



USAID | CAMBODIA

Issue Date: June 25, 2024

Deadline for Questions: July 4, 2024 at 10 a.m. Cambodia time

Pre-Application Conference: July 9, 2024 at 9 a.m. Cambodia time (Instruction for joining the conference is in section D.2 – registration in advance is required)

Closing Date: August 6, 2024

Closing Time: 10 a.m. Cambodia time

Subject: Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Number: 72044224RFA00004

Program Title: Bridging Education Solutions for Transformation (BEST) Activity

Federal Assistance Listing Number: 98.001

Ladies/Gentlemen:

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is seeking applications for a cooperative agreement from qualified entities to implement the BEST Activity. Eligibility for this award is restricted to local organizations.

USAID intends to make an award to the applicant(s) who best meets the objectives of this funding opportunity based on the merit review criteria described in this NOFO subject to a risk assessment. Eligible parties interested in submitting an application are encouraged to read this NOFO thoroughly to understand the type of program sought, application submission requirements and selection process.

To be eligible for award, the applicant must provide all information as required in this NOFO and meet eligibility standards in Section C of this NOFO. This funding opportunity is posted on www.grants.gov, and may be amended. It is the responsibility of the applicant to regularly check the website to ensure they have the latest information pertaining to this notice of funding opportunity and to ensure that the NOFO has been received from the internet in its entirety. USAID bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion process. If you have difficulty registering on www.grants.gov or accessing the NOFO, please contact the Grants.gov Helpdesk at 1-800-518-4726 or via email at support@grants.gov for technical assistance.

USAID may not award to an applicant unless the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM) requirements detailed in

Section D. The registration process may take many weeks to complete. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to begin registration early in the process.

Please send any questions to the point(s) of contact identified in Section SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT(S). The deadline for questions is shown above. Responses to questions received prior to the deadline will be furnished to all potential applicants through an amendment to this notice posted to www.grants.gov.

Issuance of this notice of funding opportunity does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government nor does it commit the Government to pay for any costs incurred in preparation or submission of comments/suggestions or an application. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Thank you for your interest in USAID programs.

Sincerely,

**Francis
Hall**

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Date: 2024.06.25
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Francis Hall
Agreement Officer
USAID/Cambodia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION A: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	5
A.1 PURPOSE.....	5
A.2 BACKGROUND	6
A.3 THEORY OF CHANGE	10
A.4 RESULT FRAMEWORK.....	10
A.5 GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE	16
A.6 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES.....	16
A.7 COORDINATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY	18
SECTION B: FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION	20
B.1 ESTIMATE OF FUNDS AVAILABLE AND NUMBER OF AWARDS CONTEMPLATED	20
B.2 EXPECTED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, TARGETS, BASELINE DATA, AND DATA COLLECTION	20
B.3 START DATE AND PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE FOR FEDERAL AWARDS.....	20
B.4 SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT	20
B.5 AUTHORIZED GEOGRAPHIC CODE.....	23
B.6 NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USAID AND THE RECIPIENT.....	23
SECTION C: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION	24
C.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS	24
C.2 COST SHARING OR MATCHING	24
C.3 LIMITATIONS ON SUBMISSIONS.....	25
SECTION D: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION	26
D.1 AGENCY POINT OF CONTACT	26
D.2 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	26
D.3 GENERAL CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION.....	26
D.4 APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCEDURES	28
D.5 TECHNICAL APPLICATION FORMAT.....	29
D.6 BUSINESS (COST) APPLICATION FORMAT	33
SECTION E: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION	46
E.1 CRITERIA	46
E.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS	46
SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION	49

F.1 FEDERAL AWARD NOTICES..... 49

F.2 ADMINISTRATIVE & NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS 49

F.3 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS..... 49

F.4 PROGRAM INCOME 54

F.5 ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE 54

SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDDING AGENCY CONTACT(S) 56

G.1 NOFO POINTS OF CONTACT 56

G.2 ACQUISITION AND ASSISTANCE OMBUDSMAN 56

SECTION H: OTHER INFORMATION..... 57

ATTACHMENT 1: INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION (IEE) 58

SECTION A: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This funding opportunity is authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, as amended. The resulting award will be subject to 2 CFR 200 – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, and USAID’s supplement, 2 CFR 700, as well as the additional requirements found in section SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION.

A.1 PURPOSE

The long-term purpose of the BEST activity is to improve learning outcomes and necessary skills of students, particularly the most marginalized groups so that they remain in primary schools and effectively transition to lower secondary education. The overarching objective of BEST is to introduce the most cost-effective education solution to improve Khmer literacy and “Read-to-Learn” abilities among grade 4 students.

Specific objectives are:

- 1) To revise core textbook for Khmer grade 4 and develop cost-effective and practical literacy packages for grade 4;
- 2) To improve teachers’ competencies in teaching literacy in target primary schools; and
- 3) To produce and disseminate evidence that supports the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport’s efforts to scale-up successful practices.

The activity is in line with the [U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education 2024-2029](#) by contributing to *“improving learning outcomes across the education continuum and expanding access to quality basic education, particularly for the most historically marginalized.”* The design is underpinned by the four strategic approaches of the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education 2024-2029: 1) *Prioritize Country Ownership and Locally Led Development*; 2) *Generate and Use Data and Evidence to Drive Decision-Making and Investments*; 3) *Strengthen the Capacity and Performance of Education Systems*; and 4) *Promote Equity and Inclusion*. BEST also advances [USAID/Cambodia’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy \(CDCS\) 2020-2025](#), particularly Development Objective 2: *“Health, education, and welfare of Cambodians improved through enhanced services;”* and USAID’s [Inclusive Development Approaches](#) to promote diversity, equity, equality, inclusion, conflict sensitivity, accessibility, and nondiscrimination.

This activity will build on USAID’s ongoing investments in early grade reading in grades 1-3, which focus on “Learn-to-Read” abilities by consolidating best practices to develop and test an evidence-based model that addresses USAID’s priority to help Cambodian students improve their “Read-to-Learn” abilities starting from grade 4. This will expand the impact of USAID’s overall early grade reading investments across the whole primary education cycle. The activity

will also document learning and concrete recommendations through robust scientific study, and test and refine a model that can serve as the basis for future national scale-up.

A.2 BACKGROUND

a. Country Context

While demand for quality primary education is increasing and access to education for all has expanded rapidly, the most significant challenge facing Cambodia's education system is related to quality. The results from well-established national and international assessments suggest that Cambodian schools are not equipping students sufficiently with the knowledge and skills required to be competitive in regional and global contexts. Cambodian students are consistently underperforming against educational standards. Data on the education levels of teachers shows that out of the 44,905 primary teachers, 28% of the total primary teachers do not receive pedagogical training (particularly among contract teachers); 53% have upper secondary certificates; 23% have a bachelor's degree; 19% have a lower secondary certificate; and 4% have only primary education. Very few have post-graduate level education and even fewer have a PhD. Urban-rural divides are another challenge facing Cambodia's education system, with rural schools lagging. The lack of library and ICT resources also restricts teaching and learning quality. The budget allocated for public primary schools is declining, and donors are making less aid available to the primary education sector. From 2018-2022, the budget for primary school teacher training decreased by 92 percent (per Budget Law 2018-2022). Innovation is needed in the delivery of quality education services, especially at the primary level.

Building upon previous national development strategies (Triangular and Four-Phase Rectangular), national education policy falls under the 2023 Pentagonal Strategy Phase I adopted by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) focusing on *"Growth, Employment, Equity, Efficiency, and Sustainability"*. The Phase I strategy is part of the broader Pentagonal Strategy, which is Cambodia's long-term (25-year), five-phase socio-economic strategy. Institutional reform and strengthening are the core of Phase I, in which three of the five pillars align with the [USAID Education Policy](#) objectives of *"Human Capital Development; Sustainable Development; and Digital Economy Development."*

In line with this updated RGC strategy, in which education is underlined as a top national priority, Cambodia's new Prime Minister, who assumed the office in 2023 has further elaborated priorities in the education sector, including strengthening curriculum review, expanding extracurricular activities, and strengthening partnerships between the state and communities. In the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) new Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2024-2028, national policy ensures inclusive, equitable, quality education to promote life-long learning opportunities for all Cambodians. Three of five priority program areas align with USAID Education Policy goals: *"Promoting Performance-Based Management; Promoting 21st-century Skills for Youth; Promoting Physical Activities, Physical Education, and Sports."*

To advance the school reform, MoEYS has developed five standards for schools to improve themselves toward the level of a so-called “model school”. The standards focus on: 1) Learning Outcomes; 2) Teaching and Learning; 3) Community Participation Standard; 4) School Operation and Administration; and 5) School Accountability. To improve learning outcomes, teacher development is targeted to core subjects - for Primary (grade 1): Khmer literacy and Math; and for Lower Secondary (grades 7-9): Math, Khmer literacy and Science. Within these standards, the MoEYS emphasizes equipping children beyond knowledge (80 percent of focus) to include skills (10 percent) and attitudes (10 percent) within a global citizenship¹ perspective, aligned with the new school curriculum and Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 “Education for sustainable development and global citizenship”. While skills and attitudes appear in the curriculum, there is widespread recognition by stakeholders, including the Primary Education Department, that insufficient attention is dedicated to these topics.

MoEYS, donors, and NGOs currently support numerous education programs. For example, the World Bank is implementing the General Education Improvement Project (GEIP) which focuses on school-based reform from pre-school to upper secondary schools, and employs a holistic approach for school improvement. UNESCO was a grant agent for the Global Partnership for Education Phase III (GPE3), which worked in partnership with USAID on early grade learning programs from 2018 to 2021. For GPE5, UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank serve as the grant agents, and programs focus on the quality of teaching and learning, gender equity, and education system strengthening, including some targeted interventions to improve in-service and pre-service teacher training, support early grade learning scale-up, and implement school-based reforms. Above the primary level, the Asian Development Bank is robustly focused on Cambodia’s upper secondary education system. The World Bank, through the legacy Higher Education Improvement Project, concentrated attention toward agricultural education, STEM, faculty upgrading, and infrastructure. Other donors currently work in niche subsectors, such as JICA which focuses on teacher education reform and improvement of pre-service training institutions. There is an ongoing effort to harmonize support in education through joint funding mechanisms, such as the Capacity Development Partnership Fund (CDPF) which pools resources from USAID, EU, GPE, and UNICEF to support system strengthening and sector capacity building. As illustrated above, while multiple sources of funding are supporting national efforts to strengthen early grade learning and other levels of education, there has been inadequate investment to date targeted to improve upper primary education. This gap has been highlighted further through consultations with MoEYS and NGO partners.

¹ Global citizenship education aims to be transformative, building the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world. This term is broadly defined in this concept note as building student competencies, value and attitude through class-based or facilitated extracurricular discussions, case studies, role playing, service learning, cross-generational and inter-cultural exposures, and by harnessing the nascent skills and curiosity of this age group.

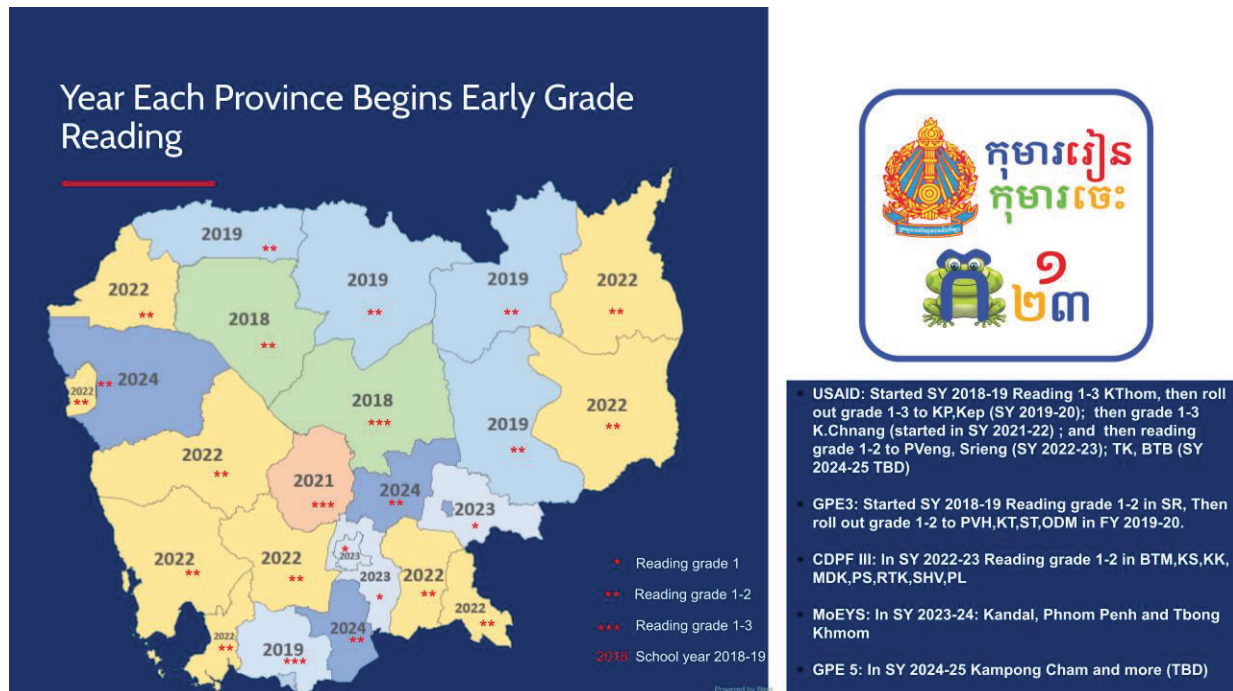
b. Problem Statement

Despite numerous efforts and investments in the education sector, Cambodia is still experiencing poor learning outcomes at scale as evidenced by national, regional and international learning assessments. The 2022 grade 6 national student learning assessment shows roughly 70 percent grade 6 students continue to face challenges in mastering literacy and numeracy skills. The 2021 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Matrix (SEA-PLM) Assessment shows that 89 percent of Cambodian students do not meet minimum proficiency for reading, and 81 percent do not meet minimum proficiency for math by the end of primary school. The 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that Cambodia is ranked at the bottom of the list of countries assessed, with 82 percent of 15-year-old students not meeting minimum proficiency in Reading, Math and Science. In addition, there is a 50 percent drop in student retention during the transition from primary to lower secondary school. Poor quality education is a major driver for school dropout in upper primary grades. Antiquated teacher practices, instructional methods, teachers' capacity in teaching literacy, and a lack of teaching and learning resources push Cambodia further away from addressing this severe learning crisis, particularly on foundational learnings in primary grades, which is the bottleneck that needs to be addressed.

c. Proposed Solution

USAID's consolidated early grade reading program is a model for making measurable improvements in learning outcomes at scale in early grades. To date, in partnership with MOYES, this early grade learning program has been scaled up to the majority of primary schools in the country (almost 90 percent for grade 1 and 76 percent for grade 2), and is on track to reach nation-wide coverage, leveraging funding from MoEYS, USAID, CDPF and GPE. Evaluation of this program using Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) showed significant impacts on students' reading skills: a 16 percent improvement in Grade 1 letter identification, and a two fold increase in students' reading comprehension in grades 2 and 3. This indicates a promising impact on students' "Learn-to-Read" ability once the program is brought to a national scale.

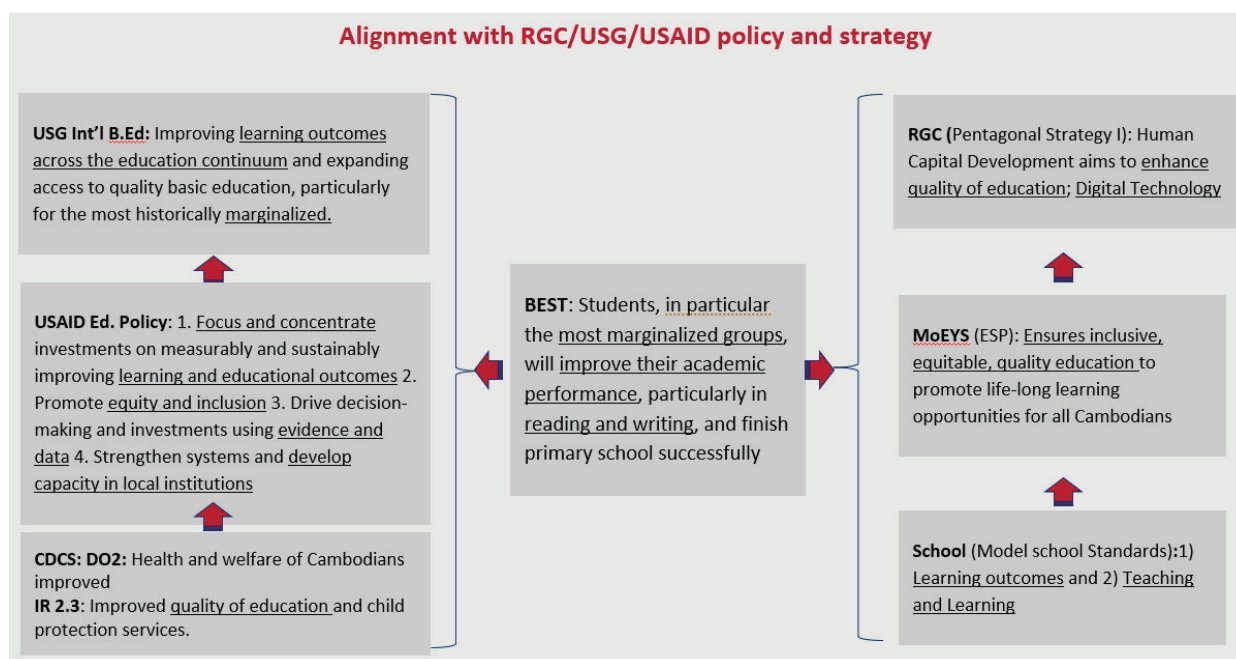
Figure 1: National Scale-up of Early Grade Reading Program



USAID, through the BEST activity, now seeks to develop and test a practical and scalable model to improve students' literacy and learning skills focusing on "Read-to-Learn" ability in upper primary grade 4. The "Read-to-Learn" ability will go beyond literacy "primary skills" to equip children with "integrated skills, values and attitudes" through project-based learning and extracurricular activities, in particular for fourth graders. Instilling project-based learning, an objective that is required if Cambodia is to develop a new generation of global thinkers and citizens, is widely recognized by officials across ministries and top leadership, including the Minister of MoEYS and Prime Minister.

This activity explores solutions that benefit students in 3 different groups: 1) the most marginalized students living in remote areas; 2) students in schools that represent a typical, or average, school context in Cambodia; and 3) students in a small number of schools that are positioned to use education technology.

Figure 2: Alignment of the proposed solution to U.S. Government (USG)/USAID and RGC education policies, strategies, and priorities



A.3 THEORY OF CHANGE

IF teachers and students in grade 4 have revised Khmer textbook and evidence-based teaching and learning literacy packages that are reinforced by teachers' practical professional development, teachers' mentoring program and extracurricular activities supported by good school governance;

THEN students in upper primary grades, in particular the most marginalized groups, will improve their academic performance, particularly in reading and writing, and finish primary school successfully.

A.4 RESULT FRAMEWORK

Overarching Objective: To introduce the most cost-effective education solution to improve Khmer literacy and "Read-to-Learn" abilities of grade 4 students, in particular the most marginalized populations.

Specific Objective 1: To revise core textbook for Khmer grade 4 and develop essential and practical literacy packages for grade 4.

IR1: Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and supplementary teaching and learning materials for literacy grade 4 developed for classroom and extracurricular activities.

Sub IR 1.1: A situational analysis and a robust teachers' and students' capacities and needs assessment conducted to inform the revision of grade 4 Khmer textbook and the design of the supplementary teaching and learning packages.	Sub IR 1.2: Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and effective supplementary teaching and learning materials packages for literacy of grade 4 developed, tested and refined.	Sub IR 1.3: A concrete approach and innovative tools for extracurricular activities to reinforce grade 4 students' skills developed, tested and refined.
<p>Specific Objective 2: To improve teachers' competencies in teaching literacy in target primary schools.</p> <p>IR 2: Teachers in target schools are more capable to teach literacy in classrooms and support extracurricular activities.</p>		
Sub IR 2.1: Teacher training and teacher mentoring programs for teachers to use the newly created materials are developed, tested and refined.	Sub IR 2.2: Teachers and mentors in the target schools receive capacity building and acquire skills necessary to implement the new literacy packages.	Sub IR 2.3: Teachers in the target schools are supported to demonstrate new skills and practices in their classrooms through ongoing mentoring and performance monitoring.
<p>Specific Objective 3: To produce and disseminate evidence that supports the MoEYS' efforts to scale-up successful practices.</p> <p>IR 3: The MoEYS adopted the revised textbook for Khmer grade 4 and the literacy packages in grade 4 for scale-up.</p>		
Sub IR 3.1: Clear documentation of lessons learned, challenges, opportunities, and results of the core targeted interventions.	Sub IR 3.2: A consolidated and realistic costing model with recommendations on scaling up effective literacy models developed.	Sub IR 3.3: A robust and reliable evaluation of the effectiveness of the core targeted interventions led by MoEYS.

The overarching objective of BEST is to introduce the most cost-effective education solution to improve Khmer literacy and “Read-to-Learn” abilities of students, in particular the most marginalized populations, utilizing the most effective, practical, adaptable, and scalable solutions to improve learning outcomes and basic social and emotional learning skills of students. The main focus of BEST will be on grade 4 students.

Subject to further funding availability, USAID may expand the activity through the use of the Opportunity Module to address additional priorities that are identified during implementation that contribute to any of the three objectives.

Specific Objective 1: To revise core textbook for Khmer grade 4 and develop essential and practical literacy packages for grade 4.

Expected Results:

Intermediate Result 1: Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and supplementary teaching and learning materials for literacy grade 4 developed for classroom and extracurricular activities.

Sub IR 1.1: A situational analysis and a robust teachers’ and students’ capacities and needs assessment conducted to inform the revision of grade 4 Khmer textbook and the design of the supplementary teaching and learning packages.

Sub IR 1.2: Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and effective supplementary teaching and learning materials packages for literacy of grade 4 developed, tested and refined.

Sub IR 1.3: A concrete approach and innovative tools for extracurricular activities to reinforce grade 4 students’ skills developed, tested and refined.

The activity will support the MoEYS to consolidate national and international best practices regarding teaching approaches and resources for literacy in grade 4, building on existing materials and tools, filling gaps in and aligning with existing curricula/syllabi, and integrating education technology where applicable to facilitate student learning and improve reading and writing proficiency. BEST will support the MoEYS to revise the core textbook for Khmer grade 4 and develop two mutually reinforcing sets of literacy packages for grade 4 – one for use in the classroom and the other for extracurricular activities. The content of the two sets of materials must be interconnected to reinforce students’ learning in literacy and to ensure alignment of the core textbook and curriculum. In addition to literacy reinforcement, the extracurricular package can be used in either the school or at home to help learners develop their “Read-to-Learn” ability beyond literacy, to include mathematics and other subject areas as appropriate and promote their basic social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. Key SEL skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship skills, and responsible decision making. BEST will ensure that extracurricular materials are enduring, cost-effective, and innovative and are complementing existing library resources. The two sets of packages must be

cost-effective and well-aligned with the MoEYS curriculum and core textbook. Development of the literacy packages will be based on a proper needs assessment and agreement with the MoEYS. The activity will support the MoEYS to test the revised core textbook. The material design process must be participatory and inclusive of experts from MoEYS and other stakeholders including the private sector. BEST must support MoEYS experts and, following localization principles, empower them to lead in the material development/revision processes with technical assistance offered by the activity as well as by other interested partners.

The larger goal of this activity is to have an effective, sustainable model that is owned and scaled-up by the MoEYS to address students' learning outcomes in varying school contexts at a larger scale. This will require an evidenced-based approach underpinned by a robust study and analysis of the current reality of the capacities and needs of teachers, students, and schools, and by evaluation of existing tools/resources and practices in grade 4 before interventions are introduced. The scope of the study/analysis will cover grades 4-6, but the activity's core interventions will focus only on grade 4 only. The design of the essential supplementary teaching and learning literacy packages must be evidence-based, cost-effective, needs-based, and innovative in integration of technology solutions and extracurricular activities to enhance learning outcomes.

The literacy packages are expected to be in both printable and digital formats taking into account overarching principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility so that all students regardless of their background or learning ability can benefit. A cost-effective education technology solution is expected to be integrated into the material design and/or to be tested as a tool to help children learn and practice their reading and writing skills in both classroom and extracurricular activities. As the MoEYS has recently introduced two-hour extracurricular activities for schools, this activity will introduce innovative approaches for extracurricular activities, such as project-based learning, play-based tutoring and academic tutoring via student clubs and/or technology-based solutions that promote students' interest in learning and help them improve their academic achievement and basic SEL skills. The packages will need to be properly tested, refined and finalized using USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Framework. Further, BEST must ensure the inclusive materials developed or revised under this activity are acceptable to the MoEYS.

Specific Objective 2: To improve teachers' competencies in teaching literacy in target primary schools.

Expected Results:

Intermediate Result 2: Teachers in target schools are more capable to teach literacy in classrooms and support extracurricular activities.

Sub IR 2.1: Teacher training and teacher mentoring programs for teachers to use the newly created materials are developed, tested and refined.

Sub IR 2.2: Teachers and mentors in the target schools receive capacity building and acquire skills necessary to implement the new literacy packages.

Sub IR 2.3: Teachers in the target schools are supported to demonstrate new skills and practices in their classrooms through ongoing mentoring and performance monitoring.

The activity will develop a teacher training and mentoring program with concrete, practical training manuals for teachers and teacher mentors to test the revised textbook and implement the new literacy packages in target schools. BEST must employ effective teacher development approaches using evidence-based teaching methodologies to ensure that all children can develop “Read-to-Learn” skills to the best of their abilities. The activity will ensure the revised textbook and the new packages are properly tested in selected schools and teachers are well supported through sufficient mentoring so that they can master the skills in teaching the new packages. BEST must ensure the use of appropriate and context-based approaches to ensure mentoring support occurs sufficiently and regularly at target schools. Target schools must be selected taking into account students in three different groups: 1) the most marginalized students living in remote areas; 2) students in schools that represent the majority of school context in Cambodia; and 3) students in a small number of schools that are positioned to use education technology. BEST will ensure that there is a sufficient number of schools that fit in categories 1 and 2 to test the effectiveness of the materials and core interventions. BEST must also take into account the role and function of school governance to ensure teachers receive the necessary support and are held accountable for implementing the new materials and teaching approaches properly.

Likewise, for extracurricular activities, BEST will ensure students’ meaningful engagement in extracurricular activities both at school and at home. This helpful habit will serve boys especially, as time with friends is a proven strategy to entice students to stay engaged with school and prevent dropout (an increasing risk for boys as they progress higher in education). For technology-based solutions, depending on resources availability and school context, a smaller number of schools in the same or different selected geographic area(s) can be selected to ensure the robustness of such interventions. Schools selected to implement technology-based solutions should have sufficient ICT infrastructure such as computers/tablets plus, where applicable, electricity and internet access. The activity does not aim to equip schools with information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, but may consider purchasing some ICT equipment such as computers, tablets, and, where applicable, internet access for a small number of disadvantaged schools to promote equitable access of ICT use in rural areas - to the extent feasible within the approved activity budget. In such a case, BEST will need to consider the associated costs for ICT equipment and maintenance and ensure the recipient schools have a plan and arrangements in place for covering them. BEST will judiciously consider, explain, and justify the cost implications for any ICT intervention. BEST also must use or deploy appropriate mechanisms, including technological tools to track mentoring support for teachers, teachers’ progress and students’ achievements throughout the school year for ongoing reflection and adaptation.

Specific Objective 3: To produce and disseminate evidence that supports the MoEYS' efforts to scale-up successful practices.

Expected Results:

Intermediate Result 3: The MoEYS adopted the revised textbook for Khmer grade 4 and the literacy packages in grade 4 for scale-up.

Sub IR 3.1: Clear documentation of lessons learned, challenges, opportunities, and results of the core targeted interventions.

Sub IR 3.2: A consolidated and realistic costing model with recommendations on scaling up effective literacy models developed.

Sub IR 3.3: A robust and reliable evaluation of the effectiveness of the core targeted interventions led by MoEYS.

Throughout the activity cycle, the activity will document what is working and what is not in line with USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Framework. Documentation will also include step-by-step guides on intervention approaches to promote replicability and fidelity of implementation, opportunities and challenges related to implementation and sustainability, and valid and reliable data on students' and teachers' performance. The opportunities could include the potential inclusion of innovative interventions, and for scale-up of best practices and future collaboration. A consolidated and realistic costing model with clear recommendations on which intervention components are best suited for scaling up for specific groups of students will be developed by BEST. This will further contribute to the existing evidence-base for the MoEYS' replication.

BEST must incorporate a robust and reliable evaluation method to test the effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, scalability, and sustainability of the program, along with a viable, costing strategy with clear recommendations on how the MoEYS should scale up the program in terms of budgeting, timeframe, geographical scope and scale-up approaches. Measuring the fidelity of implementation must take into account different school contexts (e.g. selection criteria used to select target schools) and interventions (see target school section in Intermediate Result 2). BEST must engage the MoEYS team throughout the design and implementation of the core interventions for the MoEYS' buy-in. To ensure the soundness and the reliability of the evaluation, the activity will ensure that MoEYS, especially the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD) leads on development of student learning assessment tools, data collection and analysis of the effectiveness of the interventions. Selection of student literacy assessments and teacher performance assessments must be completed in close coordination with the MoEYS and USAID. Finally, the BEST monitoring, evaluation and learning plan must demonstrate how the aforementioned data will be collected, analyzed and reported reliably and with integrity.

Opportunity Module

Supplementing the intervention description as stated in the Results Framework above, USAID and the recipient may identify opportunities for improving our response through this mechanism to address specific education priority needs that cannot be precisely identified during the design process, but emerge throughout implementation. Applying the opportunity module may also allow this activity to expand geographic coverage to other provinces/districts as appropriate or expand reach within existing provinces. Subject to funding availability, USAID will work with the recipient to identify priority needs and provide technical support by bringing national and international expertise to support interventions related to existing objectives.

A.5 GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

This activity focuses on education interventions that benefit grade 4 students in three different groups/categories: 1) the most marginalized students living in remote areas; 2) students in schools that represent the majority of school context in Cambodia; and 3) students in a small number of schools that are positioned to use education technology. BEST will develop and justify a sampling frame and strategy that will permit a robust evaluation of the proposed interventions within available resources. BEST must consult with MoEYS in identifying the final target schools for BEST interventions. In addition, the activity will also support the MoEYS to test the revised textbook which may occur in the same or different schools/geographic areas. A specific number of schools and geographic areas for testing textbook will need to be defined in consultation with MoEYS as part of the work plan development, following the award.

A.6 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

a. Gender and Inclusive Development

This activity shall consider holistic approaches to gender and inclusive development to integrate such themes in the programming, implementation, and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan.

Gender Responsive Approach is suggested to be applied in material design, teacher training and interventions with gender-diverse individuals/students. The activity requires targeting of boys related to enrollment, class participation, study performance and school achievement. It is also suggested to have men teachers/mentors, with an effort to promote gender equality and inclusive development of early-grade teachers. The activity will elevate the status of teaching in the upper primary grades by upgrading the expertise of many teachers working in these grades.

Equitable and Inclusive Education is suggested to be integrated into the work plan, teacher training, teacher mentoring programs, literacy package development and regular reporting as well as in monitoring and evaluation of the activity. It is focused on understanding, accepting and promoting the diversity and differences of students ability including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional based on local and community context. The plans will include specific

approaches or strategies that are tailored to the needs of gender-diverse individuals with particular attention to boys and marginalized groups including children with [disabilities](#), ethnic minorities, indigenous children, poor children, and those children who are lagging behind in school. All of these target children will equitably benefit from the activity without any discrimination and harm in line with the principles of [Do No Harm](#), [Inclusive Development Approaches](#), [Adapt Approach](#) and [Principle of DEIA](#) (diversity, equity, inclusive and accessibility). To **promote inclusive education in a classroom environment, training materials and designs** should utilize materials and activities that support all students' learning needs, incorporate a variety of local context backgrounds and foster critical thinking. Teaching materials (ICT equipment and textbooks) consider using illustration, visual, sensory stories, auditory, and other additional practical activities.

A focus on creating a **Child Friendly Environment** is recommended for this activity to ensure **safety and security** of students/children related to confidentiality, privacy, and respect for children's rights. Gender-inclusive language should be used where relevant, in line with the core principle of 2023 USAID gender policy. Principles of **Do No Harm** should be applied to reinforce the practices, implementation that undermine confidentiality and privacy with respect to individual students' performances and other target beneficiaries.

This activity is required to develop a **Gender and Inclusive Development Analysis (GIDA) and Action Plan (GIDAP)**² and these must be integrated into the annual work plan. The action plan and progress on implementation will be integrated into regular program discussion and reflection, and the lessons learned shall be considered for future adaptive management. The action plan should list customized relevant gender indicators to understand issues such as age, ethnic, indigenous, children with disabilities, minority groups and others, and enable USAID to track progress against gender and inclusive development issues. USAID standard PPR indicators should be considered, such as GNDR-8 and other related [indicators](#). In addition, **this activity must collect sex-disaggregated data** for all people-level indicators. Other gender identities such as age, ethnicity, indigenous group, children with disabilities, or other variables should be included in the M&E plan. When relevant, BEST should develop performance and context indicators designed to track changes in key gender gaps from baseline to the end of the activity, and use appropriate qualitative and quantitative methodologies to gather and analyze relevant [gender-sensitive data](#). This activity will integrate gender and inclusive development-related results in quarterly and/or annual reports.

b. New Partnership Initiative and Locally Led Development

This activity supports the [New Partnership Initiative \(NPI\)](#) approach, which is one of the three key objectives of USAID's Acquisition and Assistance Strategy. This encourages USAID to engage with diverse potential partners, strengthen existing partner relationships, and provide a wide

² USAID will provide relevant templates to the award recipient at a later date.

range of entry points for new, nontraditional, and local actors to partner with the agency. NPI aims to promote funding opportunities, capacity strengthening, leadership, and accountability, and elevate local partners to define the priorities, implement solutions, mobilize resources, and foster accountability for the results at a local level.

The activity is aligned with the principles of locally-led development and systems thinking and practices as outlined in USAID's [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#) and [Local Systems Framework](#). The activity emphasizes interventions based on knowledge of local systems; utilization of diverse approaches to engaging and strengthening local actors and measuring the effectiveness thereof; appreciation of local priorities and existing strengths; vigilance against imposing burdens on local communities or causing unintentional harm; and operating with mutuality and respect.

c. Positive Youth Development

[Positive Youth Development \(PYD\)](#) engages youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

USAID defines youth as those aged 10 to 29 years old. The BEST activity mainly focuses on grade 4 Khmer textbook revision, development of additional literacy packages, building teachers' capacities and competencies, and documentation of evidence to support the MoEYS to scale-up successful practices. Therefore, the majority of target students in grade 4 will be those aged 9 years old. However, where applicable, BEST may consider supporting overaged students, particularly focusing on marginalized groups such as students from ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, LGBTQI+, and children in adversity in line with USAID's [Youth in Development Policy](#).

BEST will ensure young people aged 10 and above are included, consulted and informed in the activity design and implementation process, especially related to textbook revision and literacy packages development for grade 4 students in accordance with USAID's [PYD Framework](#). Where interventions on youth are applicable, BEST will be required to report relevant USAID's [Standard Indicators on Youth](#). BEST will be encouraged to develop performance and context-specific indicators, where applicable, to track changes in positive youth development from baseline to end of activity, and use appropriate qualitative and quantitative methodologies to gather and analyze youth-related data and results should be integrated in quarterly or annual reports.

A.7 COORDINATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY

The activity will leverage the work of USAID Inclusive Primary Education Activity (IPEA) and the Digital Workforce Development (DWD) activity, and in particular, lessons learned from the design and implementation of the inclusive early grade learning package, teacher training and

mentoring program, digital development, positive youth development and the Cambodia School Drop-out and Prevention Program.

The activity will complement the General Education Improvement Project (GEIP) implemented by the World Bank, which focuses more heavily on changing school culture and accountability through school based management. Meanwhile, the BEST activity will focus on technical aspects to improve teaching and learning in a robust and targeted manner. Coordination with GEIP will be needed to avoid duplication or to leverage investment in upper primary interventions.

One of the key aspects of this activity is to leverage and build local expertise through partnerships with local NGOs and private sector including writers, illustrators, editors; and the MoEYS's experts in literacy from relevant technical departments as well as the best teachers and academia. This partnership aims to create a locally-led solution that is eventually replicated and owned by the MoEYS. It is, therefore, important to engage MoEYS and other actors early on to get their buy-in and to harmonize efforts throughout the design and implementation of the activity.

[END OF SECTION A]

SECTION B: FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

B.1 ESTIMATE OF FUNDS AVAILABLE AND NUMBER OF AWARDS CONTEMPLATED

USAID intends to award one Cooperative Agreement pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity. Subject to funding availability and at the discretion of the Agency, USAID intends to provide up to \$3 million in total USAID funding (including the opportunity module) over a three-year period.

B.2 EXPECTED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, TARGETS, BASELINE DATA, AND DATA COLLECTION

See the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan in Section F.

B.3 START DATE AND PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE FOR FEDERAL AWARDS

The anticipated period of performance is three (3) years. The estimated start date will be around October 2024.

B.4 SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT

Consistent with ADS 303.3.11, USAID/Cambodia anticipates a close working partnership and substantial involvement based on programmatic requirements under the Cooperative Agreement during performance of the Activity. The intended purpose of the substantial involvement during the award is to assist the Recipient in achieving the objectives of the agreement. The anticipated substantial involvement elements for this Cooperative Agreement are listed below:

1. Approval of the Recipient's Annual Implementation Plan:

Implementation plans include but are not limited to, annual work plans with budget, including planned activities for the following year and any subsequent revisions, international travel plans, planned expenditures, event planning/management and international meeting preparation. USAID requires the approval of implementation plans annually to ensure alignment with stated goals/objectives, milestones and outputs. The implementation plan communicates how and when the recipient will complete project activities and is drafted annually to describe new activities. This plan will be developed in partnership between the recipient and the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR). The AOR will ensure that the implementation plans fit within the scope, terms and conditions of the agreement.

2. Approval of a three- year Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan

A three- year Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan (MEL) describes the monitoring, evaluation and collaborative, learning and adapting (CLA) efforts of BEST. MEL Plan is used

to measure that progress and track the performance of the BEST to ensure that the Activity achieves the intended results and responds to the objectives. The MEL plan includes a key set of basic education core standard indicators and also custom indicators. The MEL plan will also cover monitoring and evaluation plans to ensure the timeliness and robustness of assessing the effectiveness of BEST. This MEL plan will be developed in partnership among the recipient, the MoEYS and the AOR and MEL plan specialist. The AOR will approve the evaluation design and ensure that the MEL plans fit within the scope, terms and conditions of the agreement.

3. Approval of recipient's technical report or guideline:

The Activity will implement the impact evaluation as part of the new innovations to address key challenges and to find the solutions to improve literacy and necessary skills of students in upper primary grades to inform the adoption of the model for a scale up. The development of this impact evaluation requires a partnership between the recipient, the MoEYS and the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) and MEL specialist. The AOR will engage and provide technical inputs throughout the developments to ensure the deliverables aligned with the intended objectives of the Activity.

4. Approval of specified key personnel:

BEST will require experts and specialists in a range of technical areas. The Applicant is requested to propose key personnel and a comprehensive staffing plan depicting a balance of skills to support this Activity's objectives and results under this Cooperative Agreement.

The Applicant should propose full-time and long-term Cambodian key professional personnel which include, but not limited to:

1. Chief of Party
2. Technical Team Lead

Applicants will indicate the names of each proposed Key Personnel candidate along with a brief statement of why the proposed individual is suitable for the position. In an Annex, applicants will provide CV and a letter of commitment for each Key Personnel.

The Chief of Party (COP) should serve and reside in the country for the length of the project. The COP will be responsible for the strategic direction, overall coordination and management of the activity. The COP leads the development of the annual work plan and implementation strategy and plans and assures management of project activities within those frameworks. The COP also assures alignment between the project budget and work plan and monitors project use of resources. The COP has overall responsibility for assuring the quality of the relationships with MoEYS and its partner organizations, and with the client, USAID/Cambodia. This includes supervising all the project's technical staff and putting in place and supervising the necessary grantees and the technical staff they

provide to support the project's work with the MoEYS. It also includes arranging and managing project activities to include appropriate MoEYS staff participation, contributions and leadership where called for. The COP assures the quality of all the technical work and deliverables.

The COP must have a master's degree or higher in Education, Development Studies, or an equivalent related area of study. S/he must have at least 10 years of experience managing large education projects. S/he must also have a good track record of working with senior government officials, influencing policy, and supporting policy changes based on evidence or technical developments. Ability to coordinate with donors and other NGOs working in the education sector is required. Prior experience managing U.S. Government-funded projects or similar international donor programs is also preferred but not required. Excellent oral and written communication skills in English are favorable.

The Technical Team Lead will work under supervision of the Chief of Party. S/he will provide technical direction and oversee all the technical activities of the project. S/he will support the capacity building to the MoEYS counterparts and partners in BEST activity. S/he will build and maintain relationships with MoEYS and partners, overseeing and providing technical advice on material development, teacher training and other technical interventions. S/he must have at least a Master's degree in education or other related fields. He/she must have at least 10 years experience in education, including developing and delivering curricula and teacher training. Excellent oral and written communication skills in Khmer are required. S/he must have a good command of English.

Prior to replacing any of the specified individuals, the Recipient must immediately notify both the Agreement Officer (AO) and AOR with reasonable advance notice and submit a written justification (including proposed substitutions' resume) in sufficient detail to permit evaluation of the impact on the Activity. No replacement of key personnel will be made by the Recipient without the written consent of the AO.

The key personnel specified above are considered to be essential for successful achievement of goals and results under this Cooperative Agreement. The Applicant may propose more key personnel as necessary.

5. Agency and Recipient Collaboration or Joint Participation:

a. Collaborative involvement in selection of advisory committee members:

If the Activity establishes an advisory committee that provides advice to the recipient, USAID will participate as a member of this committee. Advisory committees must only deal with programmatic or technical issues and not routine administrative matters.

b. Concurrence on the substantive provisions of sub-awards:

The recipient must obtain AO's prior approval for the sub-award, transfer, or contracting out of any work under an award. The term 'sub-awards' includes both sub-agreements and contracts under assistance. Please note that any sub-awards (sub-agreements or contracts) to foreign governmental organizations or parastatals of any amount must be approved by the AO, and may warrant additional clearances.

B.5 AUTHORIZED GEOGRAPHIC CODE

The geographic code for the procurement of commodities and services under this program is 937 which is defined as the United States, the Recipient country, and developing countries other than advanced developing countries, but excluding any country that is prohibited source.

B.6 NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USAID AND THE RECIPIENT

The principal purpose of the relationship with the Recipient and under the subject program is to transfer funds to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation of the BEST which is authorized by Federal statute. The successful Recipient will be responsible for ensuring the achievement of the program objectives and the efficient and effective administration of the award through the application of sound management practices. The Recipient will assume responsibility for administering Federal funds in a manner consistent with underlying agreements, program objectives, and the terms and conditions of the Federal award.

[END OF SECTION B]

SECTION C: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

C.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligibility for this NOFO is restricted to **local organizations**. Applications will not be considered from any other type of organization. Only the prime applicant is subject to the eligibility requirement.

Only local organizations as defined below are eligible for award. USAID defines a “local entity” as an individual, a corporation, a nonprofit organization, or another body of persons that:

- (1) is legally organized under the laws of;
- (2) has as its principal place of business or operations in; and
- (3) is
 - (A) majority owned by individuals who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of; and
 - (B) managed by a governing body the majority of who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of the country receiving assistance.

For purposes of this definition, “majority-owned” and “-managed by” include, without limitation, beneficiary interests and the power, either directly or indirectly, whether exercised or exercisable, to control the election, appointment, or tenure of the organization's managers or a majority of the organization's governing body by any means.”

USAID welcomes applications from organizations that have not previously received financial assistance from USAID.

Faith-based organizations are eligible to apply for federal financial assistance on the same basis as any other organization and are subject to the protections and requirements of Federal law.

C.2 COST SHARING OR MATCHING

Cost sharing or matching is not required. However, Applicants can propose cost sharing as part of their application at their own discretion.

If an applicant elects to provide cost sharing, the proposed cost share will be reviewed for compliance in accordance with standards set in the Standard Provisions “Cost Share” for Non-U.S. Nongovernmental Organizations. Such funds may be provided directly by the Recipient; other multilateral, bilateral, and foundation donors; host governments; and local organizations, communities and private businesses that contribute financially and in-kind to implementation of activities at the country level. This may include contribution of staff level of effort, office

space or other facilities or equipment which may be used for the program, provided by the Recipient. Please see section D.6 for additional information.

C.3 LIMITATIONS ON SUBMISSIONS

All eligible interested organizations are restricted to submitting only one application per organization. Applicants are advised to review other requirements for applications specified herein, including, but not limited to, Sections D and E herein.

[END OF SECTION C]

SECTION D: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

D.1 AGENCY POINT OF CONTACT

The point of contact for information about this NOFO is:

Honey Sokry
Acquisition and Assistance Specialist
USAID/Cambodia
#1, Street 96, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Email: hsorky@usaid.gov
(with a copy to Mr. Francis Hall at fhall@usaid.gov)

D.2 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions regarding this NOFO should be submitted via email to the Agency Point of Contacts above no later than the date and time indicated on the cover letter, as amended. Any information given to a prospective applicant concerning this NOFO will be furnished promptly to all other prospective applicants as an amendment to this NOFO, if that information is necessary in submitting applications or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to any other prospective applicant. Please monitor www.grants.gov for any amendments.

Pre-application conference

USAID/Cambodia will conduct a pre-application conference for the USAID BEST Activity on **July 9, at 9 a.m., Cambodia time** via Google Meet. We strongly encourage all potential applicants to attend the pre-application conference to ensure that they have a strong understanding of the USAID BEST Activity. The pre-application conference will provide an opportunity for potential applicants to learn more about the funding opportunity, ask questions, and network with other potential applicants. During the conference, we will discuss the objectives of the USAID BEST activity, as well as the priorities of the USAID Cambodia, Office of Public Health and Education (OPHE).

To register for the pre-application conference, please send an email with the subject line “USAID BEST Activity Pre-application Conference” to Honey Sokry (hsokry@usaid.gov) and Francis Hall (fhall@usaid.gov) with the organization, name, and email address of each participant no later than **July 5, 2024 at 10 a.m. Cambodia time**. The meeting link will then be sent to each participant prior to the conference. ***Unregistered participants will not be allowed to entry to the conference.**

D.3 GENERAL CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION

Preparation of Applications:

Each applicant must furnish the information required by this NOFO. Applications must be submitted in two separate parts: the Technical Application and the Business (Cost) Application.

This subsection addresses general content requirements applying to the full application. Please see subsections D.5 and D.6, below, for information on the content specific to the Technical and Business (Cost) applications. The Technical application must address technical aspects only while the Business (Cost) Application must present the costs, and address risk and other related issues.

Both the Technical and Business (Cost) Applications must include a cover page containing the following information:

- Name of the organization(s) submitting the application;
- Identification and signature of the primary contact person (by name, title, organization, mailing address, telephone number and email address) and the identification of the alternate contact person (by name, title, organization, mailing address, telephone number and email address);
- Program name
- Notice of Funding Opportunity number
- Name of any proposed sub-recipients or partnerships (identify if any of the organizations are local organizations, per USAID's definition of 'local entity' under ADS 303.

Any erasures or other changes to the application must be initialed by the person signing the application. Applications signed by an agent on behalf of the applicant must be accompanied by evidence of that agent's authority, unless that evidence has been previously furnished to the issuing office.

Applicants may choose to submit a cover letter in addition to the cover pages, but it will serve only as a transmittal letter to the Agreement Officer. The cover letter will not be reviewed as part of the merit review criteria.

Applications must comply with the following:

- USAID will not review any pages in excess of the page limits noted in the subsequent sections. Please ensure that applications comply with the page limitations.
- Written in English.

- Use standard 8 ½" x 11", single sided, single-spaced, 12 point Calibri font, 1" margins, left justification and headers and/or footers on each page including consecutive page numbers, date of submission, and applicant's name.
- 10 point font can be used for graphs and charts. Tables, however, must comply with the 12 point Calibri requirement.
- Submitted via Microsoft Word, except budget files which must be submitted in Microsoft Excel.
- The estimated start date identified in Section B of this NOFO must be used in the cost application.
- The technical application must be a searchable and editable Word as appropriate.
- The Cost Schedule must include an Excel spreadsheet with all cells unlocked and no hidden formulas or sheets. A PDF version of the Excel spreadsheet may be submitted in addition to the Excel version at the applicant's discretion, however, the official cost application submission is the unlocked Excel version.

Applicants must review, understand, and comply with all aspects of this NOFO. Failure to do so may be considered as being non-responsive and may be evaluated accordingly. Applicants should retain a copy of the application and all enclosures for their records.

D.4 APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

Applications in response to this NOFO must be submitted no later than the closing date and time indicated on the cover letter, as amended. Late applications will not be reviewed nor considered. Applicants must retain proof of timely delivery in the form of system generated documentation of delivery receipt date and time/confirmation from the receiving office/certified mail receipt.

Applications must be submitted by email to the email addresses mentioned in D.1. Email submissions must include the NOFO number and applicant's name in the subject line heading. In addition, for an application sent by multiple emails, the subject line must also indicate whether the email relates to the technical or cost application, and the desired sequence of the emails and their attachments (e.g. "No. 1 of 4", etc.). For example, if your cost application is being sent in two emails, the first email should have a subject line that states: "[NOFO number], [organization name], Cost Application, Part 1 of 2".

USAID's preference is that the technical application and the cost application each be submitted as consolidated email attachments, e.g. that you consolidate the various parts of a technical application into a single document before sending it. If this is not possible, please provide

instructions on how to collate the attachments. USAID will not be responsible for errors in compiling electronic applications if no instructions are provided or are unclear.

After submitting an application electronically, applicants should immediately check their own email to confirm that the attachments were indeed sent. If an applicant discovers an error in transmission, please send the material again and note in the subject line of the email that it is a "corrected" submission. Do not send the same email more than once unless there has been a change, and if so, please note that it is a "corrected" email.

Applicants are reminded that email is NOT instantaneous, and in some cases delays of several hours occur from transmission to receipt. Therefore, applicants are requested to send the application in sufficient time ahead of the deadline. For this NOFO, the initial point of entry to the government infrastructure is the USAID mail server.

There may be a problem with the receipt of *.zip files due to anti-virus software. Therefore, applicants are discouraged from sending files in this format as USAID/Cambodia cannot guarantee their acceptance by the internet server. File size must not exceed **10 MB** per email.

D.5 TECHNICAL APPLICATION FORMAT

The technical application will be the most important factor for consideration in selection for award of the proposed Cooperative Agreement. The technical application should be specific, complete, and presented concisely. The technical application will describe the applicant's capabilities and expertise with respect to achieving the goals of this program. The application should take into account the requirements of the program and merit review criteria found in this NOFO.

Technical application must not exceed **15** single-spaced typed pages, using Calibri 12pt font, typed on standard 8 ½" x 11" paper, with one-inch margins and each page numbered consecutively. The page limit does not include Cover/Title page, Table of Contents, List of Acronyms, Section Dividers, and Annexes. A page in the technical application that contains a table, chart, graph, etc., not otherwise excluded, is subject to the page limitation. See Section D.3 above for preparation of applications.

The technical application must be organized as follows:

- a) **Cover Page** (not to exceed 1 page, not included in the overall page limit)
- b) **Table of Contents** (not to exceed 1 page, not included in the overall page limit)
- c) **List of Acronyms** (not included in the overall page limit)
- d) **Executive Summary** (not to exceed 2 pages)

The Executive Summary must provide a high-level overview of key elements of the Technical Application and the managerial approach and resources that the applicant will bring to bear on the overall management of the program.

- e) **Technical Approach** (not to exceed 9 pages. See Section D.5.1)
- f) **Personnel and Management Approach** (not to exceed 2 pages. See Section D.5.2)
- g) **Institutional Capability** (not to exceed 2 pages. See Section D.5.3)
- h) **Annexes**
 - Annex A – Workplan Gantt Chart (See Section D.5.5)
 - Annex B Key Personnel Resumes/CVs and Letters of Commitment (See Section D.5.2)
 - Annex C - Organizational Chart and Staffing Plan Matrix (See Section D.5.2)

1. Technical Approach

Technical Approach must demonstrate how the Applicant's proposed approaches, methodologies, and interventions will address contextual challenges and achieve the objectives described in the Program Description and how they will address cross-cutting themes with respect to gender and inclusive development. Applicants must describe how they will establish relationships and collaborate with relevant departments of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, other USAID projects, donors, public and private sectors, and other education system actors working in primary education to optimize outcomes and avoid duplication of efforts. The Technical Approach must be clear, technically sound, contextually appropriate, feasible, innovative, and sustainable. It should be directly relevant to the achievement of objectives and reflect an understanding of likely challenges and opportunities during implementation. Technical evaluation of applications will be based on the extent and appropriateness of proposed approaches and feasibility of achieving the identified objectives.

2. Personnel and Management Approach

Applicants must include the following components for the Personnel and Management Approach.

Key Personnel

USAID requires two (2) full-time Key Personnel positions as outlined in Section B.4 of this NOFO. Key Personnel include full-time and long-term professional personnel who are considered essential to the successful achievement of goals and results of the Activity.

Applicants will propose individual names for the two (2) Key Personnel candidates along with a brief statement describing how the proposed individual's qualification and experience will assist the Applicant in achieving the Activity objectives. In Annex B, Applicants will provide CVs and a letter of commitment for each proposed individual indicating his/her availability to serve in the stated position. Each individual proposed must also provide three recent references with name, position title, valid email address and telephone number, and the relationship to the proposed candidate. Letters of commitment of proposed key personnel must not exceed one (1) page in length per person.

- The Chief of Party (COP) should serve and reside in the country for the length of the project. The COP will be responsible for the strategic direction, overall coordination and management of the activity. The COP leads the development of the annual work plan and implementation strategy and plans and assures management of project activities within those frameworks. The COP also assures alignment between the project budget and work plan and monitors project use of resources. The COP has overall responsibility for assuring the quality of the relationships with MoEYS and its partner organizations, and with the client, USAID/Cambodia. This includes supervising all the project's technical staff and putting in place and supervising the necessary grantees and the technical staff they provide to support the project's work with the MoEYS. It also includes arranging and managing project activities to include appropriate MoEYS staff participation, contributions and leadership where called for. The COP assures the quality of all the technical work and deliverables.

The COP must have a master's degree or higher in Education, Development Studies, or an equivalent related area of study. S/he must have at least 10 years of experience managing large education projects. S/he must also have a good track record of working with senior government officials, influencing policy, and supporting policy changes based on evidence or technical developments. Ability to coordinate with donors and other NGOs working in the education sector is required. Prior experience managing U.S. Government-funded projects or similar international donor programs is also preferred but not required. Excellent oral and written communication skills in English are favorable.

- The Technical Team Lead will work under supervision of the Chief of Party. S/he will provide technical direction and oversee all the technical activities of the project. S/he will support the capacity building to the MoEYS counterparts and partners in BEST activity. S/he will build and maintain relationships with MoEYS and partners, overseeing and providing technical advice on material development, teacher training and other technical interventions. S/he must have at least a Master's degree in education or other related fields. He/she must have at least 10 years experience in education, including developing and delivering curricula and teacher training. Excellent oral and written communication skills in Khmer are required. S/he must have a good command of English.

Prior to replacing any of the specified individuals, the Recipient must immediately notify both the Agreement Officer (AO) and AOR with reasonable advance notice and submit a written justification (including proposed substitutions' resume) in sufficient detail to permit evaluation of the impact on the Activity. No replacement of key personnel will be made by the Recipient without the written consent of the AO.

The key personnel specified above are considered to be essential for successful achievement of goals and results under this Cooperative Agreement. The Applicant may propose more key personnel as necessary. The evaluation of this application will take into account the proposed key personnel.

Management and Staffing Plan

Applicants must describe the overall management approach and staffing plan to implement the Activity taking into account the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). The management and staffing plan must specify the composition and organizational context of the entire implementation team and specify clear lines of supervision, accountability, decision-making and responsibility. If Applicants anticipate having sub-award(s), include information about the management of the sub-award(s) and the roles and responsibilities. Include a brief scope of work of each sub-award with information about lines of authority and communication.

Applicants must include an approach and timeline to ensure rapid and efficient start-up of both operational and technical aspects of the Activity. The proposed management structure should be feasible, efficient, and present a vision and strategy for program management that allows adaptation of program approaches based on program learning and experience. In Annex C, Applicants must provide an organizational chart and staffing plan matrix showing the overall staffing plan and reporting relationships. Applicants should assign one of their technical staff members as a point of contact for gender.

Letters of commitment from sub-partners, if applicable, must be included as an annex.

3. Institutional Capability

Applicants must discuss recent and relevant technical and field experience and quality of performance in programs or projects of similar technical content and scope. Applicants must also describe how this experience is relevant to the success of the program specified in the Program Description. This section must include a discussion of capabilities and capacities of Applicants and proposed sub-award(s), if applicable, to effectively and efficiently implement the activities required in the Program Description.

Applicants must describe their experience in working collaboratively with host government ministries, and relevant education development partners with examples of successes from

recent and existing programs that contribute to improving access to quality education services including teaching and learning material development, teacher training program, teacher mentoring and school accountability improvement.

4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan

Applicants are not required to submit a draft MEL plan supporting the technical approach. However, applicants will need to provide a narrative on how they will monitor, learn, adapt and evaluate the BEST activity. The successful applicant will develop the MEL plan in consultation with USAID at the work plan stage after the award.

5. Workplan Gantt Chart

In Annex A, Applicants must submit a draft workplan Gantt chart providing an overview of key activities envisioned during the first project year in line with the Applicants' technical approach, and their expected sequencing timing.

D.6 BUSINESS (COST) APPLICATION FORMAT

The Business (Cost) Application must be submitted separately from the Technical Application. While no page limit exists for the full cost application, applicants are encouraged to be as concise as possible while still providing the necessary details. The business (cost) application must illustrate the entire period of performance, using the budget format shown in the [SF-424A](#).

Prior to award, applicants may be required to submit additional documentation deemed necessary for the Agreement Officer to assess the applicant's risk in accordance with 2 CFR 200.206. Applicants should not submit any additional information with their initial application.

The Cost Application must contain the following sections (which are further elaborated below this listing with the letters for each requirement):

a) Cover Page (See Section D.3 above for requirements)

b) SF 424 Form(s)

The applicant must sign and submit the cost application using the SF-424 series, which includes:

- SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance
- SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs, and
- SF-424B, Assurances for Non-Construction Programs

Standard Forms and instructions can be accessed electronically at <https://grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/sf-424-individual-family>

Failure to accurately complete these forms could result in the rejection of the application.

c) Required Certifications and Assurances

The applicant must complete the following documents and submit a signed copy with their application:

- (1) "Certifications, Assurances, Representations, and Other Statements of the Recipient" ADS 303mav document found at <https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303mav>
- (2) Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
- (3) Certificate of Compliance: Please submit a copy of your Certificate of Compliance if your organization's systems have been certified by USAID/Washington's Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA).

d) Budget and Budget Narrative

The Budget must be submitted as one unprotected Excel file (MS Office 2000 or later versions) with visible formulas and references and must be broken out by project year, including itemization of the federal and non-federal (cost share) amount. Files must not contain any hidden or otherwise inaccessible cells. Budgets with hidden cells lengthen the cost analysis time required to make award, and may result in a rejection of the cost application. The Budget Narrative must contain sufficient detail to allow USAID to understand the proposed costs. The applicant must ensure the budgeted costs address any additional requirements identified in Section F, such as Branding and Marking. The Budget Narrative must be thorough, including sources for costs to support USAID's determination that the proposed costs are fair and reasonable.

The Budget must include the following worksheets or tabs, and contents, at a minimum:

- Summary Budget, inclusive of all program costs (federal and non-federal), broken out by major budget category and by year for activities implemented by the applicant and any potential sub-applicants for the entire period of the program.
- Detailed Budget, including a breakdown by year, sufficient to allow the Agency to determine that the costs represent a realistic and efficient use of funding to implement the applicant's program and are allowable in accordance with the cost principles found in 2 CFR 200 Subpart E.
- Detailed Budgets for each sub-recipient, for all federal funding and cost share, broken out by budget category and by year, for the entire implementation period of the project.

The Detailed Budget must contain the following budget categories and information, at a minimum:

- 1) Salaries and Allowances – Must be proposed consistent with 2 CFR 200.430 Compensation - Personal Services. The applicant's budget must include position title, salary rate, level of effort, and salary escalation factors for each position. Allowances, when proposed, must be broken down by specific type and by position. Applicants must explain all assumptions in the Budget Narrative. The Budget Narrative must demonstrate that the proposed compensation is reasonable for the services rendered and consistent with what is paid for similar work in other activities of the applicant. Applicants must provide their established written policies on personnel compensation. If the applicant's written policies do not address a specific element of compensation that is being proposed, the Budget Narrative must describe the rationale used and supporting market research.
- 2) Fringe Benefits – (if applicable) If the applicant has a fringe benefit rate approved by an agency of the U.S. Government, the applicant must use such rate and provide evidence of its approval. If an applicant does not have a fringe benefit rate approved, the applicant must propose a rate and explain how the applicant determined the rate. In this case, the Budget Narrative must include a detailed breakdown comprised of all items of fringe benefits (e.g., superannuation, gratuity, etc.) and the costs of each, expressed in U.S. dollars and as a percentage of salaries.
- 3) Consultants: if the applicant and partners propose consultants, whose services are directly related to the project, the budget must contain a line item for each such consultant, using unburdened daily rates. Similar information should be provided for Consultants as provided for Personnel. In the budget summary, costs for Consultants must be included under Contractual budget category. Consulting services not part of the technical scope/delivery of the award (logistical support services such as audit services, IT support, security, etc.) must be included under Other Direct Costs.
- 4) Travel and Transportation – Provide details to explain the purpose of the trips, the number of trips, the origin and destination, the number of individuals traveling, and the duration of the trips. Per Diem and associated travel costs must be based on the applicant's normal travel policies. When appropriate please provide supporting documentation as an attachment, such as company travel policy, and explain assumptions in the Budget Narrative.
- 5) Procurement or Rental of Goods (Equipment & Supplies), Services, and Real Property – Must include information on estimated types of equipment, models, supplies and the cost per unit and quantity. The Budget Narrative must include the purpose of the equipment and supplies and the basis for the estimates. The Budget Narrative must support the necessity of any rental costs and reasonableness in light of such factors as: rental costs of comparable

property, if any; market conditions in the area; alternatives available; and the type, life expectancy, condition, and value of the property leased.

- 6) Subawards – Specify the budget for the portion of the program to be passed through to any subrecipients. See 2 CFR 200 for assistance in determining whether the sub-tier entity is a subrecipient or contractor. The subrecipient budgets must align with the same requirements as the applicant’s budget, including those related to fringe and indirect costs.
- 7) Construction – is not authorized under this award.
- 8) Other Direct Costs – This may include other costs not elsewhere specified, such as report preparation costs, passports and visas fees, medical exams and inoculations, as well as any other miscellaneous costs which directly benefit the program proposed by the applicant. The applicant should indicate the subject, venue and duration of any proposed conferences and seminars, and their relationship to the objectives of the program, along with estimates of costs. Otherwise, the narrative should be minimal.
- 9) Indirect Costs – Applicants must indicate whether they are proposing indirect costs or will charge all costs directly. In order to better understand indirect costs please see Subpart E of 2 CFR 200. The application must identify which approach they are requesting and provide the applicable supporting information. Below are the most commonly used Indirect Cost Rate methods:

Method 1 - Direct Charge Only

Eligibility: Any applicant

Initial Application Requirements: See above on direct costs

Method 2 - Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)

Eligibility: Any applicant with a NICRA issued by a USG Agency must use that NICRA

Initial Application Requirements: If the applicant has a current NICRA, submit your approved NICRA and the associated disclosed practices. If your NICRA was issued by an Agency other than USAID, provide the contact information for the approving Agency. Additionally, at the Agency’s discretion, a provisional rate may be set forth in the award subject to audit and finalization. See [USAID’s Indirect Cost Rate Guide for Non Profit Organizations](#) for further guidance.

Method 3 - De minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC)

Eligibility: Any applicant that does not have a current NICRA

Initial Application Requirements: Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate an indirect rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time. The applicant must describe which cost elements it charges indirectly vs. directly. See 2 CFR 200 for further information.

Method 4 - Indirect Costs Charged As A Fixed Amount

Eligibility: Non-U.S. non-profit organizations without a NICRA may request, but approval is at the discretion of the AO Initial Application Requirements: Provide the proposed fixed amount and a worksheet that includes the following:

- Total costs incurred by the organization for the previous fiscal year and estimates for the current year.
- Indirect costs (common costs that benefit the day-to-day operations of the organization, including categories such as salaries and expenses of executive officers, personnel administration, and accounting, or that benefit and are identifiable to more than one program or activity, such as depreciation, rental costs, operations and maintenance of facilities, and telephone expenses) for the previous fiscal year and estimates for the current year.
- Proposed method for prorating the indirect costs equitably and consistently across all programs and activities of using a base that measures the benefits of that particular cost to each program or activity to which the cost applies.

If the applicant does not have an approved NICRA and does not elect to utilize the 10% de minimis rate, the Agreement Officer will provide further instructions and may request additional supporting information, including financial statements and audits, should the application still be under consideration after the merit review. USAID is under no obligation to approve the applicant's requested method.

10) Cost Sharing – If provided, the applicant should estimate the amount of cost-sharing resources to be provided over the life of the agreement and specify the sources of such resources, and the basis of calculation in the budget narrative. Applicants should also provide a breakdown of the cost share (financial and in-kind contributions) of all organizations involved in implementing the resulting award.

e) Prior Approvals in accordance with 2 CFR 200.407

Inclusion of an item of cost in the detailed application budget does not satisfy any requirements for prior approval by the Agency. If the applicant would like the award to reflect approval of any cost elements for which prior written approval is specifically required for allowability, the

applicant must specify and justify that cost. See 2 CFR 200.407 for information regarding which cost elements require prior written approval.

f) Approval of Subawards

The applicant must submit information for all subawards that it wishes to have approved at the time of award. For each proposed subaward the applicant must provide the following:

- Name of organization
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
- Confirmation that the subrecipient does not appear on the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) list
- Confirmation that the subrecipient does not have active exclusions in the System for Award Management (SAM)
- Confirmation that the subrecipient is not listed in the United Nations Security designation list
- Confirmation that the subrecipient is not suspended or debarred
- Confirmation that the applicant has completed a risk assessment of the subrecipient, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.332(b)
- Any negative findings as a result of the risk assessment and the applicant's plan for mitigation.

g) Consortium Documentation

If the applicant has established a consortium, or other type of legal relationship with its partners, the Cost Application must include a copy of the legal relationship between the parties. The agreement should include a full discussion of the relationship between the applicant and partner(s), including identification of the applicant with whom USAID will work with for purposes of agreement administration, identity of the applicant which will have accounting responsibility, how agreement effort will be allocated and the express agreement of the principals thereto to be held jointly and severally liable for the acts or omissions of the other.

h) Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and SAM Registration

Applicants must obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and register in the System for Award Management (SAM) (<https://sam.gov/>) in order to be eligible to receive federal assistance, such as grants and cooperative agreements. Unless an exemption applies (see ADS 303maz), applicants must be registered in SAM prior to submitting an application for award for USAID's

consideration. Recipients must maintain an active SAM registration while they have an active award. Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or entity that is exempted from UEI/SAM requirements under 2 CFR 25.110) is required to:

1. Provide a valid UEI for the applicant and all proposed sub-recipients;
2. Be registered in SAM before submitting its application.
3. Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

The registration process may take many weeks to complete. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to begin the process early. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements above by the time USAID is ready to make an award, USAID may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award and use that determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant.

Applicants can find additional resources for registering in SAM, including a Quick Start Guide and a video, on <https://sam.gov/>.

i) History of Performance

The apparently successful applicant must provide information regarding its recent history of performance for all its cost-reimbursement contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements involving similar or related programs, not to exceed the past three years, as follows:

- Name of the Awarding Organization;
- Award Number;
- Activity Title;
- A brief description of the activity;
- Period of Performance;
- Award Amount;
- Reports and findings from any audits performed in the last three years; and
- Name of at least two (2) updated professional contacts who most directly observed the work at the organization for which the service was performed with complete current contact information including telephone number, and e-mail address for each proposed individual.

If the applicant encountered problems on any of the referenced Awards, it may provide a short explanation and the corrective action taken. The applicant should not provide general information on its performance. USAID reserves the right to obtain relevant information

concerning an applicant's history of performance from any sources and may consider such information in its review of the applicant's risk. The Agency may request additional information and conduct a pre-award survey if it determines that it is necessary to inform the risk assessment.

j) Branding Strategy & Marking Plan

Applicants do not need to submit a draft Branding Strategy and Marking Plan in the initial applications. Under 2 CFR 700.16, USAID requires the submission of a Branding Strategy and Marking Plan from only the apparently successful applicant. It is a Federal statutory and regulatory requirement that all overseas programs, projects, activities, public communications, and commodities that USAID partially or fully funds under an assistance award or sub-award must be appropriately marked with the USAID identity. More information on Branding Strategy and Marking Plan are available at <https://www.usaid.gov/branding/assistance-awards/>. Only the apparently successful applicant will need to prepare a full Branding Strategy and Marking Plan.

The apparently successful applicant will follow the following provisions when preparing the Branding Strategy and Marking Plan:

Branding Strategy – Assistance (June 2012)

- a. Applicants recommended for an assistance award must submit and negotiate "Branding Strategy," describing how the program, project, or activity is named and positioned, and how it is promoted and communicated to beneficiaries and host country citizens.
- b. The request for a Branding Strategy, by the Agreement Officer from the applicant, confers no rights to the applicant and constitutes no USAID commitment to an award.
- c. Failure to submit and negotiate a Branding Strategy within the time frame specified by the Agreement Officer will make the applicant ineligible for an award.
- d. The applicant must include all estimated costs associated with branding and marking USAID programs, such as plaques, stickers, banners, press events, materials, and so forth, in the budget portion of the application. These costs are subject to the revision and clarifications with the Agreement Officer and will be incorporated into the Total Estimated Amount of the grant, cooperative agreement or other assistance instrument.
- e. The Branding Strategy must include, at a minimum, all of the following:
 - (1) All estimated costs associated with branding and marking USAID programs, such as plaques, stickers, banners, press events, materials, and so forth.

(2) The intended name of the program, project, or activity.

- (i) USAID requires the applicant to use the “USAID Identity,” comprised of the USAID logo and brand mark, with the tagline “from the American people” as found on the USAID Web site at <https://www.usaid.gov/branding>, unless Section F of the NOFO or APS state that the USAID Administrator has approved the use of an additional or substitute logo, seal or tagline.
- (ii) USAID prefers local language translations of the phrase “made possible by (or with) the generous support of the American People” next to the USAID Identity when acknowledging contributions.
- (iii) It is acceptable to cobrand the title with the USAID Identity and the applicant's identity.
- (iv) If branding in the above manner is inappropriate or not possible, the applicant must explain how USAID's involvement will be showcased during publicity for the program or project.
- (v) USAID prefers to fund projects that do not have a separate logo or identity that competes with the USAID Identity. If there is a plan to develop a separate logo to consistently identify this program, the applicant must attach a copy of the proposed logos. Section F of the NOFO or APS will state if an Administrator approved the use of an additional or substitute logo, seal, or tagline.

(3) The intended primary and secondary audiences for this project or program, including direct beneficiaries and any special target segments.

(4) Planned communication or program materials used to explain or market the program to beneficiaries.

- (i) Describe the main program message.
- (ii) Provide plans for training materials, posters, pamphlets, public service announcements, billboards, Web sites, and so forth, as appropriate.
- (iii) Provide any plans to announce and promote publicly this program or project to host country citizens, such as media releases, press conferences, public events, and so forth. Applicant must incorporate the USAID Identity and the message, “USAID is from the American People.”
- (iv) Provide any additional ideas to increase awareness that the American people support this project or program.

- (5) Information on any direct involvement from the host-country government or ministry, including any planned acknowledgement of the host-country government.
- (6) Any other groups whose logo or identity the applicant will use on program materials and related materials. Indicate if they are a donor or why they will be visibly acknowledged, and if they will receive the same prominence as USAID.
- f. The Agreement Officer will review the Branding Strategy to ensure the above information is adequately included and consistent with the stated objectives of the award, the applicant's cost data submissions, and the performance plan.
- g. If the applicant receives an assistance award, the Branding Strategy will be included in and made part of the resulting grant or cooperative agreement.

