



UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assis
Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (USAID/DCHA/DRG)**

**Active Communities - Effective States (ACES)
Annual Program Statement (APS)
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Pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, the United States Government (USG), as represented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA), Center of Excellence on Democracy, Rights and Governance (DRG) invites Applications for the Active Communities - Effective States (ACES) program.

The purpose of this Annual Program Statement (APS) is to disseminate information to prospective Applicants so they may develop and submit Applications for USAID funding. This APS: (A) describes the types of activities for which Applications will be considered; (B) describes the funding available and the process and requirements for submitting Applications; (C) explains the criteria for evaluating Applications; and (D) refers prospective applicants to relevant documentation available on the internet.

USAID anticipates awarding multiple grants and/or cooperative agreements under addenda to this APS. However, publishing this APS does not commit USAID to make any awards.

The ACES APS is not a Request for Applications (RFA) or a Request for Proposals (RFP). Rather, the ACES APS requests Concept Notes in response to addenda published to this APS. Based on the review of those Concept Notes by a USAID team, USAID will determine whether to request a full Application from an appropriate partner.

To be competitive under a particular addendum to this APS, Applications must be fully responsive to all directions under this APS document except when specifically noted otherwise in the addendum.

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A - PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center) provides USAID Missions with analytical and technical support to strengthen democratic development with programs that advance USAID's goal of achieving partner country self-reliance. The DRG Center advances governance and rule of law, civil society and media, elections and political transitions, human rights, and the integration of DRG principles and practices across the Agency's entire development portfolio. USAID seeks to promote democratic development by, among other ways, fostering greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the law, using citizen-led approaches.

This is an invitation to qualified U.S. and non-U.S., non-profit or for-profit, non-governmental and international organizations to collaborate with USAID in developing programs that seek to achieve one or more of the following ACES goals:

- 1) **Enhancing Accountability and Corruption Control** - Developing institutions, processes and systems that strengthen government accountability and mitigate or reduce corruption;
- 2) **Strengthening Legislative Function and Process** - Strengthening legislative functions and processes in ways that promote more democratic, transparent and inclusive governance;
- 3) **Devolution and Local Governance** - Strengthening the ability of local governments to be more responsive, effective, inclusive, and accountable;
- 4) **Promoting Justice, Rights and Security** - Strengthening and/or establishing new legal systems that promoting greater rule of law and security sector reform; and
- 5) **Elections and Political Transitions**- Promotion of inclusive, transparent and credible electoral and political processes.

ACES APS Funding Priorities and Programmatic Objectives

The ACES APS seeks to foster greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the law through activities that advance the USAID objective of supporting partner countries' journey to self-reliance. This APS also supports USAID country development and cooperation strategies (CDCS) for all USAID Missions, Regional Platforms, and Washington-based operating units. These objectives are not discrete; rather, they can and do overlap. Applications for the ACES APS can thus engage multiple areas of focus, depending on the goals and objectives of the proposed program. The discussion below clarifies the types of activities in each of the categories that comprise the scope of the ACES APS.

Accountability and Corruption Control

Corruption is defined by both USAID and Transparency International as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." Corruption erodes good governance and democratic institutions and processes, impedes sustainable social and economic development and fair business practices, and reinforces inequality. Its persistence in developing countries can exacerbate conditions of poor public health and education and spur unrest or conflict that can threaten U.S. interests.

While more research is needed on gender and experiences of corruption, it is understood that individuals and communities who are already vulnerable and/or marginalized within society and more vulnerable to corruption, and that the way men and women experience corruption may differ.

Women are disproportionately affected by corruption. First, women often have limited access to decision-making; corruption undermines a level playing field for women and men in decision-making roles. Second, women's civil rights are often grossly inequitable and not protected when it comes to key social, political, and economic issues. As a result, women rely more heavily on public services, have more frequent interaction with public service providers, and face increased risk of exploitation by corrupt state actors. This also holds true for persons with disabilities and other traditionally marginalized groups. These individuals may be more likely to face demands for bribes, suffer from sexual exploitation, be trafficked, and/or face greater barriers to seeking accountability. At the same time, men may be more likely to encounter corruption in the economic or business sphere, and may face pressures to engage in corruption due to expectations around serving as the sole provider for their families. It is clear that transparency and gender-responsive accountability systems are necessary both to end corruption and to ensure equality of access, services, and justice for all people. Integrating gender into anti-corruption and accountability systems strengthens representative institutions and helps further inclusive democracy, in support of our DRG objectives.

USAID seeks to support country-led strategies, efforts and policies aimed at preventing corruption in its various forms and manifestations. Activities could include but are not limited to efforts to simplify government functions and processes (e.g. using one-stop-shops or “e-governance”) to render them less opaque and corruption-prone.

The ACES APS seeks to encourage efforts by civil society or the private sector to improve fiscal transparency and government responsiveness in delivering public services using “social accountability” tools – online and mobile platforms and other information and communications technologies -- that are scalable. It also seeks to promote utilization of access to information laws and whistleblower protection laws.

