

Request for Proposals

Evaluation Services for IESC

Issue Date:	8 July 2020
Closing Date For Proposals:	22 July 2020
Closing Time:	5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)
Project Title:	Evaluation Services For IESC
Offer Reference Number:	IESC-T-FAST-2020-002

1. Disclaimer

The information contained in this request for proposals (hereinafter referred to as RFP) document is provided to the Offeror(s) by the International Executive Service Corps (IESC). IESC is the prime implementor of the Food for Progress Trade-Facilitating Agricultural Systems and Technology (T-FAST) project in Paraguay funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). IESC is seeking a third-party contractor (independent consultant or firm) to conduct three required evaluations during the life of the T-FAST project.

The purpose of this RFP document is to provide Offeror(s) with information to assist them in the preparation of their proposal/s for the services that IESC seeks to source. This RFP document does not claim to contain all the information each Offeror may require. Each Offeror should conduct their own assessment and should check the accuracy, reliability, and completeness of the information in this RFP document, and where necessary obtain independent advice from appropriate sources.

IESC may cancel this RFP and is under no obligation to make an award as a result of this RFP, although IESC fully anticipates doing so.

Any activities under a final agreement are subject to and shall be carried out in accordance with the regulations promulgated by the USDA for foreign donation of agricultural commodities, codified at 7 CFR 1499, 2 CFR 200 and any other subsequently published rule or regulation governing the FFPr program.

IESC may, at its own discretion, but without being under any obligation to do so, update, amend, or supplement the information in this RFP document.

Interested offerors are responsible for all costs associated with preparation and submission of proposals and will not be reimbursed by IESC.

Any contract resulting from this RFP will be a cost-plus fixed fee contract.

2. T-FAST Project Background

IESC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to equitable, sustainable economic growth in developing countries. We believe that a robust private sector is the cornerstone of resilient economies and stable countries. For more than 55 years, IESC has focused on market-driven private enterprise development. The International Executive Service Corps (IESC) is the prime implementer of the Food for Progress Trade-Facilitating Agricultural Systems and Technology (T-FAST) project in Paraguay funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). T-FAST aims to simplify, modernize, and harmonize processes for the export, import, and transit of agricultural goods in Paraguay. With the private and public sectors, the project will reduce nontariff barriers to trade and will result in a 14 percent reduction in the cost of trade in agricultural goods and a 30 percent decrease in release time of agricultural goods. The project will create improvements in predictability through transparency and automatization of processes.

With an estimated value of \$8.9 million in technical and management funds the project will run for four years, from October 2019, through September 2023. T-FAST identified five key activities that together address the needs, challenges, and constraints in the import and export processes. These activities are summarized as follows:

- 1. Capacity Building: Promote Improved Policy and Regulatory Framework.** IESC will build the capacity of Paraguay's National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) to promote an improved policy and regulatory framework for agricultural trade facilitation. IESC will work with NTFC staff and members in areas where the initial assessment and consultation with the Steering Committee identify core capacity gaps or needs, including structural and organizational, monitoring and evaluation, donor coordination, and communications capacity.
- 2. Capacity Building: Government Institutions.** IESC will address Paraguay's capacity building requests related to agriculture import and export processes important to fulfillment of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) obligations and realization of TFA benefits. IESC will build technical and managerial capacity for select government institutions involved in the regulation and facilitation of trade in agricultural products. The technical assistance will support government institutions in their efforts to implement TFA-Category C notifications.
- 3. Capacity Building: Trade Associations.** IESC will provide technical and managerial capacity building to enable trade associations to effectively advocate for trade-related reforms. IESC will build the capacity of selected trade associations to understand the relevance of the TFA to their business objectives, to analyze the impact of related

policy changes on their sector, to effectively communicate with government about these issues.

- 4. Infrastructure Market and Trade.** IESC will provide the necessary infrastructure to implement the policy, procedure, and process reforms developed in other project Activities, including infrastructure, equipment, and information and communication technology (ICT) systems. IESC will work with NTFC staff and members, other government agencies, and private sector stakeholders to identify needs that are not duplicative of existing equipment or new equipment planned for procurement by the Government of Paraguay (GoP) or other sources. IESC will procure the equipment and ensure that relevant GoP staff are trained to use it.
- 5. On-Demand Mechanism.** IESC will implement a flexible, on-demand mechanism to support the Government of Paraguay and project objectives by responding to agricultural trade issues as they arise during the project. For requests valued at or above the minimum threshold determined with USDA as part of the approved fund operational protocols, IESC will work with NTFC staff, members, or beneficiaries to develop a written request for the support. IESC will analyze the request's alignment with project objectives, potential impact and level of institutional buy-in, submit a written request to USDA for approval prior to implementation.