(END OF PRE-AWARD TERM)

Marking Plan – Assistance (June 2012)

- a. Applicants recommended for an assistance award must submit and negotiate a “Marking Plan,” detailing the public communications, commodities, and program materials, and other items that will visibly bear the “USAID Identity,” which comprises of the USAID logo and brand mark, with the tagline “from the American people.” The USAID Identity is the official marking for the Agency, and is found on the USAID Web site at <https://www.usaid.gov/branding>. Section F of the NOFO or APS will state if an Administrator approved the use of an additional or substitute logo, seal, or tagline.
- b. The request for a Marking Plan, by the Agreement Officer from the applicant, confers no rights to the applicant and constitutes no USAID commitment to an award.
- c. Failure to submit and negotiate a Marking Plan within the time frame specified by the Agreement Officer will make the applicant ineligible for an award.
- d. The applicant must include all estimated costs associated with branding and marking USAID programs, such as plaques, stickers, banners, press events, materials, and so forth, in the budget portion of the application. These costs are subject to the revision and clarifications with the Agreement Officer and will be incorporated into the Total Estimated Amount of the grant, cooperative agreement or other assistance instrument.
- e. The Marking Plan must include all of the following:
 - (1) A description of the public communications, commodities, and program materials that the applicant plans to produce and which will bear the USAID Identity as part of the award, including:

- (i) Program, project, or activity sites funded by USAID, including visible infrastructure projects or other sites physical in nature;
- (ii) Technical assistance, studies, reports, papers, publications, audio-visual productions, public service announcements, Web sites/Internet activities, promotional, informational, media, or communications products funded by USAID;
- (iii) Commodities, equipment, supplies, and other materials funded by USAID, including commodities or equipment provided under humanitarian assistance or disaster relief programs; and
- (iv) It is acceptable to cobrand the title with the USAID Identity and the applicant's identity.
- (v) Events financed by USAID, such as training courses, conferences, seminars, exhibitions, fairs, workshops, press conferences and other public activities. If the USAID Identity cannot be displayed, the recipient is encouraged to otherwise acknowledge USAID and the support of the American people.

(2) A table on the program deliverables with the following details:

- (i) The program deliverables that the applicant plans to mark with the USAID Identity;
- (ii) The type of marking and what materials the applicant will use to mark the program deliverables;
- (iii) When in the performance period the applicant will mark the program deliverables, and where the applicant will place the marking;
- (iv) What program deliverables the applicant does not plan to mark with the USAID Identity, and
- (v) The rationale for not marking program deliverables.

(3) Any requests for an exemption from USAID marking requirements, and an explanation of why the exemption would apply. The applicant may request an exemption if USAID marking requirements would:

- (i) Compromise the intrinsic independence or neutrality of a program or materials where independence or neutrality is an inherent aspect of the program and materials. The applicant must identify the USAID Development Objective, Interim Result, or program goal furthered by an appearance of neutrality, or state why an aspect of the award is presumptively neutral. Identify by category or deliverable item, examples of material for which an exemption is sought.

(ii) Diminish the credibility of audits, reports, analyses, studies, or policy recommendations whose data or findings must be seen as independent. The applicant must explain why each particular deliverable must be seen as credible.

(iii) Undercut host-country government “ownership” of constitutions, laws, regulations, policies, studies, assessments, reports, publications, surveys or audits, public service announcements, or other communications. The applicant must explain why each particular item or product is better positioned as a host-country government item or product.

(iv) Impair the functionality of an item. The applicant must explain how marking the item or commodity would impair its functionality.

(v) Incur substantial costs or be impractical. The applicant must explain why marking would not be cost beneficial or practical.

(vi) Offend local cultural or social norms, or be considered inappropriate. The applicant must identify the relevant norm, and explain why marking would violate that norm or otherwise be inappropriate.

(vii) Conflict with international law. The applicant must identify the applicable international law violated by the marking.

- f. The Agreement Officer will consider the Marking Plan's adequacy and reasonableness and will approve or disapprove any exemption requests. The Marking Plan will be reviewed to ensure the above information is adequately included and consistent with the stated objectives of the award, the applicant's cost data submissions, and the performance plan.
- g. If the applicant receives an assistance award, the Marking Plan, including any approved exemptions, will be included in and made part of the resulting grant or cooperative agreement, and will apply for the term of the award unless provided otherwise.

(END OF PRE-AWARD TERM)

k) Funding Restrictions

Profit is not allowable for recipients or subrecipients under this award. See 2 CFR 200.331 for assistance in determining whether a sub-tier entity is a subrecipient or contractor.

Construction **will not be** authorized under this award.

USAID will not allow the reimbursement of pre-award costs under this award without the explicit written approval of the Agreement Officer.

Except as may be specifically approved in advance by the AO, all commodities and services that will be reimbursed by USAID under this award must be from the authorized geographic code specified in Section B.5 of this NOFO and must meet the source and nationality requirements set forth in 22 CFR 228.

I) Conflict of Interest Pre-Award Term (August 2018)

a. Personal Conflict of Interest

1. An actual or appearance of a conflict of interest exists when an applicant organization or an employee of the organization has a relationship with an Agency official involved in the competitive award decision-making process that could affect that Agency official's impartiality. The term "conflict of interest" includes situations in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, the obligations and duties of a USAID employee or recipient employee.
2. The applicant must provide conflict of interest disclosures when it submits an SF-424. Should the applicant discover a previously undisclosed conflict of interest after submitting the application, the applicant must disclose the conflict of interest to the AO no later than ten (10) calendar days following discovery.

b. Organizational Conflict of Interest

The applicant must notify USAID of any actual or potential conflict of interest that they are aware of that may provide the applicant with an unfair competitive advantage in competing for this financial assistance award. Examples of an unfair competitive advantage include but are not limited to situations in which an applicant or the applicant's employee gained access to non-public information regarding a federal assistance funding opportunity, or an applicant or applicant's employee was substantially involved in the preparation of a federal assistance funding opportunity. USAID will promptly take appropriate action upon receiving any such notification from the applicant.

(END OF PRE-AWARD TERM)

[END OF SECTION D]

SECTION E: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

E.1 CRITERIA

The merit review criteria prescribed here are tailored to the requirements of this particular NOFO. Applicants should note that these criteria serve to: (a) identify the significant matters which the applicants should address in their applications, and (b) set the standard against which all applications will be evaluated.

Technical and other factors will be evaluated relative to each other, as described here and prescribed by the Technical Application Format; however, the technical application is considered more important than cost. The Technical Application will be evaluated by a Merit Review Committee (MRC) using the evaluation criteria described in the section below. Following review of the technical application, the cost application of only the apparently successful applicant will be reviewed for reasonableness, realism, allowability, and allocability of the proposed cost.

E.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed to ensure they have met all the required elements as set forth in Section D of this NOFO to be determined by the Agreement Officer to be responsive to the NOFO. The application must be directly responsive to the terms, conditions, guidelines, and provisions of this NOFO to be assured for consideration. Applications not conforming to this NOFO may be categorized as non-responsive, thereby eliminating them from further consideration.

A USAID Merit Review Committee (MRC) will conduct a merit review of all applications received that comply with the instructions in this NOFO, and make the recommendation on which should be considered for award. The Agreement Officer will make the final determination whether the award will be made to the applicant. Award may be made with or without a request for clarifications/additional detail on an application.

E.2.a Merit Review

USAID will conduct a merit review of all applications received that comply with the instructions in this NOFO. Criterion 1 is weighted higher than all other criteria when combined. Criteria 2 and 3 are equal. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated accordingly:

- **Criterion 1:** Technical Approach
- **Criterion 2:** Personnel and Management Approach
- **Criterion 3:** Institutional Capability

Criterion 1: Technical Approach

The merit review under this criterion will holistically focus on the following elements (not sub-factors, so not assigned any particular individual weight):

- The extent to which the proposed technical approach demonstrates a clear understanding of the country context and development challenges described in the Program Description, and is clear, technically sound, contextually appropriate, innovative, feasible, and sustainable to achieve all activity's objectives and results.
- Applicants must demonstrate their engagement with a range of actors and stakeholders to improve the quality of education services in Cambodia with specific examples. Applicants should describe how they involve stakeholders at all levels to create ownership, and leverage resources and expertise including linkages with other programs.
- Furthermore, the technical approach will be evaluated in terms of the extent to which the Applicant incorporates all cross-cutting themes and coordination and complementarity into a proposed approach that will lead to successful implementation of the activity.
- The extent to which the draft Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan presents clearly defined key indicators and provides targets that demonstrate the Activity's progress/results toward goals/objectives outlined in the Program Description and the extent to which the draft MEL plan demonstrates the Applicant's approach to adaptive management based on learning and measurable results or operational research conducted by the Activity or other stakeholders.

Criterion 2: Personnel and Management Approach

The Personnel and Management Approach will be evaluated based on the extent to which the key personnel, management capability, and management/staffing plans comprehensively address the requirements in Section D.5.2 and support the successful implementation of the Program Description, including building on existing USAID's investment on early grade reading, efficient start-up of the implementation without delay and interruption and the adaptive Management to programmatic changes. Furthermore, Key Personnel will be evaluated on a combination of their technical qualifications (including relevant work experience), educational background (including relevant academic and non-academic training and ongoing professional development), communication skills, language skills, and highlighted professional competencies.

Criterion 3: Institutional Capability

Institutional Capability will be evaluated based on the extent to which the Applicant convincingly demonstrates capability and an effective ability to identify, mobilize, and leverage required expertise to fulfill the needs for technical assistance to ensure achievement of the goal

and objectives of the Program Description. This includes the ability to manage relationships with host government ministries and other relevant education development partners.

E.2.b Business Review

The Agency will evaluate the cost application of the applicant(s) under consideration for an award as a result of the merit criteria review to determine whether the costs are allowable in accordance with the cost principles found in 2 CFR 200 Subpart E.

The Agency will also consider (1) the extent of the applicant's understanding of the financial aspects of the program and the applicant's ability to perform the activities within the amount requested; (2) whether the applicant's plans will achieve the program objectives with reasonable economy and efficiency; and (3) whether any special conditions relating to costs should be included in the award.

Proposed cost share, if provided, will be reviewed for compliance with the standards set forth in 2 CFR 200.306, 2 CFR 700.10, and the Standard Provision "Cost Sharing (Matching)" for U.S. entities, or the Standard Provision "Cost Share" for non-U.S. entities.

The AO will perform a risk assessment (2 CFR 200.206). The AO may determine that a pre-award survey is required to inform the risk assessment in determining whether the prospective recipient has the necessary organizational, experience, accounting and operational controls, financial resources, and technical skills – or ability to obtain them – in order to achieve the objectives of the program and comply with the terms and conditions of the award. Depending on the result of the risk assessment, the AO will decide to execute the award, not execute the award, or award with “specific conditions” (2 CFR 200.208).

[END OF SECTION E]

SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

F.1 FEDERAL AWARD NOTICES

A notice of award signed by the Agreement Officer is the authorizing document for this NOFO. The notice of award will be provided electronically to the applicant's point of contact listed in the application. Notification will also be made electronically to unsuccessful applicants pursuant to ADS 303.3.7.1.b. For the successful application, USAID may reach out to the applicant with clarifying questions and a request for a revised application by a specified date. USAID reserves the right to award without requesting clarifications or additional detail on an application. USAID may choose to change the Applicant's proposed award type, Grant or Cooperative Agreement, prior to award.

Award of the agreement contemplated by this NOFO cannot be made until funds have been appropriated, allocated and committed through internal USAID procedures. While USAID anticipates that these procedures will be successfully completed, potential applicants are hereby notified of these requirements and conditions for the award. The Agreement Officer is the only individual who may legally commit the Government to the expenditure of public funds. No costs chargeable to the proposed Agreement may be incurred before receipt of either a fully executed Agreement or a specific, written authorization from the Agreement Officer.

Prior to issuance of award, the applicant may be required to submit additional information on the organization and key individuals for vetting. For example, for those organizations that have not had previous grants or cooperative agreements with the US Government, Articles of Incorporation or other documentation which substantiates the legal character of the entity will be requested. In such cases, issuance of an award is contingent on the timely receipt of the information requested and the successful completion of the vetting process/post-award risk assessment. Applicants under consideration for an award that have never received funding from USAID will be subject to a pre-award audit to determine fiscal responsibility, ensure adequacy of financial controls and establish an indirect cost rate.

F.2 ADMINISTRATIVE & NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

The resulting award from this NOFO will be administered in accordance with the following policies and regulations.

For Non US organizations: [ADS 303](#), [Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-governmental Organizations](#).

The award will be administered by the USAID/Cambodia's Office of Acquisition and Assistance. The AO will designate an AOR to review, concur and/or approve on the items outlined in Substantial Involvement (Section B of this NOFO).

F.3 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

F.3.1 FINANCIAL REPORTING

The Standard Form 425 (SF-425) must be submitted via electronic format to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) via <https://pms.psc.gov/>.

The Recipient must also submit a copy of SF-425 on a quarterly basis to the Agreement Officer, AOR, USAID/Washington, M/CFO/CMP-LOC Unit at locfinalreport@usaid.gov, and to:

Office of Financial Management
USAID/Cambodia
#1, Street 96, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
phnompenhfateam@usaid.gov

Electronic copies of the SF-425 can be found at <https://www.usaid.gov/forms/sf-425>.

The USAID SF-425 Federal Financial Report Process Guide with line item instructions for completing the SF-425 can be found at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/guide-complete-sf-425.pdf>

F.3.2 PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Recipient shall submit one copy of each performance report to the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) with a copy to the Agreement Officer. Program Reporting shall be in keeping with 2 CFR 200.328.

1. Annual Work Plan:

The Recipient will submit the initial Annual Work Plan within 60 days of the effective date of the Cooperative Agreement for AOR approval. The Recipient will address the AOR's comments, if any, and submit the revised Annual Work Plan to the AOR for approval not later than 15 days from receipt of USAID's comments. The initial Annual Work Plan will cover the period through the end of the next U.S. Government fiscal year (September 30th, 2025). Subsequent Annual Work Plans will be submitted 45 days prior to commencement of the subsequent year following the U.S. Government fiscal year calendar (October 1st – September 30th) except for the last performance year which should cover until the end of the project.

The Annual Work Plan will include the following:

- Description of purpose, sub-purpose and followed by the expected program milestones, outputs, and outcomes to be achieved;
- Approaches and activities and associated actors, including sub-partners, that will be used or taken to achieve the expected targets, outputs, and outcomes;

- Description of how activities in a given year will link or lead to further activities and outcomes in subsequent/remaining years, as well as how activities are leading towards long-term sustainability of the Program impacts;
- As an annex, a Gantt Chart with the activities and milestones and timeline;
- As an annex, a spending plan (including a summary budget) that clearly explains the costs of each activity discussed in the work plan, and the allocation of funds expected to be available during the work plan year by program area.

