



Food Systems for Nutrition Innovation Lab (FSN-IL) Expression of Interest:

Demonstrating the Cost-Effectiveness of Innovation Bundles to Support Food Systems Transformation for Nutrition, Food Safety, and Reduced Food Loss and Waste

Questions and Answers

February 27, 2024

1. Would you consider submissions from institutions in other countries than those listed in the call?

For this opportunity, we will only consider submissions from one of the four Food Systems for Nutrition Innovation Lab focus countries detailed in the call: Bangladesh, Nepal, Malawi, and Mozambique.

2. The call is a highly relevant subject that corresponds with our ongoing initiatives focused on the solar/sun drying of arils, nevertheless, the call specifically designated Bangladesh, Nepal, Malawi, and Mozambique as the countries of utmost importance. Are we still able to fulfil the conditions for this application? Alternatively, I am curious if there is a potential for cooperation with colleagues in Mozambique and Malawi regarding this matter?

While we acknowledge that the topics identified in our Expression of Interest (EOI) are likely to be very relevant in other geographies and countries, for this opportunity, only submissions targeting one of the four focus countries detailed in the call will be eligible. Applicants could consider submitting a concept that involves one or more of the four listed countries. There is potential for collaboration with an in-country partner, however, the applicant needs to identify the entity or institution in Malawi and/or Mozambique at the time of application and list them in the EOI.

3. The call mentions an aim for one award per country with a total resource allocation of USD 7,000,000 across all awards for a two-year period. Could you please clarify if a consortium can apply for one award in multiple countries (Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal), or should a consortium restrict its application to just one country?

There is no restriction on number of partners on an application, and thus a consortium could consider applying for one of the awards. FSN-IL will issue multiple awards from the above noted resource allocation. A consortium could apply and propose for multiple countries, with a clear identification of local partners relevant for each focus country, and a clear description of the targeted solutions since these are less likely to be one size fits all.

4. In light of the encouragement for applicants to consider testing bundles of innovations in more than one country, could you clarify how this recommendation aligns with the award structure? Does this imply there could be flexibility in award allocations for consortia proposing multi-country projects?

Currently, we are looking for EOIs. Based on the proposed bundles, further discussions on the award allocation and decision on multi-country activities will be determined during the co-design process.

5. Where the partnering private sector entity is from a neighboring country but that have the capacity to enable/train (M)SMEs' on fabrication and scale up, would this be acceptable? We plan to work with the fish value chain in Malawi and partner with a private sector entity from Zambia that has experience in this area.

The partners are acceptable if they have a better presence in the proposed country. For instance, although the company is from Zambia, they should have an office or in-country presence in Malawi. Additionally, we suggest that the applicant explore opportunities to augment the partnerships with local Malawian organizations.

6. On this point: "Applicants are encouraged to consider the potential of testing bundles of innovations in more than one country". Is there an expectation to test the innovation bundle in more than one country or merely speculate on the opportunity? If we chose to test the possibility of the innovation being implemented in another country, must this be tested in another focus country of this call or any other country?

The expectation is that the innovation bundle has the potential for scale-up. If the proposal is to test the possibility of the bundle in more than one country, that should clearly be reflected in the EOI.

7. On this point: A demonstration of expertise in addressing one or more cross-cutting themes of gender and youth and climate smart and resilient food systems. Should this be interpreted as an expectation to have a gender or climate/environmental research expert in the team?

The partnering institution should have demonstrated expertise (individual or institutional) in addressing one or more cross-cutting themes. Please review Page 7 and 8 in the EOI guidelines.

8. Is there a ceiling of funding per country?

There is no ceiling of funding per country, however, FSN-IL aims for one award per country (4).

9. Does selection for co-creation guarantee eventual funding?

Selection for co-creation does not guarantee eventual funding.

10. Is a budget required?

At this stage, no budget is required. Please review Page 7-10 of the EOI guidelines.

11. Can we propose to have the project in two of the targeted countries? If so, do you want the CVs for the PIs from both countries?

Applicants can propose one or more countries and can have multiple partners who lead local activities. However, one institution and individual needs to be listed as the lead. Only that person's CV and institutional credentials need to be submitted at this stage. Please review other Q&A on points related to the context specific innovation bundles when choosing a multi-country option.

