

**Sources Sought # 75N93022R00014**

**National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)**

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**Response to Sources Sought # 75N93022R00014**

**International Business Express, Inc. (IBEX)** is pleased to respond to the government's Sources Sought notice 75N93022R00014, in search of qualified contractors to assume responsibility for daily operations and management of the MSC in order to facilitate and support the research of the NIAID, as well as ultimately expand the infrastructure and core capacity of the Center.

In business since 1997, IBEX is an award winning Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB), HIBZone-certified business, and a successful provider of mission-critical services and solutions to the Federal Government, serving agencies in the Continental United States and abroad. We apply industry best practices and procedures to define customers' goals. We offer complete in-country service center support, through a full range of planning, design, implementation, operations, financial and personnel management, and other support services. IBEX has been successful because our team delivers on trust, quality, and innovation.

**NOTE:** We recommend the NIH NIAID consider making this project an SBA HUBZone set-aside.

We understand the successful contractor for the proposed effort will be required to provide support for the operation of NIAID-funded activities in Mali to include the disbursement of payroll for Malian staff at USTTB (funded under a separate NIAID contract); the disbursement of payroll of staff working under NIAID extramural grants; the payment of expenses in support of field studies; the payment of expenses related to the operations of laboratory facilities; the facilitation and payment of travel of ICER scientists; procurement support, and assisting in the management of operations of ICER activities in Mali and other West African countries, as requested. IBEX is capable of supporting the Mali Service Center (MSC), a Malian entity through which we will be able to provide guidance and oversight in the administration and disbursement of NIAID grant/contract funds, and material and travel expenses for NIAID-sponsored activities within Mali and West Africa.

IBEX has over twenty years experience providing highly skilled programmatic support services in Mali and other African nations. As we have demonstrated in past performances, we have the staff and processes necessary to ensure that the NIAID operations in Mali Africa meets their operational objectives of facilitating investigative and collaborative research in emerging infectious diseases.

IBEX has provided assistance to scientific, technical, and administrative staff in Mali and other African countries, including assisting with preparation of administrative reports; maintaining the roster of scientists, technicians, and administrative and support personnel required by our customer agencies; providing staffing with appropriate subcontracts between government agencies such as USAID and the US Department of State, and individual employees; and

ensuring compliance with salary scales, payroll, and concomitant work effort is consistent with the needs of the client.

### ***Management Approach***

The IBEX management approach for in-country operations calls for a single point of contact between our organization and the Government. IBEX processes and organizational structure provide exceptional communications channels. This ensures any issues, problems, or concerns anticipated or encountered are immediately communicated to the COR and Contracting Officer (CO). Our quality assurance methodology provides for issue identification, corrective action, and proposal of resolutions, so that problems can be corrected expeditiously.

An integral aspect of the IBEX approach to a project of this scope and scale is to employ a Risk Management model. For example, at US Agency for International Development, IBEX embraced the agency's Forward reform process, where new attention was being given to the Agency's policies and systems for addressing risks that might undermine the achievement of in-country priority development goals. IBEX looked to improve risk management practices in our implementation of programs in our various projects in African nations; we sought to:

- Create opportunities to think about risks comprehensively and comparatively;
- Consider risks and rewards in setting program goals; and
- Calibrate risk mitigation measures to the risks faced in a given country or project.

The first phase was an assessment of the risk landscape in which USAID operates, beginning with a review of existing grant and contract management practices including Sustainability Analysis, Organizational Capacity Assessments, Pre-Award Surveys, and the impact of the agency program cycle. IBEX has put together a comprehensive risk training course offered to our team via our employee portal. This training summarizes definitions and our recommended approach to risk management, and proposes a conceptual framework for understanding how client practices map against contemporary standards and practices. Such knowledge transfer from the private sector to the public is a hallmark of IBEX innovation.

Another differentiator of IBEX is our management approach integrated with quality assurance. The key to successful delivery of quality work products and to the achievement of project performance standards are effective controls through reviews, testing and adherence to established processes. The first step in implement this Quality Control Plan (QCP) with effective controls is defining the applicable standards the controls are required to meet. The establishment of standards sets the performance benchmarks for the project. On this contract, IBEX will achieve the performance standards through the use of formal reviews. Our performance standards are based on achieving the contract objectives, analyzing issues, making

recommendations and proposing solutions to complex organizational management issues that represent barriers to efficient and effective business.

IBEX takes a performance management approach — many acquisitions are structured around the “what” service or quality level is required, as opposed to “how.” IBEX structures our in-country organization around performance of the work (i.e., results, not just ticking boxes). Performance management rests on developing a capability to review and analyze information generated through performance assessment — and it is this audit-ready model we use to ensure the Government has the ability to make decisions based on the analysis of performance data. This analysis yields information that indicates whether expected outcomes for the project are being achieved by IBEX.

Performance management represents a significant shift from the more traditional quality assurance (QA) concepts in several ways. Performance management focuses on assessing whether outcomes are being achieved and to what extent. This approach migrates away from scrutiny of compliance with the processes and practices used to achieve the outcome. A performance-based approach enables IBEX to play a pivotal role in how the work is performed by subcontractors and grantees, as long as the proposed processes are within the stated constraints of the overarching contract. The only exceptions to process reviews are those required by law (federal, state, and local) and compelling business situations, such as safety and health. A “results” focus provides IBEX flexibility to continuously improve and innovate over the course of the contract as long as the critical outcomes expected are being achieved and/or the desired performance levels are being met.

### ***Management of Financial Resources***

IBEX personnel have worked with agency staff to assist in complying with legal requirements necessary to establish and management the administrative and financial capacity of various in-country operations. Our team has developed portfolio management processes and established methods of proper accounting practice, such as electronic record keeping and auditing, and to assist with development of centers to support research and country aid distribution. We are experienced at seeking supporting sponsorship by third-party organizations. IBEX has in place standardized practices to report on various elements of program financial and operational statuses, such the the government can reliable account for the expenditures of funds. We are well able to provide legal services, as necessary, for the interpretation of local laws or regulations related to employment and other legal matters. We have directly relevant experience in Mali, as well as other African states.

For example, IBEX established bank accounts for receipt of U.S. deposits so that we could oversee receipt and disbursement of funds distributed to grantees. using our own DCAA-compliant accounting system we are able to institute accounting methods consistent with

generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). At the end of every engagement, IBEX provides audible records to ensure funds are accounted for and disbursed according to grant, contract, and subcontract approved budgets. Our Certified Public Accounts (CPAs) ensure appropriate financial reports reviewed before they are submitted by the grantee/contractor to the Government. We have set up bank accounts with local banks in foreign countries for operational purposes, as well as utilized established banks in the United States. Our accounting system converts reports in all currencies to U.S. dollars, for ease of analysis.

IBEX provides support to portfolio management of projects at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We assist senior decision makers with establishing short and long term objectives for tasks, projects, and programs. This includes program objectives (time, cost & schedule) and Capital Investment Planning. IBEX experts make recommendations on planning next generation infrastructure, strategic planning, and asset with oversight of small, medium and large programs. With our expertise in Organizational Management, IBEX supports SCIS with Business System Modernization and Blueprint & Business Reform Initiatives. We recently developed and conducted training on the performance of Action Planning and GAP analysis.

IBEX provides grant management oversight, and we have refined the processes and methods to assist agencies oversee grants. Our approach encompasses every part of a grant's lifecycle, from pre-award research through post-award grant closeout. Of course, the process is always evolving and includes various lifecycle tasks through its unique award phases based on the specifics of a program. Once we have determined whether an agency's partners are sub-recipients or vendors, we establish a plan for providing oversight over the sub-recipients. This plan includes how we will oversee that: the costs are in line with the budget, and all financial documents are on file; we conduct regular status checks (monthly, quarterly, etc.) to ensure activity targets are being met; and, we communicate the monitoring plan with sub-recipients and provide technical assistance to ensure they have all information needed to be successful.

Ibex's management information provides us the means to measure and report costs. The heart of this system is the QuickBooks financial accounting systems software, widely considered as a premier business application for U.S. Government contracts. This comprehensive tool provides for contract cost management; QuickBooks is the system recommended by the Small Business Administration (SBA) and used by major federal contractors. For purposes of this contract, we will configure QuickBooks to track cost by budget line items; that is for each budgeted line item, management will be provided information on a monthly basis as to budgeted item cost, and variance. Whenever appropriate, each of these monthly cost reports by budget items will be further supported by detailed schedules, which break out cost item elements. For example, a labor cost report will show (monthly) labor dollars and hours incurred by the budget, both for the current month and cumulatively; an ODC cost report will show current month and cumulative

costs incurred for each ODC cost element, such as communications, DBA insurance, etc. In summary, QuickBooks Professional provides IBEX with a very powerful tool for measuring and reporting cost on a current basis, and will be formatted to provide the basis for superior cost management.

**Measurement/Reporting of Scheduled Performance** — IBEX's field representative and Home Office Project coordinator for the contract take the lead in accomplishing this function. Our field representatives keep the prime contractor apprised of current progress towards scheduled performance milestones by means of frequent briefings; these briefings are held weekly, or as desired by the prime contractor. In addition, IBEX field technical team; IBEX assigns a dedicated Home Office Project Manager to oversee progress in the performance of the contract. Some of the functions performed by Home Office Program Manager include reviewing work plans of the field technical team, administering logistical and technical inputs into the Project, monitoring costs incurred by the budget (in coordination with IBEX Accounting), working with our in-country technical team to update performance schedules whenever appropriate. In summary, IBEX established procedures for measuring and reporting of scheduled performance insure that technical progress under the contract remains within scheduled time frame and cost parameters.

**Cost Variance Analysis** — A basic element of any cost management system is a regular comparison of budgeted (planned) costs with actual costs incurred, and taking whatever actions are appropriate in the event of variances. We believe that every (or nearly every) contractor performs this function. What distinguishes IBEX from many of our competitor is our accounting and management structure.

In addition, Ibex to identifying variance that have already occurred, Our accounting systems will project rate expenditures by budgeted line items (and cost elements under the budget), thus altering us in advance of cost variances that are likely to occur in the future. In summary, Ibex management systems in place give IBEX the capability to do a demonstrably better job of cost management. IBEX further maintains control over expenditures by effective and well-defined personnel policies, which mandates daily time sheets for all staff consultants. Additionally, an outside Certified Public Accounting firm to ensure their continued integrity and accuracy our financial records. IBEX Management has developed standard financial control forms, which will assist staff, and consultants in reporting clearly and accurately the nature, time and source expenditures with the receipts attached all expenditures. Our financial management staff maintains current information on exchange rates, per diem, etc. that will enable project staff and consultants to process expense, travel and pay.

***Transition Management***

IBEX has developed and executed transition plans to assist the Government in implementing a strategy for transitioning work incumbents. We are experienced at locking in key personnel prior to contract cut-over, so on-boarding goes smoothly. We also have handled transition of government-furnished equipment, as well as knowledge transfer and physical transfer of relevant files and records. For this effort, IBEX would draft an initial transition plan that will be revised at contract award, upon approval of the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). As we have successfully performed over a dozen times in the last decade, IBEX will ensure the final initial transition plan is followed to maintain an orderly, efficient, and expedient transition of all contract activities lasting no more than 30 days after contract award.

***Personnel*** — To fulfill the staffing requirements, IBEX will first offer employment to all qualified incumbent employees IAW the SCA and IAW Executive Order (EO) 13495 and FAR Subpart 22.12, which mandates "Non-displacement of Qualified Workers under Service Contracts". IBEX will also utilize our proven hiring processes, which include generous benefits, transferring seniority for employees, providing opportunity for professional growth and career advancement, and efforts to recruit and hire new employees. Additionally, IBEX will cross-train and cross-utilize our employees across multiple disciplines to ensure that all PWS areas are covered, particularly during times of heavy workload or unscheduled absences.

All IBEX personnel who interface with NIAID management and technical personnel will be able to communicate in English and have excellent oral and written communication skills. IBEX does not include resumes of staff (due to the inclusion of FAR 52.222-17, Non-Displacement of Qualified Workers Clause). IBEX will ensure that all candidates meet the qualifications required by the Government in the PWS. The minimum experience requirements include: good skills in reading, writing, and spoken English; effective listening and communication skills; and additional technical skills.

IBEX accepts responsibility to maintain a satisfactory standard of employee competence, conduct appearance and integrity and we will be responsible for taking such disciplinary action with respect to any employees as may be necessary. We understand the CO may require dismissal of employees which are deemed incompetent, careless, insubordinate, unsuitable or otherwise objectionable to the Government at any time during the life of this contract.

***Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Personnel***

IBEX possesses significant bench strength to meet "short fuse" or surge requirements to staff the requirements outlined in the proposed scope of work. IBEX has access to hundreds of technical and subject matter expert personnel CONUS/OCONUS who are mission ready and available to deploy in short order; we can meet all of the MSC operational requirements including any future and/or optional requirements upon award of a contract.

One aspect of this effort is sourcing and hiring experts to execute the tasks under operation of NIAID-funded scientific research and other partner activities. IBEX brings a host of human resources management capabilities to a project of this nature — specifically in Mali and other African nations. IBEX supports multiple efforts in various Saharan and Sub-Saharan nations with a robust recruiting effort. If staffing needs cannot be accomplished with resources in the IBEX human resources pool, then IBEX's Human Resource (HR) department will find resumes. IBEX's Management team will conduct phone interviews and detailed interviews to map candidate's goals with project goals. Upon completion of screening and interviewing process, we will recommend the appropriate action to the HR.

IBEX will establish and maintain policies and procedures for hiring, training, and retaining, employees, as appropriate, for the management and service activities of the MSC. We will start with updating the existing personnel manual for the management of human resources. Our human resources experts will help the MSC Director develop evaluation tools for measuring the progress of the MSC staff in gaining the expertise necessary to manage, operate, and expand the MSC as the research infrastructure in the country grows, using a Management By Objectives (MBO) approach. MBO is a strategic management model that aims to improve organizational performance by clearly defining objectives that are agreed to by both management and employees. We will define an organizational structure that drives productivity, developing effective coordination and communication within the organization, and embrace wider cultural and societal nuances to build an ethical organization. Most importantly, IBEX will dedicate time to finding the right staff and developing their skills base.

By aiming to retain 100% of incumbent staff, IBEX mitigates any impact to service levels during contract transition. Some existing personnel will be seamlessly transferred to IBEX during this phase. Our goal is to ensure exceptional performance by using a highly effective recruitment and retention program. Fair and equitable treatment of all employees, responsiveness, and organizational excellence are central themes to the delivery of our HR solutions. Our recruit and retain personnel plan is based on our total compensation, recruiting, training, maintenance, and retention strategy. Our plan ensures fair, equitable, and market-competitive compensation and fringe benefits; employee development; job growth; and promotion opportunities to attract and retain high-end talent; encourage staff to fulfill personal objectives; and enable staff to focus on NIAID missions. As part of a training feedback loop, this process includes applying lessons learned from similar contracts in a multi-tiered approach to optimize staffing. We fill each position with the most qualified candidate from: 1) incumbent staff at NIAID, 2) employees from Team IBEX, and/or 3) new hires.

***Training*** — As we provided for USAID and other agencies' operations, IBEX will put in place a Learning Management System (LMS) to support training for Malian scientists and administrators on MSC's policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) so as to support implementation of



NIAID's collaborative research projects in Mali. The LMS is a web application with workflows and staff tracking that manages the learning process. It houses curriculum, on-line courses, self-study modules, testing, and tracking of certifications. The LMS provides automated reminders to staff and managers about expiring credentials, required courses, and other educational context. Our LMS is integrated into an employee web portal for easy access. IBEX recognizes employee training is an important aspect in enhancing our staff's motivation levels, performance, and retention. These factors are the main reasons why we set aside budget and other resources to improve the skills of our team. Our LMS records the number of employees who complete the online courses, review materials, and learn skills to implement on the job.

**In-Country Experience** — Members of the IBEX team have experience developing clinical research infrastructure in Mali, Guinea, and other African nations. We have shown the ability to support rapid response of clinical research activities in support of priorities as set forth by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and other government agencies for emerging diseases. Our team has the ability to network with other clinical research collaborators whose interests align with and further NIAID's mission.

With existing "boots-on-the-ground," IBEX has the resources to provide highly skilled programmatic support services in-country. IBEX has supported multiple international development projects funded by the US Government to address the need to conduct collaborative scientific research in African nations. We have worked to build ongoing programs of a collaborative nature that have also incorporated the surge capability so agencies may respond to emergencies. IBEX has designed and implemented efficient policies, processes, and mechanisms that enable the management of research programs addressing public health priorities. Our experts have enhanced in-country capacity to obtain personnel and infrastructure so that these programs could achieve their objectives. The IBEX team is skilled at managing a diverse portfolio of funding, often sourced from donations, grants, and contracts.

