



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

RFP SOLICITATION NUMBER: FY17-RFP01-6014

Issued by: University Research Co., LLC

USAID Reading within Reach (REACH)

USAID Contract No. AID-OAA-M-14-00001

Reference: Early Childhood Education and Literacy Study

Date of Issue: 17 January 2017

Closing Time and Date for Proposals: 5:00 p.m. EST, 3 March 2017

Proposals must be emailed to: reading@urc-chs.com

Issuance of this RFP does not constitute a contractual commitment on the part of URC nor does it commit URC or the US Government to pay for costs incurred in the submission of a proposal. All costs of the Offeror in the preparation and submission of an offer shall be borne by that Offeror. URC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals and to make no award at all, or to make an award without further discussion or negotiations if it is considered to be in the best interests of the project and URC.

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ACRONYMS

ECE	Early Childhood Education
G&A	General & Administrative
MELQO	Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes
NICRA	Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
RFP	Request for Proposals
STTA	Short-term Technical Advisor
URC	University Research Co., LLC
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WBG	World Bank Group

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Rationale and Statement of Need

USAID’s Education Strategy Goal 1— “improved reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades”¹— focuses on improving student learning outcomes in reading in the primary grades. However, evidence and experience from a number of current and ongoing impact evaluations of projects in low-income countries around the world indicate that most children enter the primary grades ill-prepared to succeed in school. Despite the fact that some countries fund early childhood education (ECE) programs, very few children arrive at school with the foundational language and literacy skills required.

Ample research evidence indicates that children who participate in early childhood programs with effective, evidence-based curricula that build developmentally appropriate early literacy numeracy and social emotional skills can benefit more from strong primary grade reading and math programs. Furthermore, many are able to learn at an accelerated pace after participating in high-quality ECE programs. However, most of the current research on the effectiveness of ECE programs has been conducted in developed countries, with little research in developing countries examining specific program features within and across contexts and countries. Given this situation, it is important to better understand whether there are universal ECE program features that may contribute to improved literacy and language skills in the first three years of primary school.

A collaboration between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank’s Early Learning Partnership,² as well as other partners, seeks to fill the knowledge gap described above by generating a robust and nuanced understanding of ECE programs in low-income country contexts. In particular, the goal is to understand how these programs can effectively prepare children to acquire foundational literacy skills in the early grades.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 Objectives

The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to select a firm for an award of a subcontract to conduct preparatory work for a longitudinal study that will follow children enrolled in preprimary programs through grade 4 in order to obtain data on trajectories of learning over time at an individual and cohort level. This information will provide governments and other stakeholders with actionable information on if, why and how to invest in early childhood education, and how such investments may yield system efficiency and improved school readiness skills including, language and early literacy skills.

Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following primary research questions, which are both academically important and pertinent for policymakers and implementing partners in low-income countries:

¹ USAID. USAID Education Strategy 2011-2015. Available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacq946.pdf.

² World Bank. Early Learning Partnership. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/early-learning-partnership>.

- a. How well does an early childhood literacy assessment predict reading achievement in the primary grades within and across contexts/languages/countries?
- b. What are the quality features of early childhood programming and implementation that contribute most to achievement at the end of primary grades?
- c. Is one year of preprimary instruction sufficient to yield a measurable and positive impact on learning in the primary grades?
- d. What is the cost effectiveness as well as efficacy from an early childhood intervention that begins at age three and continues through the preprimary or pre-first grade year?

At the completion of this longitudinal study, data will allow the examination of whether participation in an ECE program in a particular country increases the likelihood that students will learn to read at an earlier age or at a higher level of proficiency than those children who do not participate in an ECE program. Results are also expected to provide evidence of whether these children are more likely to remain in school through grade 4 than children who do not attend an ECE program.

2.2 Statement of Work

The Offeror selected to carry out the research planning specified in this RFP will be expected to conduct the following activities and tasks:

- A. Conduct mapping exercise in proposed research countries (see “Geographic Scope of Work” for country list).** This will include:
 - a. (Note: countries will be identified by WBG and USAID)
 - b. Through desk research and country visits, collect information relevant to planning the research design, including each country’s ECE-related policies, program content, language of instruction, schedules, location, student enrollment and demographic information, teacher training and qualifications, instructional materials and availability, mobility of population, parental and community involvement, etc. (Note that this list is illustrative, and not exhaustive, of the information to be collected.)
 - c. Identify potential in-country partners for research implementation, including government partners and partners for data collection in schools and homes.
 - d. Identify any additional factors to be considered in the design and implementation of the research.

