CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (CEI)

As the implementer of USAID's Mali Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Platform, Social Impact, Inc. (SI) is required to develop local firms' monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities in alignment with USAID's focus on localization. Subject to the availability of funds and the level of demand for services the USAID Mali MEL Platform seeks local M&E firms to participate in a MEL capacity-building program designed to increase their MEL knowledge, skills, and services and enhance their ability to compete effectively for donor funds. In addition, selected organizations can expect to increase their financial and administrative knowledge and skills so that they are eligible to provide MEL services directly to USAID in the future. This may include (but is not limited to): conducting performance evaluations, designing monitoring systems, data collection, assessing data quality, and developing MEL plans.

This is a Call for Expression of Interest (CEI). This is not a Request for Proposals (RFP) or a Request for Quotations (RFQ) and is not to be construed as a commitment by SI to award a subcontract based on this CEI. All costs associated with responding to this request will be solely at the respondent's expense.

Please respond to this CEI by **Friday, September 22, 2023, Bamako time** with an application that includes information requested in the instructions section of this CEI.

CEI STATEMENT OF WORK

I. BACKGROUND

In support of USAID's focus on localization, one of the key objectives of the USAID Mali MEL Platform is to build the capacity of local organizations to monitor and evaluate development programs.[1] In Mali, few local companies and/or research organizations have been able to win and successfully manage prime contracts with USAID and/or other major international donors. Thus, as a part of building local MEL capacity, USAID has asked SI to help build the pool of potentially eligible local organizations that could provide direct MEL support to USAID in the future. SI will provide these organizations with MEL support and capacity development to enable them to independently monitor or evaluate development programs, improve organizational learning, and use monitoring data and evaluations to support adaptive management. SI's capacity building support will align with USAID policy, international standards, and best practices. The ultimate objective is to enable Malian organizations to apply for, win, and successfully manage MEL work with USAID and other donors as prime contractors. This Statement of Work (SOW) summarizes how SI will accomplish this goal and draws upon SI's extensive MEL capacity-building experience with USAID, other U.S. Government agencies, the World Bank, Gates Foundation, and other donors.

To provide fair opportunity to all local organizations, SI will use this CEI as a competitive application process to select a pool of approximately five local organizations to participate in its capacity building program. The selected organizations will participate in MEL capacity

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[1] This is a specific requirement in the USAID Mali MEL Platform contract, per section C5.3 of the SOW.

assessment, MEL training and support to effectively compete for work on USAID-funded MEL assignments.

Because the knowledge, skills, organizational capacities, and performance gaps of each organization are unique, SI will utilize the capacity assessment of selected organizations to provide needs-based training and capacity building support. Based on the assessment results and latest updates in USAID MEL policies and procedures, SI will design training and other capacity building support on the key technical, administrative and financial management skills and tools needed to conduct MEL work for USAID and other international donors as well as effectively manage direct donor contracts. After completion of the trainings and subject to USAID demand, SI may invite participating organizations to compete for Task Orders where they will apply their increased knowledge and skills through collaboration with SI on USAID MEL activities. Under these subcontracts (the number and exact nature of which are currently unknown), the subcontractor organizations may have the opportunity to take on increasing levels of responsibility for the work, while SI provides real-time support and guidance. As the prime contractor, SI will be responsible for the quality of all deliverables.

The following sections detail how SI will approach selecting the organizations, assessing their capacity, delivering technical and managerial training, and issuing competitive Task Orders for selected trainee organizations to implement what they have learned through "on the job" collaboration with SI.

II.   KEY STEPS TO THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS

Step 1: Organization Selection

To identify organizations with a commitment to strengthening their MEL capacity, this CEI seeks responses from local evaluation firms interested in MEL training and, potentially, work with SI as subcontractors. Organizations should have a track record of conducting MEL activities locally. This may include data collection activities, performance and/or impact evaluations, development of monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans, indicator development, or other related MEL activities.

SI will review the Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for eligibility and technical qualifications. SI will submit a list of up to five selected organizations, along with justification for their selection, to USAID for final approval. Vetting of the organizations is a part of the SI selection process. SI will not notify the selected organizations until after they have been approved by USAID.

