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**MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL COOPERATION (MERC) PROGRAM
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
SECTION A: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	3
I. Background	
II. Achievable Objectives	
III. Funding Opportunities	
A. Applied Research Grants	
B. Continuation Grants	
C. Travel and Workshop Grants	
IV. Special Call: Proposals on Climate Change	
V. Overall Process and Notional Timeline	
SECTION B: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION	9
I. Eligible Applicants	
II. Equitable Participation, Benefit, and Gender Integration	
III. Role of the Prime Applicant	
SECTION C: PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS	10
I. Applied Research Grants	
A. Pre-Proposal Format and Requirements	
B. Required Documents	
C. Submitting the Pre-Proposal	
II. Continuation Grants	
A. Proposal Format and Requirements	
B. Required Documents	
C. Submitting the Proposal	
III. Travel and Workshop Grants	
A. Proposal Format and Requirements	
B. Required Documents	
C. Submitting the Proposal	
SECTION D: PROPOSAL REVIEW INFORMATION	19
I. Applied Research Grants	

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

- II. Continuation Grants
- III. Travel and Workshop Grants

SECTION E: FUNDING LIMITATIONS, RESTRICTIONS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS **21**

- I. Awards to Commercial Firms or For-Profit Organizations
- II. Audit Requirements
- III. Compliance with Applicable Federal Funding Regulations and DOS Terms and Conditions

SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION **22**

- I. Award Notices
- II. Reporting Requirements
- III. Federal Registrations
- IV. Administrative and National Policy Requirements
- V. Applicant Vetting as a Condition of Award
- VI. Special Provision for Performance in a Designated Combat Area (SPOT) Requirements
- VII. Branding and Marking Requirements for Grantees
- VIII. Sub Awardee Reporting Requirement

SECTION G: AGENCY CONTACTS **26**

SECTION H: DISCLAIMER **26**

SECTION I: BUDGET GUIDANCE **27**

- I. Personnel
- II. Equipment
- III. Materials and Supplies
- IV. Travel
- V. Other Direct Costs
- VI. Indirect Costs
- VII. Cost Share

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SF-424 INSTRUCTIONS

APPENDIX B: BUDGET TEMPLATE

SECTION A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

I. Background

Following the Camp David accords, a Congressional initiative brought about the Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program to be implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The program began in FY 1979, was included in the Foreign Aid Bill for FY 1981, and continues to be the subject of a Congressional directive in the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Program Appropriations Act (SFOAA) to support cooperative projects of a scientific and technological nature between the United States, Israel, and Middle East countries. Since 1999, MERC has been managed through an Inter-Agency Agreement between USAID and U.S. Department of State (DOS).

The MERC Program is funded as assistance to promote Arab-Israeli scientific cooperation, technology-led development, and capacity building. Emphasis is given to research and technology subjects of regional importance and relevance to the development of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Benefits should target developing countries in the region and populations of limited income.

Strong, direct Arab-Israeli cooperation is required for proposals receiving funding under the MERC Program. Involvement of U.S. partners and support for the participation of individuals or institutions from outside the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., Europe) is not a key feature of the MERC Program, but may be considered for modest roles in exceptional cases to meet an essential technical need that is not available in the region. Applicants must be prepared to provide a well justified case for non-regional partner participation, and accept that MERC may not support the participation of any non-regional partners.

The overall goal of the MERC Program is to enhance research and development cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors – in support of achieving a comprehensive and lasting Middle East peace.

II. Achievable Objectives

1. Support applied, actionable research that generates results relevant to regional development.
2. Foster the implementation of research results and innovations to improve quality of life and achieve development impact in the MENA region.
3. Build science and technology capacity in developing countries in the MENA region.
4. Increase direct Arab-Israeli cooperation by establishing strong working relationships that last beyond the life of the project.

III. Funding Opportunities

The MERC Program funds peer-reviewed, collaborative, scientific research projects on development topics between Israel and its Arab neighbors across the MENA region. As part of this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), MERC is seeking to fund proposals in the following categories:

1. **Applied research grants:** Multi-year, joint Arab-Israeli projects
2. **Continuation grants:** Funding to extend existing or recently ended MERC awards
3. **Travel and workshop grants:** Support for workshops, meetings, and researcher exchange

Carefully read each section in its entirety to understand the unique requirements of each category. Applicants (both institutions and individual investigators) may submit more than one proposal to one or

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

more categories. Proposals to the MERC Program are not restricted to a particular technical sector; however, under this current NOFO, the program has a special interest in proposals aligned with the U.S. Government priority on climate change (see SECTION A, PART IV below).

