

## REQUEST FOR APPLICATION

This Request for Applications (RFA) is issued by the Long-term Assistance and Services for Research: Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (LASER PULSE) at Purdue University. LASER PULSE is a five-year program implemented by a consortium comprising Purdue University (lead institution), the University of Notre Dame, Indiana University, Makerere University, and Catholic Relief Services. LASER PULSE is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement 7200AA18CA00009.

**Eligible Lead Institutions:** Only Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) as defined by the United States Department of Education are eligible to apply (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html>) as lead institutions for this RFA. MSIs include institutions of higher education enrolling populations with significant percentages of undergraduate minority students, or that serve certain populations of minority students under various programs created by Congress. They include:

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) - Founded before 1964
2. Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)
3. Alaska Native Serving Institutions (ANSI)
4. Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (NHSI)
5. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (AANAPI)
6. Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI)
7. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

**Development Sectors of Interest:** Any [USAID technical sector](#), except for certain activities that fall under global health.

Agriculture and food security	Democracy, human rights, and governance
Economic growth and trade	Education
Environment, energy, and infrastructure	Gender equality and women’s empowerment
Humanitarian assistance	Innovation, Technology and Infrastructure
Nutrition	Water and sanitation
Climate change	Working in Crises and Conflict
Global Health*	

\*Only certain activities that fall under global health (<https://www.usaid.gov/global-health>) are eligible. Applicants interested in applying for a global health-related research project under this RFA are asked to first contact Pamela McClure ([awardsmanager@laserpulse.org](mailto:awardsmanager@laserpulse.org)) to determine if the proposed work falls within the scope of this RFA.

**Region/Countries of Interest in this RFA:**

This RFA is open for research project applications in [USAID partner countries](#) that are not on USAID’s FY2021 special notification country list (see [Appendix 1](#)). Regions/countries of interest to this RFA are:

Regions	Countries
Africa	Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, Zambia
Asia	Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pacific Islands, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Vietnam
Europe and Eurasia	Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine
Latin America and the Caribbean	Bolivia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Eastern and Southern Caribbean, Ecuador, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru
Middle East	Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza

**Award Number and Size:** Multiple individual research awards will be made, up to a maximum of \$150,000 per Award; awards are expected to span a period of 12 months. The total anticipated funding available for this RFA is up to a maximum of \$750,000. There is an expectation of a 10% cost-share for all Awards. **Note:** If you need a waiver for the 10% cost-share, please indicate during the submission of the LOI stage.

**Application Submission Process and Timeline:**

Issuance of Request for Application: November 8, 2021

Questions to be answered during the First Webinar should be received by November 17, 6:00 pm EST.

First webinar will answer submitted questions on the RFA and introduce Systems-Level Analysis (SLA) method November 19, at 8:00 am EST

Questions to be answered during the Second Webinar should be received by November 30, 6:00 pm EST.

Second webinar will answer questions on the Systems-Level Analysis and the RFA December 2, 2021, at 8:00 am EST

**Deadline for receipt of the Letter of Interest (LOI): December 14, 2021 at 11:59 pm EST**

**Note:** only Applicants that meet the submission requirements of the LOI are invited to submit a Full Application

Invitation to selected applicants to submit Full Application: January 12, 2022

Third webinar for Applicants invited to submit Full Application January 20, 2022, at 8:00 am EST

**Deadline for submission of Full Application: February 14, 2022 at 11:59 pm EST**

Selected Applications sent to USAID for approval: May 2022

Expected award status notification: July 2022

**Contact Information:**

For programmatic questions, please email Dr. Betty Bugusu at [td@laserpulse.org](mailto:td@laserpulse.org).

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. LASER PULSE BACKGROUND	7
2. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION	7
2.1 RFA Context	7
2.2 RFA Scope	8
2.2.1 Relevance to USAID Priorities in Selected Country	9
2.2.2 System-level Frameworks to Identify Development Challenges and Research Gaps	9
2.2.3 Embedded Research Translation (ERT)	10
3. APPLICATION INFORMATION AND PROCESS	12
3.1 Eligibility and Leadership	12
3.2 RFA Question Period and Informational Webinar	14
3.3 Stage 1: Letter of Interest (LOI) required on or before December 14, 2021	15
3.4 Stage 2: Full Application - See Summary table	16
3.5 On-line Training Requirements and Recommendations	16
3.5.1 Mandatory training	17
3.5.2 Optional training	17
3.6 Strategy for Gender Inclusion	17
3.7 Strategy for Embedded Research Translation (ERT)	17
3.8 Project Duration and Funding	18
3.9 Research Output Reporting	18
3.10 Budget Preparation for Full Application	19
3.11 Budget, Budget Narrative, and Cost-Share Documents	19
3.12 Full Application Summary Table	21
4. EVALUATION OF FULL APPLICATIONS	24
4.1 Evaluation Criteria	24
4.1.1 Research Merit	24
4.1.2 Broader Impacts	25
4.2 Evaluation Process	25

Table 1. Rating Definition for Research Merit and Broader Impact Sub-Criteria	26
5. APPENDICES	28
5.1 Appendix 1 – List of USAID 2021 Special Notification Countries	28
5.2 Appendix 2 – System-Level Analysis	28
5.3 Appendix 3 – USAID Gender Analysis Considerations	33
5.4 Appendix 4 – Glossary of Selected Key Words	36
5.5 Appendix 5 – Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) RFA LOI Template	38
5.6 Appendix 6 – Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) RFA - Full Application checklist	40
5.7 Appendix 7 – List of USAID Country (or Regional) Development Cooperation Strategy	41

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AOR	Agreement Officer’s Representative
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
COR	Contract Officer’s Representative
Co-PI	Co-Principal Investigator
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DDI	Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (USAID)
ERT	Embedded Research Translation
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HESN	Higher Education Solutions Network
ITR	Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub (USAID)
LASER PULSE	Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partner University-Led Solutions Engine
MSIs	Minority Serving Institutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PI	Principal Investigator
RFA	Request For Applications
SLA	System-Level Analysis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## 1. LASER PULSE BACKGROUND

[LASER PULSE](#) (Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partner University-Led Solutions Engine) is a five-year, \$70M program funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub (ITR) to deliver research-driven solutions to field-sourced development challenges in USAID partner countries. A Purdue University-led consortium with Catholic Relief Services, Indiana University, Makerere University, and the University of Notre Dame implements the LASER PULSE program through a growing network of 2,500+ researchers and development practitioners in 61 countries. LASER PULSE collaborates with USAID missions, bureaus, and offices, and other local stakeholders to identify and fund research needs for critical development challenges and strengthens the capacity of researcher-practitioner teams to co-design solutions that translate into policy and practice.

LASER PULSE is part of the Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN) 2.0 portfolio of programs from the ITR Hub of USAID's Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI). HESN 2.0 leverages a vast network of higher education institutions, local stakeholders, private enterprises, and other development actors to increase the use of scientific research for development. HESN works to refine and translate complex data, build local scientific potential, and test new and innovative development approaches.

## 2. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

**Purpose:** Grounded in the Biden Administration's [Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) USAID recently released its own [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Strategy](#), outlining a vision for a more diverse, inclusive, equitable and accessible workplace. Additionally, the Administration's Executive Order (E.O.) 13985, "[On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#)" calls for a similar commitment in all US government (USG) programs and partnerships. USAID's relationships with minority serving institutions (MSIs) play a key role in supporting this vision and are a natural entryway to ensuring diverse and often marginalized voices and perspectives are included as we tackle today's global challenges. In view of this commitment, this RFA is an opportunity for MSI researchers to conduct or further their development research in partnership with development stakeholders in USAID Partner Countries.

### 2.1 RFA Context

USAID partners with various entities, to deliver assistance across all regions and sectors of USAID programming and to promote inclusive economic growth, strengthen health and education at the community level, support civil society in democratic reforms and assist countries recovering from disasters. USAID mobilizes the expertise, capacity and knowledge of partners to achieve USAID's development objectives, contribute to host government and national priorities, and advance community development.

For many USAID activities, development research (i.e. scientific knowledge and evidence) is aimed at improving policy and practice to help improve the development outcomes.

However, activity implementation often reveals unforeseen areas for further development research or ways to utilize research results for improving development outcomes.

Researchers in Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) represent a significant resource of scientific talent to partner with USAID in development research. Development research, in turn, provides new opportunities to MSI researchers to increase the impact of their research and secure new valuable research funding. This RFA creates opportunities for Researchers at MSIs to work closely with a research translation partner (LASER PULSE uses the term “Translation Partners” to refer to development practitioners that are paired with researchers as part of a team submitting an Application. See Appendix 4 for Glossary of Selected Key Words) located in a USAID country/ies to address a local development challenge through a collaborative research project that aligns with USAID’s priorities in that country. Translation partners include local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s), International NGOs, local government/private sector. In addition, projects are encouraged, but not required to include local university/HEI researchers in the specific country in the collaborative project.