Step 2: Capacity Assessment

Before training begins, SI will conduct a capacity assessment of selected organizations utilizing the Technical and Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (TOCAT), the Non-US Pre Award Survey guidance (NUPAS), and other participatory assessment methodologies. The TOCAT provides a facilitated process for local implementing agencies to conduct rapid assessments to identify firms' strengths and weaknesses with respect to the core functions of a model organization. It comprises a series of checklists with questions about different key areas of organizational management (program, financial and technical) designed to elicit a consensus on the current performance level and suggestions for how to improve. It focuses discussion on three areas: 1) program; 2) finance and administration; and 3) technical. The generic tool is customized for each organization, depending on the make-up of the organization to assess the following:

- Strategic Planning and Performance Management
- Financial Management
- Human Resources
- Knowledge Management
- Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning technical capacities
- External Collaboration

NUPAS assesses organizational readiness to manage, program, and account for USAID funds, based on six dimensions:
- Legal Structure
- Financial Management and Internal Control Systems
- Procurement Systems
- Human Resources Systems
- Project Performance Management
- Organizational Sustainability

In addition, SI will review the selected organizations' current MEL products and processes. SI will facilitate a gap analysis with the selected organizations to identify their position within the ranking system and select and deliver training modules that will build on existing competencies while addressing MEL skill and performance gaps. Local organizations with higher level competencies may require fewer training modules, and others may receive a larger number of modules.

Step 3: Designing and Providing Trainings

SI anticipates a multi-pronged approach. The first step will be to train all selected organizations on key skills and principles to ensure a common understanding. SI also anticipates accompanying the trainings with capacity building support, such as targeted technical assistance and mentoring, brown bag presentations and other discussions, and – depending on USAID demand – implementation as a subcontractor on competitively awarded MEL Task Orders. Each of these aspects is described in more detail below.

Acting in a prime role on a MEL contract or grant through an international donor takes more than technical capabilities: implementation also requires organizational and managerial capabilities, such as ensuring quality control of final deliverables, contractual and financial reporting requirements, and understanding and complying with USAID's Operational Policy – the Automated Directives System (ADS). Thus, the anticipated trainings will include both technical and managerial content.

SI will deliver the trainings in a sequenced manner along with other capacity building, based on the results of the capacity assessments. Training attendees from the selected organizations can expect to participate in trainings approximately 1-2 weeks per quarter. Each week would include 2-3 days of training with the remaining time spent on applying skills and lessons learned. For example, after learning about quality control of deliverables, the trainer will help participants review actual deliverables and provide guidance on how to improve quality and establish strong quality assurance practices. Or, after learning about data quality standards and the USAID data quality assessment (DQA) requirements, trainees would receive SI technical assistance in conducting internal DQAs and improving their data quality assurance systems and practices. The table below provides illustrative training topics:

Table 1: Illustrative Training Topics

Training Topic	Description
Introduction to Managing for Results	This module will introduce key concepts utilized by international donors and the private sector for identifying measurable objectives and sub-objectives within their manageable interest and then establishing MEL systems to: track and accurately report on progress towards those results; use performance information to adapt and manage development activities more effectively; and contribute to a sound evidence base to support organizational learning. Participants will explore USAID's Program Cycle and ADS 201 guidance and become acquainted with other publicly available guidance to support working with USAID, e.g., USAID Acquisition and Assistance and Financial Management policies, procedures, and Help Documents in ADS series 300 and 600.
MEL Plan Development and Implementation	This module will include Theories of Change and logic models used by USAID and other donors, such as results frameworks (RF) and logical frameworks (LF). Participants will learn key terminology and concepts, such as inputs, outputs, and outcomes, as well as USAID-specific terminology such as development objectives, and intermediate and sub-intermediate results. Participants will learn about procedures for developing an Activity MEL Plan, including performance indicators, baselines, and targets; planned evaluations; and developing a learning agenda and data analysis of performance information for adaptive management.
Selecting and Documenting Performance and Context Indicators	Monitoring and tracking performance through performance indicators is an important way to assess whether implementation of activities is on track and whether expected results are being achieved throughout the life of an activity. SI will train the selected organizations in the selection and development of performance indicators, including standard foreign assistance indicators and custom indicators, and use of performance indicator quality standards. The module will also focus on documentation through Performance Indicator Reference Sheets (PIRS). In addition, the indicator training will include a focus on context indicators, which are key to understanding the operating environment where the development activity is to take place. Volatile changes in context, such as occur in Mali, may alter assumptions about the development hypothesis and measurement of performance, (e.g., regular population displacement).
Selecting the Most Appropriate Evaluation Design	Many different options exist for answering a client's evaluation questions. But in each context, not all options are feasible, and some may be more appropriate than others for the given purpose or evaluation questions. Training on evaluation design will teach participants how to select the most appropriate methods to answer the evaluation questions within the resource and timing constraints of the contract. Further, because responding to an evaluation requires a deep understanding of the evaluation purpose, questions, proposed methods and resources, this module will also include how review and respond to an Evaluation SOW, including through use of an evaluation matrix that matches evaluation questions with appropriate methods to employed. The module will cover both impact and

Training Topic	Description
	performance evaluation options, as well as trade-offs between rigor and cost.
Ensuring Respondent Protection	This training, which is applicable to both qualitative and quantitative methods, will discuss processes and procedures for ensuring adequate protections of study participants and respondents. Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and procedures in the U.S. and Mali will be discussed, as well as ensuring the security of data and personally identifiable information.
Synthesizing and Triangulating Data for Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations	Evaluations produce significant amounts of information and data. Synthesizing and triangulating different data sources can be a daunting task. This training will teach organizations how to triangulate their data, comparing and contrasting findings from different data sources to arrive at nuanced findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The distinction between findings (the data points themselves), conclusions (the synthesized answers to the evaluation questions), and recommendations (advice, based on the findings and conclusions, for what to do in the future to improve results) will be discussed. The training will also emphasize the need for a logical chain between findings, conclusions, and recommendations to ensure the evaluation is evidence-based and provides the client with the best information available.
Project Management	Strong project management is the backbone of strong MEL. Keeping the team on task, making sure deadlines are met, ensuring all requirements are satisfied, and keeping the activity within budget are key tasks for good MEL management. This training will be geared towards the MEL project managers who are responsible for the day-to-day management of performance monitoring, data quality, evaluations, CLA, and other MEL activities and will provide the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage a MEL-related activity.
USAID MEL Requirements (ADS 201)	Every client has their own set of requirements and standards for monitoring, evaluation, and learning and associated MEL reporting. Through the Automated Directives System, USAID has made its MEL policies clear. The ADS 201 guidance includes report templates and requirements, as well as useful Help documents – some of which SI helped develop. This training will acquaint organizations with USAID's requirements and how to fulfill them in every MEL activity
USAID Contracting Requirements (ADS 300 Series)	The US federal government, through the FAR, and USAID, through the AIDAR, have very specific requirements regarding the contracting process. Organizations that have not worked with USAID or other federal agencies may not be familiar with many of these processes and requirements. While it would be infeasible to train organizations on all the minutia of the FAR and AIDAR (which requires years of dedicated training and practice), this training will provide an overview of the key requirements and include resources for finding answers to detailed questions as they arise.
USAID Financial Requirements (ADS 600 series)	Like the training on USAID contracting requirements, an additional training will be provided on how to comply with USAID financial requirements, which are often more stringent than those required by local, non-USG clients with which organizations may have more

Training Topic	Description
	experience. As with the contracting training, it would not be feasible to train organizations on basic accounting principles nor all USAID financial requirements. However, the training will provide an overview of the key requirements and standards, with resources provided for how to access more information.

Step 4: Putting Lessons into Practice

Applying what participants learn in the trainings will be key to institutionalizing new practices. To facilitate implementation, alongside the trainings, trainers will provide additional support to the organizations, reviewing relevant deliverables and/or practices and providing customized guidance and advice for improvement. SI will also provide remote support for targeted needs.

In addition, subject to USAID client demand and the availability of funds, SI will may invite participating organizations to compete for Task Orders to provide MEL services as SI subcontractors through the USAID Mali MEL Platform mechanism. SI will examine expected MEL assignments in the pipeline to identify potential projects for which SI will issue Requests for Task Order Proposals for subcontracts to SI aligned with the training content.

