

Request for Proposals

Evaluation Services for IESC

Issue Date:	4 December 2020
Closing Date For Proposals:	20 January 2021
Closing Time:	5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)
Project Title:	Evaluation Services For IESC
Offer Reference Number:	IESC-TRASA-2021-001

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 Safe (TraSa) project in the Dominican Republic 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 TraSa 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, any other subsequently published rule or regulation governing the FFPr program, and terms and conditions of IESC's USDA award which will be incorporated in any resulting contract from this RFP.

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. In addition, per Foreign Agricultural Service – Food Assistance Division United States Department of Agriculture Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (Feb 2019), IESC will seek review and approval of the terms of reference of this RFP from USDA prior to the final selection of the contractor.

Changes or adjustments based on that review will be discussed with the successful Offeror and included in a modification if or as necessary.

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. TraSa 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 Safe (TraSa) project in the Dominican Republic (DR) funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

TraSa aims to improve the efficiency, coordination, and transparency of the trade, commercialization, and safety of food and agricultural products. TraSa will help facilitate these improvements by supporting the implementation of science and risk-based sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, standards, and regulations. SPS and food safety issues are a significant barrier to the DR's access to high-value markets, a major factor limiting agricultural production, and a risk to consumer health. By addressing these issues, the project will expand the DR's local, regional, and international trade in agricultural products; increase agricultural productivity; and improve consumer access to safe foods. To achieve these objectives, TraSa will build farm and institutional capacity in SPS, improve the application of the SPS risk management system at the border, and leverage \$2.28 million in private sector investment to further develop cold chain systems.

With an estimated value of \$13.7 million in technical and management funds the project will run for five years, from October 2020, through September 2025. TraSa identified four 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: Government Institutions. IESC will build the capacity of government institutions to implement science and risk-based SPS and food safety measures, standards, and regulations to facilitate trade in food and agricultural products. While the beneficiary focus for this Activity is with government institutions, IESC will engage and leverage private organizations in the development of evidence based applied research and other products to build and sustain this effort and encourage collaboration. IESC will assess government institutional capacity in SPS; provide training to public sector employees, including lab technicians, on

implementation of SPS and food safety systems; and, support the public sector in implementing plans to address national priorities. IESC will work with the Dominican Government to improve the single window into a more fully integrated risk management system at the interagency level to result in increased efficiency and transparency of trade. IESC will also develop a research collaboration and professional development initiatives between government institutions and university systems to build a sustainable community of practice around SPS issues and support the public sector. IESC will provide technical assistance and training to Customs, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other ministries, agencies, or border agencies as appropriate to implement SPS-related risk management systems at the border and maintain cold chain while conducting inspections. For this activity, beneficiaries include public institutions and public sector employees involved in SPS, food safety, and trade facilitation.

- 2. Capacity Building: Promote Improved Policy and Regulatory Framework.** IESC will build the capacity of Dominican government institutions to develop a modernized SPS and food safety related policy and regulatory framework to respond to the needs of the Dominican Republic's trade agreements and international best practices. IESC will assess the legal and institutional framework for SPS policy; build the capacity of the National SPS Committee, support the National SPS Committee in addressing priority issues; and, provide technical assistance, including the delivery of training, to National SPS Committee members to facilitate SPS-related process reforms. IESC will support the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in the development of policies required to implement the SPS-related aspects of the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement including test procedures, risk management systems, border agency cooperation, and trade in perishable goods (including cold chain). IESC will build public sector capacity to effectively engage the private sector and other stakeholders in policy reform initiatives and knowledge sharing. For this activity, beneficiaries include national public-private coordinating committees, government agencies, universities, and trade associations.
- 3. Cold Chain Improvement.** IESC will manage sub grants for the development of cold chain infrastructure to enable implementation of SPS and food safety standards. IESC will assess market opportunities for cold chain investments, facilitate public private partnerships to catalyze market driven investment in cold chain systems while also targeting pragmatic low-cost solutions for farmers. This will include small equipment grants for farmer cooperatives and small businesses, awarded through a competitive process. IESC will provide training in cold chain technologies and practices, as well as support cold chain traceability systems. Beneficiaries of this activity are in the private

sector, including airport and seaport operators, transportation and logistics companies, warehousing and storage facility operators, importers, exporters, wholesalers, major retailers, aggregators, producer cooperatives, and farmers.

4. Training: Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards. IESC will provide training to private sector firms, farmers, labs, and consumers. The activity will support the private sector's understanding of and compliance with international SPS and food safety standards. The training to farmers and firms will include SPS and food safety practices, such as integrated pest management, post-harvest handling, and good agricultural practices/good manufacturing practices, as well as use of traceability technology and the single window (VUCE) and other applicable systems.

IESC will also provide technical assistance to private labs in conducting SPS and food safety testing in accordance with international standards as well as other applicable systems. IESC will raise consumer awareness of food safety through media campaigns. Beneficiaries of this activity include producers, firms, private labs, and consumers.

Theory of Change: TraSa's theory of change is **if** Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and food safety policies across government agencies and the private sector are prioritized and coordinated by technically strengthened national organizing bodies; and **if** key agencies in government institutions have increased technical and managerial capacity to implement a science- and risk-based SPS and food safety system; and **if** appropriate cold chain infrastructure for enforcement of and compliance with SPS and food safety is in place; and **if** firms and farmers consistently apply knowledge gained from SPS-related training and technical assistance, **then** the safety of food and agricultural products and efficiencies in trade are improved and result in expanded domestic, regional, and international trade in agricultural products as well as increased agricultural productivity.

3. Period of Performance

IESC is seeking a third-party contractor (independent consultant or firm) to conduct a TraSa Baseline Study and a TraSa Mid-Term and TraSa Final Evaluation during the life of the project. IESC will award the contract for the TraSa Baseline Study, with option periods for the mid-term and final evaluations. IESC will award the option period awards based on the performance of the previous study or evaluation and exercised by modification to the base contract. The TraSa Baseline Study and the TraSa Mid-Term and Final Evaluations' anticipated dates are as follows:

- TraSa Baseline Study due April 15, 2021, conducted over the period of February-March 2021

- TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation due November 15, 2023, conducted over the period of September- October 2023; and,
- TraSa Final Evaluation, due September 15, 2025, conducted over the period of June-August 2025.

The period of performance of any contract resulting from this solicitation is anticipated to begin on or about February 1, 2021 but is dependent upon USDA's approval of the final terms of reference of this RFP. The duration of the contract is until the TraSa project ends in September 2025, unless the option periods are not exercised.

4. Scope Statement

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

- Undertake a comprehensive approach to evaluating project performance and impact, including proposing key evaluation questions that aim to assess sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, standards, and regulations. 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 TraSa will build evidence to help answer at least five 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 TraSa's contractor will conduct the TraSa Baseline Study and TraSa Midterm Evaluation and Final Evaluations. The overall objectives of the TraSa Baseline Study and subsequent evaluations are to establish baseline values for indicators and impartially evaluate the TraSa 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.

The study and two evaluations will be conducted by the contractor (subject to extension options) and will examine both administrative and programmatic aspects of TraSa 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 TraSa project staff, including the TraSa Steering Committee comprised of key U.S. government and Dominican government stakeholders, USDA staff, and other USDA implementers.

The key audience for the Midterm and Final Evaluation include the above as well as IESC TraSa's international partners, the University of Purdue, Global Cold Chain Alliance- World Food Logistics Organization (GCCA- WFLO), LixCap and local partners as applicable, TraSa participants and beneficiaries, and trade associations and agencies within the government of the Dominican Republic. 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>.

USDA will make all final versions of the evaluation reports publicly available. IESC and the offeror 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 TraSa contractor will operate according to the approved TraSa 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 TraSa 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

Purpose and scope. Baseline data is central to measuring progress on performance indicators and assessing project outcomes and impacts using evaluation methods. The TraSa Baseline Study will lay the groundwork for all future monitoring and evaluation activities by undertaking the following:

- Establishing baseline data (and trendline, as applicable) for eight performance indicators (five standard and three custom) prior to the start of project activities;
- Establishing baseline data and trendline for four context indicators;
- Verifying realism of all proposed targets; and,
- Thoroughly documenting fit-for-purpose data collection methods for relevant indicators to ensure the same can be applied throughout the life of the project to the extent possible, increasing the likelihood of data reliability.

The TraSa Baseline Study will mainly obtain data for the following eight performance indicators:

1. Custom Indicator 4: Number of firms that pay to use improved cold chain inspection areas;
2. FFPr Indicator 4: Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance;
3. FFPr Indicator 11: Number of host government or community-derived risk management plans formally proposed, adopted, implemented or institutionalized with USDA assistance;
4. FFPr Indicator 3: Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance;

5. FFPr Indicator 18: Value of annual sales of farms and firms receiving USDA assistance;
6. FFPR Indicator 19: Volume of commodities sold by farms and firms receiving USDA assistance;
7. Custom Indicator 2: Percent change in APHIS EANs for selected commodities; and,
8. Custom Indicator 5: Percent change in facility income from project-supported testing labs

For these eight indicators, the TraSa Baseline Study needs to: 1) document the current management practices used; 2) establish hectares under improved management practices; 3) establish value and volume of sales; 4) identify any existing risk management plans; 5) establish the number of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Emergency Action Notifications (EAN) for the baseline year in order to measure improvement accurately; and 6) establish the current income from and prices of pre-identified, high-demand SPS tests.

The anticipated methodology is a 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?

In addition to the above, the TraSa Baseline Study will provide baselines from reliable secondary resources for the following four context indicators:

- Context Indicator #1 Value of agricultural exports in U.S. dollars;
- Context Indicator #2 Volume of agricultural exports in metric tons (MT);
- Context Indicator #3 Value of agricultural imports in U.S. dollars; and,
- Context Indicator #4 Volume of agricultural imports in MT.

The contractor will submit the sampling methodology to IESC for approval before the TraSa Baseline Study commences. The estimated sample size will be designed to reflect a representative sample for each type of beneficiary population. It must ensure a 95 percent confidence level with a five to 10 percent margin of error. The table below is a snapshot of IESC's proposed sampling strategy.

Table 1: Sampling Strategy			
Indicator	Estimated Project Population	Proposed Sampling Methodology	Expected Sample Size
FFPr Indicator #4 (individuals applying improved practices)	1,875	Stratified, cluster	139
FFPr Indicator # 3 Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance.	1,875	Stratified cluster	139
FFPr Indicator #18 Value of annual sales of farms and firms receiving USDA assistance.	1,875	Stratified cluster	200
FFPr Indicator #19 Volume of commodities sold by farms and firms receiving USDA assistance.	1,875	Stratified cluster	200
FFPr Indicator #11 (host government, any level)	10	All will be reached for interviews	10
Custom Indicator #5 (project-supported testing labs)	4	All will be reached for interviews	4

It is during this time that technical staff, in coordination with the TraSa Baseline Study contractor, will set expectations with pre-identified beneficiaries on reporting responsibilities (the “what” and “how often” to report). It is important to manage expectations at the outset to enable a smooth data collection process during the life of the project without imposing undue burden to beneficiaries. A mutual understanding of the reporting requirements will ensure that data will be available on a frequency needed by the project to inform implementation as well as special studies and midterm and final evaluations.

Due to the likelihood that COVID-19 will still be prevalent during the TraSa Baseline Study period (early 2021), all in-person interactions and data collection with pre-identified beneficiaries will follow DR public health protocols to protect the beneficiaries and the evaluation team. These protocols may change so the contractor’s ability to adapt to changes related to COVID-19 safety precautions is an important consideration.

6.2. Midterm Evaluation

The purpose of the midterm evaluation is to critically and objectively assess: TraSa's implementing experience and the implementing environment; whether targeted beneficiaries are receiving services as expected; whether TraSa is on track to meet its stated goals and objectives, review the project-level results frameworks and assumptions, document initial lessons learned, and discuss necessary modifications or mid-course corrections. The scope of the evaluation will assess the relevance of interventions, provide an early signal of the effectiveness of interventions, and assess sustainability.

The TraSa Midterm Evaluation objectives are as follows:

1. 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. 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; and,
3. Recommend adjustments, if and as necessary, 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 TraSa 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 project activities to date addressed the core issues of target beneficiaries?
- **Effectiveness:** Is the project on track to achieve the specific targets and results established? Which activity or combination of activities has/have the highest potential to be the most effective approach to achieve the project's higher-level result of expanded trade through an advanced SPS and food safety system? How effective is the project at reaching women beneficiaries and what more could be done to improve women's engagement?

- **Efficiency:** To what extent are staffing, management, and oversight costs suitable given the number/scope of activities carried out?
- **Sustainability:** What factors contribute toward sustainability of project results and how has TraSa focused on these to date?
- **Impact:** What are the immediate-, medium-, and long-term effects, both intended and unintended as well as positive and negative, of the project to-date?
Other: To what extent have COVID-19-related restrictions or protocols, both domestic and international, affected project implementation?

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 TraSa and USDA representatives. Although the prevalence of COVID-19 two and a half years after project start-up (2023) will likely have decreased, the evaluation contractor will assess the situation at that time and include any COVID-19 considerations in its data collection methodology.

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 to 10 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 TraSa Midterm Evaluation will be conducted at the project's midpoint, or just following at the beginning of Year Three (October 2023). IESC will submit the final Midterm Evaluation report to USDA.

6.3. Final Evaluation

The purpose of the TraSa 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 TraSa project design, implementation, management, and replicability; lessons learned and recommendations for USDA, TraSa 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 TraSa Final Evaluation must also determine whether recommendations from the TraSa Midterm Evaluation were incorporated into the project and if not, why not?

The TraSa 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 TraSa 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 TraSa achieve the specific targets and results established? Which activity or combination of activities proved to be the most effective approach to achieve the project's higher-level results (expanded local, regional, and international trade)? To what extent did project activities influence women and youth involvement in the SPS, food safety, and trade facilitation space?
- **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 project benefits will endure over time after TraSa ends? To what extent has TraSa developed local ownership and sustainable partners
- **Impact:** What are the immediate-, medium-, and long-term effects, intended and unintended, positive and negative, of the project after nearly five years of implementation?
- **Other:** What was the overall impact of COVID-19 restrictions/protocols on project results?

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

- Did an increase in the knowledge and use of improved agricultural techniques and technologies contribute to an increase in agricultural productivity? (SO1);
- To what extent did increased adoption of established standards improve quality of products and contribute to expanded trade? (SO2, results stream 1); and,
- To what extent did activities around improved policy and regulatory framework help? (Foundational Result)

The methodology for the TraSa 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 TraSa staff and USDA. As in the TraSa Midterm Evaluation,

the evaluation contractor will assess the situation at that time and include any COVID-19 considerations in its data collection methodology as needed. The details around survey design, interview questions, and sampling will be confirmed 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 TraSa. IESC aims to establish plausible association through contribution analysis rather than scientific attribution through randomized impact evaluations.

The TraSa Final Evaluation will be conducted three 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 TraSa Final Evaluation with USDA at the start of the project Year 5.

7. Statement Of Work – Evaluation Deliverables

7.1. Schedule of Authorities

The contractor will report to the IESC associate vice president, TraSa chief of party, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) director.

7.2. Deliverables

The contractor will undertake the following tasks:

Note: Deliverables beyond the TraSa Baseline Study section are subject to the contract extension periods represented as option periods exercised at IESC's discretion and based on the contractor's performance on previous performance (TraSa Baseline Study and TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation respectively).

TraSa Baseline Study

The TraSa 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 TraSa Baseline Study report in English, addressing all Study objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard IESC TraSa 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 TraSa 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 TraSa office).

The final version of the TraSa 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.

TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation

The TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation deliverables from the evaluation team include but are not limited to the following:

- TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation work plan, which includes the following:
 - TraSa Mid-Term 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 TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation, and should be written in language that is easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables;
- An electronic draft the TraSa Midterm Evaluation report in English, addressing all evaluation objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard IESC TraSa 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 TraSa 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 TraSa Mid-Term 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 TraSa Mid-Term 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.

TraSa Final Evaluation

The TraSa Final Evaluation deliverables from the contractor include but are not limited to the following:

- The TraSa 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 TraSa Final Evaluation, and should be written in

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

- An electronic draft the TraSa 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 TraSa 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 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 TraSa Baseline Study, TraSa Mid-Term Evaluation, and TraSa Final Evaluation;
- A description of the recommended evaluation methodologies that demonstrates an understanding of TraSa's expected impact and implementation approach;
- An implementation plan in the form of a one-page Gantt chart, must be included as an annex. The implementation plan must reflect the narrative. The implementation plan must include the action name, timeline by week, output/ milestone, team owner, and IESC support if required.
- 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 TraSa project's actual implementation budget of \$13.7 million at roughly three percent. 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 *TraSa Program in the DR Request for Proposals - Evaluation Services Annex A Budget Template*. Offerors may contact Brynn Miller, Program Associate, at bmiller@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 have the option of proposing a 10 percent de minimus 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 base-line 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: Brynn Miller, Program Associate, at bmiller@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 bmiller@iesc.org not later than **5:00 p.m., Washington DC Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), on Tuesday, December 15, 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 **Thursday, December 17, 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 that 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, and not included on the Technical proposal***)
- 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 development programs;
- 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 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,
- Have in-country experience and can effectively navigate the required data collection methods considering COVID-19; and,
- Use local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the evaluation.

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;
- **Food Safety and Trade Facilitation Specialist**, a local Dominican economist or social science researcher (Master's degree preferred) with an analytical background in agricultural health and food safety. Knowledge and experience in trade facilitation processes and systems preferred. The Specialist should have at least eight years of relevant experience; will support the team leader in the baseline design, implementation of evaluation activities and report preparation; and,
- **Researcher**, a local Dominican 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 could 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 TraSa’s complex design and context, including methodology, general approach, and detailed approach to each study and evaluation. An implementation/Gantt chart plan should be included for the Baseline Study.)	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 TraSa’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 with 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 TraSa 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;
- 8) In addition, please note that for external evaluations, all contractor evaluation team members will provide a signed statement attesting to a lack of conflict of interest, or disclosing any real or potential conflicts of interest. USDA requires that all 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.

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

-END-