Questions Specific to AOI 2 and AOI 3

AOI 2/3 Question A: What is the difference between AOI 2 and AOI 3?

AOI 2/3 Answer A: AOI 2 is more of a value chain or food systems approach – participation in legume markets – enhanced value added. Opportunities for women and youth along the value chain. AOI 3: Focusing on the constraints and barriers to legumes role across production, marketing, processing, storage and consumption.

Both go beyond description and diagnosis to provide options and solutions.

AOI 2/3 Question B: What if I submit a proposal for AOI 2, but the reviewers decide it fits better in AOI 3? Would it be an issue if proposed research overlaps between AOI 2 and AOI3?

AOI 2/3 Answer B: As indicated on page 9 of the concept note, the Legume Systems Innovation Lab is selecting a portfolio of research to address its priorities, “and it reserves the right to make project selections based both on proposal score and portfolio needs. Applicants are also advised that the ME, following advice from the TMAC and AOR, may request changes to concept notes for full proposal and thereafter at any time based on changing priorities and needs of USAID. Such changes may include bringing in new partners, additional research activities, modified activities, or removal of activities.”

Submit your Concept Note proposal to the AOI that best fits the objectives of the AOI, do not submit the same concept note to both AOI 2 and AOI 3.

1 The Legume Systems Innovation Lab thanks the Peanut Innovation Lab for providing this baseline document for Lab use.
2 Updates since original version on May 28, 2019: Section AOI 2/3 Specific Questions added, addition of Q&A 1e, addition of Q&A 1f, addition of Q&A 2g, addition of Q&A 4b, updated answer to Q&A 5a, addition of Q&A 5b, addition of Q&A 5c, addition of Q&A 5d, addition of Q&A 5e, addition of Q&A 6f, addition of Q&A 7c, addition of Q&A 9b, addition of Q&A 12, addition of Q&A 13, addition of Q&A 14, and addition of Q&A 15.
AOI 2/3 Question C: Will the Legume Systems Innovation Lab consider value chain improvements like innovative transport interventions?

AOI 2/3 Answer C: We cannot comment directly to a specific proposal idea, but we welcome concept notes focused on innovative solutions to barriers of legume utilization at various stages and scales within production and market systems as well as integrating legumes within market systems including trade.

AOI 2/3 Question D: In Ethiopia the main marketable pulses are common bean and mung bean. Although chickpea and faba bean are the main pulses for domestic market and consumption, they also contribute to regional market. Can I submit a proposal to research these pulses' contributions to regional markets?

AOI 2/3 Answer D: Please carefully review the focus regions and eligible crops in the Request for Concept Notes document as well as Questions and Answers #1 and #4 that follow.

AOI 2/3 Question E: Does the reference to research on “legumes in agro-pastoral systems and in mixed cropping systems” also apply to the other research areas under AOI-3 – that is, are proposals required to address legumes in agro-pastoral systems and/or in mixed cropping only?

AOI 2/3 Answer E: No, proposals are not constrained to address legumes only in agro-pastoral systems and/or in mixed cropping, but as stated in the call, proposals must “help to diagnose and provide solutions to constraints that limit the contributions of legumes across the domains of production, marketing, processing, storage, and consumption.”

AOI 2/3 Question F: Does TMAC/ME/USAID expect for proposals to be able to meet the objectives of both one or more of the six AOI-3 key research questions AND, say, two or more of the cross-cutting themes?

AOI 2/3 Answer F: As stated in the call, “AOI 3 seeks research that will help to diagnose and provide solutions to constraints that limit the contributions of legumes across the domains of production, marketing, processing, storage, and consumption.” The six AOI-3 research areas indicated in the call are potential research areas.

General Questions

Question 1: Country and Geographic Eligibility

Question 1a: Can I propose research in the Legume Systems Innovation Lab focus regions of Central America or West Africa, in countries other than the target countries mentioned in the RFP?