### ***Relevant Past Performance***

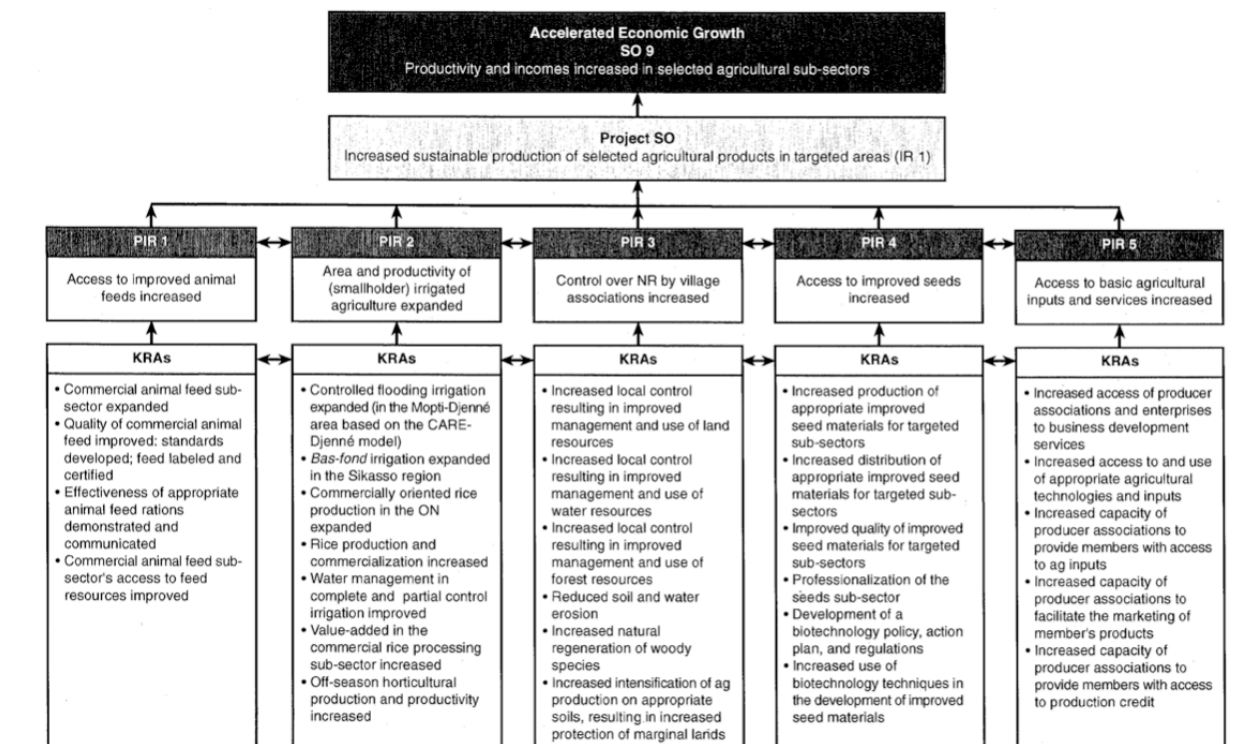
Recent past performance demonstrates our expertise. For the Ministry of Finances of Mali, in Bamako, IBEX developed a web portal for one of the key ministries that shares sensitive and important data with international financial institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, other foreign financial entities, etc. The requirements included: security, mobile friendly, multi users, easy management, and ability for the framework to evolve. With a deadline of only a few months to develop and deploy the website, IBEX worked with multiple entities to address the requirements, including the ministry's IT and communication department to come up with a design adapted to their vision. Inter-agency collaboration was required to gather data. We made sure that the database and file system would be able to handle all the current data that needed to be available online and all future data as well. A backup system was also put in place to back up files and database regularly following a disaster recovery plan IBEX developed. After release,

we developed an on-line video feature to explain the site's purpose. The IBEX team overcame the difficulties of gathering of important data while addressing the non-availability of the ministry's personal to assist.

Another technical project in Mali centered on the Ministry of Mines wanting to communicate more information to the general public about its mission, and general information about the mining sector, the different types of regulations, permitting, and jobs related to the sector. This required a website that was bilingual and mobile friendly. Another goal of this project was to create professional email templates for all employees of the ministry. We developed the French version of the website with the information at hand and deployed an English translation as part of ongoing maintenance.

For the last five years, for the Walter Reed Medical Center Network, IBEX provided desktop and general network support services for thousands of users' computers, as well as general on-site support. The support performed included troubleshooting of hardware and software problems, preventive and contingency maintenance and general help desk. Our technical capabilities in technical support \_\_\_\_\_

One example of the innovation our approach brings is the success IBEX found in the Mali Agricultural Production Initiative. This was a a climate-smart agriculture initiative that relied on a diversified micro-market farm to produce and consume locally to improve the quality of life of people in West Africa. The following exhibit depicts the results framework of that project.



Our project execution resulted in synergies between project components. The program was a cooperative created and run by young Malian agribusiness people. One “win” was the marketing of local organic fruit and vegetables, with: an online sales channel facilitated via a website; regularly scheduled collection/distribution points; and, markets set-up to deliver local fruit and vegetables at affordable prices.

### ***Overview of Staff Capabilities***

The following abbreviated biographies summarize the skills and experience of some of the IBEX team, available immediately to support the efforts in Mali, Liberia, and other Sub-Saharan locations.