Theory of Change: T-FAST's theory of change is that by developing a culture of continuous improvement, building organizational and human capacity to institute improvements, and supporting the relevant physical infrastructure, Paraguay will fully implement the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in both letter and spirit. According to the WTO, full implementation is expected to reduce total trade costs by more than 14 percent for developing countries. This will make Paraguay more competitive in the global marketplace and increase the potential for regional and international agricultural trade.

3. Period of Performance

IESC is seeking a third-party contractor (independent consultant or firm) to conduct three evaluations (baseline, mid-term, and final) during the life of the T-FAST project. The resulting contract will be awarded for the baseline survey, with option periods for the mid-term and final evaluations. Option period awards will be based on performance of the previous evaluation and exercised by modification to the base contract. The baseline, mid-term, and final evaluations and their anticipated dates are as follows:

- T-FAST Baseline Evaluation due September 15, 2020, conducted over the period of July / early September 2020

- T-FAST Mid-Term Evaluation due November 2021, conducted over the period of October 2021; and,
- T-FAST Final Evaluation, due September 2023, conducted over the period of June 2023.

The period of performance of any contract resulting from this solicitation is anticipated to begin on or about July 27, 2020. The duration of the contract is until the T-FAST program ends in October 2023.

4. Scope Statement

The successful offeror, for each of the evaluations, must demonstrate its ability to:

- Undertake a comprehensive approach to evaluating project performance and impact, including proposing key evaluation questions that aim to assess T-FAST's effect on Paraguay's implementation of the WTO TFA;
- Propose, design, and manage data collection methodologies and approach to data analysis; and,
- Highlight learning as a key focus for the project and demonstrate how T-FAST will build evidence to help answer at least four key learning questions determined by IESC with input from USDA in advance of each evaluation. from the FFPr Learning Agenda.

In compliance with USDA's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy, IESC T-FAST's contractor will conduct a Baseline Study, Midterm Evaluation, and Final Evaluation. The overall objectives of the T-FAST Baseline Study and subsequent evaluations are to establish and impartially evaluate the T-FAST project performance plan indicators and progress against indicator related baseline and targets. The analysis of progress against indicator targets will define areas of shortfalls that will inform project improvements or needed modifications as well as areas of success that may highlight opportunities for the project to scale or replicate successful interventions leading to greater impact.

All three evaluations will be conducted by the contractor (subject to extension options) and will examine both administrative and programmatic aspects of T-FAST related to data capture, measurement, and intervention impact. The contractor's evaluation team will include various positions, all of which will have a detailed scope of work. The positions and relevant qualifications for each are described below under section 10, Qualifications and Technical Criteria Requirements.

A third-party contractor, per USDA's Food and Agricultural Services Food Assistance Division (FAD) Monitoring and Evaluation [Policy](#) (page 7, February 2019) is described below:

- Is financially and legally separate from the participant's organization;
- Has staff with demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills and experience in conducting evaluations of development programs involving agriculture, education, and nutrition;
- Uses acceptable analytical frameworks such as comparison with non-project areas, surveys, involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation, and statistical analyses;
- Uses local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the evaluation; and,
- Provides a detailed outline of the evaluation, major tasks, and specific schedules prior to initiating the evaluation.

The Contractor's evaluation team, including enumerators, must ensure that the evaluation adheres to ethical guidelines as cited in the FAD Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.¹ Pages 7 to 8 of that policy states the following:

"Monitoring and evaluation activities should appropriately balance the desired creation of evidence with the protection of human subjects, including safeguarding the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants. Evaluators are responsible for applying ethical principles in all stages of the evaluation, and for raising and clarifying ethical matters with stakeholders during the course of the evaluation."

5. Evaluation Key Audience

The key audience for the Baseline Study includes the IESC T-FAST project staff, including the T-FAST Steering Committee comprised of key U.S. government and Paraguayan government stakeholders, USDA staff, and other USDA implementers.

The key audience for the Midterm and Final Evaluation include the above as well as IESC T-FAST's international partners, the Center for International Private Expertise, (CIPE), and Kansas State University (KSU), T-FAST participants and beneficiaries, and trade associations and agencies within the government of Paraguay. These evaluations also intend to benefit other USDA implementers, NTFC, and the development community in general.

¹ For additional guidance, interested parties should review American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators: <https://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51>.

All final versions of the evaluation reports will be made publicly available. IESC will ensure public copies of the evaluation reports are free of personally identifiable information (PII) and proprietary information. Additionally, final versions of the evaluation reports will also be made accessible to persons with disabilities.

