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BUREAU FOR AFRICA

UNSOLICITED PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

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1. AUTHORITIES

- A. Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR, Subpart 15.5)
- B. Automated Directives System, 303.5.3.c.3)
- C. Section 550 of the FY 97 Appropriations Act
- D. Delegations of Authority, ADS Section 103.5.11
- E. Africa Bureau Delegation of Authority to USAID/W Offices, 1/19/96
- F. Programs In Non-Presence Countries, ADS Chapter 205 (pending approval)

2. OBJECTIVES:

The objective of these guidelines is to provide Africa Bureau offices and overseas posts with guidance for managing the review of unsolicited proposals. This guidance applies to all unsolicited proposals - for grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts - received by Africa Bureau offices or overseas missions, whether such proposals are centrally-funded, mission-funded, regional, or country-specific.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. **AFR/DP:** AFR/DP will prepare updated guidance for management of unsolicited proposals within the AFR Bureau, will manage the review of unsolicited proposals in Washington, and will assure that country-specific and regional proposals are distributed to the field for review there.

B. **Director, AFR/DP:** When proposals are reviewed in Washington, the Director of AFR/DP will normally sign the Action Memo and letter approving or disapproving the activity. At his/her discretion, however, a proposal may be approved by the Director of the Office which will manage the activity.

C. **Unsolicited Proposal (UP) Officer:** The UP Officer is the Chief of AFR/DP/PFP. The UP officer is responsible for developing unsolicited proposal guidelines and for managing the unsolicited proposal review process. This officer also serves as the point of contact within the Africa Bureau for potential offerors who wish to submit unsolicited proposals for consideration.

D. **Activity Manager:** The activity manager is the officer who will be responsible for the management of the proposed activity, if approved. The activity manager should be identified early in the proposal review process and will subsequently play a prominent role in the review.

E. **Proposal Review Committee (PRC):** The UP Officer will convene a PRC composed of the UP Officer, OP, GC, and appropriate technical officers from the Africa Bureau or other USAID bureaus to evaluate proposals and recommend changes or approval.

4. DEFINITIONS:

A. Unsolicited Proposal: A written offer to perform a proposed task or effort, initiated and submitted to USAID by an offeror, without solicitation by USAID personnel, with the objective of obtaining funding. As defined in FAR, Subpart 15, advertising material, commercial product offerings, contributions, or technical correspondence will not be considered as unsolicited proposals.

B. AFR Bureau Unsolicited Proposal Fund (UPF): A line item in the AFR Bureau's annual program budget for funding of non-country specific unsolicited proposals. Each fiscal year senior bureau management will decide whether a UPF should be established for that year.

5. GENERAL:

All proposals which meet the definition of unsolicited proposals received by the AFR/W will be forwarded to the UP Officer in AFR/DP/PFP for logging in. The UP Officer or his/her designated representative will initiate a series of consecutive screening and review steps for the unsolicited proposal. The objective of the review process is to examine the proposal against relevant decision criteria and to recommend approval to senior AFR Bureau management or reject the proposal and inform the offeror.

6. PRELIMINARY CONTACTS WITH OFFERORS:

Potential offerors may contact USAID for information and guidance, either by phone, in person, or in writing, prior to submission of a proposal. The individual seeking assistance may provide a brief description of and amount sought for a proposed activity during the communication. Contacts which are requests for information and guidance need not be handled through the formal unsolicited proposal review process described herein. Only if a written reply is provided to the offeror should a file be kept of any correspondence. When an AFR Bureau representative communicates by phone or in person, he or she should follow the accepted office procedures for record keeping. The UP Officer need not be informed of these communications. In those cases, however, where an officer is aware the information or guidance request will be followed by the submission of a formal unsolicited proposal, it is advisable to alert the UP Officer, and, who, for contracts, will then inform the Office of Procurement.

7. INITIAL PROCESSING:

There are several types of unsolicited proposals for which special distribution procedures are required prior to the PRC action.

A. Receipt of Proposals for Contract: Upon receipt of an unsolicited contract proposal, the UP Officer will log it in and forward it immediately to the supporting USAID contracting office. The contracting office will review the proposal to ensure that all contracting requirements are met. USAID offices and staffs should not undertake a review of the proposal, nor should discussions be held with the offeror regarding the substance of the proposal, until guidance is provided by the contracting office.

