

Simplified Request for Proposal (SRFP)

Employability and Localization of Evidence Process in Higher Education Toolkit

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Reference No.: 12541 SRFP HELN 3.1

Education Development Center, Inc.

Email Address: ltlgp_proposals@edc.org

The purpose of this SRFP is to invite you to submit a proposal for the service(s) described in the attached statement of work (SOW). If you have questions, please send them to Carla Verbridge at ltlgp_proposals@edc.org.

PROPOSAL DUE DATE:

- **All proposals must be received by EDC before the deadline of May 12, 2023, 5 p.m. Eastern Time.**
- All proposals must be delivered via email to: Education Development Center, Inc., Attention: Carla Verbridge at: ltlgp_proposals@edc.org. Please include "HELN 3.1" in the subject line of the email.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS:

- All proposals must clearly identify the name of the company/individual submitting the proposal.
- All Offerors must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and be located within geographic [code 937](#).
- **BID CHECKLIST**

Offerors must provide the following information. Offerors who fail to supply the information requested below may be considered unresponsive in EDC's sole discretion, and incomplete applications will not be evaluated:

A written proposal (approximately 3 pages) describing how the services described in the attached SOW will be delivered. The written proposal shall include the following sections:

- Applicant's understanding of the contribution of this work to improved practice in education
- Statement of why the applicant is interested in and qualified to perform the work
- Description of how services in completion of the work will be delivered
- Proposed management/team approach

A work plan that includes a level of effort (LOE) table that describes for each deliverable (in the SOW): the estimated LOE in hours and the estimated delivery date. This may be an annex to the proposal.

A writing/similar work sample. This may be an annex to the proposal.

Three references including company name and contact information. This may be an annex to the proposal.

Name, title, and resumes or CVs of key individual(s) who would be involved in providing the services. CVs do not count as part of the page limit and may be placed in an annex. No key personnel shall be replaced without EDC's express prior approval. If changes in key personnel are necessary, the contractor agrees to furnish replacement personnel that meet substantially the same education, training, and work experience qualifications as those of the personnel originally proposed.

If submitting an application for an additional LTLGP activity (while implementing a previous one): Partners are eligible to apply for more than one active RFP but will be expected to demonstrate bandwidth to successfully implement concurrent or multiple activities. Partners are requested to submit as a separate annex to their proposal a short Capacity to Implement Concurrent LTLGP Activities statement.

PRICING TEMPLATE

Services: Unless otherwise directed, the proposal must be in the following format and not exceed the LOE maximum ceiling. Applicants should not budget for final editing and design costs, as these will be covered by the project.

Maximum LOE

Labor Category	Qualifications	Number of Hours Available in This Labor Category
Senior-level	BA + 12 years, or MA/MS + 10 years, or PhD + 8 years	370
Mid-level	BA + 10 yrs, or MS/MA + 8 years, or PhD + 6 years	420
Administrative	BA + 4 years, or MS/MA + 2 years	74

Personnel

Name	Title	Labor Category	Hourly Rate	Number of Hours	Total Amount

Total Price Quotation:

EDC anticipates awarding a Time & Materials contract for the services described in the SOW. EDC may award one or more contracts resulting from this request to the Offeror(s) whose quotation(s) conform to this request. EDC may also (a) reject any or all quotations, (b) accept quotations other than the lowest quotation, or (c) accept more than one quotation. EDC may award a contract without discussions with Offerors. Offerors are strongly encouraged to submit their best quotations. EDC reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to conduct discussions, which may result in revisions to quotations, with one or more than one or all Offerors(s).

Applications must be either from individual consultants or from organizations. Groups of individual consultants will not be considered.

Minimum Requirements: Offerors should demonstrate the following qualifications:

- Activity lead should meet one of the following education and experience combinations:
 - PhD in education or other relevant field and 8 years of experience working in education development. Experience working both in program implementation and research is an asset.
 - MS/MA in education or other relevant field and 10 years of experience working in education development. Experience working both in program implementation and research is an asset.
 - BS/BA in education or other relevant field and 12 years of experience working in education development. Experience working both in program implementation and research is an asset.
- Deep understanding of principles and concepts in education policy and practice; demonstrated experience working in the development and/or humanitarian settings on this topic; preferably, specific experience related to the SOW below
- Proven knowledge of research best practices and experience in conducting education studies and developing guidance materials related to the SOW below
- Ability to translate complex, technical concepts for a range of stakeholders with differing levels of knowledge