Legislative Function and Process

Legislative bodies are the primary mechanism through which public policy is shaped and the economic and social course of a democratic country is charted. The degree to which legislatures function freely and effectively is an important measure of democracy. Similarly, the extent to which legislatures are gender-sensitive and representative may be understood as a measure of inclusive democracy. While parliaments may be arenas that replicate entrenched inequalities, they also present a critical opportunity to advance gender equality and human rights. Taking steps to empower women legislators and to ensure that legislatures are gender-sensitive in both their work and as institutions is critical in creating stronger, more inclusive legislative bodies. Legislatures that are gender-sensitive and whose membership, leadership, structure, rules of procedures, and practices are inclusive are better able to represent their constituents, operate effectively, and advance inclusive democracy. Supporting such efforts supports our objectives under USAID's “*Democracy, Rights and Governance Strategy*”¹ (Hereafter referred to as the “DRG Strategy”).

With the ACES APS, USAID will support country-led efforts to improve the effectiveness of national or subnational legislatures in overseeing executive authority, and in holding all branches of government

¹ <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy-human-rights-and-governance-strategy>

accountable. USAID will also support efforts to strengthen the role of legislatures in policy reform processes, from identifying constituent interests to developing appropriate policy solutions; to drafting implementable laws, to advocating for the enactment of laws and monitoring their implementation.

Devolution and Local Governance

Devolution brings local governance structures to the fore and increases the amount of power and responsibility that local entities have in governing, budgeting, and service provision. Local governance is also the point at which connections between DRG and other sectors are most salient. Such a redistribution of power has the potential to empower citizens by stimulating greater participation in the political process, more effective provision of public services, and more responsive government. However, persistent gender inequality and discrimination against women and traditionally marginalized groups, including youth, people with disabilities, indigenous persons, and members of ethnic or religious minorities, may have the effect of reinforcing inequitable power structures and further marginalizing certain groups within the context of devolution. Barriers to equality within local governance and devolution processes include pervasive gender discrimination, unequal distribution of labor, low literacy levels, closed political parties, corruption, and lack of transparency within local governance. Integrating gender into devolution and local governance programming to address these barriers creates powerful opportunities to help further inclusive democracy and equitable service delivery in support of our objectives under USAID's DRG Strategy.

Under the ACES APS, USAID will support country-led reforms to advance devolution and improve the accountability, transparency and inclusiveness of local governments and their responsiveness and effectiveness in delivering public goods and services. USAID will also support efforts to promote cooperation between levels of government as a means of improving the performance of both subnational and national governments in shared or delegated functions, strengthen citizen participation in subnational government decision making function transparently and to respond effectively to inputs and requests from citizens of all communities; and providing assistance to develop and/or strengthen municipal associations to provide local governments with a permanent vehicle to advocate for their interests before the national government.

Justice, Rights and Security

Justice, Rights and Security are important development outcomes and are also means to achieving other development goals and outcomes in areas of democracy and governance. They are inextricably linked to strengthening peace, mitigating conflict, preventing crime and corruption, and combating extremism. Justice, Rights and Security are also fundamental to economic growth and foreign investment as well as to improvements in livelihoods, health, education, and the environment.

Order and security, legitimacy, checks and balances, fairness, and effective application are all elements of Justice, Rights and Security.² In strengthening these elements, USAID engages the full spectrum of state and non-state justice and security institutions and actors at national and community levels to strengthen the availability, accessibility, effectiveness, and quality of justice and security services.

² USAID, Guide to Rule of Law Country Analysis: The Rule of Law Strategic Framework, 2010

Under the ACES APS, USAID will support country-led and evidence-based reforms to promote Justice, Rights and Security, including but not limited to those aimed at building systems and the capacity of relevant institutions. These reforms may include strengthening public trust in justice and security institutions and the rule of law, making the law work for people in their daily lives, including resolving civil and administrative matters, enhancing citizen security for all, and promoting good governance and civilian control of the security sector.

Justice, Rights and Security activities under ACES will use a rights-based approach. To that end, it will empower people to know, use and shape the law, to assert their rights in demanding the services to which they are entitled to by law, to obtain remedies when their rights have been violated, and to hold those in authority accountable for their actions or inactions. Finally, the rights-based approach requires an examination of inequality, discrimination, and exclusion with regards to women and disadvantaged populations.

Elections and Political Transitions

Elections and other political processes are pivotal to a country's governance and can either greatly advance or set back a country's long-term democratic development. The quality of electoral and political processes, competition and representation, and the creation of checks and balances are at the heart of the challenges democracy practitioners face today. Elections provide citizens with the critical opportunity to choose their representatives in a competitive, participatory process. USAID uses a comprehensive 'election cycle' approach that ensures close linkages among long, medium, and short-term interventions. This cycle includes the important periods between elections where elected officials engage with their constituents, political parties and candidates hone their platforms to better reflect citizen priorities; and civil society organizations conduct oversight of government performance. Furthermore, USAID recognizes that it is not sufficient to focus only on election day, nor on a single election cycle. Because conducting elections and political processes requires focus on multiple and interconnected areas of work, the most significant gains can be made through early, comprehensive, and sustained support.

