



Technical & Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program Small Grants Fund

**Subject: Program Improvement Awards (PIA)
Request for Application (RFA)
RFA Number: SC-TOPS-SG-2013-01
Issuance Date: June 12, 2013
Due Date for Concept Paper Submission: Open**

TOPS Quarterly Schedule for Concept Papers Review:

**Phase 1 – Aug. 31st, 2013
Phase 2 – Nov. 30th, 2013
Phase 3 – Feb. 28st, 2014
Phase 4 – May. 30th, 2014**

Due Date for submission of questions to this RFA: June 25th, 2013 5 p.m. or 17:00 Eastern Time (Washington DC Time)

**Issued by
Save the Children/TOPS Program**



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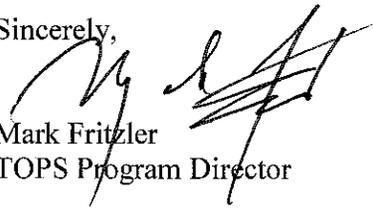
Dear Prospective Applicants:

Those who devote themselves to helping the vulnerable achieve sustained food security and healthy nutrition for their families form a highly committed and creative global **community of practice**. Because of resource constraints, however, our community is often unable to pursue many creative ideas, promising practices, or opportunities to test or strengthen program ideas or innovative content we discover during the course of our work. **The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program** presents a unique opportunity for practitioners to strengthen and sustain effective, scientifically sound, and technically innovative program content, strategies, methods, and tools to support stronger, collaborative communities of practice in food security and nutrition nationally, regionally, and globally.

As part of the Small Grants Award (SGA) Program, TOPS announces the launch of its **Cycle-II RFA for Program Improvement Awards (PIA)**. The PIA grants offer the opportunity for Title II and food security and nutrition implementing organizations to access funds to conduct and/or document innovative, best practice-focused activities, operations research, or pilot programs to strengthen the quality and efficient, effective delivery of Title II-supported food security programs. The emphasis in awarding these small grants will be on quality, practicality, documentation for rapid dissemination and knowledge sharing, and multi-partner collaboration. For details on concept paper submission guidelines, timing, subject areas, and review criteria, please see the attached RFA package.

We look forward to your ideas and proposals for funding.

Sincerely,



Mark Fritzler
TOPS Program Director

I. BACKGROUND

The **Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS)** Program, funded by the USAID Office of Food for Peace (FFP), focuses on strengthening the skills and implementation capacity of Title II grantees and improving the quality and effectiveness of U.S. Government-supported food security and nutrition programming through collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing. The TOPS Program includes a small grants award fund, an important tool for advancing these aims. The overriding purpose of the small grants program, like the TOPS Program itself, is to help families in need achieve food secure and well-nourished lives.

The TOPS PIA small grants program prioritizes collaboration (preference given to applications involving multiple partnering organizations), promising practices, capacity building, enhanced quality, continuous improvement, and practical innovation for new or existing programs. Any proposed activity submitted for a PIA grant must fill a gap or a recognized need in effective food security and nutrition programming and the results must be shared to benefit the entire PVO community. Applications that substantively involve more than one participating PVO in the proposed actions will broaden the learning experience across many implementing organizations.

In 2012, the TOPS Program issued Cycle-I RFA and awarded five PIAs. With the Cycle-II RFA, TOPS will increase the number of awards and available funding for PIAs.

II. SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AWARD (PIA) DESCRIPTION

A. Over the life of the program, TOPS will award approximately \$3.4 million in small grants, which include the capacity building Micro Grants and the Program Improvement Awards (PIA), to implementers committed to improving the effectiveness of food assistance programs globally.

B. The Program Improvement Award RFA cycles are as follows:

<u>RFA Timelines</u>	<u>Performance Period</u>	<u>Available Funding</u>	<u>Status</u>
Cycle-I March 5, 2012 - April 23, 2012	12 months	\$500,000	Closed
Cycle-II June 12, 2013 - May 30, 2014	12 months	\$1,500,000	Open

C. The maximum amount for a PIA award is \$100,000. The number of grants awarded in each cycle shall be subject to funding availability. Applicants may submit several concept papers per cycle.