- Strong collaboration and communications skills; ability to establish and maintain good working relationships with multiple stakeholders
- Experience presenting and/or facilitating trainings, web events, and in-person conference presentations
- Proficiency and fluency in English; fluency in other languages helpful
- Excellent organizational and multitasking skills, with attention to detail
- Prior experience working with USAID (preferred)

Offerors that do not meet the minimum requirements listed above will not be considered eligible for funding and, therefore, proposals from these Offerors will not be further evaluated. Proposals from Offerors that meet the minimum requirements will be evaluated based on references and the evaluation criteria listed below.

Evaluation Criteria: EDC will evaluate proposals in accordance with this section and intends to award a service agreement to the responsible Offeror whose proposal represents the best value to EDC. EDC determines “best value” by considering technical, cost, and other factors.

The submitted proposal will be scored by an evaluation committee using the criteria shown below, which will also include the extent to which inclusivity and diversity are exhibited in the proposal.

Evaluation Criteria:

Criteria Category	Description	Maximum Points (30)
Past performance*	<p><u>Acceptable</u> – Based on the Offeror’s reference checks, EDC has a reasonable expectation that the offeror will successfully perform the required effort.</p> <p><u>Unacceptable</u>: Based on the Offeror’s reference checks, EDC has no reasonable expectation that the offeror will successfully perform the required effort.</p>	Acceptable/Unacceptable
Capacity of key personnel	Extent to which the Offeror demonstrates capacity in specified technical area(s).	10
Approach and methodology	Strength of the Offeror’s approach and methodology in terms of conceptualization, strategy, planning, and efficient timeline for completion of the deliverables. See the SOW Section for details on the Quality Assurance informing the scoring criteria for this category.	10
Cost/price	The evaluation of cost will include a determination of cost realism, completeness, and reasonableness. Cost realism is defined as the Offeror’s ability to project costs that are realistic for the work to be performed, reflect a clear understanding of the requirements, and are consistent with the Offeror’s technical capacity.	10

Employability and Localization of Evidence Process in Higher Education Toolkit

Statement of Work

Background

Education Development Center (EDC) is a leading US-based nonprofit research and development firm. EDC designs, implements, and evaluates programs to improve education, health, and economic opportunity worldwide. Collaborating with both public and private partners, we strive for a world where all people live healthy, productive lives.

The Leading Through Learning Global Platform (Leading Through Learning) is a USAID-funded project within EDC's International Development Division, with the aim to establish and expand a global education learning system for USAID and its partners. Through a network approach, Leading Through Learning brings together USAID DC and Mission education teams; US, international, and locally based implementing and research partners; donor and private sector partners; international and local representatives of other global/regional education networks; and partner country government and local representatives.

Leading Through Learning stakeholders build and share knowledge to address local needs while at the same time benefiting from and contributing to a global community of learning. Technical foci for LTLGP include higher education, as represented by the Higher Education Learning Network (HELN); education in crisis and conflict, as represented by the Education in Crisis and Conflict Network (ECCN); and foundational skills, as represented by the Global Reading Network (GRN). Learning Network members collaborate and engage on the global and regional levels. Currently, learning networks have a dedicated focus in the Africa region and Latin America and the Caribbean region.

In particular, the structure and role of potential local chapters in these two regions is to facilitate the access to global education discussions by bringing together a community of education stakeholders and practitioners with common needs and interests and within a nearby time zone and language group. The primary focus of regional chapters is to facilitate cross-network and cross-thematic integration at the regional level and enable members to access, build, and share knowledge to address local needs while benefiting from and contributing to a global community of learning.

Activity Overview

The Employability and Localization of Evidence Process in Higher Education Toolkit activity is part of the Higher Education Learning Network's portfolio. The HELN is a global network that brings together donors, practitioners, government officials, academics, researchers, students, NGOs, and other stakeholders to uncover and improve the ways higher education is uniquely positioned to support sustainable development across sectors.

The activity will be conducted using an emergent process where each phase of the activity will influence the overall design and implementation of the next phase, which will allow for the final deliverables to be responsive to local priorities and needs as they emerge throughout the activity implementation. Data collection will include global and regional desk reviews, key informant interviews, and consultations with stakeholders, networks, and the voices of youth about their understanding and experiences on employability ecosystems.

