

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System.

Start date:	31 March 2023
Deadline:	1 May 2023
Closing time:	5:00 pm Paraguayan local time
Offer Reference number:	IESCT-FAST-RFP-001-2023
Title of the project:	Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System.

1. Disclaimer:

The information contained in this request for proposals document (hereafter RFP) is provided to the Offeror(s) by Improving Economies by Stronger Communities (IESC). IESC is the main implementer of the Food for Progress Trade Facilitating Agricultural Systems and Technology (T-FAST) project in Paraguay financed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) under agreement No. 526-2019/010-00. IESC seeks to support the modernization of support processes with institutions and government agencies in import-export processes. In this context, it seeks to improve the procedures related to the Foreign Trade Logistics System, by land, sea, and air.

IESC plans to award one (1) contract covering an estimated period of 6 months. Subject to the availability of funds, IESC estimates that the maximum value of this contract will be in the range of USD \$25,000 to \$30,000. However, offerors do not necessarily have to match this amount and they are invited to examine whether they could propose lower costs to achieve the objectives of this application.

The purpose of this RFP document is to provide Offerors with information to assist them in preparing their proposals for the services that the IESC seeks to obtain. This RFP document is not intended to contain all the information that each Offeror may require. Each Offeror must carry out its own evaluation and must verify the accuracy, reliability and completeness of the information in this RFP document, and when necessary, obtain independent advice from the appropriate sources.

This RFP is replacing IESC/T-Fast's Request for Expression of Interest and Quote (REI/Q) No. REI 001-2023 issued on January 19, 2023 and closed on February 12, 2023. Offerors who participated in that REI and submitted quotes in response to it must re-submit a new proposal in accordance with the terms and requirements of this RFP in order for IESC to consider their offers for next steps and evaluation.

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.

Please note that notification of proposal, award, and start dates are subject to change at the discretion of USDA or IESC. All activities under a final agreement are subject to and will be carried out in accordance with regulations promulgated by the donor under the guidance of the United States Government Office of Management and Budget which is described in 2 CFR part 200, supplemented by 2 CFR part 400 and 7 CFR part 1499, other regulations that are generally applicable to USDA grants and cooperative agreements, including applicable regulations set forth in 2 CFR chapters I, II, and IV, the provisions of the CCC Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714 *et seq.*) and any other rules or regulations that subsequently published that governs the program.

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

Interested offerors are responsible for all costs associated with preparing and submitting proposals and will not be reimbursed by IESC.

2. Background

IESC is a leading US nonprofit organization fostering private sector development throughout the economically developing world. Since 1964, it has delivered durable solutions that have resulted in more than 1.5 million jobs in 137 countries. IESC partners with companies, cooperatives, entrepreneurs, job seekers, as well as governments seeking to build skills, job creation and business growth in a sustainable way, sharing proven experiences that improve the lives of individuals, families and communities around the world. Among its major funders today are the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

IESC is the lead implementer of the USDA-funded Food for Progress Trade-Facilitating Agricultural Systems and Technology (T-FAST) project in Paraguay. The T-FAST project aims to simplify, modernize and harmonize the processes for the export, import and transit of agricultural products in Paraguay. The project will create improvements in predictability through transparency and automation of processes.

The Government of Paraguay is working on a series of initiatives that help modernize the sector and improve the infrastructure that drives the country's competitiveness, reducing costs and adding value in logistics processes. The National Trade Facilitation Committee (CNFC) is the permanent body in charge of developing a national strategic agenda on trade facilitation, and coordinating the implementation of trade facilitation measures, in accordance with the dialogue between the public administration and the actors of the sector. private sector linked to international trade as established by Decree No. 7,102 and Law No. 5,564.

The Committee is made up of Working Groups to address sectoral issues or specific issues, coordinated by a representative of the public sector and a representative of the private sector, or as each group decides. The platform working group for the digitization, integration, and simplification of foreign trade processes (DIGIVUCE) aims to digitize,

integrate, and simplify export and import processes and procedures by establishing a platform that integrates public entities and foreign trade actors.

DIGIVUCE is coordinated by the National Customs Directorate (DNA) (1), an autonomous institution in charge of applying customs legislation, facilitating trade, efficiently supervising merchandise traffic, preventing and suppressing smuggling, protecting society and generating important resources for the State, and by the Exporter's Single Window (VUE), an integral management system based on reengineering of procedures, legal adaptation and technological structure, which allows the people and institutions involved in exports to act interactively, making available the single registry of exporters and abbreviated processing. The VUE is based at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC).

