



# Frequently Asked Questions

## IDEAL Applied Research Award (ARA) Request for Applications (RFA)

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### APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

- 1. Is the limit to one application per organization applicable only to primes or also to subs? Could we submit one application as prime and another as a sub, or should we limit ourselves to one application in total, as either a prime or sub?**
  - This depends on how your organization is categorized. If you are defined as a food security or nutrition program implementer, such as a non-governmental or for-profit organization that primarily receives funding to implement food and nutrition security activities, then you can only be part of submitting one application in total. Whether as a prime/lead applicant or sub they can only be part of one application.
  - If your organization is defined as a research institution or higher education institution (HEI), the organization can only lead one application as a prime. These researchers may submit multiple applications working with different program implementers, as a collaborating organization, often referenced as a sub.
- 2. Recognizing the requirement for a partnership between a food security program implementer and a research institution, do USAID and IDEAL have a preference for who serves as the lead applicant (or 'prime')?**
  - There is no preference for whether the implementer or research institution serves as the lead applicant. This is up to the partners to decide. The role of the lead applicant is outlined in the RFA.
- 3. The RFA lists public higher education institutions (HEIs) as eligible partners, but not government entities. Does this mean they can be part of the ARA, but not as lead?**
  - Lead applicants may be research institutions, HEIs or food security program implementers. Public HEIs that are owned by foreign governments may not apply as the lead but are eligible as a sub. All other government entities are not eligible as a lead or sub.
- 4. The RFA mentions that governments, including ministries, are not eligible for the grant. Can a research institution apply to this grant to evaluate a program being implemented by one of the government departments? The funding will strictly be for research and evaluation.**

- Yes, the grant can be used to evaluate a program being implemented by one or more government departments. However, governments cannot be included as the food security and nutrition implementer or research institution in the application.

**5. Is a non-governmental organization (NGO) or research institution outside of the U.S. eligible to be a partner applicant to the Applied Research Award? Can an organization with headquarters outside of the program implementation country, but with country office(s) in the implementation country, apply for this funding?**

- Please review the list of ineligible entities in the RFA to confirm that your organization is not impacted. If not affected by this list, your organization is eligible apply.
- At the time of submission, the lead applicant must be registered and comply with all applicable Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and System for Award Management (SAM) requirements. During the life of the award, the lead and all subs must be registered and comply with these requirements.
- Additionally, the ARA must be implemented in countries where the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance currently funds or has funded activities in the past five years. Applicants and collaborating organizations must be legally recognized organizational entities under applicable law of the implementing country. Applications that will be fully or partially implemented in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, the West Bank, or the Gaza Strip will not be considered.

**6. Are Save the Children or Mercy Corps country offices eligible to apply?**

- No. Save the Children, Mercy Corps, The Kaizen Company, and TANGO International are consortium partners on the IDEAL Activity, and thus these organizations (*and their federation members*) are ineligible to apply for this award.
- The application can research activities led or supported by these organizations, but the IDEAL consortium partners cannot receive funding under this award.

**7. What is a DUNS Number and SAM registration?**

- The DUNS number is used around the world to identify and access information on businesses. You can register for free online by visiting <https://www.dnb.com/duns-number.html>.
- In order to do business with the U.S. Government, organizations must be registered with SAM. Please visit [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov) to access the online registration. Please note: to begin registering an entity in SAM, a DUNS number is required.

**8. Is there a list of countries where USAID BHA currently funds or has funded programs in the last five years?**

- For the most comprehensive public list, please visit <https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work>. Please note that the Office of Food for Peace (FFP) and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) recently merged to create the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. Thus, countries where work was funded by FFP or OFDA in the past five years are eligible and should be represented in the link above.

**9. How many organizations can be included in an application? Can we prepare a proposal in partnership with others to implement this research?**

- There is no defined limit to how many organizations can make a partnership, as long as the partnership contains at least one implementing organization and one research institution or higher education institution. There should only be one lead applicant that communicates with IDEAL during the application process.