D. All proposed costs shall be consistent with USAID policies and procedures. All costs are expected to be reasonable, allowable, and allocable to the proposed program and must

be documented and justified in the narratives. This small grants funding may not be used to supplant or replace funds or resources otherwise available to the applicant.

- E.** Use of grants funds must meet the USAID requirements under ADS 303.5.15 and 22CFR226, specifically: i) all costs to be charged to the small grants are to be identified in the budget; ii) any goods to be purchased must meet the rules governing local cost financing, and no single item having a useful life over one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more must be purchased and; iii) adequate cost (historical and unit pricing) information is available to determine the costs in the budget. Below are some examples of allowable and unallowable uses of TOPS small grants awards:

Allowable Uses

- Operational costs for organizing workshops and community events (e.g., room rental, lunch/coffee breaks, rental of the following - facilities, public address system, overhead projector, computer, LCD projector, TV monitor and other necessary equipment)
- Development and production of materials
- Website-related costs (excluding purchase of computer equipment)
- Transportation costs (based on actual costs)
- Supplies related to activity implementation
- Salaries of personnel directly related to implementing the project activities
 - Communications
- Indirect costs substantiated by a NICRA or audited financial statements supporting the indirect cost

Unallowable Uses

- Purchase of motor vehicles, office equipment or furniture
- Construction or physical improvement of offices/facilities
- Purchase of alcoholic beverages
- International and regional travel that are not directly related to implementing the project activities
- Capital equipment (equipment with a value of \$5,000 or more)
- Salaries of government personnel (either full or partial)

III. PIA RFA Cycle

“Cycle” refers to the timeline for the application RFA process under the TOPS PIA program. The first TOPS PIA RFA (Cycle-I RFA) occurred in 2012. TOPS awarded five PIA grants during this cycle.

This “Cycle-II RFA” provides applicants greater flexibility of submission date by waiving the application submission deadline for concept papers and increasing the number of possible awards to 15 with up to \$1.5 million available funding.

NOTE: Depending on demand and funds availability, TOPS may post additional cycles in the future.

Program scope and objective(s) of this RFA

Objective of the TOPS Program Improvement Award is:

To enable food security implementing organizations to identify, test, verify, promote, share, and disseminate state-of-the-art strategies, methods, and tools that support promising and/or best practices in FFP-funded development and emergency food assistance programming.

A crucial strategic objective of the TOPS Program is to identify and disseminate high quality, state-of-the-art technical and evidence-based information and improved practices to FFP implementing partners and collaborators. Strengthening technical content and improving program implementation practices among the members of the implementing community will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. Government food assistance in support of global socio/economic development.

Over the years, FFP implementing partners and collaborators have developed—and continue to develop—many powerful methods and tools for effective emergency and development food assistance programming. The TOPS PIA fund will enable practitioners to propose, design, implement, evaluate and document activities for future dissemination through the TOPS Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Network to add to the overall knowledge, skills, and proven methods with which practitioners implement their programs.

Purpose of Program Improvement Award (PIA) RFA

In issuing this RFA, TOPS seeks to expand the overall set of knowledge and skills available to practitioners that can be applied in carrying out U.S. Government-funded (primarily Title II-supported) food security and nutrition programming in the wide variety of settings where intended beneficiary families live. TOPS welcomes applications from qualified implementing organizations that will create/or identify, test, and document new or improved methods and tools.

Applications for these grants could include a broad range of technical topics and field practices. The emphasis for awards will be on activities that will produce evidence-based results and recommendations and guidance that can support others in the food security community to implement innovative or promising new practices, strengthen existing practices, or improve organizational technical capacity.

The TOPS technical team and members of the FSN Network task forces will review the results produced by the PIA grants-funded projects and, if found technically sound, will disseminate the knowledge, tools, and/or methods to the community of practice for wider use.