## 2.2 RFA Scope

*Successful applications from practitioner-researcher teams are required to address all five elements below. They will:*

- 1) Identify a development practitioner organization (which could be one of the following: a local NGO or an NGO with a local presence in the selected country or local government or private sector entity) in the USAID partner country(ies) to develop the application and its implementation.
- 2) Explicitly address USAID Mission’s country priorities. These can be obtained from USAID Country Mission priority documents, including:
  - a) USAID Country (or Region) Development Cooperation Strategy. CDCSs (or go to <https://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/planning/country-strategies-cdcs>),
  - b) **or** USAID Country Mission priority documents from the USAID Country Mission website, where CDCSs does not exist.
- 3) Utilize a system-level framework ([see Section 2.2.2 for further details](#)) to identify specific research challenges that are critical for successful development outcomes of a development challenge that is in line with USAID’s country priorities.
- 4) Co-design (among researchers and practitioners), rigorous/innovative research questions and methodology to address those challenges.
- 5) Co-develop an intentional strategy to identify and engage key stakeholders and ensure translation of research into practice or policy ([see Section 2.2.2 for more details](#)).

In particular, two key considerations drive LASER PULSE’s strategy to ensure research impact on development: the use of a system-level framework (Section 2.2.2) to identify critical development challenges, and the embedding of translation to drive policy or practice into all LASER PULSE funded research projects (Section 2.2.3). These two considerations are described below in details.



**Note:** This RFA is open to technical sectors in Table 1. USAID Technical Sectors:

Agriculture and food security	Democracy, human rights and governance
Economic growth and trade	Education
Environment, energy, and infrastructure	Gender equality and women’s empowerment
Humanitarian assistance	Innovation, Technology and Research Infrastructure
Nutrition	Water and sanitation
Climate change	Working in Crises and Conflict
Global Health*	

\*Only certain activities that fall under global health (<https://www.usaid.gov/global-health>) are eligible. Applicants interested in applying for a global health-related research project under this RFA are asked to first contact Pamela McClure ([awardsmanager@laserpulse.org](mailto:awardsmanager@laserpulse.org)) to determine if the proposed work falls within the scope of this RFA.

**2.2.1 Relevance to USAID Priorities in Selected Country**

All Applications must explicitly address an area or areas within the selected country’s USAID priorities, highlighted by the missions. These priorities can be found in various documents such as [USAID’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy](#) (CDCSs) and/or USAID Country Mission priority documents (available on USAID Mission’s website).

**2.2.2 System-level Frameworks to Identify Development Challenges and Research Gaps**

Interventions for development challenges often operate in complex social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental systems where the success or failure of development outcomes can hinge on a number of interrelated factors. A key consideration of LASER PULSE’s strategy is to use system-level thinking to identify which factors are critical to be addressed for a successful development outcome to be realized. All successful applications submitted to this RFA will describe how the proposed research addresses a key knowledge gap existing in the broader system-level context within which it resides (i.e. the CDCS area of relevance to the Application). Thus, the use of a system-level approach has immense potential to improve the efficacy of proposed solutions and activities.

While there are various system-level frameworks available, one approach used by LASER PULSE is System-Level Analysis (SLA). This method is employed to identify key interrelated factors that define a given problem to be solved. Purdue University’s Innovation Science team has developed foundational issue trees that can be applied to any development sector in order to examine generalized elements of a system to isolate “conditions for success” that must be present when addressing a complex global development challenge. For more detail about SLA, see [Appendix 2](#). LASER PULSE strongly believes in the value that this approach can impart to research project planning and, as such, strongly recommends that

Applicants use this method and its associated tools when developing their response to this RFA. However, LASER PULSE will also accept the use of other system-level planning approaches in Applicant's submissions. Applicants who choose to employ SLA are required to view the [SLA online webinar recording](#) (see 'LASER PULSE GRCD Webinar' at the bottom of the webpage) and its associated materials that will include specific examples of use. **Note:** this webinar recording is only for the SLA approach to systems analysis along with its best practices. LASER PULSE will provide links to recordings of the three planned webinars for this RFA i.e. for November 19, December 2, 2021 and January 20, 2022 (see **Section 3.2** for details).

Other system-level frameworks include, but are not limited to:

- [USAID Local Systems Framework](#)
- [USAID SPACES MERL](#)
- [Theory of Change](#); also see [Theory of Change \(ODI 2015\)](#)
- [Logic Model](#)
- [Systems \(Actor\) Mapping](#)
- [Problem Tree Analysis](#)

Applicants are **required** to utilize a system-level framework in the design of their research, it could be SLA or any of the ones listed above. Successful demonstration of the system-level framework in the application will include:

- 1) A collaborative process between university researcher(s) and a development practitioner partner to select and apply a system-level framework of choice, in order to analyze a USAID development priority in the selected country and its underlying development challenge;
- 2) Identification of 2-4 opportunities for research, revealed by the system-level analysis identified via Item #1 above, that would address the identified development challenge. Such identification includes:
  - a) a clear relationship between the identified opportunities and gaps in knowledge that subsequent research could address to benefit the USAID country priority.
  - b) potential partners for each identified opportunity, and the roles they would play.
- 3) Selection and description of **one** of the opportunities identified in Item #2 above – **this will constitute the underlying research topic/theme of the Letter of Interest (LOI, see Section 3.3 and Appendix 2)**, which will subsequently be developed into a Full Application, by invitation only (see Section 3.4).
- 4) Copies of tangible outputs (e.g. completed summary templates, flow charts, stakeholder maps) derived from the system-level process that was employed.

### 2.2.3 Embedded Research Translation (ERT)

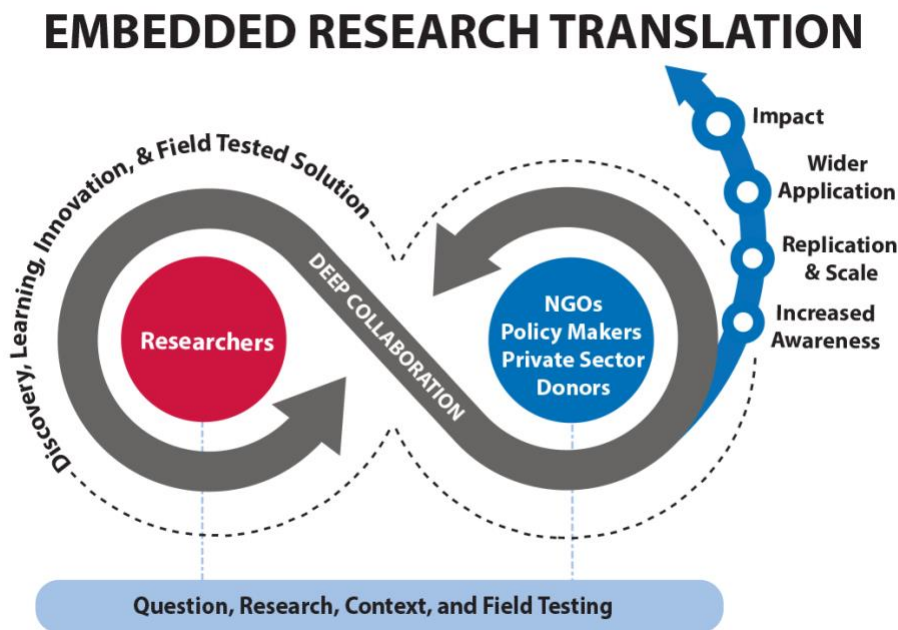
A key consideration for the LASER PULSE program is to ensure that research translation is embedded across all phases of the research project (i.e. from co-defining the research question to disseminating findings). LASER PULSE defines *Embedded Research Translation* as

*An iterative co-design process among academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders in which research is intentionally applied to a development challenge.*

Recognizing that embedded research translation is an iterative, collaborative process, LASER PULSE promotes a model in which development solutions are derived through a co-development process between researchers and development practitioners. Development practitioners are defined as individual persons engaged in the design, planning, and/or implementation of local, regional, national, or international development programs/projects. This definition refers to the personnel of NGOs and community-based organizations; but it can also include individuals representing governments, or the private sector, in an implementation capacity.

In this RFA, LASER PULSE uses the term “Translation Partners” to refer to development practitioners that are paired with researchers as part of a team submitting an Application. The lead researcher (Principal Investigator) works closely with the translation partner to ensure that the results will be made readily available – both useful and usable, in format, language, and dissemination channels to the various stakeholder groups.

LASER PULSE’s Embedded Research Translation model (Figure 1) is rooted in deep collaboration between researchers and translation partner(s) and follows an iterative process from discovery, to a field-tested solution, to wider application, and finally to impact.



**Figure 1.** LASER PULSE Embedded Research Translation model

The LASER PULSE’s Embedded Research Translation model incorporates four pillars in its approach: (1) an early and active **partnership** between researchers and translation partner(s), (2) a collaborative partnership **process**, (3) a targeted translation **product**, and (4) a **dissemination plan** with recommendations for replication and scale-up.