6. Methodology for Evaluations

The IESC T-FAST contractor will operate according to the approved T-FAST Evaluation Plan. The evaluations will employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods (surveys, focus group discussions with and direct observation of target beneficiaries, and key informant interviews with government officials and relevant public/private stakeholders, as well as IESC T-FAST project staff and USDA representatives). The details around survey design and interview questions will be finalized in conjunction with the selected contractor. An overview and the methodology for the evaluations are as follows:

6.1. Baseline Evaluation

The baseline study will provide baseline information for indicator data that will be used for performance monitoring to annually track actual results against planned targets, validate and revisit assumptions that were made in the project design and monitor the assumptions during the project implementations and also identify potential threats to project success. The Baseline Study will mainly obtain data through the following three performance indicators:

1. Custom Indicator 1.1: Percent of stakeholders who perceive the NTFC is enacting their agenda to strengthen trade facilitation in Paraguay;
2. Custom Indicator 2.1: Average release time for agricultural goods;
3. Custom Indicator 2.2: Average cost of trade for agricultural goods;

The anticipated methodology for the Baseline Study is a combination of secondary data analysis, interviews, surveys and direct observation. Given T-FAST's focus on international trade, the independent third-party contractor will obtain official statistical data on import/export values and volumes for the prior year (2018) from the Central Bank of Paraguay, the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Trade Facilitation Index (<https://www.oecd.org/trade/topics/trade-facilitation/>), the ITC Trade Map, UN Comtrade Database, or UN Food and Agriculture Organization websites and possibly Paraguay's Department of Commerce Single Window for Imports and Ministry of Commerce Single Window for Exports (consolidated under Central Bank of Paraguay data). Interviews and direct observation with a sample of pre-identified beneficiaries will provide more context around the sales data as well as clarify any pending questions the Baseline Study team or IESC T-FAST technical staff may have.

The proposed methodology for collecting baseline information for Custom Indicator 1.1 (Percent of stakeholders who perceive the NTFC is enacting their agenda to strengthen trade facilitation in Paraguay) is a structured survey with targeted government agencies that have a role in implementation of the TFA. As an example of the predefined criteria to be evaluated, and which will be finalized with NTFC's review and input, survey participants will be asked both quantitative questions where they will select a number score to demonstrate their current perception of the NTFC and T-FAST project, as well as qualitative questions to provide context to the quantitative data. An index number above a certain value will indicate that the person perceives that the NTFC is enacting an agenda to strengthen trade facilitation in Paraguay. A random sample of NTFC members and a multi-stage, cluster sample of relevant stakeholders from GoP agencies and the private sector will be selected to survey.

The baseline will help the project answer the following questions;

- What are the baseline values for the indicators?
- Do the targets need revision or adjustments?
- Does the project theory of change still hold?
- Are the assumptions still valid?
- What activities should the project focus most on?

Examples of questions that could be included in the survey are as follows, but the final survey design will require review and approval from the NTFC:

- **Communication:** Does the NTFC communicate effectively with its constituencies? Does the NTFC provide you regular and formal electronic updates regarding its work? If so, how often and is the information included in those updates useful?
- **Implementation:** Describe the TFA and Paraguay's obligations to that Agreement? What difference will full implementation of the TFA make for Paraguay's economy? How well do you understand the NTFC mandate? Does the NTFC have targets related to time and cost improvements in trade facilitation? If so, do you understand those targets? Do you believe these targets are achievable? Why or why not?
- **Governance:** Does the NTFC operate efficiently? Transparently? Does it encourage participation of all sectors (public and private) involved with the NTFC?
- **Relevance:** How well does the work of the NTFC reflect TFA priorities in Paraguay? How important has the NTFC been in advancing trade reforms in Paraguay?
- **Effectiveness:** Is the NTFC on track to achieve specific target X? Specific target Y? What would you like to see adjusted or changed in the way NTFC fulfills its mandate?
- **Impact:** In what ways is the NTFC fulfilling or not fulfilling their mandate?

- **T-FAST:** How effective do you perceive T-FAST assistance to the NTFC to be in helping the GoP enact TFA and other trade related reforms to improve the facilitation of trade in agricultural imports and exports?

The proposed methodology for collecting baseline information for custom indicator 2.1 (average release time for agricultural goods), will rely on documented data related to required processes, not user surveys. Specific commodities will be used as described in the Performance Monitoring Plan. The data will need to be collected from Custom's Sofia system, Import and Export Single Windows (VUI and VUE) and INAN's "SIGRA" system and processed in order to discriminate agricultural products.

The proposed methodology for collecting baseline information for Custom Indicator 2.2 (average cost of trade for agricultural goods) should be compared against sound international data sources (World Bank's Doing Business Survey, specifically the Trading Across Border ranking and underlying indicators and data) for context as those indicators will serve as a reference point with at international forums.

The specific sampling methodology involving beneficiaries across activities will be determined by the contractor and will include multi-stage probability sampling, a combination of stratified, systemic, or cluster sampling. For some capacity building activities, representatives from all affected agencies will be interviewed.