A. What subject areas will TOPS seek to support with the PIA program?

Subjects for PIA grants could involve a broad range of topics in food security and nutrition. The emphasis will be on innovative approaches, strengthening existing best practices, identifying and testing new promising practices, and scaling up and scaling out. Subject areas could include—but are not limited--to the following:

- Food security
- Nutrition
- Agricultural and economic development
- Natural resource management
- Food technology
- Gender integration
- Commodity management
- Social and behavioral change in food security and nutrition
- Knowledge dissemination and networking
- Monitoring and evaluation

B. What types of proposed activities could be funded through the PIA grants program?

Activities that could be proposed and receive funding might include--but are not limited to--the following types of activities (shown for illustrative purposes only):

- Design and field-test an outcome monitoring system
- Develop and document successful strategies for improving infant and young child feeding practices
- Pilot test and document new implementation strategies in response to recommendations of the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) and the second Food Aid Food Security Assessment (FAFSA II)
- Design, test, and analyze locally appropriate adaptive responses to climate change effects
- Identify and test low cost or low input methods for reducing post-harvest loss and extending safe storage of on-farm crops
- Conduct on-farm trial or demonstration of a new and improved agricultural technology or innovation (e.g., new and improved crop variety, alternative cultivation method, or information technology solution)
- Field test a novel counseling strategy for behavior change and compare it with more traditional strategies
- Design, test, and analyze a framework for integrating gender dynamics into programming and monitoring gender outcomes of behavior change strategies designed to improve food security
- Design and test an interactive tool for identifying institutional or community-based barriers to gender and develop a community or institutional model for designing and implementing an action plan to address these barriers
- Design and test methods (e.g., Village Savings and Loans groups) through which groups may identify and carry out value added or marketing activities

IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Who may apply?

PIA small grants may be awarded to U.S. and non-U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) submitting project proposals that contribute to TOPS's strategic objective of promoting the use and adaptation of capacity building tools, field-led and collaborative projects, and dissemination of best practices to food security and nutrition stakeholders.

NGO applicants are encouraged to propose collaborative efforts that involve local and other implementing partners. The application will designate one organization to be the prime recipient of funding and who will be responsive to program requirements. That organization will also be responsible for coordinating efforts with other partners. All collaborative efforts must be clearly identified in the application to the TOPS small grants program.

B. Who may not apply?

- Government entities, including Ministries
- Firms operated as commercial companies or other organizations (including nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations) which are wholly or partially owned by foreign governments or agencies thereof

V. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

A. Contact Persons

Mr. Mark Fritzler
Program Director, TOPS Program
Save the Children, Washington DC
Email: mfritzler@savechildren.org

Mr. Fitih Wedajeneh
Small Grants Management Specialist, TOPS Program
Save the Children, Washington DC
E-mail: tops.smallgrant@savechildren.org

A. RFA Questions and Answers

Questions regarding this RFA should be sent no later than **June 25th, 2013**. This is to provide sufficient time to address the questions and post TOPS's responses as an amendment to this RFA in a question and answer format. Verbal explanation or instructions will not be entertained.

Questions regarding this RFA should be submitted in writing via email to the points of contacts above, with the subject line "Questions to RFA No.SC-TOPS-SG-2013-01"

B. Preparation of Application

Applicants are expected to review, understand, and comply with the specified RFA instructions. Failure to follow instructions will result in the rejection of an application.

CONCEPT PAPER STAGE:

1. All applicants are required to submit concept papers. There is no deadline for submission of concept papers. TOPS will review all submissions in batches on a quarterly basis. The concept paper shall include general information, narrative and budget summary, as indicated in the following attachment:

- **Attachment 1:** Concept Paper Format of this RFA



Attachment 1 -
Concept Paper Templ

2. Concept papers must not exceed three (3) pages in length; longer concept papers will not be reviewed. Concept papers must have one inch (or 2.5 centimeter) margins on all sides of the paper and be printed on A4 or 8 ½ x 11 inch paper, 12 point Times New Roman font, single-spaced.
3. The TOPS Review and Evaluation Committee (REC) will evaluate and rank all concept papers independently and uniformly, based on the quarterly review timeline.
4. Once the REC has reviewed, and evaluated the concept papers, the committee will accept or reject the concept papers received. TOPS will notify all applicants of the decision.
5. If the concept paper is accepted, TOPS will send a formal notification requesting the applicant to proceed with submitting a full application, adhering to steps 6 to 10 below of this section.

