

Request for Proposals (RFP)

(This RFP has been revised on February 16, 2022. All changes and additions are highlighted in yellow)

Evaluation Services for IESC

Issue Date:	Tuesday, January 31, 2023
Closing Date For Proposals:	Monday, February 27, 2023
Closing Time:	5:00 pm EDT
Project Title:	Evaluation Services – Northern Central America Region
RFP Reference Number:	ATRACSI- RFP-001-2023

1. Disclaimer

The information contained in this request for proposals (hereinafter referred to as RFP) document is provided to the Offeror(s) by Improving Economies for Stronger Communities (IESC). IESC is the prime implementor of the Food for Progress Agricultural Trade and Climate Smart Innovations (ATraCSI) project implemented in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

IESC desires to receive proposals from companies (Offerors) to serve as evaluators for IESC's ATraCSI Project.

IESC plans to award one contract. IESC will award the contract for the ATraCSI Baseline Evaluation with option periods for the ATraCSI Midterm and Final Evaluations. IESC will award option period awards based on the performance of the previous evaluation and exercised by modification to the base contract.

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 making an award, Activities are anticipated to begin in March 2023.

Note that proposal notification, award, and start dates are subject to change at USDA or IESC's discretion. Any activities under a final agreement are subject to and will be carried

out in accordance with the regulations promulgated by the donor under the Office of Management and Budget guidance at 2 CFR part 200, as supplemented by 2 CFR part 400 and 7 CFR part 1499, other regulations that are generally applicable to grants and cooperative agreements of USDA, including the applicable regulations set forth in 2 CFR chapter I, II, and IV, and any other subsequently published rule or regulation governing the 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.

IESC estimated total cost range is up to \$850,000 to \$955,000 as follows:

- \$300,000 to \$335,000 Base Period for ATraCSI Baseline Study;
- \$250,000 to \$285,000 Option Period 1 for the ATraCSI Midterm Evaluation;
- \$300,000 to \$335,000 Option Period 2 for the ATraCSI Final Evaluation.
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2. ATraCSI Project Background

IESC is a leading U.S. nonprofit organization that fosters private sector development in the economically developing world. Since 1964, we have delivered lasting solutions that have resulted in more than 1.5 million jobs in 137 countries. We partner with businesses, cooperatives, entrepreneurs, jobseekers, and governments to sustainably build capacity, create jobs, and grow enterprises, sharing proven skills and experience that improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities around the world. Our major funders today are the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), among others.

IESC is the prime implementer of the Agricultural Trade and Climate Smart Innovations Project, a Food for Progress trade facilitation, sanitary phytosanitary (SPS), and climate smart agricultural (CSA) project in the Northern Central American Region (NCAR) funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The project aims to address root causes of migration via a holistic approach to trade via the horticulture sector. The project will focus on implementing international and risk based SPS measures, implement measures under the existing World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreements (TFA), and assist in strengthening CSA through development and transfer of agriculture technologies that focus on effective, sustainable, and environmentally friendly use of agricultural resources which focus on the high value horticulture value chains in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The project will support 22,486 direct beneficiaries and 112,267 indirect beneficiaries by (1) improving customs systems and procedures, (2) implementing measures under the existing TFA, (3) building institutional capacity for SPS, (4) strengthening SPS risk management systems and regional harmonization, and (5) strengthening climate smart farm-level horticultural value chains to curb economic pressures for migration. With the private and public sectors, the project will reduce nontariff barriers to trade and will result in a 20 percent decrease in release time of agricultural goods. The project will create improvements in predictability through transparency and automation of processes.

With an estimated value of \$31.1 million in technical and management funds the project will run for five years, from October 2022, through September 2027. The project identified five key activities that together address the root causes of migration through a holistic approach to horticulture and trade in the NCAR.

These activities are summarized as follows:

Activity 1: Improve TFA Customs Systems and Procedures

The project will use science- and risk-based food and agricultural inspections to accelerate the clearance and release of shipments. The project will provide technical assistance to improve food and agricultural inspection processes and procedures, to incorporate technology use and facilitate compliance with the TFA Article 5. The project will provide technical expertise and deliver capacity training in the use of modern information and communications technology (ICT) solutions for release and clearance processes. The project will facilitate the expansion of the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program, reinforce separation of clearance and release procedures, and advance use of cold chain logistics hubs. The project will conduct a cold chain infrastructure study with the aim in part to guide future investments and ensure compliance with the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) provision on perishable goods. The project will strengthen the capacity through training and knowledge sharing events of border and port authority coordination to integrate inspections that improve food safety and minimize exposure to ambient temperatures. The project will design and award small grants to companies seeking to join the AEO programs or other trade facilitative solutions.

