95332419N0001

PARTNERSHIPS with MCC Program

Amendment 0007

Questions and Answers

Thank you for your interest in our Annual Program Statement (APS) opportunities. We received many questions regarding our three opportunities. Please consider this information when drafting your Concept Paper. If you’ve already submitted a Concept Paper and would like to resubmit a revision, please feel free to do so prior to the Concept Paper Due Date.

**[Partnership Opportunity Statement #8: Community Engagement to Achieve Social License](#_A.6.8_PARTNERSHIP_OPPORTUNITY)**

**[Agreements with Tourism Investors in the Solomon Islands](#_A.6.8_PARTNERSHIP_OPPORTUNITY)** | Three questions and answers (pp. 2-3)

[**Partnership Opportunity Statement #9: Increasing Access to Rural Infrastructure**](#_A.6.9_PARTNERSHIP_OPPORTUNITY) | One question and answer (p. 4)

[**Partnership Opportunity Statement #10: Women’s Data Lab and Network (WDLN) Project in Côte d’Ivoire**](#_A.6.10_PARTNERSHIP_OPPORTUNITY) | 75 questions and answers + one Appendix (pp. 5-22)

# A.6.8 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #8

**Community Engagement to Achieve Social License**

**Agreements with Tourism Investors in the Solomon Islands**

Estimated Federal Budget: To be discussed during Stage II, Co-Creation[[1]](#footnote-2)

Concept Paper Due Date: May 07, 2021, 5:00pm ET

**Q1: My team and I are considering this, but it seems more oriented to having a team of sociologists rather than tourism investment and development experts. What is MCC’s take on this assumption?**

A: The APS describes the services for which MCC is seeking assistance. The Community Engagement work is one component of the Tourism Project and is considered to be critical to the success of any tourism investment mobilized under the project. As such, offerors should determine the compliment of personnel that would be best qualified to provide the requested services and include this description as part of the concept note. As this is a partnership solicitation, MCC will consider all concept notes to determine which offeror provides the most relevant vision for how to work with communities in the Solomon Islands to achieve social license agreements. MCC will discuss with the selected offeror how personnel and other resources would be deployed in an effort to reach a mutual understanding on the terms of a partnership agreement and scope of work.

**Q2: Given that MCC has confirmed in footnote 3 on p. 12 of the NOFO amendment that it will not reveal the Estimated Federal Budget for the CES partnership opportunity until the co-creation stage of the Cooperative Agreement pre-application process, does MCC still wish applicants to include a budget estimate as part of the concept paper for this particular opportunity, as indicated on p. 34 of the NOFO (i.e. in the instructions for all opportunities)? If so, please confirm that the total budget estimate would consist of three values—estimated federal contribution, estimated applicant cost share/matching contribution, and total project cost.**

A: As stated under Section D.3.2. STAGE I – CONCEPT PAPER REQUIRED CONTENT of NOFO No. 95332419N0001 the concept paper cover page should include “Total budget estimate (direct and indirect), with breakdown of estimated Federal contribution and applicant cost share/matching contribution (Note: Budget figures are only preliminary estimates at this stage).”

As detailed in the solicitation the cover page should include the total budget estimate. The applicant should include the total budget estimate including a breakdown of the estimated federal contribution and cost share matching contribution.

A cost share is not required for Partnership Opportunity Statement No. 8.

**Q3: Please confirm that offerors may include a table of contents and acronyms list with their Concept Paper that do not count against the page limits.**

A: For Partnership Opportunity Statement No. 8 the table of contents and acronyms list may be excluded from the concept paper page limits.

# A.6.9 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #9

**Increasing Access to Rural Infrastructure**

Estimated Federal Budget: $335,000

Concept Paper Due Date: May 07, 2021, 5:00pm ET

**Q1: We understand the opportunity requests the applicant connect with higher education partners to undertake evaluation initiatives.**

**We do have a number of higher education partners who are engaging with us in developing a method to remotely identify areas in need of trailbridges, but were planning on integrating evaluation through surveys conducted by Bridges to Prosperity staff or contractors in the field and a rapid impact assessment we're working on with partners at MapBox and Humanitarian OpenStreetMap, which integrates learnings from larger research studies completed previously on Bridges to Prosperity trailbridges and geospatial data to "map" prospective impact of future trailbridges.**

**Would this fulfill the expectations in the APS around evaluation and academic researchers, or is the APS firm on engaging higher education partners in a more direct study?**

A: Yes, the proposed approach could be acceptable to MCC. MCC’s intent is to ensure that the joint work under the proposed partnership includes monitoring and evaluation with a level of rigor that MCC applies to its compact and threshold programs. MC would accept a partner providing monitoring and evaluation “in house” and without an affiliated higher education partner if that partner can demonstrate it has sufficient capacity to do so.

# A.6.10 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #10

**Women’s Data Lab and Network (WDLN) Project in Côte d’Ivoire**

Estimated Federal Budget: $2,500,000

Concept Paper Due Date: May 07, 2021, 5:00pm ET

Thank you for your interest in the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Annual Program Statement, Opportunity #10, related to the Women’s Business Data Lab and Network (WDLN) in Côte d’Ivoire. Below please find a compilation of questions received by MCC’s Contracts and Grants Management (CGM) team before the Pre-Concept Conference Call which took place on Tuesday April 20th, 2021; questions asked by participants during this call; and questions included in the virtual call chat during this event. Also included are MCC’s responses to those questions. **Please note that answers from the Pre-Concept Conference Call are not exact transcripts of answers provided during the call but are consistent with those answers and/or in some cases provide additional details and/or more up to date and complete information.** Questions have been grouped by topic – and redundant and/or partially overlapping questions are identified in italics.

On 20 April 2021, MCC held a Pre-Concept Conference for this opportunity. The purpose of the conference was to share information about the WDLN Program and to answer participants’ questions. The entire session was recorded, and it can be viewed here: <https://mccus-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/leeae_mcc_gov/EbjdonarONdGqAZTIk2eEpsBx2yF2FXY0m83wgZozVDxkw>

## **Financial/Application Questions**

* 1. **How do we get a UEI number and register our entity?**

A: The applicant shall obtain a DUNS number from Dun & Bradstreet (www.dnb.com) and register the entity in SAM.gov using the DUNS number, which is their UEI number.