Experience shows that elections, even when meeting public expectations of integrity, frequently result in elected political actors ill-equipped to govern and work together in an unfamiliar political landscape. The resulting inability to deliver public goods and services in a timely manner, and the failure of nascent democratic governments to demonstrate tangible improvements in the day-to-day lives of citizens, undermines public confidence not just in particular governments but also in democratic governance itself.

Under ACES, USAID will support local actors to promote communities where all citizens are empowered to participate in governance and politics, including participation in credible, transparent, and inclusive political processes. Programming may include support to government institutions to administer credible, transparent, and inclusive elections, and promote the development and application of impartial electoral legal frameworks. It may also include efforts to enhance citizen oversight and advocacy for the integrity of elections; reduce barriers for marginalized groups to participate; and ensure election security and prevent and mitigate electoral violence. In compliance with USAID's Political Parties Assistance Policy, programming under ACES can also assist political parties to be more representative and effective at cultivating policy-based agendas that are responsive to citizen needs. Finally, USAID recognizes the peaceful transfer of power through established procedures generate public recognition for

the legitimacy of the democratic process. Under ACES, USAID can support the consensus-building transition processes, and technical assistance to newly established governments post-transition.

B - ACES CORE PRINCIPLES

Contribution to Country Self- Reliance and Sustainability

“Self-Reliance” is a country’s ability to plan, finance, and implement solutions to solve its own development challenges. USAID believes that two mutually-reinforcing factors determine a country’s self-reliance:

- **Commitment:** the degree to which a country’s laws, policies, actions, and informal governance mechanisms -- such as cultures and norms -- support progress towards self-reliance; and
- **Capacity:** how far a country has come in its journey across the dimensions of political, social, and economic development, including the ability to work across these sectors.

As a country increases its commitment and capacity to plan, finance, and manage its own development, its level of self-reliance should also increase. At USAID, we believe that as self-reliance increases, our partnership should also evolve -- ensuring that the programs we implement are best-supporting a country’s journey to self-reliance³.

USAID’s efforts under ACES to support good governance and Justice, Rights and Security are geared towards promoting country self-reliance based on local solutions and leveraging local systems⁴. Engagement of local governments and non-governmental partners such as civil society organizations is essential to promoting the sustainability of goals and outcomes. Applications must therefore include local partners in conducting work, and/or components focused on strengthening local organizations and institutions. Recipients should mentor and coach local partners, support surveys, assessments and analyses carried out by partner governments or local organizations.

Readiness for Collaboration, Adaptability, and Scalability

ACES APS activities are expected to contribute to USAID’s Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) approach to development⁵. The CLA approach is based on the understanding that development efforts yield more effective results if they are coordinated and collaborative, and build on what works and eliminate what does not.

Potential for Impact

ACES APS activities are expected to have a sustained impact, paying particular attention to:

³ <https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance>

⁴ <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-systems-framework>

⁵ <https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/understanding-cla-0>

- **Feasibility:** The proposed approach should have well-defined and achievable objectives. The enabling environment and the proposed combination of partner assets, resources and expertise should be sufficient to yield significant impact on a specific and important development challenge.
- **Sustainability:** The proposed project should demonstrate the potential to yield sustainable solutions to the development challenge being addressed. These solutions should indicate how implementers will engage with an inclusive set of stakeholders and leverage resources from said stakeholders to ensure the project is long-standing.
- **Scalability:** Where appropriate, USAID will consider whether and how the proposed approaches can be scaled or replicated in a manner that would offer a broader set of impacts at the national, regional or global level.

Basis in Evidence and Self-Reliance Metrics⁶

USAID strives to build an evidence base for its support to accountable, democratic governance through impact and program evaluations, along with evidence from existing research. Activities under this APS will align with and advance the DRG Center's Learning Agenda⁷ and may include performance, impact, and ex-post evaluations and surveys. Recipients will be required to cooperate with external (impact or performance) evaluation teams and provide reasonable logistical assistance to evaluation teams. USAID will rely on recipients for quality data measuring program performance, based on a monitoring and evaluation plan agreed upon under each award.

The first step in better supporting countries along their respective journeys to self-reliance is being able to understand where in the journey they are in the first place. This is the central goal of the Self-Reliance Metrics effort.⁸

Integration of Gender Equality, Women, Youth and Marginalized Populations' Empowerment

Effective gender integration is particularly critical to our work in the field of democracy, human rights, and governance. If USAID's work does not ensure that both men and women have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from its programs and in the political life of their societies, then we are failing in our efforts both to promote participatory, representative and inclusive political processes and government institutions and to foster greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the law. Gender analysis reveals how gender-based power--both privilege and domination and marginalization and subordination--is socially constructed and, as such, can be changed or even wholly transformed. From country-level to activity-level, gender analysis illuminates how political actors and other stakeholders exercise power in gendered ways and which stakeholders are disempowered by dominant gender norms and gender relations among stakeholders. Gender analysis of legal and policy frameworks, state institutions, influential faith and cultural institutions, and civil society organizations helps to identify areas for reform and opportunities to support coalition-building, dialogue, and organizing.