FULL APPLICATION STAGE:

1. Each applicant that receives a notification to submit a full application must furnish the requested information, in accordance with the following RFA attachments:
 - **Attachment 2:** Proposal Template
 - **Attachment 3:** Work Plan with Activity Schedule
 - **Attachment 4:** Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
 - **Attachment 5a:** Detailed Project Budget

- **Attachment 5b:** Budget Narrative Template
 - **Attachment 6:** Past Performance Information Request Template
2. Please do not submit unnecessarily elaborate brochures or other presentations beyond those sufficient to present a complete and effective application in response to this RFA.
 3. Applicants should retain a copy of the application and all accompanying attachments for their records.
 4. The full application will be evaluated based on the selection criteria set forth in the full application package. The full application package will be sent to applicants whose concept papers are selected. To be considered for selection, applicants (and their partners) must have established technical, financial, and operational capacity.
 5. The REC will review and evaluate the full applications submitted and select the finalists based on the overall rating of each application. TOPS will notify applicants about the status of their submission through email.
 6. TOPS will submit the selected applications to USAID for final approval.

C. Submission Procedures

All submissions shall be sent via email, indicating the RFA number in the subject line with the name and address of the applicant in the body of the email, and addressed to the point of contacts referenced in section V.A. (Points of Contact).

Applications received within the stated quarterly review time frame will be reviewed in batches and evaluated for responsiveness to the requirements of this RFA.

E-mail attachments should be formatted in Microsoft Word and/or Microsoft Excel format with a maximum size of 5MB per e-mail.

VI. EVALUATION PROCESS

Submissions will be evaluated in accordance with the selection criteria set forth below. Awards will be made to responsible applicants whose proposal best meets the requirements of this RFA. TOPS reserves the right to determine the number of awards and resulting level of funding for award(s).

A. Concept Paper Evaluation Scoring (Maximum Points 100)

1. Applicant Background (Maximum points 10)
2. Contribution to TOPS Strategic Objective and Program Goals (Maximum points 20)

3. Contribution to TOPS PIA Objective (Maximum points 40)
4. Project Strategies and Expected Results (Maximum points 30)

B. Concept Paper Selection Criteria

In selecting from among concept papers through the TOPS PIA small grants program, the REC will consider a variety of criteria in the evaluation process.

Applicant Background

- Substantial experience working in food security and/or nutrition, preferably with Title II food assistance programs
- A mission, objectives, and orientation that are in line with proposed activities

Contribute to TOPS Strategic Objective and Program Goals

TOPS Strategic Objective: Highest quality information, knowledge, and best practices for improved methodologies in Title II food assistance commodity program performance identified, established, shared, adapted, and adopted.

TOPS Program Goals: Improved quality, efficiency, and effectiveness, in Title II food aid supported food security and nutrition programming; strengthened capacity among all Title II grantees and implementers delivering Title II food assistance and programming.

- Briefly describe multi-stakeholder involvement (if any)
- Identify a logical link between the proposed activities and their contribution to TOPS Strategic Objective or Program Goals
- Have the potential to bring results potentially useful to the food security implementation community
- Offer adequate consideration to field reality, adaptability, and cost effectiveness

Contribute to the TOPS Program Improvement Award Objective

TOPS PIA Objective: To enable food security implementing organizations to identify, test, verify, promote, share, and disseminate state-of-the-art strategies, methods and tools that support promising and/or best practices in Title II food security and nutrition programming.