In 2018, work meetings were held with the objective of preparing a Mapping and Systematization of Foreign Trade Processes, with the participation of the different representatives of the links in the logistics chain of the maritime, land and air export and import process, which allowed perform process diagnostics. DIGIVUCE has incorporated into its Work Plan a series of improvement opportunities and proposals identified in the diagnosis, which seek to contribute to the modernization of export and import processes. This call seeks to implement part of the proposed solutions through the construction of a Foreign Trade Logistics System.

3. Period of execution

The anticipated execution period will be 6 months from the signing of the contract. Estimated term: May to October 2023.

4. Scope Statement

IESC requests interested offerors to provide proposals that meet the objectives sought.

The general objective is to support the MIC, DNA, and other member institutions of the CNFC in the design of technical specifications for the development of a Foreign Trade Logistics System to streamline administrative processes, Electronic Transfer of River Manifests (TEMAFLU), among others. . For this it will be necessary:

1. Identify the needs, scope, functionality and capabilities required for the implementation of the Logistics System,
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- (1) All acronyms reflect the name of the institution in Spanish
 2. Establish the technical specifications of the Logistics System, detailing the processes and/or stages for its development and implementation,
 3. Prepare the estimated budget for the development of the Logistics System.

The specific objective of the consultancy is to develop the technical specifications for the design of the Foreign Trade Logistics System for the MIC, DNA and other members of the CNFC. The consultancy does not have the objective of developing the Logistics System.

All quotes must be valid for 60 days.

5. Statement of Work

5.1. List of Authorities

The contractor will report to the T-FAST Project Information and Communication Technology Specialist and the contractor's performance will also be monitored by the Deputy Director of the IESC T-FAST project.

5.2 Activities

In coordination with the team of MIC and DNA officials, the offeror must carry out the activities mentioned below, which are illustrative and not limiting, and MIC and/or DNA may request support in coordination with IESC/Paraguay of the offerors in everything related to the implementation of other inherent criteria:

1. Carry out the identification of needs, expectations, scope, functionality, difficulties, and capacities required for the implementation of the new modules to be developed of the Foreign Trade Logistics System, in consensus with the MIC and DNA.
2. Identify the existing external systems that must be integrated with the new Foreign Trade Logistics System.
3. Carry out an analysis of the existing Logistics System modules, their scope, functionality, technology and technical characteristics to be considered for integration with the new system.
4. Carry out working meetings with key actors from DNA, MIC/VUE, Depositaries, transport agents, and other institutions identified as of interest and representatives of the private sector, to gather relevant information, needs, and proposals for adjustments, modifications, and actions to be incorporated in the preparation of the proposal for the design of a Foreign Trade Logistics System, based on the document on Mapping and Systematization of Foreign Trade Processes in Paraguay.
5. Prepare a document with specific technical specifications that constitute the agreed bases for the design of the computer system for a Foreign Trade Logistics System, including the phases and modules to be developed, a scheduled implementation planning, the required work team and an indicative budget.
6. Prepare recommendations to be taken into account for the preparation of Technical Specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System linked to the development and implementation stage: a technical description of the scope, functionality and technical characteristics to be met; profile of the experts required for each stage.
7. Hold an event to validate the assessments of needs of the Foreign Trade Logistics System and the proposal for a Foreign Trade Logistics System with key actors from the MIC and DNA, institutions linked to it and representatives of the private sector.

8. Make a final presentation of the results and the design proposal for a foreign trade logistics system in a communication and visibility event to be defined in agreement with the MIC and DNA authorities.

Logistics (room, refreshments, audiovisual, etc.) must be foreseen and budgeted for all the events and/or workshops that are necessary for the aforementioned activities. Justification and details of the anticipated costs should be included in the budget narrative.