⁶ <https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance/what-self-reliance-metrics>

⁷ <https://usaideallearninglab.org/library/usaaid-drg-2017-learning-agenda>

⁸ <https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance/what-self-reliance-metrics>

The DRG Strategy prioritizes empowering reformers and citizens from the bottom up, so they can have a greater say in how they are governed, are better represented throughout the process, and have a stake in the process. The DRG Strategy recognizes that citizen voice and participation are essential to build and sustain democratic societies. Yet, in many countries, large groups of people are excluded from involvement in the political processes that define their opportunities and quality of life. Traditionally marginalized groups face even greater and particularly challenging barriers to participation and representation. While advancing universal principles of human rights protection and promotion, and the prevention of human rights abuses, USAID also places particular emphasis on addressing the barriers to political participation and other freedoms for women, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, LGBTI persons, indigenous peoples, and other traditionally marginalized populations, including ethnic and religious minorities. The characteristics that can lead to marginalization differ among and within countries and include geography, ethnicity, race, religion, creed, age, class, caste, disability, education, and sexual orientation.

USAID policies seek to reduce inequality between women and men and enable women and girls to realize their full potential, determine their life outcomes, influence decision-making, and become change agents in households, communities, and societies with parental guidance for children. When applicable, activities should address an approach to identifying and addressing gender-specific issues such as gender gaps in access to services, protection of the law; enjoyment of rights and benefits, etc. Activities, when applicable, should address approaches to promoting increased women's representation in formal and informal institutions, and how they will track differential impacts on male and female participants in all activities from baseline to end line. For guidance on gender analysis and integration, see ADS 201.3.11.6, ADS 302.3.5.15, ADS 303.3.6.3.⁹

- Politically smart, locally-led: Invest in ongoing political economy analysis and in understanding institutions, rules of the game, power dynamics, incentives and norms - not just in organizations. This lens will be critical to achieving sustainable, locally-owned results.
- Align programming with existing country strategies, frameworks and commitments (e.g. OGP national action plans) - when/where they have local ownership.
- Maximize USAID's convening power to build networks and coalitions that include non-traditional partners, and that bring together diverse partners around issues and reforms that have strong locally-driven support.
- Leverage and collaborate with other USAID and donor programs wherever possible.
- Place small bets and test viable pathways and incentives for change. Acknowledge failure and recognize its importance to the learning process.
- Be creative about how to foster and empower emerging leaders - especially women, youth, and other marginalized groups.
- Build in adaptability: Seize on unexpected windows of opportunity and critical junctures, and be prepared to flex quickly if needed.

⁹ <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/agency-policy>

C - FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Opportunities

This APS is unfunded and represents the framework through which later, funded addenda will be constructed. The DRG Center will collaborate with Missions and other USAID operating units to post specific funding opportunities through addenda to this APS that address development challenges of importance to USAID. USAID will also organize meetings upon the release of addenda to explain the process to potential partners. These addenda will likely focus on particularly intractable or impactful development challenges that may occur within or across specific countries, regions, or sectors. Addenda will be the exclusive source of funding through this APS and will be posted on www.grants.gov.

Co-Creation, Collaboration and Communication under the ACES APS

A critical component of the ACES APS is the co-creation process.¹⁰ The co-creation¹¹ process is characterized by potentially extensive engagement and communication between USAID (both the issuing Mission or other USAID operation unit(s) and the DRG Center) and any key project partner(s). Key resource partners as well as organizations (public or private) who are interested in providing material, financial, or intellectual support to the proposed project may be invited to interact with the co-creation team during the process.

Co-creation brings together participants to create solutions to specific development challenges. When using co-creation, USAID teams work alongside partners and potential implementers collaboratively to define the problem, identify new and existing solutions, build consensus around areas for action, and/or refine plans to move forward with programs and projects. As its name implies, co-creation relies on collaboration with a diverse set of actors, allowing for a more equitable distribution of both the responsibility and ownership of outputs across all partners.

For Applicants under the ACES APS/associated addendum and seeking to receive USAID funding to implement the proposed activities, USAID's discussions with those Applicants will take place within the parameters of publicly available information. These parameters provide ample room for extensive, robust discussions regarding the development problem in question, best practices, lessons learned in the relevant technical sectors, and pertinent research and evaluations and various other matters.

Concept Note, Full Application & Award Process

Once a Concept Note naming the Applicant is submitted under an APS addendum, USAID can meet with and ask the Applicant (and other partners, if the Concept Note is proposing partnerships) further questions about the content of the Concept Note. Such questions are essential to USAID's review of the Concept Note and USAID's determination of whether the proposed Concept Note warrants further discussion and development. However, USAID cannot engage in highly specific, detailed activity design with the entity seeking an award of USAID funding until after USAID decides the Concept Note meets the minimum criteria under this APS, and any additional criteria put forth under addenda, and warrants further consideration and development. Submission of a qualifying Concept Note is needed. If the Concept Note meets the criteria set forth in both the ACES APS and the associated addendum, USAID personnel can

¹⁰ Co-creation Additional Help Note <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/discussion-note-co-creation-ad...>

¹¹ Co-creation Additional Help Note <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/discussion-note-co-creation-ads-201-additional-help>

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have highly specific, detailed activity design discussions with the prospective award recipient throughout the remainder of the process, e.g. up to and through any award that might be issued under this APS. Please see the “Application & Award Process” section below for more information.