The ultimate objective of the trainings, other capacity building technical assistance and support, and direct subcontracting work is for the organizations to be able to manage M&E tasks independently within their direct project implementation and/or as direct services to USAID. Ideally, after the capacity building work has been completed, most of the selected organizations will be capable of implementing MEL contracts directly with USAID and/or other major international donors as prime implementers.

III.   INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION OF THE EOI

To participate in this capacity building activity, interested organizations should submit an EOI related to the requirements identified below. The following information should be submitted to be considered:

1. Organization name and address in Mali
2. Contact person email and phone number in Mali
3. A clear description of the organization's goals regarding increased MEL capacity (e.g., what MEL services does the organization hope to provide to USAID in the future)
4. A summary of no more than four (4) full-time staff whom the organization proposes to participate in the MEL capacity building and potential Task Orders. The summary should include for each individual:
   a. Name
   b. Position title
   c. Years of work experience, and years of experience conducting MEL activities
   d. 1-2 paragraph summary of MEL responsibilities and capabilities within the organization
5. A Capability Statement that describes in one to five (1 to 5) pages the organization's current capacity and recent experience in Monitoring, Evaluation, and organizational Learning, including:
   a. Designing monitoring systems comprised of indicators, baselines and targets aligned with planned results,
   b. Data collection and establishment of data quality assurance systems,

c. Conducting performance and/or impact evaluations,
d. Designing and implementing organizational learning systems and practices, including the use of lessons learned for adaptive management.
6. A list of grants or contracts received for MEL-related work over the past five years from USAID or other funders.

This opportunity is open to organizations that meet the following qualifications:
1. Legal business registration in Mali
2. Demonstrated experience in MEL
3. Have not previously acted in a prime role on a USAID-funded grant or contract

Please direct all submissions by email to jmandel@socialimpact.com, aporter@socialimpact.com, with cc to gsidibe@socialimpact.com lraymond@socialimpact.com, and akatiella@socialimpact.com.

IV. TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

USAID Mali MEL Platform will put in place a Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP). The panel will only score those proposals that meet the following eligibility requirements:
- Legal business registration in Mali (on a scale of 1- 3 points, with 1 = not fully legally registered, 2 = registration in process, 3 = firm is fully legally registered.)
- Participants attending the trainings are Malian nationals,
- Demonstrated experience in MEL,
- Have not previously acted in a prime role on a USAID-funded grant or contract,
- Agreement to work with SI as a subcontractor on MEL Task Orders, if selected for this role (participating in the capacity building sessions does not constitute in any way a guarantee that the local firm will work with SI)
- Organizations and individuals proposed must not be barred from receiving US government funding or are otherwise ineligible as determined via SI's vetting process.

The Technical Evaluation Panel will rate all eligible applicants using a scoring matrix comprised of the following criteria:
- Clarity of MEL objectives,
- Extent of organizational MEL experience,
- MEL capabilities and commitment of no more than four full-time staff proposed to participate in the training and potentially in Task Orders,
- Past performance reviews from MEL clients or donors,
- Documented agreement that participating organizations will bring current or recent, MEL work products to the trainings for use in application exercises,
- Documented agreement that the proposed key staff will be available for capacity building trainings (at no cost to SI) and that these staff are dedicated to staying with the selected organization past the end of the capacity building activity, and at least through FY2027,
- Statement of organizational financial resources to fund key personnel to attend the training (for example, if the organization is receiving other donor funding, will it use it to support participation in trainings?).

The deadline for the submission of EOIs is **Friday, September 22, 2023, by 5:00pm Bamako time**. SI will respond to queries from local firms as following:
- Deadline for local firms to submit questions: **Monday, September 11, 2023.**

- Deadline for SI to respond to questions: **Wednesday, September 13, 2023.**
- General information session (response to all questions and explanation on what the EOI should look like): **Friday, September 15, 2023, from 9:00am – 11:00am** at the SI-Mali Conference Room at the address below:
  Hamdallaye ACI 2000, Street 317
  Gate 398, - Office 301 Bamako, Mali