



U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT

CALL FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE ALLIANCE PROPOSALS RELATED TO USAID/Vietnam Education Program UNDER EXISTING ANNUAL PROGRAM STATEMENT APS NO: M/OAA/GRO/EGAS-09-108

This program is authorized in accordance with Part 1 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as amended.

USAID/Vietnam is making a special call for the submission of concept papers related to the USG development Assistance Objective (AO) Investing in People, with a focus on higher education and work force skills development. Under USAID's proven approach to strategic public-private partnerships for achieving mutually shared interests, and leveraging individual partner's strengths and resources, USAID/Vietnam intends to launch in early FY2010, a medium-to long-term initiative in higher and skills-based education. As envisioned, the specific objective of this initiative is to:

Improve the quality and relevance of Vietnam's education, to the extent practicable, for disadvantaged youth.

Under this objective, several sub-objectives can be specified:

- 1) Enhance the capacity of Vietnam's higher education institution(s) to establish public-private partnerships for high quality, accredited courses in key technical skill areas (Engineering and Technology focus) that meet international standards.
- 2) Increase the capacity of Vietnamese higher education institution(s) to promote high degrees of academic independence, flexibility, and autonomy. Highest standards of quality in faculty and students will need to be ensured.
- 3) Increase the capacity of Vietnamese students in soft skills necessary to perform well on almost any job. These skills have been identified by employers as critical for workforce competitiveness in the 21st century (such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, English language skills, verbal and communicative skills, and computer literacy including using the internet effectively for research and information).
- 4) Help Vietnam meet its needs for cluster-based workforce skills development, in particular for disadvantaged youth (e.g. minority youth in the Central Highlands, or students of low

income backgrounds), to respond to the needs of American companies working in Vietnam.

In order to be invited to the proposal submission stage of the alliance screening process, interested organizations should ensure that the concept papers demonstrate:

- a) how the organizations will leverage USG resources on at least a 1:1 basis;
- b) how the proposed alliance will carry out priority development activities that are within the shared interests of the alliance partners; and
- c) how the proposed activities will respond to Vietnam's national socio-economic development agenda.

Expressions of interest can be submitted at any time up to April 15th, 2009 and will be reviewed on a first come/first served basis.

Background

Since 2001, USAID has built more than 680 public-private alliances worldwide with over 1,700 individual partners to contribute more than \$9 billion of combined public-private resources. USAID is firmly committed to forging public-private alliances to leverage additional resources outside of official development assistance to maximize the impact and quality of USAID's activities.

Sweeping Government of Vietnam (GVN) economic reforms and trade liberalization over the last two decades, and a recently-launched extensive public administration reform program, have spurred record levels of foreign direct investment, sustained robust economic growth, and created employment for 1.3 – 1.5 million entrants to the labor market annually.

According to the World Bank, two decades of rapid economic growth have resulted in dramatic changes in Vietnam's economic and social development and more than halved its poverty rate. Vietnam is poised to enter the ranks of middle-income countries. Further, reinforcing the capacity of an independent technocracy, allowing more openness in relation to corruption, or strengthening the rights of citizens may hold the key for Vietnam to sustain its success and become an industrial country within a generation.¹

However, an inadequate education system in Vietnam is emerging as a major constraint to Vietnam's unprecedented growth, and many challenges remain with respect to training a competitive workforce to adequately participate in a robust economy. To fully meet its

¹ Making Difficult Choices: Vietnam in Transition. The Commission on Growth and Development, supported by contributions from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the U.K. Department of International Development (DFID), the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the World Bank Group. 2008.

obligations and commitments under the Bilateral Trade Agreement with the U.S. and the WTO, and integrate fully into the global economy, it is now well accepted that Vietnam is not well prepared with a skilled workforce, and that the country will have to significantly enlarge its pool of trained mid- to upper-level management and technologically skilled graduates in the near to medium future. Many U.S. Companies operating in Vietnam are concerned about the growing difficulty experienced in hiring qualified Vietnamese staff at all levels.

In light of this situation, one of USAID/Vietnam's top priorities is continued support for reform in governance and support for institutional strengthening and human resource development. The GOV sees the clear link between its goals of economic growth and prosperity and achieving a business climate conducive to global competitiveness, and understands that a well trained workforce is essential for sustained growth.

Over the past five years, USAID has provided technical expertise to many GOV agencies involved in economic and social reform. USAID assistance has contributed measurably to Vietnam's adoption of modern economic practices that create private sector opportunities and reduce poverty, expand investment flows and reduce barriers to financial intermediation. A more encompassing development assistance program that includes specific areas within higher education would enhance Vietnam's ability to sustain broad and robust economic growth and competitiveness in a global economy.

Currently, the USG funds a Vietnam Fulbright Program and, in collaboration with the Vietnam Education Foundation, sponsors scores of promising Vietnamese students to study in the U.S. every year, thus exposing them to American society and thinking, and creating goodwill toward the United States. A joint U.S.-Vietnam Education Task Force meeting was held in Hanoi in September, 2008. The meeting generated many ideas on how to increase the number of Vietnamese students in the U.S.; deepen and expand cooperation between American and Vietnamese universities; and promote educational programs designed to help Vietnamese students acquire the skills needed in Vietnam's modernizing economy.² Participants noted that since signing the BTA and WTO Agreements, Vietnam has had one of Asia's fastest growing economies. Participants also agreed that to sustain such growth:

- An increasing supply of skilled labor and educated managers will be vital.
- A distinction should be made between training programs that improve the skills of existing human capital and educational programs that will develop the human capital (i.e.

