**Request for Applications (RFA)**

**WHAM-AID-168-LA-17-00001**

**Workforce and Access to Higher Markets (WHAM) Activity**

**Issuance Date: 23-Nov-2017**

**Closing Date: 22-Nov-2018**

**Total Potential Funding: USD 400,000**

**Estimated Number of Awards: 6**

**Maximum Award Amount: USD 100,000**

Dear Applicant:

You are invited to submit an application for implementation of the terms of references contained herein. The grants will be awarded and implemented in accordance with U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Government regulations governing grants under contracts, as deemed applicable by prime U.S. Agency for International Development, Prime Recipient IESC, and Workforce and Higher Access to Markets (WHAM) Activity’s internal grant management policies.

Please note that the **deadline for receiving Concept Note Applications** is no later than 4:00pm local time. Refer to section III Application and Submission Information for details.

Applicants who have questions about the application process or about this RFA should submit them to: whamgrants@iesc.org

This RFA contains the following documents:

Annex 1 – Concept Note Instructions and Template

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**Section I. About the Program**

**What is WHAM and what is it trying to achieve?**

Workforce and Access to Higher Markets (WHAM) is a USAID-funded activity designed to stimulate job creation by advancing Bosnia and Herzegovina’s (BiH) trade integration with and expansion into European Union (EU) and regional markets. This will be accomplished via a grant program open to eligible individual organizations, or a number of organizations working together. Grants will prioritize high-growth, exporting or export-ready enterprises aiming to expand capacity, reach more markets, and generate greater employment.

Activity efforts will focus on organizations working in, or linked to, three main sectors: wood processing, metal processing, and textile/footwear sectors. Grant funds may be used to access consultant’s services, obtain business development services, attend trade fairs, and on exceptional basis, to purchase technology necessary to meet export market requirements.

WHAM requires grantees to leverage resources from third party public and private sector funding (at approximately a 1:1 ratio).

**What are the specific intervention areas of this RFA?**

WHAM will improve the capacity of high-growth, exporting, and export-ready small and medium enterprises from the wood, metal, and textile sectors via grants focused on three intervention areas:

1. **Improve workforce** in targeted sectors by developing partnerships with the public and private sectors to share the cost of recruiting or retraining labor force with adequate skills;
2. **Increase market access** by supporting companies in targeted sectors to identify and access new customers and markets. This may include supporting private and public sector initiatives to help companies attend major regional and international trade fairs; and,
3. **Improve product quality and use of new technology related to quality management and certification** by supporting companies in targeted sectors to introduce quality management systems, technology upgrades, and necessary product/service certifications in demand by target markets (EU standards and/or other relevant standards). WHAM will help beneficiaries to improve product quality and capacity building through grants which should result in new certifications and business strategies that optimize these improvements to the enterprise’s competitiveness.

**What types of support are available from WHAM?**

WHAM can provide a wide range of support to potential grantees, examples of which are detailed below. Grantees are not limited to only one area of support and can request a package of assistance if it makes business sense and meets the eligibility criteria described below.

* Subsidize/support training initiatives in industry-related skills with both public and private sectors;
* Assist in the development of new training initiatives targeting identified industry skills deficits;
* Facilitate organizations wishing to participate in export promotion events (trade fairs, trade missions, and B2B) targeting EU and other markets;
* Help organizations develop market entry strategies for their products;
* Assist in market identification, marketing, buyer introductions, and inward buyer participation;
* Guide organizations to become export market ready (research, planning, improved management, and production practices);
* Assistance in establishing market-relevant certifications and chain of custody systems;
* Assistance in gaining quality assurance certifications for accessing EU markets; and,
* Improve competitiveness though establishing new manufacturing processes and energy efficient technology.

Volunteer Experts:

A distinctive feature of WHAM is its ability to deploy Volunteer Experts through the activity implementer, International Executive Service Corps (IESC). IESC maintains a large registry of experienced, senior-level professionals from business, financial institutions, IT enterprises, and other private sector institutions. IESC volunteers are experts in their industry with years of private sector experience and deep practical knowledge. If your organization feels they can benefit from one of these experts, you can include a request for volunteer support in your initial concept note (detailed below).

**Section II: Eligibility**

**Is my organization eligible to receive grant funding?**

The focus of this RFA is to target organizations that represent high-growth, exporting or export-ready enterprises, in the metal, wood, and/or textile industries, aiming to expand capacity, reach more markets, and generate greater employment. Generally, high-growth enterprises have at least 10 employees and an average annualized growth in employees greater than 20 percent per annum over last three-years. All organizations must be legally registered under the laws of BiH.

Grantees may include the following types of organizations:

* Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as business associations and development agencies;
* Educational institutions, such as schools, universities, adult education centers;
* For-profit organizations, training institutes, and private educational entities (second and third level);
* Research and development organizations for product development, quality management systems and certifications; and,
* Business incubators and technology parks.