2. Activity Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan (MEL) Plan:

The Recipient shall submit a draft Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan to the AOR as an attachment to the initial Annual Work Plan for approval within 60 days of the effective date of this award. The MEL Plan will cover the life of the Cooperative Agreement. The Recipient will consult with the AOR in the development of the MEL Plan, and in the proposed revision of the MEL Plan, if/when the recipient identifies a need for modification in response to changes in the activity or context that occur during the life of the activity.

The MEL Plan must include the following information:

- Summary of program description, theory of change, approaches and results and associated indicators;
- Monitoring Approach and Plan: the Recipient must explain how it will monitor the performance of the activity, including its process, outputs and outcomes indicators. The Recipient must discuss roles and responsibilities for all proposed monitoring, evaluation and learning actions. Additionally, the recipients shall explain efforts how it will undertake to monitor the conditions and external factors relevant to activity implementation.
- Planned Internal Evaluations: If Recipient plans to conduct an internal evaluation of the Program, the evaluation must conform to and address all relevant components of the USAID October 2020 Evaluation Policy, updated on October 1, 2020 (<https://www.usaid.gov/evaluation/policy>). The Recipient must include evaluation questions and methodology; and plan for collaborating with external evaluators if USAID commissions an external evaluation.
- Learning and Adapting Approach: the Recipient must explain its approach to use monitoring and evaluation information/data for learning and adapting to improve the effectiveness of the program. Learning activities will include knowledge generation, capture and sharing efforts from implementing to activity close out;
- Data Management: the Recipient must explain how will be data stored, documented, protected, managed and how they will ensure the quality of the data used for reporting;
- Performance Indicator Reference Sheet: As an annex, the Recipient must include a reference sheet for every indicator reported to USAID. The Reference Sheet must

include the following information: indicator title, result measured, precise definition(s), unit of measure, data type, dis-aggregated by data source, method of data collection and construction, reporting frequency, responsible person of the Recipient, baseline time frame, out-year targets, known data limitation and rationale for targets. The Recipient may obtain the Reference Sheet template from the AOR;

- Resources: The Recipient must identify estimated resources for the proposed monitoring, evaluation and learning activities that are part of the approved budget.

3. Quarterly Progress Reports:

The Recipient shall prepare and submit quarterly progress reports within 30 calendar days after the end of each quarter (U.S. Government fiscal year). The reports will summarize progress in relation to the agreed-upon targets contained in the Annual Work Plan, and specify any problems encountered and indicate resolutions or proposed corrective actions; describe the status of activities and deliverables and the date of their completion/submission to USAID/Cambodia; discuss changes to personnel and other relevant issues. In lieu of the quarterly progress report for the 4th quarter of the fiscal year, the Recipient will submit an annual progress report. Progress report templates will be provided the AOR. The report should not exceed 20 pages excluding annexes and will contain, at a minimum, the following information:

- Executive Summary
- Progress narrative and Implementation status;
- Implementation challenges and proposed solutions
- Monitoring, Learning, and Adapting Updates;
- Outreach and Communication;
- Collaboration with sub-partners, other USAID Implementing Partners, USG partners, other donors, and other stakeholders;
- Lesson Learned and Plans for next quarter; and
- Success stories as an annex,

4. Annual Progress Reports:

The annual progress report shall be due 30 calendar days after the reporting period covering activities of the previous USG fiscal year. The report will provide a succinct presentation of achievements of program objectives and targets during the year with a supporting discussion to explain any shortfalls. The report will summarize program progress and key results, provide an analysis of program impact based on activities completed or in-progress, identify success stories, and suggest resolution of any outstanding issues. The annual report shall consolidate the achievements made for the whole corresponding fiscal year. The Annual Progress Reports will include the performance indicator data table presenting the baseline, targets established for each fiscal year, and the actual annual performance data using indicators from the MEL Plan and the progress of cost share

achieved if any. The annual progress report shall include the status of and lessons learned in implementing the conditions of the environmental compliance requirements, the Initial Environmental Examination (IEE).

5. Final Report:

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.329(c), the Recipient shall submit the final performance report within 90 calendar days after the expiration or termination of the award. The Recipient shall submit the original and one copy to the Financial Office, the Agreement Officer (if requested), and the AOR at USAID/Cambodia and one copy, in electronic form of all final documents to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) at <http://dec.usaid.gov>

Each document submitted should contain essential bibliographic information, such as 1) descriptive title; 2) author(s) name; 3) award number; 4) sponsoring USAID office; 5) development objective; and 6) date of publication. The Recipient must review the DEC Website for submission instructions, including document formatting.

The Final Report will contain the following information:

- An overall description of all outputs, interventions completed, benchmarks achieved (as measured by performance indicators included in the Activity MEL Plan “AMELP”) and the significance of these interventions to the attainment of the Activity’s objectives;
- Accomplishments against the approved Annual Work Plans, including overall Activity results per Output/Outcome (or impact, if applicable) indicator;
- Description of how the cross-cutting issues were addressed in implementation;
- Summary of Success Stories;
- Lessons learned during the implementation and suggested ways to resolve constraints identified, including those that are gender related;
- Sustainable and transitioned BEST key activities to government after the Activity ends;
- Comments or recommendations where follow-up work by USAID and other entities could reinforce and further consolidate achieved results under the agreement;
- Discussion of the Recipient’s cost-share provided under the award, if any;
- An index of all reports and informational products produced under this agreement; and
- Status of and lessons learned in implementing the conditions of the environmental compliance requirements, the Initial Environmental Examination (IEE).

F.4 PROGRAM INCOME

If the successful applicant(s) is/are a non-profit organization(s), any program income generated under the award(s) will be added to USAID funding (and any cost-sharing that may be provided, if applicable), and used for program purposes. However, pursuant to 2 CFR 200.307 Program Income, if the successful applicant is a for-profit or commercial organization, any program income generated under the award will be deducted from the U.S. Government share of this award to determine the amount of USAID funding.

Program income will be subject to 2 CFR 200.307 for U.S. NGOs or the standard provision entitled Program Income for non-U.S. NGOs. If the successful applicant(s) is/are a PIO, any program income generated under the award(s) will be added to USAID funding (and any non-USAID funding that may be provided) and used for program purposes.

F.5 ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, Section 117 requires that the impact of USAID's activities on the environment be considered and that USAID include environmental sustainability as a central consideration in designing and carrying out its development programs. This mandate is codified in Federal Regulations (22 CFR 216) and in USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) Parts 201.5.10g and 204 (<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ADS/200/>), which, in part, require that the potential environmental impacts of USAID-financed activities are identified prior to a final decision to proceed and that appropriate environmental safeguards are adopted for all activities. Respondent environmental compliance obligations under these regulations and procedures are specified in the following paragraphs of this RFA.

In addition, the recipient must comply with host country environmental regulations unless otherwise directed in writing by USAID. In case of conflict between host country and USAID regulations, the latter shall govern.

No activity funded under this Cooperative Agreement (CA) will be implemented unless an environmental threshold determination, as defined by 22 CFR 216, has been reached for that activity, as documented in a Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE), Initial Environmental Examination (IEE), or Environmental Assessment (EA) duly signed by the Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO). (Hereinafter, such documents are described as "approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation."). Furthermore, in accordance with Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 201 on Climate Risk Management, a climate risk screening must be done at the activity level stating how climate risk will be addressed during the implementation phase.

As part of its initial Work Plan, and all Annual Work Plans thereafter, the recipient, in collaboration with the USAID Cognizant Technical Officer and Mission Environmental Officer or Bureau Environmental Officer, as appropriate, shall review all ongoing and planned activities

under this grant/CA to determine if they are within the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation.

If the recipient plans any new activities outside the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation, it shall prepare an amendment to the documentation for USAID review and approval. No such new activities shall be undertaken prior to receiving written USAID approval of environmental documentation amendments.

Any ongoing activities found to be outside the scope of the approved Regulation 216 environmental documentation shall be halted until an amendment to the documentation is submitted and written approval is received from USAID.

As this Activity will mainly consist of education, technical assistance, capacity building, and training programs related interventions, the activities are among the classes of actions listed 22 CFR 126.2(c)(2) and have no foreseeable significant direct or indirect adverse effect on the environment. Therefore, a Categorical Exclusion was recommended, and a Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE) was approved for the Activity. The approved RCE no. Asia 24-076 is attached to this RFA as an Attachment 1 for reference.

[END OF SECTION F]

SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT(S)

G.1 NOFO Points of Contact

Only the Agreement Officer is authorized to make commitments on behalf of USAID. The Agreement Officer is listed below:

Mr. Francis Hall
Agreement Officer
USAID/Cambodia
#1 Street 96, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Email: fhall@usaid.gov

Ms. Honey Sokry
Acquisition and Assistance Specialist
USAID/Cambodia
#1 Street 96, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Email: hsokry@usaid.gov

G.2 Acquisition and Assistance Ombudsman

The A&A Ombudsman helps ensure equitable treatment of all parties who participate in USAID's acquisition and assistance process. The A&A Ombudsman serves as a resource for all organizations who are doing or wish to do business with USAID. Please visit this page for additional information: <https://www.usaid.gov/work-usaid/acquisition-assistance-ombudsman>

[The A&A Ombudsman may be contacted via: Ombudsman@usaid.gov](mailto:Ombudsman@usaid.gov)

[END OF SECTION G]

SECTION H: OTHER INFORMATION

USAID reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. The Agreement Officer is the only individual who may legally commit the Government to the expenditure of public funds. Any award and subsequent incremental funding will be subject to the availability of funds and continued relevance to Agency programming.

Applications with Proprietary Data

Applicants who include data that they do not want disclosed to the public for any purpose or used by the U.S. Government except for evaluation purpose, should mark the cover page with the following:

“This application includes data that must not be disclosed, duplicated or used – in whole or in part – for any purpose other than to evaluate this application. If, however, an award is made as a result of – or in connection with – the submission of this data, the U.S. Government will have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the resulting award. This restriction does not limit the U.S. Government’s right to use information contained in this data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained in sheets {insert sheet numbers}.”

Additionally, the applicant must mark each sheet of data it wishes to restrict with the following:

“Use or disclosure of data contained on this sheet is subject to the restriction on the title page of this application.”

[END OF SECTION H]

ATTACHMENT 1: INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION (IEE)

DETERMINATION OF CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Overview: The purpose of this document is to establish that all proposed projects/activities belong to classes of actions eligible for Categorical Exclusions as set out in Agency regulations (22CFR 216.2(c)) and that there are no foreseeable significant direct or indirect impacts that would preclude them from receiving a Categorical Exclusion. Upon approval of this document, the Categorical Exclusions are affirmed for the project/activity. This analysis also documents the results of the project/activity level Climate Risk Management process in accordance with USAID policy (specifically, ADS 201 mandatory reference 201mal). This RCE is a critical element of a mandatory environmental review and compliance process meant to achieve environmentally sound activity design and implementation.

ORGANIZATIONAL DATA

Activity Name:	Bridging Education Solutions for Transformation (BEST)
Geographic Location(s):	Cambodia
Funding Operating Unit(s):	USAID/Cambodia
Other Involved Operating Unit(s):	Office of Public Health and Education
Funding Account(s):	DA
Life of Project Funding (ceiling):	
Activity Start/End Date	10/01/2024-12/30/2027
If Amended, New End Date:	
Solicitation/Contract/Award Number(s):	N/A
Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement
Implementing Partner(s):	N/A

DOCUMENT TRACKING

Bureau Tracking ID:	n/a
If an Amendment, Tracking ID of Preceding Compliance Document(s):	n/a
Other Related Compliance Documents:	n/a
Document Expiration Date:	[If different from the activity end date]
Sector Type(s):	Education

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE REVIEW DATA

Environmental Determination(s):	Categorical Exclusion
Activity will involve construction, as defined by ADS 201 and 303 :	No construction is planned or authorized under this activity
Potential Impact to Threatened or Endangered Species or Critical Habitat per 216.5:	No impact to Threatened or Endangered Species or Critical Habitats
Applicability of Safeguards for Activities Supporting Parks and Protected Areas :	No, this activity will not involve protected areas
Climate Risks Identified (#) in Annex 1:	Low:0 Moderate:3 High:0
Climate Risks Addressed (#) in Annex 1:	Low:0 Moderate:3 High:0

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

In accordance with Title 22, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 216 ([22 CFR 216](#)), this document is to establish that all proposed activities belong to classes of actions eligible for Determination of Categorical Exclusions (DCE), as set out in Agency regulations (22 CFR 216.2(c)), and that there are no foreseeable significant direct or indirect impacts that would preclude a CE determination. Upon approval of this document, the DCEs are affirmed for this activity.

This document also captures (in Annex 1) the results of the Climate Risk Management process, in accordance with USAID policy ([ADS 201mal](#)).

APPROVAL OF THE BRIDGING EDUCATION SOLUTIONS FOR TRANSFORMATION (BEST) DETERMINATION OF CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Approval:	/s/	<u>05/31/2024</u>
	<u>Christopher Kelly, Acting Mission Director</u>	Date
Clearance:	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>05/24/2024</u>
	<u>Ben Zinner, Officer Director of OPHE</u>	Date
	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>05/21/24</u>
	<u>Menglim Kim, Mission Environmental Officer & CIL</u>	Date
	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>05/28/2024</u>
	<u>Stephen Fitzpatrick, Program Office Director</u>	Date
	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>05/29/2024</u>
	<u>Ratchada Arpornsilp, Regional Environmental Advisor</u>	Date
	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>05/31/2024</u>
	<u>Eileen Hsieh, Resident Legal Officer</u>	Date
	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>5/31/2024</u>
	<u>Ben Zinner, Acting Deputy Mission Director</u>	Date
Concurrence:	WILLIAM LELAND GIBSON Digitally signed by WILLIAM LELAND GIBSON Date: 2024.05.31 16:26:08 -04'00' <u>William Gibson, Bureau Environmental Officer</u>	<u>Date</u>

Distribution: Award File; [Environmental Compliance Database](#)

1. ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The long-term purpose of the Bridging Education Solutions for Transformation (BEST) activity is to introduce the most cost-effective solution to improve learning outcomes and foundational skills of Cambodian students, particularly for the most marginalized groups, to prevent dropping out of primary school and effectively transition to lower secondary education. The overarching objective of this activity is to introduce the most cost-effective education solution to improve Khmer literacy and “Read-to-Learn” abilities among grade 4 students.

Specific objectives are:

1. To revise core textbook for Khmer grade 4 and develop cost-effective and practical literacy packages for grade 4;
2. To improve teachers’ competencies in teaching literacy in target primary schools; and
3. To produce and disseminate evidence that supports the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport’s efforts to scale-up successful practices.

Intermediate Result 1: Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and supplementary teaching and learning materials for literacy grade 4 developed for classroom and extracurricular activities.