6.2. Midterm Evaluation

The purpose of the T-FAST Midterm Evaluation is to critically and objectively take stock of T-FAST's implementing experience and the implementing environment, assess whether targeted beneficiaries are receiving services as expected, assess if T-FAST is on track to meet its stated goals and objectives, review the project-level results framework and assumptions, document initial lessons learned, and discuss necessary modifications or midcourse corrections, if necessary. The scope of the evaluation will assess the relevance of interventions, provide an early signal of the effectiveness of interventions, and assess sustainability efforts to date.

Midterm Evaluation Objectives:

1. To evaluate the quality and effectiveness of service delivery, the strengths and weaknesses of project implementation and management, and the quality of Outputs, in terms of adherence to terms agreed to by USDA and of their acceptability and perceived value to target partners, identifying factors that appear to enhance or detract from the quality, acceptability and usefulness of implementation and Outputs.

2. To present evidence of changes (intended and unintended, positive and negative) associated with project interventions and Outputs, assess how well the observed changes reflect the Theory of Change or Results Framework, identify factors in the implementation or context that impede or promote the observed and intended changes.
3. To recommend adjustments to the Theory of Change or Results Framework , activity design, resource allocation, activity management, M&E Plan, or implementation that could improve the likelihood of achieving desired results by the project's end, based on the evidence collected and conclusions drawn for the evaluation objectives above.

The T-FAST Midterm Evaluation will answer the following questions related to the USDA standard evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. A final list of questions will be developed in consultation with the project's senior leadership and USDA prior to the commencement of the evaluation field work:

- **Relevance:** To what extent have T-FAST activities to date addressed the core issues of target beneficiaries?
- **Effectiveness:** Is T-FAST on track to achieve the specific targets and results established? Which activity or combination of activities has/have the highest potential to achieve T-FAST's higher-level result (expanded trade of agricultural products)? How effective is T-FAST at reaching women beneficiaries (particularly via capacity building activities) and what more could be done to improve women's engagement/leadership? Which activities were most effective in contributing to a reduction of time and cost of trade?
- **Efficiency:** To what extent are staffing, management, and oversight costs suitable, given the number/scope of activities carried out?
- **Sustainability:** What factors contribute to sustainability of project results and how has T-FAST focused on these to date?
- **Impact:** What are the immediate-, medium-, and long-term effects, both intended and unintended, positive and negative, of the project to date?

The contractor will use a mixed methods approach including, but not limited to, quantitative surveys, focus group discussions with and direct observation of target beneficiaries, and key informant interviews with government officials and relevant public/private stakeholders, including IESC T-FAST and USDA representatives.

The tools for collection of key data should be like those used during the Baseline Study or routine monitoring (to the extent possible) so that results may be comparable. The quantitative sample size will be designed to reflect the project population of beneficiaries for each of the activities and will ensure a 95 percent confidence level with a 5 percent

margin of error. The Midterm Evaluation design will be developed in conjunction with the contractor and will utilize the most rigorous but appropriate and feasible methods.

The Midterm Evaluation itself will be conducted at the project's midpoint, or just following at the beginning of Year Three (October 2021). When establishing the timeline, evaluators will be advised to consider a logistical lesson learned from the Evaluation of USAID/Paraguay's MCC Threshold Program. IESC will submit the final Midterm Evaluation report to USDA.

6.3. Final Evaluation

The purpose of the T-FAST Final Evaluation is to assess whether the project achieved the expected results as outlined in the results framework. The scope of the evaluation will comprise T-FAST project design, implementation, management, and replicability; lessons learned and recommendations for USDA, T-FAST participants, and other key stakeholders for future projects; and follow-up on midterm evaluation questions, including assessing direct and indirect, intended and unintended, and positive or negative impacts. The Final Evaluation must also determine whether recommendations from the Midterm Evaluation were incorporated into the project and if not, why not?

The T-FAST Final Evaluation will answer the following questions related to the standard evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. A final list of questions will be developed in consultation with the project's senior leadership and USDA prior to the commencement of the evaluation field work:

- **Relevance:** To what extent did the T-FAST project design address the core issues of target beneficiaries? How were existing relevant USDA and U.S. government activities leveraged?
- **Effectiveness:** To what extent did T-FAST achieve the specific targets and results established? Which activity or combination of activities proved to be the most effective approach to achieve T-FAST's higher-level results, increased trade of agricultural products? Which activities were most effective in contributing to a reduction of average time and average cost of trade?
- **Efficiency:** To what extent did the level of project resources lead to achievement of results? Could the same results be achieved with fewer resources?
- **Sustainability:** What is the likelihood that the benefits of the project will endure over time long after T-FAST ends? To what extent has T-FAST developed local ownership and sustainable partners?

- **Impact:** What are the immediate-, medium-, and long-term effects, both intended and unintended, positive and negative, of the project after nearly four years of implementation?

