Pre-Solicitation Notice UPDATE

Notice Number: Pre-Sol-2026-001

Issue Date: October 15, 2026; **UPDATED to include Draft RFP provisions, November 18, 2026**

Subject: Upcoming Request for Proposals (RFP) for USDA FFPr Evaluation Services in Ecuador

Notice of Future Procurement Opportunity

IESC provides this notice as advance information regarding an anticipated procurement under a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-funded program.

The newly awarded project under this program is called Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization (Agrofacilita) project. The project aims to support 5,877 direct beneficiaries and 59,505 indirect beneficiaries by (1) improving stakeholder coordination and transparency in agricultural trade; (2) supporting rules-based market access for food and agricultural products; and (3) improving clearance times and port operational efficiency. With the private and public sectors, the project will reduce nontariff barriers to trade and will result in a 50 percent decrease in time required to obtain an import license for select agricultural imports to Ecuador.

The final number of direct and indirect beneficiaries and final list of indicators may vary slightly during ongoing discussions underway with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

IESC expects to issue a competitive solicitation in November 2026 for evaluation services supporting project activities in Ecuador. The overall objective of the project evaluation services is to establish and impartially evaluate the project performance plan indicator baselines and targets as well as prepare for future midterm and final evaluations during the life of the project.

The anticipated scope of services may include the following:

- 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.

- Undertake a comprehensive approach to future evaluation of project performance and impact, including proposing key baseline questions that aim to assess the project's effect on (1) Improved stakeholder coordination and transparency in agricultural trade, (2) Supported rules-based market access for food and agricultural products, and (3) Improved clearance times and port operational efficiency, as well as any project contribution to expanded trade;
- Propose, design, manage and implement 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 the U.S. Department of Agriculture in advance of each evaluation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food for Progress Learning Agenda.

The anticipated period of performance for the baseline is December 2026 through May 2027. The baseline study due date to USDA is March 22, 2027 with comments and feedback from USDA incorporated anticipated April and May 2027 that finalize the study for its approval by USDA by no later than May 22, 2027. The anticipated period of performance for the midterm and final evaluations are August to December 2029 and April to July 2031. USDA must provide approval for the final contract and is required to provide final approval for each term of reference (baseline study, midterm evaluation, and final evaluation) prior to the commencement of the effort.

Important Information

At this time, please note the following:

- No solicitation is being released.
- No proposals are being accepted.
- No vendor registration is required.
- No response to this notice is requested.
- No questions regarding the future solicitation will be accepted at this stage.

Interested parties should monitor IESC's procurement webpage and/or future procurement announcements for the official solicitation release.

Draft RFP enclosed below does not include the ToR which is pending USDA approval. The purpose of release of the draft RFP is information only regarding evaluation criteria and IESC expectations for compliant offers.

Disclaimer

This pre-solicitation notice is provided solely for informational purposes and does not constitute a solicitation, request for proposal, request for quotation, invitation for bid, or commitment of any kind by IESC. IESC reserves the right to modify, delay, or cancel the anticipated procurement at any time.

Request for Proposals (RFP) *Draft*

Agricultural Trade Facilitation and SPS Modernization Project Evaluation Services Request for Proposals (RFP)

Issue Date:	November TBD, 2026
Closing Date for Proposals:	November XX, 2026
Closing Time:	17:00, Eastern Daylight Savings Time (EDT)
Project Title:	Evaluation Services for Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization (Agrofacilita) Project
RFP Reference Number:	XXXXXXXX
Attachment A:	Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services Terms of Reference (ToR)
Attachment B:	Budget Template
Attachment B.1:	Budget Narrative Template

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 implementer of the USDA Food for Progress funded Agricultural Trade Facilitation and SPS Modernization (Agrofacilita) project in Ecuador, which commenced activities on September 23, 2026, and will be implemented through September 30, 2031; IESC seeks a third-party contractor (firm) to provide evaluation services for the project.

IESC desires to receive proposals from companies (Offerors) to serve as evaluators to undertake the tasks described in the terms of reference (ToR) provided in **Attachment A**.

IESC plans to award one contract. IESC will award the contract for the Baseline Study with two additional option periods for the Midterm and Final Evaluations. IESC may exercise the option periods by written modification to the base contract. Contract continuation by such exercise of the option periods will be determined upon satisfactory performance in the baseline study first, and later satisfactory performance on the midterm evaluation, i.e. exercising and awarding Option 1 for the midterm evaluation will be based on satisfactory performance of the baseline study and similarly, exercising and awarding Option 2 will be based on satisfactory performance on the midterm evaluation. IESC reserves the right to cancel the contract in full or in part.

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 described in the ToR are anticipated to begin in December 2026 contingent upon USDA approval.

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, and other regulations that are generally applicable to USDA grants and cooperative agreements, 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.

2. 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 139 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. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of State.

IESC is implementing a 5-year U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress funded project to provide technical services and support in Ecuador focused on achieving the following objectives:

- Expand trade in agricultural products domestically, regionally, and internationally by strengthening trade facilitation systems and modernizing Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) systems.
- Improve efficiency in logistics systems, transparency, and predictability of trade-related processes and institutions, including public and private sector entities.

IESC will support the Government of Ecuador (GoE) to improve the transparency, predictability, and efficiency of trade and the transparency, credibility, and consistency of SPS oversight to strengthen Ecuador's agricultural trade ecosystem. The Agrofacilita project will increase affordability and availability of nutritious food for Ecuadorian consumers as the result of reduced barriers to trade.

As per USDA Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines, IESC is seeking a third-party, independent, objective firm to conduct the project's evaluation services prior to the commencement of technical service delivery.

Please see **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR for additional details.

3. Period of Performance

The anticipated period of performance, should offeror be selected, is anticipated to be December 2026 until September 2031.

4. Scope Statement

The project is seeking a third-party contractor (firm) to conduct the three required evaluations, baseline, midterm, and final evaluations, during the life of the project. The baseline study, 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 assigned IESC home-office director.

5.2. Activities – Objectives and Scope

The contractor is expected to undertake the tasks as outlined in **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR.

5.3. Deliverables

See Section F "Deliverables" in **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR.

6. Contract Type

The contract is anticipated to be a firm fixed price, deliverable-based contract to be paid in stages based on deliverables accepted by IESC.

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 **12:00 PM, Washington DC Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) time, on Tuesday, November XX, 2026**. 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 **Friday, November XX, 2026**. 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 that Company's representative
7) Telephone number, Cellular/Mobile Phone number, Email address
8) Duration of Validity of proposal
9) Payment terms
10) SAM.gov **Unique Entity ID** number (Applies to companies, not to individuals)
11) Total Proposed Price (***cover page of cost proposal only***)
12) Signature, date, and time

8. Eligibility Requirements

Offeror may be required to present a business license and must have experience in Section G. of the **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR. Offerors may need to obtain a DUNS number and an eligibility notice prior to receiving any award. The award is contingent upon USDA final approval.

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 Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization project 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 **10.1 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 will be redacted and not evaluated.

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

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.

[1] Technical and Management Approach: 20 pg. limit (not including the Gantt Chart and Research Matrix); possible points 50

Proposals will be scored on the effectiveness of the proposal to meet the requirements of as outlined in **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR.

The **Technical and Management Approach** will be scored based on the following:

- Present methodology and tools required to achieve baseline study, midterm, and final evaluations outcomes.
- For the baseline study, design presented to effectively collect, collate, analyze and report high quality agricultural and trade facilitation data related to (1) improved stakeholder coordination and transparency in agricultural trade; (2) rules based market access for food and agricultural products; and (3) improved clearance times and port operational efficiency.
- A description of the recommended evaluation methodologies that demonstrates an understanding of the project expected impact and implementation approach.
- Roles and responsibilities clearly laid out.
- Detailed approach to the timeline with required steps, roles, and milestones/deliverables to generate, present, and finalize the baseline study, the midterm evaluation and the final evaluation to IESC and USDA. Summarize the timeline in a one-page Gantt chart annex, which is not inclusive of the 20-page limit to the Technical and Management Approach section.
- Research matrix that includes: research questions, related indicators, data collection strategy, Data source, Analysis methods, which is not inclusive of the 20-page limit to the Technical and Management Approach section.

[2] Offeror's past performance and references: 3 pg. limit (not including samples of previous work, which may be attachments and/or references); possible points 20.

The proposal must provide a detailed account of the Offeror's record in implementing similar activities to those outlined in the tasks and activities. The technical proposal will include a summary of past performance conducting baseline studies and evaluations of trade and/or food safety related development projects, including USDA funded projects. Offerors should provide experience in general and specifically include experience in Ecuador and/or Latin America that reflect the tasks articulated in **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and SPS Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR.

This part should include sufficient information to demonstrate the Offeror's performance for the tasks and activities laid out in **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR.

Past Performance and References will be scored based on the following:

- Offeror's record in implementing similar activities to those outlined in **Attachment A**: Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR, with

emphasis on baseline studies/economic research in Ecuador or in geographic and/or cultural settings similar to Ecuador.
- Demonstrated knowledge and application of USDA M&E guidelines and related ethics as demonstrated in the applicant's proposal and based on the Offeror's provided professional references.

