Multisectoral Nutrition
Innovation Research Fund

Request for Applications
To conduct Implementation Research under the Strengthening Multisectoral Nutrition Programming through Implementation Science Activity (MSNP)
RFA Number: 102335-2020

Issue date: July 1, 2020
Closing date: August 3, 2020
Estimated Award Date: November 1, 2020

FHI 360 Bangladesh
Email: NNahar@fhi360.org

Guidelines for Submission of Applications
Dhaka, Bangladesh July 2020
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DISCLAIMER
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I. The Multisectoral Nutrition Activity in Bangladesh: A Brief Overview

The five-year Strengthening Multisectoral Nutrition Programming through Implementation Science Activity (MSNP) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is assisting Bangladesh policymakers and institutions to use evidence to improve nutrition practices and outcomes among pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of two. MSNP contributes to the USAID Bangladesh Country Development Cooperation Strategy Development Objective “Health status improved” by improving nutritional practices of targeted women, children, adolescents and their family members. One of the Project’s main objectives is to increase the availability of evidence to guide multisectoral nutrition programming implementation.

MSNP directly supports the Government of Bangladesh’s (GoB’s) priority nutrition plans, namely the National Plan of Action on Nutrition-2 (NPAN-2), by gathering high quality local evidence on multisectoral nutrition activities and supporting nutrition stakeholders to utilize evidence for programming and policy making. The Project aims to provide the GoB with evidence of sustainable, scalable solutions to nutrition challenges among vulnerable populations in order to advance inclusive development, citizen capacity and economic capacity. The Project’s research approach supports self-reliance by assessing and documenting local implementation successes and challenges, thereby supporting program and policy decision makers to plan, finance and execute actions that efficiently and effectively lead to better nutrition outcomes.

The purpose of this Request for Applications (RFA) is to solicit applications from prospective subawardees to support FHI 360’s implementation of the MSNP activity through innovative implementation science. This RFA is issued as a public notice to ensure that all interested, qualified, and eligible organizations have a fair opportunity to submit applications for funding.

II. RFA Overview, Purpose and Technical Approach

A. Overview
The GoB is committed to improving nutrition and eliminating malnutrition, with a specific focus on children, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women. While there have been positive trends in chronic and acute undernutrition (stunting and wasting, respectively) since 2004, the rate of decline of undernutrition has slowed. Gaps between urban and rural areas, as well as between those in the highest and lowest wealth quintiles, persist. Under the Multisectoral Nutrition Innovative Research Fund, MSNP will provide grants to up to six organizations to conduct implementation research that explores innovations in nutrition programming that address priority nutrition challenges. Research findings will directly inform and enhance the effectiveness of multisectoral nutrition programming and policy-making options and decision-making.

B. Purpose
The purpose of the Innovative Research Fund is to select up to ten organizations to produce implementation science results that can inform multisectoral nutrition programming and policymaking in Bangladesh to address critical bottlenecks and improve nutrition practices and outcomes among vulnerable populations. Innovations proposed must support the GOB’s National Nutrition Policy
(NNP 2015)\(^1\) overarching goal to improve nutritional status of all people, focusing on disadvantaged groups. Applicants must demonstrate understanding of Bangladesh’s priority nutrition goals and objectives, challenges to standard programming and innovative solutions to address identified challenges in ways that effectively contribute to priority nutrition programming. Applicants must propose innovative solutions directly linked to NPAN-2\(^2\) objectives:

- Improve the nutritional status of all citizens, including children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers
- Ensure availability of adequate, diversified and quality safe food and promote healthy feeding practices
- Strengthen nutrition-specific, or direct nutrition interventions
- Strengthen nutrition-sensitive, or indirect nutrition, interventions, and
- Strengthen multi-sectoral programs and increase coordination among sectors to ensure improve nutrition

In line with the NNP and NPAN-2, the proposed research must target at least one key population with poor nutritional status or vulnerable to poor nutrition outcomes based on current evidence. The selected grantees are expected to explain how the research is innovative, present a detailed research plan, clearly define research outputs and directly link these outputs to potential impact on nutrition programming in Bangladesh.

Organizations may apply for grant funding to:

- Complement existing research initiatives
- Propose a new combined implementation and research initiative
- Add a research element to ongoing nutrition implementation activities in Bangladesh.

In such instances where the applicant proposes to complement existing research or implementation activities, the organization must clearly demonstrate the added value and impact that receiving an MSNP Innovative Research Fund Grant will have on ongoing research and implementation according to principles outlined in Section C. Technical Approach.

MSNP encourages applications from organizations that are working in any geographic area of Bangladesh.

C. Technical Approach

All funded implementation science activities funded through the Innovation Research Fund must contribute to the overall MSNP objective to increase the availability of evidence to guide multisectoral nutrition programming implementation in a manner that allows key stakeholders in Bangladesh to respond to the most urgent nutrition needs of the country. The research must clearly identify how it will support the GoB with lasting programming that can be duplicated in Bangladesh outside of its existing reach. The Technical Approach will outline easily measurable and discrete activities that support this objective and demonstrate the contributions the research outputs will make to the following key principles of nutrition programming:

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• Potential for impact in Bangladesh
• Replicability
• Scalability
• Sustainability
• Inclusive development among vulnerable populations

Implementation science and its defined component, implementation research, supports public health stakeholders to take proven interventions and implement them in the real world. Applicants should explain how the proposed innovation and research will explore factors such as feasibility, acceptability, adoption, cost, etc., associated with the key principles of nutrition programming above. As described by FHI 360’s Director of Health Sciences Research, “implementation research produces evidence to guide decision making about incorporating evidence-based interventions into service delivery at broad scale under routine conditions”.

For the purpose of this RFA, applicants should consider implementation research activities as “the scientific study of the processes used in the implementation of activities as well as the contextual factors that affect these processes”. Implementation research is conducted using a variety of methods. Further details may be found in this RFA’s footnoted sources.

Applicants should begin the technical approach by responding to the following research question:
• How would the interventions investigated by the research be sustained?

Applicants should further ensure they answer the following questions in the technical approach section of the application:
• What are the specific outcomes being evaluated?
• How does the proposed research respond to each of the key principles of nutrition programming specified in Section II C.?
• What elements of sustainability and GoB ownership are built into the nutrition intervention?
• What are the discrete research activities to be undertaken (e.g., desk review, data collection)?
• If the approach proposes to complement an existing research effort or to add a research component to existing nutrition programming, what is the added value of an MSNP grant?

D. Grant Amounts and Period of Performance
FHI 360 anticipates awarding up to ten grants under this RFA. Interested applicants can apply for a grant in one of the two categories listed below. The anticipated activities for each grant category are to propose implementation research activities as noted above, at two different levels of scale within a 14-month timeframe, inclusive of any required ethical approvals for research (October 2020 to December 2021).

• Category 1: Ceiling of $250,000. Applicants applying for this maximum level of grant funding must propose activities in-line with the Technical Approach above. This category may be particularly well-suited for applicants that submit applications to add complementary research

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initiatives to an existing program or to add a research element to ongoing research in the country.

- **Category 2:** Ceiling of $750,000. Applicants applying for this maximum level of grant funding must propose activities in-line with the Technical Approach above. As detailed in the application requirements, applicants that submit an application for this category of funding must be able to demonstrate how the proposed activity is innovative and contributes significantly to implementation research in the country; must have demonstrated organizational experience and capabilities to manage a grant of this scope and size; and must demonstrate the cost-reasonableness of the proposed budget.

### III. Application Requirements and Budget

Applicants will develop concept notes based on their understanding of needs, their prior institutional experience and their determination of the approaches that would be feasible and successful in innovatively addressing key nutrition bottlenecks in Bangladesh. In all cases, applicants shall clearly explain the rationale for the proposed approaches chosen. Applicants may submit more than one concept note if they have multiple applications that meet all criteria specified in the Technical Approach. Each concept note must follow all requirements outlined below.

All applications must clearly state the objectives and the expected results of the implementation research within the life of the funding period and define an implementation plan with a proposed time frame. All applications must include complete responses for each section below, A. Concept Note Application and B. Budget Application and C. Registration and Certifications, within the specified page limitations.

**A. Concept Note Application**

The Concept Note should include the three components below. Each component should be included in one document.

1. The **Technical Approach** should not exceed five pages (A4 paper, 12-point Times New Roman font; font size is applicable to tables and figures) and must:
   - Identify the thematic area of implementation research (see illustrative list in Section II B) and demonstrate the applicants understanding of the subject matter, including:
     - Evidence of need for target population proposed
     - Evidence for proposed activities to be implemented and researched
     - Evidenced-based rationale for scalability and sustainability potential in Bangladesh
   - Address the questions posed in Section II C.
   - Propose the components and timeline for proposed activities, including securing local research ethics approval and, if applicable, the accredited organization to be targeted for submission. (Please note that all protocols must also receive FHI 360 ethical approval, which FHI 360 will coordinate.)

2. The **Management and Staffing Statement** should not exceed two pages. This section must include:
• A brief description of relevant key personnel, including but not limited to, e.g., Principle Investigator, Co-Principle Investigator (if applicable), technical lead(s), project director, project manager), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) lead(s), and their ability to complete the work assigned.

• For applicants without existing research personnel, a brief description of proposed consultants or external data collection personnel or firm, including specifications for personnel or firm to meet research ethics and quality standards.

• A chart that illustrates the proposed management and staffing structure for the implementation of this activity.

• A brief description of the performance management approach.

3. The Organizational Capabilities and Past Experience should not exceed two pages. This section must include a brief summary of:

• A description of at least one similar type of activity in terms of topic, size and scope. Preferably, include the organization’s previous experience with implementation research and nutritional programming in Bangladesh, and contributions to the evidence base.

• One reference from a recent funder, or other partner, similar to work that may be contacted by FHI 360.

Annexes. Please include the following as an annex to the Concept Note Application (annexes will not count towards page count):

• Proposed implementation plan with key baseline, midline and endline milestone deliverables and accompanying timeline for the project within the timeframe of the award (up to 14 months);

• Short bios or CVs of key personnel and experts involved in project implementation (not to exceed 3 pages);

• A biodata form (Attachment C) for each proposed personnel or consultant who will conduct the work.

B. Budget Application: Detailed Budget and Budget Notes

The Budget should show estimated costs in BDT. The budget application should include budget notes that provide a narrative description of the estimated costs listed in the budget. For your budget please use the attached budget template included as Attachment A of this RFA. For your budget notes, please use the guidance and template included as Attachment B of this RFA. When preparing the budget and budget narrative, offerors must follow these instructions:

• Budgets must be accompanied by a brief narrative explanation and justification for each line item. The budget narrative must include data to support actual costs and/or methodologies to support cost estimates. The budget narrative should be presented in such a way as to be easily referenced from the budget and should provide sufficient information so that FHI 360 may review a proposed budget for reasonableness. If subcontracts costs are included, applicants must be prepared to submit detailed line-item budgets for all subawards if they are selected to move to the pre-award phase. All projected costs must be in accordance with the offerer’s standard practices and policies.

• Budgets must be sufficiently detailed to demonstrate reasonableness and completeness. Offerors including budget information determined to be unreasonable, incomplete,
unnecessary for the completion of the proposed project, or based on a methodology that is not adequately supported may be deemed unacceptable.

- Budgets must be submitted in Bangladesh Taka (BDT).
- If the budget includes an indirect rate, offerors must attach a Negotiated Indirect Rate Cost Agreement (NICRA), or an independent auditor-certified indirect rate based upon the last three years of audited financial statements. If the offeror does not have a copy of this to support the indirect rate proposed, they must break out the costs and charge the costs as fixed amounts and must be shown as separate line items in the budget and charge the costs as direct expenses shown via line items in the budget. If the costs are charged as fixed amounts, in the budget narrative please explain the methodology and calculation behind the estimated fixed amounts.

C. Registration and Certifications
- The applicant must include the registration certificate for the organization in Bangladesh.

IV. Eligibility and How to Apply

A. Eligible Organizations
This competition is open to any non-governmental, non-profit entity or private sector (for-profit) entity that meets the criteria set forth in this RFA. To be minimally eligible for funding, offerors must comply with the following conditions:

- Organizations must be legally registered or otherwise authorized to conduct business in Bangladesh
- Organizations must have a DUNS number and must be registered in SAM
- Applicants must have been active for a minimum of the last 1 year
- The applicant must have the necessary experience and expertise in implementation research, including knowledge of and ability to secure institutional review board (IRB) approvals

The following are not eligible to receive grant support:
- Individuals;
- Political parties;
- Military or other armed groups;
- Government or semi-governmental institutions;
- Faith-based organizations that exclude beneficiaries from other faiths;
- Organizations engaged in activities prohibited by Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA); and/or, based on their own principles relating to medical ethics, abortion, human rights, or organizational autonomy, even if their work has no relation whatsoever to abortion. These organizations will be ineligible for funding under this award.

Grant applications will first be checked for completeness and eligibility. Applications that are not eligible will not be considered by the Grant Evaluation Committee.

B. How to Apply
Timing: Applications are due by 5:00 PM/Dhaka on August 3, 2020.
Questions: Questions and requests for clarifications will be accepted by email only until 5:00 PM Dhaka on July 9, 2020. Interested applicants can send questions via email to NNahar@fhi360.org prior to this due date. Responses to all applicant questions will be posted publicly.

Language: Applications must be submitted in English.

Formatting: Please use Times New Roman 12 font type, with single space and one-inch margins on all sides. Budgets should be prepared in the required excel sheet template, Attachment A, using formulas for calculation.

Submission format: Please submit the application by email to NNahar@fhi360.org with a copy to hskelly@fhi360.org and zfonner@fhi360.org. The submissions should be emailed in PDF and excel formats, with the submission email title of “Response to RFA: Innovation Research Fund – Category X”. The Category listed should indicate whether the applicant has applied for a Category 1 or Category 2 award.

At the discretion of FHI 360, any application received after the exact date and time specified for receipt may be considered ineligible for consideration.

Applications may be withdrawn by written notice via email received at any time before award. Applications may be withdrawn in person by an organization or an authorized representative, if the representative’s identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the Application before award.

V. Selection Process, Notification, Pre-Award Steps and Reporting

A. Selection Criteria
Once the RFA is closed, the Grant Evaluation Committee will review applications received and assess them according to the criteria outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Technical Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Understanding of the subject matter and issues in Bangladesh and the purpose</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Realism, feasibility and utility of proposed approach.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Responsiveness to the principles and questions outlined in Section II.C.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Feasibility of the Implementation plan and proposed timeline that includes all</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Proposed elements of the activity and clear milestones.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. Management and Staffing Statement
   - Proposed management and staffing structure are reasonable and sufficient to implement this work.
   - Proposed personnel skills and experience are relevant and sufficient to effectively conduct the proposed research and manage the project/grant and to achieve the goals of the project.
   - Key Personnel have excellent written and oral communication skills in English.

3. Organizational Capability and Past Experience
   - Evidence of applicant’s previous experience with implementation research and nutritional programming in Bangladesh, and contributions to the evidence base.
   - Evidence that the organization possesses a credible reputation and adequate experience managing similar awards of a similar scope and size ($250,000 for applicants in Category 1 and $750,000 for applicants in Category 2).
   - Demonstrated ability to successfully complete the implementation research activities proposed within a similar timeframe.
   - Reference results.

| Total Possible Points                                                                 | 100 |

Budgets will be thoroughly reviewed but will not be assigned a score. A proposed budget that is below the chosen Grant Category ceiling does not necessarily mean a positive factor, but the Grant Evaluation Committee will evaluate budgets to ensure:

- Budget summary, detailed budget and budget notes included.
- Cost Effectiveness (costs have been reasonably set in the budget and are the most economical amount to allow attaining the project objectives).
- Proposed costs reflect a clear understanding of the requirements stated in this RFA.
- Proposed price is reasonable in comparison with prices with the independent cost estimate.
- Proposed planned costs ensure optimal delivery of the proposed activities.
- A detailed line item budget, budget narrative, and supporting documentation that clearly describe how the budgeted amounts are calculated must support the applicant’s budget.

B. Notification
Within four weeks of this RFA closing, the Grant Evaluation Committee will decide which applicants are to be selected as prospective grantees. This initial notification does not guarantee that a prospective grantee will receive a grant. First, the prospective grantee will work together with FHI 360 to complete additional steps (see below, “Pre-Award Steps”) that must be successfully completed in order to finalize a grant.

C. Pre-Award Steps
Once the Grant Evaluation Committee has notified prospective grant recipients, FHI 360 will work with each of the prospective grantees to complete the remaining steps, including:

- Clarifying any technical aspects of the concept note that are unclear and further developing the concept note with additional details for implementation;
• Negotiating the final budget and award type for the grant;
• Undertaking a Financial Pre-Award Assessment to clarify the prospective grantee’s financial capacity - this step may require submission of additional audited financial statements or policies/procedures of the organization;
• All grantees are required to have a DUNS number and register on www.sam.gov;
• Signing Mandatory Certifications (which the project will provide);
• Having Debarment and Terrorist Financing searches completed (by project team members);

Completing these steps is expected to take approximately 45 days and will require prompt responses from the prospective grantee. When these steps have been completed, FHI 360 will inform the applicant whether the application will be funded. The final award may consist of full or partial funding, with or without conditions.

D. Project Deliverables/Reporting
After completing the Pre-Award Steps and signing a grant with FHI 360, grantees will be required to submit:
• The study protocol, data collection tools and informed consent processes/forms within 30 days of signing the award
• A local IRB approval letter (IRB submission to follow FHI 360’s review/approval of the research package)
• An M&E plan (if applicable) within 30 days of award
• Quarterly narrative reports
• A final report
• Final data set(s)

The Project will provide successful applicants with more information about award reporting requirements once the award is confirmed.

VI. Terms and Conditions, Disclaimers

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5 U.S. law requires that any organization receiving over USD 25,000 in U.S. Government funds through grants and sub-grants must share certain information. To track this information, the U.S. Government requires the organization to obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number. Visit http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform to fill in and submit the web form to receive a DUNS number for your organization. It usually takes 24-72 business hours to process a request for a DUNS number. SAM, the System for Award Management, is a U.S. Government system that FHI 360 uses to determine if an entity has been banned from doing business with the U.S. Government.

6 U.S. law requires that any organization receiving over USD 25,000 in U.S. Government funds through grants and sub-grants must share certain information. To track this information, the U.S. Government requires the organization to obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number. Visit http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform to fill in and submit the web form to receive a DUNS number for your organization. It usually takes 24-72 business hours to process a request for a DUNS number. SAM, the System for Award Management, is a U.S. Government system that FHI 360 uses to determine if an entity has been banned from doing business with the U.S. Government. Organizations wishing to receive U.S. Government funds must register on the SAM website at www.sam.gov

7 Mandatory Certifications are US Government certificates to be signed by a grantee attesting that the grantee does not engage in lobbying or the financing of terrorist activities, and (for large, largely US Government-funded entities) is financially transparent.
A. Terms and Conditions
As a USAID-funded project, MNSP is required to follow the provisions of the United States Foreign Assistance Act and other United States Government laws and regulations. For non-U.S. organizations, the Standard Provisions for Non-U.S., Nongovernmental Grantees will apply. 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 700 will also apply to any sub-awards under this award. It is USAID policy not to award profit under assistance instruments.

For non-U.S. organizations, the Standard Provisions for Non-U.S., Nongovernmental Grantees and the applicable cost principles (2 CFR 200 Subpart E – Cost Principles) will apply.