Answer 1a: With limited funding, we will prioritize these competitive awards to the target countries in the two focus regions. As stated in the Call for Concept Notes on page 4, “Where applicants make a strong justification (…), other countries in these regions may be included, particularly when addressing transnational (regional) and complex issues that are aligned with

3 The term “target countries” has replaced “priority countries” found in previous Feed the Future documents.
the central research goals. Proposals that argue a strong case for work outside of the Feed the Future target countries will be considered on a case-by-case basis.”

Collaborators in Feed the Future aligned countries may be included with Feed the Future target countries for joint work, but the lead institution must meet the requirements indicated in Question 2: Institutional eligibility.

**Question 1b:** Will concept notes for research in Feed the Future target countries outside the Legume Systems Innovation Lab focus regions be considered? For example: in Asia, Southern Africa, and East Africa?

**Answer 1b:** With limited funding, we limit these competitive awards to the focus regions, unless other guidance is received from USAID that modifies the Cooperative Agreement.

**Question 1c:** If my funding is outside the Legume Systems Innovation Lab focus regions and/or Feed the Future target countries, are there other options for funding legume research?

**Answer 1c:** The Legume Systems Innovation Lab is a Leader with Associate Award Cooperative Agreement. As indicated at [https://www.usaid.gov/india/partner-resources/implementing-partners-guide-types-assistance-instruments](https://www.usaid.gov/india/partner-resources/implementing-partners-guide-types-assistance-instruments), “Leader with Associate (LWA) award involves the issuance of a leader award that covers a specified worldwide activity. The leader award includes language that allows a Mission or other office to make one or more separate awards, called associate awards, to the leader award recipient without using restricted eligibility. The associate award must be within the terms and scope of the program description of the leader award and support a distinct local or regional activity.” The Associate awards can be either grants or cooperative agreements and need not be competitively bid by the USAID Mission. They can be in Feed the Future countries outside the focus regions if the research and capacity building activities align with the objectives of the Cooperative Agreement for the Legume Systems Innovation Lab.

**Question 1d:** How many target countries can be involved in one project?

**Answer 1d:** This is up to the lead PI and co-PIs, and depends on the ability to manage the project across countries and have sufficient funds for the proposed research given a maximum budget indicated in the RFPs. The decision to submit a concept note for one country or multiple countries is the PI and co-PIs decision. With a strong justification, multiple countries could be included in the same project. Consider the focal crop, the USAID Mission strategies, partners, and the Feed the Future Zones of Influence of each country to decide to include multiple countries.

**Question 1e:** Does TMAC/ME/USAID prefer that research proposals include work in at least one FTF target country in Central America AND at least one in West Africa?

**Answer 1e:** No, work in both regions is not required.

**Question 1f:** Does TMAC/ME/USAID prefer that research proposals include work in at least two FTF target countries, or is one country sufficient?

**Answer 1f:** Depending on the research topic, one country could be sufficient.
Question 2: Institutional Eligibility

Question 2a: What institutions are eligible to prepare a proposal for the call?

Answer 2a: As stated in the Call for Concept Notes on page 6:

1. Projects must identify a **single lead institution** that is either a U.S. university, target country national agricultural research or educational institution, or an international agricultural research institution.
2. Projects must include **at least one U.S. university**.
3. Projects must also include **at least one partner institution in a target country**, such as national or regional agricultural research institutes, or universities.
4. Projects may involve additional partners, including private sector partners, NGOs, and other target country institutions, other U.S. universities, and international agricultural research institutions with active legume programs, such as the CGIAR centers participating in the GLDC.

Question 2b: Can an individual submit a proposal?

Answer 2b: A single lead Principle Investigator (PI) **and a single lead institution** must be identified in each proposal. There must be an institutional commitment from a lead institution.

Question 2c: How do I find collaborators to meet the institutional eligibility?