- Proposes to develop/test an innovative strategy/methodology/approach/tool to improve effectiveness of food security programming
- Establishes a clear link between the proposed innovation and its potential contribution to improve the effectiveness of food security programming

- Indicates how the strategy/methodology/approach/tool developed will add to the overall bank of knowledge, skills, and proven methods

Project Strategies and Expected Results

- Describes the activities to be implemented, how, and by whom
- Describes the challenges and assumptions
- Describes project results/deliverables and due dates
- Describes how project results will be documented and shared with the broader food security and nutrition community

C. Full Application Evaluation Scoring (Maximum Points 100)

1. Contribution to TOPS Program Objective (Maximum points 35)
2. Project Description (Maximum points 40)
3. Cost Proposal (Maximum points 25)

D. Full Application Selection Criteria

The selection criteria for the full application will be communicated to applicants whose concept papers are selected.

E. Rating Methodology

The Full Application will be evaluated based on a numerical ranking for overall submission and each section of the application, respectively. The following ratings will be used in assessing the criteria set forth:

- 91-100 points: The application fully meets RFA requirements and the expectations of the REC. The applicant has convincingly demonstrated that the requirements have been analyzed, evaluated, and should result in an outstanding, effective, efficient, and economical performance.
- 81-90 points: The application demonstrates a level of effort that substantially meets RFA requirements and the expectations of the REC. The application meets a specified performance level or capability requirements necessary for acceptable performance and could produce results which should prove to be substantially beneficial.
- 71-80 points: The application does not meet some specified performance level or capability requirements necessary for acceptable performance, but its inadequacies are correctable. The application demonstrates good understanding and the ability to fulfill the requirements. The application's weaknesses should not seriously affect the applicant's performance if measures are taken to correct them.

- 0-70 points: The application either doesn't fit or failed to meet specified minimum performance and capability requirements and contains major deficiencies. It is incomplete and vague and deficiencies are uncorrectable without a major revision of the application. Applications scoring within this range will not be considered for the award.

VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Type and Number of Awards

TOPS plans to award several cost-reimbursable grants under this RFA. The number of awards will depend on relevance, importance of the proposed program, and fund availability.

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of Save the Children/TOPS nor does it commit Save the Children/TOPS to pay costs incurred in the submission of a proposal.

Save the Children/TOPS reserves the right to make an award based on initial submissions; hence, applications should be submitted on the most favorable terms from a technical and cost perspective.

Save the Children/TOPS reserves the right to reject any or all submissions received and to negotiate separately with an applicant, if such action is considered to be in the best interest of the donor - USAID.

B. Authorized Geographic Code

The authorized geographic code for procurement of goods and services under this RFA is 000 (U.S.). However, local procurement is authorized within the parameters specified in 22 CFR 228.40, "Local Procurement."

C. Cost Sharing

Cost sharing is considered an important element of the USAID-recipient relationship. In this RFA selected applicants are required to propose a minimum 5% of the total funding as part of cost sharing and Save the Children/TOPS will assess applicant's commitment to the program success. The amount and of cost sharing, i.e. cash and/or in-kind contributions, will be evaluated in accordance with 22 CFR 226.23.

D. Small Grants Reporting Requirements

The recipient will be responsible for monitoring and reporting program performance and submitting the following reports to Save the Children:

- **Semi-annual Performance Reporting:** The applicant shall comply with the performance reporting requirements in accordance with 22 CFR 226.51. This report should include a brief narrative description which compares actual accomplishments

with the planned activities and expected achievements established for each period to achieve the overall goal and objectives. Reasons why established plans, activities, achievements in relation to the overall goals were not met should be cited. When appropriate and the output(s) of the small grants award can be readily quantified, data related to cost data for the computation of unit costs should be shared. Other pertinent information should be included when appropriate such as analysis, and explanation of cost overruns.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Reporting:** A semi-annual and final M&E report should be submitted in compliance with Attachment 4, the M&E Plan, of this RFA. The M&E report at six months should report on the output indicators for the small grants award, while the final M&E report should include both impact/outcome and final cumulative output indicators.
- **Final Program Report:** The applicant is required to submit a final program report to TOPS/Save the Children containing the information specified in 22 CFR 226.51.
- **Quarterly Financial Reporting:** The applicant is required to submit a quarterly financial report in accordance with the requirements of 22 CFR 226.52.
- **Final Financial Reporting:** The applicant is required to submit a final financial report to TOPS/Save the Children containing the information specified in 22 CFR 226.52.

