

**Annual Program Statement (APS)
Latin America and the Caribbean Promising
Early-Grade Reading Improvement Interventions**

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Office of the Administrator (AID/A)
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington D.C. 20523

Solicitation number: **M/OAA/GRO/LMA-12-01028**

ISSUANCE DATE: October 28, 2011

CLOSING DATE: October 31, 2012

Pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, the United States Government (USG), as represented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Office of Regional Sustainable Development (RSD) invites concept papers in response to the goals of this APS, which are to implement promising early-grade reading interventions.

The purpose of this APS is to disseminate information to prospective applicants so that they may develop and submit concept papers for further review and ultimately an application for federal funding. The application process under this APS is two tiered. The first tier is to submit a concept paper based on the information provided in this APS. If the Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) gives a concept a favorable review, they may ask the organization that submitted the concept for a full technical and cost proposal in response to the APS and evaluation criteria that will be provided at that time. Please note, at this time we **are not accepting full proposals. Only concept papers will be reviewed.** Instructions on how to prepare a concept paper are provided within this APS. This APS: (A) describes the types of activities for which concepts will be considered and the broader programming context into which they will fit; (B) describes the funding available and the process and requirements for submitting concepts; and (C) refers prospective applicants to relevant documentation available on the internet. LAC/RSD anticipates awarding multiple cooperative agreements as a result of this APS.

For any questions regarding this APS, please contact the Paul Burford, Agreement Specialist with a copy to Kara Stith, Agreement Specialist and Georgia G. Fuller, Agreement Officer (AO). After the closing time and date for concepts, the relevant AO is the official point of contact for all inquiries.

Concept papers under this APS are due by 12:00 Noon EST on December 9, 2011 for the first round of funding. Questions regarding this concept papers under this APS must be sent via email to the individuals listed above no later than November 11, 2011. Concept papers may be submitted on a rolling basis after December 9, 2011, but there is no guarantee funding will be available for concept papers that come in after that date. USAID maintains the right to amend this APS as needed to either close the APS or add another definitive round of funding.

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Acronym List:

AO	Agreement Officer
APS	Annual Program Statement
CETT	Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training
EGRA	Early-Grade Reading Assessment
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
M/OAA/CAM	Office of Acquisition and Assistance's Contract Audit Management division
RSD	Office of Regional Sustainable Development
SERCE	<i>Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo</i> (2008 Second Regional Student Achievement Test)
SSME	Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness
USG	United States Government
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Glossary:

- Activity:** A structured undertaking of limited duration and narrow scope. An activity mobilizes inputs such as technical assistance, training or resource transfers in order to produce specific objectives that will contribute to achieving a Development Objective. Activities under this APS will implement promising early-grade reading interventions.
- Component:** A project component consists of one or more activities designed to achieve a specific objective. A project typically consists of multiple components. The LAC Regional Basic Education Project consists of three components: Identification and Implementation of Promising Interventions; Evaluation; and Promotion of Proven Interventions.
- Intervention:** Activities designed to have a specific and measurable impact. Under the APS interventions are activities to improve early-grade reading outcomes designed to be evaluated using experimental methods (use of a counterfactual).
- Local Organization:** For purposes of this APS, at the time of the award a “local organization” must,
- (1) be organized under the laws of the recipient country or one of the countries in the multiple country program, or a country in the USAID/LAC Region;*
 - (2) have its principal place of business in the recipient country or in one of the countries in the multiple country program, or in a country in the USAID/LAC Region;*
 - (3) be majority owned by individuals who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of the recipient country or be managed by a governing body, the majority of whom are citizens or lawful permanent residents of a recipient country or of one of the countries in a multiple country program, or of a country in the USAID/LAC Region;*
 - (4) not be controlled by a foreign entity or by an individual or individuals who are not citizens or permanent residents of the recipient country or of one of the countries in a multiple country program, or of a country in the USAID/LAC Region.*
- Project:** A structured undertaking of limited duration and broad scope, a project consists of multiple components and comprises a series of activities designed to address a development problem. The project in this APS refers to the overall set of three components which comprise the LAC Regional Basic Education project.

Latin America and the Caribbean Promising Early-Grade Reading Interventions

Section A: Activity Description

A.1 Program Summary

The purpose of this Annual Program Statement (APS) is to solicit concepts for promising interventions to improve reading achievement in the early grades in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Again, please note that full applications are not being accepted at this time. Full applications will not be reviewed. The Office of Acquisition and Assistance at USAID will contact an organization if a full application is to be requested. These interventions constitute one component of the Regional Basic Education Project. Two other components are to be implemented separately. Through the separately implemented components, the interventions will be concurrently evaluated for impact and cost effectiveness, with the goal of helping governments, donors, and other education policy makers and stakeholders make decisions about effective use of resources.

Together, the three, interrelated components form an integrated project, requiring communication, coordination, and cooperation between implementers (see figure 1). This APS outlines the goals and requirements for implementation of the **promising reading interventions component**.