B. Receipt of Area-Specific Proposals:

1. **Country:** Unsolicited proposals which are country-specific will be processed by the appropriate field office or mission. In such cases, the offeror may submit unsolicited proposals directly to the appropriate mission. When the AFR Bureau UP officer receives such a proposal, s/he will transmit it immediately to the country desk officer (CDO) or directly to post. It is the responsibility of the field post to review the proposal and notify the offeror of the decision.

Field missions may elect to follow the general guidance provided herein regarding the convening of a committee to review all proposals and the optional criteria for evaluating the content of unsolicited proposals. The AFR Bureau recommends that section 12 and 13.A be adhered to in order to ensure that all proposals are equitably and fairly treated. For purposes of this guidance country programs managed within AFR/W, will be considered operating units which assume responsibility for reviewing, approving/rejecting, and implementing proposals. It is the responsibility of the field post to review the proposal and notify the offeror directly of the decision

2. **Global and Africa Proposals:** Any unsolicited proposal which is Africa regional in nature, or is global in nature with an African component, will normally be processed in AFR/W, with input from regional offices and bilateral missions. Responsibility for reviewing proposals for regional activities, or global activities with an African regional component, may be delegated to an appropriate regional office, i.e., any of the regional offices in Abidjan, Gabarone, or Nairobi. This determination will be made by the UP Officer in conjunction with appropriate managers in the Africa Bureau and the regional office involved.

Offerors sometimes propose an activity which takes place in more than one country where the proposed project has no real regional nature but is a bilateral activity in more than one country. In these cases, the proposal will be processed as two or more country specific proposals; i.e., the proposal will be forwarded to the appropriate bilateral missions for consideration. In some cases, the offeror may be requested to resubmit the unsolicited proposal as separate proposals for each country.

C. Proposals from Public International Organizations (PIOs): PIOs, such as the UNDP or World Bank, may submit unsolicited proposals. In these cases, the "unsolicited" nature of the activity does not need to be demonstrated because USAID's grant competition procedures do not apply to PIOs. However, grants will only be made to PIOs when a pre-award determination is made that all of the following conditions are met: 1) support of the PIO activity is considered to be an effective and efficient way to achieve a particular development assistance objective; 2) the program objective of the activity is compatible with USAID program objectives; 3) there is no reason to consider the PIO not "responsible"; and, 4) the grants will be made for USAID programmatic reasons and not to augment the PIO's operating budget.

D. Proposals for Non-Presence Countries: An unsolicited proposal involving a country without a USAID staff presence will have to meet guidelines established for program activity in such countries. If the proposal is for a closeout country, where a mission has closed out or is in the process of closing out, additional criteria apply on a case by case basis before a new activity can be undertaken. Clearance of the M Bureau and PPC may be required to approve activities in closeout countries.

E. Proposals under \$25,000: Unsolicited Proposals which are less than \$25,000 will receive an abbreviated review. The committee convened to review such a proposal may consist only of the UP Officer, a technical officer, and officers from GC and OP. Because of the workload involved (authorization documentation, congressional notification, etc.) in approving any free-

standing activity, only proposals under \$25,000 which can be funded from an on-going activity and can be authorized and managed in the context of existing authorization of that on-going activity will be considered.

F. **Research and Development (R&D) Proposals:** The Africa Bureau Unsolicited Proposal Fund will be used to fund operational proposals and not R&D proposals. The Bureau, however, will consider R&D proposals if appropriate other funding sources are identified. R&D proposals also can be transferred to the Global Bureau for consideration and review.

8. USAID MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

In accordance with good management practices, AFR Bureau operating units reviewing proposals must identify USAID's implementation responsibilities and project administration procedures, including the Project Manager as well as funding source, prior to approval of an activity arising out of an unsolicited proposal.

The operating unit will identify the name of the office and/or officer who will be responsible for managing the project proposed by the offeror. It is prudent, therefore, that the managing office/officer be involved as a "key player" in the review of the proposal. No unsolicited proposal will be funded without USAID activity management identified.

