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USAID Quarterly Business Forecast Review Meeting

USAID's Office of Acquisition and Assistance conducted its first ever **Quarterly Business Forecast Review** meeting on **February 4, 2015**.

Led by Aman Djahanbani, USAID Senior Procurement Executive, and Mauricio Vera, Director, Office of Small, Disadvantaged Business Utilization, USAID solicited comments regarding the forecast, provided insight into its business forecast process, and answered questions regarding specific agency requirements for both USAID/Washington and USAID Overseas Missions programs.

The link for USAID's business forecast is below:

<http://www.usaid.gov/work-usaid/get-grant-or-contract/business-forecast>

Attached are questions submitted by USAID partners and agency responses. In addition, provided below is access to a recording of the discussion.

The information to access a recording¹ of the call follows:

Dial-in Number:	(712) 775-7029
Meeting ID:	852-732-954
Reference Number:	1

USAID intends to conduct the forecast reviews to coincide with the formal release of the quarterly forecast. If you wish to be included on future notices of announcing publication of the forecast or the quarterly review discussion, please request notification to the following individuals:

1. Matthew Johnson, M/OAA Communications Director, matjohnson@usaid.gov
2. Rachel Chilton, M/OAA Communications Specialist, rchilton@usaid.gov

Regards,

Lance Butler III
A&A Ombudsman
USAID

¹ Playback Feature Keys: 4 - Rewind 1 minute; 5- Pause/resume playback; 6 - Fast forward 1 minute

Business Forecast: Process Related Questions

- 1. Our ability to respond to USAID with high quality proposals greatly depends on knowing what is in the USAID procurement pipeline. However, the Business Forecast is not useful if the information is incomplete or unreliable. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to ask these questions, and very much hope that the forecast can become a better tool for both sides; increasing transparency and providing a level playing field for competition, improving the quality of proposals submitted (and thus the quality of the eventual projects), and helping contractors to spend their G&A budgets more strategically.**
 - a. In the past year, several tracked opportunities have been removed from the forecast. For example, a Rule of Law project in Afghanistan and a Justice Strengthening project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo both disappeared from the forecast. If an opportunity is removed then does it mean it is no longer in the pipeline? Can we assume it will be coming out under an IQC?**
 - b. We often get information from other sources that conflict with the forecast. Are missions obliged to update the forecast accurately? Do you expect the reliability of the forecast to improve?**

Answer: We are always striving to improve the reliability and accuracy of the forecast. Earlier this fiscal year, USAID launched a new Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) Planning tool that is helping to automate and standardize how we capture the Business Forecast. The system has been rolled out to all of the Missions and Washington Offices and is mandated system for A&A planning. We are still working through the new system and learning about its capabilities, but we believe that this will go a long way in improving the accuracy and reliability of the Forecast. Further, we regularly communicate the importance of accuracy of the data to our contracting/agreement officers, bureaus, and missions. We understand your concerns and are working to make the forecast more accurate and reliable.

USAID programs undergo changes during the planning stages. As a result, Bureau and Mission priorities change which may result in a change with a particular business or funding opportunity. We will examine the feasibility of including the change rationale in the forecast.

- 2. The forecasts often list which mechanism will be used for a specific procurement (RFA vs. RFP), but we are increasingly seeing that the exact opposite mechanism being issued. The forecast may note on several forecasts in a row that a cooperative agreement will be issued, but then an RFP will actually be issued or vice versa. This often results in a consortium to scramble to revise a strategy, partnerships and/or forego an opportunity altogether. This results in lost time and resources for the team preparing to respond to a particular solicitation. We**

highly recommend that any mechanism listed on the forecast for a particular opportunity remain consistent.

Answer: We are aware of the concerns regarding this issue, and the Senior Procurement Executive has been actively communicating this concern to acquisition and assistance staff.