Additionally, applicants will be required to leverage third-party resources that match the grant amount requested at 1:1 rate. Applicants are encouraged to contribute a higher proportion of the overall costs.

**Are there any restrictions on what can be funded?**

WHAM will not provide grants to applications that create market distortion, nor can the grants awarded be utilized for the following:

* Ceremonies, parties, celebrations, or “representation” expenses.
* Purchases of restricted goods, such as: restricted agricultural commodities, motor vehicles including motorcycles, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, contraceptive products, used equipment (without the previous approval of USAID), or prohibited goods under USAID regulations, including, but not limited to, the following: abortion equipment and services, luxury goods, etc.;
* Alcoholic beverages;
* Purchase of goods or services restricted or prohibited under the prevailing USAID source or nationality (Laos, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, (North) Sudan and Syria);
* Prior obligations of and/or, debts, fines, and penalties imposed on the Grantee; or,
* Creation of endowments.

The Activity would not consider applications from or in partnership with:

* Employees, contractors and their family members, as well as employees or family members of participating sponsors;
* Selection Committee (REC) participants, providers of technical assistance (TA) and consulting services funded by the Activity; or,
* Entities listed in Parties Excluded from Federal Procurement or Non-procurement Programs.

Applicants may only submit one application per the open RFA. All applications must be in line with the environmental laws and regulations of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Section III: Application and Submission Information**

**How do I apply for grant funding?**

If you are an eligible organization and have a business need that aligns with one or more of the three intervention areas described above, you should apply for support using the Concept Note Template attached to this RFA. Please note that concept notes will only be accepted in the application format given in Annex A, and must be completed in the English language. Concept Notes and supporting documentation should be submitted electronically to the following email address: whamgrants@iesc.org

Questions regarding the technical or administrative requirements of this RFA may be submitted by email to whamgrants@iesc.org   Questions must be submitted in writing; phone calls will not be accepted. Questions and requests for clarification—and the responses thereto—that WHAM believes may be of interest to other offerors will be circulated to all RFA recipients who have indicated an interest in submitting Applications.

Only the written answers issued by IESC/WHAM will be considered official and carry weight in the RFA process and subsequent evaluation. Any verbal information received from employees of IESC/WHAM or any other entity should not be considered as an official response to any questions regarding this RFA.

Applicants that submit a Concept Note will be notified within 10 days of their submission whether they were successful.

The concept note should be accompanied by the following supporting documents and certifications:

* Copy of relevant BiH registration license;
* Tax ID; and,
* VAT number (if applicable).

**How does the selection process work?**

The information that you provide in the concept note will help WHAM decide if you are a suitable candidate to partner with. If your idea is sound and corresponds with the objectives of the activity, WHAM staff will contact you to discuss your plans further. Based on this, you may be invited to develop a more detailed full application (WHAM personnel can assist you in this if required). Please note that being asked to develop a full application does not constitute an agreement to award grant funding as the final decision remains with USAID.

Developed applications will then be submitted to the WHAM selection committee for evaluation against the merit review criteria outlined in the next section. Based on the review, the selection committee will either approve, request further clarification, or reject the application. If your application is successful it will be submitted to USAID for final review and approval. If approval of both WHAM and USAID is provided, the award will move into a final negotiation stage. Upon successful completion of this stage, the award will be finalized, and a post award management plan will be created for each grant to ensure that the award recipient will fulfil its requirements and also receive any necessary technical assistance. All awards will be monitored on an on-going basis, and evaluated upon conclusion. While some applications will be rejected outright, some will be referred back to the applicant for improvements. In such cases, the WHAM team will assist with further development of the application. Unsuccessful applications will receive written feedback intended to provide guidance on how to improve the application for future consideration.

**What criteria will my application be reviewed against?**

Applications submitted to WHAM will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

* **Soundness (and innovativeness) of business model (20%):** Applicants must present a well-thought out business model and demonstrate that they are (or represent) a high-growth[[1]](#footnote-1), exporting, or export-ready business, with the potential to be profitable, sustainable, and expand employment. Successful applications will clearly articulate why the proposed investment is necessary compared to the existing one.
* **Appropriateness of planned investment to achieve WHAM Activity objectives (30%):** Applications must demonstrate the ability to achieve tangible results in terms of business growth and economic development during the grant period and beyond. The application should define relevant outcome indicators and targets that include, but are not limited to, projected export sales growth and expected number of direct jobs created. Organizations that create jobs for women and youth are viewed favorably.
* **Organizational capacity and technical experience (40%):** Applicants should establish that they have the organizational and financial capacity to meet the demands of implementing a grant. Evidence for this will include information regarding team composition, relevant qualifications, demonstrated record of accomplishment and success, and types of management systems. Applicants must demonstrate their ability to leverage existing resources in terms of operations, financing, expertise, and networking.

**Leverage ratio (10%):** Applicants must describe how the grant funding will be used and will be required to match the grant requested with their own funding (or leverage third-party resources) at a 1:1 rate.

