

FY2016 Business Forecast Quarter 3 Review Conference Call
Thursday, May 19th, 2016
8:30AM-9:00AM

Background

USAID's Business Forecast is published each quarter throughout the fiscal year. The Agency's Business Forecast is an informational resource on potential funding and partnership opportunities at USAID. It is an advanced look at grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements that USAID is in the process of developing and plans to issue in the coming year. Two separate Forecasts are developed each quarter – one for USAID Missions overseas and one for USAID in Washington, DC. Organizations interested in working with USAID can use this tool to plan for proposal or application submissions.

USAID Participants

1. Roy Plucknett, USAID M/OAA Senior Procurement Executive
2. Sunil Xavier, USAID M/OAA Deputy Director of Foreign Operations
3. Jami Rodgers, USAID M/OAA Division Chief
4. Crista Wise, USAID Ombudsman
5. Teneshia Alston, Senior Program Manager, USAID Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)
6. Matthew Johnson, M/OAA Communications Director

Agenda

- Mr. Johnson kicks off call, introduces individuals in the room, and provides instructions for the call
- Mr. Plucknett provides introductory remarks.
- Mr. Johnson begins asking USAID participants questions submitted for the call.
- Conclusion of the call

Conference Call Transcript

Mr. Johnson remarks:

Good morning everyone and thank you joining us today. My name is Matt Johnson and I am the Communications Director for M/OAA.

Before we get started, I want to provide a few quick reminders for the call. We will be recording the call and posting it on our Business Forecast website shortly after the call is complete. We will send a notice to everyone through our email list. We will be muting everyone during the call, but we ask that you please not put us on hold.

We are excited to be here, we have around 400 people who have RSVPed for the call this morning. We have a few folks in the room with us this morning who will be answering your questions. I'd like to briefly like to allow everyone in the room to introduce themselves.

In total, we received over 270 questions and we appreciate all of the questions. We appreciate your continued interest in sending us questions each quarter. For today's call, similar to what we did last quarter, rather than going through all 270 questions, we will highlight a few of the general questions that we received.

Later today, we will be posting all of the questions and answers on our Business Forecast webpage. We will notify you through our A&A email distribution list and twitter handle @USAIDBizOpps once it has been posted.

Thank you once again everyone for joining us today. I'd now like to now turn it over to Roy to give a few remarks brief remarks.

- **Mr. Plucknett provides introductory remarks.**

Mr. Plucknett Remarks:

Good morning. Welcome to our FY 2016, 3rd quarter Business Forecast call. Thank you so much for joining us this morning and thank you for your interest in working with USAID. As our partners, you play a critical role in helping us to achieve our mission of ending extreme poverty and promoting resilient, democratic societies. I know that the Business Forecast is an important part of our partnership together.

Last time we organized a Business Forecast phone call I had just joined M/OAA. Since that time, I have had the chance to meet with all 5 partner associations -- InterAction, InsideNGO, PSC, SID-Washington, and SBAIC -- as well as many of you. In each of these meetings the importance of the Business Forecast has been raised. I want to reiterate that we are committed to making it the best tool possible.

Since our call last quarter, internally, we have made a number of improvements to our process as well as our guidance on the Business Forecast.

For example:

- An interactive webinar video was recorded and posted on our internal website for all A&A staff to follow along with best practices for entering information into our A&A Plan to have everything accurately published on the Business Forecast.
- A one-pager on the Business Forecast was created and distributed to our staff. It includes quarterly internal due dates, production processes, information about activities to include on the forecast, as well as additional things to keep in mind.
 - In the reminders section of the document, we reiterate the importance of: choice of instrument, accuracy of dates, adequate award descriptions, mechanism type, solicitation numbers, and whether or not it includes a small business component.
- Next, as many of you know, all planned or currently open competitive A&A opportunities about \$150,000 are posted on the Forecast. But as a best practice we have encouraged our staff to also include all awards under the \$150,000 threshold.
- Additionally, we complete revamped our internal process and guidance for creating the Business Forecast. As a result, I am happy to say that the internal production process of posting the Forecast has gone from 8 weeks to about 8 days. For you this means getting information that is more timely, accurate, and helpful.
- Finally, we plan to keep a tighter schedule in the future to ensure the Business Forecast is released around the same time each quarter. You can begin to expect the Forecast to be released by the end of the first month of each quarter. This means that you should see the Forecast published in late October, January, April, and July.