An Embedded Research Translation Strategy includes:

- 1) At least one translation partner (NGO, civil society, the private sector, and/or local government entities) for the proposed research project. If needed, additional local HEI partners could be included;
- 2) A collaborative co-design process between the researcher and translation partner(s);
- 3) A usable and appropriate research translation product(s) applicable to:
  - a) policy (such as a policy brief or recommendation that can lead to changes in legal, constitutional, funding, accountability, feasibility, or implementation mechanisms) and/or,
  - b) practice (such as a program recommendation, new production/processing methods, education curricula, guidebooks, technical manuals, training modules, or planning tools). Examples of tangible translation products include tools/devices, reports, multimedia products, or IT platforms;
- 4) A plan for dissemination to move beyond initial partnerships and toward a larger uptake of relevant findings in the country or region.

### 3. APPLICATION INFORMATION AND PROCESS

*This section provides detailed specific information on the RFA, including appendices that support the document.*

#### 3.1 Eligibility and Leadership

Only academic researchers based at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) in the United States are eligible to submit an Application. Minority Serving Institutions are defined by the US Department of Education as institutions of higher education enrolling populations with significant percentages of undergraduate minority students, or that serve certain populations of minority students under various programs created by Congress. They include:

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) - Founded before 1964
2. Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)
3. Alaska Native Serving Institutions (ANSI)
4. Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (NHSI)
5. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (AANAPI)
6. Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI)
7. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

The MSI researchers are **required** to collaborate with a development practitioner (e.g., an NGO, civil society, the private sector, or a local government entity) to serve as their translation partner(s) for the Applications. The Principal Investigator (PI) is **required** to provide a signed Letter of Commitment using the [provided template](#). Foreign government institutions are considered viable translation partners, however, they are not eligible to receive funding associated with this award and should not have a budget associated with the Application. Foreign government research translation contributions can be applied as cost-share.

NGO partners must have a presence in the country where the research is proposed. Note: This RFA is restricted to [USAID partner countries](#) that are not currently on USAID’s FY2021 special notification country list ([Appendix 1](#)). Regions/countries of interest to this RFA are:

Regions	Countries
Africa	Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, Zambia
Asia	Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pacific Islands, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Vietnam
Europe and Eurasia	Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine
Latin America and the Caribbean	Bolivia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Eastern and Southern Caribbean, Ecuador, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru
Middle East	Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza

The personnel structure of the research project teams for this RFA shall be as follows:

- 1) The individual coordinating the project team and submitting the application will be considered the Principal Investigator (PI). Each PI is limited to submitting only one Application to the RFA.
- 2) In addition to the PI, at least one Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) is required on each Application. The Co-PI must be a development practitioner based or with a presence in the country where the research is proposed.
- 3) Additional Co-PIs may be included as needed. They may include researchers from local HEIs or additional development practitioners from other institutions other than the main translation partner institution

- 4) Each partner institution should only have one designated Co-PIs. If there are multiple project team participants from any one institution, then they should be designated as “Key collaborators” on the Application.

All members of the project team must be registered in the LASER PULSE Network. Please [click here](#) (or go to <https://laserpulse.org/network/>) to register as a member of the LASER PULSE Network.

### 3.2 RFA Question Period and Informational Webinar

Prospective Applicants are encouraged to thoroughly review the frequently asked questions (FAQs) at [this link](#) (or go to <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OOvav4jreBsrd2ECXEZZCOmqwTX6AyHwSYyJe0ii4ig/edit>) (FAQs) for this RFA before beginning the two-stage application process (*see Sections 3.3 and 3.12*) leading to the submission of an Application. The FAQs document is provided as part of the RFA package.

Additionally, LASER PULSE will allow two weeks for prospective Applicants to submit any additional questions concerning the RFA. Questions should be sent to Pamela McClure at [pmcclure@purdue.edu](mailto:pmcclure@purdue.edu). Questions, to be answered during the first webinar, should be received no later than Wednesday, November 17 by 6:00 pm EST.

LASER PULSE will conduct three webinars as described below:

1. The first - Introduction webinar will be conducted on **Friday, November 19, 2021, at 8:00 am EST**. The 1-hour webinar will cover the following topics: 1) introduction to the LASER PULSE program and the RFA requirements, 2) information on how to complete the LOI template, and 3) a brief review of the LASER PULSE SLA method. The webinar will also respond to questions received during the question period. To register go to [this website \(https://purdue-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAuf-isqzkuGN0Smarr2ZxKipaeDqA05cAU\)](https://purdue-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAuf-isqzkuGN0Smarr2ZxKipaeDqA05cAU).
2. The second , Q&A webinar will be conducted on **Thursday, December 2, 2021, at 8:00 am EST** and will address questions submitted by Applicants. Participants will be allowed to ask questions, if time allows. To register, go to [this website \(https://purdue-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAudOysrzotEtKnGBX9\\_21JdyZSGytQ2Ln0\)](https://purdue-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAudOysrzotEtKnGBX9_21JdyZSGytQ2Ln0).
3. The third webinar for Applicants invited to submit Full Application will be conducted on **Thursday, January 20, 2022, at 8:00 am EST**. This webinar will be open to applicants to ask any question regarding the RFA and submission process for the Full Applications. The Zoom link will be provided to the selected Applicants invited to submit a Full Application.

Links to the webinar can be found on LASER PULSE website: <https://laserpulse.org/msi-rfa/>.

*In addition to the webinars, LASER PULSE staff will be available to meet one on one via Zoom, upon request by latest December 10 5:00 PM EST and pending our staff availability. Such requests will be accepted no later than December 10, 2021 5:00 pm EST.*

Specific details will be announced on the LASER PULSE website and other relevant avenues, at least one week prior to the webinar date. Notification of this event will also be sent to all



members of the Network via e-mail. The questions and answers (Q&A) received and discussed during the webinars will be posted on the LASER PULSE MSI RFA website as an amendment to this RFA. Similarly, responses to questions received during the webinar will be transcribed and made available as a supplement to the RFA. Additionally, the webinar will be recorded and made available on the LASER PULSE website.

### **3.3 Stage 1: Letter of Interest (LOI) required on or before December 14, 2021**

Applicants are required to submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) on or before December 14, 2021, 11:59 pm EST. **LOIs will not be evaluated for merit; however, only those teams submitting complete LOIs that include all the required items will be invited to submit the Full Application.**

All applicants are required to use the LASER PULSE LOI template (see [Appendix 5](#)) then upload via this [Qualtrics link](#) (or go to [https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8cOWMbkrjiCRyR0](https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cOWMbkrjiCRyR0)) along with all supporting documents. For Applicants who are not able to access the website/qualtrics link, please send the LOI and all required associated documentation to [applicationssubmit@laserpulse.org](mailto:applicationssubmit@laserpulse.org).

The LOIs must include all of the following information:

- 1) Cover page including:
  - a) Title of Proposed Research (**required, can change in the Full Application**)
  - b) Lead PI Name and Title (**required, cannot change in Full Application**)
  - c) Lead Institution (**required, cannot change in Full Application**)
  - d) Co-PI(s) and their Institutions (**required for Translation Partner, cannot change; additional co-PI institutions can change in Full Application**)
  - e) USAID technical sector(s) most closely related to the proposed research (**required, cannot change in the Full Application**).
  - f) USAID Country Mission Priority being addressed by the proposed research
- 2) Summary (**2-page limit**) that must include:
  - a) Relevance of proposed research to USAID Country Mission priority being addressed based on the USAID Country (or Regional) Development Cooperation Strategy or USAID Country Mission priority (from the Mission website).
  - b) Description of the proposed research team (Name, Title, Affiliation, email, phone number), roles and responsibilities [including co-PI's and key collaborators], prior experience, and partnerships, if any.
  - c) Name of Systems Analysis Framework Utilized
  - d) Description of Proposed Research and Systems-Level Approach Used
- 3) Letter of commitment from Translation Partner institution using the template [here on the LP website](#) as part of the RFA package (**required**).

- 4) Signed letter of support from the MSI Institution (PI institution) Department Head or Dean (including a statement that PI will be provided adequate release time from teaching duties to be able to undertake the proposed research)
- 5) Copies of tangible outputs (e.g. completed templates, flowcharts) of the system-level process that was employed (**required**).

**NOTE: Items #1&2 are completed using the LOI template; Items #3 & 4 must be combined into a single pdf, and all materials under Item #5 must be combined into another pdf so that both pdfs can be uploaded in qualtrics along with the LOI.**

### 3.4 Stage 2: Full Application - See Summary table

Teams submitting LOIs will be notified on or before January 12, 2022, if they are eligible to submit a Full Application. Full Applications will be due by February 14, 2022, on or before 11:59 pm EST. Applicants will be asked to upload three documents for their Full Application, see [Section 3.11](#) and [Appendix 6](#) for details. Full Applications should be submitted via a Qualtrics link, which will be provided to those invited to submit a Full Application. Applicants encountering difficulties with Qualtrics links or unable to access the website, can send their Full Application and all associated documentation to [applicationssubmit@laserpulse.org](mailto:applicationssubmit@laserpulse.org).

