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Issue Date of RFA: April 10, 2019  
Deadline for Written Questions: April 17, 2019 at 1:00pm, DC time  
Closing Date for Submission of Concept Notes: April 24, 2019  
Closing Time for Submission of Concept Notes: 4:00pm Washington, DC time  
Estimated Time for Concept Note Presentation: May 6-May 15, 2019

Subject: Notice of Funding Opportunity Number: 7200AA19RFA00009

Program Title: Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience

Ladies/Gentlemen:

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is seeking concept notes for a cooperative agreement from qualified U.S. organizations to fund a program entitled Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience. Eligibility for this award is restricted to Title XII institutions. See Section C of this RFA for eligibility requirements.

Subject to the availability of funds, an award will be made to the responsible applicant(s) whose application(s) best meets the objectives of this funding opportunity and the selection criteria contained herein. While one award is anticipated as a result of this request for applications (RFA), USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

For the purposes of this Notice of Funding Opportunity, the term "Grant" is synonymous with "Cooperative Agreement"; "Grantee" is synonymous with "Recipient"; and "Grant Officer" is synonymous with "Agreement Officer". Further, this Notice of Funding Opportunity is in the form of a Request for Applications. As such, the term "Notice of Funding Opportunity" is synonymous with "Request for Applications." Eligible organizations interested in submitting an application are encouraged to read this funding opportunity thoroughly to understand the type of program sought, application submission requirements and evaluation process.

To be eligible for award, the applicant must provide all information as required in this RFA and meet eligibility standards in Section C of this RFA. This funding opportunity is posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), and may be amended. Potential applicants should regularly check the website to ensure they have the latest information pertaining to this notice of funding opportunity. Applicants will need to have available or download Adobe program to their computers in order to view and save the Adobe forms properly. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the entire RFA has been received from the internet in its entirety and USAID bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion process. If you have difficulty registering on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) or accessing the RFA, please contact the Grants.gov Helpdesk at 1-800-518-4726 or via email at [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov) for technical assistance.

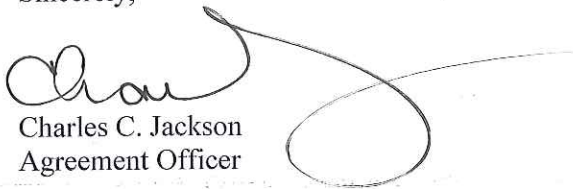
The successful Applicant will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of the program objectives. Please read each section of the RFA.

Please send any questions to Kelly Miskowski at [kmiskowski@usaid.gov](mailto:kmiskowski@usaid.gov) by the date and time set forth above. Responses to questions received prior to the deadline will be furnished to all potential applicants through an amendment to this notice posted to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

Issuance of this notice of funding opportunity does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government nor does it commit the Government to pay for any costs incurred in preparation or submission of comments/suggestions or an application. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Thank you for your interest in USAID programs.

Sincerely,



Charles C. Jackson  
Agreement Officer

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THIS RFA

ADS	AUTOMATED DIRECTIVES SYSTEM OF USAID POLICIES
AIS	AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION SYSTEMS
AMA	ASSETS AND MARKET ACCESS
AO	AGREEMENT OFFICER
AOR	AGREEMENT OFFICER'S REPRESENTATIVE
BASIS	BROADENING ACCESS AND STRENGTHENING INPUT MARKETS
BEO	BUREAU ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER
BFS	BUREAU FOR FOOD SECURITY
BS/MP	BRANDING STRATEGY AND MARKING PLAN
CCIR	CROSS CUTTING INTERMEDIATE RESULT
CFR	CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS
CLA	COLLABORATION, LEARNING AND ADAPTING
DEC	DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE CLEARINGHOUSE
DUNS	DATA UNIVERSAL NUMBERING SYSTEM
EA	ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EMMP	ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION AND MONITORING PLAN
ER	ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
FAA	FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT
FTFMS	FEED THE FUTURE MONITORING SYSTEM
GAAP	GENERALLY ACCEPTED ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES
GFSA	GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY ACT
GFSS	GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY
HICD	HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT
IEE	INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION
IRB	INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
LGBTQI	LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER, AND INTERSEX
LWA	LEADER WITH ASSOCIATES
ME	MANAGEMENT ENTITY
MEL	MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING
MRR	MARKETS, RISK, AND RESILIENCE
MSI	MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTION
NFO	NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
PMP	PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
PYD	POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
RFA	REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS
SF	STANDARD FORM
SME	SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISE
SPS	STANDARD PROGRAM STRUCTURE
TEA	TOTAL ESTIMATED AMOUNT
USAID	UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
USG	UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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## SECTION A: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### Authority

Pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (FAA), the United States Government (USG), as represented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bureau for Food Security (BFS), is seeking to support or stimulate the activities described below, and requests applications from eligible U.S. Title XII universities to manage and implement the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience.

The prime award(s) resulting from this RFA will be administered in accordance with the following:

- 2 CFR 200 UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL AWARDS
- 2 CFR 700 (USAID's implementation of 2 CFR 200)
- Chapter 303 of USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS-303)
- USAID Mandatory and Required-as-Applicable Standard Provisions for U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations

### 1. Background and Context

USAID has a long history of technical leadership in international agricultural research and development, drawing upon the expertise of U.S. universities, industry, non-governmental and private voluntary organizations, multilateral development partners, and its own technical staff. The Bureau for Food Security (BFS), which leads [Feed the Future](#)<sup>1</sup>, leverages the strengths of other USG partners, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, universities, and civil society organizations to support country-driven agricultural, food security, and resilience strategies and invests in strengthening of both public and private institutions that underpin growth in the agricultural sector.

#### 1.1 Alignment with Administration Priorities and USG Strategies

Legislation, strategy, and other programming that informs this Program Description include the Global Food Security Act (GFSA), the Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS), the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Research Strategy (Research Strategy), and the Feed the Future Innovation Labs (Innovation Labs).

- Global Food Security Act: Demonstrating the continued importance of American leadership in international food security efforts, including agricultural research and development, the U.S. Congress and the President passed into law the Global Food Security Act of 2016.
- Global Food Security Strategy: The [Global Food Security Strategy, 2017-2021](#)<sup>2</sup> (GFSS) is a whole-of-government strategy for sustainably reducing global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty by focusing Feed the Future efforts toward three interrelated and interdependent objectives: 1) inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth, 2) strengthened resilience among people and systems, and 3) a well-nourished population. Implicit in the GFSS is the recognition that achievement of these objectives requires a systems perspective, which can offer important insights for understanding the dynamics and interactions of key components of food and agriculture systems in diverse contexts. To achieve these objectives, the GFSS highlighted that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://feedthefuture.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/USG-Global-Food-Security-Strategy-2016.pdf>

Feed the Future research investments should “ensure a pipeline of innovations, tools, and approaches designed to improve agriculture, food security, resilience, and nutrition priorities in the face of complex, dynamic challenges.”

- U.S. Government’s Global Food Security Research Strategy: The United States has played a leading role in researching and discovering new and innovative tools and approaches that promote global food security. The [2017 Research Strategy](#)<sup>3</sup> aims to promote greater coordination and alignment across the U.S. Government to effectively bring U.S. ingenuity to bear on the greatest challenges in sustainably reducing global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.
- Feed the Future Innovation Labs: Title XII of the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, as amended, mobilizes the scientific expertise of U.S. land-grant and other eligible universities to improve agricultural development assistance, prevent famine, and end hunger. To address the mandates of the Title XII legislation, the GFSA, and the GFSS, BFS manages a portfolio of research activities collectively known as the Feed the Future Innovation Labs. Led by U.S. Title XII universities, the Innovation Labs are designed to support collaborative research among U.S. universities and host-country universities and/or national research institutes. Innovation Lab leadership in and implementation of research and capacity development activities are integral to USAID’s implementation of the Global Food Security Research Strategy.

## 1.2 Background

Excluding the poor from economic growth strategies is costly—both in terms of human capital and development resources. This is particularly true in areas subject to recurrent crisis where shocks result in repeated, large-scale humanitarian emergencies. Exclusion can drive man-made shocks such as conflict while also exacerbating the harm caused by downstream shocks. In Ethiopia alone over the past five years, the United States has spent an average of \$300 million annually to feed millions of people excluded from the growth process. Addressing the constraints to the poor’s participation in agriculture-led economic growth will allow them to participate in and contribute to the expansion of rural growth.

To increase the participation of the poor in agriculture-led growth, ongoing efforts focus on linking these groups to new opportunities throughout market systems and agriculture value chains. It is also critical that local and international stakeholders identify and address policy constraints which prevent asset accumulation and utilization, and otherwise limit the participation of the poor in a wider range of economic activity. Identifying economic entry points, and enabling people to take advantage of the opportunities they present, will require well-targeted social and economic safety-nets, improved access to financial services, and risk management. As women and children represent a greater proportion of the lowest income levels, development and resilience stakeholders must also employ strategies that reduce gender inequality, as described below.

The leader award for the BFS’s flagship socioeconomic research lab, the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Assets and Market Access (AMA Innovation Lab), expired on September 30, 2018.

USAID plans to award a Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience (MRR Innovation Lab) to build on this work. The MRR Innovation Lab will allow USAID to better understand the root causes of persistent poverty and food insecurity, and how best to improve the resilience of individuals, households, communities, and systems, particularly in the face of recurrent crisis. The

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/GFS\\_2017\\_Research\\_Strategy\\_508C.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/GFS_2017_Research_Strategy_508C.pdf)

elevation of resilience in this award and under the GFSS more broadly reflects the reality that poor and near-poor households and communities live in increasingly fragile, complex risk environments and are subject to a range of shocks and stresses that threaten their food security, nutrition security, and ability to sustainably escape poverty. USAID is driven by an imperative to support lasting development impact in ways that have significant local ownership, are market-oriented, and build the capacities of individuals, households, communities, and systems to withstand shocks.

As with all USAID-supported programming, the MRR Innovation Lab will be asked to work in a manner that is consistent with the Agency's strategic goals as outlined in the GFSS. It is assumed that most research activities will be carried out in GFSS target, GFSS aligned, or resilience focus countries (as further indicated by USAID). Moreover, the research agenda and portfolio should be consistent with the Global Food Security Research Strategy. In particular, this innovation lab will contribute to Research Themes II: Technologies and practices that reduce, manage, and mitigate risk to support resilient, prosperous, well-nourished individuals, households, and communities; and Theme III: Improved knowledge of how to achieve human outcomes—generating evidence on how to sustainably and equitably improve economic opportunity, nutrition, and resilience.

The innovation lab will contribute to USAID's strategic objectives by conducting rigorous policy and programming relevant research in defined areas of inquiry, as discussed below; by building the capacity of host country institutions and maximizing training of host country scientists; by achieving impact through the development, testing, and adoption of innovative approaches; and through the shaping of the development discourse. MRR will also contribute to the Feed the Future [Learning Agenda](#)<sup>4</sup>. While none of the eight learning agenda areas (gender and women's empowerment, market systems, nutrition, policy systems, risk and resilience, scaling of technologies and practices, water, and youth) are beyond the scope of the MRR Innovation Lab, MRR is best positioned to generate evidence on the following learning agenda areas:

- gender and women's empowerment,
- market systems,
- nutrition, and
- risk and resilience.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Promoting agricultural-led economic growth in rural areas, where the majority of the world's poor live, is critically important to effectively meet the Sustainable Development Goals of ending poverty and hunger, raising rural incomes, and achieving more sustainable development. Even when presented with economic opportunity, many individuals and households in rural areas do not have the capacity to engage—they face barriers to market entry or they lack the resources necessary to take advantage of these opportunities. In many contexts, conflict and insecurity are central drivers of food insecurity, tied to low growth, high levels of poverty, and dependence on marginal natural resources.

In other cases, recurrent shocks and stressors have left households and communities too vulnerable to take even prudent economic risks. Often, a limited selection of available household risk management strategies

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.agrilinks.org/post/feed-future-learning-agenda-phase-2>

means that households reduce meals (and therefore negatively impact nutrition), functionally decreasing future (and future generations') human capital in order to cope with shocks in the short term. In many instances, the limited assets and capacities that constrain people from participating in sustainable and rewarding economic activity have resulted from inadequate access to critical factors of production such as land, water, labor, and finance, as well as to services and information. Asset productivity can also be low. In certain contexts, constraining policy environments limit people from optimally using the assets they do possess. As a result, the poor often have few options other than to pursue fragile livelihood strategies, engaging in practices that yield low or negative rates of return. At a community level, missing or dysfunctional agricultural factor markets—and a lack of integration with competitive input and output markets—further undermine investment and perpetuate a cycle of poverty. Unfortunately, in many countries, government and agricultural research institutions lack the resources and/or capacity to carry out critical research and development around innovations to address these problems.

As discussed above, the poorest and most vulnerable households increasingly live in fragile and complex risk environments. Moreover, the proportion of the world's population living in fragile contexts is expected to surge in future decades, all while the world's most fragile countries remain stuck in "fragility traps." Fragile contexts create vulnerability to the very shocks that resilience capacities help people manage, and these contexts stand in the way of the capacities needed to bounce back from shocks such as conflict. Meanwhile, shocks such as conflict strongly condition people's ability to respond to other shocks and make profitable investments in their livelihoods, while also potentially limiting aspirations. In the last ten years, an increasing amount of evidence has linked low levels of aspirations (or "aspirations failure") and fatalism with lower levels of well-being and poverty. Other interactions with conflict and violence—conflict exposure, intimate partner violence, post-traumatic stress disorder, and related or unrelated mental health conditions—limit individuals' ability to manage shocks and invest in livelihoods too.

Risk and vulnerability limit economic investment in livelihoods and reinforce poverty; developing absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities are thus critical to building resilience and enabling sustainable pathways from poverty. Depending on the nature and scale of a shock, as well as the frequency of exposure, traditional risk mitigation or coping mechanisms can be overwhelmed and ineffective at preventing a return to or slide into deeper poverty. While asset reserves or access to financial instruments and social capital may help a household manage risk and recover from shock, inadequate reserves are a major source of vulnerability and can result in chronic food insecurity and persistent poverty. Inequality in asset holdings, especially in the face of limited options for the poor to acquire assets through legitimate means, can even become a trigger for conflict—both as a form of economic exclusion as well as grounds for asset looting within conflict. Asset holdings are also differentiated by gender, and women generally have less access to and control over asset-building and preservation measures, although women's assets may be the first to be liquidated in times of crisis.