Activity 2: Increase SPS Institutional Capacity

The project will conduct a gap assessment to develop customized trainings for Departments of Plant Health and Animal Health of the Ministry of Agriculture, in addition to related institutions responsible for Sanitary Phyto Sanitary (SPS) regulations in all three countries. The gap assessments will inform strategic plans for structural improvements, human resources, and management systems. The project will provide technical expertise and training to strengthen capacities in each country's alignment with the WTO SPS agreement, International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), Codex Alimentarius international food standards, SPS provisions of the Dominican Republic - Central America, Free Trade Agreement (DR -CAFTA), and regional integration agreements. The project will

develop and deploy SPS training programs for the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, laboratories, and other agencies. The training will improve compliance with the United States Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and other end market food safety requirements. In addition, the project will provide training for the public sector to better partner with the private sector in facilitating small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and farmer compliance with food safety, quality, and labeling regulations. The project will deliver training related to strengthening certification services offered by public entities related Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), and other SPS training required to meet international standards. The project will facilitate institutional strengthening by providing technical expertise, in-kind equipment, including new hardware and software ICT systems. The project will provide customized technical assistance plans that deliver expertise through consultants and training in policy analysis and regulatory impact research.

Activity 3: Harmonize Regional SPS Risk Management Systems

The project will provide software and technical expertise to strengthen the agricultural trade components of each country's official single windows for foreign trade and facilitate the integration of the USDA supported International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) ePhyto Hub. The project will collaborate with the Departments of Plant Health and Animal Health of the Ministries of Agriculture to provide technical expertise to national digitalization initiatives and preclearance processes, export certifications, and establish an online database for import and export requirements for perishable agricultural and animal products. The project will provide technical expertise, and in-kind equipment including ICT purchases. The project will provide training and facilitate research on Codex discussions and Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) policy to strengthen the harmonization MRLs regulations. This effort includes training on MRL regulatory processes and development of a regulatory impact study. The project will facilitate the improvement of plant and animal health monitoring and surveillance systems to generate data for SPS risk analysis and management. The project may conduct training on national pre-inspection regiments or Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) systems approach in coordination with USDA, APHIS, and government stakeholders. The project will incorporate the use of ICT to increase efficiency, train inspectors, and will conduct a cost-benefit analysis to review the expansion of pest risk management programs.

Activity 4: Strengthen Climate Smart Agriculture

The project will provide training in agriculture practices to increase productivity, income, and trade while mitigating the impact of climate change. The project will use farmer field schools and other group training practices to promote agriculture intercropping, diversification, and land optimization among other appropriate strategies. The project will conduct a value chain analysis and landscape summary in horticultural products, with a focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation. The project will provide training to farmers including business financial management and establishing market linkages.

The project will provide technical training in post-harvest practices for quality and food safety compliance, including training packages that provide coaching and, through grants, cost-shared equipment upgrades needed to adhere to the U.S. Food Modernization Safety Act (FMSA) and other destination markets food safety regulation requirements.

The assistance may include improving farmer access to inputs and grants to incentivize adoption of climate-smart technologies, participatory research on farm-level climate-smart agriculture innovations, investing in cold chain practices, and cold chain technology. The project aims to strengthen farmer organizations to provide grants for companies to develop solutions for long-term engagement with smallholder farmers and to advance gender and racial equity.

Activity 5: Facilitate On-Demand Mechanism

The project will manage an on-demand funding mechanism to respond to opportunities that meet project objectives and promote agricultural trade facilitation reforms presented by the Governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The project will consult with the FAS (Foreign Agriculture Service) project manager and the agriculture counselor/attaché posted in Guatemala on interventions funded through this activity to ensure interventions address specific priority issues that enhance trade. As part of the intervention review process, the project will analyze each request's alignment with project objectives, potential impact related to the project's indicators, and level of institutional buy-in, then submit a written request to USDA for approval prior to implementation. The project will seek cost-share where appropriate to leverage public spending and demonstrate buy-in.

Theory of Change

The project's theory of change states:

If Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador simplify, modernize, and harmonize export, import, and transit processes related to horticulture products per the WTO TFA and regional agreements; **and if** governments develop and implement science- and risk-based SPS/food safety measures, standards, and regulations with technical capacity increased; **and if** farmers, farmer associations, and packinghouses adopt climate smart and SPS/food safety compliant practices and technologies for horticultural production; **then** efficiency, coordination, and transparency of the commercialization, trade, and safety of horticultural products will improve; local, regional, and international trade of the three countries will increase and diversify; farm productivity will increase, and farmers will be more resilient to climate change shocks; and expanded economic opportunity will mitigate root causes of migration.

Target Beneficiaries and Geographical Areas

The project supports a wide range of beneficiaries who represent levels of engagement with the entire SPS and food safety system. The project interventions related to the WTO TFA (Activity 1) and SPS (Activities 2 and 3) are at the national level in Guatemala,

Honduras, and El Salvador. The methodology and criteria for selecting geographies for the climate smart agriculture interventions (Activity 4) are linked to the project priority value chains.

To address the root causes of migration, the project reviewed USAID’s analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection and UN International Organization for Migration data that identifies origination points for the majority of migrants and prioritizes value chains linked to the geographies. The project’s priority geographies are areas where migration and illustrative horticulture value chains align.

- El Salvador – Urban hubs of San Salvador, San Miguel, and Santa Ana – Food Processing.
- Guatemala – Western Highlands – Avocado, Off-Season Vegetables, Berries.
- Honduras – Sula Valley, North Coast, Central Corridor, Western Honduras, Eastern Hub - Peppers, Asian Vegetables, Pumpkin, Squash, Cucumber, Tropical Fruits, and Vegetables.