- 2 CFR 200 Cost Principles:
  [http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=2:1.1.2.2.1.5&rgn=div6](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=2:1.1.2.2.1.5&rgn=div6)

- Standard Provisions for Non-U.S., Nongovernmental Grantees:

Activities that will not be considered for funding include:
- Activities related to the promotion of specific political parties;
- Reconstruction or building rehabilitation projects that are not accompanied by plans for wide community use and maintenance;
- Distribution of emergency/humanitarian assistance or funds;
- Religious events or activities that promote a particular faith;
- For-profit business activities that benefit a small select group, rather than providing increased opportunities to the larger community;
- Unrelated operational expenses.

Prohibited Goods and Services
Under no circumstances shall the recipient procure any of the following under this award, as these items are excluded by the Foreign Assistance Act and other legislation which govern USAID fund Military equipment;
- Surveillance equipment;
- Commodities and services for support of police or other law enforcement activities;
- Abortion equipment and services;
- Luxury goods and gambling equipment;
- Weather modification equipment.

Restricted Goods
The following costs are restricted by USAID (primarily due to higher-level restrictions imposed by U.S. regulatory bodies or through specific legislation) and require prior approval from FHI 360 and USAID:
- Agricultural commodities;
- Motor vehicles;
- Pharmaceuticals;
- Pesticides;
- Fertilizer;
- Used equipment; and
- U.S. Government-owned excess property.

B. Disclaimers
1. FHI 360 may cancel an RFA and/or not make awards.
2. FHI 360 may reject any or all of the responses to its RFA.
3. Issuance of an RFA does not constitute award commitment by FHI 360.
4. FHI 360 reserves the right to disqualify any application based on offeror failure to follow RFA instructions.
5. FHI 360 will not reimburse applicants for the cost of preparing and submitting an application to an RFA.
6. FHI 360 reserves the right to issue an award on the basis of an initial evaluation of offers without further discussion.
7. FHI 360 may award grants for only part of the activities listed in an RFA.
8. FHI 360 reserves the right to check an applicant’s donor references.
9. FHI 360 also reserves the right to reject any or all applications received without explanation.
10. FHI 360 has the right to issue amendments to the RFA at any time.

Withdrawals of Applications
Applicant may withdraw applications by written notice via email received at any time before award. Applications may be withdrawn in person by an applicant or his/her authorized representative, if the representative’s identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the application before award.

Right to Select/Reject
FHI 360 reserves the right to select and negotiate with those organization it determines, in its sole discretion, to be qualified for competitive proposals and to terminate negotiations without incurring any liability. FHI 360 also reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received without explanation.

RFA Not an Offer
This RFA represents only a definition of requirements. It is merely an invitation for submission of proposals and does not legally obligate FHI 360 to accept any of the submitted proposals in whole or in part, nor is FHI 360 obligated to select the lowest priced proposal. FHI 360 has no contractual obligations with any organization based upon issuance of this RFA. It is not an offer to award. Only the execution of a written agreement shall obligate FHI 360 in accordance with the terms and conditions contained in such agreement.

Discussions and Award
FHI 360 reserves the right to seek clarifications, enter into discussions or negotiations, or to make award on initial submissions without discussions or negotiations of any kind. FHI 360 reserves the right to exclude from further consideration any proposal at any time, including after discussions or negotiations have been entered into.

Pre-award (Due-diligence)
FHI 360 reserves the right to conduct pre-award review of the selected applicant before making a final decision to award.
Application Validity Date
All information submitted in connection with this RFA will be valid for three (3) months from the RFA due date. This includes, but is not limited to, cost, pricing, terms and conditions, service levels, and all other information. If your organization is awarded the contract, all information in the RFA and negotiation process is contractually binding.

Offer Verifications
FHI 360 may contact organizations to confirm contact person, address, bid amount and to confirm that the bid was submitted for this solicitation.

False Statements in Offer
Applicant must provide full, accurate and complete information as required by this solicitation and its attachments. At any time that FHI 360 determines that an applicant has provide false statements in the proposal, FHI 360 may reject the proposal without further consideration.

RFA Attachments

A. Budget excel sheet (template)
B. Budget narrative (template)
C. Biodata form