Climate variability and change is an additional stressor that exacerbates these development challenges by increasing the unpredictability of rainfall and the severity of extreme events like droughts, flooding, and storms. As climate change continues, traditional coping mechanisms will be less and less adequate, necessitating new risk management tools and practices as part of broader resilience-building and climate variability/change adaptation efforts. Extreme (high or low) prices and price volatility present another set of risks for agricultural producers in developing countries, many of whom are net buyers of food. The uncertainty associated with price volatility undermines investment and technology adoption, while higher

prices erode household food security. Without adequate post-harvest storage and financial instruments that facilitate the smoothing of both sales and consumption, households are left vulnerable to dramatic seasonal price swings. At the national level, a dearth of price risk management options can lead to restrictive trade policy and/or excessive stockpiling of food commodities.

To create an environment that is conducive to broad-based economic growth, policies and programming must be informed by sound analysis of household and community behaviors, including investment and risk management behaviors (as well as the gendered aspects of these). Sound policy and programming should also be based on an understanding of the role of effective institutions, domestic and international markets, the determinants of effective governance at different levels, and ways that the rural poor contribute to and participate in economic growth opportunities. Better knowledge is needed on the way that risk shapes women and men's investment decisions, adoption of technology, engagement in economic opportunity, and access to markets, including financial markets. Policy makers and development professionals need rigorous research that will inform policy decisions and program design, test out innovative approaches, and evaluate the impact of policy and programming, including the possibility that some policies may distort incentives in such a way that actually reduces resilience.

USAID-supported socioeconomic research on food security and agricultural development, namely the AMA Innovation Lab and predecessor Broadening Access and Strengthening Input Markets (BASIS) CRSP, have made significant contributions to our understanding of the role that assets, human and productive capitals, resilience capacities, and unmanaged risk play in poverty dynamics. Research activities under these awards have developed concrete policy recommendations and institutional innovations that improve access to land and water resources, increase use of improved agricultural technologies, and reduce barriers to financial services. There has been a particularly robust engagement on the topic of risk and vulnerability, and significant investments made in advancing our understanding of when, where, and how to use agricultural index insurance in low-income country contexts to build resilience and support development objectives. This research has made important contributions to specific development challenges in host countries, but has also informed the broader development discourse. In this award, USAID seeks to deepen past work on risk and resilience, now with an increased focus on areas of recurrent crisis, while further refining the innovation lab's thematic focus and alignment with GFSS priorities and objectives, including markets.

### **3. Program Description**

This RFA is designed to identify and launch a Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience (MRR Innovation Lab). This section outlines factors to be considered in the program structure and management.

#### ***3.1 Technical Approach***

The innovation lab will inform, develop, and test innovations and conduct applied research as described below. Successful innovations and research will result in policy and programming knowledge, evidence, and best-practice that will be disseminated widely.

The MRR Innovation Lab will be comprised primarily of a portfolio of competitively selected, policy relevant research activities that aim to generate knowledge and recommendations on policy and

programming to address the development challenges discussed above. An ME in the university recipient of the Cooperative Agreement Leader Award will provide the leadership and oversight of the research portfolio. All research activities should be relevant to ongoing resilience and development debates and result in practical recommendations for policy reforms, institutional innovations, or resilience/development programming relative to these debates. They are intended to be collaborative efforts between U.S. universities and host-country universities or research institutions. USAID also encourages the MRR Innovation Lab to partner with host country NGOs, international and national agricultural research centers, other Feed the Future Innovation Labs, government agencies, and regulatory bodies. Since it is assumed that many of the innovations developed and tested under the MRR Innovation Lab will be market oriented, the successful applicant will engage and collaborate with private sector practitioners, especially where this will facilitate longer term sustainability and scaling of risk management tools, productive agricultural technologies, or interventions. The successful applicant will clearly describe approaches to work collaboratively with the private sector in the concept note.

As part of the concept note, the successful applicant will submit a Technical Strategy (research and Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) strategy) that describes how the MRR areas of inquiry and cross-cutting these will be addressed. The four principal areas of inquiry will be 1) Making Markets Work for All, 2) Risk Management and Resilience, 3) Inclusive Rural and Agricultural Finance, and 4) Resilient Systems. Gender, youth, and capacity development are critical cross cutting themes that are expected to be recurrent throughout the portfolio regardless of specific substantive issues addressed.

While not a formal cross cutting theme, MRR will focus on inclusion throughout its work. Whether building on prior women's economic empowerment theory and evidence or engaging youth or persons with disabilities in meaningful and creative ways, MRR innovations must emphasize inclusive agricultural development and resilience building. In addition, MRR operations and methods on the ground should incorporate the capacity and tools to identify and address the factors that underlie marginalization. USAID recognizes that sometimes this means direct engagement with marginalized groups, but other times inclusion impacts may be created indirectly, with care to monitor actual results. USAID takes a broad view to inclusion and specific groups of interest can and should vary and intersect depending on context, including the extreme poor, women, youth, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples, LGBTQI persons<sup>5</sup> (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex), widows and orphans, and other marginalized groups. Concept notes should outline how inclusion will underlie MRR activities.

### 3.1.1 Making agricultural markets work for all

#### *Inclusive Market Access and Integration*

Many rural households and vulnerable, marginalized populations are poorly integrated into larger agricultural markets—including input and output markets, factor (land, water, and labor) markets, and financial markets—limiting livelihood options. In these situations, land and labor remain marginally productive, and there is little investment in value-adding enterprises that could build demand for

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<sup>5</sup> When working for the inclusion of LBGTQI persons, the concept of 'Do No Harm' is critical to their safety. See USAID LBGT Vision for Action, p. 8 for more information.

[https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1874/LBGT\\_Vision.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1874/LBGT_Vision.pdf)

agricultural products and provide employment. Access to appropriate improved inputs—such as pollination services, improved seed varieties, fertilizers, animal health services, and feed supplies—is limited, but so are the incentives to adopt these and other technologies even when they are available. Innovations to increase market integration and inclusive market access/systems will help overcome the multiple market failures<sup>6</sup> that trap some rural individuals and households in poverty.

Land and labor market outcomes reflect the net effects of numerous policies, distortions, economic shocks, and development initiatives. They are also vital intermediaries in individual, household, and community efforts to diversify across livelihood activities and across space. Applied research on 1) the role that failed, weak, and resilient factor markets play in providing economic opportunities for youth, including young women, and other marginalized groups; 2) limiting or encouraging migration and conflict; and 3) the links between migration, remittances, and increased investment in agricultural activities would help in the development of policy and programming to increase resilience, particularly in the face of population pressures and conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Research can also inform the ways in which more agriculture-led economic growth programming can complement efforts to build the resilience of the poor by enhancing the entry points for the rural poor, both men and women, to step up in agriculture, expanding the rural economy through agricultural enterprises. Research on promoting greater participation of women in higher-value (crop and livestock) value chains and value-addition activities would help ensure agriculture-led economic growth policies, programs, and interventions facilitate returns to both women and men.

Further, research is needed to explore the role of social protection and insurance in enhancing the poor's capacity to engage in economic opportunity including through transforming social norms and intra-household bargaining. These studies can also examine gendered costs and benefits of different models of targeted policies.

#### *Access to and control of assets and capital*

The limited asset and capital base of the rural poor is often a major constraint to their being able to manage risk and take advantage of economic opportunities.<sup>8</sup> Research is needed to a) better understand how and b) generate innovations that assist poor individuals, households, and communities in rural areas to acquire, protect, and use their assets and capital stocks, particularly in areas of recurrent crisis. Assets and capital include physical and productive assets, such as land, livestock, agricultural tools and machinery, and the natural environment and environmental services; stores of wealth such as cash and jewelry; and human and social capital, including nutritional status, physical and mental health, aspirations, education and experience, and social and family networks.

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher B. Barrett, Michael R. Carter, "The Economics of Poverty Traps and Persistent Poverty: Empirical and Policy Implications," *The Journal of Development Studies*, (2013) 49 (7): 976-990. doi:10.1080/00220388.2013.785527.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, USAID's LEO Brief on "Resilience And Sustained Escapes From Poverty: Highlights From Research In Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Uganda" and iied's April 2015 brief entitled "Internal Migration Can Be a Radical Adaptive Strategy in Bangladesh."

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, ODI's working paper 539 entitled "Sustaining Escapes from Poverty."

### 3.1.2 Risk Management and Resilience

Risk can discourage farmers and pastoralists from investing in improvements and from adopting more profitable technologies. In the absence of adequate risk management mechanisms, poor households may maintain low risk-low return livelihood strategies that keep them trapped in poverty and make them more vulnerable to future shocks. Risk is also a critical element constraining agricultural producers' access to finance. At the same time, recent evidence demonstrates the role repeated shocks play in poverty backslides.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly the case for those living in areas of cyclical shocks and recurrent humanitarian need. Research is needed in how donors and governments can most effectively and efficiently assist households to a) build and leverage resilience capacities and b) increase their assets and capital stocks while managing cyclical or recurrent shocks and crises.

#### *Covariate Risk*

Under the [Index Insurance Innovation Initiative](#)<sup>10</sup>, the AMA Innovation Lab established a portfolio of activities designed to inform when, where, and how best to use index insurance products to protect farmers and pastoralists against covariate risk. The learning agenda included issues of uptake, product design to contain price and minimize basis risk, effective outreach and education, distribution channels and use of digital technologies, group versus individual contracts, and insurance bundled with other technologies, such as drought tolerant maize varieties or credit.

Under this new award, the MRR Innovation Lab will be expected to continue the focus on risk management by 1) adding pilots that complement GFSS implementation programs in various areas (i.e., market systems programming); 2) exploring how dissemination of risk information can improve outcomes and proactive risk management at various levels; 3) facilitating USAID Mission integration of high quality insurance and other risk management technologies (including savings and credit) into resilience programming through outreach and technical support; and 4) designing and testing the scale up of insurance products to broader areas (i.e., beyond the original areas for which micro data was available for product design or in areas of recurrent humanitarian crisis), for example, by utilizing agro-ecological mapping and crop modeling. MRR is encouraged to undertake further exploration of meso- and macro-level insurance products and other types of proactive risk management (such as forecast-based finance) for financial providers, local and national governments, and market system actors. The innovation lab should also consider research on how to effectively support private sector scaling of risk management technologies as well as integrate these instruments effectively into social protection programming. USAID would welcome additional research on the gendered impacts of risk management tools and technologies on individual and household resilience, and how risk management programming can inclusively increase the resilience of all people.

Applied research and innovation are needed in other aspects of covariate risk management, such as price and market risk management. The 2007-2008 food price crisis was a significant catalyst for establishing Feed the Future. Volatile prices provide a disincentive for investment among risk averse smallholders. USAID encourages research that explores institutional innovations and other creative programming

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, USAID's LEO report #27 "Backsliding in Uganda: Ensuring Escapes from Poverty Are Sustained to End Extreme Poverty."

<sup>10</sup> <https://basis.ucdavis.edu/index-insurance-innovation-initiative-i4>

solutions that offer some protection from price risk, and/or enhance price stability using market-friendly mechanisms. Doing so offers important insights on how to operate in fragile contexts, which are highly vulnerable to covariate risks such as price shocks.

### *Idiosyncratic Risk*

Evidence increasingly suggests that idiosyncratic shocks are as important as covariate shocks in terms of their well-being effects. While health, veterinary, and social protection systems in some contexts may reduce idiosyncratic risk exposure, access to quality services is lacking in many rural communities. Willingness-to-pay for these services or health/veterinary insurance may be limited, particularly in contexts of limited liquidity and access to financial services. Limited access and/or willingness-to-pay for health services further exacerbate vulnerability to both malnutrition and disease (health shocks).

Nonetheless, informal insurance and coping strategies may be more effective in helping individuals and households manage idiosyncratic shocks. Research is needed on effective support to informal insurance and productive coping, as well as on the effects of index insurance and other formal covariate risk management strategies on informal idiosyncratic risk management tools. Innovation is also needed in formal approaches for the management of idiosyncratic shocks. While research on the ex-ante impacts of covariate (e.g., weather) risk and risk transfer on agricultural investment is compelling, much less work has been done on the impacts of idiosyncratic risk exposure on investment which, existing evidence suggests, can be highly gendered. MRR might pilot innovations to bundle covariate and idiosyncratic risk management tools (such as index-based livestock insurance combined with veterinary care insurance).

### *Resilience*

Research carried out by USAID's Center for Resilience and their partners has highlighted the importance of strengthening three overlapping resilience capacities (absorptive, adaptive, and transformative) for building resilience in the face of shocks and stresses. This research has demonstrated the role that social capital, financial inclusion, livelihood risk diversification, access to markets, sustainable natural resources, women's empowerment and gender equality, and psycho-social factors (e.g., aspirations, self-efficacy, and confidence to adapt) play in helping individuals and households increase their well-being, build their resilience, and sustainably escape poverty. In 2017, USAID convened a [Resilience Evidence Forum](#)<sup>11</sup> highlighting new insights on these sources of resilience, many of which cut across and transcend technical sectors.

USAID's resilience efforts are increasingly focused in conflict-affected and fragile environments where conflict is the key shock people face. Conflict creates downstream shocks, strongly conditions people's ability to respond to other shocks, and also recasts and requires new resilience capacities. The MRR Innovation Lab is well placed to help USAID innovate in areas of conflict, as well as recurrent crisis more generally, by designing and testing approaches, including financial vehicles, to build, measure, and maintain resilience and resilience capacities.

