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Responses to questions submitted by interested parties on the  
Request for Application (RFA) No. RFA-VOT-2023-001:  
Assessing the Effectiveness and/or Performance of Community-based Mental  
Health Interventions for High-Risk Communities in Low- and Middle-income  
Countries

1. **Question:** Section 1, Section 2 (item 3), Section 4, and Section 8.2 (item C) indicate that the intervention must be currently being implemented; however, in Section 7.3., and in footnote number 6, the RFA asks the applicant to indicate if the award will be used to "implement the intervention and study it." Please confirm whether the intervention must be an existing one or a new one to be studied.

**Response:** Interventions proposed for study must already be in the process of implementation.

2. **Question:** In the title of the solicitation, section 1, and section 2 (item 3), RFA indicates that the interventions should be implemented in "high-risk" communities; however, in section 3 (second and third paragraphs), RFA mentions interventions in "emergency context/settings" and in section 2 (item 2), RFA says that the interventions that will be prioritized are those located among "conflict-affected" communities. Please explain the difference between these three (high risk, emergency, conflict affected) and which of these categories is the basis for the intervention. In section 2 (item 2), section 4, and section 8.2 (item C), RFA mentions trauma associated with "conflict". Please explain the meaning of "conflict" under this context.

**Response:** The concept note is an opportunity for applicants to justify why their population fits within the general criteria outlined in the RFA. We are interested in populations that are considered 'high risk' due to recent or ongoing humanitarian crises (e.g., conflict affected). As noted in Section 2. Successful Applicants, we are interested in applicants who propose studying interventions "Located in USAID program countries experiencing conflict or among conflict-affected communities, and/or populations likely to include victims of torture within Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, South/Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East."

3. **Question:** In sections 2 (item 1) and 4 (item 6), RFA mentions that the intervention should include screening, diagnosis, referral, and treatment of specific mental health conditions. Please confirm that the intervention should cover all or only some of these services. Moreover, please confirm if one or more of these intervention services can be covered by different institutions (public, private) or should all be provided by a single entity.

**Response:** Stronger applicants would offer opportunities to investigate interventions that extend beyond screening, and even diagnosis, to also include treatment. The services provided could include multiple actors, however the prime recipient would have to be one of the major implementing organizations, with letters of support from and involvement of the other implementation entities if they are part of the intervention to be studied.

4. **Question:** In section 1, RFA indicates that research teams should comprise multi-stakeholders. Please confirm if this term refers exclusively to the partnership between a non-profit organization and a research entity or if it includes other actors.

**Response:** Please reference 7.1 Eligibility Criteria for what is required in terms of prime recipient teams proposed to carry out the work. Other stakeholders/actors should be referenced in relation to how you propose translating evidence to action. See Section 7., Instruction for Responses, for more detail.

5. **Question:** In section 6 (item c), RFA mentions that the research evidence must be translated. Please confirm that the target language is American English.

**Response:** Materials developed to inform decision-makers on how to translate evidence to policy and practice should be relevant (including the language used) to the setting studied. Study deliverables will be produced in English and translated into other languages as appropriate.

6. **Question:** Will the RFA be amended by September 6th at the latest, or is this just a possibility?

**Response:** Minor updates have been made to the RFA, which can be found online at <https://iscollab.org/news/request-for-applications-no-rfa-vot-2023-001/> and attached. Updates made to the RFA are highlighted in yellow.

7. **Question:** Will all RFA short-listed applicants participate in a co-creation workshop, or is this just a possibility?

**Response:** This is just a possibility.

8. **Question:** I am writing this message to make a request for clarification regarding the application dates of the call.

**Response:** We are accepting applications on a rolling basis and concept notes will be reviewed as they are received starting on September 15, 2023 at 5:00 PM (EDT). The final deadline to submit applications is October 11, 2023, 5:00 PM (EDT). We urge early submission.

**Question:** Do country offices of international NGOs count as host-country based organizations?

**Response:** Yes.

9. **Question:** I would like to enquire if in respect of the RFA call, one can be a lead project applicant in one application (for a different institution) and a supportive applicant in another (a different institution). In summary, can one person be on two different projects from two different institutions?