This NOFO does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of the U.S. government to make any awards, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of a proposal.

A. Applied Research Grants

The MERC Program seeks pre-proposals pertaining to applied research and technology development within the broad areas of the natural, physical, and social sciences and engineering. Pre-proposals under this category should present collaborative applied research projects on topics of regional development relevance between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Pre-proposals should relate to regional problems that benefit from cross-border cooperation.

As MERC uses the scientific peer review process to evaluate full proposals, avoid topics that are not traditionally subject to peer review. Investigators are encouraged to employ mixed-methods research, economic evaluations, and the use of digital technologies in their work where appropriate. Examples of the types of development impacts MERC aims to achieve include but are not limited to: economic growth that increases incomes of the disadvantaged, improved environmental management, increased food production, water conservation and efficient use, and improved delivery of health services through better treatments or health management strategies.

MERC emphasizes training, outreach, and dissemination of research results that ideally impact management and policy-making in MENA. Travel and training within the MENA region are encouraged to achieve the purposes of a well-conceived proposal and support direct Arab-Israeli cooperation. Equipment, modest improvement of facilities, communications, publications, and dissemination of results are supported as they directly relate to the proposal's objectives. MERC may also support additional "people to people" components beyond a research and development program, such as outreach activities, training, or extension in support the proposal's objectives.

The consortium of applicants may be bi-lateral (one Israeli and one Arab country partner) or may have many partners from multiple Israeli institutions and/or multiple Arab countries and institutions, but must include at least one Israeli and one Arab country partner.

The following activities and costs are **NOT ALLOWED** under this announcement category:

- Basic research
- Activities that appear partisan or that support individual or party electoral campaigns
- Projects which solely or predominantly represent the development of physical infrastructures, core support for organizations, or delivery of services, including:
 - Construction of laboratories or clinics
 - Delivery of health services
 - Delivery of educational services
 - Social development programs
 - Establishment of private enterprises and projects of a commercial or profit-making nature
- Projects lacking an innovative approach, or primarily constitute:
 - Planning studies or case studies

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

- Operations research, surveys, evaluations, and baseline data collection
- Routine geographical mapping
- Literature reviews
- Social welfare projects
- Paying to complete activities begun with other (non-MERC) funds
- One-time events, such as stand-alone conferences and one-off round tables
- Entertainment costs (e.g., receptions, social activities, ceremonies, alcoholic beverages, guided tours)

Pre-proposals that include any of these activities or costs may not be advanced for review and may be deemed ineligible for funding under this announcement.

Estimated Award Ceiling: \$1,000,000

Estimated Award Floor: None

Cost-Sharing or Matching: No minimum or maximum percentage is required for this competition; however, institutions in Israel and other affluent countries are expected to provide cost share in order to offset comparatively higher salaries and costs. MERC funds should be preferentially targeted to ensure the full participation of the students and research staff in participating countries that are less economically advantaged.

Estimated Length of Project: 2 to 5 years

Applicants with complex, multi-partner concepts that justify a proposal budget in excess of \$1,000,000 may present a “phased” work plan with well-defined deliverables and outcomes at the conclusion of each phase. This combined work plan and budget may be in excess of \$1,000,000 over several years, but each individual phase should not be in excess of \$1,000,000. The pre-proposal should present the first phase, but briefly describe the objectives and anticipated outcomes of the subsequent phase(s).

MERC anticipates inviting approximately 15 pre-proposals from this category to submit full proposals.

Applicants under this category are required only to submit a pre-proposal as described in SECTION C. If a full proposal is invited, guidelines for preparing the full proposal and specific invitation conditions will be provided to the applicants.

Requests for funding to extend beyond the initial budget period will be entertained on the basis of a successful proposal for a Continuation Grant (next section).

B. Continuation Grants

Applicants with current or recently ended MERC awards may submit proposals to be evaluated as “continuation grants” (formerly known as “fast track”), skipping the scientific peer review process. Continuation grants provide support for the implementation, commercialization, broader dissemination, or uptake of project results from MERC-supported research. Depending on the type of project and results obtained, MERC would favor private sector partnerships, a focus on end-user adoption of technology, or tailoring outcomes to be useful to regulators in government agencies.