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/0717118\\_Resilience.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/0717118_Resilience.pdf)

### 3.1.3 Inclusive rural and agricultural finance

In many developing countries, there continues to be a vacuum in the provision of financial services for rural households and enterprises. This includes savings and other risk management mechanisms, transfer services, and seasonal and investment credit for small- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises (SMEs), including livestock enterprises. Transaction costs associated with dispersed populations can undermine financial service provision. In some countries, commercial banks may serve the needs of large agribusiness enterprises, and micro finance institutions provide financial services to the poor, at least in urban areas. Still, most agricultural SMEs cannot access appropriate financing or must rely on self-financing or informal lenders to invest in their operations. Few investors are willing to accept low returns to invest in agricultural SMEs that are riskier, more expensive to monitor, and harder to implement. However, agricultural SMEs are critical conduits that can transform agriculture from a survival strategy into a viable, enterprising livelihood. Channeling private sector capital to small and growing agricultural businesses provides an opportunity to expand operational capacities and to dramatically increase food production and security.

Improving small farmers' and pastoralists' productivity, as well as their ability to protect their productive assets in the face of shocks, requires the development of a rural financial infrastructure that provides women and men producers access to a full range of financial services, including credit and savings, but also insurance, transfers, and payments. Research on and impact evaluations of innovative financial structures and approaches that stimulate financial service provision to agricultural enterprises and smallholder producers, especially women and other underserved community members, would be of tremendous value to USAID field Missions.

Helping poorer rural residents gain greater access to consumption smoothing instruments can facilitate their resilience to and ability to recover from shocks. There is anecdotal evidence that linking household (consumption) finance with working capital production loans for smallholders can reduce the side selling that often undermines third party value chain finance. Evidence of the efficacy of this or other approaches to enhance and leverage value chain finance could help refine development programming and private sector activity in this area. Finally, the interlinking of financial services (e.g., the linking of savings with social protection transfers or input subsidies, or operational credit with insurance) can enhance development objectives by increasing technology adoption and other prudent risk taking, and also ensure that the most appropriate tools are targeted at each kind of risk, for more cost-effective risk management.

The MRR Innovation Lab will undertake research, exploration, and development of market systems innovations (such as digital tools and services, particularly which empower women and underserved minorities) that promote productive linkages between rural financial sector deepening and development objectives. Work might also include an exploration of lending practices that expand access to finance or allow restructuring of existing loans in the wake of shocks in order to facilitate recovery.

### 3.1.4 Resilient systems

There is increasing recognition that rural individuals, households, and communities live and work in a context of complex, interacting systems. Examples of these systems include the political, social, health and healthcare, economic/market, ecological, and broader environmental systems. Fragile contexts and conflicts can also be understood as systems. MRR should provide applied, policy-relevant research on

(how to measure) the attributes of resilient systems; how fragile, weak, and strong systems should be distinguished; as well as how these systems interact with individuals, households, and communities to bolster or undermine resilience. This includes innovation around behaviors and actions that individuals, households, communities, and governments may take to manage their own risks while simultaneously increasing the resilience of the systems in which they (and their citizens) live and work.

Research and innovation could address, for example, the ways in which informal governance institutions, such as traditional leadership or civil society, solve problems in society. It could also address the effectiveness and legitimacy of how local governments provide essential public goods and services. USAID would also benefit from research and innovations on the resilience impacts of agroforestry approaches. USAID strives to implement a market systems approach throughout much of the GFSS programming. As such, USAID would benefit from a series of (perhaps 9 to 12) retrospective case studies exploring how local agricultural market systems have reacted to (and recovered from) a variety of shocks (such as drought, cyclone, export bans, conflict, etc.) in different regional contexts, along with policy recommendations.

All resilient systems research should build on USAID's work on [local systems](#).<sup>12</sup>

### 3.1.5 Cross cutting themes

#### *Gender*

Gender equality and female empowerment are included as an explicit Intermediate Result (CCIR 3) of the Global Food Security Strategy and there is a deliberate effort to impact all programming through the project cycle to ensure more equitable gender outcomes. The concept note must include practical approaches that the applicant with use to ensure the gendered dimensions of markets, risk, and resilience research are explored, documented, and disseminated.

Across contexts, gender-based differences continue to affect women's participation in and benefit from agricultural economic activity. Gendered roles and systematic disparities in access to productive assets—including land, labor, financial and human capital—as well to key services and information create more significant barriers for women to access agricultural markets—lower their ability and incentives to undertake productive investments and limit their capacity to work in higher value-add segments of agricultural value chains, including as entrepreneurs. Gender disparities in human capital and unpaid care work restrict women's employment opportunities to low-skill, informal, and irregular employment with limited earning capacity. Gendered norms and attitudes underpin women's exclusion from and marginalization in social, political, and market institutions. Gender is also critical determinant of mental health and resilience, which in turn shape the ability of men and women to invest in their livelihoods as well as in human and productive capital.

Systematic gender-based barriers to accessing risk management tools such as credit and insurance, as well as differences in gender roles, social capital, and mobility also cause women to experience shocks differently and have different capacities to reduce, mitigate, and manage these shocks and stressors. Strategies for coping with shocks such as conflict can also affect intra-household dynamics; including

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>

men and women’s asset holdings, workloads, and labor market decisions including migration, and significantly alter the household economy and resilience while also challenging and transforming household and community gender norms.

Empowering women by addressing these gender disparities as well as the underlying norms and attitudes is critical for achieving inclusive agricultural markets and growth, strengthening household and community resilience, and the resilience of economic, social, and political institutions. MRR research can contribute to these outcomes by generating contextual evidence on the gendered aspects of risk, behavior, constraints to economic opportunity, and inclusive growth and inform policy and programs for more inclusive and sustained outcomes and impact. This requires the innovation lab to articulate gender-specific components of the theory of change or systems map (see Section 3.2.3, below) and describe a process to identify gender-related themes and research questions, build and apply gender research capacity, and promote gendered research implementation to improve gender-related outcomes; minimize gender biases; and produce enhanced monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

### *Youth*

Given the key role and challenges facing young people (ages 10-29), MRR research should contribute to the outcomes in the [USAID Youth in Development Policy](#)<sup>13</sup> related to effective youth engagement as partners in our programming. The concept note must describe how young people will be included in MRR’s research and piloting of innovations.

Research related to or including young people should adopt a [Positive Youth Development](#)<sup>14</sup> (PYD) approach, which is based on the belief that, “given guidance and support from caring adults, all youth (ages 10-29) can grow up healthy and productive, making positive contributions to their families, schools, and communities.” PYD programs intentionally focus on developing competencies and behaviors that support pro-social attitudes, a clear and positive personal identity, and positive belief in the future. PYD programs encourage youth leadership and experiential learning, as well as adult approachability and champions. For example, research might explore which services and opportunities support young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and empowerment or explore the challenges that youth in particular face to manage risk, invest in their livelihoods, and develop resilience capacities. To the extent possible, young people should be involved in the decision-making, management, and leadership of relevant research in their communities.

### *Capacity Development*

Capacity development is a cross-cutting intermediate result of the GFSS and USAID views capacity development at the individual, organization, and institutional levels as a necessary component of resilience-building. The concept note must address how applicants and sub-awardees will build local and partner-country capacity to independently generate and transfer MRR knowledge and innovations to beneficiaries after the conclusion of USAID-funded activities. The AMA Innovation Lab, for example, collaborated with the International Labour Organization to create a [Global Action Network](#)<sup>15</sup> that worked

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Youth\\_in\\_Development\\_Policy\\_0.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Youth_in_Development_Policy_0.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>

<sup>15</sup> <https://basis.ucdavis.edu/global-action-network-gan>

to identify gaps and build the capacity of local practitioners and governments to regulate and implement index insurance solutions, creating an enabling environment for agricultural insurance.

The [GFSS Technical Guidance](#)<sup>16</sup> for Capacity Development highlights how an agricultural innovation systems (AIS) approach to capacity development can reinforce or strengthen the skills and competencies required for agricultural systems to innovate, reduce poverty, and increase resilience. While the capacity development of each level (individuals, organizations, and the enabling environment) has to be addressed in its own right, it also should be done through multiple but complementary pathways for change. The MMR Innovation Lab may consider long-term degree training for host-country students or shorter-term training for researchers and practitioners as one approach to capacity development, but the concept note should incorporate a variety of approaches for capacity development, such as:

- assessment of the capacity strengthening needs at the individual, organizational, or enabling environment level to most effectively promote scaling of innovations;
- facilitation of local agricultural research institution strengthening to interact, innovate, learn, and carry-out markets, risk, and resilience research, including gendered research;
- support to bridging institutions, such as private sector associations and agricultural extension, to support scaling of innovations; and
- use of a participatory approaches throughout the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of capacity development programming to increase local ownership and the effectiveness of local systems.

Potential beneficiaries include host country scientists, universities, national agricultural research institutions, local NGOs, private sector actors, and/or other relevant beneficiaries within the MRR innovation system. The successful applicant's approach to HICD should:

- primarily benefit host-country individuals and organizations;
- pursue gender balance in access to capacity development opportunities and promote equal participation in HICD activities;
- identify strategic opportunities to complement and collaborate with other research, development, and HICD investments, particularly those aimed at organizational and institutional relationship strengthening, in order to maximize HICD outcomes;
- align with host-country national research and USAID strategic priorities for capacity development; and
- integrate traditional capacity development approaches that primarily emphasize developing technical skills through training—such as long-term degree training for partner-country students, shorter-term training for developing country researchers and practitioners, and direct collaborations between U.S. and partner-country researchers—with more contemporary, facilitative approaches that support individuals and organizations to develop and manage their own capacity development and learning plans through continuous improvement processes.

### ***3.2 Management Approach***

The development, selection, and management of a high-quality portfolio of sub-awards is the basic function of an Innovation Lab ME. As part of the concept note, the successful applicant will submit a Management Strategy that describes how the ME intends to address the following five areas:

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.agrilinks.org/post/guidance-and-tools-global-food-security-programs>

### 3.2.1 Staffing

To ensure successful implementation of core technical and management functions, concept notes must very briefly list proposed staff positions and external advisory bodies. A complete staffing plan will be requested along with the full application. At that time, the staffing plan will outline the roles and responsibilities of proposed staff positions; proposed lines of responsibility, authority and communication; and procedures to ensure productivity as well as cost and quality control and to ensure that all USAID programmatic requirements are assigned to at least one proposed position. If more than one staff member will be assigned responsibility for an area, the staffing plan must define functional supervision for that area.

USAID discourages exclusivity agreements between the applicant and any candidates that will be proposed for Key Personnel (i.e., a person could be proposed by multiple Applicants). “Key Personnel” of the MRR Innovation Lab will be the director and the associate or deputy director. The proposed technical team, which will include the Key Personnel and may include technical specialists, must collectively demonstrate strong technical capacity in gender-responsive research, inclusion, and capacity development.

#### *Innovation Lab Director*

The Innovation Lab director has overall responsibility for the management and implementation of the MRR Innovation Lab, and serves as USAID’s principal point of contact for all issues regarding the innovation lab. The director publicly represents the MRR Innovation Lab to the U.S. Government, the public, the global research community, and other diverse stakeholders, and is ultimately responsible for activity coordination, planning, work plan development, program reporting, and overall program monitoring and evaluation. The director ensures that cross-cutting themes are properly addressed throughout the entire portfolio. The director also ensures coordination, communication, and cross-learning between both internal and external partners and stakeholders of the project. The director is the primary point of contact for development of Associate Awards and buy-ins and is responsible for integrating Associate Awards and buy-ins into the overall program.

The director’s level of effort should be clearly articulated in the concept note; if the director cannot commit to full-time management responsibilities, the staffing plan must demonstrate how the director’s management responsibilities will be undertaken by other staff members. The director must hold at minimum a Ph.D. (or equivalent advanced degree) in a subject relevant to development and resilience research as described by this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO), a minimum of 10 years (15 preferred) relevant technical expertise, and demonstrated competency in international research program management. Experience in managing research partnerships between international, national, and local partners is required. Experience integrating gender, youth, and capacity development is required.

In the concept note, applicants must identify the person proposed to serve as director and very briefly describe her or his (1) role and responsibilities for innovation lab leadership and implementation; (2) proposed level of effort; and (3) qualifications for this position. Higher consideration will be given to applicants who propose a candidate with experience most closely matching the requirements described above.

### *Associate or Deputy Director*

The associate or deputy director supports the director and serves as IL leader when called upon. The associate or deputy director must hold at least a Master's or equivalent advanced university degree in a subject relevant to MRR research, a minimum of 5 years relevant technical expertise, and demonstrated program management competency. If the director does not have experience managing large, USAID-style programs, the associate or deputy director must hold such experience.

In the concept note, applicants must identify the person proposed to serve as associate or deputy director and very briefly describe her or his (1) role and responsibilities for innovation lab leadership and implementation, including any that are to be transferred from the Director; (2) proposed level of effort; and (3) qualifications for this position. Higher consideration will be given to applicants who propose a candidate with experience most closely matching the requirements described above.

### *Technical Specialists*

Depending on the nature of the research to be conducted under the innovation lab, technical specialists may be necessary or preferred to perform specific functions such as conducting scoping studies to inform technical components of sub-award research solicitations, carrying out capacity development activities, monitoring performance (section 3.2.3), or implementing the knowledge management plan (section 3.2.4). The technical specialists' areas of expertise might include, but are not limited to: knowledge management, capacity development, gender, youth, inclusion, risk management and resilience, policy, and market systems development. Their expertise may be cross-cutting in several technical fields. Technical specialists may be local, host country, or regional hires with length of assignment determined by need.

### *Other Personnel*

Proposal of any additional positions, position descriptions, and accompanying level of effort, rests with the applicant and will depend on the nature of the proposed innovation lab. Proposed personnel must be sufficient to effectively and efficiently execute all technical and management functions.

Various responsibilities that need to be filled within a successful ME include:

- Effective management of all financial tasks, including timely and accurate financial statements and reports according to USAID guidelines and generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP).
- Creation of materials to increase awareness and to promote productivity including maintaining a positive image of the innovation lab to all stakeholders, such as the research and development communities, policy makers and government stakeholders, users of generated technologies, and the general public.
- Execution of planning, monitoring, evaluation, learning, and reporting aligned with USAID requirements.
- In-country coordination to ensure that decisions and analyses are consistent with on-the-ground realities, that activities are aligned with USAID country and regional priorities and geographies, and that critical partners, including USAID Missions, are engaged from the beginning of the project.
- Creation and management of sub-contracts or sub-grants to other responsible institutions to conduct research activities, including international institutions. The financial and contract and

grant offices of the successful Applicant institution must have the demonstrated capacity to issue and manage such sub-contracts or sub-grants using financial and contract mechanisms appropriate for the expected range of sub-awardees. The accounting system must be able to account for funds allocated to each country, including through sub-sub-awards, and by funding origination year.