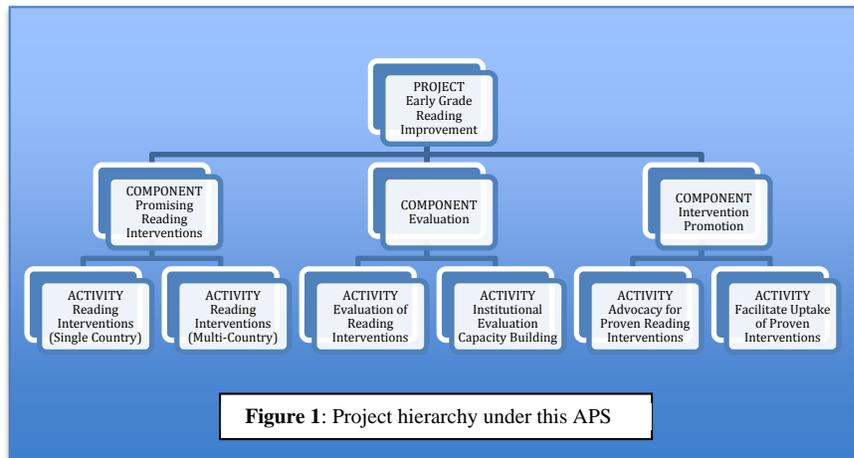


Figure 1: Project hierarchy under this APS

Through this APS, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will implement in select countries of the region several promising interventions designed to improve reading outcomes for target populations. The interventions will form a key part of the overall Regional Education Project of USAID’s Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In order to rigorously assess the cost-effectiveness, impact, and scalability of the interventions, implementation will be designed and coordinated in close collaboration with a separate, independent evaluation unit. The evaluation unit will be procured and implemented through a separate mechanism.

Pending availability of funding, LAC anticipates awarding multiple cooperative agreements to fund applications submitted in response to this APS. LAC anticipates making a range of awards, from \$600,000 for a single country intervention to a maximum of \$5,000,000 for multi-country interventions. LAC welcomes concepts that are tailored appropriately to the evaluation questions and sub-region or select countries described later in the APS, including concepts from organizations that have not received USAID funding in the past. New organizations may be subject to a pre-award survey by the Office of Acquisition and Assistance’s Contract Audit Management division (M/OAA/CAM) upon selection for award. Note that this APS is not a small grant mechanism; each agreement will run for approximately three to five years. Depending on availability of funding, LAC anticipates multiple awards totaling up to \$12 million in total funding over five years under this APS.

Concepts are welcome from local and U.S.-based non-governmental organizations, public and private education institutions, partnerships, and consortia. Under this APS, USAID expects to directly fund 50% local organizations. Please note that all organizations that apply must have a DUNS number and be registered in the Central Contractor Registration (CCR). Applicants should demonstrate a strong argument, base of evidence and relevance for proposed interventions in select countries, as well as an intervention framework that allows for close coordination with a separate evaluation unit. Approaches that allow for rigorous evaluation (randomized or quasi-experimental) in multiple contexts and countries are encouraged.

New organizations will need to register with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR), and will need to have or obtain a DUNS number. For more information regarding the DUNS number, please visit www.dnb.com or call 1-866-705-5711. New implementers may be subject to a pre-award survey upon selection for award.

A.2 Goals and Objectives of Activities under this APS

The implementation of activities described in this APS will form a key part of USAID's overall LAC Regional Basic Education Project, which is designed to further goal one of the USAID Education Strategy: "improved reading skills for 100 million children (globally) in the primary grades by 2015."

The **overall project goal** is to address the gaps that remain in the information available regarding cost-effective, scalable approaches that will work to improve reading in the early primary grades. Building on successful interventions in the region and prior USAID work, including the successful Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT), activities under this APS will contribute to the verification, scalability, and uptake of identified best practices in order to enhance reading achievement in the region.

The **goal of early-grade reading interventions** under this APS is: Improve knowledge and availability of cost effective interventions to strengthen the learning of reading in the early grades in the Latin American and Caribbean context.

The **objective of the interventions** under this APS is: In collaboration with a USAID-supported evaluation unit, implement interventions in select areas designed to improve the learning of reading in the primary grades in such a manner that they can be rigorously evaluated and systematized for widespread adoption.

The **expected results** for the interventions are:

- Significantly improved learning of reading by children in intervention-supported schools (as compared to control schools);
- Effective collaboration with separate, USAID-funded independent evaluation unit, ensuring valid and reliable evaluation; and
- Creation of models that are systematized and replicable.

A.3 Background and Rationale

Interventions under this APS will address education quality in targeted countries in LAC, specifically, low levels of learning of reading in the early grades. They will build on, enhance, support, or complement past and current USAID and local experience in the region, including (but not limited to) USAID experience in implementing CETT. Interventions should be designed

to increase knowledge and availability of approaches that can most cost effectively improve early-grade reading in LAC in different contexts and with different populations and are most likely to be adopted by Ministries of Education and other education officials. Particular attention will be given, as relevant, to ensuring gender equity as well as equity for poor, rural, indigenous, and other populations with the most limited access to quality education.

