

**FFY 2021, 2nd Quarter Business Forecast Questions and Responses**  
**March 10, 2021**

**Background**

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) 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. Organizations interested in working with USAID can use this tool to plan for proposal or application submissions.

**General Business Forecast Questions**

1. **Geocodes:** Does USAID anticipate reducing the number of opportunities it releases under the 935 geocode this year?

**USAID Response:** The Agency has not and is not planning to issue any guidance related to geographic codes and the restriction of eligibility of international organizations to work with USAID.

2. **Activities removed from the Business Forecast:** Does USAID have any recommendations or requirements to make it easier to respond to questions about programs that are not on the Forecast, such as if they are included in the Q&A but not the Forecast, or if they disappear from the Forecast?

**USAID Response:** The forecast may not have the opportunity if the solicitation closes. Please refer to the archive of forecasts and POCs if you need further information about a forecasted opportunity that is no longer available.

3. **Associate Awards:** What does USAID do to promote the use of Associate Awards under Leader with Associate Award mechanisms by bilateral missions? It seems they are underused; many missions are very reluctant to use them and some are not aware of their existence or clear about how they work.

**USAID Response:** Thanks for the recommendation. USAID provides training to staff on all types of Assistance mechanisms. LWAs are one mechanism available for Agreement Officers to consider in terms of the best approach. However, we will continue to look into this as a communication/training opportunity.

4. **Small Business Goals:** What are USAID's small business goals for FY21? And which Missions have small business goals?

**USAID Response:** USAID [small business goals](#) are 12.51 percent for prime (direct) contracts and 16.00 percent for subcontracts. Missions with an annual contract obligation at or above \$5 million for three consecutive fiscal years are assigned small

business goals.

5. **Procurement Action Lead Time (PALT):** What is USAID's current procurement acquisition lead time (PALT)? What is USAID's goal for PALT?

**USAID Response:** USAID's average PALT for new actions in FY20 valued at over \$10 million was 233 days. This breakdown includes contracts (250 days), GSA schedule order (112 days), indefinite delivery contracts (294 days), other federal orders/contracts (104 days), and task orders and delivery orders (162 days). The procurement action lead time goal by action can be found in [ADS 300 on page 15](#).

6. **ADS:** Might USAID consider hosting one or more webinars to explain the critical changes made last year to the ADS?

**USAID Response:** We will look into the possibility of hosting a webinar like this. The Agency published all of the relevant A&A policy revisions in the M/OAA Annual Progress Report that is available here: <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/bureau-management-office-acquisition-and-assistance-fiscal-year-2020-progress-report>

7. **Business Forecast:** We have noticed a growing number of opportunities are marked as TBD in the "Award/Action Type" and "Small Business Set-Aside" fields. Leaving fields "TBD" makes it difficult for potential offerors to make bidding decisions, and delaying those decisions affects the quality of proposals USAID receives. While we understand that sometimes USAID requires further information and cannot make these determinations when an opportunity is posted to the business forecast, we request that USAID try to update the forecast with this information as soon as possible.

**USAID Response:** Thanks for the recommendation. We will include this point as a part of updating changes.

8. **Business Forecast change log:** Could USAID please provide an update on when the change log is expected to be added?

**USAID Response:** The change log is now live on the Agency's Business Forecast.

9. **Business Forecast:** Is there a standard system or process for locating an awarded project from a previously forecasted opportunity? It appears that one must search thoroughly through a general search engine using key words rather than having a USAID source of information. If there is no system, will USAID consider providing links to awarded projects on grants.gov, as a part of related documents or elsewhere?

**USAID Response:** As a part of our quarterly outreach, the Agency downloads a copy of the Forecast and posts it on our archived page. This would be the best way to identify an

old opportunity not currently on the Forecast.

10. **Business Forecast:** This quarter, we noticed that several opportunities—including the Georgia Civil Society Engagement Activity and Jordan Sawt Activity—published Draft Program Descriptions on [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), but did not have a corresponding entry on the Business Forecast that noted a release date. This approach makes it difficult for organizations to plan appropriately to be able to respond. Will USAID continue using this approach in the future? If so, we request that Draft Program Descriptions please include estimated release dates.

**USAID Response:** Thanks for bringing this to our attention. We will ensure that we note this in our outreach to our AO/COs.

11. **Non-Permissive Environments:** Would USAID please provide a list of the countries included in the non-permissive environment category?

**USAID Response:** USAID does not have a current, updated list of countries in the non-permissive environment category. This workstream was previously paused, and USAID is assessing whether to re-engage on this topic.

12. **New Partnerships Initiative:** USAID has confirmed that the New Partners Initiative requirements will be mainstreamed into NOFOs. Can USAID please provide more details on how this will happen?

**USAID Response:** USAID provides Operating Units and Missions language that can be used in NOFOs specifically listed as New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) actions. Missions have outlined in NPI Action Plans how they will be integrating NPI into their portfolios.

13. **Business Forecast:** We have observed that for an increasing number of forecasted opportunities the solicitation was released earlier than the stated release date, sometimes significantly earlier. There are also solicitations posted that were never in the Forecast. How is USAID taking this into consideration as it looks at ways to improve the Forecast?

**USAID Response:** We are regularly engaging with our staff to ensure that all of our funding opportunities are on the Business Forecast. We also regularly stress the importance of ensuring that information is accurate. We will continue to focus on these efforts.

14. **Co-Creation Suggestions:** Missions are increasingly using co-creation phases that require substantial resources from implementing partners and their respective consortium members in advance of award. While this is a great opportunity to engage industry experts in the design process, co-creation has the potential to strengthen efficiencies of resources. However, lengthy co-creation processes that involve large teams of large groups of competitors limits that positive impact and stretches the

limited resources of implementing partners engaged in the co-design. Therefore, we have a few suggestions to strengthen the process, based on our recent experiences:

- a. Use of the concept note stage to identify the top one or two contractors to advance to the full proposal stage is effective, rather than including all participants in more than one stage of the competition. It is most efficient to engage smaller groups of participants (less than 5 people) in co-design.
- b. Some missions have elected to limit recruitment requirements during the solicitation process and instead require implementing partners to describe the strategy for recruitment upon award. This is a helpful practice.
- c. Some missions have elected to hold co-creation post-award using refinement periods to launch and study initial impact of interventions and then build implementation in Y2-Y5 based on successes and lessons learned.
- d. It would be useful for USAID to analyze these and other models for co-design and provide guidelines and best practices to help Missions interested in using this innovative practice. We also recommend USAID to consider standardizing the process for all Missions to ensure consistency across the agency.

**USAID Response:** Thank you for these suggestions. We agree that co-creation can be a useful tool for collaboration in not only the competitive but in non-competitive situations to achieve a mutually valued outcome. Proper preparation and resources are required to ensure a successful co-creation and is not appropriate in every situation. Currently, USAID is conducting a stocktaking exercise associated with the Acquisition and Assistance Strategy from 2018, and we appreciate the feedback and suggestions on USAID A&A approaches from our implementing partners.

15. **Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS):** According to information USAID provided on the Country Development Cooperation Strategies Wave Completion a number of CDCSs were due for completion by December 2020. When does USAID anticipate making this public?

**USAID Response:** USAID has put a temporary pause on new strategic plans, effective March 5. The temporary pause is applicable only to countries that are launching new strategies in 2021. Analytical work, consultations, and other key elements of strategic planning can continue during the pause. Missions with recently approved CDCSs or Strategic Frameworks are encouraged to utilize the Mid-Course Stocktaking (MCST) or Portfolio Review exercises to consider Administration priorities and other factors that may affect strategy implementation, such as COVID-19.

16. **Environmental Compliance Database:** What is the status of the Environmental Compliance Database? Will access be fully restored? If so, when?

**USAID Response:** The Environmental Compliance Database is currently down for

unscheduled maintenance. There is no fixed ETA on when service will be restored; however, we hope to restore access by April 1, 2021.

17. **Employee Biographical Data Sheet:** Since September 2019, the Contractor Employee Biographical Data Sheet (biodata sheet)/USAID Form 1420-17 form no longer requires salary history information. This has consequently required contractors and USAID staff alike to adapt policies and procedures to establish rates through a market-based approach (a welcome change through the lens of more equitable rate-setting practices). With the removal of the salary history dynamic, all other information on the biodata sheet seems to reflect duplicative information already provided in the proposal (e.g., in CVs) and the form requires a disproportionate amount of time to be spent by candidates and contractor staff to populate and edit it accurately for submission. While AIDAR 752.7001 requires biodata sheets only for key personnel and individuals sent outside the US, RFPs and resultant contracts continue to require a broader application of the biodata sheet which creates frustration with candidates, especially when English is not their primary language. Given the removal of salary history component (which previously made this form necessary) and the duplicative nature of the remaining information requested within the biodata sheet, the utility of the form is questionable and it is unclear what value it adds to USAID proposal evaluation and contract management processes. What is the value and utility of this form to USAID at this stage? Has USAID considered retiring this document?

**USAID Response:** At present, USAID considers USAID Form 1420-17, Contractor Employee Biographical Data Sheet, necessary because it provides a standardized way for COs and CORs to receive information on the individual being proposed and also for the CO to determine the reasonableness of proposed salaries.

18. **Category Management:** Can USAID please share current FY2021 data on the number and value of solicitations released under each of the OASIS Unrestricted Pool 1 and the OASIS Small Business Pool 1 IDIQs?

**USAID Response:** USAID does not track solicitations issued, but we do have information on the number of contracts awarded. Further, USAID does not track solicitations or contracts awarded by OASIS Pools. We can, however, provide information on the number of contracts awarded under OASIS this FY. To date in FY21, USAID has awarded two contracts under OASIS UR with total obligated value of \$7,078,030.48 and three contracts under OASIS SB with total obligated value of \$5,220,300.15.

19. **Category Management:** What are USAID's category management goals for FY21? Are

these goals limited to Washington-based procurements? And, if so, are there plans to extend the goals across all of USAID's acquisition?

**USAID Response:** USAID's FY21 CM targets are as follows: Best-In-Class (BIC): \$204.39M obligated contract dollars, and Spend Under Management (SUM): \$3.85B obligated contract dollars. These targets are for the Agency as a whole; the targets are not divided amongst Washington and Missions. That said, the majority of USAID's CM contract dollars will come from Washington. Washington is therefore our focus audience as it relates to CM.

20. **GSA MAS:** Can USAID please elaborate on the process used by Contracting Officers (COs) to determine the list of GSA MAS holders that should receive a particular solicitation, particularly since solicitations under GSA MAS are not sent to all schedule holders?

**USAID Response:** USAID COs rely on information obtained from market research to decide which MAS holders should receive a solicitation.

21. **Multi-Phase Opportunities:** We have seen an uptick in USAID opportunities that utilize a phased approach to bidding, outside of BAA processes. Usually, the first phase may include past performance or institutional capacity statements. Is this a best practice, and will USAID be using this approach more frequently?

**USAID Response:** USAID is committed to lowering barriers to entry for our partners, especially new, underutilized, and local partners. One way that we've been seeking to do this is through multi-phased approaches. For example, in November of 2020, USAID issued a [Procurement Executive Bulletin \(PEB\) 20-02](#) on the use of advisory phased acquisition process, and has since set up a subject matter experts group to support Contracting Officers in using these approaches. We are encouraging our staff to consider using these approaches, as appropriate, and will continue to investigate new and innovative ways to lower barriers to entry.

22. **Requests for Information:** Since the adoption of USAID's new A&A Strategy, a large number of Missions are now releasing Requests for Information (RFIs). Many of these RFIs ask Offerors to answer a large number of detailed questions, presumably to aid USAID in the design of the future procurement. However, the eventual solicitations vary rarely seem to reflect any changes to what was released in the RFI stage, which implies that Missions may be releasing RFIs simply to meet USAID quotas for co-creation. In some cases, we have seen an RFP released just days after the response of the RFI was due, making it impossible that the responses received added any value in the development of the procurement. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the RFI is released on both beta.SAM.gov and on grants.gov indicating that the Mission has not yet selected a mechanism, requiring potential Offerors to spend time and resources

helping USAID design programming for which they are ultimately ineligible to compete. In several of these cases, the RFIs have not yielded any new programming at all. Responding thoughtfully to the current high volume of RFIs requires a significant investment in time on the part of USAID's implementing partner community. Has USAID considered refining internal guidelines to Bureaus and Missions on how to maximize the value of RFIs to inform procurements?

**USAID Response:** We agree that the use of RFIs and thoughtful consideration of information submitted is just good practice. Co-creation can be a collaborative tool in the RFI stage, but only should only be used properly. The intent of an RFI is to elicit information and not necessarily an appropriate vehicle for co-creation. The [5Ws of Co-creation](#) provide some details on whether co-creation is appropriate in this or any case.

23. **Transformation:** Is the USAID reorganization expected to continue in the new administration? We ask because under the operating unit on the forecast we see references to both structures that were being phased out i.e., DCHA as well as new structures i.e., CPS.

**USAID Response:** The Bureaus for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, Resilience and Food Security, and others have been implemented and are officially part of the organizational structure. DCHA no longer exists as an organizational bureau and should be phased out of the Business Forecast.

24. **Facility Security Clearance:** For contracts that include both classified and unclassified requirements, particularly in the case of procurements that consolidate previous contracts with different classifications and therefore different facility security clearance (FCL) requirements, will the Government please consider only requiring a FCL for contractors performing the classified portions of the contract's scope? Will the Government please consider the following concerns related to this request:
- a. The requirement of a FCL for all companies (including prime and all subcontractors) on a contract that includes both classified and unclassified elements risks unnecessarily eliminating from competition contractors with unmatched institutional knowledge of USAID, its organizational structure, and its Bureau and Office missions. It may also prohibit contractor teams from including innovative, new partners whose fresh ideas could maximize efficiency.
  - b. Given that an FCL and issuance of a DD254 is predicated on a "need to know" or "need to access" classified information, such a sweeping FCL requirement could exclude uncleared incumbent companies (who are currently providing services that are being consolidated) from continuing to act as a prime or subcontractor on a consolidated contract that includes those services they are currently providing that do not require an FCL?

**USAID Response:** A Facility Security Clearance (FCL) is granted to a contract company,

not an individual. A FCL is a requirement under the NISPOM, EO 12829, and through DCSA. A company who has cleared personnel is required to have an FCL. This protects the company, the people, and the information they are afforded access to.

If the work of the contract requires access to classified information, an FCL for the company is a requirement. There is unfortunately no exception to this requirement. If a company determines that their staff does not need access to classified information, they should enter into an unclassified contract. If the contract requires some employees to access classified information while others do not require such access, we see that as a dual performance contract (ADS 567). However, even with dual performance contracts, the company is required to obtain an FCL since they will have some cleared individuals working for them.

25. **Links to RFIs:** For opportunities for which RFI has been posted, would USAID consider providing a link of it in the forecast itself?

**USAID Response:** Thanks for the recommendation to consider this change.

26. **NDA Section 889:** Requests for Proposals now include the following related to waivers under FAR Part 4.21: “(1) The submission of an offer where the Offeror makes a representation at paragraph (d)(2) of the provision at FAR 52.204–24 that it “does” use covered telecommunications equipment or services will mean the Offeror is seeking a waiver...” and “USAID does not guarantee that waiver requests from such an offeror will be considered; USAID may make an award to an offeror that does not require a waiver. Where agency needs do not permit time to obtain a waiver, USAID may move forward and make an award to an offeror that does not require a waiver.” Has USAID considered waiver requests from offerors? Have waiver requests been granted?

**USAID Response:** USAID has made some awards based on the use of a waiver.