Technical specialists and other personnel are not subject to approval by USAID and as such only the position should be mentioned in the concept note. Once (if) a full application has been requested, the staffing plan should include a description of each position and associated responsibilities. Applicants are advised to find qualified staff to fulfill these responsibilities prior to program implementation, but USAID will not review individual qualifications or CVs of these other staff positions either during the concept note evaluation, full application evaluation, or after award. Please do not include individuals' names or CVs for these positions in the concept note or in the full application.

#### *Advisory Committee*

As a part of the full application staffing plan, applicants should describe how the ME will hold sub-awardees accountable for progress along the defined impact pathway and address how the ME will oversee sub-award activities, along with means to correct, cancel, or terminate under-performing sub-awards. Typically, innovation labs accomplish this partly through the oversight of an Advisory Committee (variously called an External Advisory Panel, External Advisory Committee, etc.). Applicants must describe the mandate and oversight to be ascribed to any such committee and the desired composition of the members as part of the staffing plan.

#### 3.2.2 Development, Selection, and Management of the Research Portfolio

USAID maintains a commitment to fair and open competitive procurement processes, out of conviction that this approach generates the highest-quality research and development outcomes. As a result, a majority of the funds allocated for research activities should be used for sub-awards resulting from competitive solicitations issued by the ME. To support a vigorously competitive solicitation process, the successful applicant will develop and publicize Requests for Application that elicit high-quality applications from an appropriate range and number of institutions in the U.S. (including minority-serving institutions (MSIs)), in the selected focal geographies, and from appropriate international institutions. The applicant should describe how the sub-award procurement process will broadcast solicitations to ensure MSIs—including, but not limited to, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Predominantly Black Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Asian American Native Alaskan and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions—and local universities and research institutes in target countries are made aware of sub-award research opportunities, including as principal investigators or co-principal investigators.

The applicant should describe how the ME will engage an appropriate range of expertise to mount an intellectually rigorous peer review process for a given solicitation. This process should produce a portfolio of sub-awards that, collectively, meet the primary and cross-cutting technical objectives of the proposed research and HICD strategy, and reflect the important role that private sector actors play in ensuring sustainable pathways out of poverty.

The ME will adaptively manage the portfolio of sub-awards to ensure optimal implementation of all activities. The ME will institute procedures that provide sub-awardees with appropriate technical guidance and feedback, to ensure that planned research and HICD benchmarks are met, assure compliance and accountability, and address unexpected challenges and opportunities. The sub-award selection process will require potential sub-awardees to identify impact pathways, including leverage points, as described in Section 3.2.3 below. The translation of research into digestible policy briefing documents will be a critical component of the leader award (Section 3.2.4).

A “[collaboration, learning and adapting](#)” (CLA) approach<sup>17</sup> is a primary precept for USAID work. The ME’s explicit incorporation of CLA is expected to strengthen the technical knowledge base for new strategies and programs, as well as continuously align programs with dynamic contexts, encourage adaptability and accountability, and support early recognition and application of new trends and findings to strategically influence outcomes. The ME should plan to develop approaches, such as partnerships and platforms, to share “lessons learned” both internally (among target and partner countries and among the program participants) and externally, such as with stakeholders, including the public and private sectors and civil society. The ME must provide approaches to ensure that structures and opportunities are in place to facilitate cross-project collaboration and learning within the program portfolio and with other USAID awards, such as the Feed the Future Market Systems and Partnerships Activity, Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems, and Innovation Lab for Sustainable Intensification. The ME must also ensure that knowledge and understanding gained from the cross-cutting issues of gender, youth, inclusion, and capacity development are incorporated into the rest of the portfolio as part of a virtuous cycle in addition to being shared with external Feed the Future and USG stakeholders as relevant.

Recognizing that throughout the life of the program there may be instances where directed or commissioned research and associated activities best meet program goals, the ME may directly commission research without a competitive process. To reduce delays between project award and initial program outputs, one set of commissioned research “Quick Start” activities (Initial Activities) are to be proposed with the submission of the application and will be evaluated as an integral part of the overall application according to the quality of the research concepts, applicability to overarching research goals, and the diversity represented among activities. While a list of proposed Quick Start activities is not expected at the concept note stage, applicants should briefly describe in their concept notes how Quick Start activities will be identified.

Throughout the lifetime of the award, the ME may choose to propose that some activities be awarded directly, without competition, when there is compelling justification to do so after review and recommendation by appropriate program advisory body/ies and final approval by the Agreement Officer (AO). While USAID considers that the combined cost of all approved “Quick-Start” activities would likely not exceed \$1,000,000, applicants are welcome to propose appropriate levels for Initial Activities during the concept note phase. The combined cost of all remaining commissioned activities (excluding buy-ins and Associate Awards) must not exceed \$2,000,000 over the life of the program.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://usaidlearninglab.org/faq/collaborating-learning-and-adapting-cla>

### 3.2.3 Performance Monitoring

The applicant should outline a clear and compelling plan to 1) apply performance monitoring best practice and 2) adapt as needed to ensure successful implementation of impact-oriented research and capacity development. Furthermore, an approach to achieving development impacts must also address opportunities for the program to support Mission demands for research, should funding become available through Associate Awards or buy-ins.

#### *Impact Pathways, Theory of Change, and Results Framework*

Impacts denote change from one condition, status, or behavior to another as a consequence of using research results; they should not be confused with research program outputs. While broad scale-up of technologies and knowledge is not within the sphere of direct responsibilities of the MRR Innovation Lab, the program is responsible for building the horizontal linkages across appropriate end-users, particularly in target countries, to enable a hand-off of relevant technologies and knowledge to those best positioned for its use to achieve Feed the Future goals and to track progress of such adoption throughout the life of the project. A program's theory of change specifies how a monitoring plan and indicators will measure progress, and how gender, youth, inclusion, and capacity development considerations are incorporated and measured throughout the impact pathways. Impact pathways also consider knowledge sharing and transfer of research outputs to relevant end-users including local institutions to contribute to USAID goals. Such end users may be farmers and pastoralists, government researchers, government decision-makers, development professionals, and the private sector.

Concept notes should include a brief narrative description of the theory of change. Applicants invited to submit a full application will be asked to include a draft theory of change or systems map as an annex, which will be refined in consultation with BFS. By working with BFS, MRR will allow USAID to pilot the theory of change approach to outcome and impact measurement for research awards. The draft theory of change or systems map annex included in the concept note should describe how research and capacity development activities will lead to development outcomes and impacts, including identification of 1) key stakeholders needed to achieve outcomes and impacts, 2) conditions or potential constraints for ensuring MRR activities support outcomes and impact, 3) adoption/scaling leverage points, 4) contributions toward strengthening the capacity and commitment of countries on their journeys to self-reliance, and 5) associated measures. The theory of change/systems map will then be co-elaborated with BFS based on the proposed draft. Applicants should note that the sub-award selection process will also require potential sub-awardees to identify impact pathways, including leverage points, and applicable associated measures.

After selection of the portfolio of activities, the ME will be required to develop a strategy to document technology adoption and program impact. All research activities must be structured to answer at least the following questions before, during, and after the development and dissemination of research outputs:

- How does the research activity advance USAID-supported goals and strategic objectives (e.g., reducing poverty, increasing resilience and sustainable poverty escapes, increasing food production and access, improving nutrition of women and children, promoting youth inclusion, reducing humanitarian crises, and preserving environmental quality)?
- How does the research activity address the agronomic, economic, environmental, resilience, and capacity development needs of target beneficiaries, both men and women, as they define those needs? Are the research and associated outputs accessible, as appropriate, to both men and

women? Is the research, as appropriate, accessible to youth, as well as all social/ethnic groups and other marginalized peoples?

### *Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan*

Performance management requires access to useful and timely information on a broad range of factors throughout the life of a program. Without planning how and when this information will be obtained, it will be difficult or impossible, once activities start, to put systems in place to ensure adequate information flow to enable ongoing decision-making and to meet performance reporting requirements. The ME must take adequate steps to plan and institutionalize a process for collecting performance information as part of everyday work. This performance information consists of the indicators that will measure progress toward intermediate and final results and includes baseline data and periodic and final performance targets. Reporting to the Feed the Future Monitoring System (FTFMS) using appropriate indicators is required.

The successful applicant must submit a comprehensive Activity MEL Plan within 60 days after award. The comprehensive Activity MEL Plan will serve as a tool to plan and manage the process of monitoring, evaluating, and reporting progress toward achieving the desired results. The plan must employ appropriate gender-sensitive and youth-inclusive methodologies (including sex and age disaggregation), and include approaches to monitor inclusion. The Activity MEL Plan should include a process and schedule to establish the following:

- Performance indicators that will measure progress toward achieving the desired results and account for gender, youth<sup>18</sup>, inclusion, and capacity development<sup>19</sup> dimensions, as relevant. The Activity MEL Plan must use appropriate Feed the Future indicators. Mandatory indicators, required as relevant, are defined under the Standard Program Structure (SPS) indicator categories in the most recent version of the [Feed the Future Indicators Handbook](#)<sup>20</sup>: Definition Sheets. Indicators can include quantitative data (e.g., individuals receiving training) and qualitative information (e.g., description of technology adoption and reported barriers). Indicator definitions and required disaggregation categories can change from year to year. At times, Feed the Future may designate additional mandatory indicators or drop mandatory designations.
- A baseline for the indicators.
- Performance targets, with appropriate benchmarks and milestones of progress.
- Critical assumptions.
- Disaggregation of all people-level performance indicators by gender and age cohort.
- Documentation of known data limitations of each performance indicator by explaining any data quality limitations and what steps will be taken to address them.
- Description of the data quality assessment procedures that will be used to verify and validate the measured values of actual performance.
- Designation of the individuals or contractors responsible for any or all parts of performance monitoring, including data aggregation, review, approval, and entry into FTFMS.
- The estimated costs of collecting, analyzing, and reporting performance data in the budget.

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<sup>18</sup> For more information on integrating PYD into MEL, see the [Positive Youth Development Measurement Toolkit](https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-toolkit) (<https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-toolkit>).

<sup>19</sup> For more information on measuring organizational capacity development, see the resources on USAID's Learning Lab page [here](https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/measuring-organizational-capacity) (<https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/measuring-organizational-capacity>).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.agrilinks.org/post/feed-future-indicator-handbook>

- A calendar of performance management tasks (e.g., reviewing performance reports, conducting site visits, updating and revising the performance management plan as necessary, etc.) that must be conducted over the expected duration of the program, with approximate timeline for the completion of each task, recognizing there will be modifications necessary based on the sub-award portfolio.
- An Evaluation Plan that includes possible evaluation questions, ideas for evaluation design, and methodologies to be used. In the event that BFS commissions an external evaluation in year 4 or 5, this plan will be used by the evaluation team to design the evaluation.

(Note: All of the aforementioned items will be refined after the selection of the portfolio of activities.)

### 3.2.4 Knowledge-Sharing and Data Management Plans

The knowledge and technologies generated by the MRR Innovation Lab are expected to have national, regional, and global impact. To help realize this impact, the ME must regularly curate the generated knowledge and make it available in formats and relevant contexts to facilitate timely awareness and effective application of key findings by multiple audiences (e.g., including program participants across projects and external stakeholders such as producers, processors, other private sector stakeholders, and consumers; government policy-makers; the scientific community; and development practitioners).

The ME is responsible for a clear Knowledge Management Plan that links explicitly with the objectives of the award and which supports achieving and sustaining those objectives; the applicant’s concept note should briefly describe this plan as a critical component of the Management Strategy. The ME should engage and leverage existing knowledge-sharing platforms and resources to further their reach and impact. For insights on and some examples of knowledge management under Feed the Future programs, please visit [Agrilinks](#) and the [USAID Learning Lab](#).

USAID is committed to making USG-funded data accessible, discoverable, and usable by our partners and is proactively releasing Agency-funded data to the public as a member of the Open Government Partnership. USAID’s policy of sharing data in machine readable formats for public benefit is in adherence with the Office of Management and Budget’s Open Data Policy. Although not a concept note requirement, the successful applicant will be responsible for developing a Data Management Plan for the MRR Innovation Lab in accordance with USAID Development Data [ADS Chapter 579](#)<sup>21</sup> and storing and maintaining data in such a way as to deliver the data to the USAID Development Data Library.

### 3.2.5 Management of Associate Awards

The MRR Innovation Lab will be implemented under a Leader with Associates (LWA) mechanism. An anticipated \$23,000,000 in funding from the USAID Bureau for Food Security (BFS) for the Leader Award will support the core research and capacity development program focused on market systems, risk and vulnerability, and resilience, particularly in areas of recurrent humanitarian need. As a leader award, the MRR Innovation Lab may accept additional funds up to the Total Estimated Amount in order to conduct additional activities related to its core research mission on behalf of USAID Missions or Washington offices. The potential \$7,000,000 of buy-ins and/or Associate Awards permit Missions and other USAID offices to address country-specific needs and respond to dynamically changing

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/579.pdf>

programmatic requirements by tapping into a competitively awarded program that offers global expertise that can be put into place quickly and efficiently. Buy-ins are the preferred mechanism when they fund smaller activities (\$1,000,000 or less) that are already part of the approved Leader Award technical program. Associate Awards may be used to carry-out large, country-specific research activities, impact evaluations, or pilots, or to scale up technological innovations proven to be successful by the innovation lab and where the innovations still reside under the purview of the innovation lab or its affiliated local partners. Associate Awards require their own financial and activity reporting. These additional activities are not guaranteed, but the concept note should articulate how the applicant proposes to generate and meet demand in USAID Missions or Washington offices for buy-in and Associate award activities.

#### **4. Geographic Scope**

Ultimately, this activity should focus on achieving global and regional impacts rather than focusing more narrowly on national or sub-national areas. However, research and capacity development activities will be carried out in target countries. While exceptions may be made in consultation with the Agreement Officer's Representative, field-based research activities will take place in GFSS target, GFSS aligned, or resilience focus countries as indicated by USAID. Additional information on Feed the Future Mission strategies and programs can be accessed [here](#)<sup>22</sup> and on Mission [websites](#)<sup>23</sup>. Information is also available on [USAID resilience programming](#)<sup>24</sup>.

