



Guide to Unsolicited Applications

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 303

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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 addressing development challenges outside of 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 fully support USAID's agency-wide 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 funded on a non-competitive basis, consistent with [ADS Chapter 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

All unsolicited applications should be submitted via the Unsolicited Application portal on WorkwithUSAID.gov.

The Bureau for Management, Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA) Industry Liaison's team manages this portal to ensure that unsolicited applications reach the most appropriate Mission, Bureau, or Independent Office (M/B/IO). The Industry Liaison's team will send the unsolicited application to the applicable M/B/IO based on the technical nature or the region/country of implementation in the application.

The recommended contents of an unsolicited application are available on the [Unsolicited Submissions](#) page of USAID.gov.

Unsolicited applications may contain sensitive 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 except in cases where the applicant has been consulted and agreed it is beneficial to them. Unsolicited applications should only be shared with USAID staff who have a need to review or if agreed upon by the applicant, are interested in or able to support the application in some way.

4. Review of Unsolicited Applications

Stage 1 – Industry Liaison Review: The M/OAA Industry Liaison team reviews the unsolicited application to ensure all required fields in the WorkWithUSAID submission form are complete and the proposed activities are relevant to USAID's mission and objectives. This review ensures that sufficient information is provided in order for the submission to be evaluated. Upon completion of this review, M/OAA's Industry Liaison team: 1) directs applications that are deemed complete to one of USAID's M/B/IOs, 2) contacts the applicant by email and requests missing information, or 3) rejects the application if it is irrelevant to USAID's mission.

Stage 2 – M/B/IO Review: The M/OAA Industry Liaison team sends the application to the Operating Unit (OU) through the WorkWithUSAID.org portal to determine if it fits within their development objectives. M/OAA's Industry Liaison team maintains these POCs. Once received, M/B/IOs should review applications on the WorkwithUSAID.gov portal within 60 days following completion of the Stage 1 review. If the M/B/IO reviewing the application determines it does not fit within objectives, the M/B/IO will reject the application and provide feedback to the applicant through the portal.

Stage 3 – Relevant Technical Expert Staff Review: If the application is considered relevant to the M/B/IO's development objectives, a team of cognizant technical experts will conduct a detailed technical review of the application. At this stage, the M/B/IOs may contact the cognizant Agreement Officer (AO) to discuss whether there are existing

NOFOs to which the applicant can apply. At the direction of the AO, the M/B/O may take next steps, which may include, requesting additional information from the applicant, informing the applicant of existing, relevant NOFOs for which the applicant can submit their application, or starting a [co-creation process](#). Prior to moving to Stage 4, Negotiation, the M/B/O must confirm availability of funding.

Stage 4 – Negotiation: 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](#).

USAID expects unrestricted competition in the award of discretionary grants and cooperative agreements, unless otherwise restricted following the requirements and procedures in ADS 303. 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 303.3.6.5](#) before the AO can proceed with [issuing an](#) 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://my.usaid.gov/M/OAA/business-process-improvement>) in creating the request for a full application to ensure that all statutory, regulatory, and Agency policy requirements, including representations and certifications (see [ADS 303mav](#)), 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](#).

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