**Response:** An individual can be reflected in more than one concept note application.

10. **Question:** I have a MD degree but still am a resident physician (albeit with a significant amount of time protected for research). I have worked in X location for nearly a decade - could I be the co-investigator from the implementing organization?

**Response:** One proposed Principal Investigator (PI) must be staff of the prime applicant organization, which should be an implementation entity implementing the intervention under study. Co-PIs and research partners can be from other organizations.

11. **Question:** Can there be two co-PIs from research institutions?

**Response:** See answer to question 10 above. It is not recommended to have more than two formal PIs given the small scope of the studies and the intention for it to be implementer driven. However, additional colleagues can form part of the team.

12. **Question:** What are the financial and M&E reporting requirements for this RFA?

**Response:** If awarded, the financial reporting requirements will depend on the type of award granted (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). If a cost reimbursable subaward is issued, the sub-recipient will be required to submit invoices signed by an authorized representative as well as sufficient detail and backup documentation to permit an analysis of the costs contained therein. If a fixed amount award is issued, payment will be made based on a milestone/deliverable schedule following receipt of a sub-recipient invoice. We do not anticipate any additional M&E reporting besides the

required quarterly and end-of-project performance reports and ad hoc reports requested by URC.

- 13. Question:** In section 7 “Instruction for responses”, subsection 7.1 “Eligibility criteria”, point A. mentions the following: “Be a host-country-based and/or regional based NGO...”. With regards to this, I wanted to ask if this means that the organization must have a country office in the selected country, or if it means that in addition to having a country office, it must be registered as a national organization?

**Response:** The applicant should have established relationships in the country of implementation, and should have an office either in the host country or in the region, but the applicant need not be registered as a national organization in the host country.

- 14. Question:** I work for a foreign government teaching and referral institution, but would implement any project through a consortium of several institutions- does this make us eligible given the clause that foreign govt and govt parastatals are not eligible to apply?

**Response:** Applying through consortia is welcomed, and the prime recipient institution must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the RFA. Foreign government teaching and referral institutions may serve as sub-recipients to an eligible prime organization.

- 15. Question:** Do victims of Gender Based Violence (GBV) qualify as persons living in emergency situations?

**Response:** The primary interest is to study high risk populations affected by humanitarian emergencies that are likely to include victims of torture, including GBV.

- 16. Question:** My thoughts are around a family-based intervention, that includes problem solving therapy and for families of victims of GBV- does this fall in the scope of the work you are interested in?

**Response:** Please note, the mental health intervention proposed for study should be ongoing and meet the criteria outlined in the RFA.

- 17. Question:** Is Afghanistan eligible for HEARD funding as there's no mention of the Central Asia region in the RFA?

**Response:** Afghanistan is not among the priority countries for this RFA.

**18. Question:** We are in the process of forming an academic research partnership with specific agencies and research experts in Mental Health sector. By the time of CN submission, we may not have concrete partnership established. Is it still ok to continue Concept Note submission through in-house research expertise we have?

**Response:** If you meet the criteria outlined in the RFA, you are welcome to submit.

**19. Question:** Ethical approval for the research requires IRB approval but that can also be time-consuming. We are exploring options. The time taken for IRB approval may impact the overall project duration of 9 months. Is there a scope to subsume certain monitoring and evaluation activities beyond the project duration? Can we highlight this clearly in the research design and work-plan? Will the URC-HEARD have some flexibility in terms of project duration?

**Response:** Unfortunately, we are not able to extend the timeline. Proposed designs should consider feasibility in terms of ethical review, timeframe, and resources.

**20. Question:** Is the planned funding within the defined 150000 distributed among the selected 2-3 applications or for each selected application?

**Response to Question 24:** Each selected applicant **may** receive up to a planned ceiling of \$150,000 or less. We cannot guarantee exact funding amounts at this time.

**21. Question:** Who can be the stakeholders?

**Response:** See section 7.3 Instructions for the Concept Note for guidance.

**22. Question:** Given the short timeframe, can the study be conducted within one community?

**Response:** The justification for the proposed scope and design of your study should be detailed in your application.

**23. Question:** Can members of the research team be psychologists who implement the intervention?

**Response:** Yes.

**24. Question:** Is it possible to study one intervention?

**Response:** Yes.

**25. Question:** Does it have to be a cross-cultural study? If so, how will the interventions to be studied be defined (which should obviously be common to all countries) and what methodologies will be recommended to study the effectiveness of the intervention?

