

“Common Comments” on Shelter and Settlements (S&S) and NFI Proposals During the Fiscal Year 2017 Proposal Review Season

The PSPM S&S Team has reviewed over 700 proposals and revised proposals (both S&S and Logistics/Relief Commodities sectors) thus far in FY 2017, the bulk of them during what seems to have become the annual April to August review season.

Several comments on proposed activities were repeated often enough during the review season to serve as the basis for this informal guidance note, which is intended to inform implementing partner proposal preparation efforts. In enhancing clarity of the USAID/OFDA Proposal Guidelines, this guidance will hopefully increase the prospect that proposals can be reviewed and approved in an expeditious manner, leading to improved projects, and improved support of beneficiaries.

The Basics: Expediting Proposal Reviews

Reviewing USAID/OFDA Proposal Guidelines Beforehand, and reviewing the references found in the Guidelines (e.g., the Sphere Project Handbook), will inform proposal preparation efforts, significantly enhance proposal quality, and reduce review time. USAID/OFDA will issue revised proposal guidelines in the near future, but the contents of this informal note will remain relevant to any future proposal submissions.

Incorporating Page Numbers into proposals prior to submittal will expedite both USAID/OFDA review and Implementing Partner response and proposal revision efforts.

Identifying the Number of Beneficiaries, the Number of Beneficiary Households, the Average Beneficiary Household Size, and Minimally Adequate Covered Living Space. S&S assistance is linked directly to provision of “minimally adequate covered living space” (see Sphere Project and USAID/OFDA Proposal Guidelines) in new or existing structures. This space is, in turn, linked directly to the average number of people per household among the beneficiary population. Although people around the world do it differently, they generally tend to aggregate in households.

Please provide figures for beneficiary population, households, and average household size, as these basic metrics inform the provision of S&S sector assistance, primarily the calculation of minimally adequate covered living space (3.5 M²/person x no. of persons/household), as identified by Sphere Project guidance, that will serve as the basis for responding to household shelter needs.

Bills of Quantities (BOQs) and Diagrams. These items are the basics of shelter, and need to be included in proposals when covered living space needs to be created via new structures, or within existing structures. BOQs may not be needed for proposed hosting support or rental activities if they do not include the creation of covered living space. A BOQ, listing the cost per item and quantities/costs by item for ALL materials needed to create the identified covered living space, is a basic project design element that guides project activities. IPs should identify what materials in the BOQ will be provided by the IP, and what materials (if any) will be provided by the beneficiaries. Further, field-level diagrams/sketches illustrate how proposed materials listed in the BOQ are combined to create the needed covered living space. Generating BOQs also helps identify the materials that might be available locally, either through salvaging, scavenging, or purchase by beneficiaries. Related issues are whether beneficiaries will be expected to provide any BOQ items, at what cost, whether these additional costs will pose a burden to beneficiary households, and how to mitigate this burden.

Shelter is More Than a Piece of Plastic Sheeting. Providing plastic sheeting as part of NFI packages distributed through either a Logistics/Relief Commodities or S&S sector activity permits a means of delivering the sheeting from Point A to Point B. However, once the plastic sheeting is in the hands of beneficiaries, and they intend to use it for shelter, the sheeting becomes an input to the creation of covered living space. Guidance on use of the sheeting is needed, as it's often the case that beneficiaries do not know how to use it to create "minimally adequate covered living space" (Sphere Project). It's important, then, to provide a detailed discussion on how the sheeting will be used; how it will be combined with other materials (e.g., rope, wood, nails, existing walls and roofs, etc.) to create covered living space, at what cost; or whether the materials are available locally that beneficiaries can provide themselves, at no or low cost, either as a substitute for, or complement to, materials that IPs might provide. BOQs and diagrams are exceedingly helpful in this regard. In sum, it's not sufficient to respond to identified shelter needs with a piece of plastic sheeting -- and the hope that beneficiaries can create needed covered living space.

Plastic Sheeting: Number, Dimensions, and Specifications. If plastic sheeting is proposed, please provide the number to be provided per beneficiary household, as well as the dimensions and technical specifications. Please compare sheeting with specifications of the sheeting provided by major international humanitarian agencies (e.g., IOM, UNHCR, IFRC, USAID/OFDA, etc.), and identify measures that will increase the longevity of sheeting that does not meet or exceed specifications (e.g., covering sheeting with local materials to reduce degradation caused by extended solar exposure, wear and tear, etc.).

Project Guidance and Monitoring. If beneficiaries will assume a primary role in creating needed covered living space, please provide detailed discussion on how guidance will be provided to inform beneficiary efforts, and how beneficiary efforts to create covered living space will be monitored throughout the project cycle.

Assistance to Vulnerable Groups. USAID/OFDA welcomes sensitivity towards vulnerable groups in humanitarian programming. However, proposals often include limited information on how, specifically, implementing partners will identify and assist those vulnerable households requiring special attention to create minimally adequate covered living space as part of proposed activities.

Please identify selection criteria that will be used to identify beneficiaries, taking into account the ability to self-recover of each household based on a detailed socio-economic analysis of their post-disaster condition. If possible, rely heavily on the affected community to identify the most vulnerable families among them. IPs should discuss how the need for S&S assistance will be assessed, what criteria will be used to identify S&S beneficiary households, and describe the beneficiary selection process. This information is needed to inform programming, and will enhance the ability of partners to identify and clarify assistance to those households unable to create such space because of special circumstances (e.g., disabled/elderly/child-headed households, income limits, etc.).

Secure Support of Primary Stakeholders. Process matters. Stakeholder support and understanding of proposed activities is critical to the success of any humanitarian assistance program. Please identify the primary project stakeholders, and describe how proposed activities will engage and consult them to ensure they agree and support the beneficiary selection criteria and approach, and the shelter delivery methods, designs, and costs (including cash transfers).

Additional Guidance for More Complex Proposed Activities

Reconstruction. Please note that USAID/OFDA is not mandated to support reconstruction activities. Please delete proposed activities that seek to provide permanent housing, as well as all references to “reconstruction”.

Protecting Sensitive Beneficiary Data and Avoiding Duplication of Efforts. IPs are strongly encouraged to participate in cluster activities to increase opportunities to engage beneficiaries, host country governments, and other humanitarian actors in generating appropriate responses, and avoid duplication in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Also, IPs should be mindful of need to protect beneficiary personal identifiable data, how it is stored and used, and how it will be securely shared with program stakeholders, including host-country governments.

Using Cash and Vouchers to Promote Access to Adequate Shelter. Implementing an S&S project using cash-based programming measures (e.g., cash and vouchers) is different than, but equally as complex as, direct shelter construction. Cash is a tool, not an intervention in and of itself; partners still must ensure the

provision of minimally adequate covered living space. IPs must describe how the value of any shelter-related cash transfer is calculated, and note the assumptions made. Partners should also describe how most recipients will secure access to shelter (repair, rental, etc) and explain the extra support (e.g. in-kind assistance, technical support, legal assistance, and referrals) the program will provide besides the cash transfers to ensure that most vulnerable households access shelter consistent with Sphere Project guidance. Finally, if beneficiaries are expected to repair, upgrade, or build shelters using cash, IPs should provide illustrative BOQs and field sketches/diagrams that inform and guide beneficiary activities, recognizing that individual shelter solutions will vary.

Although cash transfers do present opportunities for a limited range of shelter activities (e.g., emergency NFIs, tools, and other basic materials), recent research¹ has documented multiple deficiencies in the use of unconditional or unrestricted cash transfers to support self-help shelter repair and construction. If proposing such transfers for shelter repair or construction, IPs should discuss how to avoid or reduce common risks, such as:

- Low quality of construction work performed
- Frequent use of low-quality building materials
- Price inflation in local labor and building materials markets
- Slow pace of shelter activities, frequently leading to program delays, and
- Insufficient cash to meet shelter needs after other humanitarian needs (e.g. food) are met.

Shelter Needs and Use of Local Materials. USAID/OFDA welcomes and supports use of local materials where supplies exist and do not generate adverse impacts on local materials markets or degrade local environments. It is often possible, for example, to replace plastic sheeting in whole or part with local materials. IPs should review proposed project designs to increase local materials content, on the assumption that introduction of said materials does not pose a fire or environmental hazard.

Building Materials Market Assessments. IP assessments should include evidence demonstrating that building materials markets have adequate access, supply, quality, and stability to meet the demand generated by the displaced population (including those not benefiting from the program, as well as other humanitarian efforts) in settlements of proposed activities.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Awareness Efforts. Please describe the need for DRR, both at the shelter and settlements levels. In addition to the incorporation of specific measures into structures to reduce identified hazards risks,

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https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/gsc_position_paper_cash_and_markets_in_the_shelter_sector-1_2.pdf

USAID/OFDA encourages adoption of a balanced DRR awareness approach, including a variety of methodologies and tools, including but not limited to demonstrations, publications (e.g. brochures and posters), formal training sessions, and use of social media. Please share related documents so that best practices can be identified.

Reducing S&S Risk. IPs should confirm that qualified staff (e.g., structural engineers, civil engineers, or architects) will be included in project activities to assess new or existing living spaces proposed for occupancy by beneficiaries to ensure that spaces are capable of withstanding common hazards without collapsing or injuring beneficiaries/occupants. IPs should avoid, to the extent possible, improving or strengthening structural elements (e.g., columns, beams, and foundations) in buildings of more than two stories. If repair of structural elements in buildings higher than two stories is proposed, IPs should describe the knowledge, skills, and resources that qualify IP staff to perform high-quality structural repairs on time and under budget.

IPs should also confirm that qualified staff will verify that all available settlement systems (e.g., water, sanitation, heating, cooling, and electric services, if present) to be used for shelter are working properly throughout project duration.

Technical Review Before Upgrading Buildings. For proposed activities in conflict zones with limited USAID/OFDA access, and where security conditions permit, IPs should submit a description of the scope of the activity prior to commencing structure repairs, as well as a beneficiary census disaggregated by gender and age groups, BOQs for each building disaggregated by dwelling unit (e.g., flats, houses, etc.), geographic coordinates in degrees, minutes and seconds using as reference the World Geodetic System (WGS 84), and pictures illustrating the current status of each dwelling unit.

Debris Removal Planning. If conflicts or disasters have generated debris in settlements of proposed activities, IPs should provide a detailed description of the approach and assumptions used to estimate the volume of debris to be removed. In addition, maps or other illustrations showing the spatial distribution of debris in the project area should be provided, and areas of proposed disposal sites. Please describe the anticipated logistical constraints expected to be addressed via a debris management plan.

Infrastructure Improvements. IPs should identify and discuss the extent and cost of service infrastructure repair/rehabilitation activities in settlements of proposed activity, including selection criteria to be used in identifying the infrastructure it plans to repair/rehabilitate. In addition, IPs should identify costs of each proposed infrastructure project (e.g. markets, water points, roads, etc.), and confirm the qualifications of IP or contractor staff that will perform repair/rehabilitation activities that require specialized knowledge and skills, and/or to guide, support and supervise the quality of proposed work conducted by the program beneficiaries. Finally, please provide BOQs, drawings, and

narrative descriptions of each infrastructure rehabilitation project in settlements of proposed activities.

Relationship of Shelter Size to Plot/Parcel Size. This relationship, also expressed as the relationship of covered living space to total living space, is particularly important in camp settings, and critical to ensuring needed outdoor living space for cooking, washing clothes and dishes, bathing and sanitation, drainage, physical access, services, etc. It is not uncommon to establish a ratio between shelter size and plot size of 1:4 or 1:5, whereby, for example, a 25 M2 shelter might indicate plot sizes of 100-125 M2. In this configuration, beneficiary households would have a total of 75-100 M2 of usable outdoor living space on their plots.

It is often the case that shelter to plot size ratios in camps are in excess of 1:7 or more, so there is little justification for reducing shelter size below Sphere Project guidance. However, real or perceived limitations in living space in camp settings are often used to justify reductions in covered living space below Sphere guidance. Even a shelter to plot size ratio of 1:2 or 1:3 generally permits minimally adequate outdoor living space for beneficiaries. It is unusual to observe ratios this low in camp settings, however.

IPs should provide information on shelter and plot sizes when working in camp settings, to both ensure sufficient outdoor usable living space and eliminate efforts to reduce covered living space, even in the densest camps.

Addressing Potential Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) Conflicts. IPs should provide detailed description on how proposed projects will contribute to protecting the land, housing and property rights of beneficiaries, whether assisted in-kind or with cash transfers. Also, IPs should discuss how the proposed project will address any conflicts that might arise over housing land and property rights. Finally, IPs should describe the system the proposed project would establish, or link to, to collect and address HLP grievances in a timely fashion.