The work will be guided by the following USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda questions: How can skills or competencies (e.g., technical and soft skills) for employability best be identified, analyzed, and incorporated into curricula, teaching, and learning? How can higher education institutions (HEIs) collaborate most effectively with the private sector to enhance the relevance and quality of teaching and learning, and research and innovation?

The specific research questions for this activity are:

- What practices do HEIs and USAID use to support the employability of higher education graduates?
- What does the evidence say about good practices for promoting employability (even if USAID is not currently working in that area)?

The equity and inclusion focus theme for this activity is the extent to which the consultations and research represent diverse regions and populations.

The audiences for this activity are a) USAID Mission and Washington staff, b) USAID implementing partners, and c) other HELN members including higher education institution staff and representatives and private sector actors who are involved in college-to-career transitions.

Rationale

USAID states that “higher education (HE) plays an important role in USAID’s mission to transform countries in their journey to self-reliance by building intellectual capital, preparing the workforce, and conducting and translating research, all of which lead to strengthening economies.”¹ However, according to a report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020), “higher education is no longer a guarantee of employment and stable livelihoods given the decreasing return on investment of post-secondary education. This is mainly due to the limited number of decent jobs, inefficiencies in job-matching mechanisms and discrepancies between jobseekers’ skills and those required by employers. Consequently, many overqualified young people are pushed into occupations typically performed by those with lower levels of education.”²

The USAID Higher Education Evidence Summit in May 2022 was well-attended with robust engagement from the Africa region. In July 2022, the HELN hosted a follow-on event focused on the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region that explored one component of employability programming, specifically higher education and

¹ “What Does Higher Education in USAID Programs Look Like?” USAID, accessed April 3, 2023. www.edulinks.org/learning/what-does-higher-education-usaid-programs-look

² International Labour Organization. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the Future of Jobs* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020). https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_737648/lang-en/index.htm

industry collaborations. In both of these events, employability came across as one highlighted topic with particular interest in localized evidence from Africa and LAC. To build on momentum from the Summit and other HELN events, the Bureau for Democracy, Development, and Innovation and the Center for Education have identified a critical need for evidence on employability of higher education learners, as well as an innovative process for localizing that evidence. The work will focus on responding to local needs (learner-centered purpose) and outreach and engagement with local and global partners (learner-centered function) and contribute to answering question 4 of the USAID Higher Education Learning Agenda (How can skills or competencies [e.g., technical and soft skills] for employability best be identified, analyzed, and incorporated into curricula, teaching, and learning?)

Objectives and Outcomes

The purpose of this activity is 1) to identify evidence-based practices that support the employability of higher education learners and graduates (locally and globally) and 2) to understand how to increase usage of evidence-based practices through a localized approach to knowledge generation and dissemination in USAID programming.

Additionally, we want to understand the actors, processes, and policies that increase the employability of higher education institutions graduates. This step will allow us to identify all the leverage points to make knowledge around employability useful and actionable for higher education institutions, USAID staff, and USAID implementing partners within Africa and LAC. We may connect with the Evidence Ecosystem³ and Ecosystem Diagnostic work in SHARE.

Following the activity, audiences will be able to:

- Understand the employability ecosystem from the perspective of HEIs; the roles of local, regional, and national actors in supporting employability; and the evidence and practices they use to support college-to-career transitions
- Understand how network members (inclusive of USAID missions and implementing partners) generate and use evidence in the design and implementation of employability activities
- Understand how the evidence generated during this activity can be used to understand the challenges and successes in uptake of this product

Please note: In this activity, a working definition of employability is defined, per the ILO, as: “portable competencies and qualifications that enhance an individual’s capacity to make use of the education and training opportunities available in order to secure and retain decent work, to progress within the enterprise and between jobs, and to cope with changing technology and labor market conditions.”⁴ Though, we will research the following: How do higher education stakeholders define employability? Are there any contextual differences

³ An ecosystem can be defined as “a system that contains a large number of loosely coupled (interconnected) actors who depend on each other to ensure the overall effectiveness of the system” (Marco Iansiti and Roy Levien, “Strategy as ecology,” *Harvard Business Review* 82.3 (2004): 68-78).

⁴ International Labour Organization, accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>.

between the LAC and Africa regions?

