



Guide to Unsolicited Applications

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 303

Full Revision Date: 07/29/2021
Responsible Office: M/OAA/P
File Name: 303mbd_072921

1. Introduction

This Mandatory Reference provides guidance and procedures for receiving and reviewing unsolicited applications. Unsolicited applications provide a method for organizations to submit unique, innovative, or proprietary approaches for solutions to development challenges. USAID reviews unsolicited applications to determine whether funding such applications is in the best interest of the Agency and consistent with USAID's development objectives.

2. Purpose of Unsolicited Applications

Unsolicited applications can be received by USAID on a continuous basis for review; however, funding for USAID programs is concentrated and focused on clear objectives within program priorities, and only limited funding for unsolicited applications may be available for exceptional applications within those priorities. The unsolicited application process provides a method for organizations to provide USAID with:

- Exceptional, unique, or innovative ideas for consideration;
- Ideas that demonstrate a unique capacity by the applicant to carry out proposed activities where there is clear support for such activities by the host country government or private institutions; and
- Ideas that are fully supportive of USAID's development objectives.

Consistent with the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, USAID encourages unrestricted competition in the award of discretionary grants and cooperative agreements to identify and fund the activities that best achieve Agency objectives. As such, it is USAID policy to allow all eligible organizations to compete for assistance awards unless there is a strong programmatic rationale to restrict eligibility that outweighs the benefits of a competitive process. Unsolicited applications do not meet USAID's preference for unrestricted competition, but they provide a method for organizations' unique or innovative approaches to be awarded on a non-competitive basis, consistent with [ADS Chapter 303, sections 303.3.6.4](#) and [303.3.6.5](#).

Unsolicited applications must not be:

- Specifically requested or solicited by USAID Missions or Bureaus;
- Used as an alternate method to issue a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO), such as creating a continuously open window similar to an Annual Program Statement (APS); or
- Used as a method to bypass USAID's preference for unrestricted competition.

3. Receipt of Unsolicited Applications

The preferred method for unsolicited applications is via the Agency's central mailbox: **UnsolicitedProposals@usaid.gov**. The Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) manages this mailbox to ensure that unsolicited applications reach the most appropriate Bureau or Mission. Unsolicited applications may also be sent directly to USAID/Washington Bureaus or directly to USAID Missions. The technical nature of the unsolicited application or the region/country of implementation will determine the applicable Bureau/Mission to which the application should be submitted.

USAID encourages organizations to submit unsolicited applications in the form of a concept paper for initial consideration as opposed to a lengthier detailed application. The recommended contents of an unsolicited application are available on the [Unsolicited Applications and Proposals](#) website.

4. Review of Unsolicited Applications

Once the unsolicited application is received, the cognizant Program/Technical Officer will review the concept for strategic alignment with the Bureau/Mission's priorities and feasibility of funding. The Program/Technical Officer should notify the applicant within 60 days of receipt of the result of the review of the unsolicited application. If the Agency has no further interest in funding the unsolicited application, the cognizant Program/Technical Officer should provide a brief explanation to the point of contact listed in the unsolicited application.

Unsolicited applications may contain sensitive selection information and applicant proprietary data. USAID staff reviewing unsolicited applications must keep information contained within unsolicited applications confidential. Unsolicited applications must not be distributed outside of USAID and should only be shared with USAID staff who have a need to review.

If USAID has a potential interest in funding the unsolicited application, the cognizant Program/Technical Officer (Planner) must engage the appropriate Agreement Officer (AO) to move forward with the award process, consistent with [ADS 303](#) and in compliance with [2 CFR 200](#) and [2 CFR 700](#).

It is USAID's preference for unrestricted eligibility in the award of discretionary grants and cooperative agreements. If an unsolicited application reasonably fits within an existing NOFO, the unsolicited application may be included in a relevant review and selection under that NOFO. If it does not fit within an existing NOFO, the Planner must provide the AO with an approved written determination to restrict eligibility based on programmatic purposes in accordance with [ADS 303](#) before the AO can proceed with award.

As most unsolicited applications are received as a concept paper, a more detailed application will be required to proceed with a potential award. The AO must consult the NOFO template (available internally at <https://pages.usaid.gov/M/OAA/assistance->

[templates](#)) in creating the request for a full application to ensure that all statutory, regulatory, and Agency policy requirements, including representations and certifications, are addressed. The AO makes the final award decision for a noncompetitive grant or cooperative agreement based on an unsolicited application. In making the award, the AO must follow the award process outlined in [ADS 303](#).

303mbd_072921