- B. Develop a detailed research design and implementation plan.**
 - Based on the country mapping information, and in collaboration with USAID, the World Bank and country partners, develop the research design and plan for sampling. This will include considering a design with a control wait group so that it might be possible to assess those with one or two years of ECE, as well as a design that is grounded in implementation science so that adjustments/program improvements that may be made over the course of the research can be measured over time during implementation.

- C. Conduct initial adaptation of research instruments to be used for the study.** This will include:
 - a. A review of existing standardized child assessment instruments that can be used as models with a recommendation for the most appropriate ones for this study. These

should include Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes (MELQO) and other tools used in low-income countries.

- b. Draft child development tools (creating new instruments or adapting/supplementing the MELQO instrument), to be further refined in collaboration with country partners.
- c. Finalize tools for each of the selected countries and develop training materials for administering the assessments.

2.3 Geographic Scope

The proposed longitudinal studies will be conducted in countries in which preprimary programs are already government-funded. Countries in which the initial mapping studies will be conducted are: Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana, Pakistan (Punjab province), Senegal, Liberia, Malawi, India, Cambodia, Uganda and Zambia.

2.4 Subcontract, Period of Performance and Estimated Costs

URC anticipated awarding a firm fixed-price subcontract. The estimated period of performance for activities under the award shall be 18 months, with a start date of 1 May 2017. The estimated amount of the award will be approximately \$500,000 USD. Offerors must propose costs that are reasonable and realistic for the work described above. USAID will be providing the Technical Direction for the Sub-Contractor.

2.5 Collaboration and Partnerships

Offerors may propose relevant collaborations with other organizations, government institutions and individuals to successfully carry out the proposed work. This may include collaboration with a relevant Ministry of Education or university.

2.6 Key Personnel

To conduct the proposed work, Offerors are expected to propose the following Key Personnel with the following qualifications:

<p>Project Director/Principal Investigator</p>	<p>The candidate should have a doctorate and at least 7 years of experience managing a research initiative of similar scope and size. S/he should have a background in early childhood education with expertise in early literacy in low-income country contexts, as well as work experience in at least one of the potential study countries. The candidate should have demonstrated experience managing and working with cross-cultural teams. Excellent English communication skills are required.</p>
<p>Early Childhood Education Specialist</p>	<p>The candidate should have a master’s degree (Ph.D. preferred) in child development, developmental psychology or a related field, with at least 8 years of research and evaluation experience. Experience with child development assessment tools in evaluation projects in low-income countries is required. Excellent English communication and training skills are essential. Familiarity with ECE in at least one of the target countries is preferred.</p>

Additional non-key personnel and short-term technical advisors (STTA) also may be proposed.

2.7 Deliverables and Reporting Requirements

The successful Offeror will be expected to furnish the following deliverables according to the timeline listed below:

Deliverable	Due Date
1. Plan for mapping ECE [and primary grades reading] program information in proposed countries	Within 60 days of award
2. Mapping report on ECE [and primary grades reading] program information for proposed countries	To be determined per approved work plan
3. Consultative workshop to share mapping report and initial research design ideas with stakeholders	To be determined per approved work plan
4. Research design and implementation plan	To be determined per approved work plan
5. Initial adaptation of research instruments and training materials to be used for the study	To be determined per approved work plan
6. Quarterly progress reports (technical and financial)	Within 30 days after the quarter
7. Final report	Within 30 days after end of contract

3 APPLICATION

3.1 General Guidelines and Instructions to Offerors

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP should follow these guidelines:

- a. Responsiveness to solicitation: Proposals should be specific, complete and presented concisely. They should respond directly to the terms, conditions, specifications and provisions outlined in the RFP. Proposals that do not conform to the RFP provisions may be determined to be non-responsive and eliminated from consideration.
- b. Accurate and complete information: Offerors must set forth accurate and complete information as required by this solicitation.
- c. Format and presentation: Proposals must be submitted in two separate parts: (a) Technical Proposal and (b) Cost Proposal. Technical Proposals must not make reference to pricing data in order that the technical evaluation may be made strictly on the basis of technical merits. All pages of the technical and cost proposals must be sequentially numbered.
- d. Proposal submission: The technical and cost proposals must be submitted via email. No other forms of submission will be accepted. Signed and dated proposals should be submitted on or before the date and time indicated on the RFP cover page. The proposal

must be received by the due date to be considered. Email with attachments **must be submitted in the following formats: Adobe Acrobat (PDF), Microsoft Word and Excel. All files must be unprotected including any spreadsheets, which are to be provided as Excel files with visible calculation cell formulas intact.**

Our preference is that an Offeror's technical and cost proposals be submitted in a single email. For the Technical Proposal, various parts should be consolidated into one document. Offerors must not submit zipped files. Should Offerors send multiple emails, the subject line of the email should indicate whether it relates to the technical or cost proposal, as well as the desired sequence of multiple emails and of attachments (e.g., "number 1 of 3"). **Each email must not exceed 5 MB in size.** Attachments (files) should be clearly named. The proposal may not receive optimal treatment if the name, order and composition of files is unclear. All proposals received will be reviewed for responsiveness to the specifications outlined in these guidelines.