Figure 1: Map illustrating priority geographical areas and value chains



The project has three types of beneficiaries from the public and private sectors:

Public sector— The project selects individual beneficiaries from key public sector agencies based on their roles and responsibilities in SPS, food safety, and trade facilitation, decision making authority and ability to build buy-in for reform, in consultation

with their employers with an emphasis on early to mid-career professionals and gender inclusion.

Private sector— Private sector participants in the project are selected through an open competitive process. All private sector participants will be selected based on (1) Active in the selected value chains, (2) Linkages to export markets, (3) Demonstrated motivation to invest in SPS, food safety, cold chain and/or climate smart agriculture, (4) Proven interest in engaging smallholders and/or inclusive employment. In addition to the above criteria for engagement with the project will prioritize women-, minority-, or indigenous-owned SMEs.

Smallholder farmers— The project will engage with smallholder farmers based on requests from companies and /or farmer organizations with a specific focus on women and youth smallholders. Selected smallholder farmers will have a connection to a buyer or farmer organization in the project targeted value chain and will have a strong incentive to engage in SPS, food safety, and/or climate smart agriculture.

3. Period of Performance

IESC is seeking a third-party contractor (firm) to conduct a baseline study and two required evaluations (mid-term and final) during the life of the 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, midterm, and final evaluations and their anticipated dates are as follows:

- The project’s baseline evaluation due on or around June 15, 2023, conducted over the period of March to May 2023;
- The project’s midterm evaluation due July 31, 2025, conducted over the period of April to June 2025; and
- The project’s final evaluation, due July 31, 2027, conducted over the period of April to June 2027.

Anticipated Timeline:

EVALUATION	EVALUATION TIMELINE	FINAL REPORT DUE DATE
Baseline	March to May 2023	June 15, 2023
Midterm	April to June 2025	July 31, 2025
Final Evaluation	April to June 2027	July 31, 2027



The period of performance of any contract resulting from this solicitation is anticipated to begin on or about March 2023. The duration of the contract is until the ATraCSI program ends in September 2027.

Each of the evaluations noted above be designed to accomplish the following:

- Undertake a comprehensive approach to evaluating project performance and impact, including proposing key evaluation questions that aim to assess the project's effect on (1) the implementation of the WTO TFA in the NCAR, (2) homogenized SPS measures, standards and regulations, and (3) the adoption of climate smart agricultural techniques (4) migration out of the NCAR;
- 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 the project will build evidence to help answer at least three key learning questions determined by IESC with input from USDA in advance of each evaluation from the FFPr Learning Agenda.

The successful contractor will be tasked with planning and generating the project's baseline study, midterm evaluation, and final evaluations provided the prior study or evaluation was delivered on time and with the quality expected by IESC and USDA.

4. Scope Statement

The project is seeking a third-party contractor (firm) to conduct three required evaluations during the life of the project. The baseline, midterm, and final evaluations All quotations must be valid for sixty (60) days.

5. Statement Of Work

5.1. Schedule of Authorities

The contractor will report to the Home Office Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Director.

5.2. Evaluation Services Objectives and Scope

In compliance with USDA's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy, the project's contractor will conduct a baseline study, and if awarded the option periods, the midterm and final evaluations. The overall objectives of the project's baseline study and subsequent evaluations are to establish and impartially evaluate the 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 an independent third-party team (the “contractor”) and will examine both administrative and programmatic aspects of the project related to data capture, measurement, and intervention impact. The 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 G. Qualifications and Technical Criteria Requirements.

Third-party, per USDA 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 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.”

The evaluator must take necessary precautions regarding COVID-19. Evaluation activities must not threaten the safety of evaluators, project stakeholders/staff, and the general public. The evaluator must comply with local law and health ordinances when implementing the evaluation.

5.3. Key Audience

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>.

The key audience for the baseline study includes the project staff, the project steering committee comprised of USDA/Washington, USDA/Guatemala, representatives of the Governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the private sector, and others as appropriate as identified by USDA.

The key audience for the midterm and final evaluations include the above as well as the project’s international partners, the Corporation of Salvadorian Exporters (COEXPORT), Guatemalan Association of Exporters (AGEXPORT), Honduran Foundation for Agricultural Research (FHIA), Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), Purdue University, and the World Food Logistics Organization - Global Cold Chain Alliance (WFLO-GCCA), The project participants and trade associations and agencies within the governments of El Salvador Guatemala, and Honduras. These evaluations also intend to benefit other USDA implementers, and the development community in general.

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.

5.4. Methodology and Evaluations

The project evaluation team will operate according to the approved evaluation plan. The evaluations will be performance evaluations (i.e., with no comparison groups). The evaluations will employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods (surveys, focus group discussions with direct observation of target beneficiaries, and key informant interviews with government officials and relevant public/private stakeholders, as well as the 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 provided in this section.

5.5. Evaluation Management and Coordination

The evaluations will be supported by the home-office MEL director, who leads IESC’s dedicated evaluation unit based in Washington, DC in collaboration with the CoP and the project’s MEL director in conjunction with the IESC home-office program team. The project staff will assist the evaluator by providing logistical support during the baseline study and midterm and final evaluations. Roles and responsibilities for IESC staff and partners are outlined below.

STAFF	ROLE
Chief of Party	Providing necessary project documents.