* 1. **Can we respond to this as a consortium of organizations?**

A: Yes. Responses from a consortium of organizations are allowed – and expected to be beneficial. MCC encourages the submission of comprehensive concept notes. For example, if an applicant has capabilities in only one of the areas of necessary expertise (e.g., SME experience), while another has expertise needed to develop data and/or digital training, it will be to the benefit of both applicants to consider submitting as a consortium to submit a more complete concept note. The concept note should indicate which organization in a consortium will be the prime or lead organization for the purposes of interfacing with MCC.

* 1. **What is the expected budget and the project period?**

A: The estimated total U.S. Government share of the budget is $2,500,000.00, as noted in ***A.6.10PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #10***. The estimated period of performance is on the order of 36 months (3 years), beginning September 2021.

* 1. **Le montant minimum et maximum en terme de budget à soumettre.**

**(The minimum and maximum amount in terms of budget to be submitted)**

A: There is no minimum amount in terms of budget. However, MCC is looking for comprehensive concept notes that address the five stated target outcomes. The overall total estimated U.S. Government share of the budget is $2,500,000.00, as noted in ***A.6.10PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #10***. Please also see response to Question#3 (Q3).

* 1. **Comment obtenir les termes de référence ou les lignes directrices des opportunités?**

**(How to get the terms of reference or guidelines for opportunities?)**

A: This opportunity is not a contract, but a partnership opportunity. There are no separate terms of reference, just the Opportunity Statement, per the APS NOFO, for this program. The Opportunity Statement outlines MCC vision – and seeks organization that can help MCC achieve the five outlined target outcomes. MCC will select organizations based on the concept notes submitted – and selection criteria outlined in the APS documentation – to co-develop the scope of work with MCC during co-creation.

* 1. **Est-ce que c'est possible d'avoir le formulaire et le terme de référence de votre appel à projet?**

**(Is it possible to have the form and the term of reference for your call for projects?)**

A: There are no separate forms or terms of reference, other than the Opportunity Statement per the APS NOFO, for this program. Please see our response to Q5.

* 1. **What is the difference between the COST SHARE REQUIREMENT and COST SHARE OR MATCHING?**

A: The terms “cost share” and “matching” are often used interchangeably. 2 CFR 200 does not define the terms. Nevertheless, to clarify based on the common understanding of the terms, a “cost share” is when the Government requires a portion of the total award to be contributed by the Recipient (e.g., if the total award is $100, $80 is Government contribution and $20 is the Recipient’s contribution) and a “matching” is when the Government requires a percentage of the Government’s contribution to be matched by the Recipient (e.g., the Government’s contribution is $100 of which 20% must be matched by the Recipient, or $100 \* 20% = $20; making the total value of such a program $120).

If a cost share or matching is required, the Recipient must adhere to the requirements of the cost share or matching. Refer to ***A.6.10 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #10*** Subsection for *Cost Share Requirement* and ***C.2. COST SHARE OR MATCHING*** for more detail regarding the specific cost share requirements for this opportunity.

* 1. **Is this a matching fund?**

*Q: Could you elaborate on the matching funds requirement?*

A: There is a Recipient Cost Share or Matching requirement (10% for non-profit entities and 100% for for-profit entities) for this partnership opportunity. The requirement will be based on the Prime Recipient’s entity status as either a non-profit or for-profit entity. The Prime Recipient for a consortium must be the technical lead. Please also refer to our response to Q7.

Refer to ***A.6.10 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT #10*** Subsection for *Cost Share Requirement* and ***C.2. COST SHARE OR MATCHING*** for more detail.

* 1. **For international Organisations to be Eligible must they have a local presence in Côte d'Ivoire? Can International Organisations lead without having a local presence but have local partners in their consortium?**

A: International organizations are eligible, and they do not have to have a local presence in Côte d'Ivoire. However, as noted in the APS, local knowledge, experience, and input is critical to success – and one or more Ivorian-native organizations must be involved and 70% of funding under this project must be allocated to Ivorian-native (or Ivorian-based) organizations, for expenditure inside Côte d'Ivoire.

* 1. **Must the applicant be a US entity?**

A: Applicants need not be a US entity. In fact, MCC prefers international, West African regional or local Ivorian organization(s) for this local project. Please also refer to MCC’s response to Q9.

* 1. **What are the particular administrative and accounting procedures that the partner should take into account?**

A: The award recipients must familiarize themselves with the terms and provisions of the award itself and the guiding principles, 2 CFR 200.

* 1. **La durée minimale du projet.**

**(The minimum duration of project.)**

A: There is no minimum duration of the project. The estimated period of performance is on the order of 36 months (3 years), beginning September 2021.

* 1. **Is it necessary to have experience in gender or expertise in coaching start-ups?**

A: Eligibility requirements are outlined in the APS. Experience in gender and working with W-SMEs would be integral to successful achievement of the WDLN Program Vision and Expected Outcomes.

* 1. **Can you share what MCC has designed for the WDLN project.**

A: See the WDLN Program Vision and Expected Outcomes section of the Opportunity Statement #10, Women’s Data Lab and Network (WDLN).

* 1. **Est-ce le seul document à soumettre ? (Is this the only document to submit?)**

A: For the first stage of the process, the only document to submit is the complete Concept Paper in accordance with NOFO **Sections D.3.1. Stage I – Concept Paper Required Format** (pp. 33-34) and **D.3.2. Stage I – Concept Paper Required Content** (pp. 34-36) for more detail.

* 1. **Is there any outline to follow or form to fill out as part of the 6 pages of the proposal?**

A: There is a general format and page limitation. Please review Sections **D.3.1. Stage I – Concept Paper Required Format** (pp. 33-34) and **D.3.2. Stage I – Concept Paper Required Content** (pp. 34-36) for more detail.

* 1. **A quelle adresse devons-nous soumettre notre notre dossier svp ? (To which address should we submit our file please ?)**

A: The Concept Note must be emailed to [apspartnerships@mcc.gov](mailto:apspartnerships@mcc.gov) . The Concept Note must be submitted in English.