This option can also be used to propose the incorporation of an additional country partner to a current award, or to propose an additional objective(s) be added on to a current award as supported by preliminary findings.

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

Concepts proposing new objectives or methodologies that were not previously subject to scientific peer review may be required to submit a new pre-proposal (PART A). Applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with MERC prior to submission to ensure proposals are suitable for consideration for continuation funding.

MERC will review each grantee's progress in meeting grant requirements, including timely submission of required reports, and compliance with all terms and conditions of the award; timely submission of a request for continuation funding; the availability of funds; and evaluate whether continued funding would be in the best interest of the MERC Program.

The same activities and costs disallowed under the Applied Research Grants category are also disallowed under this announcement category.

Estimated Award Ceiling: \$500,000

Estimated Award Floor: None

Cost-Sharing or Matching: No minimum or maximum percentage is required for this competition; however, institutions in Israel and other affluent countries are expected to provide cost share in order to offset comparatively higher salaries and costs. MERC funds should be preferentially targeted to ensure the full participation of the students and research staff in participating countries that are less economically advantaged.

Estimated Length of Project: 1 to 3 years

C. Travel and Workshop Grants

Proposals to support joint Arab-Israeli workshops, meetings, or exchange of researchers may be considered under this category. MERC acknowledges the relatively limited opportunities for scientific exchange between Arab and Israeli scientists and seeks to support forums that advance dialogue on regional scientific issues, develop new partnerships, or deliver training on a topic relevant to regional development. Preference will be given to proposals that cite the development of new pre-proposals to the MERC program as a key outcome, engage students and early career researchers, meaningfully engage policymakers and stakeholders, and are organized in the Middle East region.

It would be suitable to propose one prime recipient/grantee and no sub-recipients under this category, provided the prime intends to organize an activity that is joint Arab-Israeli and directly cover the associated costs for participants.

Examples of potential activities that would be considered under this category include:

- A multi-day training program focused on bringing together early career researchers to develop specific skills or know-how related to a regional development priority
- A meeting of stakeholders to discuss research gaps in a particular sector with relevance to regional development
- A workshop of researchers and stakeholders with shared interests to identify potential areas for cross-border scientific cooperation
- An Israeli institution hosting a visiting researcher from an Arab country (or vice versa) for a couple months to learn a new technique and develop a research partnership

Estimated Award Ceiling: \$100,000

Estimated Award Floor: None

Cost-Sharing or Matching: No minimum or maximum percentage is required for this competition; however, institutions in Israel and other affluent countries are expected to provide cost share in order to offset comparatively higher salaries and costs. MERC funds should be preferentially targeted to ensure the full participation of the students and research staff in participating countries that are less economically advantaged.

Estimated Length of Project: One activity, event, or exchange to be completed within one year of the award.

MERC anticipates advancing approximately 3 proposals from this category for funding consideration.

VI. Special Call: Proposals on Climate Change

As part of this NOFO, in alignment with the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27) priorities, and in order to achieve the ambitious goals of [USAID's 2022-2030 Climate Strategy](#), MERC is particularly interested in receiving proposals of relevance to climate change.

The implications of climate change are especially severe in the MENA region, with impacts including rising temperatures, floods, droughts, and desertification. These in turn are increasing water and food insecurity, threats of emerging infectious diseases, agricultural pests, and social inequality. Promoting environmental stewardship and science and technology-based innovation is essential for tackling climate change, building resilient healthy communities, preserving natural resources, supporting equitable and sustainable economic growth, and promoting peace in the MENA.

With this special call, MERC aims to promote Arab-Israeli partnerships and innovative approaches that address climate mitigation (reducing and sequestering greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (reducing climate vulnerability and improving resilience to climate impacts) priorities in the MENA.