	Introducing the team to stakeholders (government, private sector and NTFCs) Getting government approvals for government site visits
The project MEL Director	Logistical support to evaluation team. Identification of the required stakeholders. Setting up required stakeholder meetings and site visits.
Home Office MEL Director	Ensuring independence of the evaluator. Ensuring agreed methodologies are followed. Evaluation quality assurance.
Home Office project Team	Providing project information. Liaison between the project team and evaluator. Submission of evaluation reports. Evaluation contract management.
Partners	Providing site visits facilitation

5.6. Ethical Guidelines

Every member of the evaluation team must adhere to ethical guidelines as outlined in the American Evaluation Association’s Guiding Principles for Evaluators. A summary of these guidelines is provided below.

- **Systematic Inquiry:** Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries.
- **Competence:** The evaluation team possesses the education, abilities, skills, and experience appropriate to undertake the tasks proposed in the evaluation. Evaluators practice within the limits of their professional training and competence and decline to conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits. The evaluation team collectively demonstrates cultural competence.
- **Integrity/Honesty:** Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
- **Respect for People:** Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, project participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders. Evaluators regard informed consent for participation in evaluation and inform participants and clients about the scope and limits of confidentiality.
- **Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare:** Evaluators articulate and consider the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.

Evaluation activities must not endanger the evaluation team, project stakeholders /staff, and public health. The evaluator must comply with local law and health ordinances when implementing the evaluation.

5.7. Activities

The contractor is expected to undertake the following tasks:

1. Task One: 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, monitor the assumptions during the project implementations and identify potential threats to project success. The baseline study will obtain data for the following ten performance indicators:

INDICATOR NO.	INDICATOR NAME
Ind 1 - FFPr #1	Yield of targeted agricultural commodities among program participants with USDA assistance
Ind 2 - FFPr #2	Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies that promote improved climate risk reduction and/or natural resources management with USDA assistance
Ind 3 - FFPr #3	Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance
Ind 4 - FFPr #4	Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USDA assistance
Ind 5 - FFPr #11	Number of host government or community-derived risk management plans formally proposed, adopted, implemented or institutionalized with USDA assistance
Ind 6 – FFPr #12	Number of organizations with increased performance improvement with USDA assistance
Ind 9 – FFPr #18	Value of annual sales of farms and firms receiving USDA assistance
Ind 10 - FFPR #19	Volume of commodities sold by farms and firms receiving USDA assistance

INDICATOR NO.	INDICATOR NAME
Ind 15 - Custom	Average release time (in hours) for agricultural goods
Ind 17 - Custom	Volume of selected commodities affected by number of EANs out of total volume exported to the USA

SUGGESTED SAMPLING STRATEGY			
INDICATOR	ESTIMATED PROJECT POPULATION	PROPOSED SAMPLING STRATEGY	EXPECTED SAMPLE SIZE
Ind 1 - FFPr #1 (yield of agricultural commodities)	Small scale Farmers - 6,550	Stratified/ Cluster	Small scale Farmers
Ind 2 - FFPr #2 (hectares under improved management practices that promote improved climate risk reduction)	El Salvador – 50 Guatemala – 6,000 Honduras – 500		El Salvador – 45 Guatemala – 362 Honduras – 218
Ind 3 - FFPr # 3 (hectares under improved management practices)	Private Sector (Large Farms)		Private Sector (Large Farms)
Ind 4 - FFPr #4 (individuals applying improved practices)	El Salvador – 1 Guatemala – 20		El Salvador – 1 Guatemala – 20
Ind 9 - FFPr #18 (value of sales)	Honduras – 15		Honduras – 15
Ind 10 - FFPr #19 (volume of sales)	Processing Plants El Salvador – 2 Guatemala – 10 Honduras – 2		Processing Plants El Salvador – 2 Guatemala – 10 Honduras – 2

SUGGESTED SAMPLING STRATEGY			
INDICATOR	ESTIMATED PROJECT POPULATION	PROPOSED SAMPLING STRATEGY	EXPECTED SAMPLE SIZE
Ind 5 - FFPr #11 (Risk management plans host government, any level)	6	All will be reached	6
Ind 6 – FFPr #12 (organizations with increased performance improvement)	6	All will be assessed	6
Ind 15 – Custom (average release time)	10 exporters	All will be reached	10 exporters
Ind 17 - Custom (volume affected by EANS out of total volume)	APHIS EAN report/s for the 2020 - 2022 period for selected commodities No sampling		

The anticipated methodology for the baseline study is a combination of secondary data analysis, interviews, surveys, and direct observation. Given the project’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 (2021) from the Central Banks of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, 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 Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador 's Central Banks and/or Ministries of Agriculture 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 the project technical staff may have.

The proposed sampling methodology for collecting baseline information for Each indicator requiring a baseline through this study is provided in the table above.

The proposed sampling methodology for FFPr standard indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 18 and 19 will be a multistage sampling—a combination of stratified or cluster. The sample will include: 1) crop-land based group of farmers/producers; 2) beneficiaries trained in cold chain practices, e.g., packinghouses and slaughterhouses. Data will be collected through

Farmer Survey and observation for farm level data and through Key Informant Interviews (KII) for packinghouses and slaughterhouses.