To the extent feasible, the ME and sub-awardees will be encouraged to co-design research and capacity development activities with USAID Missions to ensure that local needs and priorities are fully addressed. Activities may not commence in any country until the respective USAID Mission provides concurrence with the activities. Applicants are encouraged to provide illustrative examples or case studies of how they would carry out their proposed technical approach. Applicants must remain flexible with regard to the countries where activities would be implemented.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://feedthefuture.gov/countries>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/resilience>

**Program Description Annexes:**

**Program Description Annex A.** Initial Environmental Examination

**Program Description Annex B.** Gender Analysis

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION ANNEX A:**

**INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION (IEE)**



**BUREAU FOR FOOD SECURITY  
INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION (IEE)**

**PROJECT/ACTIVITY DATA**

<b>Project/Activity Name:</b>	Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience
<b>Geographic Location:</b>	Global
<b>Implementation Start/End Dates (FY or M/D/Y):</b>	6/30/19-6/29/24
<b>BFS Tracking ID:</b>	BFS-18-12-001

**ORGANIZATIONAL/ADMINISTRATIVE DATA**

<b>BFS Implementing Office:</b>	MPI
<b>Other Involved Operating Units:</b>	BFS/C4R
<b>Funding Account(s) (if available):</b>	BFS central funds (C4R); w/possible Mission buy-in
<b>Original Funding Amount:</b>	\$27,000,000
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Murielle Brunache
<b>Date Prepared:</b>	11/19/2018

**ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE REVIEW DATA**

<b>Analysis Type:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Initial Environmental Examination (IEE)
<b>Environmental Determination(s):</b>	Categorical Exclusion
<b>IEE Expiration Date:</b>	6/29/24
<b>Climate Risks Identified (#):</b>	Low
<b>Climate Risks Addressed (#):</b>	Low

**PROJECT/ACTIVITY SUMMARY**

The MRR IL will mobilize US university expertise to support USAID in achieving its goals and strategic objectives around food security, agricultural development and rural resiliency. It will do this through the generation and dissemination of knowledge, and the promotion of recommendations on policies, programming and practices that will improve rural households' ability to acquire, protect and effectively utilize productive assets. The MRR IL program will generate innovations in the enabling environment, institutions and products that support inclusive agriculture-led economic growth through enhanced access to markets, improved access to financial and risk management services, increased technology adoption and climate change adaptation, and increased resilience of both men and women in vulnerable households and communities.

The MRR IL will contribute to USAID's strategic objectives by conducting rigorous policy and programming relevant research in defined areas of inquiry by building capacity of host country institutions and maximizing training of host country scientists; achieving impact through the development, testing and adoption of innovative approaches, and through the shaping of development discourse.

The MRR IL activity will conduct applied research on the elements that shape rural households' resiliency, food security and participation in agriculture-led economic growth. The research will inform, develop and test innovative interventions that will enhance rural households' ability to acquire, protect and effectively utilize productive assets, as well as their ability to effectively engage in markets. The activity will help USAID to bring to light applicable policy, programming recommendations, and institutional innovations that will build resilience among vulnerable households and communities and enhance the participation of the poor in the Agency's agriculture-led growth programming.

The MRR IL will be comprised primarily of a portfolio of competitively selected, policy relevant research activities that aim to generate knowledge and recommendations on policy and programming to address the development challenges discussed above. The activity will be market oriented, engagement and collaboration of private sector practitioners will also be encouraged, especially where this will facilitate longer term sustainability and scaling of interventions.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATIONS

None of the sub-activities anticipated under the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience activity is anticipated to have any impact on the environment. Per USAID Environmental Procedures, certain classes of actions may qualify for a Categorical Exclusion, pursuant to 22 CFR Section 216.2(c)(2), for which an Initial Environmental Examination, Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement generally are not required. The activities described qualify for a categorical exclusion per 22 CFR 216 as follows:

- Education, technical assistance, or training programs except to the extent such programs include activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.)—Section 216.2(c)(2)(i);
- Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings—Section 216.2(c)(2)(ii);
- Document and information transfers—Section 216.2(c)(2)(v);
- Studies, projects or programs intended to develop the capability of recipient countries to engage in development planning, except to the extent designed to result in activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.)—Section 216.2(c)(2)(xiv).

Upon approval of this document, the determinations become affirmed, per Agency regulations (22CFR216).

#### CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT

This activity is categorized as having low climate risk to the achievement or sustainability of project or activity outcomes. This is because 1) the research and training components are unlikely to be affected by climate risk, and 2) climate risk is only likely to increase willingness-to-pay for risk management technologies and resilience.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

In accordance with 22CFR216 and Agency policy, the conditions and requirements of this document become mandatory upon approval. This includes the relevant limitations, conditions and requirements in this document as stated in Sections 3, 4, and 5 of the IEE and any BEO Specified Conditions of Approval.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION ANNEX B:**

### **GENDER ANALYSIS**

#### **Markets, Risk, and Resilience Innovation Lab Gender Analysis**

##### **1. Background: Approach to Analysis to support Markets, Risk, and Resilience Innovation Lab Solicitation Design**

The Markets, Risk, and Resilience (MRR) Innovation Lab (IL) will conduct applied research on the elements that shape rural households' resilience, food security, and participation in inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth with a focus on areas of recurrent humanitarian need. The BFS Gender Team, with guidance from the Design Team for MRR IL has conducted a light review of existing literature, including what was produced under AMA IL to serve as a gender analysis to provide specific outcomes or directions to be incorporated into the MRR IL solicitation as well as bidders' proposals.

##### **2. Why Gender Matters for Markets, Risk and Resilience Innovation Lab**

Gender equality and female empowerment are included as an explicit Intermediate Result (CCIR 3) of the Global Food Security Strategy.<sup>25</sup> and there is a deliberate effort to impact all programming through the project cycle to ensure more equitable gender outcomes: "Our programming, policy, and research efforts will engage women, men, communities, and institutions to regularly identify and address gendered needs and barriers throughout design, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning"<sup>26</sup>.

The MRR IL research can contribute CCIR 3 through generating policy and program relevant evidence on how gendered norms and practices and gender relations in social and market institutions may affect rural households' and communities' participation and benefit from agriculture-led economic growth, their ability to cope with and adapt in the face of shocks and stressors, and ultimately their food security and economic well being. Gender informed implementation of MRR IL research activities can also support improved gender-related outcomes; minimize gender biases; and produce enhanced monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Finally, the MRR IL can be more inclusive in its capacity building by supporting gender-related research and analytical capacity among implementing partners.

##### **3. MRR IL Research Questions Relevant to Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality**

While both men and women in rural areas face barriers to enter agricultural markets, women often encounter more significant and persistent constraints to market access and integration. Gender-based norms in social and market institutions underlie women's more limited access to productive assets; including land, labor, financial and human capital, as well to key services and information, which in turn result in gender gaps in productivity and affect women's incentives and ability to undertake potentially

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<sup>25</sup> US Government Global Food Security Strategy FY17-2  
<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/USG-Global-Food-Security-Strategy-2016.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

productivity enhancing investments on their farms and competitiveness in markets (O'Sullivan, Rao, Banerjee, Gulati, & Vinez, 2014; World Bank; Food and Agriculture Organization; International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2009).

In many contexts women are also underrepresented in rural producer associations (RPAs). This leads to their limited access to contracts, market information, and training opportunities and exclusion from key post-production services (such as storage, aggregation, and transport) RPAs provide or facilitate access to (World Bank, 2009). With respect to contract farming, insecure tenure and laws barring women from entering formal contracts are among the other factors leading to women's exclusion from such schemes. When it does not engage women directly, contract farming stand to further exacerbate gender inequality in the household by increasing demand for women's labor while denying them control over cash crop revenue (Bolwig, 2012).

As paid agricultural laborers, women are often segregated into labor intensive jobs and informal and seasonal employment that offer lower wages and employment security, weaker health and safety standards, and weak social protection (Asian Development Bank, 2013). Due in part to the limited and insecure wage employment opportunities, a significant and growing number of women in the rural sector own and operate enterprises. However, these women-owned enterprises tend to be smaller and have lower capacity to integrate into formal and distant markets (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2015; Gnisci, 2016). The factors that prevent women-owned enterprises from growing and connecting to markets include limited access to training and networks, women's unpaid care burden, and the implicit or explicit gender biases in regulatory/legislative frameworks (International Finance Corporation, 2014). Across the world, women perform three-quarters of unpaid care work, or 76.2 per cent of the total of hours provided (International Labor Organization, 2018). However financial exclusion constitutes the most significant constraint to scale and sustainability: 70 percent of women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are found to have inadequate or no access to financial services (Koch, Stupnytska, MacBeath, Lawson, & Matsui, 2014).

While the expansion of digital financial products and services have accelerated financial inclusion of men and women, a significant gender gap persists: according to the latest Findex data, 67 percent of men and 59 percent of women own an account. Further, women who are less educated, live in poorer households and who are out of the labor are more likely to be excluded (Findex 2017). Women's more limited access to financial products and services, along with gender asset gaps more broadly, define their more severe challenges to undertake productivity enhancing investments and their more limited capacity to manage risk and recover from shocks (Holmes & Jones, 2011).

With a weaker asset base to draw from and more limited access to information and financial tools, women are often less able to insure against climate change related production risks (crop failures, disease etc.) or to invest in mitigation strategies such heat tolerant crop varieties and irrigation (Theis, Lefore, Meindick, & al., 2018). Men and women can also experience price risks differently. Broadly, while fluctuations in cash crop prices may affect men more, food price fluctuations are more likely to impact women who mainly produce and draw income from food crops and also are the main buyers of food (World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development,

2009). Men and women are not equally represented in farmer organizations that can devise market-based or infrastructure solutions to support farmers smooth income and consumption.

Several studies in Ghana, Bangladesh and Uganda have examined how men’s and women’s assets are impacted by shocks and found highly gendered patterns of impact shaped by ex-ante ownership of assets, household division of labor and management of resources, as well as norms (Bomuhangi, Doss, & Meinzen-Dick, 2011; Quisumbing, Kumar, & Behrman, 2011; Barrett, et al., 2007). There also emerge gendered differences in how social networks and informal networks are utilized to cope with shocks.

In addition to the gender differences in access to productive resources, economic opportunity and income, women’s unequal bargaining power in households and in public fora, their limited representation in community governance and decision-making can also impact households’ and communities’ resilience capacity as these inequalities are shown to impact a wide array of outcomes related to resilience such as human capital investment and natural resource management (Smyth & Sweetman, 2015).

The MRR IL can build on this existing body of knowledge by supporting and advancing research that explore the gendered dimensions of rural households’ resilience, food security, and participation in inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth. Illustrative research questions can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Illustrative Research Questions for MRR IL**

<b>Research area</b>	<b>Gender Considerations</b>	<b>Illustrative Research Questions</b>
<b>Making Agricultural Markets Work for All</b>		
Market Access and Integration	<p>In many contexts, women have more limited mobility due to gender norms or because of their care responsibilities.</p> <p>Women often have more limited participation and voice in producer organizations which limit their access to key market mechanisms and services.</p> <p>Women owned enterprises often face challenges to scale and sustainability that limit their market integration.</p>	<p>What are the gendered impacts of contract schemes including on household resource allocations, work-loads, and control over income?</p> <p>Which approaches can promote women’s participation and empowerment in producer organizations?</p> <p>What approaches improve women’s participation in and benefits in higher-value portions of value chains?</p>
Access to and control of land and other assets	Limited and insecure access to land affects women’s incentives and ability to invest; engage and be competitive in markets.	<p>To what extent does improved tenure security impact women’s use of improved agricultural practices, technologies, credit, and other investment and conservation behaviors?</p> <p>What are the gendered impacts of large scale land investments</p>

		on women's tenure security?
Labor	<p>While gender gap in educational attainment is closing, women in many contexts continue to have lower human capital.</p> <p>Inadequate mental healthcare and low aspirations impact the ability of both men and women to invest in the livelihoods, as well as in human and productive capital.</p> <p>Women in rural labor markets are segregated in informal, lower paying and less secure jobs.</p> <p>Women's unpaid care burden, particularly in contexts where the infrastructure is weak and market-based options are limited result in weak labor market attachment.</p>	<p>Which interventions are most successful at productively increasing aspirations for women and/versus men?</p> <p>What public and/or private solutions can sustainably resolve women's unpaid care burden and facilitate their labor force participation and attachment?</p>
<b>Risk Management and Resilience</b>		
Weather risk	<p>Women and men often have different levels of access to weather information.</p> <p>Gender differences in sources of livelihoods, including different livestock and crops grown by men and women result in different perceptions and impacts of weather risk.</p>	<p>What are the gendered impacts of risk management tools and technologies?</p> <p>How do risk management strategies vary by gender?</p> <p>What are gendered impacts of weather shocks [health, education, time poverty...]? (How) do these impacts depend on gendered resilience capacities?</p>
Price risk	<p>Gender differences in sources of livelihoods, including different livestock and crops grown by men and women result in different perceptions and impacts of price risk.</p> <p>Men and women don't have the same tools (e.g. financial tools) to help smooth income and consumption when they are faced with price risks.</p> <p>Men and women have different</p>	<p>What are the intra-household processes of bargaining and decision-making around risk management?</p> <p>How do men and women rely on/use formal and informal insurance mechanisms to cope with shocks?</p>

	levels of participation in cooperatives that offer a platform for managing price fluctuations.	
Conflict	<p>Women and men have different exposure to conflict and therefore manage conflict risk differently.</p> <p>Women and men's roles and responsibilities are often transformed by conflict, leading to a new set of capacities.</p>	<p>How does conflict risk and exposure affect the risk management and investment choices of women, men, and households?</p> <p>How does exposure to conflict impact livelihood and leadership opportunities for men and women?</p>
<b>Inclusive Rural and Agricultural Finance</b>		
Finance	<p>Demand and supply side factors continue to impede women's access to and use of digital financial services, including insurance and the extent to which they benefit from them. These include technological and financial literacy, women's preferences/need for liquidity, norms, access to the mobile platforms including ability to meet registration requirements etc.</p> <p>Men and women differ in how/where they receive information and in their adoption behavior.</p> <p>Digital financial platform may result in "individualization" of how women save or seek credit and may erode the social capital that they draw from traditional group lending.</p>	<p>Do digital financial services and products increase access to finance differently for women and men? What are the gendered impacts?</p> <p>What design and market system innovations can increase the impact of digital financial products for women?</p>
<b>Resilient systems</b>		
Resilient Systems	<p>Women have less representation and agency in political fora, in local and national governance bodies.</p> <p>Recurrent shocks and stressors</p>	<p>What are gendered costs and benefits of different models of targeted social safety nets in rural areas?</p> <p>(How) does gender equality contribute to more resilient</p>

	have resulted in significant demographic shift - characterized by male out-migration.	systems?  (How) does male out-migration affect gender norms in social and market institution? How can positive norm change be reinforced for more resilient systems?
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#### 4. Building Gender-Responsive Research Capacity

The IL is expected to build institutional and technical capacity among host country scientists, universities, research institutions and/or governmental and non-governmental organizations with which it works. Part of this effort should be focused on gender-responsive research: on institutions’ abilities to identify relevant gender questions and carry out rigorous analysis to answer them, collect and analyze sex-disaggregated and other data, and engage women and men as participants. More specific gender-responsive research capacities may include but are not limited to:

- Apply gender analysis to identify relevant questions for the research areas.
- Design and carry out data collection that captures gendered perspectives using relevant qualitative, quantitative, and participatory social science research methods and analysis.
- Communicate gendered needs, perspectives, and impacts identified through research to diverse stakeholders, ranging from smallholder farmers to local women’s groups to private sector stakeholders to government officials.
- Ensure policy recommendations are sufficiently nuanced to best address the needs of women and men; improve gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The Innovation Lab’s MEL Plan should describe how it will assess, develop, and track key capacities for gender-responsive research among participating research institutions and researchers as part of overall capacity-building efforts.