I hope with these changes and improvements to the process you are beginning to see improvements in the Forecast. As I've shared a number of times, we are committed to continuing to improve the Forecast.

Once again, I want to thank you for joining us today and for submitting your questions.

- **Mr. Johnson begins asking questions submitted for the call.**

1. **QUESTION FOR MR. PLUCKNETT: Actions Under \$150,000:** The legal frame requires all procurements that small business can fulfill to be included in the business forecast. As currently implemented the forecast excludes procurement valued at less than \$150,000. While a smaller amount, we know that even with smaller awards, they give small business an opportunity to build and demonstrate a good reputation to working with USAID. Would you consider including solicitations valued at less than \$150,000 on the forecast?

USAID Response: Our current ADS policies only require actions over \$150,000 to be included on the Business Forecast. However, in our guidance to Contracting and Agreement officers we encourage all awards, regardless of the dollar amount, to be included in the Business Forecast. This is a best practice that we continue to communicate to our staff.

It is important to note that many of the actions that are under \$150,000 are done by the Agency's Executive Officers (EXOs). We are looking into how we could potentially begin to capture their transactions in the A&A plan and what policy changes would need to be updated in order to include this information in the Business Forecast.

But more importantly, note that our EXOs are required by the FAR to put solicitations that are over \$25,000 on FedBizOpps.gov. For actions that are over \$15,000, but under \$25,000 they are required to be posted in a public place for no less than 10 days. The FAR does not provide specifics on where they must be posted. In these circumstances how they get posted can vary. They can be published in local newspapers, on the Embassy/USAID website, or on FedBizOpps.gov.

While actions that are under \$150,000 are not captured on the Business Forecast, they are still made publically available for competition.

2. **QUESTION FOR MS. ALSTON: Small Businesses:** As USAID is aware, some businesses can graduate from small to large under a NAICS code and yet still qualify to bid under the GSA schedule if they received their schedule while still small and their schedule is still valid. Will USAID please clarify which definition of small businesses will guide USAID's approach (NAICS code classification vs GSA schedule classification)?

USAID Response:

The Agency defines a small business in accordance with the Federal Acquisition Regulations, Parts 2 and 19.

USAID's approach to a requirement is often based on the procurement's complexity, urgency and other factors that may have an impact on the acquisition process. It is at

the discretion of Contracting Officer to utilize U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Supply Schedules. In regards to the use of GSA Schedules, a firm under a schedule, which has outgrown its small business status, may be considered for a set aside. If the requirement is an open market small business set-aside, the corresponding North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code must be used to confirm the business size status, as well as the firm's System for Award Management (SAM) data.

- 3. QUESTION FOR MR. RODGERS: Small Businesses Column on Forecast:** The set aside column entry is N/A for most entries. A more appropriate entry would be: type of set aside, TBD, no, or N/A if IDIQ is entered on the forecast.

USAID Response: We agree with this statement. We are looking at updating our Acquisition and Assistance Planning tool to include each of these options. Over the last quarter we have done a significant amount of outreach to our staff on the Business Forecast. Part of our outreach has included making sure that the small business column has been properly completed. We will continue to stress this.

- 4. QUESTION FOR MR. RODGERS: USAID Incumbent Partner:** We note that the forecast used to name the incumbent partner. This got changed last year (now seems to refer to the new implementing partner – so is almost always tbd). Would it be possible to indicate the incumbent or add a column to indicate if the opportunity is a follow-on from an existing project or “new” – last year several people asked about this related to specific projects?

USAID Response: We agree that the column should indicate “incumbent partner” to avoid confusion. We have this change pending with the system developer.