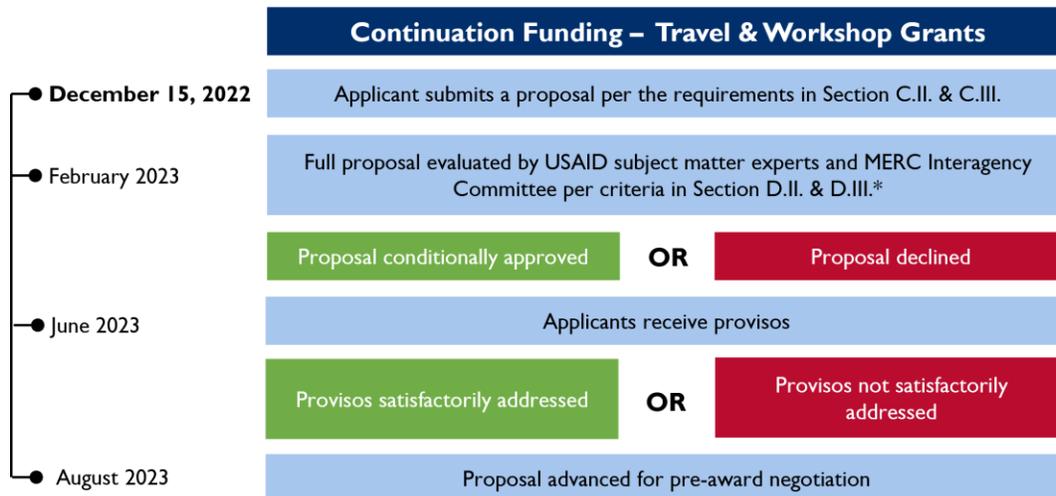
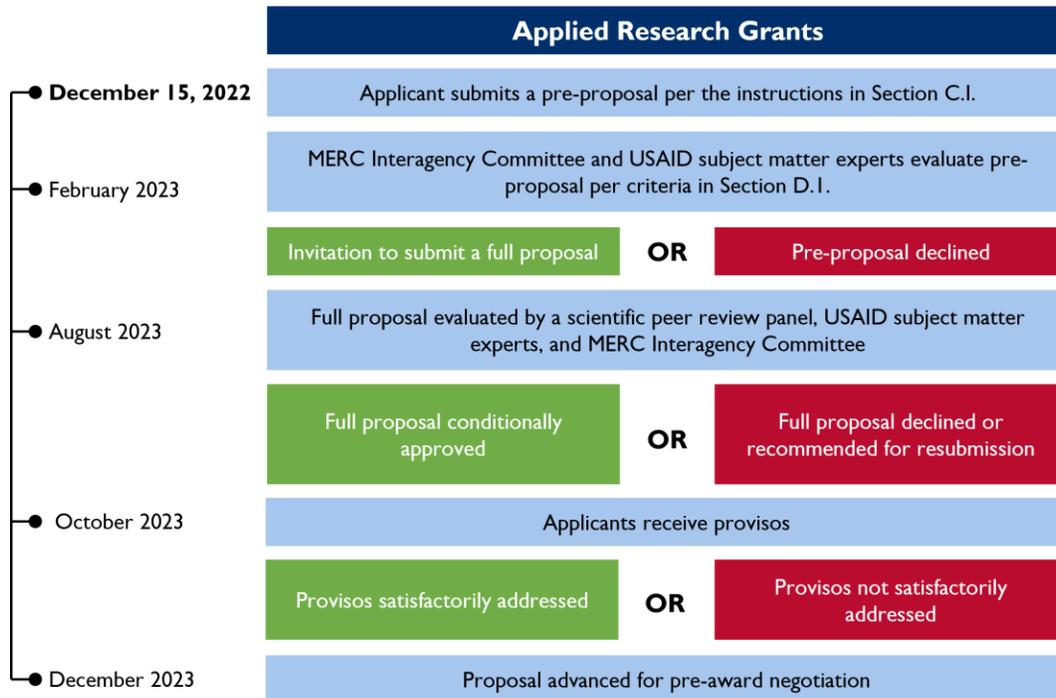
Applicants who wish to respond to this special call may apply for an **applied research grant, continuation grant, or travel and workshop grant** (as described above) and should aim to integrate as many as possible of the following foundational principles from USAID's Climate Strategy into their proposals:

- **Evidence, technology, and innovation:** Generate evidence and spur innovation to identify and deploy effective climate solutions.
- **Nature-based solutions:** Engage in research that supports the conservation, restoration, or management of areas with a climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation benefit. This covers research on natural areas and/ or research that supports reconciliation ecology in human dominated habitats.
- **Locally led development:** Design a technical work plan and relevant outreach activities to yield outcomes that are locally led, owned, and implemented, as well as tailored and context appropriate.
- **Equity and inclusion:** Plan to engage local, marginalized, and underrepresented groups as agents of change.
- **Private-sector engagement:** Partner with the private sector to expand the scale, impact, and sustainability of research outcomes.