3.2 Technical Proposal Specifications

The Technical Proposal must address how the Offeror intends to carry out the Statement of Work. It should be specific, complete, presented concisely and responsive to the goals of the funding. The Technical Proposal must address how the Offeror intends to fulfill the RFP requirements. Detailed information should be presented only when required by specific RFP instructions.

The Technical Proposal must contain the following:

- a. **Cover letter (1 page maximum, not included in page limit):** Must accompany the proposal and be typed on official organizational letterhead and signed by a person who has signatory authority for the organization.
- b. **Cover page (1 page maximum, not included in page limit):** This must include the following information:
 - i. RFP solicitation number
 - ii. Project title (Early Childhood Education and Literacy Study)
 - iii. Offeror name and address
 - iv. Date of submission
 - v. Point of contact information for the technical and cost proposals (names, titles, email addresses and telephone numbers)
 - vi. Tax identification number (U.S. organizations only)
 - vii. DUNS number
- c. **Table of contents** (not included in page limit)
- d. **List of acronyms** (not included in page limit)
- e. **Body of proposal (15 pages; any pages over 15 will not be evaluated):** This section must include the following:
 - i. **Technical approach** – Detailed description of the Offeror's understanding of the statement of work and strategy and methodology to be used. This section should allow technical evaluators to quickly understand the critical elements of the proposal including the most salient features of the Offeror's technical approach to carry out the scope of work and achieve the deliverables described within the RFP.
 - ii. **Management and staffing** – The Offeror should describe its plan for management of the project. The Offeror's description must reflect a clear understanding of the RFP requirements and communicate confidence that the Offeror has the capacity to

- efficiently and effectively conduct the work. This will include a description of the roles and functions of the organizations and individuals proposed to carry out the work, as well as a summary of their relevant experience. Include key personnel, short-term technical advisors (STTAs) and non-key personnel. Offerors should briefly explain the rationale for proposed collaborations and selected personnel. The Offeror must also identify organizational structures (e.g., people, systems, policies and procedures) that support its ability to conduct the research outlined in this RFP and per the Offeror's technical approach. The Offeror should provide a one-page organizational chart in the annex that includes the proposed organizations and staff.
- iii. **Capabilities and past performance** – The body of the Technical Proposal should include a summary of the Offeror's relevant past performance and capabilities, including that of proposed collaborators. Offerors should describe their institutional capabilities (e.g., experience and expertise) and past performance in successfully managing and implementing projects of similar scale, technical scope and geographic context. This will include experience managing and conducting education research in low-income country contexts. Detailed past performance references should be included as annexes (see guidelines in Annex A).
 - f. **Annexes (not included in page limit):** Annexes should be labeled and pages should be numbered sequentially. They should be limited to:
 - i. **Key personnel** – CVs and letters of intent for two key personnel.
 - ii. **Organizational chart** – The chart should show relationships among the organizations, offices, key personnel and STTAs proposed.
 - iii. **Past performance references** – The Offeror must provide performance references for itself that demonstrate its capacity to effectively conduct work of similar nature to that proposed in this RFP. Offers can submit up to four past performance references for awards (e.g., contracts or grants) or programs implemented. A template for past performances references is included in Annex A.

The Technical Proposal, excluding annexes, is limited to 15 pages and must be written in English. Pages that exceed the page limitation will not be considered. Offerors must use only 8 ½" x 11" or A4 paper. Each page should be numbered sequentially. A page in the Technical Proposal that contains a table, chart, graph or other exhibit is included within the above page limitation.

Type should be single spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font, or similar, with margins not less than one inch on each border. Use of smaller font or other page format may result in removal of proposal materials provided to the evaluation panel. Tables, maps, charts or other exhibits may use a font smaller than 12 point as long as the text is legible without magnification.

3.3 Cost Proposal Specifications

The Cost Proposal shall reflect the Offeror's understanding of the resources necessary to implement the proposed Scope of Work. The proposed costs should demonstrate the Offeror's understanding of the technical requirements and deliverables.