Applications containing the following will be viewed favorably:

* Intermediary bodies (described in section II) that represent groups of individual companies will be given preference;
* Higher employment generation – please note that new jobs are defined as persons being fully employed by the applicant, or partner, which would be documented through official employment records upon grant closeout;
* Higher potential for the increase in export sales documented through the creation of long lasting and profitable export contracts;
* Provision of effective technical assistance to a larger number of private enterprises and beneficiaries;
* Higher number of female/youth participants in selected companies; and,
* All other evaluation factors being equal, WHAM may assess applicants that have not received previous USAID funding more favorably. Applicants that haven’t received previous USAID funding are highly encouraged to apply.

**Availability of Funds and Other Considerations**

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Workforce and Higher Access to Markets (WHAM) or International Executive Service Corps (IESC), nor does it commit USAID or the U.S. Government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of the concept note and grant application.

WHAM/IESC reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted, to extend or shorten the due date for applications, and to make grant awards on a revised schedule. Grant awards will be subject to the availability of funding in the grant fund.

**Annex A:**

**B.3. Grant Concept Paper**

**Purpose**

The Grant Concept Note serves as a first-screening test for potential grant activities. The form is designed to gather essential basic information about the Applicant and what it is proposing to do.

Workforce and Higher Access to Markets (WHAM) Activity

Grant Concept Paper

1. **Organization’s Name**:
2. **Address**:
3. **Telephone**: **Fax**: **E-mail:**
4. **Key contact person and title**:
5. **Briefly describe organization, purpose, and past related experience**:
6. **Grant activity title**:
7. **Problem analysis and statement**:
8. **Grant objective**:
9. **Results to be achieved, linkage to grant objective, and verifiable indicators of achievement**:
10. **Identify beneficiaries, disaggregated by gender if possible, number, and how they will benefit from grant**:
11. **Anticipated duration of activity from start to finish**:
12. **Main task phases of the activity**: [Include Calendar activities with estimated periods, responsible and expected results.]

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Time (periods)** | **Responsible** | **Expected Results** |
| Task 1: |  |  |  |
| Task 2: |  |  |  |
| Task 3: (etc.) |  |  |  |

1. **Approximate cost of this activity (cash, in-kind, and third-party sources)**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organization** | **Total Amount in Bosnian Convertible Mark** |
| Estimated Funding Requested from IESC/WHAM\* |  |
| Grant Applicant Resources |  |
| Third-Party Resources (identify source and add lines as needed)\*\* |  |
| Total Estimated Cost |  |

\*Currency amount Grant Applicant is requesting from the WHAM Activity

\*\*Third party resources include resources provided to the grant that are not provided by either the Grant Applicant or WHAM. Identify source and add lines as needed if more than one source.

**Grant Concept Paper Instructions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Items 1-3: | Applicant’s organization name, address, telephone and e-mail—self-explanatory |
| Item 4: | Key contact person and title—The contact person (agent) is responsible for communications between the Workforce and Higher Access to Markets (WHAM) Activity and the Applicant. This applies to all aspects of the grant, from initial summary through completion. The agent must have full authority and responsibility to act on behalf of the Applicant. The agent should be someone who will be directly involved with the grant activity and has a proven, established relationship with the Applicant |
| Item 5: | Briefly describe organization and its activities—Should introduce the Applicant and its background: How it was formed, its mission or purpose, major accomplishments in the area of the targeted activity, current activities, and clients. |
| Item 6: | Grant activity title—The title given to the activity should relate to the grant activity objective. |
| Item 7:  | Problem analysis and statement—Identify the problem that the grant activities proposes to address. |
| Item 8-9: | Grant objective, results to be achieved, linkage to grant objective, and verifiable indicators of achievement——must be linked to Workforce and Higher Access to Markets (WHAM) Activity objectives. |
| Item 10: | Identify beneficiaries (disaggregated by gender if possible), number, location, and how they will benefit from the grant. |
| Item 11: | Anticipated duration should be stated with a degree of accuracy of plus or minus two weeks |
| Item 12: | Main task phases of the activity—Provide details regarding the subtasks of the activity. |
| Item 13: | Approximate cost of this activity (cash, in-kind, and third-party sources)—Applicant must submit a rough estimate of the cost of the proposed activity and sources of funds, specifying how much will come from the Workforce and Higher Access to Markets (WHAM) Activity, the Applicant’s contribution, and any third-party contributions. A detailed budget is not necessary at this point, only a plausible “ballpark” calculation, which should be within 15 percent (+/-) of the final approved budget. |

1. High-growth businesses are defined as businesses experiencing at least 10 percent growth over the past three years with an expected growth of 15 percent or higher within the next two years. These targeted businesses include an existing employment base of 10 to 250 employees, significantly expanding by at least 10 employees within the next 12 months due to increased markets. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)