A.3.1 Early Grade Reading in LAC

Across LAC, major gains in access to primary school have been achieved over the past twenty years. However, learning levels as measured by both regional and national learning assessments remain stagnant. On average, education quality in public schools across the region remains low. A multitude of factors combine to create this problem of low achievement, including socio-economic conditions, low public investment in the sector, quality of teaching, and others. In line with goal one of the USAID Education Strategy—improved reading skills for 100 million children (globally) in the primary grades by 2015—early-grade reading has been identified as a priority area for USAID programming in the region.

a. Low reading levels in LAC

Low reading levels remain a significant challenge for basic education in LAC. As evidenced by various studies, learning levels at the primary grades across the region are low and mostly stagnant. According to the most recent regional achievement test (2008 Second Regional Student Achievement Test, SERCE), one-third of all third-grade students in the LAC region are functionally illiterate. Over 30% of third graders and nearly 20% of sixth graders read at the lowest level (1 or below out of 4). The number is even higher in the LAC countries where USAID maintains education projects (as high as 78% and 51% in the Dominican Republic, respectively). Equally troubling is the relative lack of above-average readers (level 4), which ranges from 1% to 8% in LAC countries with USAID education projects. Primary students in rural regions are particularly disadvantaged, as are those from indigenous communities and populations in which Spanish is a second language. Gender dynamics vary across the region and education level, as does the gender that is disadvantaged. On average, there is relative gender parity for reading achievement in primary education. SERCE results demonstrate reading parity in Spanish at the third grade level, and a slight advantage of girls over boys by the sixth grade in some countries, while national results from Early-Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) suggest a slight advantage of second-grade boys over girls in indigenous language reading ability along the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast.

b. USAID experience in early-grade reading in LAC

Based on a long history of working to improve early-grade reading in the region and through renewed emphasis on the subject of early-grade reading in the new USAID Education Strategy, USAID is primed to work in the area of improving early-grade reading.

Through the regional CETT program, USAID developed a promising model for improving the teaching of literacy in the early grades of primary education. CETT was implemented in 16 countries through three regional centers, one each in the Caribbean, Central America and the Dominican Republic, and South America. Between 2002 and 2010, CETT trained over 35,000 teachers and administrators, and benefited nearly 800,000 children.

In a number of LAC countries, bilateral programs have complemented or extended regional efforts to improve the quality of reading instruction. For example, in the Dominican Republic

USAID is supporting Ministry adoption and expansion of CETT through the Effective Schools Program. In addition, as of 2011, seven countries have or will have implemented the EGRA, developed with USAID support, and/or the more extensive snapshot of school management effectiveness (SSME), which incorporates EGRA.

c. Lessons learned from CETT (2001 – 2010)

Based on the findings and recommendations from several recently completed evaluations, including an evaluation of the LAC Regional Education program, a two-year impact evaluation of CETT, and five White Papers presenting focused assessments on specific topics related to CETT implementation, the following achievements, opportunities, lessons, and recommendations were identified. (The evaluations and white papers are included as annexes 1, 2 and 3 of this APS.)

- An important value-added of CETT was its **regional implementation**, which included active collaboration between countries and local partners working on multi-country programming and strengthened local capacity through mutual learning and sharing of best practices and lessons-learned.
- Important achievements include a demonstrable impact on in-classroom **teacher performance**, evidence that the model can have positive impact on **student learning**, and the formation of a **strong consortium of organizations and individuals** in Central America and the Caribbean with increased capacity for implementation and evaluation. CETT also helped successfully **raise the profile for reading** in the region and the importance of improving teacher training therein.
- Notable challenges include **inconsistent administration** of testing and its use for assessing program impact, **inadequate incorporation** by host-country governments and in policy for long term sustainability, and **challenges with assessing the cost effectiveness** of the entire “Cadillac” model.
- Evaluations noted that regional programs were most successful and sustainable in countries that had **active Mission engagement** on the in-country activities, usually countries where USAID has an active bilateral education program. For this reason, it will be expected that implementers of promising interventions will cooperate/collaborate closely with Missions, as needed, for example, to inform and engage ministries of education, teachers unions, civil society groups and other key stake-holders. Only interventions of interest to the relevant USAID Mission(s) will be awarded.
- While CETT was successful in improving reading instruction practices of benefitting teachers, the complete model was expensive and out of reach of many LAC Ministries of Education. Some countries reacted by adopting individual elements of the model. A richer understanding is needed of the **impact and cost effectiveness** of key components of this “Cadillac” program, ideally in comparison to other promising approaches. From recent CETT evaluations, we know that the follow up support is what makes CETT effective in supporting teachers to change their behavior in the classroom. We are particularly interested in assessing the cost effectiveness of the different forms of follow up used by CETT, such as the use of the teacher circles, classroom follow up by a trained facilitator, or both. This work is particularly important given the focus of Goal 1 of the USAID Global Education Strategy (available in Annex 4).