Offerors should provide a minimum of three (3) references for past and present projects, to include the contact information of three prior or current employers or clients for which monitoring and evaluation services (baseline studies, midterm, final evaluations, and/or other related studies) has completed a similar task. References must include accurate, up-to-date contact information, name, position title, relationship to offeror, phone number(s) and email address.

[3] Offeror's Personnel Experience and Capacities: 3 pg. limit (not including resumes or CVs, which are attachments); possible points 30.

The technical proposal must include a description (a biographical sketch is acceptable) of the individual, or for companies, a minimum of one, but not more than two, senior management personnel, who would directly work on the activities in the contract. Resumes or CVs must be submitted as attachments for individuals submitted in this section and do not count within the page limitations of this section.

This section will be scored based on the following:

- Presentation of the appropriate skills possessed by the team in a matrix as referenced in **Attachment A:** Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services ToR; Sub-Section G. Qualifications and Technical Criteria Requirements
- Team Leader's ability to effectively manage small teams and manage complex research logistics to produce required deliverables in geographic and/or cultural settings similar to Ecuador.
- Each proposed individual's ability to work both remotely and in-person with stakeholders.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with a project team.
- Excellent demonstrated analytical, interpersonal communication, and English writing skills.
- Demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills, and prior experience conducting evaluations of development projects involving agriculture and trade development projects.
- Proven ability to use quantitative, qualitative and participatory evaluation methods, with examples and references that can speak to this experience.
- Experience using acceptable analytical frameworks such as surveys, stakeholder engagement, and statistical analyses.
- Experience using advanced quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- Clarity of thought process and writing style, as evidenced in technical proposal.
- Use of local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the assessment.
- Fluency in English and Spanish (required).
- Experience with USDA Food for Progress projects (preferred).
- Experience in similar or comparable geographic and/or cultural settings. Previous experience in Ecuador (preferred).

11. Cost Proposal Evaluation

The Offeror will submit a separate cost proposal that complies fully with the project evaluation services budget template at **Attachment B**.

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 baseline study work plan and for implementing the baseline study, including unit costs for each proposed cost. Costs must be broken out to include labor, fringe benefits, supplies, travel, subcontracts (if any), indirect costs (if any), fee/profit (if any), and total cost. Offerors must also provide proposed individual deliverable prices at the Payment Plan tab of **Attachment B** and in accordance with the Payment Schedule at **Attachment B.1.** Offerors must include detailed narrative justifications at **Attachment B.1** for each cost 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, using the same formats at **Attachment B and B.1**. A level of effort per position is required to assist with estimated dedicated time provided by critical positions.

Additionally, as contractors may be offered the option to extend, offerors should provide detailed budgets for the midterm and final evaluations as well, including all required information for the baseline study budget and all critical assumptions informing estimations.

If indirect costs are proposed as a component of the fixed priced deliverables, 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 15 percent de minimis rate, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.414(f). IESC reviews all costs including indirect costs as part of the cost build-up of individually priced deliverables to determine cost reasonableness. Note that should an offeror propose an indirect cost rate other than a NICRA or de minimis rate, such rates must be demonstrated as reasonable and supported by an independent auditor's indirect cost rate audit (standard financial statements will not suffice). Only incorporated businesses (501(c)(3), LLC, etc.) are eligible to charge and be reimbursed for indirect rates. Offerors may propose a reasonable fee (profit) at **Attachments B and B.1**.

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, steps that 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, and posted on IESC's website, simultaneously.
3) Once the proposals are received, an evaluation committee scores them.
4) Cost proposals are evaluated for reasonableness, allowability of costs, 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.
7) IESC's policy against fraud and other violations of its code of business ethics applies throughout the life of the subcontract and beyond. Even if the contract is closed, if any party is found guilty of fraud or other prohibited conduct, 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.

15. USDA Award Compliance and Procurement Reservation Rights

Any contract awarded will be required to comply with all administrative standards and provisions required by the USDA prime award. IESC reserves the right to cancel any planned procurement based on the final terms of the USDA award.

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Attachment A

Agricultural Trade Facilitation and Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) Modernization Project Evaluation Services Terms of Reference (ToR)

See **Attachment A** as a separate document, fully incorporated in this RFP and a required part of an offeror's proposal.

<Pending USDA review and approval>

Attachment B

Budget Proposal Spreadsheet Template

See **Attachment B** as a separate document, fully incorporated in this RFP and a required part of an offeror's proposal.

Attachment B.1

Budget Narrative Template

See **Attachment B.1** as a separate document, fully incorporated in this RFP and a required part of an offeror's proposal.