5.3 Deliverables

As a result of this design effort, the following deliverables are expected:

- **Deliverable 1: Foreign Trade Logistics System Work Plan.** The work plan must contain the proposed methodology for the activity, calendar of activities, task by task, with disaggregated days of execution and total sum, and must be presented in a maximum of eight (8) pages without counting any annexes. A one-page Gantt chart that notes all and each task proposed, timing of effort for each task, and deliverable associated with each task must be included as an annex to the work plan. A one page executive summary of the work plan both in Spanish and in English must also be included.
- **Deliverable 2: Foreign Trade Logistics System Stakeholder Consultative Report.** Report will contain the results of the working meetings with key actors from the MIC, DNA, VUE, depositaries, transport agents, other institutions identified as of interest and the private sector, to gather relevant information, needs and proposals for adjustments, modifications, and actions to be incorporated into the preparation of the proposal for the design of a foreign trade logistics system, based on the report: *Mapping and Systematization of Foreign Trade Processes in Paraguay (1)*, put together by the Paraguayan Industrial Union and the Procomex Institute with the support of the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), the Brazilian Confederations of Industries, and US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The report is estimated between 8 to 10 pages, not inclusive of annexes. A two to three page executive summary in Spanish and in English needs to be included. The executive summary should include a summary of scope, methodology as well as key findings and recommendations.

(1) [Mapeo-y-Sistematizacion-PLIEGOS.pdf \(uip.org.py\)](#)

- **Deliverable 3: Existing Logistics System Report.** This report will include an analysis of the modules of the existing logistics systems, their scope, functionality, technology, and technical characteristics considered for integration with the new system and identify the existing external systems that must be integrated with the new foreign trade logistics system. This report is estimated between 10 to 15 pages, not inclusive of annexes. A two to three page executive summary in Spanish and in English need to be included. The executive summary should include a summary of scope, methodology as well as key findings and recommendations.

- Deliverable 4: Foreign Trade Logistics System Needs Assessment.** The needs assessment will identify the needs, expectations, scope, functionality, difficulties, and capabilities required for the design of a foreign trade logistics system; including the analysis of the modules of the existing logistics systems and the other potential systems to be integrated, their scope, functionality, technology, and technical characteristics. The report is estimated between 10 to 15 pages, not inclusive of annexes. A two to three page executive summary in English need to be included. The executive summary should include a summary of scope, methodology as well as key findings and recommendations.
- Deliverable 5: Foreign Grade Logistic Systems Technical Specifications.** This report will include the detailed specific technical specifications, which will constitute the agreed bases for procuring the computer system of a foreign trade logistics system expertise. The technical specifications will include the development phases and modules, a scheduled implementation planning, and an indicative budget. Likewise, recommendations will take into account the elaboration of technical specifications related to the design, development and implementation phase: a technical description of the scope, functionality and technical characteristics to be fulfilled; profile of the experts required for each stage; and any other suggestions technique that the expert, in her or his best understanding and opinion, deems important to consider. The report is estimated between 10 to 15 pages,, not inclusive of annexes. A two to three page executive summary in Spanish and in English need to be included. The executive summary should include a summary of scope, methodology as well as key findings and recommendations.

Table 1: Deliverables

DELIVERABLES	FORMAT	ESTIMATED DELIVERY DATE
Deliverable 1 - Foreign Trade Logistics System Work Plan	MS Word and PDF, single spaced, 12 font	Within 15 calendar days from the start of the contract
Deliverable 2 - Foreign Trade Logistics System Stakeholder Consultative Report	MS Word and PDF, single spaced, 12 font	Within 60 calendar days from the start of the contract
Deliverable 3 - Existing Logistics System Report	MS Word and PDF, single spaced, 12 font	Within 90 calendar days from the start of the contract
Deliverable 4 - Foreign Trade Logistics System Needs Assessment	MS Word and PDF, single spaced, 12 font	Within 120 calendar days from the start of the contract
Deliverable 5 - Foreign Grade Logistic Systems Technical Specifications	MS Word and PDF, single spaced, 12 font	Within 150 calendar days from the beginning of the contract

The approval of the deliverables will be the responsibility of the MIC and DNA and in the instances determined by the highest institutional authorities.

6. Type of contract

Any contract resulting from this RFP will be a hybrid contract (fixed price against deliverables and reimbursable costs for logistics expenses associated with the events and/or workshops necessary to carry out the required activities).

7. Instructions to the Offeror:

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with all days and each of the instructions included in this Section No 7. If a offeror does not comply with each and every one of the instructions established in this section and in the rest of the application, your proposal will not be considered or it will receive a low grade on your evaluation.