A.3.2 Promising areas of intervention

To date, there are not many robust approaches to reliably improving early-grade reading at affordable costs, nor much direct evidence from the region. Thus, it is critical to carefully build on the available evidence and insights in partnership with host country actors in such a way as to facilitate evidence-based scaling up of impactful, cost-effective practices. The most promising early-grade reading interventions are those that demonstrate both the potential for high impact on the learning outcomes of primary school students and cost-effectiveness. Whereas cost efficiency measures the cost per output (e.g., cost per student or per teacher of an intervention) without consideration of impact, cost effectiveness takes into consideration both cost and impact. The key point is to provide a high impact relative to cost. Given the often scarce resources (both human and financial) available for education, it becomes critical to use resources with attention to effectiveness. The intention under this APS is to compare approaches and/or components of interventions to improve early-grade reading achievement that are thought to be promising for having high impact relative to cost. This may include both low cost interventions as well as more expensive interventions with potentially much higher impact.

A survey¹ of policymakers' perceptions on successful and cost-effective interventions for improving learning in Latin America suggests at once a consensus of "common sense" understandings of what works, as well as a notable gap between implementation of such practices and evidence that supports their impact and relative costs. With this in mind, successful concepts will aim to test interventions with respect to (1) the ease or difficulty of the intervention at an administrative or policy level, (2) the relative impact on learning of reading, and (3) the relative costs of the intervention. Successful concepts must also demonstrate a high capacity to comply with the standards of a rigorous evaluation conducted by a third party.

In order to facilitate a dialogue and inform concepts, and eventual proposals, under this APS, USAID and its partners in the region have identified a non-exhaustive set of five categories of promising early-grade reading interventions; these interventions offer high potential in the short to medium term (three to five years) and are of most relevance in select countries of the region (see Section A.4 for details on select countries, and Annex 5: Review of Promising Reading Interventions in LAC).

- i. Effective professional development for teachers**
 - a. While the evidence is clear that follow-up to training is critical in effectively grounding training content in classroom practices and greatly increases the impact of the training, exactly which types of follow up are most cost effective is not understood (including, for example, teacher circles, in which teachers benefit from peer support, and classroom accompaniment by trained facilitators).
 - b. Innovative service delivery mechanisms for training or follow-up: these may include interventions that make productive use of information technology.
- ii. Appropriate use of language of instruction**
 - a. Bilingual education: interventions that promise increased aptitude in familiar languages as well as those that offer suitable transitions to second languages,

¹ Schiefelbein, Ernesto, Laurence Wolff, and Paulina Schiefelbein. "Cost-Effectiveness of Education Policies in Latin America: A Survey of Expert Opinion" Inter-American Development Bank, December 1998.

particularly in rural settings with indigenous populations for whom the national language is a second language.

- iii. **Classroom factors**
 - a. Increased availability of quality, relevant materials (textbooks, classroom libraries, or other reading materials): Some research suggests cost-effective learning gains are associated with allowing young students to bring texts home for personal use.
 - b. Effective teaching practices: Increasing or altering time spent on teaching reading or on student-centered reading may impact learning outcomes.
 - c. Grouping: Arranging students by level of achievement (based on early-grade reading assessments), accompanied by differentiated instruction shows promise for improved learning, particularly if coupled with other appropriate interventions.
- iv. **Out-of-class factors**
 - a. Parental involvement: Effective engagement of parents with respect to their children's literacy may be low-cost and associated with reading gains, especially when done through existing community organizing mechanisms.
 - b. Remedial instruction: research suggests that sustained remedial instruction for early-grade learners can have a significant effect on reading outcomes.
- v. **Assessment tools for teachers**
 - a. Tests: Simple and low-cost reading tests for assessing individual student progress may be associated with key instruction and classroom management changes which impact learning. The extent to which training in the application and interpretation of the instruments is required and cost effective in impacting learning remains unclear.

A.4 Countries and Topics of Interest

Recipients may implement interventions in one or multiple countries from the list below. Interventions implemented in multiple countries must address common themes, such as models for second-language learners, or test implementation in multiple contexts (e.g., components of CETT). A clear rationale for the selection and grouping of interventions in countries of interest must be articulated. In addition to the areas of intervention listed in A.3.2, possible topics of interest for each country are listed below.

- **Dominican Republic**
 - Interventions that enhance the USAID bilateral Effective Schools Program (*Programa de Escuelas Efectivas*), which incorporates aspects of CETT with other activities. Of particular interest are those interventions which increase understanding of cost effectiveness and impact of current aspects of the bilateral program. Tools or techniques to effectively reach students of all learning abilities, such as the use of performance monitoring/assessment to inform corrective action for underachieving learners. (See Annex 6 for description of the Effective Schools Program.)
- **Guatemala**
 - Interventions that address the consistent lack of available reading materials noted in classroom observations complement USAID efforts to foster a textbook and educational materials policy, and strengthen Ministry of Education institutional capabilities for timely delivery of quality reading materials. Interventions might focus on working with the Ministry of Education to produce reading materials aligned with

the national curriculum, or on the production and delivery of materials in a selected zone (see A.3.2.iii.a).

- Adaptation and use of assessment tools in Mayan languages. Of particular interest is adaptation to other major Mayan languages (i.e. Mam, K'aqchiquel, and Q'eqchi) and the use of similar tools to inform teachers about the reading progress of their students (A.3.2.ii.a).
- Models for Spanish learning as a second language. To close ethnic learning gaps, there is a need to develop and institutionalize a Spanish learning model for indigenous children as a second language (A.3.2.ii.a).
- **Honduras**
 - Interventions expanding on CETT, ideally using locally available expertise and including materials developed under CETT. A regional approach that maintains exchanges and learning between countries is particularly valued. Areas of interest include the following:
 - Effective professional development for teachers, especially cost effective follow up (see A.3.2.i.a)
 - Increased availability of quality materials (A.3.2.iii.a); approaches might include but would not be limited to development of sustainable partnerships and alliances
 - Effective teaching practices (A.3.2.iii.b)
 - Parental and community involvement in reading acquisition (A.3.2.iv.a)
 - Assessment tools for teachers (A.3.2.v.a)
- **Jamaica**
 - Interventions expanding on CETT, ideally using locally available expertise and including materials developed under CETT in future work. A regional approach that maintains exchanges and learning between countries particularly is valued. Areas of interest include the following:
 - Differentiated instruction based on diagnostic testing (see A.3.2.i, A.3.2.iii, A.3.2.v)
 - Increased availability of quality reading materials (A.3.2.iii.a), with particular interest in books that have broad appeal to boys.
 - Effective professional development for teachers, especially cost effective follow up and effective use of teacher circles (A.3.2.i)
 - Effective implementation, application, and awareness of the standards and benchmarks for reading for each grade level (A.3.2.v.a).
 - Models for using the indigenous language (Creole) to teach the national language (A.3.2.ii.a)
- **Nicaragua**
 - Interventions expanding on CETT and promising advances in in-service teacher training. Areas of interest include the following:
 - Increased availability of quality materials (see A.3.2.iii.a); particularly those in the indigenous Miskitu language for relevant populations.
 - Effective professional development for teachers, especially cost effective follow up and effective use of teacher circles (A.3.2.i)
 - Training and provision of simple, low-cost tools for in-class reading assessment by teachers, such as EGRA (A.3.2.v.a)

- **Peru**
 - Interventions addressing issues of social inclusion. Areas of particular interest include the following:
 - Models to effectively reach children in rural areas or particular ethnic and indigenous groups (may address any area of A.3)
 - Models for bilingual and intercultural education, offering suitable transition to the national language (A.3.2.ii.a)
 - Teacher performance standards and incentives
 - Accreditation for teacher training institutions
- **Eastern Caribbean** (including Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines)
 - Interventions expanding on CETT, ideally using locally available expertise and including materials developed under CETT. Common approaches to strengthening reading across the six countries of the eastern Caribbean, using the Caribbean CETT approach as the platform for intervening; these six countries share a common education policy under the regional education policy developed at the level of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

A.5 Programming Context for Proposed Activities

a. USAID's LAC Regional Basic Education Project: Three Components

Activities funded under this APS are a vital component of the new LAC Regional Basic Education Project. They fall under the first of three inter-related components, each of which will be conducted through a mechanism to be procured separately. A description of each component follows.

- i. **Identification and Implementation of Promising Interventions.** Under the first component, highly promising, low-cost and high impact approaches to improve reading will be implemented. USAID/LAC/RSD will work in partnership with LAC Missions, Ministries, and other key stakeholders to identify the projects of greatest interest and promise. Selected interventions shall be implemented in targeted areas in coordination with an independent evaluation contractor (see step ii), and as such, flexibility shall be needed to roll out implementation in a manner that supports rigorous evaluation. Of particular interest will be interventions to evaluate selected components of CETT as well as other innovative approaches to be identified with Mission assistance and collaboration. Multi-country interventions of relevance and interest for the participating countries will be valuable in allowing testing and evaluation in a greater variety of contexts.
- ii. **Evaluation.** The selected, promising interventions will be rigorously evaluated by an independent contractor for impact, cost effectiveness, and/or other factors which affect adoption by national governments and other stakeholders. To enable rigorous evaluation, implementers of the promising interventions shall determine intervention rollout with guidance from and in cooperation with the evaluation contractor. Cooperation on development and application of appropriate assessment/testing instruments and on systematization of the intervention shall also be necessary.

Rigorous evaluations are those which are valid and reliable, for example, using experimental or quasi-experimental techniques.

- iii. **Reading Intervention Promotion.** Dissemination, scale up, and sustainability of proven interventions will be supported by an intervention promotion component. This component will be implemented to: 1) support dissemination and use of proven, cost-effective practices to improve reading, including the evaluation findings as well as other available research; 2) facilitate uptake and application by governments and decision-makers; and 3) strengthen key stakeholder knowledge, understanding, and demand for good reading instruction. Cooperation in sharing information and results shall be necessary.

b. Contribution to Goals and Objectives of LAC Regional Basic Education Project

Implemented in concert with the other components of the LAC Regional Basic Education Project, activities under this APS contribute to the **overall LAC Regional Basic Education Project goal**, which is: To increase the uptake of evidence-based, cost effective and impactful best practices by Ministries of Education and decision makers in order to increase reading achievement in the region.