²American Support for Education in Vietnam: A Brainstorming Conference for American Stakeholders Convened and hosted by Ambassador Michael W. Michalak, Sofitel Plaza, Hanoi, Vietnam, January 24-25, 2008; followed by a U.S. - Vietnam Education Task Force Meeting September 21-22, 2008.

managers and skilled workers) needed a decade from now. Private companies must develop both types of programs.

Solicitation

USAID/Vietnam seeks to forge far-reaching alliances for improving and implementing a robust and dynamic education program that promotes innovation and market-oriented skills. The goal is to build a cadre of middle level technically skilled professionals to satisfy the growing demand by business and industry - including the service and manufacturing sectors in Vietnam. In addition, we also envision that this alliance will help make governance in the higher education system or institution more autonomous and transparent and become a powerful voice in shaping future higher education reforms in Vietnam's development agenda.

To this end, USAID/Vietnam envisions that alliance proposals will embrace a demand-driven approach, and leverage private funding to develop industry and business-specific skills relevant to the country's rapid integration into the global economy and commitment to improved governance. The proposed concept will also need to be manageable and affordable within existing resources of money and time (see page 5).

Illustrative activities include:

- Certified and accredited training programs for Vietnamese youth in fields of study relevant and adaptable to industry over time, as well as programs including but not limited to foreign languages (especially English), communication, design, management, engineering and technology.
- Innovative solutions for teaching and learning, including possibilities for distance learning, and other multi-media approaches for enhancing the skills of faculty and students.
- A system or process for establishing and maintaining quality standards that are accredited nationally and regionally.
- An innovative and aggressive sustainability strategy to recover costs that utilizes multiple solutions for resource development such as resource partnerships with government, local financial institutions, education foundations, and the private sector. Every effort should be made to maintain an equitable fee-structure, including subsidies and incentives for disadvantaged students.
- Sponsorships from private companies to obtain scholarships, hands-on experience, knowledge and training of future employees through exchange visits on a continuing basis. Such programs will help the firms' productivity, the individuals' career growth, and will foster global competitiveness.

- A management and governance structure that will maintain responsiveness to market needs over time, incorporate active industry participation and oversight, and achieve financial sustainability.

Evaluation Criteria

Alliances will be evaluated based on the general criteria set forth in the APS. In addition the following criteria will apply:

- Demonstrated familiarity of the proposal with the GOV's Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2020, and relevant GOV and donor-initiated basic, secondary and higher education reform strategies that identify steps for making Vietnam's education system more responsive to the national industrialization, modernization and sustainable development needs and priorities.
- Cognizance of USAID/ Vietnam's assistance programs which underscore the inextricable linkage between sustainable economic growth, good governance, and strong and well-developed institutions that can serve as catalysts for improving the effectiveness of environmental policies, legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks.
- Demonstrated familiarity with the GOV's Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan, 2006 – 2010, and national strategies for education reform.
- Sound understanding of GOV's complex and constraining environment for achieving some of the objectives of this program, specifically autonomous governance and academic freedom for higher education institutions.
- Ability to implement the proposed initiative in a manageable and affordable way within existing resources of money and time.
- Concrete plans to ensure job placements for over 60% of graduating students.
- Ability to propose higher leverage, including possibility of leveraging multiple corporate, private, and higher education partners for a 3-5 year program.
- Demonstrated long-term interest in the sustainability of the program beyond the performance period.

Preference will be given to concepts describing alliances that include private sector partners with long-term commitment to the region and a recognized business interest in the proposed concept. In the concept paper, reviewers will consider the extent to which the proposal addresses these objectives. If USAID requests a full proposal, applicants will be given additional, specific evaluation criteria that speak to the subject matter of the concept at the time.

USAID assumes a total budget of \$1m per year. From this amount, USAID would like to make up to three awards for programs lasting a minimum of three years subject to final USAID approval and availability of funding. As stated in APS NO: M/OAA/GRO/EGAS – 09 – 108, USAID/Vietnam expects to receive alliance proposals that leverage resources at a minimum of 1:1.

Proposed alliances should be consistent with USAID legal and policy restrictions including those set forth in USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) and in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

For information regarding guidelines and procedures to submit a concept paper, please refer to the 2009 annual Program Statement posted by the USAID's Office of Development Partners, Global Development Alliance. The APS can be found at the following website:
www.usaid.gov/gda

USAID Vietnam will be responsible for the proposal review process and management of the awards. Applicants are required to submit short concept papers to USAID Vietnam through email at hhandler@usaid.gov. Applicants will receive instructions on whether or not to proceed with a full proposal. Proposals for consideration should be submitted by April 15, 2009 in order to be considered.

Before submitting a concept paper we encourage applicants to speak with key staff involved in the USAID Vietnam Program. These staff can discuss with you the extent to which your idea is appropriate and aligned with USAID's goals. The contact person is Mr. Howard R. Handler, General Development Officer, and he will connect you with others, as appropriate, for your questions. His address is:

USAID
General Development Office
Tung Shing Square
15/F, 2 Ngo Quyen Street
Hanoi, Vietnam

Clearances: Vietnam Annual Program Statement – call for concept papers for Investing in People/Education.

Drafted: 2/06/09

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