* 1. **Who are the people being part of the evaluation team?**

A: MCC is in the process of assembling a Selection Committee, or the evaluation team. Several members will be part of the MCC WDLN team, but we also expect to bring on some other MCC experts as needed depending on the number of concept notes received. MCC may also invite a representative from Microsoft and/or MCC’s Ivoirian consultant to serve as an advisor to the Selection Committee.

* 1. **When is the next time we get chance to have an online meeting?**

A: The Pre-Concept Conference held on April 20, 2021, was the only meeting we have planned for the Opportunity Statement #10 before the Concept Note due date. If we plan to host another conference, we would let everyone know via an Amendment to the NOFO.

* 1. **MCC paye t-il les impôts et autres charges? (Does MCC pay taxes and other charges?)**

A: No, MCC will not pay any taxes on behalf of the recipient. However, recipients will be reimbursed for relevant taxes incurred.

## **Geographic targeting**

* 1. **Clearly in the presentation of there were clear focus on the geography. I was wondering, whether they are, or other folk use, in particular, whether there is a focus more on, new business creation and focusing more on youth, or not.**

*Q: Is the focus group limited to women entrepreneurs who have existing businesses, or could it be expanded to include women 'wannapreneurs', who haven't yet launched ventures but would be aided in doing so through the skills training?*

*Q: What percentage of women do you expect to "complete" the program? How often will you recruit or bring in new participants?*

*Q: Why this choice of San Pedro?*

*Q: Are we correct in understanding that while the focus should be on 1-2 geographic areas and Growth W-SMEs, there must also be a certain degree of program activity directed at each stage/type of W-SMEs, from a broader set of geographic areas?*

*Q: What should be the geographical scope of our proposal? Could we propose women groups located in Grand Bereby? Tabou? Or should we restrict to the city of San Pedro pls?*

A:Regarding new business creation versus existing firms: While we anticipate working with women who have defined start-up plans, the WDLN program is primarily focused on already existing small businesses. The actual selection criteria for W-SMEs will be developed with the local partner. We anticipate that most of the businesses will be able to employ others (at least 2 employees) and have an existing customer base,. There may be opportunities for more sophisticated and larger women-owned businesses that have been generating a bit of a revenue to be connected to resources like for Microsoft’s [4Afrika](https://www.microsoft.com/africa/4afrika/entrepreneurs.aspx) platform.

MCC takes a systems approach to programming. We are looking for some anchor activities in Abidjan because there are some important linkages and opportunities there that could be leveraged. For, example, government ministries such as the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children as well as the Ministry of Promotion of SMEs. But we would not want to be confined only to Abidjan, as there are already a number of training programs for SMEs and W-SMEs that are active there. We want to target at least one and perhaps two geographic areas outside of Abidjan.

San Pedro was selected because there are currently few donors / funders supporting W-SMEs there, but at the same time there is a port and potential for economic activity – as well as some government initiative around supporting W-SMEs. San Pedro and Bouake are also geographical areas of overlap with MCC Côte d’Ivoire compact activities, which provides for useful potential synergies.

MCC will not be the one “recruiting” W-SMEs, the locally rooted partner identified through this APS partnership opportunity will. MCC will seek input from the local partner on the average duration of a typical W-SME’s involvement. Based on other programs we anticipate however that this could be anywhere from 2-3 weeks for a W-SME that requires specialized training, to a 2-4 month program that supports the W-SMEs through different levels of training, coaching and/or support.

* 1. **Is business banking readily accessible in San Pedro? Are the banks offering competitive borrowing rates? What are their refusal rates for female entrepreneurs? Is there a gender gap in business banking?**

A: MCC fully expects that the selected partner or consortium would want to help us build our knowledge of San Pedro, along with specific banking realities which could be affecting their ability to growth their businesses.

* 1. **La zone du district des montagnes est-elle une zone cible.**

**(Is the mountain district area a target area?)**

A: As noted in previous responses, MCC is proposing to focus some of the activities of the program in San Pedro, not necessarily the mountainous region of Côte d’Ivoire which borders Guinea.

* 1. **What are the IT infrastructure plans for Côte d’Ivoire in the near term? What percentage of the population has access to 3G or 4G networks?**

A: MCC’s foundational study focused principally on the needs and capabilities of W-SMEs to use data, not on the state of IT infrastructure. However, there are a number of studies on such as those published (2020) by [GSMA](https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GSMA-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2020.pdf), along with more recent (Jan 2021) information on digital access within Côte d’Ivoire (see [Data Report](https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-cote-divoire)). There are likely many more such public reports and information available from the [Ivorian Ministry of Information, Communication Technology](https://www.ita.gov.om/itaportal/About/about.aspx) that the applicants can research.

* 1. **When you say "high growth" do you mean compete on a global scale? Across Africa? Within in Côte d’Ivoire? Will the entrepreneurs be able to access sales and marketing support?**

**A:** MCC did NOT say “high” growth, but rather “growth-oriented” W-SMEs vs. subsistence W-SMEs. In other words, MCC recognizes that there are many needs amongst W-SMEs; but we hope to focus on those SMEs that are seeking to create jobs and opportunities for others – and have anywhere from 1-10 employees. As noted in a previous answer (see responses under Q21), MCC hopes to positively impact groups of W-SMEs spanning different capabilities.

In terms of sales and marketing support, MCC could, for example envision, partner-led activities that facilitate access and/or train W-SMEs in using sales, client, and other business information to focus their strategy, marketing, and sales.

## **Number and Type of Beneficiaries**

* 1. **How many beneficiaries would the programme like to reach?**

*Q: I can understand the expected sophistication needed to use data. With that in mind San Pedro region what is the realistic number of entrepreneurs do we want to support?*

*Q: Are there any KPIs or benchmarks in terms of number of participants trained, etc.?*

A: The target number of beneficiaries, types of W-SMEs along the business maturity scale – and cohort size for the program will depend on the geographic areas of focus proposed by the local partner(s); and the operational strategy which they proposed. Consequently, while we are flexible on this point, we are clear that are not looking in the thousands. Instead, we expect cohort-based programming (likely different sets of training and/or activities once the level of data / digital and business capacity is assessed) with on the order of 100 to 200 W-SMEs involved per year.

We will be co-developing KPIs with the local partner; however, we do expect to be asking the local partner to track number of W-SMEs involved, metrics related to training and effect of training, as well as business success / progress metrics.