The objectives of the overall LAC Regional Basic Education Project to which the activities funded under this APS contribute are:

- **Objective:** Confirmation of and wide dissemination of proven and effective² early childhood reading teaching and learning interventions.
- **Objective:** Increased use of criteria- and evidence-based decision-making to improve the teaching and learning of early-grade reading by project implementation partners and other civil society actors.

c. Contribution to Expected Results of LAC Regional Basic Education Project

Activities under this APS are expected to contribute to the following results of the overall LAC Regional Basic Education Project.

Activities under this APS are expected to directly impact activity beneficiaries.

In addition, through intervention uptake under the third component of the overall project, successful activities will indirectly impact additional beneficiaries. USAID recognizes that indirect impacts also may be influenced by bilateral education projects, and it may not be able to differentiate attribution. Measurement of indirect impacts will be determined according to standard reading improvement metrics devised by Missions for goal one.

- **Result:** Targeted percentage of students demonstrate at least a targeted increase in reading achievement in a cost effective manner.

² For purposes of this APS, *proven and effective* is understood to mean interventions and approaches which meet the criteria established at the outset by key stakeholders, including MOEs, implementing partners and other relevant actors. These criteria may include but are not limited to cost-effective, culturally appropriate, replicable, and scalable.

Through evaluation and contribution to knowledge generation and engagement in the use of this knowledge, activities under the APS also contribute indirectly to additional overall project outcomes and results, as follows:

- **Output:** Number of interventions tested
- **Outcome:** Number of interventions proven and meeting criteria established with governments
- **Result:** Awareness among education stakeholders of availability of cost-effective, impactful reading interventions.

d. Contribution to USAID Education Strategy

Interventions under this APS contribute to Goal One of the USAID Education Strategy: Improved Reading Skills for 100 Million Children in Primary Grades by 2015. This goal builds on USAID's long experience in primary education and its more recent leadership in supporting interventions to improve learning outcomes. While it is recognized that learning takes place at all levels, the focus is on reading improvement in the early grades as the foundation for future learning.

While the strategy includes three results under goal one, interventions under the APS are anticipated to contribute directly to two: Result 1.1, Improved Reading Instruction, and, in some cases, to Result 1.2, Reading Delivery Systems Improved. Under Result 1.1, the focus is on improving reading instruction through three types of interventions (a) improving teacher effectiveness, (b) increasing availability and use of materials, and (c) strengthening school and classroom management. Under Result 1.2, USAID will support efforts to develop more robust reading delivery systems at the primary level, including, for example, addressing teacher absenteeism, strengthening standards and assessment, or incorporating the use of appropriate, cost-effective, scalable technologies with the potential to improve reading or reading performance.

e. USAID Forward

In accordance with current [USAID Forward reforms](#) (see annex 7), the following considerations will be emphasized in funding activities through this APS, including:

- i. Contracting with and providing grants to more and varied local partners and creating true partnerships to create the conditions where aid is no longer necessary. A premium is placed on supporting local, governmental, and civil-society implementers and building their capacity to carry out the work in the future, independently or otherwise, thus diminishing the need for outside assistance.
- ii. Leveraging the strong relationships, networks and capacities forged by CETT.
- iii. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of USAID programs, and improving local monitoring and evaluation capacity (for more information, see USAID Evaluation Policy in Annex 8)
- iv. Transforming development through science and technology: USAID welcomes appropriate, innovative yet practical solutions to strengthen reading learning in the region in a cost-effective manner.

- v. Commitment to innovation: Where possible, seek ways to incorporate innovative use of technology, evaluation methods, and information gathering and organizing in order to facilitate the proposed activity objectives.
- vi. Fortified policy capacity: will include strategic engagement with and buy-in from governments and key stakeholders on identification, evaluation, and scale up of promising interventions. This engagement will include the use of reliable partner country institutions and systems where feasible and appropriate and will strengthen local civil society and private sector capacity to improve program effectiveness and sustainability through both capacity building and use of local grant and contract mechanisms.

A.6 Recipient Responsibilities

Again, please note that only concept papers are being accepted at this time. Organizations that submit successful concepts will be requested to submit a full technical and cost application. If an application is accepted and recommended for funding under this APS, the recipient must incorporate the following components into their final activity design and work plan:

A. 6.1 Local Capacity Building

In accord with USAID Forward reforms, USAID places value on contracting with and providing grants to more and varied local partners and creating true partnerships to create the conditions where aid is no longer necessary. To this end, strong proposals under the APS will include one or more of the following features: implementation by local organizations, both as direct implementing partners of USAID and, secondarily, through sub-grants or sub-agreements; fostering of regional networks; and proposed metrics to measure progress toward building local capacity. It is expected that the recipient will identify potential needs and resource requirements for capacity building.

A.6.2 Relationship with other Regional Basic Education Project partners

Through separate and forthcoming procurements, USAID plans to support intervention evaluation and promotion efforts. As part of USAID's Regional Basic Education Project in LAC, recipients under this APS will be required to collaborate closely with implementing partners of the other project components. This collaboration between the three project components is of critical importance to the success of USAID's overall Regional Basic Education Project.