Answer 2c: We encourage you to network with the PIs of Initial Activities to create research partnerships with other institutions. We now have a “Find a Collaborator” page on our website to post requests for collaborators.

Question 2d: Can a developed country university or national agricultural research institution outside of the United States (e.g., in Canada or the Netherlands) be a lead institution?

Answer 2d: No, a university or national agricultural research institution in a developed country outside of the United States is not eligible to be a lead institution, but it can be a partner institution with an eligible lead institution. Please see page 6 of the Call for Concept Notes.

Question 2e: Can I be a PI or co-PI on more than one Concept Note in each Request for Concept Notes? Can a home country collaborator be included in more than one concept note?

Answer 2e: Yes, you can submit as many Concept Notes as you would like as a PI or co-PI. Also, institutions can submit or collaborate on more than one proposal.

Question 2f: Can a scientist in one of the target countries be a PI?

Answer 2f: Yes, we encourage scientists in target countries to take the lead in developing and leading the projects as PIs. However, a U.S. university must be included in the project and the lead PI must be at an institution with the demonstrated capacity to manage international grants and funds.
Question 2g: One of the proposal requirements is to include a U.S. university. Does it matter if the professor of a U.S. university included in the proposal is also affiliated with my research institution? Certainly, the budget allocated to the professor and her/his team will go directly to the university.

Answer 2g: Including a collaborator from a U.S. university does meet the U.S. university requirement

Question 3: Collaborators

Question 3a: Will inter-departmental collaboration be fine? Or only one department per institution can propose a collaboration with collaborators included in the request for concept notes?

Answer 3a: We encourage inter-departmental and multidisciplinary collaboration within an institution and across institutions. Note, only one lead PI per concept note can be indicated.

Question 3b: Do we need letters of support from all co-PIs?

Answer 3b: We are not requiring formal letters of support at the Concept Note stage, only a simple email indicating that all co-PIs agree to participate in the project.

Question 4: Eligible Crops

Question 4a: The RFP said cowpea in West Africa and common bean in Central America are the focal crops. Can I submit a concept note for research activities on other legume crops?

Answer 4a: As stated in the Call for Concept Notes on page 3, “The Legume Systems Innovation Lab will focus primarily on two major crops: common bean (Phaseolus vulgaris L.) in Central America and cowpea (Vigna unguiculata W.) in West Africa. These crops have critical potential for integration with other legumes and increased crop resiliency and food security. The ME welcomes proposed research with other legume crops and legume tree species systems as part of the overall research portfolio if applicants make a compelling argument for their inclusion and their role in legume systems resilience, nutrition, youth and women, or feed and fodder for agro-pastoral systems.”

Question 4b: Can research on peanuts (groundnuts) be included? What about soybeans?

Answer 4b: No, peanuts (groundnuts) and soybeans are not eligible as focal crops. However, in the case of trade off analysis or other systems research, crops beyond the focal crops may be included.

Question 5: Guatemala and Honduras

Question 5a: The RFP lists Honduras and Guatemala as eligible countries for funding, but recent news coverage indicate there currently are or could be in the future restrictions to funding.
Answer 5a: We encourage Concept Notes proposals for research in Honduras and Guatemala. Due to financial constraints specific to USAID spending in Guatemala and Honduras, the Legume Systems Innovation Lab encourages concept notes for AOI 2 and 3 for these specific countries with a maximum budget of U.S. $250,000. Duration of projects may be any length, but activities must be concluded by July 2023. Applicants are still required to include in their proposed budget Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) and travel cost to attend Legume Systems Innovation Lab’s planning and research meetings as indicated in the Request for Concept Notes document.

Question 5b: If a project proposes cross regional research activity, does this mean it can request a maximum project funding of U.S. $1,025,000 across two regions with funding for Central America not exceeding $250,000 and for West Africa not exceeding $775,000?