Approach and Methodology

Phase 1:

1. Consult with the HELN Steering Group and/or HELN working group on employability (i.e., the advisory group) to guide the activity through each of the phases.
2. Conduct a desk review of the practices higher education institutions use to support the employability of graduates and any evidence of their success. Findings of the desk review should result in a higher education employability framework that explains the employability ecosystem with higher education institutions in the center.
3. Create a stakeholder consultation plan to conduct key informant interviews (KIIs) with HEIs, USAID staff, and implementing partners to understand their practices related to employability and any related evidence that will inform the direction of the research. Findings from the KIIs should refine the higher education employability framework and provide evidentiary support of the framework.
4. Create a working draft of the higher education employability framework that provides examples of employability practices, and their evidence base, used by HEIs, USAID, and implementing partners drawn from the desk review and KIIs. Working draft will be reviewed by the advisory group and used to inform Phase 2 of the activity.

Phase 2:

5. Using the evidence from Phase 1, engage in a series of local consultations (as guided by the advisory group) in Africa and Latin America to understand local practices, knowledge, and evidence on employability from a regional perspective. Consultations will share the draft employability framework with USAID staff, local implementing partners, and local higher education stakeholders to uncover knowledge gaps, applicability to their local context, and whether such evidence would be useful to inform their own employability practices. The consultation process may result in the refinement, expansion, or other changes to the research question and final knowledge products. Create technical briefs based on the consultations (e.g., regional or thematic) that share the practices, evidence, applicability, and barriers to usage that have arisen during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the process. The advisory group will provide input before these products become final. Final deliverables will be determined based on this emergent process, but can include:
 - a. Webinars related to employability for African and LAC audiences
 - b. Global knowledge product describing an employability framework in higher education
 - c. Technical briefs (e.g., regional [LAC and Africa] or thematic focus) to advance employability through higher education and the regional and local levels
 - d. TBD: A dedicated knowledge product related to process of localization for employability

Phase 3:

6. Disseminate final knowledge products, through LTLGP's dissemination channels and as directed by the advisory group. Conduct follow-up to understand usage and uptake of knowledge for stakeholders,

which could include reaching out to stakeholders at the time of dissemination on how they intend to use the products produced during this process and then conducting user outreach (a survey) to determine the usability of the knowledge products.

Quality Assurance

The Offeror will conduct all studies in adherence with the eight principles of quality⁵ as described below. These principles provide a common framework on the quality of research and evaluation studies, codifying best practices in designing, implementing, and reporting on studies. The principles are intended for social science researchers and evaluators, commissioners of social science research and evaluation, and users of social science research and evaluation. The following questions, as relevant, will be used as part of the evaluation criteria:

1. Is the study situated within a theory, and does it acknowledge existing research and pose specific questions? (*conceptual framing*)
2. Is the study transparent about the design, methods, data, and limitations? (*openness and transparency*)
3. Does the study consider the local context in the design and data collection tools? (*cultural appropriateness*)
4. Does the study use designs and methods that are appropriate to the stated purpose and research questions? (*robustness of methodology*)
5. Does the study produce credible and accurate results? (*validity*)
6. Does the study use consistent approaches and produce consistent results? (*reliability*)
7. Does the study provide a clear and logical thread linking the purpose to the methods and data to the conclusions? (*cogency*)
8. Does the study adhere to the highest ethical standards, protect the human subjects involved, and do no harm to children, vulnerable populations, or study participants? (*ethics*)

⁵ United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2022, December). *Draft research and evaluation study quality assessment tool* [Paper presentation]. Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) 2023, Washington, D.C.

Deliverables and Timeline

Task/Deliverable	Deliverable Description	Due Date
Develop the work plan	A document detailing key activities and deliverables	19 May 2023
Conduct desk review	A document describing an employability framework	12 July 2023
Consultation events (LAC and Africa)	Conduct consultations to develop a foundational understanding of the topic at the regional and local level	15 September 2023
First draft of knowledge products	Building on the research and with guidance from the advisory group, draft knowledge products that answer the research questions above	29 September 2023
Collect feedback on the knowledge products	Synthesize stakeholder feedback	1 November 2023
Finalize knowledge products	Based on feedback, complete knowledge products	22 December 2023
Dissemination	Lead web event to share the main findings and features of the knowledge products	10 January 2024
User survey	Product an instrument to collect user feedback on the utility of the content and modalities of the knowledge products	7 March 2024