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

This special call for proposals should not discourage applicants from submitting proposals on any other topic within the natural, physical, and social sciences and engineering.

V. Overall Process and Notional Timeline



* Proposals may be sent for external evaluation by peer reviewers if the technical content cannot be adequately assessed by USAID

SECTION B. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Proposals will be screened to determine whether they meet the program eligibility requirements detailed below. Proposals that do not demonstrate that they meet all eligibility requirements described below may not be advanced for review and may be deemed ineligible for funding under this announcement. Proposals cannot be revised or amended once the competition deadline has passed.

Please contact merc@usaid.gov if you have questions about eligibility.

I. Eligible Applicants

Only proposals developed jointly by Arab and Israeli investigators are accepted. All proposals must include **at least one institutional partner in Israel and one in an Arab country/territory** eligible to receive U.S. foreign assistance. Proposals involving three or more regional partners are also allowed and encouraged. The proposal may be submitted by any party in the collaboration. Partners may come from academic, private sector, non-governmental, or governmental institutions.

Subject to change based on U.S. federal law and country-specific restrictions on funding, the following countries/territories are eligible to apply as Arab partners: Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank & Gaza.

MERC projects involving Israel and another relatively affluent Arab country (e.g., Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) must include a developing country from the region as a partner and/or a beneficiary of the products and processes developed by the research in order to achieve development impact. These affluent countries must adhere to budgetary restrictions, such as cost-sharing in support of salaries and cost of living, maintain the spirit of Arab-Israeli cooperation opposed to primarily engaging foreign expatriates, and target benefits and outcomes of the project to countries and populations of limited income. Satellite or portal campuses of foreign (e.g., U.S., India) institutions are not considered eligible Arab partners.

MERC does not encourage the involvement of U.S. partners nor participation of individuals or institutions from outside the Middle East and North Africa region (e.g., Europe). U.S. partners may be considered for modest roles in exceptional cases to meet an essential technical need that is not available in the region. Applicants must be prepared to provide a very well justified case for the participation of partners or individuals from outside the MENA region, and accept that MERC may not support the participation of any non-regional partners. The use of any non-regional partner to lead or administer the overall project is discouraged.

II. Equitable Participation, Benefit, and Gender Integration

MERC is committed to an anti-discrimination policy in all of its programs and activities. MERC welcomes proposals irrespective of an applicants' race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, and encourages proposals from organizations working with underserved communities, including women, people with disabilities, and youth.

Furthermore, research must meet standards of equity in access to research funds, participation in research, benefits from research findings, and safety in research efforts. Issues of gender equity are of special concern.

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

Assessment of equity in research programs will also include concern for ethnic and racial minorities and other disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

Applicants are encouraged to address any potential biases inherent in their proposal. Consider any differences in how women, men, youth, those with disabilities, or other minority groups might engage with or benefit from a technology, product, or protocol under development, or how they might benefit or equitably participate in research, training, or outreach activities.

III. Role of the Prime Applicant

MERC's preferred award structure is a prime recipient who receives the grant, issues sub-award agreements to sub-recipients, and transfers payments to sub-recipients. If the consortium of partners involved in the proposal would require an alternative award management structure, describe those constraints within the proposal to the extent possible. Applicants with questions about award structure are encouraged to contact merc@usaid.gov.

SECTION C. PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

I. Applied Research Grants

A. Pre-Proposal Format and Requirements

The main body of the pre-proposal (Parts 1-11, below) must be no more than 6 pages (U.S. Letter, 8.5 x 11 inches) with one-inch margins, single spaced, using a full-size font (e.g., 12 pt Times New Roman). All proposals must be prepared in English, in the following format, and contain each of the following elements. Additional pages (such as letters of support) may be included, but any pages beyond the 6-page limit may not be evaluated or considered as part of the pre-proposal. Do not include biographical data sheets, CVs or resumes, publications, or general institutional information such as brochures. All pre-proposals must stand on their own merit. The pre-proposal and any additional pages should be saved as one PDF document.

Submissions that do not follow the format, or are incomplete, may be declined without review.

Investigators from all participating institutions must collaborate in writing the pre-proposal. Pre-proposals are not binding agreements; therefore, signatures from institution officials are not required at the pre-proposal stage. Do not include the names of investigators/participants unless they were active participants in preparing the pre-proposal and have given their permission.