E. Marking and Branding

As a condition of receipt of TOPS Small Grants Awards, the recipient is required to use USAID and TOPS branding logos of a size and prominence equivalent to or greater than that of the recipient's, the sub-recipient's, other donor's, or a third party's. In the event the recipient chooses not to require marking with its own identity or logo by the grantee, USAID and/or TOPS may, at its discretion, require marking by the grantee with the USAID and TOPS identity.

As a condition of receipt of TOPS Program Improvement Awards, the following disclaimer language should be used on all technical deliverables:

The TOPS Small Grants Program Improvement Award was made possible by the generous support and contribution of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of the materials produced through the TOPS Small Grants Program Improvement Award do not necessarily reflect the views of TOPS, USAID or the United States Government.

F. USAID DISABILITY POLICY - ASSISTANCE (DECEMBER 2004)

- a. The objectives of the USAID Disability Policy are (1) to enhance the attainment of United States foreign assistance program goals by promoting the participation and equalization of opportunities of individuals with disabilities in USAID policy, country and sector strategies, activity designs and implementation; (2) to increase

awareness of issues of people with disabilities both within USAID programs and in host countries; (3) to engage other U.S. Government agencies, host country counterparts, governments, implementing organizations and other donors in fostering a climate of nondiscrimination against people with disabilities; and (4) to support international advocacy for people with disabilities. The full text of the policy paper can be found at the following Web site: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDABQ631.pdf

- b. USAID therefore requires that the recipient not discriminate against people with disabilities in the implementation of USAID funded programs and that it make every effort to comply with the objectives of the USAID Disability Policy in performing the program under this grant or cooperative agreement. To that end and to the extent it can accomplish this goal within the scope of the program objectives; the recipient should demonstrate a comprehensive and consistent approach for including men, women, and children with disabilities.

G. Award Administration

Small grants recipients shall be subject to the applicable rules and regulations associated with the small grants such as 22 CFR 226 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title22-vol1/xml/CFR-2011-title22-vol1-part226.xml>). The relevant Standard Provisions for U.S. and Non-U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations can be found in the below link.

Regulations listed above can be accessed via the USAID webpage:

- <http://transition.usaid.gov/policy/ads/300/303maa.pdf>
- <http://transition.usaid.gov/policy/ads/300/303mab.pdf>

Attachment 1

TOPS CONCEPT PAPER TEMPLATE

The concept paper should not exceed 3 pages (excluding the General Information) in length; longer concept papers will not be reviewed. Specific page limitations and basic formatting requirements are listed below:

1. Page Limitations

- a. General Information (half page)
- b. Concept Paper Narrative (3 pages)
- c. Budget Summary (half page)

3. Basic Formatting Requirements

- a. All concept paper must be submitted in 12 point Times New Roman font and single-spaced.
- b. Concept papers must have one inch (or 2.5 centimeter) margins on all sides of the paper and printed on A4 or 8 ½ x 11 inch paper.
- c. Concept papers must be in English.
- d. Submitted concept papers should present all sections in the order as they appear in this Concept Paper Template.

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Name of Organization:	
Contact Details:	
Name of Focal Point:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Fax:	
Email:	
Summary of Mission Statement of Organization:	
Anticipated Project Start Date:	
Anticipated Project End Date:	
Total Project Budget:	
Total Funds Requested from TOPS:	
Total cost share:	

CONCEPT PAPER NARRATIVE

a) Objectives

b) Strategies

c) Expected Results

d) Key Challenges

BUDGET SUMMARY

LINE ITEM	AMOUNT
SALARY/WAGES	
TRAVEL/LOCAL TRANSPORTATION	
TRAINING/WORKSHOPS	
OTHER DIRECT COSTS	
INDIRECT COSTS	
TOTAL	
Cost share	