Data for FFPr indicator 11 (host government risk management plans) will be collected from national organizing bodies, e.g., overall SPS risk management plans with the National SPS Committee's and with the NTFC's, and any key public sector agency addressing TFA articles, environmental risks, and specific threats identified by USDA APHIS, including pests, such as the tomato leaf miner (*Tuta absoluta*). Data will be collected by KII.

For FFPr #12 (organizations with increased performance improvement), the evaluators will develop or recommend a tool that can be used to measure the SPS capacity of the ministries of Agriculture and Health in the 3 target countries. Evaluators will conduct the first administration of this tool to establish the baseline capacity in SPS of the abovementioned ministries. The tool must be robust, grounded in evidence, and simple to administer and score as it must be used by the project MEL team in subsequent years and results must be comparable to baseline scores. The tool developed/recommended by evaluators will be required to be approved by the IESC home office MEL director and CoP prior to administration by evaluators.

For custom indicator 15 (Average release time for agricultural goods) the evaluators will propose a methodology that will result in good quality data for all required disaggregates [Country, Channel (Red/green), direction of trade (export/import)] and is sufficiently elegantly designed that the project MEL team can manage and report this data without undue administrative burden in subsequent years of the project implementation. The data collection method for this indicator will be agreed with the evaluators prior to commencement of baseline activities.

For custom indicator 17 (Volume of selected commodities affected by EANS), the proposed methodology will be document review of data from the USDA database Agricultural Quarantine Activity System (AQAS) in the form of "shipment disposition summary" reports and "EAN summary for commodities" reports. The reports provide data by port and by product on a weekly basis but can be requested for specific periods of time. The project will focus on a reduction in the volume of trade affected by EANS for the following targeted commodities: pineapple, avocado, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers (both bell peppers and chili peppers), papaya, limes, and eggplant. The horticultural value chain analysis planned in Year 1 may also recommend adjustments to this list based on market demands, opportunities, and rejection risks that IESC would discuss with USDA. If there are additions or changes, IESC would document those changes, report changes in semi-annual reports, and seek to formalize change through the midterm and/or final evaluation as appropriate. If commodities are added the project team will establish a baseline for these commodities using the same methodology employed by the baseline contractor.

The evaluators will ensure that they are familiar with the standard definitions, required disaggregates and disaggregate tree structure, and will ensure that all the required data

points are available following the baseline. The evaluators will further ensure that the methodology and tools applied to the baseline can be used for (1) ongoing data reporting at semi-annual (only for relevant indicators) and annual reporting (all indicators) periods, and (2) the midterm evaluation and final evaluation to ensure comparability of results.

The evaluators should consider that data collection methodologies may need to be revised from the approach specified in the TOR and evaluation plan to accommodate health and safety precautions/requirements related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The final data collection methods should be communicated to IESC, and the evaluator should clearly describe in the evaluation report how they collected data as well as any potential limitations and/or implications for interpreting evaluation findings.

The baseline will help the project answer the following questions;

- What are the baseline values for the 10 indicators (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, and 17) that require a baseline? Are there any reasons to adjust the context indicators (19 to 23)?
- Do the indicators or indicator definitions need revision or adjustments?
- Do the targets need revision or adjustments, based on more current data and/or decisions by public or private sector stakeholders that would positively or negatively affect current and future production and sales of value chains crops/products?
- Does the project theory of change still hold? Are the assumptions still valid? Do the assumptions consider potential impacts of loss of labor for production, harvesting, and packing horticultural crops; national elections in each of the countries; climate stress, e.g., draughts; natural disasters, e.g., earthquakes in Guatemala or hurricanes in Honduras; and plant plaques?
 - Mobilization of people: What activities on the project are going to be needed to approach if there is a massive mobilization of people (caravans) since agriculture sector will be losing labor?
 - Political changes: Reduction of percent in some indicators might be affected. Which indicators are most likely to be affected if political changes are held dramatically?
 - Natural disasters: What are the impacts of natural disasters in reaching the targets?
 - Major plague or infestation: which targets of the project will be affected with a major plague or infestation spread?

Examples of questions that could be included in the baseline are as follows. However, the contractor will develop a final list of questions in consultation with the project's senior leadership and USDA prior to the commencement of the evaluation field work:

- **Communication:**

- **TFA:** Does the NTFC in each country have an action plan that is shared with and agreed to by (public and private) decision makers? How often does the NTFC meet/should the NTFC meet to advance and report progress against that action plan?
 - **SPS:** Are SPS requirements published electronically and included in outreach and extension activities? Are they understood by public sector management of those processes and communicated to their field staff? Are they understood and put into practice by private sector actors (exporters, packinghouses, small holder farmer suppliers to exporters) responsible for adhering to those processes?
 - **CSA:** What is the level of familiarity with CSA concepts and practices as defined by FAO and USDA: conservation tillage; cover cropping; nutrient management; agroforestry; on-farm water management, e.g., drip irrigation; and other practices to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at the farm and packinghouse levels? What acknowledgement at the farm level is there of the effects of climate change on production and sales, and other challenges?
- **Implementation:**
 - **TFA:** Does the NTFC have targets related to digitalization of services in trade facilitation related to agriculture non-tariff barriers (NTBs)? If so, what are they doing to advance those services in their government? How and when do you believe these targets would be achievable? Why or why not?
 - **SPS:** What measures have horticultural value chains' sectors taken to prevent or reduce the risk of pest/plague infestations in production, handling, and transport to markets? How are producers collaborating to spread best practices, e.g., integrated pest management? What could be improved/implemented to increase adoption of best practices?
 - **CSA:** To what extent are farmers already implementing CSA practices e.g., conservation tillage; cover cropping; nutrient management; agroforestry; and other practices to reduce GHG? What effects are these practices having on productivity and profitability of horticulture value chains' crops. What CSA practices are likely to be well received and willingly implemented by small scale farmers?
 - **Governance:**
 - **TFA:** Do the NTFCs have a formalized governance structure? Do the NTFCs encourage and is there evidence of participation of all sectors (public and private) involved with the NTFC?
 - **SPS:** What have been/are examples of public-private efforts to increase SPS harmonization among El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras agriculture in general and horticulture crops in particular?