* 1. **Would there be a specific age range?**

A: There is no specific age range for participants. However, through the MCC-PEPFAR [Data Collaboratives for Local Impact](https://dcli.co) program and the [Des Chiffres et des Jeunes](https://www.dcdj.ci/) Effort, programming related to digital tools and data seemed to principally (more than 80%) appeal to youth. While MCC would not wish to exclude W-SMEs based on age, we expect that many of the W-SMEs that will search out and get involved are likely to be young.

* 1. **Of the women interviewed [in the Foundational Assessment], what is the proportion of those who have an informal activity and those who are formal?**

A: Please refer to the results of Foundational study shared on grants.gov. 58% of the study participants were not registered. As also mentioned during the pre-Concept Conference, we do not see registration as a prerequisite for participating in the program.

* 1. **We work with women associations within our cocoa supply chain. We intend to support them to get registered and plan to involve them in intensive trainings to build their capacity based on proven training tools. These groups are not actually SMEs in the proper definition, but we do see the added value into providing the knowledge actually missing to set up community development. Is the criteria of SMEs being registered absolutely mandatory for the women living in rural areas?**

A: While we recognize the importance of community development and the role played by cooperatives, the focus of the WDLN program is on women that own or manage small and medium sized businesses. The businesses need not be registered, however as noted, we are not focusing on subsistence W- SMEs. Given that the focus on digital and data skills, is it likely that participants we will need to be literate and have numeracy skills.

* 1. **The Geographic and W-SME focus is stipulated to be: 1-2 geographic areas and more so Growth/Opportunity SMEs than Subsistence / Necessity SMEs. However, the 'Guide to Applicants' states: "The Applicant should carefully consider in the project design that proposed interventions are specifically targeted toward women entrepreneurs, including both registered and non-registered W-SMEs, firms of different size and maturity, W-SMEs from different geographic areas, and women SME owners and managers with different levels of business knowledge and data and digital skills."**

A: That is correct, and these statements are not mutually exclusive. Please see MCC’s answer to Q21. We are hoping for a subnational focus – and for the program to target groups of W-SMEs in varying stages of business maturity.

* 1. **Will MCC assist with sourcing W-SMEs who need to be Growth/Opportunity W-SMEs?**

A: MCC expects the local partner(s) to draw and build on their own local SME network – and for the proposed programming to include the establishment of a presence, branding – and outreach that will attract the different categories of W-SMEs – and actively involve them in programming. MCC may facilitate synergies with other MCC or United States Government programs, as well as with other bilateral and multilateral programs focused on SMEs, and in particular W-SMEs. However, the local partner is the one that will be identifying, involving, and sustaining its activities in support of W-SMEs.

* 1. **What is an example of a unique challenge facing women entrepreneurs of high-growth businesses in Côte d’Ivoire as opposed to women entrepreneurs in the US?**

A: Some of the women SMEs that participated in the MCC sponsored survey reported that they cannot be solely focused on their business owner, given their care burdens. In addition, they have limits on their mobility, so if training was held in a location that involves extensive travel and/or overnight stays, they may not to be to take advantage of training and other programming support offered by WDLN. MCC also understands that W-SMEs in Côte d’Ivoire are interested in data and digital training that is most applicable and useful to grow their businesses. They also expressed interests in mentorship programs, r as well as safe locations where there might be an opportunity to meet, network, and obtain advice from more experienced W-SMEs. Many of these needs are not necessarily distinct from some of those that US-based SMEs experience, but they are much more acute.

* 1. **What is the current and trending literacy rate in Côte d’Ivoire?**

A: Literacy rates in Côte d’Ivoire, vary by location, age group and gender – and are still comparatively low. There are several public resources available that interest applicants may review. One here is from UNESCO which can be access here: [Côte d'Ivoire | UNESCO UIS](http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ci).

* 1. **Has anyone created any customer profiles? Customer journey maps? Three years is a long time. I am trying to understand where the woman founder starts and how she progresses through various milestones over the three years +/- assuming she is expected to remain in the program for all three years.**

A: MCC has not developed these, but we expect that these types of journey maps would likely be developed by the local partner – and /or that some of the organizations already working with SMEs in Côte d’Ivoire might already have some.

MCC has not determined how long each individual W-SME would remain engaged in the program. For example, some might remain for the full three years of the program as they progress through successive business stages, whereas others may remain for a particular type of data-related training and/or shorter involvement, lasting as short as 1-3 months. There are many possible approaches that could be taken, and the final design will be decided during co-creation.

* 1. **What are the top 3 industries women entrepreneurs cater to in in Côte d’Ivoire?**

A: As a country, Côte d’Ivoire’s economy depends on agriculture, construction, petroleum products, transport and trade, investment, and consumption. There are likely some public sources of data in Côte d’Ivoire, such as CIPME, that can provide more information on which industries W-SMEs principally focus on. MCC does not currently have this data. Respondents to MCC’s survey indicate that around Abidjan, many W-SMEs are involved in the services sector.

* 1. **What is the average level of educational attainment (specifically literacy) among your target group? Proficiency in Business English?**

A: MCC fully expects that the local partner will either have more precise information about W-SMEs in the area which they may propose to be a focus and/or that additional information / data would be collected as part of the initial programming. Please also see MCC’s response to Q33.

MCC also does not have statistics on English proficiency in Côte d’Ivoire. We expect programming to be in French to be accessible to the broad base of W-SMEs expected, particularly in subnational areas. It is also our understanding that [through MCC’s collaboration with Microsoft](https://www.mcc.gov/news-and-events/release/release-042721-microsoft-and-mcc-sign-mou), some of the Microsoft 4Afrika platform resources may be made available by Microsoft in French.

* 1. **How do you define a woman owned SME? In the US, some organisations require women to own 51% of the equity.**

A: MCC is open to input from the local partner on what would constitute an appropriate definition given the Ivorian context. However, we consider a women-owned SME one that is either majority owned or operated by one or more women.

* 1. **What is demographic of women you want to serve? Understand the survey was limited to women who are online?**

A: MCC recognizes that the survey was biased toward those with internet access and were able to fill it out the survey online. This was because COVID made it hard for us to go out and meet people in person. We recognize we will need to work with the local partner to gather more information on where W-SMEs are and what their skill level is today. At the same time, please note that this program cannot help all W-SMEs in all ways, we will be focused on providing data and digital skills, along with coaching and mentoring or networking that will help convert data and digital skills into stronger business performance.