9. REVIEW PROCESS:

In light of the reduction in staff to review unsolicited proposals, the AFR/W procedures described below are design to filter out lower priority proposals with minimal investment of staff time, while assuring the offeror a fair and equitable evaluation.

A. **AFR/W Priorities:** Early in each FY, the UP Officer will meet with senior AFR Bureau management to determine UPF program priorities, if any, for unsolicited proposals and to identify potential funding sources. The Directors, or their designates, of AFR/DP, AFR/SD, AA/AFR/DRC, and the AFR Geographic Offices will attend. All priorities will normally fall under foreign policy goals set forth in the Congressional Presentation and the Bureau's strategic framework. The UP officer will prepare a memorandum listing these Bureau priorities for clearance by AFR Bureau operating units and subsequent general distribution to bureau staff.

B. **Submission:** Offerors who have requested and received the AFR Bureau "Guidance for Preparation and Submission of Unsolicited Proposals" will submit the proposals directly to the UP Officer. When unsolicited proposals are submitted to other AFR Bureau officers or offices, they should promptly be forwarded to the UP Officer for logging in and processing.

C. **Receipt:** When the UP Officer receives a formal unsolicited proposal submitted by an offeror either directly or from another in-Agency source, s/he will enter it into the Unsolicited Proposal Log. As soon as is reasonably practicable, a written response of receipt and disposition (for those proposals sent to another operating unit for review per 7.C above) signed by the UP Officer will be provided to the offeror.

D. **Initial Screening:** Following acknowledgement and logging of an unsolicited proposal, the UP Officer, with appropriate AFR/SD or technical office support, will make an initial screening and review of the proposal. When the proposal is clearly outside of the scope of USAID's strategic plan and/or U.S foreign policy goals (e.g., the construction of a dam), the UP Officer will

notify the offeror, in writing, of the rejection, along with an explanation for the decision.

E. Identifying Activity Management and Funding: Where further review of the proposal is warranted, the UP officer, in collaboration with AFR/SD, will identify a potential activity manager. Again, unsolicited proposals cannot be authorized without identification of a USAID Project Manager. Grant officers, cooperative agreement officers, or contracting officers are not activity managers. Furthermore, the UP Officer will not be designated as the Project Manager for any approved unsolicited proposal.

As part of the initial processing, the UP Officer, and the activity manager when selected, will review the unsolicited proposal and attempt to identify a potential funding source. When the activity manager has been identified, s/he should be involved throughout the review of the unsolicited proposal since his/her office would eventually manage the activity.

F. Proposal Review Committee (PRC): When the initial screening indicates that a review of the proposal is warranted, the UP Officer will identify appropriate staff to serve on a Proposal Review Committee (PRC). The PRC will consist of the activity manager and/or technical officers (normally from AFR/SD and/or the Global Bureau) with expertise about the proposal's subject matter; a representative from AFR/DP (normally the UP Officer); staff from the AFR Geographic Office such as an appropriate Country Development Officer (CDO) and/or appropriate Project Development Officer (PDO); a contracting specialist from the Office of Procurement; a legal advisor from General Counsel (GC); and representatives from any office in the Bureau, USAID, or other USG agency who are necessary in order to conduct a complete and thorough review of the proposal. The PRC will be chaired by the UP Officer, although the identified project manager should assume a key role in the overall review process.

G. Review Meetings: The PRC chairperson will assume responsibility for distributing copies of the proposal and for soliciting issues and comments. In some case, even though activity management will reside in AFR/W using AFR/W funding, it may be advisable to solicit issues and comments from bilateral missions or regional offices in Africa where such input would benefit the review process. Participants in the proposal review should submit issues and concerns to the chairperson. If the chairperson deems it useful, an issues meeting will be held prior to the PRC meeting to clarify and select the issues to be addressed at the review meeting. An agenda will be prepared by the chairperson containing the issues and agenda for the PRC meeting.

As a result of the PRC meeting, the PRC may determine that the proposal warrants further consideration, although the PRC may also have questions regarding the contents of the proposal or possible changes, clarifications or modifications. In such cases, a letter will be sent to the offeror addressing these issues, with the intent that the offeror respond to issues, concerns, and questions raised. Based on response of the offeror to this letter, it may be necessary to scheduled another PRC meeting to review the response, which may include a modified proposal resubmitted by the offeror.