Relationship with Independent Evaluation Unit:

Under USAID direction, an Evaluation Unit will perform rigorous evaluation of the promising interventions implemented under this APS as well as provide technical assistance to APS recipients, as needed, to support successful evaluation. Additionally, the evaluation unit will provide technical assistance to systematize the intervention, as needed. Recipients will be required to cooperate with the evaluation unit to plan roll out of the intervention in order to facilitate the rigorous evaluation. This is likely to include collaborating with the evaluation unit to: develop monitoring instruments; design appropriate record-keeping systems for needed budgetary and programmatic data; collect requested budget and programmatic information; identify treatment and control groups; plan comparative implementation of intervention components; measure the impact on children's learning; and other tasks as required for rigorous evaluation. Flexibility will be required on the part of intervention implementers in planning roll out and overall implementation of an intervention..

Relationship with Intervention Promotion partners:

USAID plans to support promotion of proven interventions under a separate implementing mechanism. Recipients shall be required to coordinate with the specified partner units with respect to intervention scale-up, information-sharing, and intervention promotion. Recipients shall be responsible for systematization of the intervention(s) (at a minimum, internal assessment and write-ups in addition to regular reporting requirements) and for sharing intervention information and results to support intervention promotion.

A.6.3 Relationship with Project Stakeholders

Relationship with USAID Washington and Missions:

USAID/Washington, via the Bureau for Latin American and the Caribbean, together with relevant Missions in the region will jointly fund and manage the interventions supported under this APS. During the award process, USAID/W will work collaboratively with interested Missions to determine key interventions and issues for evaluation, and it is expected that Missions will similarly engage their Ministries or other stakeholders (e.g., teachers' unions), as appropriate. USAID/W will lead the award process, and Missions will determine appropriateness for the local context. Interventions will be implemented only in interested countries (as listed in section A.4, above).

Implementers will be expected to maintain strong, consistent communication and coordination with USAID/Washington and the relevant USAID Mission(s). Depending on the planned intervention, management responsibilities may reside with Washington or with the relevant field office. At a minimum, Missions will serve as activity managers for in-country activities. In collaboration with implementers, Missions would potentially work toward formal agreements with stakeholders on the details of a national roll-out if the intervention has the desired cost effectiveness and quantitative impact.

Relationship with Host Country Governments and Key Stakeholders:

USAID Missions will play an important role in liaising with national-level actors, such as ministries of education and civil society. When possible, USAID Missions will work with ministries of education to gain commitment to scale up those tested interventions that prove effective. Recipient communication with host country governments shall be undertaken only following coordinated consultation with LAC/RSD and the relevant USAID Mission.

A.6.4 Performance Monitoring

Recipients shall be responsible for developing performance plans in cooperation with USAID and tracking and reporting on performance indicators. In addition to intervention-specific indicators, recipients must track and report on applicable standard Agency education indicators, including those related to learning outcomes, as agreed upon with USAID (see Annex 9 for an illustrative list). Resources should be budgeted accordingly.

A.6.5 Performance Reporting Requirement

The recipient shall submit financial and performance reports in English on a quarterly basis to USAID. Reports shall be in accordance with 22 CFR 226.51 and 226.52. Other reporting requirements—including format, number of copies, information to be included, due dates, and distribution—will be developed in consultation with the LAC Regional Sustainable Development Office and/or relevant Missions during the award negotiation process.

The recipient is responsible for following the approved implementation and monitoring and evaluation plans throughout the life of the award. These plans should provide the basis for Recipient's reporting to USAID during the life of the award. USAID will use the plans (including the approved budget plan) to monitor, assess, and evaluate Recipient's activity and activity operations. USAID will work with Recipient to revise plans throughout the life of the activity, identifying corrections and adjustments as required. It is the Recipient's responsibility to inform the Cognizant Technical Officer if implementation issues arise which may affect approved plans.

A.7 USAID Substantial Involvement

Should a cooperative agreement be awarded as a result of a concept paper under this APS, USAID will be substantially involved in the award in the following ways, to include but not limited to:

- a) Approval of implementation plans, including monitoring and evaluation plans.
- b) Approval of specified key personnel.
- c) Monitoring progress towards the achievement of agreement objectives during the course of the agreement, including through site visits; participation on steering, executive, or advisory committees that provide overall guidance and monitor implementation; and appropriate other means of oversight to ensure activity outcomes (e.g., data quality assessments, etc.).
- d) USAID and recipient collaboration or joint activity implementation.
- e) Coordination of agreement activities with separately implemented intervention evaluation and promotion units.
- f) USAID shall provide prior approval of all sub-awards under this Agreement; without which the sub-award shall not be executed. A sub-award will not be considered approved until the organization has been identified and the detailed budget has been accepted by USAID.

Section B: Instructions for Concept Papers

B.1 Overview

The structure of this APS is intended to stimulate innovative approaches to identifying and verifying the most cost effective of the various promising approaches to improve the learning of reading by children in the early primary grades in Latin America and the Caribbean. The end goal of the project to which this activity contributes is the scale up of proven approaches by national, regional, or local education authorities and other stakeholders. The intent is to encourage creativity but at the same time test methods that have already been developed and shown promise. Of particular interest will be interventions to evaluate selected components of CETT as well as other innovative approaches to be identified with Mission assistance and collaboration. Multi-country interventions of relevance and interest for the participating countries will be valuable in allowing testing in a greater variety of contexts. Local implementers, including regional consortia, are particularly encouraged to apply. USAID welcomes incorporation of innovative uses of technology where practical and appropriate to facilitate the proposed activity objective of strengthening reading learning in the region in a cost-effective manner.