As noted in *Section 3.2* there will be a third webinar for Applicants invited to submit Full Applications on January 20, 2022, at 8:00 am EST. The webinar will be open for applicants to ask any question regarding the RFA and submission process for the Full Applications.

**Full Applications have a limit of 10 typed pages of core content**, excluding the cover page and supplemental materials (e.g., workplan, budget, references). Content details are provided in the Application summary table at the end of this section. Applications must be in English, with narrative portions prepared in MS Word or Open Office format, using Times New Roman font, size 11, or similar typeset in single-line spacing on 8.5x11 inch sized paper with 1-inch margins. LASER PULSE will only evaluate the first 10 pages for any Applications that exceed the 10-page limit of core content.

Full Applications will be reviewed by selected external reviewers: Research experts in specific sectors/sub-sectors and geographic focal areas; USAID personnel; and the LASER PULSE Management team. Reviewers will evaluate the Applications based upon specifications listed in the Evaluation Criteria section (*Section 4*). All Applications selected for awards are subject to final approval by USAID before the notification and issuance of an award.

### 3.5 On-line Training Requirements and Recommendations

LASER PULSE provides online training modules as part of the technical assistance tailored to provide guidance and information for effective Applications that align with the RFA requirements.

**Note:** PI and co-PI(s) identified in the Application must have taken and passed both online training before submitting the Application. Other team members are also encouraged to take these training sessions as they explain important concepts needed to develop a successful



Application. Project team members must be registered in the [LASER PULSE Network](#) to access the training sessions.

### **3.5.1 Mandatory training**

Two online training modules on “Embedded Research Translation” and “Gender Analysis in research and application” are mandatory for the PI and Co-PI(s) identified in the Application. They must have completed both training sessions before submitting the LOI. Please click [here](#) for the introductions of Embedded Research Translation and [here](#) for the gender analysis in research and application. Certificates of completion for each training module will be sent via email or can be downloaded directly from the training site. Other team members are also encouraged to take these training sessions as they explain important concepts needed to develop a successful application.

### **3.5.2 Optional training**

LASER PULSE highly recommends that potential Applicants take the training on “Preparing a Successful LASER PULSE Application”. This training is available [here](#) (or go to <https://laserpulse.org/course/preparing-a-successful-laser-pulse-application/>).

## **3.6 Strategy for Gender Inclusion**

Prior to developing an Application, applicants should review the USAID gender analysis guidelines in [Appendix 3](#). Applications should reflect that the research team is fully aware of the relevant gender considerations for the development solution proposed. The intention is not that the proposed solution be ‘about gender,’ but that the team should look at gender as a factor that is relevant for any work with human beings, or solutions that propose to benefit human beings.

Applications responsive to gender will ‘unpack’ certain nouns that mask the target group, but tend to default to a focus on a single-sex. For example, terms such as youth, farmers, entrepreneurs, armed group actors/fighters, and head of household often default to men or boys. Other nouns, such as teachers, caregivers, and parents, often tend to default to a focus on women or girls. As appropriate, applicants should ensure that the target group is clarified and that the choice of focus population is supported by evidence that this is the population group in need for this sector. The LASER PULSE gender online training will show many practical examples where an improperly targeted group can lead to missed opportunities for impact in development solutions and research translation. The Application in response to this RFA should show how these gender considerations are addressed in research design, the development of tools, the research subject selection, the collection and analysis of data, and the proposed translation of the research.

## **3.7 Strategy for Embedded Research Translation (ERT)**

Applications should provide a concise summary of their research translation strategy that addresses the four pillars of LASER PULSE’s ERT Model: (1) partnership, (2) process, (3) product, and (4) dissemination plan. In addition, Applications should account for any translation activities in their budget. The summary shall include brief explanations on:

- 1) **Partnership:** A justification of the proposed research and translation partner team, including why the translation partner was chosen and any previous history of collaboration. The roles and responsibilities of the researcher and translation partners should be explicitly defined with the expectation that all partners will be engaged throughout the research translation process.
- 2) **Process:** The collaborative process by which the researcher(s) and translation partner(s) will work together, from identifying the research topic to ensuring the research solution will be feasible for use. The description of the collaborative process may include information on communication type and frequency and how the team will facilitate collaborative engagement.
- 3) **Product:** The intended policy and/or practice-focused translation product(s), to be developed collaboratively from research findings. Translated products may include, but are not limited to: policy briefs, information briefs, guidebooks, training, multimedia products, production or processing methods, education curriculum, and technical manuals. Products should lead to changes in legal, constitutional, funding, accountability, feasibility, or implementation mechanisms or practice recommendations.
- 4) **Dissemination:** A dissemination plan for wider application and scale beyond the initial partnership and toward a broader uptake of relevant findings in the field or region. This can include meetings, events, and workshops, in acceptable formats (virtual, in-person, live, or asynchronous, etc.), targeted toward influential stakeholders for further adoption. Please be sure to list the targeted stakeholders.

Any research translation activities that are identified in the ERT strategy above should be accounted for in the overall budget and reflected in the budget narrative. This may include, but is not limited to, funds to hold stakeholder workshops, consultancy fees (e.g. for copy editing briefs or manuals), resources needed to develop the translation products, etc.

### 3.8 Project Duration and Funding

Subject to the availability of funds, LASER PULSE will issue awards in response to those Applications that best meet the objectives of this funding opportunity as evaluated by the selection criteria outlined in *Section 4* of this RFA. LASER PULSE anticipates funding awards for a period of 12 months of research and translation for up to \$150,000.00 USD per award, including all indirect costs. For this RFA LASER expects to award \$750,000 in total funding across all awards. While award(s) are anticipated as a result of this RFA, LASER PULSE reserves the right to fund any or none of the Applications submitted and for the amounts funded to vary from those described. Only one Application may be submitted per PI.

### 3.9 Research Output Reporting

Applications must include a brief narrative describing the expected outputs of the proposed award. The research team should identify the various outputs, including the translated research products identified in *Section 3.9* above, and provide an associated approximate timeline for delivery for each item. These items can be listed as bullet points within the text, with an estimated delivery date placed in parentheses after a given item's description, or as a

Gantt chart or other format. Note that traditional academic outputs such as journal articles, technical reports, conference posters, etc. should also be listed, but it is understood that these are not the only research outputs that could be produced from the proposed work.

The PI of each successful Applicant team that is awarded a grant will receive a Research Award Reporting Guidelines document describing procedures on curation and submission of award information, research products, and research datasets. These guidelines will also contain a template for the research team to develop a brief data management plan that will be required as part of the post-award process. Once the award has commenced, output data compiled and reported by the PI shall consist of, but not be limited to: (1) the names and selected information of the PI and Co-PIs; (2) research products such as technical manuals, policy briefs, guidebooks, peer-reviewed publications, technical reports, and relevant datasets; and (3) presentations at convenings where translated research is disseminated to various development actors, including translation partner(s), policymakers, donors, or other development researchers. PIs will receive from LASER PULSE a Research Output Reporting Form (via an online survey) to facilitate the submission of required data and information for bi-annual reporting.

### **3.10 Budget Preparation for Full Application**

The project budget must be submitted using the [LASER Application Budget Template](#) in Excel, Google Sheets, or an Open Office format. If these options are not available please contact us via email, [applicationsubmit@laserpulse.org](mailto:applicationsubmit@laserpulse.org). Please follow the directions in the workbook when entering your budget numbers.

### **3.11 Budget, Budget Narrative, and Cost-Share Documents**

The budget, budget narrative, and cost-share documents should provide, in detail, the total costs for implementation of the program that the Applicant's institution is proposing using the [budget narrative template](#) provided. Each Award may be issued to the PI from the lead institution. If determined necessary or requested by the lead, Purdue University is able to issue a sub-agreement directly to each partner involved in the research activities. Each institution is required to complete the budget, budget narrative, and cost-share documents. Foreign governments are not eligible to receive funding and should not have a budget associated with the Application. Foreign government translation contributions can be applied as cost-share, however.

- 1) The budget must be submitted in Excel, Google Sheets, or an Open Office format using the [provided template](#) with unlocked cells and all formulas available to enable LASER PULSE to check the calculations included. This budget template and budget narrative should be completed for each applicable institution that is planned to receive funding (i.e. the Prime and any sub-award partners) included in the Application.
- 2) The following major line items must be included within the budget narrative. When available, each major line item must be supported by detailed breakdowns of each expected sub-expense under that line:
  - a. Personnel (positions and/or names, rates, etc.)