Note: None of USAID’s communication during the co-creation process provided by this APS should be interpreted as a commitment to making an award of USAID funding. Applicants are advised that participation in the co-creation process under this APS is their responsibility; the Government is not responsible for any costs incurred by the Applicant, if the Applicant decides to accept the invitation to co-create with USAID. A commitment to an award of USAID funding is only made when an award agreement is signed.

Concept Notes and Full Applications must (1) align with the Mission Bureau or Independent office’s development objectives; (2) advance one or more of the APS objectives; (3) articulate a problem statement that reflects an awareness of the country context in which the program will be implemented; (4) describe a feasible approach connected to a theory of change; and (5) address ACES Core Principles.

This ACES APS provides a platform for the initiation of consultations by current or new partners with USAID, and reflects USAID’s interest in expanding and diversifying its partner base, while supporting ideas with high potential for transformative impact. The general ACES APS is unfunded and serves as a general umbrella APS, to which USAID can post specific addenda or funding opportunities that are focused on cross-sectoral or intractable development challenges.

An addendum highlights a specific program or activity, where technical assistance or partnership opportunities are communicated by USAID. USAID addenda are time-sensitive calls for Concept Notes. While this APS is not supported by specific funds, funding levels and estimated numbers of awards will be specifically outlined in any subsequent addenda.

NOTE: USAID will not accept or consider any Concept Notes under this ACES APS unless it is submitted in direct response to an addendum issued under this ACES APS. Applicants interested in pursuing an opportunity posted as an addendum should follow the instructions and guidance set forth in that text. This APS is not supported by specific funds; therefore the amount of resources made available under this APS will depend on the scope of the specific addenda, the concepts received, and the availability of funds. The DRG Center and/or the awarding USAID Operating Unit of field Missions for specific addenda will review submissions as indicated in the addendum. Applicants should submit Concept Notes according to the timeline outlined in the specific addendum and send them to the POC indicated in that addendum. Information on the target response time, and on any special deadlines, is available at www.grants.gov.

The application and award process under this APS has the following steps:

Concept Note Submission

Interested Applicants must first submit a Concept Note using the template provided in Annex One. Concept Notes must respond to a specific addendum under this APS and should be prepared and submitted according to the specific instructions in the addendum of interest and in the Concept Note template. Applicants should submit only the information and materials requested in the addendum and the Concept Note template. Applicants should not submit any alternative document or narrative as a substitute for a Concept Note. Application materials in any other format will not be accepted or reviewed. In addition,

and as noted in the ACES APS Concept Note Template, all Concept Notes must be in English and submitted electronically according to the instructions in each specific addendum.

Concept Notes must be submitted to the names indicated in the specific ACES APS addendum. Concept Notes sent by any other means (including Grants.gov) will not be considered. The Concept Note submission deadline for each specific ACES APS addendum will be indicated in that addendum. Additionally, Concept Notes must also be submitted to the DRG Center at the email address ACES-APS@usaid.gov. Additional information can be found at www.grants.gov. For questions regarding a particular addendum, please contact the USAID staff named in the specific ACES APS addendum.

Concept Notes submitted under this APS are encouraged to demonstrate a cross-sectoral approach to solving an intractable development challenges through a consortium of actors, to be led by representatives from one primary recipient of the award (Prime Recipient). USAID's "*Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development*", reference above, elaborates on this approach. Additionally, these development challenges should relate directly to the ACES APS addendum to which the Concept Note is responding. These Concept Notes will be evaluated based on the criteria and considerations set forth in the "Concept Note Evaluation Criteria and Considerations" section below.

Review of Concept Notes

Concepts Notes will be evaluated according to the criteria and considerations set forth in this ACES APS and any additional criteria indicated in the pertinent ACES APS addendum. USAID will conduct an initial review of the Concept Note using the criteria outlined in the section: Concept Note Evaluation Criteria and Considerations, as well as the criteria stated in the individual addendum.

The purpose of the initial review and related communication is to determine whether USAID wishes to engage in further discussions regarding the proposed approach and activities. The initial review and communication will result in one of three outcomes:

1. A decision to forego further consideration of the approach proposed in the Concept Note;
2. A decision to provide the Applicant an opportunity to submit a revised Concept Note (this is very rare); or
3. An invitation to engage in more in-depth and specific co-creation discussions aimed at further developing the proposed approach and determining whether to request a full application.

