperative agreements. It is important that we avoid, wherever possible, situations where the RFA indicates one thing and then the decisions reflect a different approach, thus creating more work for the applicants and grantees and donor than is necessary.

- b) The geographical focus of a RFA should be more condensed so that the MYAP can focus on doing more activities in fewer districts to see greater impact. Increasing the geographical footprint of a MYAP potentially risks “watering down” the budget across too many districts; additionally, implementation across a large geographical area increases administrative costs, thereby reducing net-to-field budgets.

- c) Geographic Priorities (CSI p. 3): Can USAID be more specific in the geographic focus, given that there are more needs in the geographic area that we have the capacity to cover? The Zimbabwe CSI outlined a very broad geographic area, beyond the scope of the resources available in the solicitation. Can there be additional clarification on how concentrated our geographic focus should be, and whether preference would be given to contiguous geographic coverage?

16) Types of funding and budgets

- a) “Applicants may propose up to 13 percent of Section 202(e) funding unless otherwise noted in the country specific information.” Does FFP require 202e funding to be 13% each year, or cumulatively for the LOP?
- b) “Applicants may submit budgets using Standard Form 424, 424A, and 424B, as appropriate, which can be downloaded from the USAID website.” Is this submission not required?
- c) “A suggested budget format organized by program elements, grouped by object class category and itemized by suggested individual line items, is available on the FFP website.” Link to the suggested budget format in RFP is broken.
- d) “The Comprehensive Budget will be data entered on FFPMIS.” Is the suggested budget format compatible with converting into the FFPMIS system?



- e) Ensure that the SF425 cost categories and the suggested budget template actually do match up. Also, clear guidance on where some common costs (ie trainings, program materials) should fit into the cost categories.

- f) Traditionally, DFAPs have followed a rather complex balance of funding: 202e not to exceed 13% of budget; distribution commodities ‘preferably’ 60% or more of total tonnage; no direct local food procurement. As USAID realizes how difficult it can be to ensure these equilibriums, has made a number of ‘case by case’ deviations from its own policies/guidance. It would be good to simplify the funding mix and allow the integration of local procurement into DFAPs, as a standard option, even if small. We suggest including brief language that explains the different funding sources that fund Title II, and generally what types of costs they cover. The RFA seems to assume that applicants know all of this but newer applicants most likely will not. The Zimbabwe RFA (on top of page 8) refers readers to the FFPIB on eligible uses of Section 202(e), monetization, and ITSH funding. It will be helpful, most especially for applicants new to Title II, to add a brief paragraph either on page 8 or page 14 such as “The Title II program provides funding for administrative and overhead costs, personnel, internal transportation and distribution, storage, and programming materials and costs. Costs eligible for funding under specific sections of P.L. 480 Title II are described in detail in the FFP Information Bulletin 11-01, “Eligible Uses of Section 202(e) and ITSH funding.” (See Annex X). Costs are eligible under either the ITSH, Section 202(e), or monetization proceeds, categories. Your comprehensive and detailed budgets will present all costs broken down by these funding sources. See the table in FFPIB 11-01 for detail on the order of preference for funding.”
- g) 202(e) (pg 8, 2nd paragraph) – Clarity should be provided to indicate 13% of what? What is the denominator? Total budget or total program value? Add a reference noting that the 202(e) percentage is automatically calculated and shown in the Exec Summary Table.

17) Yearly funding levels over life of project

- a) The PM2A approach create a ‘pyramid’-like tonnage – and presumably budget – requirements on a month to month basis because the recipients enrolment and graduation are both gradual (they start small, then grow, reach a peak typically in year 3 and then decline). But the DFAP resources are straight-lined so that every year, applicants have the same budget to spend. This creates a need for artificially ‘padding’ programs in years 1 and 5, and ‘thinning’ them in year 3, just to keep the budget in check. The pad-thin-pad forces applicants to create short term and presumably short impact programs at the beginning and at the end of programs.
- b) Commodity calculations/AER: The current format is based on an assumption that beneficiaries are stable throughout the feeding timeframe, and does not work with gradual enrolment and graduation. A month-by-month commodity table should be considered.