- b. Fringe Benefits
  - c. Anticipated Travel (if trips are known, please provide details, if not yet known, then overall estimates and number of proposed trips would be helpful)
  - d. Equipment and Supplies – per USAID restrictions, LASER PULSE will not allow funding to the following categories/items:
    - i. Procurement of commodities listed below, but not limited to
      - 1. Agricultural commodities,
      - 2. Motor vehicles,
      - 3. Pharmaceuticals,
      - 4. Pesticides,
      - 5. Used equipment,
      - 6. U.S. Government-owned excess property, or
      - 7. Fertilizer
    - ii. Construction [e.g. alteration, or repair (including dredging and excavation) of buildings, structures, or other real property and includes, without limitation, improvements, renovation, alteration, and refurbishment]. The term includes, without limitation, roads, power plants, buildings, bridges, water treatment facilities, and vertical structures.
  - e. Other Direct Costs (see information in Item #5 below)
  - f. Indirect Costs
- 3) Further, please provide a breakdown of costs associated with the program for any identified partners (as sub-awardee), including any funded translation partners, if applicable. Budget details should be clearly described and denoted for all sub-awards.
- 4) An estimate of the level of effort (either as a percentage or as a ratio to full-time employment) relative to their role must be included for all personnel.
- 5) Please provide a breakdown of all anticipated other direct costs (i.e. the amount, type, and unit cost with as much detail as possible). Examples may include, but are not limited to: consulting fees, participant support costs, workshop costs, maintenance or usage fees, program-specific software, etc.
- 6) Cost sharing is required at 10% of the total funds requested. The cost-share must consist of non-US Government-funded contributions that meet the criteria detailed in [22 CFR 226.23](#). Cost-sharing may include, but is not limited to: 1) Personnel effort and any associated indirect costs; 2) in-kind contributions (such as office or laboratory space, access to equipment, etc.); 3) cash contributions; or 4) any other costs. Cost-sharing documentation from the contributing entity must be provided at the time of Application submission (in most cases, this will be in the form of a letter signed by the authorized organizational representative). Within the budget narrative described above, please provide additional details outlining the cost-share expectations of the prime institution and any partner institution(s) (if applicable) with details, including dollar amounts and descriptions. The cost-share (total 10%) can come from any of the

partner organizations. It is the Applicant’s responsibility to ensure that all necessary documentation is complete and received on time. **Note:** If you need a waiver for the 10% cost-share, please indicate during the submission of the LOI stage.

- 7) Note: Purdue University may request additional detailed budget information following notification to an Applicant that it is under consideration for an award. If necessary, Purdue may conduct discussions to verify cost data, evaluate specific elements of costs, and examine data to determine the necessity, reasonableness, and allocability of the costs reflected in the budget and their allowability pursuant to the applicable cost principles.

**3.12 Full Application Summary Table**

Important note for submission of Full Application documents:

Applicants will be asked to upload three documents for their Full Application, see [Appendix 6](#) for details.

<b>Document #1: Submitted as a single combined PDF file in the following order</b>	
<b>Section</b>	<b>Description</b>
Cover Page ( <i>1-page maximum; does not count against the page limit</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project title</li> <li>● Lead institution applying for the Award</li> <li>● PI, Co-PI(s): names, titles, addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers</li> <li>● Sector of inquiry</li> <li>● Country where the project will take place</li> <li>● Project length (years, months)</li> <li>● Total budget requested (USD)</li> <li>● Signature and contact information for an authorized official from the lead institution (email and phone number)</li> <li>● Contact information for the person responsible for negotiating the final agreement, if different from the above</li> </ul>
Project Summary ( <i>1-page maximum; does not count against the page limit.</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project Summary</li> </ul>
Relevance to USAID Country Priorities in Selected Country ( <i>½ page maximum</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Required section entitled “Relevance to USAID Priorities in (country/region name)s”: Brief background on the USAID country priority based on USAID Country (or Region) Development Cooperation Strategy or USAID country priority document that can benefit from proposed research and local context of the development challenges in the selected country.</li> </ul>

<p>Research Plan (<i>6 pages maximum</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Description of development challenge and clear identification of research question(s) based on system-level analysis; and justification for research focus, framed in the context of local, social, cultural, and economic background.</li> <li>● Research methods and approaches, including objectives and hypotheses. Clear differentiation from past published research and description of innovative concepts and methodology.</li> <li>● Description of how the project will leverage the team’s experience with community engagement, private sector, or government entities in chosen country/region.</li> <li>● Description of how this research opportunity will strengthen capacity or sustain partnership outcomes between the local HEI research partner and the USAID implementing partner.</li> <li>● Strategy for research translation [partnership, process, research translation product(s), dissemination plan].</li> <li>● Integration of gender considerations into the Full Application (see <a href="#">Appendix 3</a>).</li> </ul>
<p>Project Management (<i>1-page maximum</i>)</p>	<p>Qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of team members, including technical and administrative staff</p>
<p>Workplan (<i>not included in page limit</i>)</p>	<p>Timeline for the entire project period by activity, indicating what, when, by whom, and where using the provided <a href="#">Workplan template</a></p>
<p>Research Output Reporting (<i>2 pages</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Link research activities to outputs/deliverables: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Describe research outputs intended as deliverables (e.g. journal articles and/or technical reports, white papers, and conference posters) with estimated approx. dates of completion.</li> <li>○ Describe research translated products (e.g. policy briefs, infographics, dissemination workshops) that follow from the translation strategy, with estimated approx. dates of completion for each item.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Brief description of output curation and management strategy (1-2 paragraphs).</li> </ul>
<p>Budget Narrative/ Justification (no page limits)</p>	<p>Detailed budget narrative that explains each cost including cost associated with research translation activities. Use the provided <a href="#">Budget Narrative template</a>.</p>
<p><b>Appendices</b></p>	
<p>List of References (Bibliography)</p>	
<p>System Framework Summary (<i>2-pages maximum descriptive text</i>)</p>	<p>Description of how a system framework was used to identify the critical challenge areas to address development outcomes in the context of ongoing USAID activity. Attach all supporting materials</p>



	(illustrative templates, flowcharts, log frames, etc.) in addition to the 1-2 pages of text.
PI Qualifications (2- pages maximum for each)	Curriculum vitae (CV) of the PI (use the provided <a href="#">CV Template</a> )
Collaborator qualifications (2-pages maximum for each)	Curriculum vitae (CV) of any Co-PIs (use the provided <a href="#">CV Template</a> )
<a href="#">Letter of Commitment</a> from Translation Partner Institution(s)	Signed letter(s) of commitment from primary <u>translation</u> partner(s) on the research project
Letter of support from PI institution Department Head or Dean	Signed letter of support from the MSI Institution (PI institution) Department Head or Dean (including a statement that PI will be provided adequate release time from teaching duties to be able to undertake the proposed research)
Checklist for the Full Application	see <a href="#">Appendix 6</a>
<b>Document #2: Submitted as an unlocked Excel sheet</b>	
Budget (no page limits)	Use the provided <a href="#">Excel Application Budget Template</a> (see budget details in <i>Section 3.12 and 3.13</i> ); this template must be submitted as an unlocked Excel document.
<b>Document #3: Submitted as a single combined PDF file in the following order</b>	
Gender Training Certificates	Gender training is mandatory for the PI and Co-PI(s) identified in the Full Application. They must have completed this training before submitting the Application. Please click <a href="#">here</a> for the gender analysis in research and application training. Certificates of completion for this training module will be sent via email or can be downloaded directly from the training site. Please include a copy of the certificate for each PI and co-PI in the Full Application packet.
Research Training Certificates	Research Translation training is mandatory for the PI and Co-PI(s) identified in the Application. They must have completed this training before submitting the Full Application. Please click <a href="#">here</a> for the introductions of Embedded Research Translation training. Certificates of completion for these training modules will be sent via email or can be downloaded directly from the training site. Please include a copy of the certificate for each PI and Co-PI on the application.

## 4. EVALUATION OF FULL APPLICATIONS

LASER PULSE will assemble a committee of external reviewers with expertise in the relevant technical sectors to review the submitted Applications, followed by Consensus Reviewer Panel meetings (organized by sector) to discuss the applications based on the review criteria listed below. Selected Applications will be recommended to USAID for final approval prior to notification of award. Applicants are highly encouraged to develop their Applications with the consideration of these criteria (detailed below) in mind.

### 4.1 Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be rated based on two criteria: Research Merit (RM) and Broader Impact (BI).

#### 4.1.1 Research Merit

The research merit criterion encompasses three sub-criteria: (1) Use of a system framework to identify the key development challenge and associated research gaps, (2) Attention to local context and leveraging local capacity, as well as (3) Technical merit:

- 1) Sub-criterion 1: Use of a system framework to identify the key development challenge and associated research gaps.

*To what extent is a robust system framework used to systematically identify unmet development challenges and research gaps in the USAID county priority that is identified? To what extent does the Full Application demonstrate that the proposed research logically follows the knowledge gaps identified through the system framework?*

Note: Sub-criterion 1 will be judged based upon the following: the number of options for research identified using a systems framework; are these options logically connected to / derived from the on-going USAID activity; and, is there sufficient and convincing evidence (completed templates, flow charts, etc.) resulting from your systems framework approach to support the knowledge gaps identified as critical for additional study. The supporting documents that constitute the evidence should be self-explanatory such that the reviewers can clearly observe in the materials to determine how the proposed research was derived from the system-level framework employed.