The BEST activity will support the MoEYS to consolidate national and international best practices regarding teaching approaches and resources for literacy in grade 4, building on existing materials and tools, filling the gaps in and aligning with existing curricula/syllabi and integrating education technology where applicable to facilitate students’ learning and help them improve their reading and writing proficiency. BEST will support the MoEYS to revise the core textbook for Khmer grade 4 and develop two mutually reinforcing sets of literacy packages for grades 4: one for use in the classroom and the other for extracurricular activities. The content of the two sets of materials have to be interconnected to reinforce students’ learning in literacy and are aligned with the core textbook and curriculum. In addition to literacy reinforcement, the extracurricular package can be used in either the school or at home to help learners develop their “read-to-learn” ability beyond literacy to include mathematics and other subject areas as appropriate and promote their basic social emotional learning (SEL) skills including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship skills and responsible decision making. Extracurricular materials must be enduring, cost-effective, and innovative and complement existing library resources. The two sets of packages must be cost-effective and well-aligned with the MoEYS curriculum and core textbook. BEST will define what should constitute the literacy packages based on needs assessment and agreement with the MoEYS. The activity will support the MoEYS to pilot the revised core textbook. The material design process must be participatory and inclusive of experts from MoEYS and other stakeholders including the private sector. The MoEYS experts must take lead in material development/revision processes with technical assistance offered by the activity as well as by other interested partners.

The larger goal of this activity is to have an effective, sustainable model to be owned and scaled-up by the MoEYS to address students' learning outcomes in varying school contexts at a larger scale. This will require an evidenced-based approach with a robust study and an analysis of the current reality of the capacity and needs of teachers, students, and schools as well as evaluating existing tools and practices in grade 4 before interventions are introduced. The scope of the study/analysis will cover grades 4-6, but the activity’s core interventions will focus only on grade 4 only. The design of the essential supplemental teaching and learning literacy packages must be evidence-based, cost-effective, needs-based, and

innovative in integration of technology solutions and extracurricular activities to enhance learning outcomes.

The literacy packages are expected to be in both printable and digital formats taking into account diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as an underpinning principle so that all students regardless of their background and status can benefit. A cost-effective education technology solution may be integrated into the material design and/or piloted as a tool to help children learn and practice their reading and writing skills in both classroom and extracurricular activities. As the MoEYS has recently introduced two-hour extracurricular activities for schools, this activity will introduce innovative approaches for extracurricular activities, such as project-based learning via student clubs and/or technology-based solutions that promote students' interest and help them improve their academic achievements and basic SEL skills. The packages need to be properly tested, refined and finalized using USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Framework.

Intermediate Result 2: Teachers in target schools are more capable to teach literacy in classrooms and support extracurricular activities.

The activity will develop a teacher training and mentoring program with concrete, practical training manuals for teachers and teacher mentors to pilot the revised textbook, and implement the new literacy packages in target schools. BEST will utilize effective teacher development approaches using proper teaching methodologies to ensure that all children can develop "Read-to-Learn" skills to the best of their abilities. The activity will ensure sufficient mentoring support is provided to teachers to ensure the revised textbook and the new packages are properly piloted in selected schools and teachers are well supported to help them master the skills in teaching the new packages. The use of appropriate and context-based approaches will ensure mentoring support occurs sufficiently and regularly at target schools. Target schools will be selected in consultation with USAID and MOEYS taking into account: 1) that the most marginalized Cambodian students are living in remote areas; 2) that the majority of Cambodian schools have a similar school context; and 3) that only a small number of schools are positioned to use education technology. BEST will target a sufficient number of schools that fit in categories 1 and 2 to test the effectiveness of the materials and core interventions. School governance will be taken into account to ensure teachers' accountability in implementing the new materials and teaching approaches properly. Likewise for extracurricular activities, BEST will ensure students' meaningful engagement in extracurricular activities both at school and at home. For technology-based solutions, depending on resource availability and school context, a smaller number of schools in the same or different selected geographic area(s) can be selected to ensure the robustness of such interventions. Schools selected to implement technology-based solutions should have sufficient information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure but may consider purchasing some ICT equipment such as computers, tablets and, where applicable, internet access. The activity does not aim to equip schools with ICT infrastructure, but may consider purchasing some ICT equipment such as tablets for a small number of disadvantaged schools to promote equitable access of ICT use in rural areas. In such a case, the applicant will need to consider including the associated costs for ICT equipment. Technology-based mentoring data throughout the school years will be generated to track teachers' progress and students' achievements and for ongoing reflection and adaptation.

Intermediate Result 3: The MoEYS adopted the revised textbook for Khmer grade 4 and the literacy packages in grade 4 for scale-up.

Throughout the activity cycle, the activity will document what works well and what is not in line with USAID's CLA Framework. Documentation will also include step-by-step guides on intervention approaches to promote replicability and fidelity of implementation, challenges related to implementation and sustainability, opportunities and valid and reliable data on students' and teachers' performance. The opportunities could include potential inclusion of innovative interventions, scale-up of best practices and future collaboration. A consolidated and realistic costing model with clear recommendations on which intervention components are best suited for scaling-up for students will be developed. This will further contribute to the existing evidence base for the MoEYS' replication. The BEST activity will include a robust and reliable evaluation to test the effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, scalability, and sustainability of the program, along with a viable, costing strategy with clear recommendations to assist the MoEYS in scaling up the program. Measuring the fidelity of implementation must take into account different school context and interventions (see target school selection in Immediate Result 2). The applicant must propose how to engage the MoEYS team throughout the design and implementation of the core interventions for the MoEYS' buy-in. To ensure the soundness and the reliability of the evaluation, the activity will ensure that MoEYS, especially the Education Quality Assurance Department, leads on assessment tool development, data collection and analysis of the effectiveness of the interventions. Among other assessment tools for the overall activity, there must be agreed assessment tools to assess the learning outcomes in literacy and the teacher's performance in teaching literacy. The applicant must propose a monitoring, evaluation and learning plan which ensures the integrity and reliability of data collection, analysis and reporting.

Opportunity Modules: Supplementing the intervention description as stated in the Results Framework above, USAID and the recipient may identify opportunities for improving our response through this mechanism to address specific education priority needs that cannot be precisely identified during the design process, but emerge throughout implementation. Applying the opportunity modules may also allow this activity to expand geographic coverage to other provinces/districts as appropriate or expand reach within existing provinces. Subject to funding availability, USAID will work with the Recipient to identify priority needs and provide technical support by bringing national and international expertise to support interventions related to the existing objectives. Even though the programmatic activities might be expanded in scope and coverage, the opportunity modules would remain within the result areas. In the event that the programmatic activities expanded under the opportunity modules might have any impact on the environment not already stated below, the Initial Environmental Examination will be reviewed and revised accordingly.

TABLE 1: ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES OR INTERVENTIONS

IR1 - Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and supplementary teaching and learning materials for literacy grade 4 developed for classroom and extracurricular activities.
1.1. A situational analysis and a robust teachers' and students' capacities and needs assessment conducted to inform the revision of grade 4 Khmer textbook and the design of the supplementary teaching and learning packages.
1.2. Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and effective supplementary teaching and learning materials packages for literacy of grade 4 developed, tested and refined.
1.3. A concrete approach and innovative tools for extracurricular activities to reinforce grade 4 students' skills developed, tested and refined.

IR2 -Teachers in target schools are more capable to teach literacy in classrooms and support extracurricular activities.

2.1. Teacher training and teacher mentoring programs for teachers to use the newly created materials are developed, tested and refined.

2.2. Teachers and mentors in the target schools receive capacity building and acquire skills necessary to implement the new literacy packages.

2.3. Teachers in the target schools will be supported to demonstrate new skills and practices in their classrooms through ongoing mentoring and performance monitoring.

IR3 - The MoEYS adopted the revised textbook for Khmer grade 4 and the literacy packages in grade 4 for scale-up.

3.1. A clear documentation of lessons learned, challenges, opportunities, and results of the core targeted interventions.

3.2. A consolidated and realistic costing model with recommendations on scaling up effective literacy models developed.

3.3. A robust and reliable evaluation of the effectiveness of the core targeted interventions led by MoEYS.

2. DETERMINATION OF CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

A DCE is recommended for the following activities or interventions (sub-activities) that fall under the classes of actions defined in §216.2(c)(2). No further analysis is required for the activities/interventions described in Table 1. In the event of modification to the scope of work or addition of new activities an amendment will usually be required.

Activity or Intervention #	Recommended Determination for Categorical Exclusion
IR2 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	§216.2(c)(2)(i) Education, technical assistance, or training programs except to the extent such programs include activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.)
IR3 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	§216.2(c)(2)(iii) Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings
IR3 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	§216.2(c)(2)(v) Document and information transfers
IR3 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	§216.2(c)(2)(xiv) Studies, projects or programs intended to develop the capability of recipient countries to engage in development planning, except to the extent designed to result in activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.)
IR1 1.2, 1.3 IR3 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	§216.2(c)(2)(xv) Activities that involve the application of design criteria or standards developed and approved by USAID

3. MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

3.1. USAID IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARDS

The DCE is contingent upon full implementation of the following requirements.

Changes to scope of awards require a determination be made as to whether such change may have an environmental impact not previously assessed (per §216.3(a)(9)). Per ADS 204, it is the responsibility of the AOR/COR to keep the MEO/REA and BEO informed of any new information or changes in the activity(ies) subject to this DCE.

- 3.1.1. Provide briefings for implementing partner(s) on environmental compliance responsibilities relevant to the award (justification for DCE and limitations - such as no physical works, ensure activities remain within the scope of the DCE, monitoring to ensure activities do not result in unintended environmental impacts, etc.);
- 3.1.2. Ensure integration of DCE limitations in prime and sub-awards and grant agreements;
- 3.1.3. Ensure compliance with applicable partner country requirements;
- 3.1.4. Annual review of activities to ensure that scope is consistent with the DCE;
- 3.1.5. Records Management: The AOR/COR will maintain environmental compliance documents in the official activity file and upload records to the [USAID Environmental Compliance Database](#);
- 3.1.6. Corrective Action: When noncompliance or unforeseen impacts are identified, the AOR/COR will initiate the corrective action process, in consultation with the cognizant environmental officer(s) (e.g., MEO, REA, or BEO). The Corrective Action Plan is used to document findings, recommendations, and a timeline for making the corrections.

ATTACHMENTS: Annex 1: Climate Risk Management Summary and Table

BUREAU RESOURCE LINKS: If desired, add URLs to Bureau specific resources and guidance

ANNEX 1. CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT SUMMARY AND TABLE

CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Cambodia has a humid tropical climate, heavily influenced by the annual monsoon season that typically begins in mid-May and lasts through the end of October. The dry season stretches from November to April, with less rain, little wind, and much lower humidity. The monsoons deliver approximately three-fourths of the country's annual rainfall and are the primary contributor to the flood pulse essential to the region, especially along the central alluvial plains of the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers that comprise roughly 80 percent of the country's landmass. Temperatures are generally consistent across the country, averaging 25 to 27 Celsius throughout most of the year, though with an average annual maximum of 38 Celsius in April and an average annual minimum temperature of 17 Celsius in January. Rainfall varies more widely, with average annual rainfall as low as 1,400 millimeters (mm) in the central lowlands, and as high as 4,000 mm near the Cardamom mountains and nearby coastal areas in the southwest. Cambodia's Eastern plains receive approximately 2,000 to 2,600 mm of rainfall annually though they may exceed those amounts in the mountainous areas in the Northeast within or around Virachey National Park.

The USAID [Cambodia Country Risk Profile 2019](#) and [World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank Climate Risk Profile](#) identified the main climate risks include: agriculture, water, health, food security and ecosystems (detailed information: Climate-Risk-Profile-Cambodia). According to the Country Development Cooperation Strategy Climate Risk Management (CRM) level analysis, extreme heat, droughts, and storms are additional climate risks that could affect the proposed activity. The overall climate risk rating for this activity is **Moderate**. There is an Education in Emergencies Working Group to monitor natural disasters and other emergencies (i.e., flood and drought) and their impacts on schools. This Working Group is led by the MoEYS and in collaboration with such members as USAID, UNICEF, GIZ, and the World Bank. The CRM Summary and Table below summarizes activity-level CRM including programmatic components, identified risk, and associated mitigation measures.

CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT SUMMARY TABLE

Activity or Intervention #	Climate Risks ¹	Risk Rating ²	How Risks are Addressed ³	Opportunities to Strengthen Climate Resilience or Climate Mitigation ⁴
<p>IR1 - Core textbook for Khmer grade 4 revised and supplementary teaching and learning materials for literacy grade 4 developed for classroom and extracurricular activities.</p> <p>IR2 - Teachers in target schools are more capable to teach literacy in classrooms and support extracurricular activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the rainy season, it is likely that schools will be flooded and affected by wastewater overflow and spread of waterborne diseases. This will increase the likelihood of school closure and reduced school attendance among school children and extracurricular activities. Teaching and learning resources may be damaged by floods. During the dry season, students are more likely to be affected by extreme heat and drought. Strong heat waves are likely to 	Moderate	The activity will utilize existing mechanisms such as the Education in Emergencies Working Group to monitor natural disasters and other emergencies (i.e., flood and drought) and their impacts on schools. This Working Group is led by the MoEYS and in collaboration with such members as USAID, UNICEF, GIZ, and the World Bank will be mobilized locally when the country experiences an emergency. MoEYS, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, are also tracking schools and WASH infrastructure to make sure schools meet the minimum standards of 1, 2, and 3 star(s). The activity will further leverage new mobile technologies and low cost telecommunications to reach more remote communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate environmental and climate matters/education into the improved teaching and learning materials, and extracurricular activities. Ensure that the implementing partner is connected with the Education in Emergencies Working Group and promote environmental education materials in the Working Group. Policy level work with MoEYS on promoting environmental and climate education for children and youth, flexibility in school calendar to adjust for flooding and limited access

¹ List key risks related to the defined/illustrative interventions identified in the screen and additional assessment..

² Low/Moderate/ High

³ Describe how risks have been addressed in activity design and/or additional steps that will be taken in implementation. If a decision has been made to accept the risk, briefly explain why.

⁴ Describe opportunities to achieve development objectives by integrating climate resilience or mitigation measures.

Activity or Intervention #	Climate Risks ¹	Risk Rating ²	How Risks are Addressed ³	Opportunities to Strengthen Climate Resilience or Climate Mitigation ⁴
IR3 - The MoEYS adopted the revised textbook for Khmer grade 4 and the literacy packages in grade 4 for scale-up.	affect school closure and reduce school attendance among school children and extracurricular activities. Droughts can increase school absenteeism and increase the likelihood of students dropping out of school. This has also been shown to disproportionately affect girls.		The Ministry employs flexi school instructional hours to ensure that children are safe from extreme heat.	to education or increase distance learning opportunities for students impacted by school closures.