- **CSA:** What are examples of and degree to which public institutions and private brokers, exporters, buyers support farmers through training and access to inputs to facilitate adaptation/adoption of CSA practices? Are farmers aware of and making use of this support? What more can be done?
- **Relevance:**
 - Relevance related questions are anticipated for the midterm and final evaluations.
- **Effectiveness:**
 - **TFA:** What are the top three specific NTFCs' priority areas in each country and how well are the NTFCs setting and achieving specific targets in those priority areas? What would you like to see adjusted or changed in the way NTFC fulfills its mandate?
 - **SPS:** What could be done to improve the effectiveness of SPS programs in the respective country? What practices/techniques for pest prevention and control are most cost effective?
 - **CSA:** How can the project best communicate the challenges and benefits of climate change mitigation at the farm and packinghouse level. What are examples of effective ways to encourage and adopt CSA practices at the farm and packinghouse level?
- **Impact:**
 - **TFA:** In what ways is the NTFC in each country fulfilling or not fulfilling their mandate?
 - **SPS:** As the value chain actors respond to stricter SPS regulations, they will have to absorb higher costs of inputs and ensure compliance requirements (testing and certification services, etc.); what impact and what adjustments need to take place to ensure current and future profitability?
 - **CSA:** What profit incentives related to CSA are farmers adopting and how are public and private organizations support them in this adjustment? Based on experiences what activities are most likely to foster CSA practices? What is the effect of implementation of CSA on outward migration, and how does outward migration of labor affect application of CSA practices?

2. Task Two: Midterm Evaluation

The purpose of the project's midterm evaluation is to critically and objectively take stock of the project's implementing experience and the implementing environment, assess whether targeted beneficiaries are receiving services as expected, assess if the project 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 are as follows:

1. To evaluate the quality and effectiveness of service delivery, the strengths and weaknesses of the 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 the 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.
4. Review the baseline study recommendations and the management response and assess to what extent those recommendations have been implemented.

The project's 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 the 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 achieve the project's higher-level result (expanded trade of agricultural products)? How effective is the project 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 the project 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 independent third-party contractor will use various methods (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 the project and USDA representatives.

The same contractor and 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 USDA 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 (March 2025). When establishing the timeline, evaluators will be advised to review recent evaluations (as relevant), completed by ongoing donor programs, including USAID, EU, IDB, the World Bank, and South Korea. If evaluations are not completed or available, the project will help set up interviews with those implementors for the evaluators to review lessons learned and relevant outputs against anticipated targets. This TOR will be updated and reviewed by USDA before the midterm and again at the final evaluation. IESC will submit the final Midterm Evaluation report to USDA for review and feedback prior to finalizing.

3. Task Three: Final Evaluation

The purpose of the project 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 the project design, implementation, management, and replicability; lessons learned and recommendations for USDA, the project 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 shall also determine whether recommendations from the midterm evaluation were incorporated into the project and if not, why not?

The project 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 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 the project 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, increased trade of agricultural products? Which activities were most effective in contributing to a reduction of average time and average cost of trade? Which activities were most effective in contributing to reduced outward migration?
- **Efficiency:** To what extent did the level of project resources lead to the 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 the project ends? To what extent has the project 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 five years of implementation?

The final evaluation’s questions will be finalized with the 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 expanded trade impact outward migration from the target countries (Foundational Result)?
- To what extent did activities around improved policy and regulatory framework help achieve expanded trade (Foundational Result)?
- To what extent did activities around CSA and SPS at the farm level impact small-scale farm incomes and outward migration?

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 the project’s staff and USDA (Mixed method). 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 the project.

The final evaluation will be conducted three to six months prior to completion of the project, barring any discussions of an extension, with the draft terms of reference submitted to USDA at least three months prior to the start of the evaluation. This TOR will be updated and reviewed by USDA before the midterm and again at the final evaluation. IESC will confirm the timing of the final evaluation with USDA at the start of the project and include it in the year four work plan.