The Final Evaluation questions will be finalized with the IESC T-FAST project team and USDA prior to the commencement of the evaluation. Potential questions include the following:

- What were the major results of the project in achieving the goal and intended objectives?
- Did increased adoption of established standards by industry (2.1.1.1) lead to increased value added to postproduction products (2.1)? Did this then contribute to increased volumes traded and, thus, Expanded Trade (SO2)?
- Did Increased Efficiency of Post-Production Processes (2.1.2) lead to trade-related average cost and average time reductions through Improved Transaction Efficiency (2.3)? Did this then contribute to increased volumes traded and, thus, Expanded Trade (SO2)?
- To what extent did activities around improved policy and regulatory framework help achieve expanded trade (Foundational Result)?

The methodology for the Final Evaluation includes a combination of quantitative surveys; focus group discussions with, and direct observation of, target beneficiaries; and key informant interviews with government officials and relevant public and private stakeholders including IESC T-FAST staff and USDA. The details around survey design, interview questions, and sampling will be developed in conjunction with the evaluation contractor. The Final Evaluation will not attempt to confirm attribution of impact but, rather, verify contributions and plausible links between impact and T-FAST.

The Final Evaluation will be conducted three to six months prior to completion of the project, barring any extension, with the draft terms of reference submitted to USDA, through IESC, at least three months prior to the start of the evaluation. IESC will confirm the timing of the Final Evaluation with USDA at the start of the project.

7. Statement Of Work – Evaluation Deliverables

7.1. Schedule of Authorities

The contractor will report to the IESC Program Director, T-FAST Project Director, and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Director.

7.2. Deliverables

The contractor is expected to undertake the following tasks:

Note: Deliverables beyond the Baseline Study section are subject to the contract extension periods represented as option periods that will be exercised at IESC's discretion and will be based on the contractor's performance on previous performance (baseline and mid-term).

Baseline Study

The Baseline Study deliverables include but are not limited to the following:

- Write a Baseline Study work plan, which includes the following:
 - A demonstrated understanding of the program based on desk review and kick-off meeting;
 - Baseline Study methodology including detailed sampling plan, field work plan, and any limitations of the proposed approach;
 - Planned quality control measures;
 - Communication protocol with interview subjects related to purpose of interview, the project, and consent for participation and/or inclusion of subject in photograph captured during the study;
 - Final timeline; and,
 - A Gantt chart reflective of the narrative that includes action, timeline by week, output, team owner, IESC support if required.
- Electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools;
- Clean and final versions of quantitative datasets and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;
- Electronic draft Baseline Study report in English, addressing all Study objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard IESC T-FAST report template. The report is estimated to range from 20 to 30 pages excluding relevant annexes. It must include the following:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary;
 - Background;
 - Detailed methodology;
 - Baseline Data Findings;
 - IESC response to findings;
 - Annexed scope of work;
 - Annexed export and import statistics;

- Annexed data collection instruments;
- Annexed CV of team leader; and,
- Annexed photographs from meetings.
- An oral presentation supported by PowerPoint slides and any applicable electronic handouts the evaluation findings in the IESC T-FAST template. The presentation should be an hour and include 20 to 25 slides. An initial review shall be completed in-country at the completion of the field assignment, the final presentation delivered at the completion of the report;
- 15 to 20 high-quality pictures of the process, which are date and time stamped;
- An electronic English version of the Final Evaluation report in PDF and MS Word, as well as two printed copies in color (one for USDA and one for the T-FAST office).

The final version of the Baseline Study report may be made publicly available (including to those with disabilities), therefore the contractor is expected to produce two copies of which one version of the report should not release the following:

Proprietary information owned by third parties; and information that could put individual safety at risk or personally identifiable information (PII). PII is information that can be used to reasonably infer the identity of an individual, directly or indirectly.

Midterm Evaluation

The Midterm Evaluation deliverables from the evaluation team include the following:

- Midterm Evaluation work plan, which includes the following:
 - Midterm evaluation methodology including detailed sampling plan, field work plan, and any limitations of the proposed approach;
 - Planned quality control measures;
 - Communication protocol with interview subjects related to purpose of interview, the project, and consent for participation and/or inclusion of subject in photograph captured during the study;
 - Final timeline; and,
 - A Gantt chart reflective of the narrative that includes action, timeline by week, output, team owner, IESC support if required.
- Electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools in English;
- Clean and final versions of quantitative datasets and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;
- A two- to three-page stand-alone brief describing the evaluation design, key findings, and other relevant considerations. The brief will serve to inform any interested stakeholders of the Midterm Evaluation, and should be written in

language that is easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables;

- An electronic draft midterm evaluation report in English, addressing all evaluation objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard IESC T-FAST report template. The report is estimated to range from 20 to 30 pages excluding relevant annexes. It must include the following:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary;
 - Background;
 - Detailed evaluation methodology;
 - Program Database Audit;
 - Findings;
 - IESC response to findings;
 - Suggestions and requests from beneficiaries;
 - Recommendations for the remainder of the program;
 - Annexed scope of work;
 - Annexed overview of performance for each indicator;
 - Annexed export statistics;
 - Annexed data collection instruments;
 - Annexed org chart;
 - Annexed CV of team leader; and,
 - Annexed photographs from meetings.
- An oral presentation supported by PowerPoint slides and any applicable electronic handouts the evaluation findings in the IESC T-FAST template. The presentation should be an hour and include 20 to 25 slides. An initial review shall be completed in-country at the completion of the field assignment, the final presentation delivered at the completion of the report;
- 15 to 20 high-quality pictures of the process, which are date and time stamped;
- An electronic English version of the final evaluation report in PDF and MS Word.

The final version of the evaluation report may be made publicly available (including to those with disabilities). Therefore, the contractor is expected to produce two copies of the Midterm Evaluation report and must not release the following:

- Proprietary information owned by third parties, information that could put individual safety at risk, and personally identifiable information (PII). PII is information that can be used to reasonably infer the identity of an individual, directly or indirectly.

Final Evaluation

The Final Evaluation deliverables from the contractor include the following:

- Final Evaluation work plan that describes the following:
 - Understanding of the program based on desk review and kick-off meeting;
 - Final evaluation methodology, including detailed sampling plan, field work plan, and any limitations of the proposed approach;
 - Description of planned quality control measures;
 - Communication protocol with interview subjects related to purpose of interview, the project, and consent for participation and/or inclusion of subject in photograph captured during the study; and,
 - Final timeline.
- Electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools;
- Clean and final versions of quantitative datasets and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;
- A two- to three-page stand-alone brief describing the evaluation design, key findings, and other relevant considerations. The brief will serve to inform any interested stakeholders of the Final Evaluation, and should be written in language easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables;
- An electronic draft Final Evaluation report in English, addressing all evaluation objectives and questions;
- Oral presentation materials of evaluation findings in agreed upon format;
- 15 to 20 high quality pictures of the process;
- An electronic final English version of the Final Evaluation report in PDF and Word. The report is estimated to range from 20 to 30 pages excluding relevant annexes. The report should include, but not limited to:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary;
 - Background;
 - Detailed evaluation methodology;
 - Findings;
 - Lessons Learned;
 - Recommendations for USDA, participants, and key stakeholders;
 - Annexed scope of work;
 - Annexed data collection instruments; and,
 - Annexed photo montage.

The final version of the evaluation report will be made publicly available (including to those with disabilities). Therefore, the contractor is expected to produce two copies of of the Final Evaluation report must not release the following:

- Proprietary information owned by third parties, Information that could put individual safety at risk, and personally identifiable information (PII). PII is information that can be used to reasonably infer the identity of an individual, directly or indirectly.

8. Contract Type

The contract is anticipated to be cost plus fixed fee.

9. Instructions to Offerors

9.1. Submission

Offerors must submit both a technical and cost proposal, as described below.

Technical Proposal

The technical proposal should not exceed ten pages and should include the following:

- A cover letter summarizing the applicant's interest and capacity to implement the T-FAST Baseline Study, Mid-Term Evaluation, and Final Evaluation;
- A description of the recommended evaluation methodologies that demonstrates an understanding of T-FAST's expected impact and implementation approach;
- A demonstrated understanding of and experience in USDA Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning policies, guidelines and practices;
- Experience in evaluating the development sector, including areas such as agricultural import, export, and goods in transit processes and systems; policy and regulatory reform related to trade facilitation, and global agricultural value chains;
- Strong experience in applying different quantitative and qualitative methodologies (provide some details of specific assignments, challenges encountered and how the challenges were mitigated);
- List of three references who can attest to your experience and expertise in evaluation. Include contact information (daytime phone numbers and email contacts); and,
- List of the three most recent relevant assignments that you have undertaken, including a description of why these are relevant to this RFP and what learnings were drawn from that assignment.

Cost Proposal

The cost proposal must include a detailed budget for completion of the baseline evaluation work plan and implementing the baseline evaluation. Please note, total IESC MEL services are budgeted under the T-FAST project's actual implementation budget of \$8,840,195 million at roughly 3%. Offerors are strongly encouraged to keep this project budget constraint for MEL services in mind as they determine costs. Offerors must complete the budget template found in Annex A, posted on the IESC website as Annex A – Evaluation Budget Template_IESC-T-FAST-2020-002. Offerors may contact Brendan Gernes, Program Associate, at bgernes@iesc.org to request a copy of the Annex A Budget Template in Excel format. Costs should be broken out to include labor, supplies, travel, subcontracts (if any), indirect costs (if any), fee (if any), and total cost. Offerors must include detailed narrative justifications for each cost in order for IESC to determine cost reasonableness. Should an offeror propose any subcontractors to perform any portion of the work, such subcontract costs must be proposed separately, demonstrating clear delineation between prime and subcontractor costs. Offerors must include a detailed budget for any subcontract proposed; this budget and narratives must adhere to the same budgeting format requirements (per Annex A Budget Template) herein for prime offerors, including cost narratives.