7.1 Submission of offers

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

1. Proposals received after the closing date and time may not be considered. It is recommended to follow the deadlines and schedules established to submit the proposals.
2. The Cost proposal must be in local currency Guarani.
3. Technical and cost proposals must be submitted as two separate documents. Cost information should not be included in the technical proposal
4. Offerors must send their proposals before the closing date and time, as indicated on page one, to the following email: t-fastconcursos@iesc.org

7.2 Clarifications and amendments

Offerors may request clarification questions by email to t-fastconcursos@iesc.org no later than 5:00 p.m. Paraguayan local time, on Wednesday, April 19, 2023. IESC will provide responses to these questions and requests for clarification simultaneously via email and will be posted on the IESC website with the RFP prior to the close of business on Friday, April 21, 2023. IESC will not answer questions outside the period allotted for clarification. Questions will not be answered over the phone or in person. Any changes to the RFP will be posted on the website and simultaneously sent via email to Offerors who have expressed interest.

Interested offerors are recommended to participate in a 30-minute webinar on the requirements of the cost proposal to be held on Friday, April 14, 2023. Interested offerors must confirm their attendance by email to t-fastconcursos@iesc.org to receive the link, no later than noon 12:00 pm Paraguayan local time on Thursday, April 13, 2023. Interested parties will remain anonymous during the webinar, but are welcome to submit questions in advance. If IESC does not receive confirmation of attendance from any offeror, it will not carry out the webinar.

7.3 Cover Page

In addition to the documents required in sections 10 and 11 below, please include a cover page with your technical proposal and with your cost proposal (separate cover

pages and proposals). The cover must be on paper with the company logo and must contain the following information:

1. Project or title (first page of this RFP document)
2. Offer reference number (first page of this RFP document)
3. Company name
4. Company address
5. Name of the authorized representative of the company
6. Name of the contact person if it is different from the authorized representative of the company
7. Phone number, email
8. Duration of validity of the proposal (minimum of 60 days)
9. Payment terms
10. The Unique Entity Identifier or (UEI) generated by the SAM – Visit the site [SAM.gov Home](https://sam.gov) for more details.
11. (Cost Proposal Only) Total Proposal Cost, which must be submitted only in the budget templates provided with this RFP and following strictly the instructions provided in the budget templates.
12. Signature, date and time

7.4 Technical and cost proposal structure

Technical proposal:

The technical proposal must not exceed 13 pages and must include the following:

- The technical and managerial approach to carrying out the work, maximum seven (7) pages
- Experience and past performance of the company in activities similar to that of this proposal and technical approach for this proposal, maximum three (3) pages
- Staff experience and skills, maximum three (3) pages.
- Proposals must include contact information for three current or former clients. If the offeror has previously worked with T-FAST and wants that work to be considered in the proposal evaluation, the offeror must submit information from those contracts.
- Attachments, e.g., work samples, references, and staff CVs, which do not count toward the proposal page limit.

Cost proposal:

The cost proposal must include the following:

- A detailed budget to complete the Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System. Offerors must complete the budget template found in the **Annex A**, published on the IESC website as **Annex A – Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System**.
- A detailed narrative for each cost for IESC to determine the reasonableness of the cost. Costs should be broken down to include labor, supplies, indirect costs

(if applicable), profit/benefit fee (if applicable), and total cost. Budget narratives should include unit cost information.

Complete the technical specifications of each Product included in Annex A – Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System. (Excel document). Send offers to t-fastconcursos@iesc.org before the deadline date specified in this application. All quotes must be valid for sixty days. All prices must be in guaraníes WITHOUT taxes included since T-FAST has the corresponding tax exemption card. The award will be communicated by email, and the payment of all the expenses incurred in accordance with the budget will be made according to the delivery and execution schedule.

No advance payments will be made, the payment will be according to the calendar.

The best proposals are requested. It is anticipated that a contract will be awarded solely on the basis of the original proposals received. However, IESC reserves the right to conduct discussions, negotiations and/or request clarifications before awarding a contract.

8. Eligibility requirements

The offeror may be required to present a business license. The contract will be subject to final USDA approval. Additionally, the T-FAST project reserves the right to conduct an interview together with the Offerors after the technical and cost evaluations and before the award of the contract.

Offerors may be required to obtain their UEI code generated by the SAM system, as well as an eligibility notice prior to being awarded the contract.

For this call, the subcontracting of services with a maximum that should not exceed 50% will be considered valid of the work to be done.