Note: A decision to engage in more in-depth and specific co-creation discussions is not a commitment to funding, nor is it a commitment that USAID will request a Full Application. If an Applicant is invited to engage in co-creation and further discussions, additional guidance with respect to expectations during the co-creation process will be provided to the Applicant. There is no guarantee that participation in the co-creation phase will lead to an award from USAID. This is a collaborative process and the outcome may be that all, some, or none of the participants will be asked to submit a Full Application. If a formal co-creation workshop is held, it will be viewed as an opportunity to team up, brainstorm and prepare the initial skeleton of a project/activity that may or may not be funded. If subsequent in-depth and specific discussions do not result in the identification and development of an activity worthy of further pursuit, USAID will not request a Full Application and will instead inform the Applicant that USAID is no longer interested in the proposed activity. On the other hand, if more in-depth discussions enable the partners to

jointly develop and design (or further clarify) a promising, high impact approach, and the USAID decides a Full Application is warranted, USAID will inform the Applicant of that determination.

Full Applications

If USAID decides a Full Application is warranted, an RFA will be sent to the applicant containing instructions for a Full Application. Full Application instructions and/or templates are expected to vary based on specific USAID mission and other USAID operating units needs and project objectives. Consistent with the co-creation focus of this ACES APS, USAID will continue to have robust communication with Applicants, potential partners, and other key stakeholders regarding the technical substance of the evolving approach, as well as the identity and roles of proposed or additional partners. This will include USAID and partner communication regarding the content of the Full Application, including but not limited to the program description to be included in the resulting RFA and subsequent application.

Review of Full Applications

After receipt, all Full Applications will be reviewed for their technical merit by a decision panel, anticipated to be comprised of USAID/Lab staff and staff from the requesting USAID operating unit. USAID may request Applicants to present their Application to the decision panel via teleconference or video conference, or to travel to USAID/Washington (if local/within 50 miles of USAID Headquarters). The decision panels will only meet with Applicants when they determine a meeting is appropriate; applicants should not contact USAID to schedule a presentation. Instructions will be shared by the Agreement Officer if the decision panel requests an Applicant to present their Application to the panel.

Request for Additional Information

Consistent with the co-creation objectives of this ACES APS, the decision panel may suggest revisions and additions to the proposed project as well as potential partners and resources. The decision panel, working in collaboration with the Lab and the relevant USAID operating unit may also seek additional information regarding the technical approach, the capacity of the applicant and partners, management and organization, past performance, budget, representations, and certifications.

Agreement Officer Determination

If the decision panel selects an Application for funding, its review will be shared with the Agreement Officer (AO) for final review, approval and award negotiation. Based on the criteria outlined in the specific addendum, the decision panel will recommend which Full Application(s) be advanced to the AO for the relevant USAID operating unit for award instrument negotiation and finalization. Depending on the nature of the lead partner and the activities to be conducted under the award, agreements and/or awards may take the form of grants, fixed amount awards, cooperative agreements, leader with associate awards, collaboration agreements, or other appropriate assistance awards.

Final Review and Negotiation

The AO will engage in final review, negotiation, and determination of assistance award instrument type, responsibility, and cost realism, and will craft an assistance award instrument with the Apparently

Successful Applicant. Such assistance award instrument can be in the form of grants, fixed amount awards, cooperative agreements, leader with associate awards, collaboration agreements, or other appropriate assistance awards. If the Apparently Successful Applicant and USAID cannot arrive at a mutually agreeable arrangement, the AO will cancel the project at no cost to the Government.

Number of Anticipated Awards

USAID plans to make multiple awards under this APS, pursuant to the needs of USAID Missions, bureaus and independent offices, and subject to the availability of funds. USAID reserves the right to make a single award, to fund parts of an application, or not to make any awards at all. Issuance of this APS does not constitute an award commitment on the part of USAID, nor does it commit USAID to pay for any costs incurred in the preparation, co-creation opportunity and submission of any application.

Various kinds of awards including fixed amount awards are expected to be made as a result of this APS. USAID will determine the type of award on a case by case basis. Please see ADS 303 for more information on the kinds of awards that are possible.¹²

Award and Implementation

The USAID AO will award the instrument, and the Awardee will begin implementation, in collaboration with USAID, according to the terms and conditions of the award instrument.

Award Information

We anticipate that the opportunities provided under this APS will be of high interest to the global development community and therefore may result in a high number of Concept Note submissions. However, given anticipated funding levels, USAID will only be able to fund a small portion of the ideas that are offered. Again, all Applicants are advised that submission of a Concept Note under this APS is entirely at their own risk; the Government is not responsible for the cost of Application preparation (at any stage in the process), nor is the Government committed to funding any Concept Notes or Full Applications that may be submitted under this APS.

Cost Sharing in the ACES APS

A cost-share or match from non-government sources of 10% or more for local (non-U.S.) organizations is preferred but not required under this APS. A cost share of 15% or more is preferred but not required for U.S. organizations under this APS.

Cost sharing under the ACES APS can be changed if there is an adequate justification, as per ADS 303.3.10.2.