To apply, applicants will need to submit a concept paper according to the requirements in section B.2.1. If a concept paper is approved, applicants will then be asked to develop a full technical application, for which instructions will be provided at that time. Please do not submit a full application at this time. This APS is effective from the date of this announcement until October 31, 2012. To be considered during the first round of applications, concept papers must be submitted by December 9, 2011 at 12:00 Noon, EST. After this date, concept papers will be considered on a rolling basis. Dates for later review periods will be announced via an amendment to this APS.

Only one agreement will be awarded to an individual organization. Each organization can submit only one application per review round. Applications may include implementation of multiple interventions as long as a clear conceptual linkage between the interventions is proposed – e.g., comparison of relative cost effectiveness.

New organizations will need to register with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR), and will need to have or obtain a DUNS number. For more information regarding the DUNS number, please visit www.dnb.com or call 1-866-705-5711. New implementers may be subject to a pre-award survey upon selection for award.

Issuance of this APS does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of the U.S. Government, nor does it commit the U.S. Government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.

B.2 Concept Paper Instructions

Concept papers must not exceed six pages, and supporting information must not exceed nine pages, for a total length of no more than fifteen pages. Concept papers must contain the following information.

1. Cover Page
 - Title of the proposed Activity
 - Name and address for the lead organization

- Type of organization (i.e., for-profit, non-profit, university, etc.)
 - Contact point (lead contact name, relevant telephone, email)
 - Names of all organizations that are part of the concept; regional or multi-country concepts should provide the name of at least one local partner for each country targeted in the intervention(s)
 - Signature of authorized representative of the organization
2. Technical Information
- Clear description of the proposed intervention (including gender considerations, inclusiveness of children with disabilities, constraints, and opportunities), the rationale for how the intervention will improve learning of reading, the evidence supporting its potential as a cost effective approach likely to be adopted by education authorities and other stakeholders, and the proposed questions for evaluation and/or components for comparison
 - Proposed countries of implementation and target populations
 - Expected results
 - Approach to strengthening local capacity and improving intervention effectiveness and sustainability, including (but not limited to) any proposed use of local implementers and/or regional networks, cost share, and/or local grant/contract mechanisms
3. Supporting Information
- Brief description of proposed management structure
 - Proposed estimated cost
 - Brief cost breakdown by category (i.e., salaries, travel, etc.)
 - Proposed cost share
 - Proposed duration of Activity
 - Estimated calendar of proposed management and intervention milestones

Section C. Concept Paper Evaluation Criteria

Technical Evaluation Criteria

The concept paper will be evaluated based on the criteria listed below.

1. Importance and relevance of intervention (higher importance)
- Conceptually sound intervention to improve early-grade reading
 - Evidence that evaluation will contribute to greater understanding of cost effective approaches to improving early-grade reading
 - Relevance and value to country working in – particularly Ministry and USAID objectives
 - Where feasible, preference given to multi-country implementation supporting greater breadth of learning
 - Design of interventions includes flexibility to include variation in implementation to address Ministry/country needs in evaluation, and to accommodate rollout in such a way as to support rigorous evaluation design, including phased rollout to selected treatment groups identified in cooperation with the evaluation unit, and to cooperate with evaluation unit on all aspects of evaluation, including facilitating timely and accurate collection of baseline and follow up data
 - Adequate incorporation of consideration of gender analysis

- Adequate incorporation within project design of consideration of inclusion of children with disabilities
 - Where practical and appropriate to facilitate the proposed activity objective of strengthening reading learning in the region in a cost-effective manner, incorporation of innovative uses of technology.
2. Capacity to implement proposed intervention(s) (high importance)
- Well-defined technical approach
 - Planned management structure and staffing plan capable of effective collaboration with evaluation unit and intervention promotion component
 - Planned management structure plan and staffing plan adequate to implement proposed technical approach
3. Use and capacity building of local organizations and networks (moderate importance)
- In accordance with priorities of USAID Forward reforms (as delineated in Section 5(e), preference will be given to concepts which prioritize local capacity building, including implementation directly by and through local organizations
 - Regional networks leveraged (including but not limited to networks developed by CETT)
 - Value is placed on contracting with and providing grants to more and varied local partners and creating true partnerships to create the conditions where aid is no longer necessary. To that end, strong concepts under this APS will include one or more of the following features: implementation by local organizations, fostering of regional networks, and/or proposed metrics to measure progress toward building local capacity. A premium will be placed on supporting local, governmental, and civil-society implementers and building their capacity to carry out the work in the future, independently or otherwise, thus diminishing the need for outside assistance. We also will seek to leverage the strong relationships, networks and capacities forged by CETT.
 - Extent to which approach engages reliable partner country institutions and systems, especially governments, where feasible and appropriate
 - Use of local grant/contract mechanism to strengthen local civil society and private sector capacity to improve intervention effectiveness and sustainability