- c) Flat equal budget allocation over LOA is a big challenge for PVOs – rather it should be a bell curve; less at the beginning and end and more in the middle.



- d) FFP should clarify its expectations and flexibility in terms of annual funding caps. PVOs are told that there may be an annual funding level (at least in year 1). PVOs must work within these limitations to ensure that there is sufficient commodity in country, yet not too much, and there are sufficient cash resources. We must do this with consideration of applicable percentages, MT ratios, etc. While FFP has verbally indicated that PVOs should propose what they think is correct, PVOs are willing to push the envelope of the guidance so far given the investment of resources in the proposal. So for example, if there is a \$20 million cap on funding, in order to access \$X in 202e, the organization must request a certain amount of ITSH and monetization resources. Or does CDF count in calculating the 202e ratio (note in Haiti the CDF and Title II resources were separate). Are we to allocate program elements across CDF and 202e and then have to determine allocation between the two – even though they are both USAID cash resources?? A full discussion of this point would be appreciated.

18) Community Development Funds

- a) There is little reference to the CDF, which may be used in lieu of monetization. The existing design and evaluation is based on monetization and management of commodities, but there is no evaluation in relation to the management of CDF funds.

- b) In the Zimbabwe RFA, USAID FFP anticipated to use Community Development Funds (CDF) in lieu of monetization. However the use of CDF was not confirmed. This lack of clarity makes challenging to plan properly and to appropriately budget 202 E and ITSH as in most recent FFP information bulletin the three funding mechanisms (202E, ITSH and monetization) are intrinsically linked.

- c) Within the RFA, please indicate whether all funding will be addressed within the same award and if CDF funding can be rolled over or if it will be treated differently in any way. For example, will there need to be separate reports generated? Different approval processes? Can CDF be rolled over if not all funds are utilized? (In one case, though we presented the CDF as a cost modification to our existing agreement, USAID subsequently provided us with an entirely new agreement, with four program element \$ totals – which did not match any budget we had created or agreed upon at the time). Granted our CDF agreement was separate from our Title II agreement, but it still creates uncertainty as to whether CDF will be treated the same as 202e, etc.
- d) The draft states that assistance made available to this RFA may be used to meet emergency/exceptional circumstances as provided in accordance with the terms of those awards and 22 C.F.R.211.5(o). We request clarification be provided on flexibility in use of Community Development Funds (CDF) resources in responding to emergencies. Guidance previously noted that 10 percent of in-country resources could be diverted, etc. This is no longer provided in the guidance. Is the intent to provide this information in the awards if not the guidance and will it address the use of CDF, ITSH, 202e and monetization proceeds to fund the transport and use of in country resources?



19) Commodity budgeting

- a) Commodity price during budget preparation and actual monetization could be different – what is the mechanisms/contingency for making up the gap

- b) The commodities formats need to be available, updated, in excel. Due to the strong collaboration between PVOs field and headquarters offices, the formats (commodities, etc.) are not just completed by one of the 5 FFP-MIS account holders at HQ. By having the forms available in excel, FFP will
- c) Maximize collaboration and learning within PVOs (the old formats, though problematic, do follow a somewhat logical process, that helps someone understand the FFP process, whereas FFPMIS does not) and
- d) Level the playing field with the great new competition we've seen (a full deck of current, updated forms probably would have been very helpful to CNFA for Zimbabwe, another, less-resourceful organization probably would have thrown in the towel)

- e) Once templates are posted on the FFP website as part of the final solicitation, does FFP envision changing them, such as the commodity calculator, to reflect updated prices? Please clarify how FFP will notify potential applicants of updated versions and that this information is not changed within the last month before a proposal is due.

- f) The Commodity Calculator needs to be refined to include projections for future years out. In the past, if you changed the year prices did not change. The calculator is also much more complicated than it needs to be. We end up doing our own separate calculations for our needs and then inputting our details in to USAID's calculators. All parties could benefit from PVOs and USAID sitting down and looking at it together to develop something that would provide USAID with the info they need and PVOs providing guidance to modify it so that it can be used as a tool to develop our programs rather than just a format that we have to figure out how to get our info into.

20) IEE

- a) IEE and budgets appear to be an after-thought in the RFA in terms of guidance as reference is made to environmental regulations and FFP Information Bulletins (FFPIBs). There should be more up front guidance in the RFA as it can be quite bewildering, especially for applicants new to the process, understanding exactly what is required and hunting for the guidance. For example, in the Zimbabwe RFA issued October 2012, the instructions on the IEE start on page 20. On that page, Applicants are “highly recommended” to use the IEE Guidance and Compliance Information for Title II Programs and templates. A link takes the reader to the “Compliance and Preparation Resources for IEE” page on the USAID web site. On that page, there are links to the IEE face sheet, narrative and screening forms. Those links take the reader to an external web site, the Natural Resources Management and Development Portal, where finally we find the face sheet, but not the narrative or screening forms. We suggest that the three forms be included in the RFA annexes.



- b) Currently IEEs don't include the impact of fuel wood consumption for the preparation of Title II foods; this should be included as one of the aspects included in the IEE.

- c) RFA should be released with sufficient time to enter into negotiations/BAFO – at which point the IEE would be developed as well as other ancillary documents. Currently, the IEE is due with the proposal, and while environmental mitigation and monitoring is a critical element, much of the IEE is dependent on what is approved in the program. We do not want to expend resources of IEEs that include road rehabilitation for example if that is going to be removed from the program. We recognize that this was tried in the past (IEE during BAFO), and then the IEE was instated for the full initial application. We believe it is worth trying again but ensuring that there is sufficient time to create the IEE.
- d) PERSUAP - These rather voluminous documents need to be prepared for each project before activities can be implemented (given that we understand they are necessary for commodity management). These documents are most often prepared by outside consultants as they are too complex for the project team not only to prepare but often to absorb. Since the documents are in essence addressing similar issues to the IEE, rather than repeatedly develop PERSUAPs for each project that manages commodities it would be more conducive to spend resources and time on training and preparing the teams to understand the PERs and implement the SUAPs. We would also advocate that FFP indicate if existing PERSUAPs exist that could be used for the project, or consider whether this is the type of initiative that should be funded directly by FFP given that its application may apply to many projects in country.

21) FFPMIS

- a) FFPMIS – FFP should ensure that they review and adjust as needed the RFA guidance against the content requirements of the FFPMIS, i.e. attachments, formats, etc. At the FACG meeting on May 21 the suggestion was made to establish a group of PVOs who could provide input and feedback to FFP on the FFPMIS system. A number of PVOs submitted the names and contact information on a sign up sheet for staff to participate in this group. We recommend that FFP take further action to follow this through.

22) Partnership roles.

- a) Partnership approaches vary based on the capacity of in-country partners, and thus roles that partners play in implementation will also vary. FFP and USAID should either base their preferred partnership approach for a proposal on their own assessment of local partner capacity, and then reference and provide a link to such assessment in the RFA or Country Specific Guidance, or request that the applicant provide an assessment of local partner capacity as part of their proposal, and use it to justify the partnership approach used.

23) Use Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Findings to Support Ration Composition:

- a) Post guidance on the FFP website that provides guidelines and criteria for acceptable ration composition based on the FAQR findings. This guidance should be referenced and a link provided in the RFA in a section that focuses on food rations. This guidance should be updated on an annual basis to ensure that new findings and new commodities are included.



24) Cost share

- a) FFP's statement on cost share was vague. It wasn't clear in the statement if the "future" FFP was referring to included the timeline of the project. If so, it would be problematic to guarantee cost share after the proposal is formulated and after start-up.

- b) Cost share (RFA p. 5): The wording is ambiguous. To what extent is cost-share scored? How will it impact our proposal? How is it accounted for in the evaluation process? Other USAID solicitations include the wording "NGOs are not required to include counterpart funding. However, applications that include additional in-kind and/or cash contributions from non-USG sources will be more competitive, since cost-sharing demonstrates a strong commitment to the planned activities and will be rewarded under the "cost-effectiveness" criterion". Does this describe the FFP position?

25) Miscellaneous comments

- a) Not having a signed agreement until the day the agreement starts or even after can limit a PVO's ability to staff quickly without assuming financial risk. For example, in some countries, it may be the norm to give current employers three months notice at the senior staff level. If we cannot sign employment contracts until we have a signed CA without incurring risk, then we are already in a place where we cannot staff up quickly. We request FFP consider getting the agreements in place at least a month before the effective date for the program to start (i.e., award is made in July to start in August).
- b) Pre-Award Costs: Please clarify what options exist to winning applicants regarding pre-authorization letters for 202e, ITSH and CDF funds. Negotiations can be extensive, and PVOs are expected to initiate activities in the first year (or be viewed as slow starting up). PVOs should not have to assume the risk of incurring costs related to program activities without written pre-authorization and coverage of costs from USAID.
- c) Review and Selection Process: Please clarify the statement..."whether to accept an application no later than 120 days after receipt of a complete application". Does this mean after receipt of the initial application? Does the clock start ticking again after a revised proposal or issues letter is submitted?
- d) Requests for level of detail should be in line with the Paperwork Reduction Act and not increase the administrative burden on the PVOs (additional info. on paperwork reduction act provided below). For example, the budget template that is provided by USAID could, taken to the extreme, allow for 70 different budgets to be developed for the proposal and then tracked per year (14 program elements x 5 funding sources) when program elements/funding sources are taken into account. The issues surrounding flexibility given this level of detail have never been discussed (that I am aware of), nor the rationale behind the level of detail. When PVOs report through the official SF-425, is there an expectation for example that we would submit 50 different SF-425s? Is this going to change the reporting requirements (which should be clear in the RFA)?



- e) The level of detail that is stipulated in the RFA should not be modified at the time of negotiations unless critical to successful award and it can be argued that the applicant did not follow the guidance of the RFA.
- f) Information should not have to be duplicated across tables, etc. Information should not be hidden as it may be critical to the PVO and/or the spreadsheets should not be locked. For example, commodity costs and transportation costs are hidden in the executive summary tables – why? PVOs may need to be able to link these files with other during the proposal design process and manipulation of the spreadsheets is critical.
- g) USAID should confirm that glitches that occurred in FY13 were resolved. If any additional changes are made to the system that substantially impact a submission, then FFP should allow for a secondary method of submission such as email to ensure that there are no problems with meeting the deadline – esp. since the guidance states: “Applications that are received late or are incomplete run the risk of not being considered in the review process. Such late or incomplete applications will be considered with FFP’s sole discretion depending on the status of application review process as of the time of receipt and/or the quality of other applications received.” When an organization spends hundreds of thousands of dollars, it does not want to be excluded for consideration based on a computer issue.
- h) FFP should provide guidance as to its expectations for coordinated activities with other programs in the country. For example, will the awardee be required to coordinate commodity shipments? FFP should also reflect how much flexibility there is with regard to coordination and minimum tonnage shipments.
- i) The guidance calls for one key personnel – the COP. It would be useful to the PVOs which key personnel will be included in the agreement.
- j) FFP should indicate any anticipated workshops it plans to hold directly or that will be sponsored by TOPS so that the cost of trips can be built into the program design. (e.g., a workshop on M&E or environment)
- k) The draft RFA stated that FFP will send a signed award letter.... We request that the potential awardee receive a draft copy of the agreement to review prior to it being signed by FFP.
- l) Please clarify the level of detail required in the initial application regarding the Host Country Agreement. The draft RFA notes that “even though the HCA is expected and preferred prior to finalization of the award, the applicant may submit when asked during the review and approval process (if selected) either the HCA or the Mission director’s determination that the proposed food aid program can be effectively implemented...” Does FFP expect to see a draft HCA with the initial submission and/or a statement from the Mission Director? Please note that a PVO should not be asked to enter into a HCA with the government prior to the finalization of the award. The HCA reflects the agreement regarding the program between the PVO and USAID ; the PVO should not be asked to enter into an agreement stipulating to information that is not yet finalized or to make commitments based on an award which is not yet in place.
- m) Number of awards (RFA p. 1): The relatively recent practice of USAID indicating the maximum number of awards they intend to make is very useful in determining program scope. This should continue.



- n) PVOs should have a more opportunity to influence the RFA design and the BEST during the development phase.



Annex D: RFA Feedback Workshop Agenda

June 27, 2013

Location: At Counterpart Offices, 2345 Crystal Drive, Crystal City, Arlington, VA 22202. First floor meeting room, commonly called The Beehive. Signs will be posted to direct you to the meeting room. If you get lost Counterpart's reception is in Suite 301 and they can direct you.

Remote participation instructions: We will be using Fuze Meeting. See instructions below.

Objectives:

1. Develop list of prioritized recommendations for FFP regarding the RFA process for development food assistance projects. These recommendations will consist of the following in prioritized order:
2. Set in place follow up plan to address recommendations not finalized in this meeting.

Summary Agenda:

- 9.00 Opening, introductions, agenda for the day
- 9.20 Priority setting
- 9.40 Group discussions – 2 rounds discussing 2 different priority recommendations
- 10.30 Coffee break
- 10.45 Group discussions – 3 rounds, 3 different recommendations
- 12.15 Lunch
- 12.30 Next steps discussion (while eating lunch)
- 1.00 End

All times, except start and end times, are dependent on progress. All times Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).



Annex E: Workshop Participants

Name	Email	Organization	Remotely/ In person
Bridget Rohrbough	Bridget.rohrbough@crs.org	CRS	In Person
David Leege	David.leege@crs.org	CRS	In Person
Madeleine Smith	Madeleine.smith@crs.org	CRS	Remotely
Mark Castellino (?)	Mark.Castellino@adra.org	ADRA International	In Person
Gillian Bath	Gillian.Bath@adra.org	ADRA International	In Person
Mara Russell	MARussell@landolakes.com	Land O' Lakes, Inc	In Person
Laura Brye	Laura.Brye@adra.org	ADRA International	Remotely
Suzanne Berkey	SBerkey@acdivoca.org	ACDI/VOCA	In Person
Tanja Pavdovic	tpavdovic@ird-dc.org	IRD	In Person
Dianne Forte	dforte@aficare.org	Aficare	In Person
Erica Tangen	EHTangen@landolakes.com	Land O' Lakes	Remotely
Rashida Petersen	rpetersen@oici.org	OIC International	In Person
Carl Henne	chenn@oici.org	OIC International	In Person
Travis Massar	TMassar@acdivoca.org	ACDI/VOCA	In Person
Alexandra Riboul	ariboul@usaid.gov	USAID/FFP	In Person
Laura Arnston	larntson@usaid.gov	USAID/FFP	In Person
Juli Majernik	jmajernik@usaid.gov	USAID/FFP	In Person
Jennifer Burns	jburns@InternationalMedicalCorps.org	International Medical Corps	In Person
William Noble	wnoble@savechildren.org	Save the Children	In Person
Altrena Mukuria	amukuria@counterpart.org	Counterpart International	In Person



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Penelope Anderson	panderson@dc.mercycorps.org	Mercy Corps	In Person
Joe Lumpkin	JLumpkin@care.org	CARE	Remotely
Gwenelyn O'Donnell Blake	godonnell@pciglobal.org	PCI	Remotely
Joan Whelan- TOPS	whelanfsn@gmail.com	CORE- TOPS	In Person
Patrick Coonan- TOPS	coonanfsn@gmail.com	CORE- TOPS	In Person
Mark Fritzler- TOPS	mfritzler@savechildren.org	Save the Children- TOPS	In Person
B.K. De- TOPS	bkumarde@savechildren.org	Save the Children- TOPS	In Person
Arif Rashid- TOPS	arif@tangointernational.com	Save the Children- TOPS	In Person
Julia Crowley- TOPS	jcrowley@savechildren.org	Save the Children- TOPS	In Person
Tim Ogborn (consultant)	Tim.ogborn@gmail.com	TOPS	In Person
Ashley Wagoner	AWagoner@samaritan.org	Samaritan's Purse	Remotely
Hamissou Samari	hsamari@africare.org	Africare	Remotely
Adam Reinhart	areinhart@usaid.gov	USAID/ FFP	Remotely
Harley Stokes	Harley.stokes@gmail.com	Tufts FAQR	In Person
Jessi Mann	jmann@amexdcz.com	USAID/ FFP	In Person
Michelle Gamber	mgamber@usaid.gov	USAID/ FFP	In Person
Danielle Mutone-Smith	Dmutone-smith@usaid.gov	USAID/ FFP	In Person
Moustapha Niang	mniang@counterpart.org	Counterpart	In Person
Melanie Thurber	mthurber@usaid.gov	USAID/ FFP	In Person
Paul Macek	pmacek@worldvision.org	World Vision	Remotely
Asamenuw Alemu	Asamenuw.Alemu@adra.org	ADRA	Remotely
Hap Carr	Harry.carr@crs.org	CRS	Remotely