The cost proposal must contain the following parts:

- a. **Budget:** The Cost Proposal must be submitted in a separate document in Microsoft Excel format (with formulas) at the same time the Technical Proposal is submitted. The Cost Proposal shall consist of a budget and budget narrative describing the following costs, as applicable:

- i. Personnel
- ii. Fringe benefits
- iii. Consultants
- iv. Travel
- v. Equipment and supplies
- vi. Other direct costs
- vii. Indirect costs (e.g., negotiated indirect cost rate agreement [NICRA])*
- viii. Total costs

*If the Offeror includes indirect costs (i.e., overhead and general and administrative [G&A]) in its budget, it should submit a copy of a government-approved NICRA if it has one. If it does not have a NICRA or similar document, it should clearly describe the basis for the claim of indirect costs (e.g., financial statement or audit report) or simply list only direct charges in the budget (i.e., no indirect costs as a percentage of direct costs).

- b. **Budget narrative:** A budget narrative, with a cover letter, should also be submitted along with the Cost Proposal. The budget narrative should include a description of costs and how they were determined or calculated for each line item in the budget. The budget narrative should be in Times New Roman font (or similar), size 12, and submitted in Microsoft Word or PDF format. It should not exceed three pages. Failure to include all information or to organize the Cost Proposal in the manner prescribed may result in rejection of the proposal as being noncompliant.

4 PROPOSAL REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

4.1 Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria below are the standard against which all proposals will be evaluated. Each Technical and Cost proposal will be evaluated according to the factors described below.

A. Technical Proposal – 100 points total

a. Technical Approach (30 points)

- i. Demonstrates an understanding of the purpose and objectives of the proposed research initiative and research questions.
- ii. Presents a technically sound and effective approach to carrying out the activities and tasks outlined in the scope of work.
- iii. Exhibits a high degree of technical knowledge in relevant domains, including early childhood education programming, early childhood skills assessment and early grade reading assessment, particularly as they relate to low-income country contexts.
- iv. Demonstrates a high level of technical knowledge in research design (including longitudinal research studies), implementation, analysis and reporting.

b. Management and Staffing (30 points)

- i. Reflects a clear understanding of the RFP requirements.
- ii. Presents a clear and detailed management approach to carry out the work effectively.
- iii. Rationale for and role of any proposed partners are clearly described; proposed partners have the relevant experience and skills.

- iv. The staffing plan demonstrates “efficient yet sufficient” personnel capacity to successfully carry out the work.
- v. Proposed key personnel have the necessary qualifications and experience for the position/work proposed.
- vi. Proposed non-key personnel are appropriate and have the qualifications and experience necessary.
- vii. Offeror’s organizational structures demonstrate capacity and ability to conduct the proposed work.

c. Capabilities and Past Performance (40 points)

- i. Demonstrates that the Offeror has institutional capacity and technical knowledge in relevant areas to conduct the proposed work.
- ii. Demonstrates that the Offeror has successful past experience designing, managing and implementing work of similar scale and technical scope in low-income country contexts.
- iii. Demonstrates that the Offeror has experience successfully managing contracts of similar monetary value.
- iv. Demonstrates the Offeror’s experience successfully collaborating with partners to conduct similar work.

B. Cost Proposal

The evaluation of Cost Proposals will include a determination of cost realism, completeness and reasonableness. The Cost Proposal should demonstrate the Offeror’s:

- a. Understanding of the resources required to successfully accomplish the proposed technical scope of work.
- b. Efficiency in proposed financial expenditures.
- c. Reasonableness and accuracy of the costs proposed.

Cost Proposals will not be evaluated if an Offeror’s technical proposal is not deemed technically acceptable.

4.2 Selection Process

A best value method whereby a combination of technical factors and cost will be used in selecting the winning proposal, with technical being a greater factor than cost.

4.3 Award of Contract

The Subcontract award will be between University Research Co., LLC and the winning Offeror. URC implements Reading within Reach (REACH), a five-year initiative to support USAID and its partners to develop, disseminate and apply evidence-based good practices to increase the impact, scale and sustainability of early grade reading programs.

Note: Modifications to the RFP may be made at any time prior to the proposal submission deadline. The deadline for submission may be extended depending on the scope of a modification. Modifications after the deadline for proposals will be communicated only to those Offerors who submitted proposals.

ANNEX A: FORMAT FOR PAST PERFORMANCE REFERENCES

To be completed by Offeror. Offers may submit up to four past performance references.

PERFORMANCE REPORT
1. Name of Awarding Entity:
2. Award Number (if applicable):
3. Award Title:
4. Award Type:
5. Award Value:
6. Award Period of Performance:
7. Contacts: As applicable depending on award type. If non-US government award, indicate appropriate title. Include full name, address, telephone number and email address for each.
7.1 Contracting Officer:
7.2 Technical Officer:
7.3 Other (as applicable depending on award agency):
8. Description of Project or Services Provided under Award, Including Outcomes/Impact Achieved (up to 300 words):
9. Problems (if encountered on this award, explain corrective action taken):
10. Information Provided in Response to RFP/RFA or Other Solicitation Number: