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U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief



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USAID's Office of HIV/AIDS and the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security

Private Sector Engagement for Youth Employment

Request for Information

Introduction

USAID is seeking to connect with private sector companies to provide employment and/or entrepreneurship opportunities for adolescent girls and young women. Partnering with USAID's [DREAMS](#) program in sub-Saharan Africa and Haiti (see [Description of DREAMS Program](#) below) provides businesses with an opportunity to access new talent that already have many of the financial, interpersonal, and job readiness skills needed for successful employees. USAID sees linking the private sector with an existing pool of young people as a mutually beneficial endeavor – a partnership that could act as a force multiplier for both parties.

- As of 2019, there are 221 million youth between the ages of 15-24 in sub-Saharan Africa, which is expected to increase 89% by 2050.¹ Companies are eager to take advantage of the largest generation of youth in history, both as a labor pool and a potential client base.
- By partnering with DREAMS, companies not only have access to a skilled talent pool, but also one with increased access to health services, which reduces healthcare costs, employee absenteeism, and turnover while increasing employee productivity.
- Investing in young people as employees and customers has longer term benefits to companies' bottom lines: improved brand loyalty and reputation (which is becoming more important as markets' attention to environmental, social, and governance [ESG] concerns increases), higher productivity, new business opportunities, increased revenues, and growth.

The DREAMS program is rooted in reducing adolescent girls' and young women's vulnerability to HIV, which is due in part to economic disparity related to gender inequality. In addition to helping adolescent girls and young women stay healthy, prevent violence, and continue their education, DREAMS supports the development of behavioral and soft skills, such as communication, higher-order thinking, goal-setting, and other job readiness skills that prepare participants to enter the workforce. **This year, DREAMS is focused on providing economic strengthening programs for its participants, which includes training to develop financial literacy, marketable skills, and an entrepreneurial mindset, as well as pathways to employment through paid internships or jobs or self-employment through entrepreneurship.**

Through USAID and other agencies, the US government has invested nearly one billion dollars over the last five years in the DREAMS program. This commitment has driven reductions in new HIV diagnoses among adolescent girls and young women by 25% or more in nearly all of the geographic regions with DREAMS.^{2,3} In order to maximize this return on investment, USAID is seeking to partner with businesses to solve a common business challenge by providing a skilled talent pool of young people from which to

¹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2019. [International Youth Day, 12 August 2019: Ten key messages](#). Accessed October 1, 2021.

² U.S. Department of State. [DREAMS Partnership Fact Sheet](#). 2019. Accessed April 27, 2021.

³ As of 2021, DREAMS operates in 16 countries: Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe



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recruit, while supporting thousands of talented young women to achieve their employment and economic goals. Although there is no new funding for any resulting activity, a partnership would be building off the significant existing financial investment that the US government has made in the DREAMS program and its participants. Interested private sector businesses should reply to this Request for Information (RFI).

Objective

USAID's Office of HIV/AIDS and the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security are seeking to link companies with employment and/or entrepreneurship opportunities to adolescent girls and young women enrolled in the DREAMS program. The objective is to connect private sector businesses with highly capable, motivated, and skilled young people who have the support from USAID to lead healthy, productive lives. **These young women are assets to companies, representing new audiences for products, innovative ideas and fresh perspectives, digital expertise, and reach into their communities.** Such an engagement would demonstrate a company's commitment to provide employment with a living wage and/or entrepreneurship opportunities for adolescent girls and young women, while also reducing their vulnerability to HIV – the purpose of the DREAMS program.

Synopsis

USAID is interested in partnering with private sector businesses to find ways to meet their needs for a skilled talent pool and the needs of adolescent girls and young women related to employment and economic opportunities across multiple sectors, such as health and social services, supply chain, technology, transportation, energy, manufacturing, retail, agriculture and food systems, and more. USAID is especially interested in sectors where women have previously been underrepresented. In this context, the private sector can include: for-profit, commercial entities and their affiliated foundations; financial institutions, investors and intermediaries; business associations and cooperatives; micro, small, medium and large enterprises that operate in the formal and informal sectors; American, local, regional, and multinational businesses; and for-profit approaches that generate sustainable income (e.g., a venture fund run by a non-governmental organization).⁴ This is also inclusive of business support organizations, firms that provide start-up support to entrepreneurs; organizations that provide training, coaching and mentoring to potential entrepreneurs; and those that provide opportunities for quality self-employment, such as through franchising.

The private sector is a driving force for innovation and jobs, and businesses provide vital pathways to employment for young people. However, in countries like Lesotho with a high prevalence of HIV, certain industries are significantly impacted by worker absenteeism and lower productivity associated with HIV/AIDS. For example, the apparel and textile industry in Lesotho is dominated by women, and in a country where 30% of women are HIV-positive, worker illness due to HIV can significantly impact business.⁵

Companies also face a challenge of high numbers of applicants for few jobs, exacerbated by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sorting through the applicant pool to identify quality talent that already possess the interpersonal skills and work ethic required for these positions can be difficult and time-consuming. Since 2015, USAID has offered comprehensive programming to groups of young women through DREAMS, providing the necessary interpersonal and behavioral skills that employers often note

⁴ USAID. [Private-Sector Engagement Policy](#). 2018. Accessed May 5, 2021.

⁵ Project Last Mile. USAID Lesotho. Private Sector Engagement for Health Service Delivery: Landscape Analysis



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are lacking in younger employees, especially those with limited education.⁶ DREAMS not only supports young women to continue their education and graduate, but provides them with training in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, workforce readiness, risk analysis and contingency planning, and other skills that make them marketable and appealing to the private sector. These can also reduce women's vulnerability to shocks and stresses that might interfere with women's development journeys. In this way, the DREAMS program can act as the pipeline to provide skilled, supported talent directly to private sector businesses. One such example can be found in the document "Partnering with DREAMS: A Program Example" associated with this RFI.

USAID is looking to link these skilled, supported young women to new career or entrepreneurship opportunities and paid employment across multiple sectors. In line with local labor laws, these opportunities will vary by age and level of education of the young person but will focus on helping address the skills gap and linking them to current jobs or future employment that will pay a living wage.

Requested Information

To better understand the needs and opportunities available with the private sector, USAID is interested to learn:

1. What efforts are underway in your organization to recruit and retain younger employees (age 18-24), if any?
2. What challenges do you face regarding talent, especially youth in countries with DREAMS programs? What could USAID do to help address these challenges?
3. What would enable businesses like yours to hire more young talent in countries with DREAMS programs?
4. Are you open to expanding recruitment to youth from countries with DREAMS programs?
5. How can USAID partner with your organization in a mutually beneficial way to secure employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for youth in the DREAMS program? Specific ideas for partnership with USAID are welcome.

Expected Results

USAID Washington will review the responses and proceed based on the information received. Next steps include:

- USAID will review possible opportunities for partnership with specific companies.
- USAID Washington will assist the USAID Missions (country offices) in evaluating whether a partnership with specific companies would be viable and beneficial to DREAMS participants in that country.
- USAID Washington will facilitate connections between companies and USAID Missions in countries with DREAMS programs and support any resulting engagement.

USAID is primarily interested in companies that have existing offices or opportunities in one or more countries where DREAMS operates (Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi,

⁶ 360 Communications. 2020. Labour Market Assessment: Perceptions from the Market. Report for USAID Lesotho.



Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe); however, there is no expectation that a company should or will work in all 16 countries.

How to Submit Information for this RFI

If you are interested in partnering with USAID on this opportunity, please complete the Response Form available on sam.gov and email it and any additional documentation to YouthRFI@usaid.gov. Please limit your entire response, including the Response Form and additional documentation, to no more than 5 pages. Applications are due **December 15, 2021**.

Description of DREAMS Program

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in sub-Saharan Africa are at a considerably higher risk of contracting HIV. To address the impact of HIV on AGYW, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) funds the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) program that began in 2015. Targeting AGYW ages 10 to 24, DREAMS is currently implemented across 15 countries in Southern and East Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, and Haiti,⁷ and in 2019, reached nearly 1.5 million AGYW with critical HIV prevention programming. As of 2020, the program has driven reductions in new HIV diagnoses among AGYW by 25% or more in nearly all of its geographic regions.⁸

To achieve this reduction in new diagnoses, DREAMS provides a comprehensive, multi-sectoral package of interventions to address structural factors that make AGYW particularly vulnerable to HIV, such as gender-based violence, exclusion from economic opportunities, and a lack of access to education.² USAID is the lead implementer of DREAMS and provides a core package of services, including HIV prevention and testing services, education subsidies, violence prevention programs and post-violence care, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV, improved access to condoms and contraceptives, economic strengthening, parenting/caregiver programs, and community mobilization and norms change programs.⁹ DREAMS programs are facilitated in "safe spaces" by DREAMS peer mentors and are linked to other community-based organizations through referrals. In 2021, DREAMS is prioritizing economic strengthening interventions for AGYW, which is intended to address the economic disparity related to gender inequality that is an ongoing and complex driver of HIV.¹⁰

⁷ Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

⁸ U.S. Department of State. [DREAMS Partnership Fact Sheet](#). 2019. Accessed April 27, 2021.

⁹ USAID Bureau for Global Health. [DREAMS: Partnership to Reduce HIV/AIDS in Adolescent Girls and Young Women](#). Accessed October 1, 2021.

¹⁰ PEPFAR. 2021. [FY2021 Country and Regional Operational Plan \(COP/ROP\) Guidance for all PEPFAR Countries](#). Accessed April 28, 2021.