12. Do you want a CV from the site PI if the project proposes a sub-contract with another US-based institution in order to show the expertise on the research team?

Please review Page 10 of the EOI guideline, under PI Qualifications: Optional 'one' CV (maximum of 2 pages).

13. Please confirm whether the inclusion of US-based academic institution is a firm requirement. If so, is it also permissible to include other academic institutions as additional partners (including in a prime role)?

It is required that a US-based academic institution be included, however, other academic institutions (US or non-US based) may be included as partners. Only the submitting institution and individual can serve in a prime role.

14. Is Tufts University and/or Tufts faculty eligible to participate as applicants/partners/Pis?

Yes, faculty at Tufts are eligible to participate.

15. Can one organization submit more than one project proposal, providing the proposals are for different FSN-IL priority countries? For instance, can the same organization propose one project for Nepal and another for Bangladesh?

Yes, one organization may submit more than one project proposal.

16. Is it preferable to have the organization based in the targeted country be the lead organization, or is it preferable to have US-based academic partner be the lead organization?

Yes. The target country can be the lead organization.

17. Is it allowed to have a small amount of the budget (<5%) set aside for co-funding of infrastructures of collaborating SME food supply chain actors?

This can be further discussed during the co-design process, given the proposal is successfully selected for the co-design process.

18. Cost-effectiveness implies a scaling approach and potentially advocacy with finance institutions and governments to co-facilitate investments and/or apply subsidies for interventions that improves availability, affordability and accessibility of perishable, nutrient-dense foods. Therefore, is advocacy an acceptable budget item?

Yes, advocacy, engagement and awareness can be part of the innovation bundle.

19. I am wondering if the PI for the project may be based at a university overseas if there is a US based academic institution listed as a partner.

Yes, there is no restriction on who can apply as the lead (prime). Therefore, the PI may be based at a University overseas as long as the criteria for being the lead of a USAID project are met and documented, and at least one U.S. based academic institution is included in the application.

20. Would it be possible to have more information about the projects funded through the FSN-IL during the last round of proposals? Specifically, it would be helpful to know the country, commodity and topic focus so that we can avoid overlap.

Please refer to FSN-IL's latest [blog post](#) for the information. Proposals on post-farm gate innovations on improving storage, processing, and packaging, of perishable foods from Nepal, Bangladesh and Malawi were supported in the first round of proposals.

21. The overarching questions mention "effectiveness of implementation" and "cost-effectiveness of specific innovation bundles". Would it be possible to get more guidance on how that is to be defined and if possible measured? This has implications for study design and resources- is it expected that we are to study effectiveness in terms of human nutritional status outcomes on a population level for example?

Effectiveness of implementation refers to the evidence of innovations in successful achievement of outputs (for example, adoption), and impact outcomes such as the human nutritional status outcomes.

22. Is it expected that proposals geographically focus on the USAID Zone of Influence in countries?

Proposals are not mandated to concentrate solely on the USAID Zone of Influence in the specified four countries, but such a focus is encouraged.

23. Could we please have further guidance on what type of expenditures are acceptable? For example, would drying equipment or other food preservation equipment such as freezers/ice machines or packaging machines be permitted expenditures?

The EOI does not necessitate a detailed budget or specific details regarding expenditures. The cost associated with innovations (such as technologies, products, processes) can be discussed and established during the subsequent phase of co-design and full proposal development.

24. Are there cost sharing requirements that will be required as part of future applications?

Based upon the co-design process, cost sharing is a requirement for all proposals.

25. Should the following statement be interpreted to mean that prior collaborations with partners are necessary for a successful application or will be part of the scoring: "Applicants are required to demonstrate their own past performance as well as the history of collaboration with the proposed partners"?

Certainly, the scoring process will consider past performance, collaborations with proposed partners, and institutional qualifications. Statements on prior collaborations with in-country partners are encouraged. Kindly refer to the scoring criteria on page 11 of the EOI guidelines for additional information.

26. There will be one award for each of the four countries and total funding is \$7 million, so the maximum one award can get may be around \$ 1.7 m?

Yes.

27. Can non-U.S. institutions lead the proposal where a U.S. institution is one of the partners?

Yes.