**10. Is there a list of pre-qualified implementing partners or is any organization/institution eligible to get a grant from USAID able to apply?**

- There is not a list of pre-qualified partners; any organization is eligible as long as they meet eligibility criteria as outlined in the RFA.

**11. Could you provide a definition of multilateral organization? We would like to know if research institutions like the ones that comprise the CGIAR are eligible.**

- For the purposes of this RFA, we define multilateral organizations as international organizations or agencies that have been developed in partnership between many countries and that receive annual funding allocations from member country governments. Examples of multilateral organizations include agencies of the United Nations, the World Food Programme, and the World Bank.
- Research institutions like those that comprise the CGIAR are eligible to apply in partnership with implementing organizations; we do not consider them multilaterals.

## STRATEGIC INTEGRATION AND LEARNING AGENDA GUIDANCE

**12. Would it work well to have a focus that addresses Strategic Integration (Theme 4) as well as additional themes from the Food Assistance and Food Security Program Learning Agenda? Is it possible to address one important gap and in doing so, address a few elements of Theme 4?**

- It is acceptable if the application touches on other themes naturally, but the primary focus of the application should be on Strategic Integration (Theme 4).

**13. Would research, development, and implementation of management technologies for an invasive insect that is causing serious damage to crops in Africa be eligible under the Applied Research Award?**

- Any research considered must align with the theme of Strategic Integration as outlined in the Learning Agenda, as well as the overall objective of the RFA to fund research that contributes to an evidence base for best practices in food and nutrition security programming throughout the BHA implementing community.

**14. Why is Strategic Integration (Theme 4) the only theme highlighted in the Food Assistance and Food Security Program Learning Agenda?**

- The focus of the ARA is based on an assessment of critical evidence and knowledge gaps for improving the quality of food security programming. The ARA provides an opportunity to strengthen evidence and knowledge in alignment with IDEAL's goal and priorities across content focus areas. The strategic integration theme as laid out in the learning agenda is very broad and allows a wide range of research methods to be utilized and.

**15. Will there be other Applied Research Awards focusing on other Food Assistance and Food Security Programmatic Learning Agenda topics?**

- Given available funding for the Small Grants Program, this is the only expected Applied Research Award RFA that will be released during the remainder of the five-year IDEAL Activity. There will be other RFAs for \$50,000-\$100,000 Small Grants released during the activity that may focus on other topics of the Food Assistance and Food Security Programmatic Learning Agenda.

**16. Can IDEAL or BHA please provide their definition of the terms: *Sequencing, Layering, and Integration*?**

- This was fully addressed by Joan Whelan during the ARA orientation webinar. Please reference the recording here for more details <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQT5qa79cm8>. Please also refer to the Learning Agenda and the [IDEAL RFA](#) for more information on sequencing, layering, and integration.

**17. What is the connection between the following terms and the sub-themes under Theme 4 (Strategic Integration: *Sequencing, Layering, and Integration*) in the Learning Agenda: The Optimal Package of Interventions; Joint Action; and Responding to Acute and Chronic Need? Does IDEAL see it as necessary that a research project address all three sub-themes, or is it possible to focus on one or two that are most pertinent?**

- Sequencing, layering, and integrating are key mechanisms involved in Strategic Integration and the lines of inquiry under it. This connection has been addressed in the webinar and can be referenced using the link to the recording above.
- It is not necessary for a research project to address all three lines of inquiry. We recommend focusing on just one line of inquiry, and just one research question that is of importance to your organization and the food security community.

**18. Will there be a focus on impact on COVID-19-affected households and how food security and nutrition implementers adjust their interventions to include both emergency and long-term development sectoral interventions?**

- The RFA is not directive on this front. However, applicants are urged to read the Learning Agenda and determine for themselves whether this topic fits well under one of the broad lines of inquiry.