- 5. QUESTION FOR MR. RODGERS: TEC Ranges:** In an earlier Business Forecast call, USAID indicated that it was considering making changes to the Business Forecast process to further narrow down the Total Estimated Cost/Amount Range, with the recognition that the current ranges are too wide to assist bidders in bid preparation without a realistic probable contract ceiling. Could USAID please provide an update on the status of this potential improvement to the Business Forecast?

USAID Response: Several changes have been made to the Business Forecast based on partner feedback. For example, additional specificity was added for awards greater than \$500M from the initial ranges used in earlier versions of the Business Forecast. We remain open to considering additional updates to TEC ranges to help partners better pursue specific opportunities. If you have suggestions, please send them to our Ombudsman at Ombudsman@usaid.gov.

- 6. QUESTION FOR MR. PLUCKNETT:** Can missions/office increase the content of information in the description column? In some case the information is

not sufficient for an organization to determine if it wants to respond. Once USAID has determined that an activity is to be in the form of a Task Order/Delivery Order under an IDIQ, would it be possible for USAID to specify on the Business Forecast which vehicle is being used to issue the Task Order or the Delivery Order?

USAID Response: As I mentioned earlier, over the last quarter we have done a significant amount of outreach to our staff on the Business Forecast. This has included updating our guidance on our intranet page, creating a one-page cheat-sheet for updating the Forecast that was given to all staff, and conducting a webinar on how to properly update the Forecast.

A few areas that we have particularly stressed in all of our outreach:

- They must include the vehicle on the Forecast if the action will come out as a task order.
- If you don't know the mechanism that will be used for the activity, write "to be determined" -- but as soon as you do know the mechanism, please include it on the Forecast.
- Verify that the dates are correct.
- If you have a solicitation number, make sure it is included on the Forecast.
- Make sure that you fill out the small business column on the Forecast.
- Ensure that the award description adequately describes the planned activity.

I think in our most recent Forecast we saw a great improvement in each of these areas through our outreach efforts. We will continue to stress these particular areas.

- 7. QUESTION FOR MR. XAVIER: Mission Forecast:** Some countries have a low number of forecasted procurements. How does USAID verify the mission/office has made a reasonable effort to develop a forecast and the forecast is realistic? In addition, USAID has programs in more than 80 countries, but only 57 countries are represented on the Forecast. While some missions may not have a forecast, could countries with no forecast indicate none on the forecast?

USAID Response: Each quarter we do a significant amount of outreach to our Missions to ensure that they are entering information into the A&A Planning Tool for our Business Forecast. If you have been following the Forecast for the last year or so, I think you will agree that there have been a lot of improvements in both the quality of the data as well as the consistency of information provided. While there is always room for improvement, we have made significant progress.

Yesterday, during a meeting with Roy we discussed how we can do a better job of communicating when Missions do not have any upcoming opportunities. Each quarter, my office, Foreign Operations, reviews the information on the Forecast before it is published. Starting next quarter, we are going to reach out to Missions missing from the first draft of the Forecast to verify that they have no new opportunities. We will also

check with Missions that have a low number of actions. With this additional step, we will begin footnoting in the Mission Forecast specific Missions that have no opportunities available for the quarter.

8. **QUESTION FOR MR. XAVIER: Points of Contact at Missions:** Listed on the Mission Forecast is a point of contact. However, it is not possible to find the point of contact in USAID's staff directory. How do we get in touch with Mission points of contact?

USAID Response: You are correct. Contact information for Mission staff is not available in USAID's global directory. Previously, we have instructed partners to email our Ombudsman if they needed to get in touch with someone working overseas and did not have contact information.

During our meeting yesterday, we discussed this issue and came to what I think is a good solution. We will be asking all of Missions to set-up standard email boxes for inquiries and questions -- something along the lines of: OAAKenya@usaid.gov or OAAEthiopia@usaid.gov. We know that many missions already have these and we would like to see all of our Missions have a central place for inquiries. Once we have been able to get all of our Missions to set-up the email box, we will publish the contact information on our Business Forecast webpage for you to use.