- 2) Sub-criterion 2: Attention to local context and leveraging local capacity

*To what extent does the proposed research address USAID priorities in (country/region name)? To what extent does the research plan take into account the local social, cultural, and economic contexts in (country/region name) with respect to the research question and research methodology/approach applied to the proposed work? To what extent does the Application appropriately leverage the team's experience with community engagement, the private sector, or government entities in the specific country/region?*

- 3) Sub-criterion 3: Technical merit



*To what extent is the technical plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale? To what extent does the proposed research explore innovative concepts and methodologies?*

**Note:** All three sub-criteria are to be considered equally important for evaluating the overall Research Merit for Applications, thus will be weighted equally.

#### **4.1.2 Broader Impacts**

This criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired outcomes for LASER PULSE; and will be judged based on these questions:

1) Sub-criterion 1: Embedded Research Translation (ERT)

*To what extent does the Application reflect LASER PULSE's ERT model? Key considerations for the model are:*

- a. Assessment of the appropriateness of translation partner(s) other than the USAID activity implementer (if applicable), and the extent to which the roles of these additional partners are explicitly detailed.*
- b. The extent to which the Application captures the collaborative process by which researcher(s) and USAID activity implementers (plus any additional partners) will work together, including how the research topic was identified.*
- c. Assessment of the potential impact of the research translation product(s) to be developed, including the feasibility of the plan for wider dissemination and any budget-related considerations for the translation strategy.*

2) Sub-criterion 2: Gender Mainstreaming

*How well does the proposed research project identify relevant gender issues for the specific context and how has the consideration of these contributed to the overall research design? How will the team composition promote gender-inclusive participation and contribute to informing the research focus and implementation at all stages?*

3) Sub-criterion 3: Other Societal Impacts

*What is the potential of the proposed activities to benefit the community/society beyond the scope of the project?*

**Note:** The ERT is considered more important thus will be weighted slightly higher than the other two (Gender Mainstreaming and Other Societal Impacts), which are considered equally important and will be weighed equally.

#### **4.2 Evaluation Process**

LASER PULSE staff will conduct a preliminary screening of Applications to ensure they are complete and conform to instructions and requirements. The selected Applications will be

separated into respective technical sector groups and reviewed by a panel consisting of technical experts assembled by LASER PULSE in consultation with USAID.

The evaluation criteria emphasize the strengths and weaknesses of each sub-criterion and the overall adjectival rating for the main criteria (research merit and broader impacts). Each Application will be evaluated based on the main criteria and sub-criteria described above. Reviewers are required to provide written narratives on the “strengths” and “weaknesses” of each sub-criterion, and an adjectival rating based on the scale of “Excellent (E)”, “Very Good (V)”, “Good (G)”, “Fair (F)”, and “Poor (P)”, according to the descriptions shown in [Table 1](#). Additionally, Reviewers will provide an overall adjectival rating for the main criteria (RM and BI).

After the individual reviews have been completed, LASER PULSE will conduct a Consensus Reviewer Panel for each of the technical sectors, to deliberate on the review comments and determine a final consensus rating for each application. The Consensus Panel will also recommend the Applications into one of three funding recommendation categories – “Fund”, “Fund if Possible”, and “Do not Fund” – according to those final ratings. LASER PULSE, in consultation with USAID, will make the final selection of successful Applications based on the criteria listed above in addition to regulatory and geographic factors that may be relevant to individual Applications. USAID will provide final review and approval for the selected awards. While 4 to 6 awards are anticipated as a result of this request for Applications, LASER PULSE reserves the right to fund any, or none, of the Applications submitted. All proposed activities that occur outside of the United States require the concurrence of the respective USAID Mission(s) and, as such, Applicants may be asked to provide additional information to USAID if your Application is shortlisted for a potential award.

**Table 1. Rating Definition for Research Merit and Broader Impact Sub-Criteria**

Adjectival Rating	Descriptive Statement
<b>Excellent</b>	Outstanding Application in all aspects. The Application fully addresses all aspects of the criterion and convincingly demonstrates that it will meet the RFA objectives. Weaknesses, if any, can be easily addressed.
<b>Very Good</b>	Strong Application in all aspects. Applicant fully addresses all aspects of the criterion and convincingly demonstrates a likelihood of meeting the RFA objectives. Weaknesses, if any, can be easily addressed.
<b>Good</b>	Application addresses all aspects of the criterion and demonstrates the ability to meet the RFA objectives but shows some weaknesses, yet the positives of the application outweigh the negatives.

<b>Fair</b>	Application does not address all aspects of the criterion nor is evidence presented indicating the likelihood of successfully meeting the RFA objectives. Significant weaknesses are demonstrated and clearly outweigh any strengths presented.
<b>Poor</b>	Application does not address all aspects of the criterion and the information presented indicates a strong likelihood of failure to meet the RFA objectives.

**5. APPENDICES**

**5.1 Appendix 1 – List of USAID 2021 Special Notification Countries**

Regions	Countries
Africa	Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe
Asia	Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan
Europe and Eurasia	Russia, Greenland
Latin America and the Caribbean	Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela
Middle East	Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Yemen

**5.2 Appendix 2 – System-Level Analysis**

[System-Level Analysis](#) (SLA) is an approach that allows one to examine a complex challenge, such as those encountered in the field of international development, in terms of foundational factors/elements that are broadly characteristic of all contemporary complex issues. SLA is only one application of a larger effort to develop a comprehensive system-level framework that deeply explores the roots of a complex challenge to identify multiple unmet conditions that limit problem resolution, such that working on one (or even a few) conditions in order to “make progress” is rarely sufficient to overcome a systemic issue.

Extensive research has identified a set of 16 factors that span complex, multi-dimensional problems – such as those encountered in the field of global development – that are present in a given system (e.g. Basic Education sector) in various combinations. These broad-level elements were isolated over time from theory and practical application and were informed through the discovery of patterns commonly appearing in successful innovation systems, many of which are reinforced in the theoretical schools of thought of design and innovation. In practice, they can be used as lenses through which a complex challenge can be examined in order to map out various routes to achieve a solution. The following paragraphs (excerpted from [this article](#)) describe these elements in detail, with regard to how any system can be characterized in terms of four distinct categories – Organization, Operations, Users and Actors, Dynamic Properties – within which the 16 elements reside. In addition, there are nine overarching lenses and five levels (National, Regional, Community, Household, Individual-level) that are complementary and necessary for a holistic SLA.

As shown in Figure 5.1 below, a system is composed of elements that make up the solution (a combination of organization, operations, and dynamic properties), and another set of elements that characterize the user and actors that are/will be engaged in the management, development, delivery, and use of the solution. The solution consists of fundamental and constant ‘organizational’ elements as well as desired ‘operations’ elements representing activity within the system.

1. Organizational elements form a foundation for development support – ‘security and safety; ‘policy’; ‘leadership’; and ‘stakeholder interactions’. They are typically present in varying amounts and are necessary regardless of the context of the challenge at hand.
2. Operations elements include desired variables ‘infrastructure’; ‘equipment and supplies’; ‘workforce and talent’; ‘capital and finances’; and ‘practices and mechanisms’. These are desired, but not guaranteed, requiring them to be built/accumulated and, therefore, consume resources. Specifically, operational elements require two types of resources:
  - a. resources to start-up operations, and
  - b. resources to sustain operations (these may not be -and often are not- the same as those needed for start-up operations).
3. The users and actors category contains elements that are important for impactful action, that is for the expansion of the reach and impact of the intended action. It includes measurable and evaluable outcomes and learning; awareness and access; motivation; adoption and habit conversion; and retention, loyalty, and advocacy.
4. Lastly, changes in the system over time are affected by dynamic properties that constitute elements of “sustainability” and “resilience”.

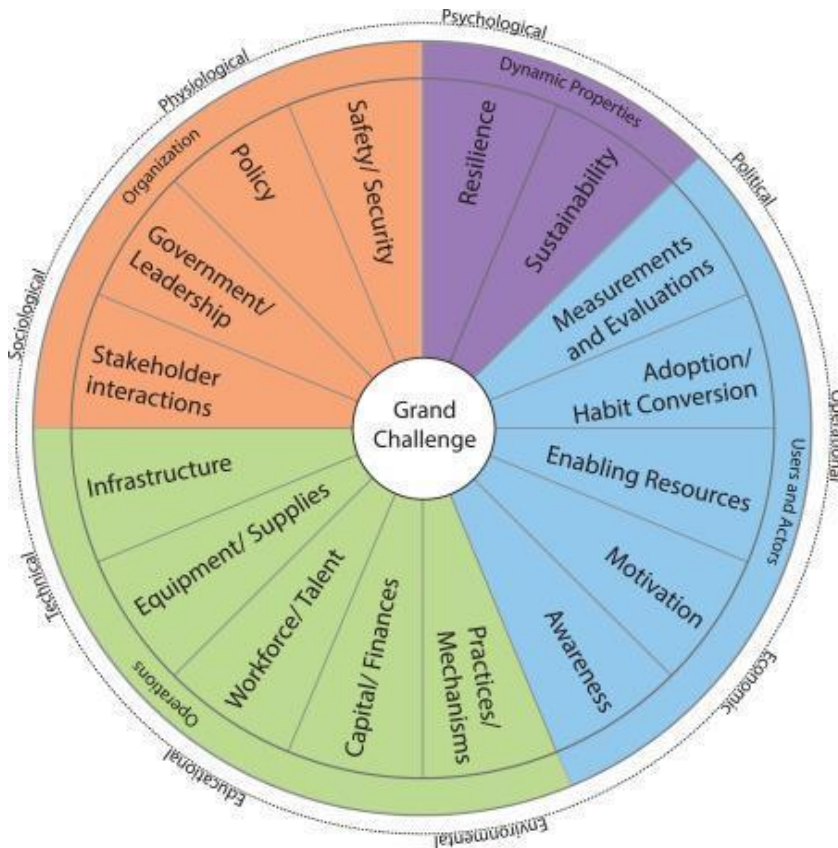


Figure 5.1. The 16 elements were observed to be shared across multiple challenges of a nature similar to that of complex socio-technical challenges. They are organized into four categories (Organization, Operations, Users and Actors, Dynamic Properties), along with nine overarching lenses (labeled just outside the circumference of the wheel), and five levels (National, Regional, Community, Household, and Individual level) that exist as part of any complex challenge, but are not depicted in the graphic.