## PROGRAMMATIC GUIDANCE

**19. What criteria qualify an institution as a food security institution, is it to do with number of years? Published work?**

- There are no specific criteria, as long as the institution is implementing a food security and nutrition program or has done so within the past five years.
- An organization cannot apply for an Applied Research Award as a food security implementer in one application and as a research institution or HEI in another application.

**20. Are budget funds only for research-related expenses or can they be used towards implementation of the food security program?**

- ARA funds may only be used for research-related expenses. Some research designs, such as a pilot of a specific intervention, may justify ARA funding of implementation as part of the research. Every application must fully explain all proposed grant activities and costs. Applications that propose funding for implementation that is not part of the research design will not be considered.

**21. For the food security activities being studied, should they already be in progress when we apply or can the research be for a future or past program? Are post-project studies eligible for the IDEAL Applied Research Award? Does IDEAL give preference for applications involving *active* food security programs?**

- The intention is to focus research on ongoing or recently completed activities, however, we may consider allowing research for a future program on a case-by-case basis. If the food security activities you plan to study have not started, the application must demonstrate that the activities will start during the ARA life of award, and that the proposed research can be completed prior to the ARA life of award (there is no expectation that the activity needs to be completed to finalize the ARA award). Applicants must ensure there is sufficient time for report writing and dissemination during the 24-month period. No preference will be given for involving currently active food security programs.

**22. Are organizations that will not have an ongoing/active BHA-funded food security and nutrition program throughout the research period (24 months) eligible to apply? In**

**the RFA, it is stated that “there is a need to fully explore the degree to which these planned interactions are taking place within activities (across sectors), between activities, and across organizations through...”, this suggests there should be an ongoing BHA program.**

- Yes, organizations are eligible to apply even without BHA-funded food security activities.

**23. Can USAID funds under this grant explore questions outlined when the project being studied was funded by another donor, e.g. DFID?**

- Yes, programs funded by another donor, for example DFID, could be studied to explore the lines of inquiry and themes we have prioritized from the USAID Food Assistance and Food Security Learning Agenda.

**24. Can scaling up of technologies already developed and implemented be a part of the award?**

- Yes, as long as this is essential to answering your research question and fits into the theme of Strategic Integration.

**25. Does this award require addressing gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) as a core component?**

- We encourage considering gender equality and social inclusion when developing research methods, however there is no requirement to address GESI as a core component.

**26. What types of projects have been funded in the past under IDEAL's Small Grants Program, and from which organizations/institutions? Is it possible to get a list as a reference?**

- All of the RFAs released under the IDEAL Small Grants Program have been unique in scope, focus, and objective, so past projects would not be relevant to this specific RFA. In the future, we will be providing more details on past projects through the FSN Network website. You can also visit the FSN Network to view past [Small Grant RFAs](#) (Micro Grant and Program Improvement Award).

**27. It is clear from the RFA that multilateral organizations are not eligible to receive this Applied Research Award. If we would like to conduct an evaluation of a program implemented by a local partner, which is funded by a UN agency that also provides technical input and expertise, is that acceptable? The funding would be used to conduct in-depth implementation research, which is currently not funded by the UN agency. The funding would go to the implementation partner and the research institution, not to the UN agency.**

- Yes, that setup would be eligible under this RFA because the UN agency would not receive the award funding.

**28. Are multi-country studies allowed? Are multiple implementing partners (one in each country) allowed?**

- Yes, multi-country studies with one or more implementation partners are allowed.

**29. Could I have more explanation about this: “This RFA requires partnership between a food and nutrition security program implementer (e.g., a non-governmental organization, civil society, or private sector company) and an established research team from a higher education institution (HEI) or research institution.” Should the partnership comprise of each organization from the list?**

- At a minimum, the partnership must comprise two entities: one food and nutrition security program implementer and one research institution or HEI.

**30. Can the food and nutrition security implementer and HEI be located in the same country and work together?**

- Yes, they can be located in the same country and work together.