Answer 5b: If a proposed project crosses regions, the maximum project funding would be $775,000 with the Central America research activity limited to $250,000 leaving $525,000 for West Africa. Due to Central American funding limitations, we will require separate budgets for Central America and West Africa research and capacity building activities. The cost of U.S. PIs, supplies, travel and other categories related to Central American research must be attributed to the Central American budget and not exceed $250,000. Thus, the excel workbook file should include two excel sheets (tabs), one for each region.

Question 5c: If a project proposes research activity only in Central America, does this mean it can request a maximum project funding of U.S. $250,000 as the budget share for HC partners in Central America (i.e., funds to be spent in Central America by HC institutions either through a sub-award or Personal Service Contract) or does this maximum amount also include funds for the US lead institution (i.e., budget for US + HC institutions should be < $250,000)?

Answer 5c: Total project funding for a Central American project will be limited to $250,000 regardless of the budget allocations between HC or US institutions.

Question 5d: Given the budget constraint for Central America, can proposed projects for this region be less than 47 months (i.e., do something meaningful by intensifying resources in shorter time frame rather than spreading it too thin over 47 months)?

Answer 5d: Yes, we encourage shorter duration projects given the spending limitations.

Question 5e: If we are interested in proposing research and capacity building activities in both Honduras and Guatemala, does the budget maximum of US $250,000 per proposal for Honduras/Guatemala mean that we can propose to spend a maximum of U.S. $250,000 for work in Honduras and a maximum of U.S. $250,000 for work in Guatemala (for a combined total amount of U.S. $500,000)?

Answer 5e: The budget maximum for a single proposal with activities in Honduras and Guatemala is U.S. $250,000 for the combined activities.
Question 6: Indirect Cost Rate and Budget Template Signature

Question 6a: What indirect cost rate should we use?

Answer 6a: Michigan State University uses a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC) for sub-awards. A request for a higher indirect cost rate must have documented justification, such as an established NICRA. Indirect costs charged to your subawards are limited to the first U.S. $25,000.

Question 6b: Regarding the indirect cost, what if our institution requires indirect cost other than 10%?

Answer 6b: To request a higher indirect cost rate, a U.S. institution may if it wishes provide documentation on an established NICRA rate above the 10%. See Answer 6a above.

Question 6c: Is the 10% indirect cost also related to the indirect costs on our project subawards (from the host institution)? Does it relate to the indirect cost rate for the host institution’s direct costs?

Answer 6c: MSU, in granting awards to lead institutions, allows 10% indirect cost rate or the established NICRA rate on MTDC, with indirect cost rates on subaward amounts from the lead to other institutions limited to the first $25,000 of that subaward. The indirect cost rates charged by subawardees to the lead institution are negotiated between the lead institution and the subawardee institution.

Question 6d: Do I need to submit the concept note through my institution’s official representative with financial authority? Do they need to sign off on the budget?

Answer 6d: Each institution has its own regulations and we respect those regulations. From the Legume Systems Innovation Lab’s perspective, if permitted by the applicant institution, the signature on the concept note budget may be that of the PI. However, the signature on the full proposal budget must be an official institutional representative with financial authority.

Question 6e: My institution does not allow submission of a signed EXCEL file. It will need to be scanned and submitted as a PDF document? Is this allowed?

Answer 6e: All concept notes and full proposals must submit the budget as an EXCEL file using the provided template. One option is to include the signed and scanned PDF as an appendix to the Proposal File and submit the Budget File as an EXCEL document. Type the name of the person who signed the PDF version into the signature field of the EXCEL file. Digital signatures in the EXCEL Budget File are another option.

Question 6f: Is there a limit to how much can be spent in any given year of the project?

Answer 6f: No, the budget design should correspond to activities.
**Question 7. CGIAR Centers**

**Question 7a:** Can you provide some guidance about how to integrate CGIAR centers into proposals? Can they be a lead institution, as an International Ag Research Center (as long as a U.S. university is on the proposal)?