As noted in answers to previous questions, MCC hopes to focus on growth-oriented (but not necessarily “high” growth) W-SMEs, not subsistence SMEs. Many women are responsible for running businesses out of their house to provide immediate subsistence needs, but other programs are addressing that population. We are also not looking to help the top of the spectrum (i.e. very sophisticated, established W-SMEs). We want to reach smaller groups not being reached by other programs, focusing on digital and data skills directly related to their business needs. We are not looking to change W-SMEs into programmers, but we do want to address the data skills they need to grow their business.

We will be asking of the local partner to help us define and identify the women SMEs. Data in the report is biased, but if you look at the responses from the non-Abidjan based W-SMEs you get closer to the type of W-SMEs we would like to focus on and target.

Our current thinking is of having hundreds of women brought in, grouped by criteria, and supported. We intend that the program does not end when we no longer support it. Some potential applicants are already working on SMEs but not W-SMEs, and we are looking to co-create the process. We are looking to tap into the applicant’s expertise and advice and help establish a branded, successful, and sustainable focus on W-SMEs.

## **Activities and Target Sectors**

* 1. **Are there any other initiatives to support women SMEs in the region? If yes, have you discussed with the sponsors to learn the opportunities and challenges?**

A: There are several different kinds of programs and organizations working with SMEs in Côte d’Ivoire, such as the UN, which is developing a platform through which SMEs, including W-SMEs (in the cassava sector) are trained to access market intermediaries. However, based on our research, it does not appear that there are any programs specifically tailored to the needs of W-SMEs around access to data, information, digital tools, and data skills in order to strengthen their business operations. Once the local partner – and the geographic area of focus – is selected, additional research into the specific data / digital needs of W-SMEs will be necessary.

* 1. **If the survey is already biased toward W-SMEs with access to the internet, and considering that agriculture is the dominant industry in CI (so less literate actors) have you thought about ways to effectively reach those SMEs to gain digital and data literacy skills and tools? Are they any less conventional ways explored/being explored?**

A: The survey was biased, but also helpful (particularly for the respondents from outside of Abidjan) in confirming that there are opportunities to support W-SMEs through data and digital skills, even those that are already connected to the Internet. The WDLN program will not focus on “connecting” women to the Internet (there are other programs, such as the USAID-funded [WomenConnect Challenge](https://www.womenconnectchallenge.org/), that focus on this need). WDLN will likely work with women that are already able to connect to the Internet but are unable to access or sufficiently leverage the information which they could collect -- or are already collecting -- in order to strengthen their business**.**

* 1. **The announcement states that MCC is looking for a consortium “to finalize the design and implement the “Women’s Data Lab and Network” (WDLN)”. What has happened thus far in the program design process and who are the existing stakeholders?**

A: MCC has completed a foundational study and survey of the 800+ W-SMEs. This study included key informant surveys in Côte d’Ivoire, desktop research – and the survey of 800+ W-SMEs. We have also identified the 5 specific outcomes which we would like the program and local partner to focus on and co-design the activities around. MCC and Microsoft have also formed a partnership related to WDLN. More information about the MCC and Microsoft partnership is [available here](https://www.mcc.gov/news-and-events/release/release-042721-microsoft-and-mcc-sign-mou).

* 1. **Outcome 3 mentions data-driven innovation challenges; are we correct in understanding that a certain degree of broader ecosystem building activities are expected, in addition to the core capacity building work?**

A: As noted in our answer to Q21, MCC does expect some level of ecosystem building activities. For Outcome 3 specifically, we sought to include an outcome that would help the local partner stimulate support of W-SMEs in the data / digital innovation space, through targeted small-scale competitions / challenges and/or an accelerator program.

* 1. **Does the program not address the idea of ​​creating employment opportunities for women?**

A: The program is focused on supporting W-SMEs to improve their businesses and specifically through access to information, and the skills needed to leverage that data, digital tools and/or other related business capabilities. Employment opportunity creation would likely be a side-benefit when these W-SMEs grow and are able to hire more women.

* 1. **Do you mean the local digital economy or the global digital economy?**

A: Both are material. Local is important, but once digital the SMEs effectively become part of the global digital economy.

* 1. **Many women-led SME networks already exist across Africa and the diaspora. In what key way(s) will your proposed networks differ?**

A: The WDLN network would focus specifically on W-SMEs in Côte d’Ivoire that are connecting to become more adept at leveraging data, collecting data – and using digital tools to enable more strategic business tracking, pricing, service delivery and profit margins, amongst others.

* 1. **Will sub programs for women be created based on socioeconomic background, age, religion, parental or caring responsibilities, etc.?**

A: Ideally, any sub programs created would be based on needs / data & digital skill level; however, some of the considerations noted in the question will be important for the local partner to consider in order to ensure that the programming (i.e. time, format, duration, physical vs. virtual, services provided to participants during meetings/training, etc.) is compatible with such factors.

* 1. **Will the women receive cash support to take time off from work or school, or be helped with daycare?**

A: Costs / expenses will need to comply with 2 CFR 200 requirements. Please see response to Q46, in that we hope the local partner will design the programming and activities to be compatible with the local reality of W-SMEs that are targeted.

* 1. **Will funds be made available for promising women entrepreneurs to be able to fly to Europe or say, San Francisco, to pitch her business and obtain venture capital funding?**

A: The intent of the program is not to help bring entrepreneurs to pitch to global investors for further funding**.** However, there are opportunities where the country partner could establish new private sector partnerships that could support such initiatives in the future. We do hope that local partner can identify subset of women who are ready for more resources (see WDLN Outcome #4), but the resources contemplated through the 4Africa platform are mostly virtual. Through WDLN Outcome #3 we may also be interest in supporting innovative W-SMEs by connecting them to established accelerators and/or other training partners.

* 1. **Is there a budget for food during these training days? For example, will you provide lunch or even breakfast?**

A: The specifics of what are allowable costs are provide in2 CFR 200 . However, this question suggests that it might be important to clarify the stage at which we are: This is a pre-concept note submittal, the first step of a process through which MCC hopes to competitively identify a partner with whom the program can be designs. At stage (Concept Note Preparation), we're looking for good teams that have experience on the ground, and that have a great idea that is in line with the 5 outcomes that we have identified in the Opportunity Statement. Once we have reviewed these concepts, MCC will invite select organizations with the most promising concepts, strategies, and teams to co-create the program with MCC. After co-creation, the select team(s) will need to provide all the details of a full proposal with the budget. We are not looking for a budget currently. Budget will come in stage 3, final award stage. Food costs are generally unallowed cost, but if a valid reason is provided, we could include it.

* 1. **What if the women entrepreneurs are direct competitors? Would you want the entrepreneurs to merge? or partner? Or would you recommend they continue to compete on an individual basis?**

A: MCC hopes the WDLN activities would tailor the activities and training to the specific data and digital related needs of W-SMEs. In that sense, the goal of the partner would be to impart those skills and ensure those skills are helpful to strengthen all participants – while leaving market capture and ultimate results and outcomes to the W-SMEs.

* 1. **If another pandemic hit, would you pause the program? Would you move to online training? Would you offer additional support around health or family issues?**

A: MCC would like the local partner to propose a concept that is compatible with the current reality, amidst an evolving COVID-19 situation. WDLN always considered some element of online / virtual programming, but we also believe that some in-person (with appropriate COVID-19 precautions) programming will be needed. Consequently, we are looking for a program that embraces the reality and helps us to achieve the 5 target outcomes included in the opportunity statement despite the current outlook.

* 1. **Are you targeting any particular industries or sectors, such as agriculture, waste management, healthcare, etc.**

A: No. WDLN is sector agnostic, but we do expect our “niche” to impact W-SMEs to involve training, coaching, and mentoring (virtual or in person) to enable greater use of data. As noted in a previous response (see response to Q21), this may require some level of ecosystem building so that program, services, and systems that provide information that could be relevant to W-SMEs reach them, particularly in subnational areas.

* 1. **Perhaps part of the program could be to introduce women to unfamiliar industries along with increasing their digital skills. Just a suggestion**

A: WDLN will support W-SMEs through improved data use and better digital skills. However, during in-person programs they will come into contact with other entrepreneurs, who could be from different sectors.

* 1. **Did you look at the infrastructure because when we talk about data and everything, we have to look also at the wifi, the internet.**

A: There is a need for better digital infrastructure, and across all of MCC’s partner countries, there's a need for more and better connectivity -- in particular, outside of what might be the larger cities or the capitals. There are other funders / donors that are focused on this space; and WDLN may in time seek to collaborate or link with such initiatives. For WDLN, MCC will be focusing on the human capital element of data and digital tool use, and specifically that of W-SMEs.

* 1. **We are speaking English and Abidjan is a French colony. The mentality is a little different, versus something like, where they already have the mindset and, small businesses and growing, in French colonies is more, a set mind on, corporate war kind of, so it's already a task trying to get them into believing in small businesses, before even getting to the data level.**

A: There are many reasons why we decided on Côte d’Ivoire, and we're very excited about this investment being in Côte d’Ivoire. As you can see in the back of the fact sheet that we all shared with you before this call, we have other investments in Côte d’Ivoire: There’s an MCC, investment in the education and transport sector, that also has elements of gender in gender and social inclusion in it. There was also a three-year program called the [Data Collaboratives for Local Impact](http://dcli.co/), where we have worked with youth to bring about greater use of data and digital tools. So, we're very excited to build on this, and ensure that W-SMEs in Côte d’Ivoire are provided some competitive advantage through greater use of data and digital tools.

* 1. **For SMEs are you also looking to potentially connect them to global value chains, whether it's regionally or internationally?**

A: As explained in our answer to Q21, we will focus on 1-2 geographic regions – and within those on groups of growth-oriented W-SMEs along different stages of business maturity. Most of our effort should be on W-SMEs that are not yet ready to scale; however, through outcome #4 we hope the local partner will help to identify women that have the potential to benefit from regional networks and/or are ready to scale regionally. These are the cohorts / groups of women which the local partner would seek to prepare, and which may then benefit from the Microsoft [4Afrika](https://www.microsoft.com/africa/4afrika/entrepreneurs.aspx) program.

* 1. **Is your belief that mentoring is the #1 factor for success among women entrepreneurs?**

A: We don’t know if it’s the principal success factor, but it is an important element. We would be curious to hear what prospective partners think based on their experience.

## **IT Equipment**

* 1. **Design might require purchasing IT equipment that might not be available in Cote Ivoire. It might be a large portion on the budget. How does your proposal requirement account for this?**

A: The focus of this program is on the skills and know-how of W-SMEs in subnational areas – and not necessarily on those that are higher end yet, but those that are connected to the Internet and have an interest in growing. While some equipment purchase might be allowable, it would need to be justified under the 200 CFR requirements.

* 1. **At the end of the training, is it possible to donate digital or computer equipment to certain beneficiaries? Does the budget take into account equipment purchases?**

A: Per 200 CFR requirements – and depending on the individual and aggregate value of any equipment purchased, upon the end of the program and the resulting cooperative agreement, the local partner would have an opportunity to propose an asset disposition plan, which would be reviewed – and would need to be approved by MCC.

* 1. **Will the women receive IT infrastructure such as laptops and modems?**

A: Please see response to Q58.

## **Digital Skills**

* 1. **Does the program plan to train, build capacity for the benefit of women on the notion of digital technology?**

A: MCC hopes that the local partner(s) will assess predominant W-SME data and digital skill needs and build these businesses’ capabilities to use both tools and information that can help grow their businesses. **Attachment 1** to this Q&A includes examples of data and digital skills, and methods by which W-SMEs could use data to strengthen their businesses.

* 1. **When you mention digital skills, to what level do you hope to equip these women? For example, to be able to build a website, to learn to code, to become competent in emerging technologies? Something else?**

A: Please refer to our answer to Q61 – and Attachment 1 for some ideas. MCC does not wish to suggest that W-SMEs should be learning how to code or become data experts. However, we would like the W-SMEs to become more aware of the kinds of data sets that are either already available (open data), which they could obtain from different government agencies, or which they could collect themselves (client data, pricing information) – and help their business leverage this information to provide better service, pricing, strategic marketing, and/or other enhancements that would increase their profit margins and/or make their product or service more competitive.

* 1. **What are some examples of digital capabilities their customers expect or require?**

Please refer to our answer to Q61, Q62 – and Attachment 1 for some ideas

* 1. **Is the expectation to have single Data Lab or to have satellite Labs in multiple regions in the country?**

A: MCC envisions activities in Abidjan and in a subnational location like San Pedro. While we believe that a physical location is important to provide a center of activities for the program, we are open to suggestions on different modalities based on the partners’ current footprint / space and facilities in country – and their understanding of the necessary space (physical and/or virtual) to accommodate programming.

* 1. **Can we learn more about the level of use of digital tools for women in San Pedro?**

A: MCC welcomes proposals that include a rapid assessment of the level of use of digital tools by W-SMEs in the San Pedro area; and/or that propose a set of activities while concurrently validating and structuring additional ones on the basis of such an assessment.

**Q66: How do we envision this tool being used by SMEs? Not sure whether traditional methods will meet requirements in scalable manner. Do we envision women coming in constantly for training, or ways that are more flexible and in tune with technology we are using today?**

A: MCC is open to ideas that will help W-SMEs derive more benefit from the digital and data revolution. We are not looking at a “tool” per say, but rather agile and flexible programming that assesses W-SMEs businesses needs and then tailors data and digital skills building activities to fill capacity gaps / access business opportunities.

This will involve a mix of in person and virtual programming, with activities that are in line with the global trends (more information, more data and the need to strategically mine this data). Based on our experience in other parts of Africa and Côte d’Ivoire, youth and women need safe spaces to access mentors, meet other participants, get training they need.

Based on the results of the foundational study, there are opportunities to support W-SMEs with tools for visualizing their data, accessing prices, marketing. We are hoping the local partner will propose a program that tracks needs and adapts program activities in an agile way to the evolving needs of different groups of W-SMEs. Will not remain static but will change along with W-SMEs.

## **Partners**

**Q67: What is the current relationship with Microsoft 4Afrika, and what types of support does MCC hope Microsoft 4Afrika or other regional partners will be able to provide?**

A: [MCC has signed a memorandum of understanding with Microsoft](https://www.mcc.gov/news-and-events/release/release-042721-microsoft-and-mcc-sign-mou) that will make Microsoft 4Afrika platform resource more accessible to a subset of W-SMEs in Côte d’Ivoire. Key resources will be adapted, translated, and made available to the WDLN program.

**Q68: Is Microsoft offering special discounts to the women entrepreneurs? If so, in what ways?**

A: MCC is not aware of such discounts.

**Q69: Does MCC have preferred Ivorian partners to partner with for the program?**

A: No. This MCC Annual Program Statement (APS) and the WDLN partnership opportunity is an open, fair, and competitive process by which MCC seeks to select a partner or consortium of partners best positioned to finalize the design, implement, and take ownership of the program.

**Q70: Would the local partner be accountable for finding local partners and funding?**

A: The primary role of the partner will be to contribute to the final design, develop an implementation plan including a sustainability plan, implement the program, and ensure its sustainability. To access the federal funding, the partner would have to meet the specified cost share requirements for this opportunity. The primary partner is welcome to bring on additional local, regional, or international partners that wish to contribute resources to the program. Importantly, the partner should be considering its approach to sustaining the program, either through synergies of broader SMEs program which it already oversees, or through other revenue-generation activities.

**Q71: To what extent will the successful candidate be expected to work with DCLI’s partner, Sejen Cl?**

A: There is no such expectation. This MCC Annual Program Statement (APS) and partnership opportunity is the process by which MCC seeks to select a partner or consortium of partners best positioned to finalize the design, implement, and take ownership of the program.

**Q72: What, if any, local government support exists or is forthcoming?**

A: It is MCC’s understanding that there is increasing interest on the part of the Ivorian Government; however, it is unclear what local government support exist. MCC would expect the local partner to leverage its existing network including local government contacts and counterparts to ensure there is local support of the program.

## **Metrics of Success**

**Q73: What kinds of growth metrics, you all are looking for from the participating businesses, is this online growth? What type of growth outcomes? Percentage of growth?**

*Q: The announcement states that MCC is looking for the consortium to help women-owned SME's “grow their business”. What specifically is MCC looking for with respect to SME business growth, is there a growth target that needs to be achieved? Does the growth need to be specifically through online channels?*

*Q: Are there any tangible outcomes, KPIs or targets for the program?*

*Q: Programs for women entrepreneurs in the USA mean well, but often struggle to achieve their targets. Do you have an opinion on why women owned businesses tend to fail? I ask, because the answer could inform the concept paper.*

A: It doesn't have to be online growth. We are looking for businesses that can move up in maturity - building client base, employing more people, market strategy etc. It's also about helping these businesses move from one phase of the business cycle to another – building out their team, leveraging data to make better business decisions, increasing their revenue, and ultimately expanding into new markets. We know that there are many programs in Abidjan, but few dedicated specifically to W-SMEs during all stages of their business lifecycle.

**Q74: What does success look like to MCC, especially in terms of metrics? So, for instance, I understand that at the end of the program to have equipped women with digital skills, et cetera. What is the size of the impact you're looking for? What are some of the success metrics that's important to you?**

*Q: What are the leading indicators of success for the programme?*

A: MCC shared the 5 high-level outcomes; these five outcomes are what success would look like for us. The program will have made a difference if, at the end of five years, there will have been hundreds of women that will have been brought in, grouped, and then supported through specific data / digital and other business insights training, mentoring, and coaching – reaching measurable effects. The other big outcome is that this program does not end the moment MCC’s support ends, because we're hoping to work with entities that are already working with SMEs, but perhaps don't have a program specialized in women SMEs, and are interested in doing this through this funding.

**Q75: Is there less of a focus on bringing more women into creating their own businesses, rather the focus is on the existing businesses that are in the space and creating an ecosystem that would then encourage more women to join? Is increasing the number of women creating businesses a side effect or spillover?**

A: We do want to focus mainly on existing businesses. Increasing the number of women creating businesses would in fact be less of a focus and more of a spillover effect. However, as explained in answer to Q21, some ecosystem level investments that are helpful even to new businesses could be proposed (e.g. opening up data sets that could be used by W-SMEs, extending the support that is available in Abidjan to W-SMEs in subnational area of focus, etc.)

## **Appendix 1: Women SME Entrepreneurs and Digital and Data Skills**

**What do we mean by digital skills**:

[Broadband Commission report](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002590/259013e.pdf) proposes seeing digital skills and competences on a spectrum, including:

* **Basic functional digital skills**, which allow users to access and conduct basic operations on digital technologies;
* **Generic digital skills**, which include using digital technologies in meaningful and beneficial ways, such as content creation and online collaboration; and
* **Higher-level skills**, which mean using digital technology in empowering and transformative ways, for example for software development. These skills include 21st century skills and critical digital literacies.

***Note:*** The [Principles for Digital Development](https://digitalprinciples.org/) codify high-level best practices for any digital project

**Women SME owners’ needs that can be met with digital skills, products, and information:**

* Basic skill level, which allow users to access and conduct basic operations on digital technologies. Examples include:
  + Accessing digital financial products, including e-banking and mobile money
  + Accessing digital insurance products
  + Accepting and making payments (e.g., mobile money, mobile wallets)
  + Accessing information and services (e.g., weather, agricultural extension information)
  + Spreadsheet skills, including tracking income and expenses, cash flow, sales, inventory, and basic visualizations like charts and graphs
  + Basic accounting, marketing and branding
* Medium/Higher skill level, which include using digital technologies in meaningful and beneficial ways, such as content creation and online collaboration. Examples include:
  + Digitizing records/bookkeeping, and understanding and analyzing own data
  + Marketing/communications with customers (e.g., social media and messaging)
  + Accessing markets (e.g., online marketplaces)
  + Planning and mapping delivery services, to buy and sell goods and services
  + Inventory access and management
  + Strategic planning
  + Product development (marketing and packaging, commercialization, and registration of products, etc.)
  + Operations analysis
  + Logistics optimization
  + Website design
  + Business plan and access to finance training
* Skills/tools specific to [women’s entry into sustainable market systems](https://www.ictworks.org/solve-your-gender-gap-problem/)
  + Inventory access and management
  + Access to credit
  + Logistics
  + Market growth and marketing

**Business needs that could be met with the combination of business skills when paired with digital skills and data could include:**

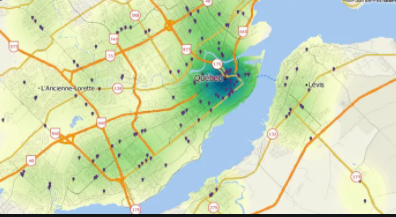
* **Micro and small WSMEs**
  + Mapping routes, services, and customers using open street maps
  + Simple spreadsheets for cash flow, inventory tracking, sales, expenses
* **Medium-sized WSMEs**
  + Visualizations using MSMEs data:
  + Dashboards, graphs, and charts to track the firm’s cash flow, sales, costs, etc.
  + Forecasts, strategic planning
  + Mapping: satellite and/or street map data merged with MSME’s data
  + Customer route optimization to save time and transportation costs
  + “Heat maps” for customer density, to target sales
  + Operational Efficiency
  + Real-Time Location Tracking
  + Risk Management
  + Situational Awareness
* **Higher-level WSMEs and Startups**
  + Site Analysis and Territory Planning
  + For aggregators, managing value chain of smaller MSMEs
  + Providing business-to-business data analytics, dashboards, and platforms
  + Strategic support for market expansion and growth capital

**Examples of data that the entrepreneurs might use could include:**

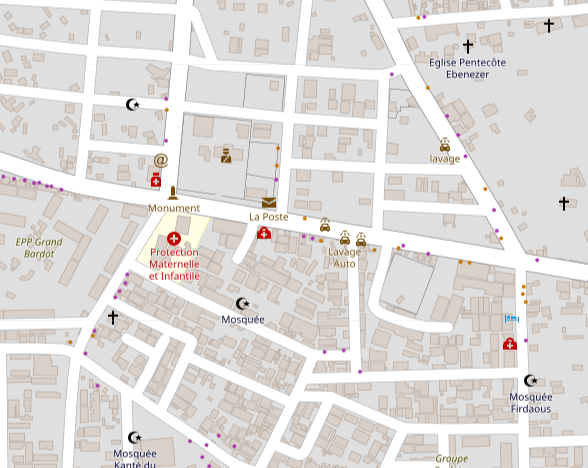
* **“Open” data freely available to the public:**
  + Satellite data (e.g., USGS Earth Explorer)
    - Roads, waterways, and footpaths
    - Rainfall
    - Terrain and vegetation
    - Night lights (indicating electricity access)
  + Government data
    - Weather
    - [National Statistics Office](https://cotedivoire.opendataforafrica.org/data/#menu=topic) demographics, health, infrastructure, and economic data
    - [Citizen-generated data](https://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Making%20Use%20of%20Citizen-Generated%20Data%20-%20Data4SDGs%20Toolbox%20Module.pdf) (explore possibility of open data competition to support the needs of WSMEs)
      * Street maps
      * Social media
      * Surveys and polls
      * SMS messages
      * Sensors
* **Data that can be generated and digitized by MSMEs themselves:**
  + Banking and accounting: cash flow, loan repayment schedules
  + Customers: revenues, locations, previous orders
  + Expenses: utilities, rent, delivery/transportation costs, payroll, taxes
  + Suppliers: orders, expenses, locations
  + Product data: amounts, inventory, cost per good sold
  + Scheduling: routes, recurring services
* **Data packaged on platforms/apps:**
  + [ArcGIS](http://www.arcgis.com/) satellite data platform
  + Google analytics for MSME website
  + Facebook analytics for MSME Facebook page
  + Microsoft cloud tools

**Sample visualizations:**

**Customer density map:**



**Open street maps:**



1. As announced during the [MCC’s Solomon Islands Threshold Program Industry Day](https://beta.sam.gov/opp/207614047a264a18944cec0f06c193f2/view), which was held virtually on February 24, 2021, MCC will reveal the Estimate Federal Budget for this partnership opportunity during Stage II, Co-Creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)