For indirect costs proposed, please include a copy of your organization's Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA), if applicable. Otherwise, should your organization or consulting company not have a NICRA and you are proposing indirect costs, you must include information that serves to verify how the indirect costs were derived along with documentation (financial statements or audits, for example) that IESC will review to verify the accuracy and veracity of the rates and bases of application. Indirect costs under U.S. Government programs are fully auditable. Alternatively, any legally incorporated not for profit entity may opt to charge a 10% de minimus indirect rate in accordance with 2 CFR 200.414(f). Only incorporated businesses (501(c)(3), LLC, etc.) are eligible to charge and be reimbursed for indirect rates. No individual (independent consultant that is not legally incorporated) may propose or be reimbursed for indirect costs.

Additionally, as contractors may be offered the option to extend, offerors should provide detailed budgets, in the same (Annex A) format, including cost narratives, as the baseline evaluation budget, for the mid-term and final evaluations as well, including all critical assumptions informing estimations.

Offerors must submit their proposals by the closing date and time, as listed on page one, to the following: Brendan Gernes, Program Associate, at bgernes@iesc.org.

9.2. Appendices (not included in the ten-page limit)

- CVs of the contractor team, outlining previous evaluation experience and accomplishments as it relates to demonstrating the skills and knowledge needed to fulfill the requirements of the RFP (CVs must be in English);
- The final contract ceiling will be contingent on both the “value for money” of the selected applicant’s cost proposal and on the final program budget;
- Demonstrated financial and administrative capacity to manage a contract of this size; and,
- Optional: one example of an evaluation report recently completed or any other document that demonstrates strong writing ability. (These documents will be handled with the utmost confidentiality).

9.3. Clarification and Amendments

Offerors may request clarification questions via email to bghernes@iesc.org not later than **5:00 p.m., Washington DC Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), on Tuesday, July 14, 2020**. IESC will provide answers to these questions and requests for clarification simultaneously via email and posted on the IESC website with the RFP before the close of business on/or before **Wednesday, July 15, 2020**. IESC will not answer questions before the proposal submission deadline outside of the allotted response period for clarifications. No questions will be answered over the phone or in person. Any amendments to the RFP will be posted on the website, and simultaneously emailed to Offerors who have expressed interest.

9.4. Cover Page and Markings

In addition to the required proposal documents listed in sections 10 and 11 below, please include a cover page with your submission for the technical and the cost proposals (separate cover pages). The cover page should be on company letterhead and should contain the following information:

- 1) Project or Title (from the front page of this RFP document)
- 2) Offer Reference Number (from the front page of this RFP document)
- 3) Company Name
- 4) Company Address
- 5) Name of Company’s authorized representative
- 6) Contact person if different than Company’s representative
- 7) Telephone #, Cellular/Mobile Phone #, Email address
- 8) Duration of Validity of proposal
- 9) Payment terms

- 10) DUNS # (Applies to companies, not to individuals)
- 11) Total Proposed Price (**cover page of cost proposal only**)
- 12) Signature, date, and time

10. Qualifications and Eligibility Requirements

All interested parties will be assessed based on the following:

- Demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills, and prior experience conducting evaluations of development programs involving agriculture and trade;
- Proven ability to use quantitative, qualitative and participatory evaluation methods, with examples and references that can speak to this experience;
- Experience using of acceptable analytical frameworks such as surveys, stakeholder engagement, and statistical analyses;
- Experience with World Bank Doing Business Survey Trading Across Borders methodology as well as World Bank Time-Release Studies (preferred);
- Experience using advanced quantitative and qualitative methodologies;
- Knowledge of World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement and related economic impact studies and analysis;
- Experience conducting evaluations of economic growth and trade programs;
- Experience with USDA Food for Progress programs (preferred);
- Fluency in both English and Spanish required;
- Clarity of thought process and writing style, as evidenced in technical proposal; and,
- Previous experience in Paraguay (preferred).

IESC is looking for the following team composition. IESC encourages offerors to include no more than three key team members in addition to any field support staff consultants:

- Team Leader, an experienced international expert (at least ten years of relevant experience) with a background in economics or related field (PhD or Master's degree) with appropriate agricultural and/or import/export process research, analytic, and writing skills as well as leadership experience;
- Trade Facilitation Specialist, a local Paraguayan economist or social science researcher (Master's degree preferred) with an analytical background in trade facilitation processes and systems and at least five years of relevant experience; will support the team leader in the baseline design, implementation of evaluation activities and report preparation; and,

- Researcher, a local Paraguayan with at least five years of relevant experience, and an agriculture and economics/statistical background (Bachelors or master's degree) and ability to support team leader;
- Field support staff (local consultants), the team leader will have the option to hire local support staff to facilitate the fieldwork and translations. Local enumerators will assist with data collection and translation on a short-term, as needed basis;

IESC may support recruitment of local enumerators, but the hiring decision will be the responsibility of the contractor.

Note: The applicant may propose a different team composition with clear justification on how the new team composition will benefit the performance of this scope of work.

11. Basis for Award

IESC anticipates that award will be based on best-value principles. Accordingly, award will be made to the technically acceptable Offerors whose proposals provide the greatest overall value to IESC and the USDA FFPr program, price, and other factors considered. Should two or more offers be technically equivalent, IESC may use cost as the determining factor for award. The winning proposal must conform to all solicitation requirements.

To determine best value, proposals will be evaluated on the criteria below. The number of points assigned, totaling 100 points, indicates the relative importance of each individual criterion. Offerors should note that these criteria serve to: (a) identify the significant factors that Offerors should address in their proposals; and, (b) set the standard against which all proposals will be evaluated.

12. Technical Proposal Evaluation

Please read carefully, the following are instructions for preparing proposals. Proposals must be organized into sections corresponding to the sections presented in **12.1 Technical Evaluation Criteria** and numbered accordingly. Only include the requested information and avoid submitting extra content. Any pages exceeding the page limitation for each section of the proposal may not be evaluated.

Proposals shall be written in English with each page numbered consecutively.

12.1. Technical Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate and rank the proposals submitted.

Section	Points
Proposed Evaluative Approach (suitable to T-FAST’s complex design and context, including methodology, general approach, and detailed approach to each study and evaluation)	40
Past Performance , related to a similar scope, e.g. evaluations related to trade, agriculture, and import/export processes and demonstrated knowledge and application of USDA M&E guidelines and related ethics (as demonstrated in the applicant’s proposal and based on the three provided professional reference checks)	30
Staffing (team with knowledge and skills suitable for T-FAST’s evaluation needs, including ability to communicate in English and Spanish)	20
Cost based on best value	10
Total	100

IESC reserves the right to award the contract to the consultant or firm whose proposal is deemed to be in the best interest of IESC and USDA. The specifics of the scope are subject to change in accordance to potential additional input from USDA and the initial agreement with the selected organization discussed and modified accordingly. Contract continuation will be determined upon satisfactory performance in the baseline study first, and later satisfactory performance on the midterm evaluation. IESC reserves the right to cancel the contract in full or in part.

The independent consultant or firm with the winning proposal will be notified in writing. Applicants who are not selected will also be notified.

13. Cost Proposal Evaluation

The Offeror shall submit a separate cost proposal, proposed in accordance with Provision 9.1 “Cost Proposal,” to include the project cost of performing the evaluations.

All proposed costs must be in accordance with the U.S. Government Cost Principles under 2 CFR 200, or for for-profit firms Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 31.

14. Deviations

IESC reserves the right to waive any deviations by offerors from the requirements of this solicitation that in IESC's opinion are considered not to be material defects requiring rejection or disqualification; or where such a waiver will promote increased competition.

15. Discrepancies

Please read the instructions carefully before submitting your proposal. Any discrepancy in following the instructions or contract provisions may disqualify your proposal without recourse or an appeal for reconsideration at any stage.

16. Conflict of Interest Declaration for the IESC T-FAST Evaluation Services

The following steps outline IESC's contract selection process and should be understood by all Offerors to ensure the transparency of awards and avoid conflict of interest.

- 1) Request for Proposals (RFPs) are posted on IESC's website. The offer is open to all qualified offerors;
- 2) Clarifications will be emailed to all offerors submitting questions, as well as posted on IESC's website, simultaneously;
- 3) Once the proposals are received, an evaluation committee scores them;
- 4) Cost proposals are evaluated for reasonableness, accuracy, and completeness;
- 5) The best value proposal is selected based on a combination of the technical score and the cost;
- 6) No activity can be started until both IESC and the awardee have signed a formal contract; and,
- 7) IESC policy against fraud and code of business ethics exists throughout the life of the subcontract and beyond. Even if the contract is closed, if any party is found guilty of fraud, IESC will make a full report to the USDA Office of Inspector General, which may choose to investigate and prosecute guilty parties to the fullest extent of the law.

Any contracts awarded will be required to comply with all administrative standards and provisions required by USDA.

-END-