Total: 42			
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Annex E: Workshop Evaluation summary

These are the result of an electronic survey sent out to all participants following the RFA Feedback Workshop.

1. Are you with a PVO, with other non-USG organization or with USAID?

PVO.....	14	87.50%
Non-USG Organization.....	1	6.25%
USAID.....	1	6.25%

2. The workshop achieved its objectives.

Strongly Disagree.....	0	0%
Disagree.....	0	0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree.....	1	6.25%
Agree.....	13	81.25%
Strongly Agree.....	2	12.50%

3. I found the documents produced for the event useful.

Strongly Disagree.....	0	0%
Disagree.....	0	0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree.....	0	0%
Agree.....	9	56.25%
Strongly Agree.....	7	43.75%

4. Please rate the overall quality of the workshop.

Poor.....	0	0%
Fair.....	2	12.50%
Good.....	8	50%
Excellent.....	6	37.50%

5. What was most valuable about this workshop?

- Hearing how things have changed with FFP RFA over the years and what works most realistically among all attendees
- Discussing the different topic areas in small groups with other PVOs to hear their perspectives.
- The precedent it sets is very useful -- it is good to see FFP is open to PVO feedback and looks to TOPS to organize it. The open friendly discussion was good. Given the extent of feedback from different orgs, the facilitator did a good job in organizing it, and recognizing the quality of some comments (e.g., the long one on restructuring). The table conversations covered a lot of good material.



- The opportunity for PVOs to discuss issues and provide feedback on the RFA., FFP staff were there to listen, so it feels like our voices are heard. The online participation was well managed.
- The questions and answers sent out in advance in order to agree on the recommendations during the workshop.
- Hearing the perspectives of the different NGOs.
- Working in groups on the recommendations.
- The process that was used to conduct this workshop was extremely good as it enabled all participants to contribute to the discussion and provide input. While some individuals appeared more vocal than others, and remote participants were somewhat disadvantaged, there was a strong effort made to include input from everyone on an equal basis.
- the opportunity to exchange ideas and hear other perspectives.
- The opportunity to discuss different positions on the key topics, and appreciate varying perspectives.
- I appreciated that each of the groups went through each topic, rather than dividing into topic-specific groups. Overall, this is a very valuable process. Great that USAID is asking for our input!
- The fact that feedback was taken seriously and directly from PVOs and included in the overall report recommendations.
- The opportunity to provide feedback on the RFA process.
- Small group discussion with report outs
- Prioritization of discussion points

6. How would you improve the workshop?

- Allow a full day as opposed to a half day as we didn't get through all the points
- Some people mentioned they felt constrained by the presence of FFP staff. FFP did actively interject into conversations, which might mute some of the more outspoken PVO opinion. It would have been good to build in a cushion for us to run over, rather than rushing us out the door the second we hit the official end point of the meeting. I think a bit of over-run was not only predictable, it is actually an important part of the process -- people discover what they think is most important to say before the meeting ends.
- I felt it was hard to know if the group had really come to a consensus on some points, so some recommendations are more open-ended. It is not clear if FFP requested this feedback to make changes this year, or if this will impact next year's submissions. This could be made clear. A full day could have been used to get through all the topics. Or, if there was more preparation time, focus groups could be established to ensure the right people were participating.
- Having so many USAID people there was a mixed blessing. We could not all be fully open.
- As always needed more time or less material to cover.