Types of Organizations Eligible to Apply

U.S. and Non-U.S. Non-Profit Organizations (NGOs)

¹² <https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303>

Qualified U.S. and non-U.S. private non-profit organizations may apply for funding under this APS. Foreign government-owned parastatal organizations from countries that are ineligible for assistance under the FAA or related appropriations acts are ineligible.

U.S. and Non-U.S. For-Profit Organizations

Qualified U.S. and non-U.S. private for-profit organizations may apply for funding under this APS. Foreign government-owned parastatal organizations from countries that are ineligible for assistance under the FAA or related appropriations acts are ineligible. Potential for-profit applicants should note that, pursuant to 22 CFR 226.81, the payment of fee/profit to the prime recipient under grants and cooperative agreements is prohibited. However, if a prime recipient has a subcontract with a for-profit organization for the acquisition of goods or services (*i.e.*, if a buyer-seller relationship is created), fee/profit for the (subcontractor is authorized).

U.S. and Non-U.S. Colleges and Universities

Qualified U.S. and non-U.S. colleges and universities may apply for funding under this APS. USG and USAID regulations generally treat colleges and universities as NGOs, rather than governmental organizations; hence, both public and private colleges and universities are eligible. Non-U.S. colleges and universities in countries that are ineligible for assistance under the FAA or related appropriations acts are ineligible.

Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO)

A local or indigenous PVO, which by definition is a non-U.S. PVO operating in the same foreign country in which it is organized, is eligible to receive funding. Local PVOs are not required to register with USAID. In accordance with 2 CFR 203, a U.S. PVO and an “International PVO,” which by definition is a non-U.S. PVO that performs development work in one or more countries other than the country in which it is domiciled, must be registered with USAID to be eligible to receive funding.

Public International Organizations (PIOs)

PIOs are eligible to apply for funding under this APS. Please see Automated Directives Series (ADS) 308 for USAID policy on defining PIOs. <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/300/308.pdf>

New Partners

USAID encourages applications from new partners. Resultant awards to these organizations oblige USAID to undertake necessary pre-award reviews of these organizations to determine their “responsibility” in regards to fiduciary and other oversight responsibilities of the grant/cooperative agreement. In order for an award to be made, a USAID Agreement Officer must make an affirmative determination that the applicant is “responsible,” as discussed in [ADS 303.3.9](#).

Prior to making an award under this competition, USAID may perform a pre-award survey for organizations that are new to working with USAID (“NUPAS”) or for organizations with outstanding audit findings. Accounting systems, audit issues and management capability questions may be reviewed as part of this process. If notified by USAID that a pre-award survey is necessary, applicants must prepare in advance the required information and documents. A pre-award survey does not commit USAID to make an award to any organization.

DCHA/DRG reserves the right to adjust these timelines as the number of applicants and other scheduling may require.

Local Engagement International Organizations must consider local engagement as an effort to promote sustainability and country self-reliance. This section must describe strategies that will be employed to sustain the activities beyond USAID funding and contribute to building self-reliance and sustainability. One way this can be done is through meaningful partnerships with local organizations. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate a clear understanding of the role that local organizations and institutions are playing or can play in promoting the objectives of this APS.

Where the primary applicant is not a local organization, it is strongly encouraged that applicants work closely with local partners on all phases of program design, implementation, and evaluation. When the primary applicant is not able to identify appropriate local partners at the concept note phase, it should describe its approach to identifying and partnering with local entities to build organizational and technical capacities of local organizations with which they are engaging, as appropriate. If the application from an International Organization includes partnerships with local organizations, the application should include a capacity building plan to include building the technical skills of its local partner(s). In cases where an international applicant is not able to partner with a local organization or institution, does not consider such partnership feasible, or does not consider it in the program's best interest, the applicant must clearly explain why that is the case.

Evaluation Criteria and Considerations

USAID will use the following broad criteria to assess both Concept Notes and Full Applications. Concept Notes and Full Applications submitted under an addendum to this APS should propose an approach that satisfies these criteria and exhibits the characteristics set forth below. Note: In addition to the following criteria and considerations, there will likely be additional criteria highlighted in specific ACES APS addenda.

1. **Alignment with DCHA/DRG Strategic Objectives and Programming Priorities** - USAID will evaluate Concept Notes and Full Applications based on the extent to which they can convincingly demonstrate understanding, experience and capabilities in implementing activities designed to advance one or more of the Development Objectives (DOs) contained in the "USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Right and Governance"¹³ below: (Note: Individual addenda will likely not focus on all four DOs):
 - DO 1: Promote participatory, representative and inclusive political processes and government institutions
 - DO 2: Foster greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the law
 - DO 3: Protect and promote universally recognized human rights
 - DO 4: Improve development outcomes through the integration of DRG principles and practices across USAID's development portfolio

¹³ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID-DRG_fina-_6-24-31.pdf

2. Alignment with ACES APS Funding Priorities and

Programmatic Objectives; USAID will evaluate Concept Notes and Full Applications based on the extent to which they can convincingly demonstrate understanding, experience and capabilities in implementing one or more of the ACES APS Funding Priorities, below (please refer to II. “ACES APS Funding Priorities and Programmatic Objectives” for more detail on these priorities and programmatic objectives). Note: addenda will vary and will likely not address all of these priorities):

- Accountability and Corruption control
- Legislative Function and Process,
- Devolved and Local Governance, and
- Justice, Rights and Security
- Elections Administration

3. Basis in ACES Core Principles.

USAID will evaluate Concept Notes and Full Applications based on the extent to which they can convincingly demonstrate understanding, experience and capabilities in incorporating the relevant ACES Core Principles listed below. Please refer to III. “ACES Core Principles” above, for greater detail on these Core Principles. Note: Not all of these Principles may be relevant depending on the individual addendum.