**Answer 7a:** We encourage CGIAR centers to participate in the call for concept notes. They can be lead institutions as indicated on page 6 of the Call for Concept Notes, but U.S. universities and host country institutions are required in a partnership with CGIAR centers. The funding distribution will be a consideration in the evaluation.

**Question 7b:** Would all direct costs to the CGIAR center’s regional office be considered “not HC”? What about country staff versus international staff at these offices? Could national staff salary be considered HC?

**Answer 7b:** A CGIAR center’s regional office based in a target country can be a partner. However, the direct costs allocated to the CGIAR center’s regional office are NOT considered host country costs (see page 5 and 6 of the Call for Concept Notes) and an additional in-country institution should be identified for collaboration and HICD investment (page 4 and 5 of the Call for Concept Notes).

**Question 7c:** If a CGIAR scientist is based at a national or regional institution, is that person considered a host country researcher and salary considered host country expense?

**Answer 7c:** No, a CGIAR researcher is not considered a host country researcher.

**Question 8. Feed the Future Zones of Influence**

**Question 8a:** Zones of Influence (ZOI) are considered in Africa. Are ZOI going to be considered in Central America as well?

**Answer 8a:** Proposed research and capacity building activities in both West Africa and Central America must relate to the Feed the Future Zones of Influence within the target country. The Feed the Future ZOI are geographic areas targeted for Feed the Future interventions. Proposed research and capacity building activities must also align with the USAID Mission strategies. As indicated on page 3 of the Call for Concept Notes, “applicants should review the Country Development Cooperation Strategies (available at [https://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/planning/country-strategies-cdcs](https://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/planning/country-strategies-cdcs)) and the ZOI in each country at the Feed the Future webpage (available at [https://www.feedthefuture.gov/](https://www.feedthefuture.gov/)).” Applicants should use existing Feed the Future and USAID documents to justify the geographic area of proposed research and capacity building activities. Applicants should pay attention to maps, text, and linked additional documents on the webpages listed above. During the full proposal stage, the Management Entity will work with the relevant USAID Missions and PIs of selected Concept Notes to resolve country specific ZOI questions.

**Question 8b:** Are research and capacity building activities limited to the ZOI?

**Answer 8b:** Proposed research and capacity building activities may occur outside of the ZOI, but the activities should be designed such that the anticipated results and outputs are applicable in and relate to the ZOI.
**Question 8c:** What should we do if we cannot find information on the Zones of Influence for a given country or where information on the websites is contradictory or confusing?

**Answer 8c:** Use your best judgement given the available information concerning the ZOIs.

**Question 9. Number of Awarded Projects**

**Question 9a:** How many projects will be funded in West Africa and Central America for Areas of Inquiry 2 & 3?

**Answer 9a:** For Areas of Inquiry (AOI) 2 and 3, we expect 2 to 3 projects to be funded in each area, however, the number of awarded projects could increase if the ME awards projects with smaller budgets. We cannot comment on the distribution between those two regions.

*Please note in the call for AOI 3 on page 6 it should read, “The Management Entity (ME) anticipates awarding between two and three projects under AOI 3 with each project awarded a maximum of U.S. $775,000.”*

**Question 9b:** Does the TMAC/ME/USAID have a preference for how many years a given project runs?

**Answer 9b:** We have given a maximum project period as all projects must end by July 2023. There is no minimum project period.

**Question 10. Guidelines on length and page allocation for concept notes**

**Question 10a:** If the cover page will be less than 1 full page, can the remaining space left blank (with a page break)? Does the cover page count against the total of 4 pages?

**Answer 10a:** The cover page may only contain the content indicated in the call and any extra space cannot be used for other CN content. The cover page, the XLS budget, and the Appendices do not count toward the 4 page maximum for the Concept note.

**Question 10b:** Are the page allocations indicated in Table 1 for the research plan and other sections fixed? Can the space allocation be changed?