As you likely know, as a part of the project design process, we discuss and debate whether to use acquisition or assistance tools. The Office of Acquisition and Assistance is in the process of updating USAID's Choice of Instrument Guidance to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are used. We believe that this will help ensuring that the appropriate mechanisms are used and identified.

- 3. How should we interpret when a solicitation temporarily drops off the business forecast but then reappears (lack of funding, redesign, other)? Who makes decisions about changes to the forecast in Washington and at the Mission level?**

Answer: Because Agency programs and strategies are subject to revisions for any number of reasons during the project design stage, those design stage changes will be reflected in updates to the forecast. We attempt to keep changes to a minimum but changes will occur.

- 4. How is the forecast updated? How are missions and bureaus incentivized/encouraged to provide timely, accurate information?**

Answer: With the Agency's new A&A planning tool, all of the Business Forecast information is captured in as a part of the normal project planning and design. When USAID is preparing to release an updated Forecast, a call out to the COs is made in advance with a deadline to check the information in the system. Final review is left with the Senior Procurement Executive for final release. Missions are consistently encouraged to provide accurate, timely information, and we will continue to stress the importance.

- 5. Could there be a systematic point in the project design or internal RFP drafting and approval process where the requirement is placed on the forecast?**

Answer: This is a great suggestion. We believe at the project design stage this may be possible. , We are working with our team to see if this is feasible.

- 6. Will USAID consider including information under "Award Type" or elsewhere on the business forecast as to whether or not a particular opportunity will be released under an IDIQ? This information could allow for great cost savings to potential bidders and ultimately, the client, minimizing spending on advanced preparation for opportunities that ultimately are not biddable.**

Answer: Yes, USAID includes the award type for full and open opportunities.

7. **Could USAID include a note as to when each solicitation was last updated in the business forecast, which would indicate the day that information was received or entered into the Business Forecast system?**

Answer: This is a great suggestion and something we have been discussing internally. We are in discussion with our A&A system developers and hope that we can implement this in future releases.

8. **What is the role of the point of contact listed in the Forecast?**

Answer: The Point of Contact is put on the forecast to help answer questions regarding the opportunity.

9. **Can the name of the incumbent be included and/or updated when they exist?**

Answer: Yes. As a part of the Business Forecast process, we ask contracting officers to provide this information.

10. **We highly recommend that USAID missions include eligibility requirements regarding upcoming solicitations. Is an opportunity to be awarded directly to a local group only or is it open for anyone to apply? In the past, we have invested resources on various opportunities; only have them to be issued for local groups only.**

Answer: This request has been passed along to the system developers. Further, the solicitation will have these final details.

11. **After a forecast is issued, our staff often visits their respective USAID missions to confirm and/or verify the information on the forecast. When asking about the forecast, many senior mission staff are unaware that this tool exists and its purpose and are not able to answer. Who within each mission is involved in developing the respective forecasts and how is this related to appropriate personnel so they are aware this exists?**

Answer: Mission personnel responsible for providing forecast information varies by mission. If/when there is an omission or ambiguity in the forecast, we will use the quarterly review discussions to address it as well as engaging the Mission.

12. **Could task/delivery orders be placed on the forecast? This is especially important for small businesses which need the lead time. This benefits all parties as USAID ultimately then receives higher quality proposals. Also, if USAID partners know something is coming out as a RFTOP, they can make important decisions, e.g., if they are not a holder of an IDIQ, they know not to spend time on the effort, or to try to join a consortium; it sheds light on USAID's programmatic decisions, which are important in understanding the overall market; consortium**

members, including small business, can begin to advocate for roles on the upcoming RFTOP; and so on.

Answer: Only full and open competitions are released. However, orders via the GSA schedule will be included.

13. The estimated dollar value ranges used are wide and it is difficult to have a real sense of scope and coverage of the forthcoming procurement. Is it possible to narrow these dollar value ranges further?

Answer: We understand this concern and agree that the dollar ranges are too large. We are working with the A&A system developers to narrow the ranges.

14. Could USAID add a field to indicate where the award is expected and/or planned to be a small business set-aside?

Answer: This field already exists in the Forecast.

15. Are there ways in which USAID can improve the accuracy of its business forecasts with regard to release dates of opportunities?

Answer: Our new A&A system has provided the ability for CO's to run a report before quarterly deadlines. Further, we encourage CO's to update whenever there is a change in the forecast. We find this is actively being done more often.

16. Regarding the information that appears in the Mission forecast, would USAID please discuss how information is collected, recorded, and its tenure on the Mission forecast? For example, when activities that once appeared on a previous mission forecast are not on a more recent version, does that mean the activity is no longer being considered? If the activity is still being considered, why is it no longer on the current Mission forecast?

Answer: Mission requirements are consolidated through a Mission point of contact. That information is submitted to the M/OAA Deputy Director for initial vetting and the Senior Procurement Executive for clearance.

Activities that were on prior forecasts but subsequently removed can be changed because of project design updates, bureau or mission priority changes, or funding constraints.

17. Will USAID consider including information under "Award Type" or elsewhere on the business forecast as to whether or not a particular opportunity will be released under an IDIQ or global? This information could allow for great cost savings to potential bidders and ultimately, the client, minimizing spending on advanced preparation for opportunities that ultimately are not biddable.

Answer: Currently, USAID does not include opportunities under IDIQs (task/delivery orders) and does not expect to include them in the near future.

18. When a country is omitted from the Mission Forecast (as Tanzania was from the January Forecast), what are we to take from that? What is the best way to get updates on previously listed opportunities for those countries?

Answer: Please contact the respective Mission and USAID's A&A Ombudsman at lbutler@usaid.gov if a Mission's forecast omitted. We will work with the Mission to include the omitted information.

19. When an opportunity is no longer on the forecast (e.g, USAID Ethiopia READ II), but there is no record of a solicitation being released or an award being made, how can we learn its status (i.e., is it no longer planned, was it awarded as a sole source, etc.)?

Answer: Activities that were on prior forecasts but subsequently removed can be changed because of project design updates, bureau or mission priority changes, or funding constraints.

We recommend contacting the point of contact identified on the prior forecast to inquiry of more information.

20. What is the lag time between when information is collected from Missions and when the forecast is released? We often see solicitations listed that have already been released – is that intentional or is there a lag time that we should factor into our analysis of the forecast?

Answer: Although USAID works to timely include opportunities on the forecast, lag times may occur. However, there is no general lag time for forecast postings.

21. Sometimes, we will see an activity that seems like one previously listed, however, it has a different name. How can we know if it is the same or a different opportunity? Could USAID make a note if it is the same one with a new name?

Answer: USAID will work to identify substantive changes in the forecast.

22. Does USAID plan to host future Business Forecast Reviews? If so, with what frequency and how will this be communicated to implementing partners?

Answer: USAID will host forecasts each quarter immediately after forecast issuance. Please sign up on our listserv if you would like to be notified. We also intend to provide public notice of the forecast review as well.

23. Is it possible to set up some sort of alert to know when the forecast is updated? For example –

- a. Perhaps ask people to sign up to a distribution list?
- b. Allow for alerts or RSS to be set up on the business forecast page to receive updates
- c. Post on social media when the forecast is updated?

Answer: Yes. We are looking in to potential option for notifications. We hope to have something established soon.

24. Question: Is there a reason why there are not *any* SBSAs on the Mission Forecast? Can we expect to see more SBSAs in the future?

Below is a breakdown of the Mission Forecast:

- 0 SBSAs
- 15 TBD
- 8 Purchase Orders
- 8 PSCs
- 3 IDIQs
- 5 Grants
- 1 DIA
- 99 Cooperative Agreements
- 95 Contracts
- 4 Collaborative Agreements

Of the 95 contracts, I have identified 34 opportunities that could potentially be small business set aside (under \$4million in value) and should be further reviewed.

- 17 contracts between \$150k-\$550k
- 5 contracts between \$500k-\$1m
- 12 contracts between \$1m-\$4m

Answer: Although Missions are not bound by the set aside requirements of FAR Part 19, Missions are strongly encouraged (See ADS 302) to set aside appropriate opportunities for small business concerns. Further, USAID's Office of Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization works with Mission contracting officers and technical staff to identify as early as possible set aside opportunities along with providing Missions with small business indicators to monitor set aside progress for overseas activities.

25. If an RFI or pre-solicitation is released, does this mean that the final solicitation will be an openly competitively bid or is there a possibility that it could be released under a limited competitive bidding mechanism like an IDIQ?

Answer: Both are possible at the pre-solicitation stage. The contracting officer will make the final determination.

26. Could USAID include a note as to when each solicitation was last updated in the business forecast, which would indicate the day that information was received or entered into the Business Forecast system?

Answer: USAID will examine this as an option.

27. Is it possible to add a column that would note whether a pre-solicitation conference, RFI or draft solicitation is planned for the activity?

Answer: USAID will examine this as an option.

Business Forecast: Specific Forecast Questions

1. **Re: LAC/Colombia, AO Nubia Farfan, Cooperative Agreement – Why is the Reconciliation Program included in this forecast given that the estimated solicitation date was back in May 2014?**

Answer: The anticipated solicitation release date for the reintegration program is 3/2/2015, and for the reconciliation program, 7/1/2015.

2. **Re: LAC/El Salvador, AO Renata Suarez – The project title and award type are “TBD.” Why and when will these be defined?**

Answer: The program is in the early stages of project design. We will work with the Agreement Officer to better describe this opportunity.

3. **Re: LAC/El Salvador, AO Indyra Gonzalez – Why is the award type “TBD?”**

Answer: The award type is TBD because the project design team and CO have not finalized the most appropriate instrument for this opportunity. However, we wanted to alert the IP community as early as possible regarding the potential opportunity.

Is this solicitation similar to the one released last year under a similar title?

Answer: We cannot say at this point how similar this action will be with respect to last year's action, provided that we have not reviewed the SOW/PD yet.

4. **In the October 2014 updated USAID Mission Forecast, the following opportunity was listed:**

Uganda	TBD	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	2/1/2015
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However, this opportunity is no longer listed in the January 2015 updated forecast among other updated opportunities for Uganda. Does USAID/Uganda still intend to issue this solicitation?

Answer: Uganda Sanitation Program is updated in the 2nd Quarter Forecast

5. **The USAID Mission in Afghanistan released an RFI for CINHS stating it would be a contract. The revised quarterly forecast now lists this opportunity as a Cooperative Agreement – please clarify what funding instrument USAID plans on using for this solicitation.**

Answer: The CINHS project (Afghanistan nutrition program) will be a contract.

6. **Regarding the forecast for items coming out of Egypt, we have heard that Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA) ceiling is being increased and**

that an award coming out of Egypt may be targeted to that LWA. VEGA's ceiling seems to have been suddenly increased by \$100m, and has been extended for many years. Could you describe the system by which LWAs are competed and managed, and how it is decided to extend an LWA?

Answer: LWAs are assistance awards (competed under an RFA) that cover a specified worldwide activity. The Leader Award includes language that allows a Mission or other office to award a separate grant to the Leader Award recipient without additional competition and which supports a distinct local or regional activity that fits within the terms and scope of the Leader Award. This is the Associate Award. Generally, LWAs run for a period of five years. However, LWAs may be extended for up to an additional five years provided a justification for restricted eligibility is approved in accordance with ADS 303. Moreover, all USAID contracting and agreement officers (not just Egypt) are required to determine whether proposed work is more appropriate for either acquisition or assistance. The contracting/agreement officer is required to prepare a choice of instrument determination document that details why the determination was made - using factor specified in the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act.

What has been considered by Egypt with respect to whether this opportunity is really assistance or acquisition-type work?

Answer: USAID/Egypt's Agreement Officer has determined that assistance is the most appropriate type of instrument for its upcoming agriculture development activity. The decision was based upon the nature of the relationship between USAID and the awardee and the intended purpose of the proposed interventions.

- 7. We do not see Tanzania opportunities represented in the January 2015 Mission Business Forecast documents (PDF and Excel files) that were posted on the USAID website on January 9th. Is it possible that the Tanzania section was mistakenly omitted and, if so, do you anticipate posting a revision soon?**

Answer: Yes, the Tanzania forecast was omitted but the 2nd Quarter forecast will include the Tanzania forecast opportunities.

- 8. Previous forecasts (e.g., September 2014 and May 2014) listed a number of upcoming Egypt projects, including the Technical Assistance Trade and Investment Program BPA (TATIP) and the TIA Trade and Investment Assistance IQC, as well as two prospective delivery orders under the TATIP BPA (Entrepreneurship Program and MSME Support Project).**
- a. It was never clear from the Forecast how exactly these would work – whether they were for international firms or local ones – and how they differed from each other.**
 - b. The January 2015 forecast does not list any opportunities for Egypt. Does the omission signify anything? (It would be less surprising, if a mission doesn't respond to a request for updates, if the "old info"**

remained. Deletion of the old information seems to be a new development.)

Answer: Forecasting opportunities for Egypt will be included in the 2nd Quarter forecast update.

9. While the January 2015 has no listings for Ukraine, the September 2014 forecast listed five opportunities for Ukraine (Economic Revitalization of the South and East; Transforming Agriculture; Trade Policy Assistance; Energy Reform Initiatives; and Technical Assistance to the City of Kiev). Does the omission signify anything?

Answer: The information will be included in the 2nd quarter forecast issuance, but here is what we can release:

- **Economic Revitalization of the South and East:** Still in the project design stage but we anticipate an activity of not more than \$5M planned.
- **Transforming Agriculture:** Still in the project design stage - \$4M planned.
- **Trade Policy Assistance:** Ukraine Trade Policy Program, Pending award under a Washington-based IDIQ in March 2015.
- **Energy Reform Initiatives:** Municipal Energy Reform - project design stage - \$5M planned - PAD in progress - approval expected by the end of February 2015. Municipal Energy Reform Project - project design stage - \$500K planned.
- **Technical Assistance to the City of Kiev - Still in project design stage:**
 - This has been split into the following activities:
 - eTender Initiative
 - Kyiv Parking Initiative
 - Waste Management Initiative
 - Investment Oversight

10. What's the status of the DCHA/DRG replacements for ENGAGE, Rule of Law, and Legislative Strengthening AND DCHA/DRG Global Civil Society Strengthening (GCSS) LWA?

Answer: Both requirements are in the early stages of project design but continue to be a priority of DCHA/DRG. They are working on providing status updates in a subsequent business forecast.

11. Can you explain why there are no opportunities listed for Haiti on the Missions forecast? Does USAID anticipate releasing any solicitations for programs in Haiti in the first quarter of 2015?

Answer: We are currently working with respective Missions (including Haiti) to include potential requirements on subsequent forecasts.

12. Question on the Bureau for Middle East MENA Supporting Sustainable Transition Initiatives IDIQ (CO: Alicia Henderson):

- a. Does USAID anticipate that this will be a single award or multi-award IDIQ?
- b. This opportunity has not previously appeared on the forecast. Can USAID confirm that this will be a new initiative rather than a follow-on to an existing contract?
- c. Does USAID anticipate that this will be a mechanism that other USAID offices and/or bureaus will be able to utilize to release new opportunities?

Answer: USAID does anticipate this will be a multi-award IDIQ. This will be a new opportunity, not a follow-on activity. We do anticipate that this would be a mechanism that other USAID missions and operating units *inside* the Middle East Bureau would be able to utilize.

13. Regarding Mission Forecast: Nigeria - Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH) Activity. Is this opportunity a follow on to the USAID Nigeria TSHIP Project?

Answer: USAID will include an update in the next forecast issuance.

14. Regarding Mission Forecast: South Africa - Tuberculosis South Africa Project (TBSAP). Will this opportunity have any eligibility restrictions such as being limited to local South African Organizations?

Answer: SA TBSAP - the activity is in design stage; the project design team has not yet determined eligibility.

15. Regarding Mission Forecast: Malawi - One Community Project. The estimated solicitation date was 1/15/15 and the target award date is 6/30/15. Does USAID still expect this opportunity to be awarded by 6/30/15?

Answer: Yes. We expect to issue the opportunity mid-Feb and award by 6/30/15.

16. Would USAID please expand upon the Economic Development, Governance and Entrepreneurship (EDGE) project listed under the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia in the Washington forecast? For example, will this be a single activity or an IQC type mechanism? Are there specific countries identified to be targeted or will it be more regional based? Will the program focus on specific sub-sectors (EG, enabling environment, work force development, etc.)?

Answer: Although this opportunity is in the project design stage, USAID anticipates this as a single award mechanism - no decision has been made whether this will entail a stand-alone contract or an IDIQ. Further, USAID envisions this supplying a need to the region.

17. There was an entry on last year's Mission Forecast in Tanzania that identified an upcoming opportunity entitled, "USAID Tanzania: CSO - LGA Linkage and Support (CLLAS)." We note that on the current forecast that neither this opportunity nor any others for Tanzania are listed. Why are there no opportunities for Tanzania listed on the current forecast and is this specific opportunity still being considered?

Answer: We will include Tanzania opportunities in the next forecast.

18. The previous Forecast showed a project for Haiti in hospital infrastructure, but that project is no longer listed. What happened to this project? Is another donor building this hospital? What will the resources available for Haiti be used for?

Answer: We will include Haiti opportunities in the next forecast.

19. We were curious as to whether there's any update from the Egypt Mission in relation to the forecast that was released last month? We checked today and USAID still hadn't published the addendum. We understand from the Egypt Desk Officer that the Mission has sent its info to Washington.

Answer: USAID/Egypt opportunities have now been posted.

20. DRC and Tanzania were removed from the last business forecast. Can USAID please confirm there is still a pipeline of opportunities for these countries?

Answer: Confirmed.

21. USAID updated the release date for Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene to December 2014, which has passed. Is there a further updated release date?

Answer: Not at this time.

22. What is the difference, if any, between the Guatemala Community Strengthening RFA listed and the one that was solicited last year? Is this a re-procurement of the same RFA?

Answer: Although similar with respect to the emphasis on strengthening communities, this is not a re-procurement of the same RFA. This opportunity is currently at the project design stage. However, your question also highlights to USAID that we need to be cognizant of the fact that a Local Community Strengthening, a Community Strengthening and a Healthy Communities opportunity need to have an appropriate naming convention to reduce the likelihood of confusion.

23. RDMA/Thailand notes a new a new Control and Prevention of Infectious Diseases (CAP-3D) project. Is this anticipated to be a multiple or single award?

Answer: At this time, we anticipate that the replacement will be a single award, made on/around the end of FY17.

**24. Country and Activity Name: Liberia - Liberia Agribusiness Activity (BLiV)
Instrument Type: Contract
Point of Contact: Thomatta C. Cooper**

An RFI for the BLiV opportunity was released on January 6th, indicating that the mechanism would be a cooperative agreement. The same opportunity now appears on the business forecast listed as a contract. Could USAID please clarify what the contract mechanism will be for this opportunity?

Answer: The mechanism identified in the 2nd Quarter forecast is a cooperative agreement.