**Response:** Interventions to be studied do not have to be common across different applicants. Interventions to be studied should be in the process of implementation.

**26. Question:** Is the number of people involved in the application limited? If so, how many people? Is everyone paid to participate in the project?

**Response:** It is up to the prime recipient institutions selected to determine personnel, compensation, and budgets that reflect the study parameters and funding available.

**27. Question:** Are those who implement the intervention paid for their participation in the project?

**Response:** See response to number 26.

**28. Question:** Can we submit one application from two universities from the Ukrainian side or two different applications?

**Response:** One application from two partnered University entities would be acceptable, provided the prime organization meets the criteria set forth in the RFA, including Section 2, Item 5 (i.e. the intervention proposed for study should be “carried out by an implementation organization which will serve as a prime recipient for the study award”).

Per USAID guidance, new activities **within** Ukraine are not **currently** eligible for funding through this RFA at this time. However, studies and partnerships addressing war-affected Ukrainian populations in neighboring countries, including Moldova, Poland or Romania, are welcome. Ukrainian institutions partnering with other organizations outside of Ukraine are eligible to apply.

**29. Question:** Is it necessary to conduct a field study? Is the descriptive part (what methods are used, what problems with mental health services exist?) sufficient?

**Response:** Some degree of measurement and analysis of the proposed intervention should be involved to enhance the intervention description and delve into implementation factors. If baseline data has not been collected, previously an experimental study will not be feasible with the resources and time possible through this RFA. Please see RFA for eligibility criteria related to studying community-based mental health interventions.

**30. Question:** Is it possible we can do this RFP for one country or several countries?

**Response:** Please note the eligibility criteria for prime recipient organizations. It is possible to study across countries, but it may not be feasible given time and resources available.

**31. Question:** Is it a requirement of the concept note that we implement a mixed-methods study, or would a purely experimental study (randomized controlled trial) be considered?

**Response:** Experimental designs are likely NOT feasible given the timeline and resources available. Any feasible study design examining an intervention that meets the criteria set forth in the RFA will be considered.

**32. Question:** Do the community-level interventions assessed need to be targeted at survivors of torture or psychological trauma caused by conflict only? For example, would interventions which support survivors of psychological trauma caused by other reasons rather than conflict, be eligible?

**Response:** The community-level interventions assessed may target individuals experiencing mental health conditions regardless of the source of trauma. However as noted in RFA Section 2, the principal focus of this RFA is on interventions implemented among populations likely to include victims of torture, whether because the population is experiencing conflict, is conflict affected, or for some other reason.

**33. Question:** Would a community-based mental health intervention that supports broader communities, which would not exclusively include survivors of torture, be eligible?

**Response:** Yes.

**34. Question:** Ghana would not be classified as a conflict-affected country but does include persons who have experienced torture, including around mental healthcare. Please could you confirm if Ghana is eligible for the RFA on this basis?

**Response:** A country does not have to be classified as conflict-affected to have populations or communities that may be eligible based on the criteria outlined in the RFA.

**35. Question:** We would like to enquire whether Namibia is also included under one of the Countries identified. In particular whether Namibia USAID Country covers one of the interventions prioritized?

**Response:** The eligible regions are listed in the RFA. In the concept note submission you have the opportunity to make the case as to why your ongoing intervention and the population it serves meets the criteria and is worthy of further study.

**36. Question:** Our concept note revolves around mental health awareness campaigns and communities dialogues including training of the existing community based care workers in each country on mental health. Production of IEC materials and social media activities. Is our concept note aligned to your objectives, if not how should we restructure it to suit the call for application?

**Response:** Please note the 'Successful Applicant' section (Section 2) in the RFA and the section on guidance for what belongs in the concept note (Section 7.3). RFA item 2.1 specifies that interventions proposed to be studied should include the diagnosis, referral and treatment of mental health conditions by community-based and/or primary care-level providers (specialist or non-specialist), with or without psychosocial support elements.

**37. Question:** Could you please tell us if organizations are able to submit more than one concept note for different regions, for example one for Colombia and another for the Democratic Republic of Congo?

**Response:** Yes, multiple concept notes can be sent from one implementation organization.