In most cases, it is not anticipated more than two PRC meetings will be required before a decision is reached to either accept and authorize a proposal, or to decline a proposal. In some cases, however, issues may remain unresolved and that a senior level decision meeting may be required. The meeting should be chaired by the UP Officer, unless Bureau Management decides that another chairperson would be more appropriate because major policy issues or other sensitive matters are involved. The meeting will be attended by the PRC and other staff as necessary.

H. Final Decision/Notification Letter to the Offeror: The PRC may decide either to decline or to accept a proposal. In both cases, the UP Officer will prepare a brief Memorandum for

the Record and a letter to the offeror explaining the rationale for the final decision to decline or accept the proposal. The memorandum and letter will be drafted as soon as is practicable following the final PRC or senior management decision meeting.

When the PRC approves a proposal, the identified Project Manager will prepare the approval and/or obligation package(s) for clearance, including a congressional notification or technical notification, as required. AFR Bureau clearance procedures for approval of activities will be followed for an activity arising from an unsolicited proposal.

10. FUNDING ISSUES:

A. Limitations on Funding Amounts and Life of Activity: USAID/W offices should seek to minimize the domination of limited program funding resources by a small number of offerors and activities and limit the majority of these activities to periods of less than 3 years. To the extent possible, unsolicited proposals should be funded fully in the first year. Offerors are normally expected to fund 25% of the cost of the proposed activity.

B. Funding of Unsolicited Proposals: Unsolicited proposals may be funded from many possible sources. Proposals are often funded under on-going strategic objectives. However, to encourage the submission of unique and innovative proposals, the Africa Bureau, at the beginning of each fiscal year, may decide to allocate an amount of its overall OYB in a fund for unsolicited proposals. The AFR Bureau's Unsolicited Proposal Fund is not expected to be used to fund country-specific proposals or to fund R&D proposals.

C. Cut-Off Date for Submitting Proposals:

Offerors should submit proposals no later than April 30 if they wish the proposal to be considered for funding during that fiscal year. The purpose of this deadline is to ensure that there is adequate time to convene a PRC, to undertake a thorough review of the proposal, to seek clarification about the proposal from the offeror if needed, to prepare an authorization package, to prepare a congressional notification, and to allow the Office of Procurement adequate time for negotiating a contract or grant. Proposals received after April 30 will only be considered for the current fiscal year, on a case-by-case basis, if AFR Bureau management determines that evaluation of the proposal is critical to the success of the Bureau's program strategy and objectives.

11. NON-COMPETITIVE AWARDS FOR UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS:

USAID encourages competition in the award of grants or cooperative agreements. Unsolicited proposals received by the Bureau, however, may result in the award of a non-competitive grant or a cooperative agreement under the following circumstances when it is determined that the proposal:

A. was not solicited by USAID; and

B. is unique, innovative, or proprietary, and acceptance would be fair, reasonable, and would represent appropriate use of USAID funds to support or stimulate a public purpose.

Regardless of whether a proposal was unsolicited or not, non-competitive grants or cooperative agreements may also be awarded under the following circumstances: predominant capability;

amendments to existing assistance; follow-on assistance for continuation of an activity; and other circumstances, as determined by AA/AFR, deemed critical to the objectives of the foreign assistance program.

12. PROPOSAL CONTENT:

The proposal must have the necessary descriptive, analytical, and planning information needed for USAID to conduct a comprehensive and thorough evaluation. The following is a suggested seven part checklist/format with illustrative descriptions of each section which are consistent with the ADS and the Agency core values:

A. Basic Information: The proposal should include the offeror's name, address, type of organization, contact names and phone numbers, identity of proprietary data, other organizations receiving the proposal, date of submission, signature of the authorized representative and a brief abstract of the proposal.

B. Statement of Problem or Opportunities, Activity Purpose and Assistance Interventions: This section clarifies the problem addressed by the assistance, identifies the activity's purpose, and discusses the proposed interventions. Where possible, offerors should state how the activity contributes to U.S. foreign policy objectives and USAID strategic objectives.

