Lewis-Burke Associates LLC

U.S. Agency for International Development

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is a mission agency responsible for implementing the United States' global development agenda in partnership with the Department of State. While universities have long viewed USAID as an underutilized partner, USAID has made an enhanced use of science, technology, and innovation to modernize global development. Illustratively, the past two years have seen the emergence of numerous new initiatives to better engage the scientific and technological communities in global development. Programs like the Higher Education Solutions Network, Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER), Development Innovation Ventures (DIV), and Grand Challenges for Development are all initiatives either targeted specifically at or available to university researchers. Further, a new Office of Science and Technology was recently established within USAID to help ensure that development policy decisions are guided by the best possible evidence. The Office has proven to be a valuable new entry point for the research community.

Research Scope & Objectives

USAID supports research with the ability to enhance global development. This includes projects involving the development of new systems and technologies as well as the application of existing technologies to development in innovative new ways. While the agency is willing to support projects in a wide variety of areas relevant to global development, many recent solicitations have sought proposals on topics including climate change, energy, agriculture, education, and child and maternal health as applied to the developing world. The Obama Administration's broad global development priorities were outlined in the inaugural Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) released in 2010. These priorities continue to guide USAID's development policies and associated research opportunities.

Degree of Engagement

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Most USAID research awards flow to universities as grants, although some development work and project implementation may be funded through contracts or other mechanisms. As discussed above, USAID has engaged with universities for years but efforts have greatly expanded under the current Administration. USAID's increased outreach to universities is also aimed at helping achieve the goal of building capacity in developing countries to ensure that progress is made beyond the end of federal support. Local capacity building is another pillar of Administrator Shah's reform agenda for USAID following years of concern about waste and inefficiency caused by the agency's historical reliance on large development corporations to design and implement development programs. This approach is expected to continue as development dollars remain tight. Finally, USAID accepts unsolicited proposals through its country and regional missions, but the squeeze on the agency's appropriations have caused low success rates through this approach.

Signature Programs

Targeted Opportunities:
- **Higher Education Solutions Network** – In February, USAID released a solicitation for a new program called the Higher Education Solutions Network to create a network of university-based centers to pursue potentially game-changing advances in international development. Agency officials stress that they want universities' best

and most creative ideas which target key global development challenges and were intentionally vague regarding topic areas for the new program. USAID wants centers to be interdisciplinary and to heavily involve students. The strong interest in the program makes it likely that USAID will fund additional rounds of the program subject to future appropriations. *More information: http://universityengagement.usaid.gov/.*

- **Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER)** – PEER is the first opportunity through the new NSF/USAID MOU which will provide grants to researchers in developing countries to supplement ongoing work by U.S. researchers through active NSF awards. There is no new money for U.S. researchers and applications must be submitted by foreign researchers directly to the National Academies, which will administer the money on behalf of USAID. USAID is funding PEER while NSF is offering guidance on the peer review process for selecting proposals. Because USAID is focused on building capacity through the program, conferences and other seminars in developing countries also qualify for funding in an effort to engage as many individuals as possible on topics of interest (including natural hazards resiliency, biodiversity, and climate change). A second round of PEER awards focused on global health in partnership with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has also been announced. *More information: http://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/dsc/peer/index.htm.*

- **Grand Challenges for Development** – Grand Challenges for Development are competitions to promote innovative new solutions to targeted global development challenges. Administered as partnerships between USAID, its foreign counterparts, and a variety of nongovernmental organizations, the agency has thus far run competitions for Grand Challenges related to education (All Children Reading), maternal health (Saving Lives at Birth), and energy to support agricultural development (Powering Agriculture). Future Grand Challenges are expected, with potential topics including water and food security. Grand Challenges are open, but not limited, to universities. *More information: http://www.usaid.gov/grandchallenges/.*

- **Development Innovation Ventures** – DIV provides funding to identify and test projects with the potential to provide game-changing development outcomes. DIV funds proof of concept activities, scaling, and implementation of innovative development solutions, but does not support basic research. Similar to the Department of Defense's Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) process, USAID uses an Annual Program Statement to outline its priorities for DIV and invites proposals until a replacement is issued. DIV affords applicants a broad ability to propose innovative projects so long as they are linked to a USAID development priority. However, USAID emphasizes that proposals must offer transformative development solutions, and that DIV is not designed to support incremental advances in existing technologies or systems. *More information: http://idea.usaid.gov/organization/div.*

Additional
Resources

USAID Website: http://www.usaid.gov/
USAID University Engagement Website: http://universityengagement.usaid.gov/
Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review: http://www.state.gov/s/dmr/qddr/index.htm