5.8. Deliverables

5.8.1. Baseline Study

The baseline study's 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.
- A two to three-page stand-alone brief describing the evaluation design, key findings and other relevant considerations. It will serve to inform any interested stakeholders of the evaluation and should be written in language easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables.
- Provide the electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools, both in English and Spanish;
- Provide clean and final versions of quantitative datasets (one complete and one with all PII removed) and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;
- Provide electronic draft baseline study report in English, addressing all Study objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard [USDA report template](#). The report is estimated to range from 150- 200 pages excluding relevant annexes. It must include the following:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary (not to exceed 4 pages);
 - Introduction and Purpose;

- Evaluation Design and Methodology;
- Baseline Data Findings;
- Baseline Data Conclusions;
- Recommendations;
- Annexed bibliography;
- Annexed Table of indicator data with Baseline and targets;
- Annexed Results Framework (If not present in body of report)
- Annexed IESC response to findings;
- Annexed cleaned raw data and all analyses;
- Annexed data collection instruments;
- Annexed Conflict of interest forms; and
- Annexed photographs from meetings.
- Deliver an oral presentation supported by PowerPoint slides and any applicable electronic handouts of the evaluation findings in the IESC 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;
- Produce 15 to 20 high-quality pictures of the process, which are date and time stamped;
- Produce electronic English version of the baseline study report in PDF and MS Word.

The final version of the baseline study report will 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.
- Final versions of evaluation reports ready for publication should be accessible to persons with disabilities. For guidance on creating documents accessible to persons with disabilities, please see the following resources:
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/documents>
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/pdfs>

USDA reserves the right to any data produced (including the evaluation report) per 2 CFR 200.315 Intangible Property

5.8.2. 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.
- Provide the electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools in English;
- Provide clean and final versions of quantitative datasets and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;
- Generate 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 easy to understand by non-evaluators and with appropriate graphics and tables;
- Provide electronic draft midterm evaluation report in English, addressing all evaluation objectives and questions. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard **USDA report template**. The report is estimated to range from 150- 200 pages excluding relevant annexes. It must include the following:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary (not to exceed 4 pages);
 - Introduction and Purpose;
 - Evaluation Design and Methodology;
 - Findings;
 - Brief assessment of data quality (data collected by the project should be triangulated with and confirmed by data collected by the evaluator);
 - Suggestions and requests from beneficiaries;
 - Conclusions;
 - Recommendations for the remainder of the program;
 - Annexed bibliography;
 - Annexed Table of indicator data with Baseline, Mid-Term data and targets;
 - Annexed Results Framework (If not present in body of report);
 - Annexed IESC response to findings;
 - Annexed scope of work;
 - Annexed cleaned raw data and all analyses;
 - Annexed data collection instruments;
 - Annexed Conflict of interest forms; and
 - Annexed photographs from meetings.

- Deliver an oral presentation supported by PowerPoint slides and any applicable electronic handouts the evaluation findings in the IESC 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;
- Produce 15 to 20 high-quality pictures of the process, which are date and time stamped;
- Produce electronic English version of the final evaluation report in PDF and MS Word.

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 which one version of the midterm evaluation 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.
- Final versions of evaluation reports ready for publication should be accessible to persons with disabilities. For guidance on creating documents accessible to persons with disabilities, please see the following resources:
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/documents>
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USDA reserves the right to any data produced (including the evaluation report) per 2 CFR 200.315 Intangible Property

5.8.3. Final Evaluation

The final evaluation deliverables from the evaluation team 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.
- Provide electronic copies of all clean and final versions of data collection tools, both in English and Spanish;
- Produce clean and final versions (both English and Spanish) of quantitative datasets and qualitative transcripts in agreed upon format;

- Generate 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;
- Provide electronic draft final evaluation report in English, addressing all evaluation objectives and questions;
- Deliver oral presentation materials of evaluation findings in agreed upon format;
- Produce 15 to 20 high quality pictures of the process;
- Generate electronic final English version of the final evaluation report in PDF and Word. The report will be in Microsoft Word in a standard [USDA report template](#). The report is estimated to range from 150 to 200 pages excluding relevant annexes. The report should include, but not limited to the following:
 - List of acronyms/abbreviations;
 - Table of contents;
 - Executive summary (not to exceed 4 pages);
 - Introduction and Purpose;
 - Evaluation Design and Methodology;
 - Findings;
 - Brief assessment of data quality (data collected by the project should be triangulated with and confirmed by data collected by the evaluator);
 - Lessons Learned;
 - Suggestions and requests from beneficiaries;
 - Conclusions;
 - Assessment on implementation of recommendations from Mid Term evaluation;
 - Recommendations for USDA, participants, and key stakeholders;
 - Annexed bibliography;
 - Annexed Table of indicator data with Baseline, Mid-Term data and targets;
 - Annexed Results Framework (If not present in body of report);
 - Annexed IESC response to findings;
 - Annexed scope of work;
 - Annexed clean raw data and all analyses;
 - Annexed data collection instruments;
 - Annexed Conflict of interest forms; and
 - Annexed photographs from meetings.

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 which one version of the Final Evaluation 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.

- Final versions of evaluation reports ready for publication should be accessible to persons with disabilities. For guidance on creating documents accessible to persons with disabilities, please see the following resources:
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/documents>
 - <https://www.section508.gov/create/pdfs>

USDA reserves the right to any data produced (including the evaluation report) per 2 CFR 200.315 Intangible Property.

6. Contract Type

The contract is anticipated to be a cost-plus fixed fee service contract, to be paid in stages based on deliverables.