#### 7. Summary and Recommendations

It is recommended that the MRR IL (1) pursue research questions with direct relevance to gender equality and female empowerment, (2) build technical capacity to conduct gender-responsive research, and (3) apply those capacities throughout the research process.

The following are useful guiding questions for both the overall IL proposal and resulting proposed research by participating institutions,

What: Gender Research Objectives	Do the global research topics identify gender-related themes and does the proposal include examination of gender impacts? Is gender proposed as a cross-cutting theme?
By whom: Gender Research Capacities	What gender-related skills do the staff have (e.g. gendered research capacities and approaches)? What is the experience of applicants in gender analysis and research?

How: Gendered Research Implementation	Does the proposal include the intention to promote: Sex-disaggregated data collection; gender-sensitive informant selection; gender research hypothesis development; support gender-related research by local partners; and gender themes for reporting?
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In light of the above implications of gender for this Innovation Lab, bidders should:

- Articulate gender-specific components of the theory of change or systems map in the proposal.
- Articulate and/or describe a process to identify gender-focused research questions and gender-responsive questions the Innovation Lab will research.
- Outline a plan for assessing, developing, and measuring changes in gender-responsive research capacities among participating research institutions and researchers.
- Demonstrate their own strong capacity for gender-responsive research (including identify, collect, analyze, communicate, engage relevant parties).
- Follow the Feed the Future & USAID monitoring and evaluation requirements for reporting sex-disaggregated data.

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## **SECTION B: FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION**

### **1. Estimate of Funds Available and Number of Awards Contemplated**

Subject to funding availability, USAID intends to provide up to \$23 million in core BFS support and up to \$7 million in potential USAID Mission buy-ins and Associate Awards in total USAID funding over a five year period. The ceiling for this program is \$30 million. Actual funding amounts are subject to availability of funds.

USAID intends to award one Leader with Associates Award Cooperative Agreement mechanism. Associate Awards and buy-ins will be made during the life of the project based on demand from USAID Missions and other USAID Bureaus or Offices to the holder of the Leader Award. The competition under this RFA covers both the Leader Award(s) and all subsequent Associate Awards and buy-ins.

USAID reserves the right to fund any one or none of the applications submitted.

### **2. Start Date and Period of Performance for Federal Awards**

The period of performance anticipated herein is five years. The estimated start date will be September 30, 2019.

### **3. Substantial Involvement**

#### **a. Leader Award**

USAID will be substantially involved in the implementation of the core program described in Section A of this RFA under the Leader Award described in Section B above. The intended purpose of the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) involvement during the implementation of the program is to assist the recipient in achieving the supported objectives. The Agreement Officer will delegate approvals to the AOR via a separately issued AOR Designation Letter, except for changes to the Program Description or the approved budget, approval of sub-awards, and other costs requiring prior approval per 2 CFR 200 which may only be approved by the Agreement Officer.

Substantial involvement will include:

- Approval of Specified Key Personnel,
- Approval of the Recipient's annual work-plans,
- Approval of the MEL Plan and substantial revisions thereto,
- Approval in the selection and issuance of sub-awards and the substantive provisions of sub-awards, and
- Review and approval of Program Descriptions and Budgets for proposed Associate Awards and Buy-ins.

#### **b. Associate Awards**

An Associate Award may be a grant or cooperative agreement. If an Associate Award will be a cooperative agreement, specific substantial involvement provisions will be identified for that Associate Award.

#### **4. Authorized Geographic Code**

The authorized geographic code for the source of USAID financed commodities and for the nationality of suppliers of USAID-financed commodities and services, is Geographic Code 937. Geographic Codes are described in 22 CFR 228.03 and the Internal Mandatory References to Chapter 310 of USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS 310) entitled "List of Developing Countries", "List of Advanced Developing Countries", and "List of Prohibited Source Countries".

#### **5. Nature of the Relationship between USAID and the Recipient**

The principal purpose of the relationship with the Recipient and under the subject program is to transfer funds to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk, and Resilience which is authorized by Federal statute. The successful Recipient will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of the program objectives and the efficient and effective administration of the award through the application of sound management practices. The Recipient will assume responsibility for administering Federal funds in a manner consistent with underlying agreements, program objectives, and the terms and conditions of the Federal award.

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## **SECTION C: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **1. Eligible Applicants**

Eligibility for this RFA is restricted. The eligibility requirements below apply only to the principal Applicant. Eligibility is restricted to Title XII institutions as set forth below.

This program is authorized under Title XII of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended. Applications may only be submitted by eligible U.S. colleges and universities as defined under Section 296(d) of Title XII of the Foreign Assistance Act, as amended: "... those colleges or universities in each State, territory, or possession of the United States, or the District of Columbia, now receiving, or which may hereafter receive, benefits under the Act of July 2, 1862 (known as the First Morrill Act) or the Act of August 30, 1890 (known as the Second Morrill Act), which are commonly known as 'land-grant' universities; institutions now designated or which may hereafter be designated as sea-grant colleges under the Act of October 5, 1966 (known as the National Sea Grant College and Program Act), which are commonly known as sea-grant colleges; Native American land-grant colleges as authorized under the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note); and other United States colleges and universities which— (1) have demonstrable capacity in teaching, research, and extension (including outreach) activities in the agricultural sciences; and (2) can contribute effectively to the attainment of the objectives of this title."

The Title XII university-led Feed the Future Innovation Lab programs involve multiple partners, with the prime partner being U.S. universities, working in collaboration with research institutions and research scientists in developing countries, national and international research centers, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to jointly pursue research to overcome critical agricultural constraints facing today's global food systems. All types of U.S. and non-U.S. entities are eligible as collaborating partners (e.g., sub-recipients or contractors at various tiers), provided that they are not excluded from U.S. Government (USG) acquisition and assistance awards (this may be verified through the Government System). In preparing the application, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that no individuals or organizations proposed for participation in the program are excluded by the USG. After award, it is the Recipient's responsibility to ensure that no transactions are conducted with excluded parties.

USAID strongly encourages applicants to include qualified Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) including, but not limited to, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American Native Alaskan and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).

Collaborating partners may be contractors or sub-recipients, and applicants should be aware of the distinction between procurement contracts (acquisition) and sub-awards (assistance). Contracts are subject to 2 CFR 200.318-326 and the USAID standard provision entitled "USAID Eligibility Rules for Goods and Services" (see Section C.IV below). Sub-awards are subject to 2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 700 and the USAID standard provision entitled "Applicability of 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 700."

The recipient's and sub-recipients' contractors and subcontractors at all tiers must also meet USAID's supplier nationality requirements described in Section C.IV below. Please note that it is USAID policy that no profit (i.e., any amount in excess of allowable direct and indirect costs) is payable under the prime award or under any sub-award (i.e., sub-grants and sub-cooperative agreements, but excluding procurement contracts). However, profit is payable by the prime recipient or a sub-recipient to a contractor/vendor if the recipient or sub-recipient is procuring goods or services in furtherance of the

program being supported by the award or sub-award. Please refer to the following for additional information: (<http://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303sai>).

USAID welcomes applications from organizations which have not previously received financial assistance from USAID.

## **2. Cost Sharing or Matching**

**Leader Award:** Cost-sharing is not required for the Applicant to be eligible, however it is suggested. Such funds may be provided directly by the recipient; other multilateral, bilateral, and foundation donors; host governments; and local organizations, communities and private businesses that contribute financially and in-kind to implementation of activities at the country level. This may include contribution of staff level of effort, office space or other facilities or equipment which may be used for the program, provided by the recipient. For guidance on cost sharing in grants and cooperative agreements, see 2 CFR 200.306.

**Associate Awards:** Cost sharing requirements, if any, will be established for each Associate Award by the USAID mission or office that finances the Associate Award.

## **3. Other**

There is a limit of one application per eligible institution as defined in Section C. USAID does not require and does not encourage exclusivity contracts between proposed key personnel and the applying institution. As such, the proposed key personnel may be listed on more than one application.

## **4. RISK ASSESSMENT**

In order for an award to be made, the USAID Agreement Officer must evaluate the risks posed by applicants as outlined in 2 CFR 200.205 and ADS 303.3.9. This means that the applicant must possess, or must have the ability to obtain, the necessary management and technical competence to conduct the proposed program, and must agree to practice mutually agreed-upon methods of accountability for funds and other assets provided or funded by USAID.

In evaluating the risks posed by applicants, the Federal Awarding Agency uses a risk-based approach and may consider:

1. Financial stability;
2. Quality of management systems and ability to meet the management standards prescribed in this part;
3. History of performance. The applicant's record in managing Federal awards, if it is a prior recipient of Federal awards, including timeliness of compliance with applicable reporting requirements, conformance to the terms and conditions of previous Federal awards, and if applicable, the extent to which any previously awarded amounts will be expended prior to future awards;
4. Reports and findings from audits performed under Subpart F—Audit Requirements of this part or the reports and findings of any other available audits;
5. The applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities; and
6. That applicant is otherwise qualified to receive an award under applicable laws and regulations (e.g., Nondiscrimination, Lobbying, Debarment/Suspension, Terrorist Financing, etc.).

In the absence of a positive risk assessment, an award can ordinarily not be made. Awards to potential new partners may be significantly delayed if USAID must undertake necessary pre- award reviews of these organizations to make an adequate risk assessment. These organizations should take this into account and plan their implementation dates and activities accordingly.

## **SECTION D: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

### **1. Agency Point of Contact**

Kelly Miskowski  
Agreement Officer  
USAID/M/OAA/BFS  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
SA-44, RM 566-E  
Washington, DC 20523  
E-mail: kmiskowski@usaid.gov

### **2. Questions and Answers:**

All questions regarding this RFA should be submitted in writing to Kelly Miskowski at the e-mail address above no later than the time and date indicated on the cover letter, as amended. Any information given to a prospective applicant concerning this RFA will be furnished promptly to all other prospective applicants as an amendment to this RFA, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective applicant.

### **3. RFA Structure**

The competition conducted under this RFA will be completed in three phases:

- Phase I: Concept Note
- Phase II: Oral Presentation
- Phase III: Full Application

Each applicant shall initially provide USAID with a concept note. The most highly technically qualified concept note(s) will be invited to present a Phase II oral presentation. Only applicants who are requested to present Phase II presentations should prepare presentations. Presentations will allow USAID to better understand the applicant's proposal and discuss USAID priorities. The most highly technically qualified presentation(s) will be invited to submit a Phase II full application under this RFA. All phases shall be competitively evaluated against the pre-determined evaluation criteria outlined in Section E. Unsuccessful applicant(s) will be notified in a timely manner and provided written feedback.

### **4. Phase I - Concept Note**

#### **Required Contents and Organization of Concept Note**

Applicants shall submit an initial Concept Note covering, in summary form, the same general information as will be required in the full Application.

#### **General**

1. All information shall be presented in the English language.
2. The concept note and full application shall use the Letter Format 8 1/2" x 11" (There are two exceptions to the aforementioned instruction: 1) budgets (full applications only) may be in a slightly smaller font (10 point) with smaller margins, and 2) tables may use smaller fonts and margins, however, must be easily readable, no smaller than font of 9 point).

3. Times New Roman 12-point font using fixed pitch spacing per inch
4. 1” margins on standard, letter-sized paper (8 1/2” x 11”).
5. Concept notes and full applications submitted in response to this RFA must be received by email in MS Word or PDF format. If submitting a PDF, it must be text accessible.
6. Closing Date and Time. The email submission of concept notes in response to this RFA shall be due no later than April 24, 2019 at 4:00pm Washington, D.C. time. The time stamp on the email received shall serve as the official time of receipt. USAID bears no responsibility for transmission errors or delays.
7. The electronic files must be labeled as follows: “[Organization Name] (Concept Note)”
8. Submissions must be made to Kelly Miskowski via e-mail at kmiskowski@usaid.gov.