- Contribution to Country Self-Reliance and Sustainability
- Readiness for Collaboration, Adaptability, and Scalability
- Potential for Impact
- Basis in Evidence and Self-Reliance Metrics
- Integration of Gender Equality, Women , Youth and Marginalized Populations’ Empowerment

Rationale for Instrument Selection

Assistance through grants or cooperative agreements (to be decided at the time addenda are issued) or other available assistance instruments is recommended for the ACES APS because USAID intends to transfer a thing of value (funding) to recipients to carry out a public purpose, namely, the goal of achieving partner country self-reliance by advancing greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the rule of law. Recipients will include qualifying local, U.S., and international organizations whose missions and charters align with these objectives. The principle purpose of these grants or cooperative agreements or other assistance instruments will be to assist/benefit recipients so that they may pursue these common objectives, and not to procure property, supplies, or service.

According to ADS 303.3.5.2,a, “A Request for Application (RFA) is used when the intent is to provide assistance for an activity or methodology that supports or is in keeping with USAID’s program objectives.” and “An Annual Program Statement (APS) is used when USAID intends to support a variety of creative approaches towards developing methodologies to assess and implement development objective activities”. The latter is applicable for ACES, because DRG plans on supporting new and innovative approaches to pursuing our objectives. For this reason, DRG recommends the use of an Annual Program Statement instead of a Request for Application for ACES.

D - FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT

The USAID/Washington point of contact is Michael Kwaw. The USAID Agreement Officer will appoint an Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) to provide technical and administrative oversight of any awards issued. For questions regarding this APS, contact USAID/M/OAA at: ACES-APS@usaid.gov.

Annex 1 - Concept Note Template ACES APS Addenda

Concept Notes in response to ACES APS addenda must include the following three components. Please organize the Concept Note according to the outline below.

The main body of the concept paper must not exceed 5 pages and must use standard margins and 12pt Times New Roman font. The required supporting information must not exceed six pages. The concept paper and supporting information must use the format described below. The Concept Note paper must be submitted to the Mission or other USAID operation unit which is issuing the addendum via email (the email address will be provided in the addendum) as well as copied to ACES-APS@usaid.gov.

a. Cover Page (1 page maximum)

1. USAID Addendum Reference
2. Name and address of organization;
3. Contact person (lead contact name, telephone number, and e-mail Information);
4. Title of proposed program; country(tries) and sector(s) being proposed; total dollar amount of funds requested for the proposed period of performance;;
5. Identify type of applying organization (e.g., local NGO, US NGO, etc).
6. Names of other donor organizations to whom you are submitting the application and/or which are funding the proposed activities; and
7. Signature, name and title of the authorized representative of the applicant.

b. Technical Instructions (5 page maximum)

The Concept Note must include:

1. A brief background on the specific development challenge(s)/opportunity(ies) and needs to be addressed by the proposal;
2. Statement of the objectives and how they relate to specific challenges/opportunities in the country and sector(s);
3. How achieving the objectives of the proposed activity will advance the DCHA/DRG Strategic Objectives and Programming Priorities and APS Funding Priorities as laid forth in the ACES APS and the addendum;
4. Statement on how the relevant ACES APS Core Principles will be addressed in the proposed activity;
5. Anticipated results and indicative measures to monitor and evaluate results;
6. Role of proposed partners (such as NGOs and/or alliances with private businesses);
7. A notional budget including type of budget support requested from USAID disaggregated by Direct, program costs as well as Indirect costs;
8. Cost Share: Submit information indicating the financial and/or in-kind resources to be leveraged by all participating organizations. A cost-share or match from non-government

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sources of 10% or more for local NGOs is preferable but not required. A cost share of 15% or more is preferable but not required for U.S. NGO/PVOs. Submit a written commitment by other organizations, donors or individuals; and

9. How the proposed activities will be sustained after the grant ends.

c. Attachments (includes past performance, institutional capabilities, and supporting information) (no page limit; but please be as concise as possible)

1. Statement of USAID assistance received during the preceding five-year period; a brief description of activities, donor(s) and amount of support (Organizations that did not receive funds during the preceding five-year period must state this fact);
2. Concise description of the Applicant's development experience including project descriptions, results and evaluations;
3. A brief statement of the history of the organization; its primary development focus, capabilities and challenges;
4. An organizational chart of the Applicant organization; and
5. Proposed staff roles and responsibilities.