The technical experiences and background of work carried out as a group of the main contractor and potential subcontractors will be considered.

9. Basis for contract award

IESC anticipates that the contract will be based on best value principles. Accordingly, the contract will be awarded to the technically acceptable offeror whose proposal provides the greatest overall value to IESC and to the USDA T-FAST program, price and other factors will be considered.

The winning proposal must meet all the requirements of this application, in order to determine the best value. The number of points assigned, out of a total of 100 points, indicates the relative importance of each criterion. Offerors should note that these criteria serve to (a) identify factors that offerors should address in their proposals; and b) establish the standard against which all proposals will be evaluated.

10. Evaluation of Proposals

Please read carefully, the following are instructions for preparing proposals. Proposals should be organized in sections corresponding to the sections presented in 10.1 Technical Evaluation Criteria and numbered accordingly. Please stay within the page limits below. Only include the requested information and avoid sending additional content. Any text or pages that exceed the page limit for each section of the proposal may be redacted and not evaluated.

10.1. Technical Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria. The points will also reflect the overall presentation of the proposal, which must be clear, complete, well organized and well written. Most importantly, proposals must address all of the requirements listed in this RFP. If the proposal does not meet each and every one of the RFP requirements and/or does not use the templates and/or formats required as RFP annexes, it may be declared incomplete, disqualified, and will not be evaluated.

[1] Technical and management approach (7 page limit: score: 60 points)

The technical and management approach is scored based on the following:

- Explanation of the methodology to be used for the development of the deliverables detailed in Section 5.3 Deliverables.
- Schedule of preparation and presentation of deliverables.

[2] OfferOfferor's past performance and references (Limit 3 pages: Does not include samples of previous work and references, which can be sent as attachments: limit for attachments is 4 pages; score: 15 points)

Past performance is scored based on the following:

- The offerofferor's track record in implementing activities similar to those described in the tasks and activities.
- The offerors's track record demonstrates how previous experience supports the proposed general approach.

Offerors must provide as an attachment, not to exceed the 4 pages, and that are not part of the limit of 3 pages by past performance, the following:

- A minimum of three (3) references for past and present programs, to include contact information for three former or current employers or clients for whom the Offerors has completed a similar task. References should include contact information and a brief summary of relevant work performed.

[3] Experience and technical ability required (Limit 3 pages. Does not include resumes or CVs, which are sent as attachments; score: 15 points)

The offerofferor must submit a proposal with a team of the following composition:

- **Senior Principal Expert**
 - Training and skills:
 - Must be titled preferably in careers related to marketing, business management, projects or the like;

- Possess postgraduate studies (specializations, master's degree/s or doctorate/s) in areas related to the tasks to be carried out;
- Excellent command of the Spanish language, both oral and written; with a positive assessment of the management of foreign languages;
- High capacity for information management and drafting of technical documents.
- Overall professional experience:
 - A minimum of 15 years of professional experience;
 - Professional experience and technical assistance to public, academic institutions, and international organizations in technical coordination of the development and implementation of computer programs and/or systems will be positively valued.
- Specific professional skills:
 - A minimum of 10 years of professional experience relevant to the mission, in-depth knowledge in programming, analysis and design of computer systems, Database design, Network Architecture, Intranets, Data Communications in Heterogeneous Environments, knowledge of Web technologies, etc. .;
 - Specific experience in managing the Oracle Database engine.
 - Experience coordinating multidisciplinary and institutional teams;
 - Experience in LAC, valuing the one acquired in the MERCOSUR region.
- **Process Expert**
 - Training and skills:
 - Must have a higher degree in Engineering or related careers;
 - Postgraduate studies (specializations and/or master's degrees) in areas related to the tasks to be carried out are valued;
 - Excellent command of the Spanish language, both oral and written; with a positive assessment of the management of foreign languages;
 - High capacity for information management and drafting of technical documents.
 - Overall professional experience:
 - A minimum of 10 years of professional experience;
 - Professional experience and technical assistance to public, academic institutions, and international organizations in technical coordination of the development and implementation of computer programs and/or systems will be positively valued.
 - Specific professional skills:
 - A minimum of 5 years of professional experience in project management.
 - Previous experience working on issues similar to this call;

- Experience facilitating workshops with member institutions of the National Trade Facilitation Committee;
- Experience coordinating multidisciplinary and institutional teams.