7. Instructions to Offerors

7.1. Submission

- 1) Offers received after the closing date may not be considered.
- 2) Offers must be in U.S. Dollars.
- 3) Technical and cost proposals must be submitted as two separate documents. Cost information must not be included in the technical proposal.

Offerors must submit their proposals by the closing date and time, as listed on page one, to the following: globalawards@iesc.org.

7.2. Clarification and Amendments

Offerors may request clarifications via email to globalawards@iesc.org not later than **February 13, 2023 at 5:00 p.m., Washington DC Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) time**. IESC will provide answers to these questions and requests for clarification asked by all Offerors simultaneously via email and posted on the IESC website with the RFP before the close of business on/or before **Thursday, February 16, 2023**. IESC may 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.

7.3. 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) SAM.gov **Unique Entity ID #** (Applies to companies, not to individuals)
- 11) Total Proposed Price (**cover page of cost proposal only**)
- 12) Signature, date, and time

7.4. Technical Proposal

The technical proposal should be twenty (20) to twenty five (25) pages and should include the following:

- A cover letter summarizing the applicant's interest and capacity to implement the Baseline Study, Mid-Term Evaluation, and Final Evaluation;
- A description of the recommended evaluation methodologies that demonstrates an understanding of the project 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.

Appendices (not included in the 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; **Gantt Chart and Team Plan (Annex B)**.

7.5. Cost Proposal

The cost proposal must include a detailed budget for completion of the baseline evaluation work plan and implementing the baseline evaluation. Offerors must complete the budget template found in Annex A and the budget narrative template found in Annex A.1. Costs should be broken out to include labor, supplies, travel, total direct costs, indirect costs, fee (if any) and total cost. Offerors must include narrative explanations for each cost in order to demonstrate cost reasonableness.

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 entity may opt to charge a 10% de minimis 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 for the mid-term and final evaluations as well, including all required information for the baseline evaluation budget and all critical assumptions informing estimations.

8. Qualifications and Eligibility Requirements

Offeror may be required to present a business license and must have experience in conducting evaluations for trade and agricultural projects. Offerors may need to obtain a SAM.gov generated Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) Number and an eligibility notice prior to receiving any award. Award may be contingent upon USDA final approval.

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 Customs Organization Time Release Study, plus non-trade barrier costs and time considerations (preferred);
- Experience using advanced quantitative and qualitative methodologies;

- Knowledge of World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement and related economic impact studies and analysis;
- Knowledge of SPS and USA/NCAR issues;
- Experience conducting evaluations of economic growth, agricultural value chain 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 NCAR (preferred).

IESC is looking for the following team composition:

- 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 professional in each of the three countries (from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) 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 professional in each of the three countries (from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) 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; and
- 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 in each country will assist with data collection and translation on a short-term, as needed basis.

IESC may support recruitment of local enumerators; however, 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.

9. Basis for Award

IESC anticipates that award will be based on best value. Accordingly, award will be made to the technically acceptable Offerors whose proposals provide the greatest overall value to IESC and the USDA Agricultural Trade and Climate Smart Initiatives (ATraCSI) program, price, and other factors considered. The winning proposal must conform to all solicitation requirements.

To determine the successful offer, 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.

10. 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 **9.1 Technical Evaluation Criteria** and numbered accordingly. Please stay in the page limits given below. Only include the requested information and avoid submitting extra content. Any text or pages exceeding the page limitation for each section of the proposal may be redacted and not evaluated.

Proposals will be written in English with each page numbered consecutively. Cover pages, dividers, and tables of contents are not subject to the page limit.

The Offerors must complete the Gantt Chart and Team Plan using IESC’s template, included as Annex B. The Gantt Chart requires details from Offerors on project tasks for the duration of the project, base evaluation, midterm evaluation and final evaluation. The Team Plan requires details about the team and their proposed Level of Effort (LOE).

10.1. Technical Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria. Points will also reflect the overall presentation of the proposal, which should be clear, complete, well organized, and well written. Most importantly, proposals should address all the requirements listed in this RFP.

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

Section	Points
Proposed Evaluative Approach (suitable to the projects complex design and context, including methodology, general approach, and detailed approach to each study and evaluation)	50
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	20

ethics (as demonstrated in the applicant’s proposal and based on the three provided professional reference checks)	
Staffing (team with knowledge and skills suitable for the project’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.

11. Cost Proposal Evaluation

The Offeror will submit a separate cost proposal that complies in full with the (Evaluation Services – Northern Central America Region) budget template at Annex A and the budget narrative template Annex A.1.

All proposed costs must be in accordance with the U.S. Government Cost Principles under 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (found at: [2 CFR 200 Subpart E](#)).

The cost proposal must include a detailed budget for completion of the base evaluation work plan and implementing the base evaluation. 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, 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 not have a



NICRA and you are proposing indirect costs, you have the option of proposing a 10 percent de minimis 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. Additionally, as Offerors may be offered the option to extend, offerors should provide detailed budgets, including cost narratives, as the base evaluation budget, for the mid-term evaluation and final evaluation as well, including all critical assumptions informing estimations.

All quotations must be valid for sixty (60) days from the date of final submission.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. Conflict of Interest Declaration

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 the Award made from USDA.

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