- A full day should have been set aside for this rather than a half day. The ideal venue would have been in DC rather than Crystal City, as this made it difficult for many people to participate. The process might have benefitted from more time, i.e. starting about one to two months sooner than it did, with more time for focused discussions on individual topics.
- Better time management and realistic time frame to complete the stated tasks. we ran out of time and had to leave the room. Provision should have been made for our going over (based on previous experience with this type of audience)
- Given the time available, it would have been better to have a more limited scope, which would have led to more realistic objectives. It's not clear how well we're going to be able to continue/finish the discussion on the topics not covered.
- More time would have been great. It was a very intense few hours but it would have been really good to have a couple more hours to finish up. Alternatively, a series of consultations would be useful as well and then PVOs can send relevant staff.
- Finding a really reliable platform to include remote staff is always challenge. There were some challenges with connecting participants who couldn't attend in person; particularly with the audio portion of the workshop.
- Do not have the donor present in the room. It constrains open dialogue (even if they say they are there simply to listen). Also, there was not time to really discuss recommendations - which was a lost opportunity to try and come to consensus on priority recommendations. I would recommend further sessions with PVOs only to really discuss some of the issues.
- Better organization getting the groups set up at the beginning.
- folks wanting to reorganize the meeting, change up the process that had been planned in advance

7. Please rate the facilitation.

Poor.....	0	0%
Fair.....	1	6.25%
Good.....	6	37.50%
Excellent.....	9	56.25%

8. How could the facilitation be improved?

- I think Tim did fine. He was against the clock so we could only cover so much. I think it was really smart to type up things then as opposed to taking flipcharts away and dealing with it later.
- More flexibility at the end, please. It might have been good to allow different groups to discuss different subjects. I understand that the idea was that ALL of us should discuss to make sure there was broad consensus on approaches. But in practical terms, what this meant was that the topics that came last chronologically got very little discussion, even though one of the topics (guidance vs. freedom) I think was really one of the most important subjects to discuss.



- The facilitators were very good and kept everyone on track. The workshop could have extended into the afternoon to cover more topics.
- I thought that perhaps we could have gotten our lunches and talked while we ate instead of grabbing and going, but otherwise, it was OK
- It could not have been better.
- Some participants seemed to be confused between the compiled comments and consultant recommendations. It could have been explained a bit clearer.
- We were over 1 1/2 hours into the session before we really started talking about the PVO recommendations. I think some of the initial sessions could have gone faster (If we want to say what we like about the RFA, this could have been part of the written feedback). If there is not time to really discuss the recommendations, perhaps it is not necessary to report out on them. Rather, summaries could be posted around the room, there could be time for questions/answers, but not report out. This would leave a lot more time for actual discussion at the tables on the recommendations. If a list of recommendations could be shared beforehand, then perhaps PVOs could also determine if different people should attend.
- Could have held closer to the agenda so that we wouldn't have to rush at the end.
- Sometimes the audience talked too softly, so reminding folks to speak up or use of a mic (???)

9. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the workshop?

- There was a lot of topic areas to be discussed which could have been more rapidly covered by dividing them up among the different groups. However, having the groups discuss the same topic areas led to a more realistic consensus so was the better way to go. We just needed more time in order to discuss all the topic items. Without drawing out the meeting longer, I think the more pertinent topics were discussed though. Thanks for providing lunch, even though we ran out of time to eat together!
- The draft proposed recommendations were sent out at 11:30 PM the night before the meeting, and the meeting started at 9 AM in a different state than most attendees live in. I did not have the chance to see these recommendations before the meeting started, and I think I was not alone. Either send out the draft earlier or have lots of hard copies with the expectation people won't have seen them or at least not printed them. Also, about this questionnaire -- if, above, you are going to ask whether the workshop achieved its objectives, the objectives should be spelled out so we can answer the question.
- Thanks for organizing this in a very short period of time.
- It would be great if this could be an on-going process, and could inform the guidance each year.
- The consultant recommendations should have been distributed earlier than the night before the workshop.
- Thank you to FFP for consulting with PVOs on this very difficult topic!



- Although the documents produced were useful, it was difficult to digest them prior to the workshop since they were disseminated late. I participated online and appreciated the ability to do so. It was very well organized and the facilitator for the online group was very helpful and made sure that we understood what was happening in the room.