



Frequently Asked Questions: USAID's Higher Education Solutions Network

What is the objective of USAID's effort to partner with universities and research institutions?

By partnering with universities and research institutions, USAID will create and leverage the resources, intellectual power and energy of universities and other institutions to address key global development problems. This network will help us better understand the problems, identify, evaluate, and create new solutions, and incubate new multidisciplinary approaches to implementing those solutions. By working collaboratively, we will save money and improve results.

How does USAID currently partner with universities and research institutions?

We currently have a variety of partnerships with institutions that range from direct implementation and research contracts to scholarship support; these partnerships typically focus on a single sector, such as the environment or health or on specific activities like evaluation and communication. Most recently, USAID and the National Science Foundation partnered to bring American and developing country scientists together to address global development problems through cooperative research.

How is the program different?

USAID's new partnership program with universities will span many disciplines and institutions to identify solutions that can create significant results and reduce the need for aid over time. For example, USAID hopes that proposals will include coalitions among organizations with various backgrounds -- including academic and research institutions in the US and developing countries, private sector enterprises, NGOs and minority serving institutions -- to strengthen the collective perspectives and experiences of prospective program partners. We believe this collaborative model reflects the realities of the development field today, where innovations require the resources and ingenuity of many different players who can bring solutions to scale locally and globally.

How much funding will USAID apply this effort?

Total funding will depend in part on the number and quality of proposals received.

While we have not finalized the award levels, based on expectations of available funding, institutions would be eligible at two award levels: 1) single centers funded at up to \$1-2 million annually for five years; and 2) consortia centers funded at up to \$5 million annually for five years. Consortia would consist of three to four academic institutions and/or other partners, and can include developing country partners. This will be a significant program that USAID expects will have strong positive effects in reducing the cost and increasing the reliability of delivering development results.

What are some of the specific outcomes that the partnerships will focus on and likely deliver?

While we are looking for universities to develop their own recommended outcomes based on their unique expertise, we are seeking proposals that will accomplish the following objectives:

- Utilizing knowledge and research to improve our understanding of development problems;
- Identifying, designing and evaluating the range of potential solutions for development problems through the sciences, technology and engineering; and,
- Creating an opportunity for students and faculty to apply their knowledge to address development challenges in new and creative ways.

How will USAID and these institutions work together?

Applicants will be evaluated on how they can integrate their programs against the needs of our field missions and headquarters staff. We will expect the applicants to demonstrate a capability both to question long-held development assumptions and to provide evidence that support policy and programmatic approaches. While various models might be used, the staff of the Agency's Science and Technology office within our Policy, Planning and Learning Bureau will be the central liaison for partnerships.

What is the timeline for the RFA?

On February 8, 2012, we released an updated and final RFA, which reflects comments received by institutions following dissemination of the initial draft. As stated in the final RFA, submissions for initial concept notes are due on March 22. We will then review the concept notes, working with internal and external evaluators, and ask the institutions with the strongest concepts to submit a full application. The deadline for the full applications is July 17, and we expect to announce awards in September.

Will the partnerships and projects endure beyond the five-year timeline identified in the RFA?

Yes, although we have only described a five-year timeline at this early stage given USAID's funding cycle, we intend to work with partners to build networks and systems, ideas and solutions that can be sustained over time and contribute to strengthening long-term development.

How will the programs be monitored and evaluated? Will evaluations be made public?

As part of the Obama Administration's and USAID's commitment to transparency and accountability, we will carefully consider an applicant's proposed system to monitor and evaluate its projects when we review proposals before announcing winners. We encourage universities to present a robust, and realistic, plan for tracking and evaluating their proposed activities. Once awards are made, USAID staff will work with each institution to develop a plan that includes baseline data and performance targets for each indicator. The monitoring and evaluation plan will be revised as appropriate throughout the project lifecycle.

What type of outreach has the Agency done to engage universities for this RFA?

USAID's Science and Technology Office has conducted extensive outreach to understand how universities are approaching development, and have engaged multiple university and scientific institutions, organizations and societies, and media. Since the draft RFA was released on January 12, 2012, USAID has hosted two Webinars with more than 1,000 registrants to discuss the new

program and application process. USAID seeks to partner with diverse partners for the new program, including private sector organizations, nongovernmental organizations, developing country institutions, as well as minority serving institutions, and has therefore included diverse partnership structures as one of the criteria for evaluation.

RFA materials have been broadly circulated and are available on both [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and through www.usaid.gov/universities.