In summary, the framework (represented in Figure 5.1) can be employed to initiate exploration of a specific challenge with an aim to frame the grand challenge in a comprehensive manner. Each of the challenge-independent elements that form the framework are explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

***Element Descriptions***

With the above theoretical underpinnings, generalizable views of each of the 16 challenge-independent elements are detailed below, noting that these descriptions are provided as guides to exploration in the problem framing exercise:

*Security and safety:* This category covers aspects relating to the maintenance of the state of security and safety for all actors in the context, and to the provision of a conducive environment for solution generation. Elements that could fall within this category are: safety of vulnerable populations, risk management, conflict resolution mechanisms, crime and corruption mitigation mechanisms, workforce safety concerns, environmental safety, and information safety.

*Policy:* Policies are a formal set of guidelines that direct operations within a governed region. The policy category, therefore, helps frame the overarching understanding of existing goals and outcomes in the region, and formal guidelines related to governing paths to achieve desired goals.

*Government:* An engaged and supportive government/leadership is necessary to drive change (at scale) and see to the creation and implementation of policies. This category frames factors such as the legislative, executive, and legal structures of the country; the commitment of the leadership towards solving the challenge at hand, government bodies that need to be in place for the management of the system, and the overall government structure (centralized versus decentralized) along with mechanisms of cooperation among different levels.

*Stakeholder interactions:* The stakeholder interactions section captures internal system interactions. This is characterized by capturing the various types of stakeholders present in the system in terms of roles and responsibilities that they carry out, as well as the types of positive and negative interactions that may take place among them.

*Infrastructure:* This category includes the different infrastructure capabilities required to support value chain processes and related institutional, organizational, and other supporting processes to facilitate solution delivery to the beneficiary population. Infrastructure needs for a solution that may be product-based (e.g., manufacturing infrastructure) would be different than those required to support a digital solution, for example. This category aims to capture these infrastructure facilities to envision a realistic and applicable solution.

*Equipment and Supplies:* Just as infrastructure needs exist for different demands and types of solutions, on a smaller scale equipment and supplies are required to support the infrastructure and sustain value chain operations. This section explores the details of types of equipment and supplies required to perform different critical operations within the system.

*Workforce and Talent:* Here, the workforce development process is highlighted. This includes, for example, the need for a specific workforce to drive system processes, the progression of training the workforce to fulfill these roles, generation of interest in roles that need to be filled in the system, placement of individuals within the system as per their skill-set and ability to contribute, and provision of fulfilling and rewarding jobs with benefits that help the workforce meet their needs.

*Capital and Finance:* Capital and finance mechanisms enable the economics of the system to function. This element category highlights that start-up finances and sustaining finances are distinct and need to be accounted for separately, along with other macro and micro-economic factors.

*Practices:* To enable the best outcome, tools and facilities provided should be put to their intended use. This category encourages exploration of ideal practices in the operating system that can achieve the required social, economic, health, and/or environmental outcomes for the context.



*Awareness:* A population needs awareness regarding its existing conditions, knowledge of the possibility of improvement, and means to improve. This category contains factors that support the acknowledgment of the existence of a problem, as well as awareness-building mechanisms that are necessary to drive change.

*Motivation:* Internal and external motivators drive populations to adopt desired habits and practices. This section can be used to explore existing attitudes and beliefs towards change and the means to manage it strategically.

*Enabling strategies:* Barriers to adoption and change are commonplace in development. This section can be employed to explore the different types of barriers that can be encountered during the adoption process, which, if overcome, contribute towards achieving the desired system state.

*Adoption/Habit conversion:* The last stage in the translation process is related to adoption, retention, and advocacy for new solutions, practices, habits, and/or processes. Adoption is reflected through progress towards set goals to overcome existing challenges. Achieving this requires that key stakeholders, including beneficiary populations, are encouraged and/or incentivized to accept their roles and responsibilities involving possibly new practices and behaviors in favor of improvement in existing conditions.

*Measurement and Evaluation:* The effective functioning of the system depends on careful monitoring of its operations. Various indicators need to be defined and monitored to gather information for learning and improvement where necessary. This section can be used to frame details on the indicators that are required for these purposes.

*Sustainability:* The overall system needs to be able to sustain functions and processes in the long term. This section probes key areas to assess system sustainability measures, without which long-term plans may face limitations.

*Resilience:* Sudden shocks and long-term stressors, which can vary in intensity, duration, frequency of occurrence, and scope, can cause large impacts on progress. This section studies elements of resilience that help protect the system and overcome negative impacts, which are categorized into ‘sensing’ as planning and anticipation; ‘response’ as implementation and performance measurement; and ‘learning’ as feedback, and adaptation.



### 5.3 Appendix 3 – USAID Gender Analysis Considerations

Researchers responding to this RFA must consider the USAID Gender Analysis Considerations described below when designing Applications. The goal is to ensure that all findings from the gender analysis are integrated throughout the research application and all other supplementary documents.

Below is a synthesis of resources, considerations, tips, and a checklist when integrating gender analysis into your application. It will be helpful to clearly identify in the application when gender considerations are being integrated.

#### A. Checklist of Gender Analysis Domains:

*Please note all domains outlined below must be addressed. All statements within your Full Application must be backed up by cited references.*

- **Access** – Refers to being able to use the resources necessary to be a fully active and productive participant (socially, economically, and politically) in society. It includes access to resources, income, services, employment, information, and benefits.
- **Knowledge, Beliefs, and Perception** – Refers to the types of knowledge that men and women are privy to (who knows what), the beliefs that shape gender identities and behavior, and perceptions that guide how people interpret aspects of their lives differently depending on their gender identity.
- **Practices and Participation** – this refers to people's behaviors and actions in life – what they actually do – and how this varies by gender. It encompasses not only current patterns of action but also the way that people engage in development activities. It includes attending meetings, training courses, accepting or seeking out services, and other development activities. Participation can be both active and passive.
- **Time and Space** - This domain includes recognizing gender differences in the availability and allocation of time as well as the space in which time is spent. It includes the division of both productive and reproductive labor, identifying how time is spent and committed during the day, week, month, or year, and in different seasons, and determining how people contribute to the maintenance of the family, community, and society. The objective here is to determine how people in different gender categories spend their time and what implications their time commitments have for their availability for program activities.
- **Legal Rights and Status** - How people are regarded and treated by both the customary and formal legal codes and judicial systems. It encompasses access to legal documentation such as identification cards, voter registration, and property titles as well as rights to inheritance, employment, redress of wrongs, and representation
- **Power and Decision-making** - This sphere of social life pertains to the ability of people to decide, influence, control, and enforce. It refers to the capacity to make decisions freely and to exercise power over one's body and within an individual's household, community, municipality, and the state. This includes deciding about the use of household and individual economic resources, income, and employment. It also includes voting, running for office, entering into legal contracts, etc.

#### B. Some USAID Resources:

- [How-To Note: Addressing Gender and Inclusiveness in Project Design](#)

- [Tips for Conducting a Gender Analysis at the Activity or Project Level](#)
- [USAID's 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy](#)
- [ADS Chapter 205: Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle](#)
- Others: [World Bank's 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development](#)

### **C. Tips for Gender Integration:**

- Be sure to disaggregate people-level data by sex (and to the extent possible, by other demographics, e.g. age); person-level disaggregated data should be analyzed and discussed during performance reviews and used for adaptive management.
- Include issues/solutions identified in the [parent LASER gender analysis](#).
- Identify people with gender expertise to support your activity and list their experiences.
- To the extent possible, disaggregate non-person data by sex (e.g., number of peer-reviewed publications by male/female researchers).
- Include how concerning findings will be addressed in all relevant documents related to your activity (e.g. MEL plan, quarterly/annual reports, annual workplans, etc.). Consider how gender inequality issues identified in your research might impact your activity – don't just randomly pick one.
- A quick Google search and/or consultation with LASER's Gender Advisor can help identify sector-specific gaps, potential risks, etc.
- If details of activities are not known at the time of approval, descriptions must be approved by the gender advisor when details become available and before the money is committed.