**Answer 10b:** Table 1 indicating page length of contents is indicative, and you may adjust allocation of space between sections, as long as you stay within the total 4 page guidelines, using spacing and margins indicated. See Question 10a answer as well.

**Question 10c:** The guidelines in the Request for Concept Notes document (page 8) request a summary budget narrative to be about ½ page. But the budget guidelines and description document requests a separate budget justification which need to be much more detailed and cannot fit into the required ½ page. What summary budget narrative is needed?

**Answer 10c:** The detailed budget justification in the budget guidelines and description document is for the next stage, Full Proposals. For the Concept Note proposals in the current stage include the ½ page summary budget narrative in the Concept Note Proposal.
**Question 11: Addressing Cross-Cutting Themes Including Gender**

**Question 11a:** The research activities in my concept note will impact men, women, and youth equally. How do I address the cross-cutting themes in general and gender specifically?

**Answer 11a:** All proposals are required to address the relationship between the proposed research and capacity building with each of the cross-cutting themes. For example, how might the technology impact women’s labor? Are youth included in this approach? What potential impacts are there on individual nutritional outcomes and household resilience? Additionally, it will be important to explain if no impacts on these cross-cutting themes are expected. Please see the technical guidance documents from USAID at [https://www.agrilinks.org/post/guidance-and-tools-global-food-security-programs](https://www.agrilinks.org/post/guidance-and-tools-global-food-security-programs) to help frame the discussion and assist in the design of relevant components for each of the cross-cutting themes.

**Question 11b:** I see that gender perspective need to be an integral part of any proposal; can you provide some illustrative examples on this?


**Question 11c:** Are the cross-cutting objectives going to be equally scored? What if a project only addresses two cross-cutting themes?

**Answer 11c:** All cross-cutting themes need to be addressed in every proposal. If a project only addresses two themes, the concept note will not meet our requirements and will affect the score. However, “addressing” the cross-cutting themes may not necessarily involve activities on each of these themes but demonstrating an understanding of the implications of the research for the cross-cutting themes.

**Additional Questions from Webinar**

**Question 12:** Is it possible to highlight the activities done in legume one phase to avoid duplication of submitting similar activities?

**Answer 12:** Legume one phase might incorporate three different possibilities. We do have initial activities under Legumes Systems Research Innovation Lab, which are elaborated on our website under projects. You can review those to see the extent to which you may be able to build off of those programs, which are currently ongoing. There is also the option, our AOI one, call for concept notes. We are only now reviewing the proposals so we do not know what those projects will be. If you're interested in previous legume research under the Legume Innovation Lab and its predecessors, please go to the website and under the **about us** tab there's a link to the [10 year legacy report](http://example.com) and there you'll find more details on the previous research that has been funded under USAID initiatives in legumes.

**Question 13:** Is there a recording of the webinar?

**Answer 13:** Yes, please see the webinars page of our website for the recorded webinar.
**Question 14:** Could an assistant professor at any US university be a PI on any project of AOI two or three? How many co-PIs could work in the project?

**Answer 14:** Yes, an assistant professor can be a PI. The number of co-PIs is a decision that will have to be made by the research team submitting the proposal.

**Question 15:** This solicitation notes that the Legumes Systems Innovation Lab will focus primarily on two major crops, common bean in Central America and cowpea in West Africa. Does the Legume Systems Innovation Lab contemplate future windows for common bean's value chains in other geographies such as Tanzania or Sierra Leone?

**Answer 15:** Tanzania is not within our focal regions. You can see our answers to question one concerning geographic eligibility. We have no mandate to work in Tanzania at the present time or anywhere in East and Southern Africa. If the mission indicates interest or USAID Washington changes our contract, we would have an update regarding this. For Sierra Leone, it is not a target Feed the Future country. It might be included within a West Africa regional project, but it is not eligible to be a focal country in a research project.