**Please note that for RFA Phase I, applicants only need to provide the following information:**

The concept note shall include:

**I. Cover Page (1 Page):**

- a. Prime Organization Name
- b. Prime DUNS Number
- c. Prime Tax Identification Number (TIN)
- d. Prime Contact Name (Authorized Negotiator) and Contact Information
- e. Prime Complete Business Mailing Address
- f. Prime Active Sam.gov Registry (Y/N)
- g. A summary table that lists the prime applicant and all major partner organizations

*For Proposed Sub-Awardees (if identified) only:*

- a. Sub Organization Name(s)
- b. Sub Organization(s) Business Status (non-profit, for profit, PVO, etc.)
- c. Sub DUNS Number
- d. Sub Contact Name and Contact Information
- e. Sub Complete Business Mailing Address

**II. Concept Note Body (5 Pages):**

The concept note should follow the outline below, addressing the problem areas, challenges and opportunities outlined in the Program Description. For additional guidance on content, review the criteria that will be used to evaluate the concept notes described in Section E, Application Review Information. Given the page limitation, the concept note should focus on overall approaches and unique aspects of your organization’s approach. Should your organization be invited to submit a full application, much greater detail should be provided at that point.

The concept note body shall consist of the following sections:

- a. Technical Approach: The concept note needs to provide an approach to achieving the stated objectives of the innovation lab. The technical approach should clearly describe approaches

- to work collaboratively with local actors, explicitly including the private sector.
- i) *Research Strategy*: The concept note must outline a research strategy, including an articulation of recent trends and critical research issues related to the MRR areas of inquiry and cross-cutting themes, as well as key processes that will be used to identify, define, and ensure implementation of research priorities.
  - ii) *Human and Institutional Capacity Development Strategy*: The concept note must outline an HICD strategy that encompasses a variety approaches to capacity development. Specifically, it must address how applicants and sub-awardees will build local and partner-country capacity to independently generate and transfer MRR knowledge and innovations to beneficiaries after the conclusion of USAID-funded activities.
- b. Management Approach: The concept note needs to outline approaches and mechanisms to ensure high quality research and capacity development, with key leadership by MSIs and local/regional research institutions and synergies with Mission-funded activities and priorities.
- i) *Staffing*: Concept notes must identify the individuals proposed to serve as director and associate/deputy director and very briefly describe their (1) roles and responsibilities for innovation lab leadership and implementation; (2) proposed levels of effort; and (3) qualifications for the positions. Additionally, concept notes need to provide a very brief list of proposed staff positions and external advisory bodies needed for successful implementation of core technical and management functions. No CVs are needed at the concept note phase.
  - ii) *Development, Selection, and Management of the Research Portfolio*: The concept must describe the applicant's approach to sub-award development, selection, and management. The applicant should describe how it will encourage the participation of MSIs and local partners. The concept note must also briefly describe how the ME will identify Quick Start activities, although proposed activities are not required.
  - iii) *Performance Monitoring*: The concept note must discuss how the ME will apply performance monitoring best practice and briefly discuss the proposed theory of change or systems maps. A full theory of change or systems maps is not required at the concept note phase.
  - iv) *Knowledge Management Plan*: The concept note must include a brief Knowledge Management Plan describing how the ME or sub-awardees will ensure that MRR-generated knowledge and technologies have national, regional, and global impact.
  - v) *Management of Associate Awards*: The concept note must include a discussion of how the applicant will generate and meet demand in USAID Missions or Washington offices for buy-in and Associate award activities.

### **3. Phase II – Oral Presentation**

Oral presentations (via telephone) will be scheduled with short-listed applicants after evaluation of concept notes and completion of Phase I. Oral presentations will likely be scheduled between May 6 and

May 15, 2019. Presentations will not exceed 60 minutes, to include 30 minutes of presentation and 30 minutes of discussion. The presentation must be given by the proposed director and/or proposed associate/deputy director. Phase II oral presentations will be evaluated under the same criteria as the concept notes, as outlined in Section E.

The purpose of the oral presentations is to ensure USAID fully understands the content of the concept note. USAID technical specialists may be invited to participate in the presentations and ask technical questions of the applicants. The Applicant is expected to be prepared to respond to questions.

### **Required Contents and Organization of Oral Presentation**

Applicants shall submit a presentation deck covering, in summary form, the same general information as was included in the concept note.

#### **General**

1. All information shall be presented in the English language.
2. Presentation decks submitted in response to this RFA must be received by email in MS PowerPoint or PDF format.
3. Decks should not include more than 20 slides, including the title slide.
4. Closing Date and Time. The email submission of the presentation deck in response to this RFA shall be due at a date and time specified by the AO, likely around May 6, 2019.
5. The electronic files must be labeled as follows: “[Organization Name] (Presentation)”
6. Submissions must be made to Kelly Miskowski via e-mail at kmiskowski@usaid.gov.

#### **Please note that for RFA Phase II, applicants only need to provide the following information:**

The presentation should follow the outline below, addressing the problem areas, challenges and opportunities outlined in the Program Description. For additional guidance on content, review the criteria that will be used to evaluate the oral presentations described in Section E, Application Review Information. The presentation shall include the same sections as the concept note:

- a. Technical Approach
  - i) *Research Strategy*
  - ii) *Human and Institutional Capacity Development Strategy*
- b. Management Approach
  - i) *Staffing*
  - ii) *Development, Selection, and Management of the Research Portfolio*
  - iii) *Performance Monitoring*
  - iv) *Knowledge Management Plan*
  - v) *Management of Associate Awards*

#### **4. Phase III - Full Application**

Successful oral presentation(s) will be invited to submit a full application. The criteria that will be used to evaluate the full applications are the same as those used to review the concept notes and oral presentations. These are described in Section E, Application Review Information. Only applicant(s) who

are requested to submit Phase III applications should respond with a full application.

More information on the content and structure of the full application and cost application will be made available to invited applicants following the oral presentation.

**End of Section D.**

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## SECTION E: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

### E.1 Merit Review Criteria: All RFA Phases

Concept notes, oral presentations, and full applications (collectively referred to as “submissions”) will be evaluated in accordance with the Merit Review Criteria set forth below. Minor changes will be made for Phase III to account for additional information required for submission. If invited to apply in Phase III, a full RFA will be provided with clear evaluation criteria and requirements for submission. Also, if a concept note/oral presentation is recommended for RFA Phase III following the technical review, a Full Application and Cost Application will be requested and cost negotiations will be conducted based on a detailed budget (to be requested upon notification of successful applicant status). Only applicant(s) who are requested to submit Phase III applications should respond with a full application.

The Merit Review criteria have been tailored to the requirements of this particular Notice of Funding Opportunity. Applicants must note that these criteria serve to: (a) identify the significant matters which applicants must address in their applications; and (b) set the standard against which all applications will be evaluated. To facilitate review, applicants must organize their narrative sections of the application in the same order as the selection criteria. The criteria listed below are presented by major category, so that applicants will know which areas require emphasis in the preparation of proposals. The two factors are in descending order of importance. Sub-factors within Factor 1 are in descending order of importance. Sub-factors within Factor 2 are weighted thusly: 2a, 2b, and 2c are equal to each other and significantly more important than 2d and 2e which are equal in weight to each other. Applicants should note that these factors serve as the standard against which all technical information will be evaluated, and serve to identify the significant matters which applicants should address:

Factor 1: Technical Approach
● Sub-factor 1a) Technical Leadership & Research Strategy
● Sub-factor 1b) Human and Institutional Capacity Development Strategy
● Sub-factor 1c) Achieving Development Impact
Factor 2: Management Approach
● Sub-factor 1b) Staffing
● Sub-factor 2b) Development, Selection, and Management of the Research Portfolio
● Sub-factor 2c) Performance Monitoring
● Sub-factor 2d) Knowledge-Sharing and Data Management Plans
● Sub-factor 2e) Management of Associate Awards

#### 1. Factor: Technical Approach

The concept note will be evaluated on its contents relative to the elements outlined in the Technical Approach section of this NFO. Subfactors are listed in descending order of importance:

*1.a - Subfactor: Technical Leadership & Research Strategy*

The submission will be evaluated for the clarity and compelling nature research strategy, including its articulation of recent trends and critical research issues related to the MRR areas of inquiry and cross-cutting themes: Making Markets Work for All, Risk Management and Resilience, Inclusive Rural and Agricultural Finance, Resilient Systems, Gender, and Youth.

*1.b Subfactor: Human and Institutional Capacity Development Strategy*

The submission will be evaluated for the logic, feasibility and appropriateness of its proposed Human and Institutional Capacity Development strategy, as discussed in the program description. This strategy should include a variety of approaches for capacity development.

*1.c Subfactor: Achieving Development Impact*

The submission will be judged on its overall approach and potential for achieving development impact including the approach to insure utilization of research findings by the research community, development practitioners, host country policy makers and the donor community, particularly USAID field Missions. The submission will also be judged on its discussion of program issues relative to USAID's Global Food Security Strategy and Resilience Strategy and vision for the role that a university-led collaborative research can play in improving developing country policy and institutional environments, and donor (i.e., USAID)-supported programming.

**2. Factor: Management Approach**

The submission will be evaluated on its contents relative to the elements outlined in the Management Approach section of this NFO. Subfactors 2a, 2b, and 2c are equal in weight to each other and significantly more important than Subfactors 2d and 2e which are equal in weight:

*2.a Subfactor: Staffing*

The submission will be evaluated on the proposed staffing. It will be judged on whether the proposed staff is sufficient to carry out core technical and management functions, while facilitating productivity, containing costs, and ensuring quality control. Key Personnel will be judged on the extent to which their background and experience match the requirements described in the Program Description.

*2.b Subfactor: Development, Selection, and Management of the Research Portfolio*

The submission will be evaluated on the Applicant's approach to sub-award development, selection, and management, including how the proposed sub-award procurement process encourages the participation of MSIs and local partners, how the ME proposes to engage an appropriate range of expertise to mount an intellectually rigorous peer review process for a given solicitation, the applicant's proposed approaches to facilitate cross-project collaboration and learning, and how the ME plans to identify Quick Start activities.

*2.c Subfactor: Performance Monitoring*

The submission will be evaluated on how the ME will apply performance monitoring best practice, how the applicant proposes to adapt programming as needed to ensure successful implementation of impact-oriented research and capacity development, and the proposed general theory of change or systems map.

*2.d Subfactor: Knowledge-Sharing and Data Management Plans*

The submission will be evaluated on the clarity, quality, and expected impact of its Knowledge Management Plan. Data management plans are not required at the concept stage and will not be evaluated.

*2.e Subfactor: Management of Associate Awards*

The submission will be evaluated on the Applicant's strategy to generate and meet demand in USAID Missions or Washington offices for buy-in and Associate award activities.

## **E.II. SELECTION PROCESS**

### **A. Merit Review**

The review process will include three phases:

#### **1. Phase I – Concept Note**

Concept notes will be evaluated in accordance with the criteria set forth in Section E.I. All concept notes received by the deadline will be reviewed. Those which are non-responsive will be removed from consideration. After evaluation of the concept notes and depending on the volume of concept notes received, either all or the most technically sound concept notes will be invited to give oral presentations.

#### **2. Phase II – Oral Presentation**

(Select) applicants will be invited to present their concept notes to USAID via a telephonic conference call at a mutually convenient time, likely between May 6 and May 15, 2019. Applicants will submit their slide deck to USAID in advance. In the interest of efficiency, USAID reserves the right to limit those presentations to only the most technically successful concept notes should there be a significant number of concept notes submitted during Phase I. Slides must be presented by the proposed director and/or associate/deputy director. No other individuals from the applicant organization will participate in the presentation. After evaluation of the oral presentations, the most technically sound concept notes/presentations will be invited to submit a full application.

#### **2. Phase III – Full Application**

The mostly highly successful applicant(s) will be invited to submit a full application, including cost application, in Phase III.

Following that, either: (1) an award will be made without discussions/negotiations; or (2) if deemed necessary or desirable by USAID, written and/or verbal discussions/negotiations will be conducted with the applicant(s) that submit the most highly rated application(s). USAID hopes to evaluate applications and award a cooperative agreement without discussions with applicants. Therefore, the applicant's initial application should contain the applicant's best terms.

After the conclusion of any such discussions, the applicant with whom discussions were conducted will, unless otherwise advised, be required to submit a revised application or addendum to the initial application. It is expected that the award will ordinarily be made after the first round of any such discussions and revised applications/addenda; however, USAID reserves the right to conduct subsequent rounds of discussions and revised applications/addenda, and to further limit the number of applicants with which such subsequent discussions would be conducted and from which a subsequent round of revised applications/addenda would be requested.

USAID intends to award a cooperative agreement resulting from this RFA to the responsible applicant whose application, application modification(s), and/or revised application(s)/addendum(s) represents the greatest value to USAID based on the evaluation of applications in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth above.

The Agreement Officer will make the final decision as to which institution, if any, will be awarded a cooperative agreement based on the determination of the Merit Review Committee, the cost/management evaluation, and whether the applying institutions are eligible to receive the award.

## **B. Cost Evaluation**

No Cost information is requested for the Phase I concept notes or Phase II oral presentations. The below guidance refers to analysis of cost at the Phase III full application stage.

While cost is less important than technical and is not weighted, the cost applications of the apparently successful technical applications will be evaluated for cost effectiveness. Other considerations are the completeness of the application, adequacy of budget detail and consistency with elements of the technical application. In addition, the organization must demonstrate adequate financial management capability, to be measured for the risk assessment.

The application with the lowest estimated cost may not be selected if award to a higher priced technical application offers a greater overall benefit for the program. All evaluation factors other than cost or price, when combined, are significantly more important than cost. However, estimated cost is an important factor and the estimated cost to the Government increases in importance as competing applications approach equivalence and may become the deciding factor when technical applications are approximately equivalent in merit.

Cost estimates will be analyzed as part of the application evaluation process. Proposed costs may be adjusted, for purposes of evaluation, based on results of the cost analysis and its assessment of reasonableness, completeness, and credibility.

USAID has not established a suggested cost share of the Award's projected value of for the recipient of the award. Leveraged non-USAID resources from private firms and institutions (such as equipment, training, level of effort and any in-kind contributions) may be considered part of cost share. Cost sharing may be also demonstrated either through direct funding, beneficiary contributions, in-kind assistance, or a combination thereof. USAID shall make the final determination and assess whether or not the Applicants cost share contributions (e.g. categories or items) meet the standards set in 2 CFR 200. Under no circumstances can funding or in-kind contributions traced back to the U.S. Government resources be considered cost share.

## **SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

### **1. Federal Award Notices**

The Leader Award is anticipated to be made by **September 2019**.

Award of the agreement contemplated by this RFA cannot be made until funds have been appropriated, allocated and committed through internal USAID procedures. While USAID anticipates that these procedures will be successfully completed, potential applicants are hereby notified of these requirements and conditions for the award. The Agreement Officer is the only individual who may legally commit the Government to the expenditure of public funds. No costs chargeable to the proposed Agreement may be incurred before receipt of either a fully executed Agreement or a specific, written authorization from the Agreement Officer.

Although an earlier notification may be provided to applicants regarding their recommended selection for an award, only an award signed by the USAID Agreement Officer will constitute the USAID commitment of the selection of the applicant. USAID may, at its sole discretion, provide the award to the successful applicant's designated point or contact in hardcopy originals, by fax, or electronically. The signed award will authorize the selected applicant to begin implementation of the activities described in their technical applications or revised technical applications/addenda, and will obligate funds for payment to the recipient of the award for costs incurred in such implementation. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Agreement Officer may authorize the selected applicant(s), at its sole risk, to begin implementation and the incurrence of costs prior to a signed award as of a specified date, with no commitment to reimburse costs in the event that the award was not subsequently signed.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of their non-selection after the award(s) has been made. Within 10 working days after an applicant receives notice that USAID will not fund its application, the unsuccessful applicant may send a written request for additional information to the Agreement Officer. This information may be provided at the discretion of the Agreement Officer orally or in writing. To the maximum extent practicable, the Agreement Officer should respond to the request within 30 days or inform the applicant that more time is necessary. If a response is granted, it will be limited to the Agency's interest in supporting the applicant's program as described in the application without comparison of one applicant to another. Only additional information that would be useful to the applicant in future application preparation should be provided.

### **2. Administrative & National Policy Requirements**

The resulting award from this NFO will be administered in accordance with the following policies and regulations.

For US organizations: [ADS 303](#), [2 CFR 700](#), [2 CFR 200](#), and [Standard Provisions for U.S. Non-governmental organizations](#).

For Non US organizations: [Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-governmental Organizations](#).  
The applicable Required as Applicable Provisions will be identified when Applications are actually requested as they will vary depending upon the Applicant's proposed approach.

### **3. Reporting Requirements**

#### **(1) Financial Reporting**

Financial reporting requirements will depend on the method of payment. In accordance with 2 CFR 700, advance payments will be provided if the recipient meets the standards for financial management systems in 2 CFR 700. Recipients will comply with the financial reporting requirements set forth in 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 700. If advance payments are provided, reporting periods are calendar quarters or parts thereof. Quarterly financial reports are due not later than 30 days after the end of each calendar quarter. The final financial report is due not later than 90 days after the estimated completion date of the award. If payment is on a reimbursement basis, financial reports may be submitted monthly, but not less frequently than 30 days after the end of each calendar quarter. The final financial report is due not later than 90 days after the estimated completion date of the award. The Recipient shall also comply with the USAID standard provision entitled “Reporting Host Government Taxes.” For more information, please see ADS 303.

The Recipient must submit to the AOR an estimate of quarterly accruals at least 2 weeks prior to the end of each financial quarter. The Recipient must submit a completed [Standard Form SF-425](#) to the AOR no later than 30 days after the end of each financial quarter.

#### **(2) Annual Work-Plans**

The Recipient will be required to submit annual work-plans describing all activities planned for the year, including benchmarks/milestones and annual performance targets; the outputs/outcomes which the Recipient expects to achieve; and the input/support planned to be provided by the Recipient, during the work-plan period. Included must be an explanation of how those inputs are expected to achieve the outputs/outcomes and benchmarks/milestones.

The first-year work-plan will also include:

- IRB Response (or planned process)
- Updated Knowledge Management Plan
- First Year Data Management Plan

The annual work-plan for the first year will be submitted no later than 60 days after the effective date of the award. Annual work-plans for subsequent years shall be submitted no later than 60 days prior to the start of that year. Annual work-plans and significant revisions thereto are subject to USAID approval.

The work-plans will describe activities to be conducted at a greater level of detail than the Program Description of the award, but shall be cross-referenced with the applicable sections in the Program Description. All work-plan activities must be within the scope and objectives of the award. Work-plans must not change such scope and objectives or any other terms and conditions of the award in any way; such changes may only be approved by the Agreement Officer, in advance and in writing. Thereafter, if there are inconsistencies between the work-plan and the Program Description or other terms and conditions of the award, the latter will take precedence over the work-plan.

#### **(3) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan**

The Recipient will be required to submit a MEL Plan, as described in Section A.3.2.3 of this RFA, within 60 days after the award is made. The MEL Plan, which describes the program over the life of the project,

will be submitted at the same time as the first-year work-plan discussed in the previous paragraph. The MEL Plan may be refined after the selection of initial portfolio of activities; however significant revisions are subject to USAID approval.

#### **(4) Performance Reports**

The Recipient shall submit electronically all performance reports to the AOR in USAID/Washington. All country-level and global research activities implemented under the Leader Award shall be included in the performance reports. Performance reports shall consist of the following:

##### **(1) Annual Reports**

Annual reports covering the period October 1 through September 30, or the equivalent time period as per the award date, shall be submitted not later than 30 days after the end of the reporting period. The reports are to include the following sections: Title Page, Management Entity Information, Technical and/or Advisory Committee Information, Map or List of Countries Where Work, List of Program Partners, Acronyms, Glossary, Table of Contents, Executive Summary, Management Entity Activities, Program Activities and Highlights, Key Accomplishments, Research Program Overview and Structure, Theory of Change and Impact Pathway(s), Research Project Reports; Associate Award Research Project Reports, Human and Institutional Capacity Development, Other Topics, Issues, Future Directions, three Success Stories, and any required Appendices. A copy of the Annual Report shall also be submitted to the USAID DEC. Please reference the [DEC website](#)<sup>27</sup> for any questions your organization may have on the reporting requirements:

#### **(5) Notifications**

The Recipient will be required to immediately notify the AOR and the Agreement Officer of developments that have a significant impact on the award-supported activities. Also, notification shall be given in the case of problems, delays, or adverse conditions which materially impair the ability to meet the objectives of the award. This notification shall include a statement of the action taken or contemplated, and any assistance needed to resolve the situation.

#### **(6) Final Report**

The final performance report, which does not replace the last annual report, shall cover the life of award or the first five years, whichever is shorter. If the award is extended beyond five years, a second final report shall be required. The final report shall include an executive summary of the Recipient's accomplishments in achieving results and impact; conclusions about lessons learned; future challenges and opportunities; an overall description of the Recipient's activities and attainment of results by country or region; an assessment of progress made toward accomplishing the development impact objectives and expected results; significance of these activities; important research findings; and comments and recommendations. The final report shall incorporate the findings and results that were included in previous annual reports, and is due no later than 90 days after the completion, expiration, or termination of the award. A copy of the final report shall also be submitted to the USAID DEC.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://dec.usaid.gov/dec/home/Default.aspx>

## **(7) Associate Awards**

Reporting requirements and evaluation plans for Associate Awards will be specified in such awards. The Recipient will be required to provide an electronic copy of all reports produced under Associate Awards to the AOR for this Leader Award.

## **(8) External Evaluation**

USAID may choose to procure an external evaluation for this innovation lab. If so, the ME will be expected to cooperate with the evaluation team. Evaluation questions from the MEL Plan will be provided to the external evaluation team.

## **(9) Submission of Reports**

The Recipient must submit the Annual and Final Reports and all other requested and required periodic reporting documents to the AOR. Additionally, Annual and Final Reports, once approved by the AOR, shall be submitted to the USAID DEC. Occasionally, a report will contain sensitive information such as data not yet ready for release to the general public or otherwise embargoed information. In such an event, the AOR will work with the Recipient to either 1) approve an interim, edited version that can be submitted to the DEC until the full report can be released publically or 2) approve a delay of a reasonable amount of time for submission to the DEC. Evaluations, whether conducted by the Recipient, USAID, or other entity contracted to perform the evaluation, shall also be submitted to the DEC. All journal publications resulting from this award shall be submitted to the DEC. In cases where journal articles have restricted access, the final author's manuscript shall be submitted to the DEC.

## **(10) Branding Strategy and Marking Plan (BS/MP)**

The applicant is required to comply (and ensure compliance by partners) with USAID's branding and marking requirements set forth in 2 CFR 700.16 with Feed the Future specific guidance located at [feedthefuture.gov](http://feedthefuture.gov).

These regulations and provisions include the requirement for the apparently successful applicant to submit a Branding Strategy and Marking Plan for pre-award review, negotiation, and approval by the Agreement Officer. Under these regulations and provisions, the BS/MP does not need to be submitted until the applicant is notified by the Agreement Officer that it is the apparently successful applicant, and is requested to submit the BS/MP by a time specified by the Agreement Officer. Thus, the initial cost/management application is not required to include a BS/MP.

Nevertheless, applicants are encouraged, but are not required, to submit their BS/MP with their full/cost applications. Applicants who choose not to include their BS/MP with their full/cost application will not be penalized during the evaluation process, but should be aware that, if the applicant is the apparently successful applicant, the applicant will be required to submit an acceptable BS/MP as a prerequisite for any resulting award. This would delay any such award, pending receipt, review, and, if necessary, negotiation of the applicant's BS/MP, with failure to submit or negotiate a BS/MP within the time specified by the Agreement Officer making the apparently successful applicant ineligible for award. Moreover, because USAID's branding and marking requirements have cost implications, such costs must

be included in the detailed budget, even if the applicant does not submit its BS/MP with the initial cost/management application.

Failure to submit or negotiate a Branding Strategy within the time specified by the Agreement Officer will make the Apparently Successful Applicant ineligible for award.

The proposed Branding Strategy and Marking Plan (BS/MP) will not be evaluated competitively. The Agreement Officer shall review for adequacy the proposed BS/MP, and will negotiate, approve, and include the BS/MP in the award.

## **(11) Environmental Compliance**

Section 117 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, requires that the impact of USAID's activities on the environment be considered and that USAID include environmental sustainability as a central consideration in designing and carrying-out its development programs. This mandate is codified in 22 CFR 216 and in USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) Parts 201.5.10g and 204, which, in part, require that the potential environmental impacts of USAID-financed activities are identified prior to a final decision to proceed and that appropriate environmental safeguards are adopted for all activities. The environmental compliance obligations of the Recipient of the award(s) resulting from this RFA under these regulations and procedures are specified in the following paragraphs.

(a) In addition, the Recipient must comply with host country environmental regulations unless otherwise directed in writing by USAID. In case of conflict between host country and USAID regulations, the latter shall govern.

(b) No activity funded under the award(s) resulting from this RFA may be implemented unless an environmental threshold determination, as defined by 22 CFR 216, has been reached for that activity, as documented in a Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE), Initial Environmental Examination (IEE), or Environmental Assessment (EA) duly signed by the Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO). (Such documents are hereinafter described as "approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation.")

(c) The BEO approved a Request for Categorical Exclusion for activities related to this award on February 4, 2019. The approved IEE is attached as Program Description Annex A. The activities qualify for a categorical exclusion per 22 CFR 261 as follows:

- Education, technical assistance, or training programs except to the extent such programs include activities affecting the environment (such as the construction of facilities, etc.)—Section 216.2(c)(2)(i);
- Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings— Section 216.2(c)(2)(iii);
- Document and information transfers—Section 216.2(c)(2)(v);
- Studies, projects or programs intended to develop the capability of recipient countries to engage in development planning, except to the extent designed to result in activities directly affecting the environment (such as the construction of facilities, etc.) —Section 216.2(c)(2)(xiv).

(d) As part of its annual work-plans, the Recipient, in collaboration with the AOR and MEO/BEO, shall review all ongoing and planned activities under the award to determine if they are within the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation. If the Recipient plans any new activities outside the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation, it shall prepare an amendment to

the documentation for USAID review and approval. No such new activities shall be undertaken prior to receiving written USAID approval of environmental documentation amendments. Any activities found to be outside the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation shall be halted until an amendment to the documentation is submitted and written approval is received.

**(12) Program Income**

Any program income generated under the award(s) will be added to USAID funding (and any cost sharing that may be provided) and used for program purposes. Program income will be subject to 2 CFR 200.307.

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**SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT(S)**

All questions and application submissions regarding this RFA must reference “7200AA19RFA00009” in the subject line when directed to:

Kelly Miskowski  
Agreement Specialist  
USAID/M/OAA/BFS  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
SA-44, Rm 566-E  
Washington, DC 20523  
E-mail: kmiskowski@usaid.gov

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## **SECTION H – OTHER INFORMATION**

USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

### **H.I. PRE-AWARD AUDITS/SURVEYS AND DISCUSSIONS**

USAID reserves the right to perform a pre-award audit/survey which may include, but is not limited to:

- 1) interviews with individuals to establish their ability to perform award duties under project conditions;
- 2) a review of the applicant's financial condition, business and personnel policies and procedures, etc.;
- and 3) site visits to the applicant's institution.

However, it must be understood that USAID undertakes no obligation to perform any of the foregoing elements. Accordingly, applicants should submit their best and most complete application initially.

### **H.II. INTERVIEWS/DISCUSSIONS/ORAL PRESENTATIONS IN WASHINGTON**

USAID anticipates requesting Telephonic presentations of selected concept notes. These will be presented remotely (and not in person). USAID will not pay any travel costs associated therewith.

### **H.III. INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN THIS RFA AND 2 CFR 700, 2 CFR 200, ADS 303**

In case of any disagreements or discrepancies between the terms and conditions of this RFA and 2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 700, or ADS 303, the latter shall prevail unless any such conflicting terms and conditions of this RFA are expressly and specifically stated to be an approved deviation from and 2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 700, or ADS 303.

### **H.IV. FAILURE TO CONFORM**

The USAID evaluation committee may consider any failure to conform to these instructions and rules, and any attempt to evade these specifications and rules on the basis of technicalities, as indications of the kind of behavior that it may expect from the applicant during award performance/implementation. The committee will take this into account when making its evaluation. If an applicant does not understand these instructions, it should follow the instructions in Section D above.