### **D. Some Questions to consider in your Gender Analysis integration:**

- 1) *What development problem does the activity address? How are groups of people affected differently by the issue in the target area? Potential groups include: women, youth, ethnic groups, gender and sexual minorities (e.g. LGBTI+ persons), people with disabilities, indigenous communities, low-income groups, the elderly, and other socially relevant categories.*
- 2) *Are there any social inequalities and/or gender gaps that need to be addressed to achieve the project's development outcomes? Please describe the inequalities/gaps that exist within the following domains:*
  - a) Access to/control of resources
  - b) Time use (i.e. traditional division of labor in professional and home settings)
  - c) Power inequalities and decision-making
  - d) Cultural norms, roles, and responsibilities
  - e) Laws, policies, and institutional practices

*Option A: If there are no relevant social inequalities and/or gender gaps, explain why.*

*Option B:* If there are social inequalities and/or gender gaps, describe the issues different groups may experience. Also, explain project plans to address relevant *social inequalities and/or gender gaps*.

- 3) *How are there any potentially harmful and/or unintended consequences of this activity on participants/customers/beneficiaries? Negative consequences can include, but are not limited to, increasing the risk of gender-based violence or increasing womens'/girls' unpaid work.*
- 4) *Describe any benefits of the activity for marginalized populations (e.g. womens'/girls' empowerment and leadership). Empowerment and leadership opportunities are not required components of projects but should be described if they are part of the project design.*

## 5.4 Appendix 4 – Glossary of Selected Key Words

### **Collaboration**

Willingness to work together in an open and supportive manner to advance the work of LASER PULSE to achieve its goals and objectives; applies to LASER PULSE staff in their interactions with USAID and research teams (e.g. HEI researchers, development actors) that are recipients of LASER-funded awards. Also applies to HEI researchers and development translation partner(s) involved in their funded research.

### **Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI)**

Each research team receiving an award will be composed of a Principal Investigator (PI) affiliated with the prime recipient, as well as one or more Co-PI(s). LASER PULSE defines Co-PI as a key member of the research team (who is not the PI) that also serves as the point of contact for their institution. If there is more than one team member from a given institution, said the institution will inform LASER PULSE who will be their designated Co-PI.

### **Development Practitioner(s)/Practitioner(s)**

Individual persons engaged in the design, planning, and/or implementation of local, regional, national, or international development programs/projects. This definition refers to the personnel of NGOs and community-based organizations; but it can also include individuals representing governments or the private sector in an implementation capacity (e.g., extension agents) as opposed to a funding capacity. Under certain circumstances (e.g., co-creation of research questions), donor staff may also fall under this definition.

### **Development Stakeholders**

Any entity involved in international development funding, promotion, and/or implementation, as well as the intended beneficiaries (e.g. local communities and their citizens).

### **Embedded Research Translation**

An iterative co-design process among academics, practitioner(s), and other stakeholders in which research is intentionally applied to a development challenge.

### **Higher Education Institution**

Based upon the 2018 USAID Education Policy, LASER PULSE defines a Higher Education Institution (HEI) as a tertiary education institution that provides educational opportunities that build on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialized fields. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialization. This may include public or private universities, colleges, and training institutes.

### **Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)**

The MSIs as defined by the US Department of Education (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html>) include institutions of higher education enrolling populations with significant percentages of undergraduate minority students, or that serve certain populations of minority students under various programs created by Congress. They include:

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) - Founded before 1964
2. Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)
3. Alaska Native Serving Institutions (ANSI)
4. Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (NHSI)

5. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (AANAPI)
6. Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI) - Previously PWI
7. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

**Translation Partners**In this RFA, LASER PULSE uses the term “Translation Partners” to refer to Development Practitioner(s) (see definition above) that are or are intended to be paired with researchers as part of a team submitting an Application.

**5.5 Appendix 5 – Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) RFA LOI Template**

*This template is to be completed and submitted via Qualtrics by the proposed Principal Investigator; all fields denoted by an asterisk (\*) cannot be changed when submitting the Full Application. The LOI should not exceed three (3) pages.*

**Title of Proposed Research**

--

**Lead Principal Investigator\***

Name	Professional Title	Organizational Affiliation

**Co-Principal Investigator(s)**

Name	Professional Title	Organizational Affiliation
Translation Partner*		

**USAID Technical Sector(s) Most Closely Related to the Proposed Research\***

--

**USAID Country Priority Being Addressed by the Proposed Research** based on USAID Country (or Region) Development Cooperation Strategy/USAID country priority document\*

--

**Relevance of Proposed Research to USAID Country Priority being addressed\***

**Description of Proposed Research Team**

**Name of Systems Analysis Framework Utilized \***

**Description of Proposed Research and Systems-Level Approach Used\***

**Checklist of Additional Information \*^**

Checklist Item	Yes / No
a. Have you used Systems Analysis Approach?	
b. Have the Completed ERT and Gender Trainings?	
c. Have you included a letter of commitment from the main translation partner institution?	
d. Have you included a letter of support from the Dean or Department Head of the PI's institution?	
e. Do you need a waiver for the 10% cost-share?	

^ Note: please upload to Qualtrics all supporting documents for the items listed above.

**5.6 Appendix 6 – Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) RFA - Full Application checklist**

**List of required documents for the Full Application**

*(see Section 3.11 for details)*

**Document 1: Submitted as one combined pdf**

- A completed Application (maximum 10 pages)
- Workplan (not included in the page limit); use the [template provided](#)
- Detailed budget narrative that explains all costs; use the [template provided](#)
- Curriculum vitae (CV) of the PI ( 2-pages maximum for each); use the [template provided](#)
- Curriculum vitae (CV) of the Co-PIs ( 2-pages maximum for each); use the [template provided](#)
- Signed letter(s) of commitment from translation partner(s), using the [provided template](#))
- Signed letter of support from the PI institution’s Department Head or Dean (including a statement that PI will be provided adequate release time from teaching duties to be able to undertake the proposed research)

**Document 2: Submitted as an unlocked Excel sheet with formulas available.**

- Detailed budget; use the [template provided](#)

**Document 3: Submitted as one combined pdf file.**



- Certificates of completion from the PI and Co-PIs for two online trainings: 1) Gender Analysis in Research and Application; 2) Introduction to Embedded Research Translation Research training

**5.7 Appendix 7 – List of USAID Country (or Regional) Development Cooperation Strategy**

[USAID CDCS/RDCS](https://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/planning/country-strategies-cdcs), CDCSs (or go to <https://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/planning/country-strategies-cdcs>)

Regions	Countries
Africa	<a href="#">Angola</a> (use Southern Africa RDCS), Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, <a href="#">Democratic Republic of the Congo</a> , Djibouti, Eswatini, <a href="#">Ghana</a> , <a href="#">Guinea</a> , <a href="#">Kenya</a> , Lesotho, <a href="#">Liberia</a> , <a href="#">Madagascar</a> , <a href="#">Malawi</a> , Mali, Mauritania, <a href="#">Mozambique</a> , Namibia, Niger, <a href="#">Nigeria</a> , Republic of the Congo, <a href="#">Rwanda</a> , <a href="#">Senegal</a> , Sierra Leone, <a href="#">South Africa</a> (use Southern Africa RDCS), Tanzania, The Gambia, <a href="#">Uganda</a> (use East Africa RDCS), <a href="#">Zambia</a>
Asia	<a href="#">Bangladesh</a> , China, <a href="#">India</a> , <a href="#">Indonesia</a> , Kazakhstan, <a href="#">Kyrgyz Republic</a> , Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, <a href="#">Nepal</a> , Pacific Islands, Tajikistan, Thailand, <a href="#">Timor-Leste</a> , Turkmenistan, <a href="#">Vietnam</a>
Europe and Eurasia	<a href="#">Albania</a> , <a href="#">Armenia</a> , <a href="#">Azerbaijan</a> , Belarus, <a href="#">Bosnia and Herzegovina</a> , Cyprus, <a href="#">Georgia</a> , <a href="#">Kosovo</a> , <a href="#">Moldova</a> , Montenegro, <a href="#">North Macedonia</a> , <a href="#">Serbia</a> , <a href="#">Ukraine</a>
Latin America and the Caribbean	Bolivia, Brazil, <a href="#">Dominican Republic</a> , Eastern and Southern Caribbean, Ecuador, <a href="#">Jamaica</a> , Panama, Paraguay, <a href="#">Peru</a>

Middle East	<a href="#">Jordan</a> , <a href="#">Morocco</a> , <a href="#">Tunisia</a> , West Bank and Gaza
-------------	---

**NOTE:** For all other countries please go to the Country Mission website to check country priorities.