Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish
Responses to Written Questions
RFA-FIL-24-000001
May 2, 2024

Below are responses to questions received regarding the Fish Innovation Lab Request for Applications (RFA). Some questions have been truncated or modified to protect the privacy and research interests of submitting individuals and organizations.

APPLICATION MATERIALS AND SUBMISSION PROCESS

1. I have problems registering on Piestar and/or need to change my password. Can you help?

   Response: Please go to the Piestar Help page at https://fish.piestar-rfx.com/help for help with Piestar.

2. When will the resources listed in the webinar on collaborative opportunities for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) be posted? And where?

   Response: All materials are available on the Current Opportunities page of the Fish Innovation Lab website: https://www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu/opportunities/current

3. Can we submit more than 1 application? Are we limited on the number of submitted concept notes?

   Response: An individual can be a PI on only one concept note. It is possible for that individual to serve in another capacity on other concept note applications. An institution can lead and/or participate in multiple concept notes.

4. If I send you a question to your email, will you answer me directly and post the response online or just post it online?

   Response: To maintain a fair, competitive process, questions should be submitted by April 24th; answers to those questions will be posted to our website.

5. Can you please elaborate more about the Unique Entity ID and registration in SAM.

   Response: Unique Entity ID (UEI) is required to receive U.S. federal dollars, and any institution receiving funding from the Fish Innovation Lab must have a UEI. You can visit sam.gov to start the application process or to renew your UEI: https://sam.gov/content/home. This website is listed in the RFA document and on our website.

6. How many projects are you planning to fund for this call?

   Response: We anticipate funding approximately 14 activities for a period of up to 3 years.

7. What is the success rate of funding?

   Response: The success rate of funding is dependent on the number of concept notes received, the competitive nature of the concept notes, and other factors. In the 2019 Fish Innovation Lab Request for Applications, the funding success rate for concept notes was approximately 6%.

8. Are new applicants supposed to fill out the Appendix F Past Performance Table?

   Response: The Past Performance Table should be completed by all applicants.

9. What is the format for the activity timeline?

   Response: Please include your activity timeline as an appendix in the form of an activity chart, sometimes referred to as a GANTT Chart. The chart should include columns for the months across the anticipated period of performance and rows listing the outputs/objectives. An "x" should be placed in cells to indicate which outputs/objectives are occurring within each month period. This activity timeline can be included as a separate appendix.

10. Where do we obtain the Conflict of Interest (COI) Form?

    Response: The COI form is available on the Current Opportunities page of the Fish Innovation Lab website: https://www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu/opportunities/current

11. Can you please confirm that the completed past performance matrix fulfills the reference requirement?

    Response: The past performance matrix is separate from the References section of the concept note. The References section of the concept note should list the reference documents cited in the concept note.

12. Is there a limit on the number of references we can include?

    Response: There is no limit to the number of references you can include.

13. Can you kindly reconsider expanding the page limit to accommodate the amount of content requested to be included in the initial concept paper (the headers alone take up a full page in the RFA)?

Response: The concept note is limited to four pages and must be in English with narrative portions prepared in Microsoft Word with Times New Roman font size 11 and 1-line spacing with 1-inch margins. Please note the cover page <u>is not included in the four-page count</u>.

14. Outputs vs. outcomes: Can you please expand on some typical outputs and outcomes that are desirable, and describe the difference between the two?

    Response: In the context of this RFA, an output refers to something the activity will produce, while an outcome refers to the changes or benefits that result from an output. For example, an output could be results from a fish feed formulation trial, and the outcome would be fish farmers using the new fish feed formulation to improve efficient production.

<u>RESEARCH TOPICS</u>

15. I read that there are cross-cutting themes. Do we have to have all 3 of those or can we just pick one to focus on?

    Response: While the degree of depth implementing the three cross-cutting themes can vary, an application must consider ways to address issues related to all three cross-cutting themes.

16. For the cross-cutting themes you mentioned, do you require experts from these themes in the proposal?

    Response: No, experts in these cross-cutting themes are not required in the concept note. The Fish Innovation Lab has cross-cutting theme specialists who provide feedback to contingently accepted applicants and work with funded activities to support incorporation of the cross-cutting themes throughout the period of performance.

17. Does it make us more competitive if we select more than one Area of Inquiry?

    Response: Not necessarily. All concept notes addressing at least one Area of Inquiry will be evaluated equally. A strong concept note will be able to showcase its capacity to become a robust research-for-development proposal that is supported by a reliable team to implement the proposed activities. This includes addressing at least one Area of Inquiry, consideration of the three cross-cutting theme areas, and support for the Fish Innovation Lab's goals as stated in the Theory of Change.

18. Can We submit a research proposal on Shrimp Health Management?

    Response: Yes, aquatic animal health fits under the Fish Innovation Lab Theory of Change, and concept notes on this topic that meet the requirements listed in the RFA can be submitted.

19. We have a novel approach for increasing aquaculture productivity that involves an emerging technology that is at its infant stage to the globe and literally absent in Africa. The finding is published, and portion of the lab-tested results have been filed for patent. As a result, we eagerly await your response on whether or not we are eligible to apply for this position.

    Response: Yes, aquaculture productivity fits under the Fish Innovation Lab Theory of Change, and concept notes on this topic that meet the requirements listed in the RFA can be submitted. Novel approaches are encouraged.

20. I have recently read about the subject research opportunity. I have over twenty years of experience with the United Nations and am planning to work on researching how to address chronic food and nutrition insecurity in Africa by leveraging indigenous foods. As this does not seem to fall under the research opportunity you are supporting, I was wondering if USAID Feed the Future plans to offer research opportunities around food, especially indigenous.

    Response: The mission of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish is to alleviate poverty and improve nutrition, especially for marginalized populations, in selected priority geographies, through the reliable and inclusive provision of nutrient-rich fish and other aquatic foods. This includes indigenous aquatic foods. Research concepts that fall under this mission and meet the requirements listed in the RFA can be submitted.

BUDGET

21. What percentage of funding can be allocated to a Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) from a foreign institution?

    Response: There is no predetermined limit on percentage of funding allocated for a co-PI. As stated in the RFA, at least 50% of the total budget amount must be spent in the host country.

22. Do you support purchase of equipment?

    Response: Yes, with limitations set by USAID. See 2 CFR 200.439 for more details: https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E/subject-group-ECFRed1f39f9b3d4e72/section-200.439

23. Is there a provision for private institutions to apply a profit margin on the staff rates on the budgets?

    Response: Fringe rates are allowed for employees. Please see 2 CFR 200.431 for additional information: https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.431

24. Is there a limit to the % of Overheads in a budget?

Response: Applicants may elect to charge a 10% indirect cost rate of the modified total direct costs as per 2 CFR 200.414(f) (http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/textidx?node=se2.1.200_1414&rgn=div8). Indirect cost rates higher than 10% are only allowed for institutions that have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the US Government or are a Public International Organization that consistently charge the rate throughout their projects and have the rate formally documented in their policies. Applicants with one of these exceptions must submit copies of their NICRA or institutional policy.

25. Are these restricted to Grant Agreements or can an organization submit a Commercial Proposal?

    Response: This RFA is for concept notes for research-for-development activities. Public-private partnerships may be effective mechanisms for handoff and scaling of research findings; we encourage those partnerships in concept notes.

26. What budget information is needed for the concept note submission?

    Response: Detailed budgets are not needed for the concept note. Concept notes must include the following budget information:
    1. Total Budget Amount for Activity
    2. Total Amount Budgeted for Target Country
        - If there is more than one target country, the total amount budgeted for each target country should be clearly stated.
    3. Total Budget Amount for Lead Institution
    4. Total Budget Amount for Each Additional Implementing Partner

27. If the PI is US-based, please confirm that any of the budget spent in Nigeria, for example, counts towards the 50% requirement?

    Response: At least 50% of the total budget amount must be spent in the host country. These funds should be allocated to an institution in the host country; that institution can be where the PI or Co-PI of the project is employed.

28. Appendix H:
    - The template includes a 3% annual salary increase rate. Can you please confirm that the PI can apply other salary rate increases in line with their company policies?
    - The Fringe line item in the template only allows one fringe rate to be applied to all labor. Can you update the template to allow additional fringe line items to be added and applied to different personnel depending on location?

    Response: Yes, annual salary increase rates can be adjusted to comply with the PI's company policy. This increase will apply to all personnel. If it is anticipated to have different rates for different personnel, we recommend averaging those increases and

applying the average increase to all personnel. We also recommend averaging the fringe rate for each personnel or using the highest rate and apply that to all.

29. Appendix C states that for indirect rates "Exceptions will apply to institutions that have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the US Government or are a Public International Organization that consistently charge the rate throughout their projects and have the rate formally documented in their polices. Applicants with these exceptions must submit copies of their NICRA or institutional policy." In appendix H, it only allows for overhead, however in our NICRA we also consistently charge General & Administrative (G&A). Can you please modify the template to allow us to incorporate in our G&A rate?

    Response: For organizations that have a NICRA allowing for charges in addition to overhead, please email your NICRA agreement to fishlab@gcahfs.msstate.edu and request an updated budget template.

30. Appendix C also states "Consultants: Include name, title, name of institution (if known), number of units (days, months, or FTEs), proposed unit rate, and total consultant costs for each proposed consultant." However in the Appendix H budget template, there is no specific line item for consultants. Can you please confirm that we can place consultants under the "other personnel" line item?

    Response: If a consultant is not employed at the institution, they should be placed under the contractual category. If they are employed at the institution, then they should be placed in the other personnel category.

PARTNERSHIPS, LEAD INSTITUTIONS, AND TEAM COMPOSITION

31. Can the primary institution leading the project be in a country other than the USA?

    Response: Yes, the lead institution can be in the USA or in another country. Most commonly, if the primary institution is not in the USA, it is located in the "host country" where the project is implemented.

32. Is it compulsory to have the co-PI, especially from the country of interest, in the concept notes by May 15?

    Response: Yes, all concept notes must include a host country institution and identify an individual who will serve as the host country PI.

33. I am based in a country outside the USA, can I apply without including the information of a US-based collaborator or is my concept note required to have a US-based collaborator?

    Response: It is encouraged but not required to have a U.S. institution. It _is_ required to have a host country institution.

34. What is the nature of the partnership that is needed for the applicants. For example, if I am a researcher in Kenya interested in submitting a proposal, must I have a partner from a US institution or elsewhere?

    Response: While having a host-country institution is required, having a U.S. institution is not mandatory, but strongly encouraged.

35. Is there specific numbers of partner organization?

    Response: The number of partner organizations depends on what makes sense to achieve success. We encourage teams to have at least two institutions.

36. Will a proposal be viewed as less competitive if the lead institution is a Host Country Institution (with a US institution as a collaborator)?

    Response: No. The leadership of the application depends on what makes sense to achieve success. Consideration will be given for the capacity of the institutions to meet the objectives and outcomes in the concept note.

37. I would like to submit a concept note on [topic] to Feed the Future program under your lab. I have already contacted a US university Professor. My question is: who will submit the concept note to your lab?

    Response: The concept note should be submitted by the individual who will serve as the lead PI.

38. Can you tell me what is the difference between a **primary institution, implementing partner**, and **Co-PI**? I am collaborating with fisheries research institutes, with an international NGO, and organizations in two countries. I am wondering who should be listed as primary institutions vs. implementing partners?

    Response: Within the context of this RFA, a primary institution is a lead institution. This lead institution can be in the U.S. or the host country. Note that the lead institution should designate a lead PI at that institution. The lead PI can also be in the U.S. or the host country. A Co-PI is a key person who is supporting the PI. This support is articulated in her or his Scope of Work. Implementing partner refers to an entity conducting the work of the project.

39. I have already identified some of the graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and collaborators to engage in this work. Should each one be listed as an implementing partner, co-PIs, or can I list them as collaborators?

    Response: PI and Co-PIs should be identified in the concept note by listing their name, institution, and role in the project. Other personnel are not required to be identified in the concept note.

ELIGIBILITY

40. I am not clear on the description of what a MSI is, can you please clarify?

    Response: MSI refers to a U.S. minority-serving institution. Information about which U.S. universities are considered MSIs (based on 2023 data from the U.S. Department of Education) is included in the RFA document. It includes institutions that qualify for MSI funding, have an open MSI grant, and those receiving MSI funding: https://cmsi.gse.rutgers.edu/msi-directory

41. I am interested in applying, where do I find the application materials and descriptions of eligibility and other requirements?

    Response: All materials are available on the Current Opportunities page of the Fish Innovation Lab website: www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu/opportunities/current

42. In regards to this RFA, our team would like to know whether a project that is currently being funded by a USAID entity would disqualify additional funding from Feed The Future?

    Response: Fish Innovation Lab funding cannot be used for the same work that is already funded. Concept notes proposing a continuation of other funded work, addressing knowledge gaps or barriers in a program, or addressing questions related to scaling of previous work will be considered under this RFA.

43. The RFA states that "Either a U.S. university or the host-country institution (which is typically a local university) may serve as the lead organization." Can you please advise if international NGOs are eligible to apply as a lead organization?

    Response: Yes, international NGOs are eligible to serve as the lead organization for an activity. You can read more about previous activities funded by the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish at www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu/research/activities

44. Is it a must to partner with a U.S. Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), or is any person from another type of University in the U.S. eligible?

    Response: It is not required to partner with a U.S. MSI. All types of U.S. universities are eligible if they qualify for federal funding. The Fish Innovation Lab encourages MSI-led and MSI-collaborative projects.

45. Can you please confirm a for-profit woman owned small business with research experience can be the prime with the PI?

    Response: This competition is open to any qualified research, educational, governmental, private sector, or nonprofit institution globally that has a Unique Entity

ID and is registered in the System for Award Management (SAM; http://sam.gov/). This includes a for-profit woman owned small business if it meets these qualifications.

<u>SHORT- AND LONG-TERM TRAININGS AND GRADUATE STUDENTS</u>

46. In the webinar on April 16, you indicated that there is a preference for any graduate students on the project to go through the Host Country institution rather than US institutions. Is it possible for the students to enroll in a graduate program at a US institution to complete their coursework, and then do their thesis research/project in a Host Country? With this arrangement I envision forming a thesis committee with both US and HC faculty members. This would strengthen the collaboration among the institutions.

    Response: The preference is for graduate students funded by the Fish Innovation Lab to receive their degree and be trained at the host country institution. This contributes to the capacity of the host country university, which is an important outcome of the Fish Innovation Lab. Alternative options may be considered during the evaluation of concept notes and full proposals.

47. I know you encouraged long-term trainings to take place in the host countries. Just wondering if there can be opportunities for short term trainings at the US based institution involved in the grant in case it is not the host institution?

    Response: We encourage long-term trainings, most commonly graduate students, at host country institutions. With justification, short-term training events at U.S. institutions may be considered during the evaluation of concept notes and full proposals.

48. A good part of the budget will be earmarked for training graduate students and post-doctoral fellows from the host countries. I am curious whether this training can happen at a U.S. institution, or it should occur in the host country?

    Response: The preference is for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows supported with Fish Innovation Lab funding to be trained and receive degrees at the host country institution.

<u>GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS</u>

49. The application states the project must impact designated zones of influence. Is there a map we can reference of zones of influence down to regional level or is a macro statement at country level?

    Response: Feed the Future Zones of Influence for each country are included in the Feed the Future Country Plan for each respective country. Feed the Future Country Plans are available at this website: https://www.feedthefuture.gov/countries/. Note that Feed the Future Country Plans for many of the focus countries are currently being

revised; we recommend monitoring the Feed the Future website for release of the Country Plans.

50. What are the Zones of influence in Zambia? Would a project in Lake Kariba in the Siavonga District of Zambia be considered for funding?

    Response: We are awaiting release of the Zambia Feed the Future Country Plan, which will delineate the Zambia Feed the Future Zones of Influence (ZOI). We encourage projects to be flexible in their implementation plans and consider the possibility of adapting to accommodate the requirement of project outcomes in the ZOI. We are monitoring the Feed the Future website for release of the Feed the Future Country Plans, and we encourage applicants to do the same.

51. Would a project in the Copperbelt province of Zambia be considered for funding?

    Response: We are awaiting release of the Zambia Feed the Future Country Plan, which will delineate the Zambia Feed the Future Zones of Influence (ZOI). We encourage projects to be flexible in their implementation plans and consider the possibility of adapting to accommodate the requirement of project outcomes in the ZOI. We are monitoring the Feed the Future website for release of the Feed the Future Country Plans, and we encourage applicants to do the same.

52. Will a proposal be seen as less competitive if it targets one of the countries that is not identified as highest priority, even if the project is in-depth and well-integrated with Feed the Future priorities and its participants?

    Response: Proposals targeting one of the four focus countries (Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia) will be evaluated and ranked using the same criteria as proposals targeting one of the listed high-priority countries (Ghana, Madagascar, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda). The Fish Innovation Lab Management Entity reserves the right to make strategic selections to achieve Feed the Future objectives as well as geographic and research priorities.

53. Can you confirm for Nigeria, the proposal would be based on Nigeria's former Feed the Future country plan, which included aquaculture in the target states of Benue, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Kaduna, Kebbi, and Niger?

    Response: We are awaiting release of the Nigeria Feed the Future Country Plan, which will delineate the Nigeria Feed the Future Zones of Influence (ZOI). We encourage projects to be flexible in their implementation plans and consider the possibility of adapting to accommodate the requirement of project outcomes in the ZOI. We are monitoring the Feed the Future website for release of the Feed the Future Country Plans, and we encourage applicants to do the same.

54. Although Uganda is listed as one of the other high-priority Feed the Future target countries, it is missing on the list of "Activity Country" within the RFA submission form. Could this have been an omission that needs to be corrected?

   Response: Uganda is included on the list of "Activity Country" within the RFA submission form. Due to a technical glitch, Uganda was not visible to all users. That glitch should be resolved. If you encounter technical problems, please contact fishlab@gcahfs.msstate.edu immediately.