C. Plan of Action: This section describes how the proposed project will work. Other institutions, organizations, and groups with a role to play and whose actions can impact on the project's success, i.e., the offerors partners, should be identified. The roles of other donors and any partnerships which will be formed should be discussed.

D. Definition of Success: This section defines what circumstances in the assistance environment will demonstrate that the activity has been successful. Typical contents should include description of the activity's intended results, indicators for monitoring the activity's progress during implementation, and the criteria for assessing results achievement. Resources required for monitoring and evaluating should be addressed.

E. Analysis of Feasibility, Key Assumptions, and Related Issues: This section should provide a clear understanding of the issues examined during activity design and the risks associated with the proposed activity before funding is approved. Key points of discussion might include design issues as well as noteworthy risks to successful implementation and sustained development impact.

F. Financial Plan: This section should provide detailed information for the activity's funding requirements its life. In cases where the activity will use funds from other sources, in addition to USAID, the financial plan should explain how each donors funds will be utilized.

G. Management Procedures: This section describes the management structure which the offeror will implement to ensure the prudent performance and financial management of the activity.

13. EVALUATION CRITERIA:

All unsolicited proposals should be evaluated in accordance with standard criteria. The use of standard criteria will promote a fair and equitable system of review and increase the likelihood that

selected proposals will be successful.

A. MINIMUM CRITERIA:

1. Must be innovative and unique;
2. Must be independently originated and developed by the offeror;
3. Must be prepared without USAID supervision;
4. Must include sufficient information to permit a determination of the proposal's worth and value to the USAID strategy and program;
5. Must contain a description of the offeror's capabilities, related experience, facilities, techniques, or key personnel which are critical to achieving the proposals objectives;
6. Must include the qualifications, capabilities, and experience of key personnel; and,
7. Must not be an advance proposal for a known USAID requirement that can be acquired by competitive methods.

B. OPTIONAL CRITERIA:

The following criteria, which may be augmented or modified to fit the case being considered may be applicable and should be used by the PRC at its discretion.

Capability and Capacity of the Offeror: The PRC should determine whether the offeror is technically capable of implementing the proposal. In some cases, the offeror may have adequate technical expertise, but the offeror's management and staffing capacity will be strained by implementing the new proposed activity.

Experience in Africa: Does the offeror have experience in the African countries where the proposal will be implemented?

Uniqueness/Innovativeness of the Proposal: Unsolicited Proposals should be unique, innovative or proprietary. If not, some other basis for negotiating a non-competitive award should be identified, such as predominant capability.

Proposed Staff: Are the staff members proposed by the offeror for implementing the proposal qualified? Are salary levels consistent with work experience and salary histories?

Social Soundness: Does the proposal demonstrate that the offeror is sensitive to cultural, religious, ethnic, and other such factors which could influence the success of the proposed activity.

Relationship between USAID and Other Donor Programs: Will the proposed activity complement and dovetail with programs of USAID or other donors? Has the offeror proposed effective coordination with other donor activities in related sectors in the same countries?

Other Funding Sources: Where the offeror states that other donors will provide funding critical to the success of the activity, the PRC should confirm these commitments prior to approval of the activity.

Partnerships and Strengthening African Organizations: In cases where the offeror is not an indigenous NGO, will partnerships with indigenous organizations be formed and will local African organizations be strengthened?

Customers: Does the offeror's proposed activity clearly define the ultimate customer and how the

benefits are to be obtained? Are the customers integrated into the planning and implementation of the proposed activity:?

Gender Issues: Are gender issues addressed in the proposal to the maximum extent possible?

Sustainability: Can the activity's benefits be sustained at the end of life of activity or will a follow on proposal be required?

USAID Management and Funding Source: Have USAID management responsibilities and administrative procedures been defined? Have a USAID manager and a funding source been identified?

Non-Presence/Closeout Countries: Is the offeror proposing activity in non-presence or closeout countries? Are the necessary pre-conditions met? Can Agency waivers be obtained?

When a large number of proposals are submitted in sector (e.g., conflict resolution), the PRC may choose to develop additional criteria for evaluating each proposal so that proposals may be evaluated and differentiated in a more rigorous manner, and so that only the best-designed and most relevant proposals will be considered for funding.