11. Evaluation of the cost proposal

The OfferOfferor will submit a separate cost proposal that fully complies with the budget model for the Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System. **(Annex A).**

All proposed costs must be in accordance with the US Government Cost Principles under 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (found at: 2 CFR 200 Subpart E) or the cost principles of Part 31 of the Regulations Federal Acquisition Agreement (FAR), for non-profit and for-profit entities (found at: FAR part 31 respectively).

11.1 Cost proposal evaluation criteria (limit of 5 pages for narrative with budget description: score: 10 points):

If the proposal does not meet each and every one of the RFP requirements and/or does not use the templates and/or formats required as RFP annexes, the proposal will be declared incomplete, disqualified, and will not be evaluated. For which the proposal can be evaluated, the same must consist of the following:

- A detailed budget to complete the objective and requested activities in the requested period. Offerors must complete the budget template found in the **Annex A**, published on the IESC website as **Annex A – Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System**. This will not count against the page limits; and,
- A narrative describing each budget item (limit of 5 pages).

It is mandatory and exclusive that the Offerors submit a cost proposal separate from the technical proposal. The proposal must address all the deliverables indicated in Section 5.3 Deliverables, Table 1: Table of Deliverables. The cost proposal should provide detailed budgets and deadlines for completion of each of the deliverables for later use in developing a contract based on fixed-price deliverables.

The OfferOfferor must submit a budget in accordance with the IESC budget template found in the **Annex A – Design of technical specifications for a Foreign Trade Logistics System**. Please note that the budget template for the **Annex A** requires the OfferOfferor to price each of the deliverables as full fixed-price deliverables, as well as a detailed breakdown of the proposed costs, including labor, supplies, and other direct costs as per the OfferOfferor. **Annex A.**

The OfferOfferor must present explanatory descriptions of the budget as an annex. It must include all the elements of the cost proposal and be no more than 5 pages. In the narrative, costs should be broken down by individual cost element, include supporting information for the proposed costs. The OfferOfferor must include the **unit costs in your detailed description for each proposed cost.** In the event that the proposed

rates are combined rates (including tax payments, profit percentage, indirect expenses, etc.), the offeror must break down said rates in such a way that it is clear for the evaluation committee to determine what the direct costs are. real. The IESC will use the required detailed budget narrative justifications to determine the reasonableness of costs and prices as required by US federal regulation. In the event that an offeror proposes subcontractors to perform any part of the work, such subcontracting costs must be proposed separately, demonstrating a clear delineation between primary and subcontractor costs. Offerors must include a detailed fixed-price budget and corresponding budget descriptions as described above for any proposed subcontracts. The overhead instructions above also apply to any proposed subcontractors.

All proposed costs must be in accordance with the US Government Cost Principles under 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (non-profit organizations and universities) or Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) Part 31 (for commercial organizations).

12. Requirements

Please read carefully the following instructions for preparing proposals. Proposals should be organized into sections corresponding to the sections submitted.

13. Deviations

IESC reserves the right to waive any deviation by offerors from the requirements of this solicitation that, in IESC's opinion, are not material defects requiring rejection or disqualification; or where such exemption will promote greater competition.

14. Discrepancies

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

15. Declaration of conflict of interest

The following steps describe the IESC contract selection process and must be understood by all Offerors to ensure transparency of awards and avoid conflicts of interest.

1. Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are posted on the IESC website. The offer is open to all qualified offerors;
2. Clarifications will be emailed to all offerors who submit questions, as well as posted on the IESC website, simultaneously;
3. Once the proposals are received, an evaluation committee scores them;
4. Cost proposals are evaluated for reasonableness, accuracy, completeness, and conformance to the budget template (**Annex A**);
5. The best value proposition is selected based on a combination of technical score and cost;
6. No activity can be started until both the IESC and the successful offeror have signed a formal contract; and

7. IESC's Anti-Fraud Policy and Code of Business Ethics exists for the life of the subcontract and beyond. Even if the contract is closed, if either party is found guilty of fraud, IESC will file a full report with the USDA Office of Inspector General, which may choose to investigate and prosecute the guilty parties to the fullest extent of the law.

Any contract awarded must comply with all regulations and administrative provisions required by the USDA and IESC. IESC reserves the right to cancel any planned proposal based on any adjustment to the performance period of the IESC agreement with USDA.

-END-