**31. Can the submitting organization be registered outside the country where implementation is to be done?**

- Yes. However, if the submitting (lead) organization is not registered where the implementation is being done, a partner organization must be legally recognized in the country and have the necessary approvals to conduct the research and go through any required national-level institutional review board (IRB) process.

**32. If the applicant were to partner with an HEI or research institution based in a Most Developed Country or Middle-Income Country that would coordinate with a local HEI or research institution based in a Least Developed Country (LDC), would this be less preferable to IDEAL than partnership with an HEI or research institution based in an LDC?**

- There is a preference for working with a local HEI or research institution headquartered in a Least Developed Country. Applications including partnerships with research institutions or HEIs headquartered in developing countries as defined by USAID's [List of Developing Countries](#) will receive a full 5 points in the scoring criteria.
- If the application includes an HEI or research institution based in a Most Developed Country, AND includes an HEI or research institution headquartered in an LDC, the application will still receive the full five points.

**33. Section B.4 of the RFA states that it is anticipated that the award will be made in or around March 2021. For budgeting purposes, should applicants assume a start date of March 1, 2021?**

- For budgeting and work planning purposes, please assume an April 1, 2021 start date.

**34. In regard to Section B.9 Payment, please confirm that while the resulting award will be cost reimbursement, USAID or Save the Children intends to provide quarterly advance funding, which recipients will report on a quarterly basis.**

- As this grant will be made as a sub-award from Save the Children, the expectation is that costs will be reimbursed at the end of each quarter without quarterly advances. Payments will be made for properly invoiced amounts within 30 days of approval of quarterly financial reports and progress updates, which are included as part of the award reporting requirements in Section B8 of the RFA.
- On a case-by-case basis, where the research methods and the partner demonstrate a need for advances, Save the Children will consider quarterly advances.

**35. Could you please clarify what constitutes longitudinal research? Are studies that primarily seek to compare different interventions/exposures but include before/after analyses acceptable? Does the limitation on longitudinal studies apply to impact evaluations that may follow a cohort of participants over a limited number of time periods (baseline, immediate post intervention, 3- or 6-month follow-up)?**

- The ARA award does not preclude longitudinal research. However if a longitudinal design is proposed, the applicant must be clear – and realistic – on the timing of each cross section. While light touch multi-round data collection activities might be possible, the ARA is not appropriate for multiple rounds of large scale data collection activities. The use of existing secondary data source(s) coupled with primary data collection is allowable as well.

**36. What does IDEAL consider the best balance between primary and secondary data collection methods? As it may not be possible to conduct significant primary data collection in contexts where there is significant community spread of COVID-19, is it possible to rely on analysis of existing datasets, or will primary data collection be required? If so, will remote data collection methods (using phone surveys, electronic surveys) be acceptable?**

- There is no prescription on the balance between primary and secondary data collection methods. Understanding that COVID-19 will complicate data collection, applicants are welcome to use any range of necessary research methods, as long as the application demonstrates sufficient processes to ensure quality research implementation, data collection, and analysis, while aligning with COVID-19 regulations in their target countries. Remote data collection methods are acceptable.

**37. The RFA states: “While the award is envisioned for up to 24 months, please note that study preparation, data collection, and preparing the research products should not exceed 18 months.” There seems to be an inconsistency between this statement and the timeline expressed in the Illustrative Award Timeline Table, which spreads the study preparation and products finalization process over 21 months and the dissemination phase over 3 months. Can this be clarified? Is there preference for IDEAL in terms of duration of the research?**

- You are correct, there is an inconsistency here. The expectation is that study preparation and data collections should only take up to 18 months. Preparing research products does not need to be completed in the first 18 months. This has now been updated in the RFA. The goal of the 18-month limit is to ensure there is adequate time at the end of the research award to draft the research products, have IDEAL review the documents, and fully disseminate the results within the 24-month award period. The illustrative timeline is just an example of how the 24 months could be broken across all five phases, considering the time it could take for start-up, including IRB approval, and closeout.

**38. While the applicant’s responsibility for research dissemination is clearly stated in the RFA, the RFA also states: “The IDEAL Activity will facilitate further dissemination beyond the award period in collaboration with the implementer, but Applied Research Award funds will not be utilized for this. IDEAL’s support may include but is not limited to the following: technical review and preparation for publication, outreach to the food and nutrition security community, and promotion of resources during IDEAL in-person and online events.” Please clarify whether there is an expected role from the implementer in the dissemination of work post the ARA life of award. If that is the case, how will this collaboration be supported? Can the applicant include funds in the budget for this activity?**

- There is no required role for the grant recipient to further disseminate their work beyond the ARA life of award. IDEAL will continue to look for opportunities to disseminate the learnings and research from each small grant product after the award period ends, and the grant recipients are invited to engage in this as they deem appropriate. If grant recipients have independent funding to further disseminate research findings (e.g. publishing a research paper) after the life of award, IDEAL may be able to provide support as described above.

**39. Is it possible to increase the budget depending on activities?**

- Final funding levels for each award will depend on content, relevance, quality, and needs, with a ceiling of US \$300,000 per award (subject to availability of funds). No applications with

budgets greater than \$300,000 will be considered and no increases in funding will be made after grants are made.

#### **40. Should the scope be at national level or can it be at sub-national level?**

- It can be at sub-national or national level. Learning should address a gap in knowledge or evidence that is of importance to the larger food and nutrition security implementing partner community.

### **APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA**

#### **41. Please confirm the application formatting requirements for 12-pt font of any choosing, or whether to follow the font (Ubuntu, 10-pt) displayed in Attachment 1 (Narrative Research Application Template).**

- An adjustment has been made to the RFA package. The font size however must be 10 point. While the document is written using Ubuntu font, applications can utilize any font with 10 point size.

#### **42. Attachment 1 (Narrative Research Application Template) requires that applicants provide the total funding requested in both local currency and US\$ in the cover letter. Please confirm that if the applicant is US-based, the funding request should be submitted only in US\$ in the cover letter.**

- We confirm that if the applicant is US-based and the budget will be calculated in US\$, the funding request need only be submitted in US\$ in the cover letter and budget documents.

#### **43. Should the lead applicant also include a signed letter of commitment in Appendix C?**

- No, the Letter of Support is only necessary for the partner organization(s) to indicate intent, willingness, and ability to conduct the research alongside the lead applicant.

#### **44. Should the applicant include as part of the proposal any anticipated outcomes the research will seek to support in one or more specific project(s) in a specific country where research is carried out given that this research is meant to be applied? Or should applicants reference generally anticipated outcomes for one or more types of projects or project components? Or both?**

- The applications should clearly state the expected outputs, outcomes, and impact of the research. These may be at the local, country, and/or global level depending on the nature of the research. Applicants are encouraged to keep in mind that the goal of the Applied Research Awards is to generate evidence that benefits the global food security and nutrition community.

#### **45. What are the documents an organization or research institute need to put in place when applying for the grant with regards to USAID policies?**

- Please reference Section I of the RFA document. All attachments can be found on the [Applied Research Award RFA](#) webpage on the FSN Network.



## USEFUL LINKS

- Webinar Resources:
  - [Recording](#)
  - [Presentation Slides](#)
- Learn more about [IDEAL](#)
- Learn more about the IDEAL [Small Grants Program](#)
- Access most up to date [USAID COVID-19 Resources](#)
  - [BHA Development Activity Guidance during COVID](#)
  - [BHA Humanitarian Activity Guidance During COVID](#)
- Learn more about responding to USAID funded opportunities through the New Partnership Initiative:
  - [Training Link](#)
- Learn more about [Embedded Research Translation](#)
- Access the [Food Assistance and Food Security Programmatic Learning Agenda](#)

## DISCLAIMER:

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