1. **Title:** Provide a technical, concise, descriptive title.
2. **Investigators:** List the full name (first and LAST name, using all uppercase letters for surname only), title, affiliation, full mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address of every investigator. Clearly identify the principal investigator at the submitting institution (i.e., prime applicant) to whom all correspondence should be addressed. If more than one investigator is listed at the other cooperating institution(s), identify the primary point of contact.
3. **Overall aim and technical objectives:** State the overall aim of the project in one sentence or very short paragraph. State the specific technical objectives (typically 3 or 4 objectives presented as a short list). The specific objectives should each be instrumental to achieve the overall aim of the project. Explicitly articulate the hypotheses being tested.

4. **Relevance of the project to Middle East development:** (approx. ¼ to ½ page) Briefly discuss the significance of the proposed research and how it will advance a practical application to development in the Middle East and North Africa, address a key challenge in the region, and benefit a population (particularly in developing or USAID-presence countries and communities of limited income). Briefly, but clearly, describe the size/magnitude of the problem being addressed in terms of its impact on the Middle East region. Also describe the impact the proposed project intends to achieve and mechanisms to put the research results into practice.

5. **Technical background:** (approx. ½ page) Provide a brief summary of earlier studies, the technical basis and starting point for the work proposed, preliminary data if available, and citations of a few key literature references, as appropriate. This summary should also clarify why the proposed research is scientifically important.

6. **Technical work plan:** (approx. 1 to 2 pages) Provide a detailed description of the proposed work, outlining the specific technical activities and experimental design proposed for this project. State the scientific hypotheses and how they will be tested. Be specific about which experiments you intend to do and why. Do not generalize. Similarly, describe and justify any other related technical activities you plan to include.

Tip: The pre-proposal will be reviewed by both non-technical staff (those without a scientific background) and technical staff (those with a scientific background). Parts 4-6, in particular, should be presented such that the value of the proposed research and approach can be appreciated by a general audience, but specific enough to provide technical reviewers with sufficient detail to appreciate the technical merit.

7. **Innovation:** (approx. ½ page) Provide a brief description of what is new or innovative about the proposed activity, including how it represents a significant departure from other work in this area.

8. **Project structure and management:** (approx. ½ page)

- Briefly describe the division of labor among partners and the capabilities and substantive contributions of each partner institution. Indicate how the capacity of institutions in the participating countries to conduct research would be enhanced by the project.
- Describe organizational and operational plans for managing the collaboration financially and programmatically. Include project meetings, technical and management committees, etc., if applicable.
- Identify which single institution would serve as the prime grantee and be responsible for technical and financial reporting. MERC's default award structure is a prime grantee who receives the grant, issues sub-award agreements, and transfers payment to sub-recipients. If the consortium of partners involved in the project would require an alternative award management structure, note those constraints here. Applicants with questions about award structure are encouraged to reach out to MERC.
- Involvement of U.S. partners and support for the participation of individuals or institutions from outside the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., Europe) is not a key feature of the MERC Program. If your proposal includes a non-regional partner, summarize the critical importance of that partner, including the technical expertise they provide that is both essential to the success of the project and unavailable in the Middle East.

9. Joint Arab-Israeli activities planned: (approx. ½ page) Provide a brief, specific description of the planned interactions between Arab and Israeli participants. Present evidence that this project would be a true intellectual partnership. For example, would there be joint decision making, shared data analysis, direct Arab-Israeli exchanges of personnel (e.g., scientists in residence, the training of students from other countries), joint Arab-Israeli publications, conferences and workshops in the region, etc.? List the specific face-to-face joint activities that would occur in the project itself and when they would occur. If a U.S. partner is involved in the project, also describe how that partner will avoid becoming a buffer to direct cooperation between the regional parties.

Tip: Partners under MERC awards are expected to conduct in-person coordination meetings at least once per year. Successful applicants generally host joint training sessions on technical topics, and/or support student exchange. End-users of research products are frequently involved from the beginning of the project and are engaged via outreach presentations, demonstration days, etc.

10. Expected benefits of the project: (approx. ½ page) Identify who would be the primary beneficiaries of the information, technologies, or management practices developed by the project; if possible, include numbers affected, their socio-economic status, and gender. Also describe how impact would be assessed. Describe how the project results would be disseminated to those beneficiaries, and in what form, to ensure that the impact of the program is realized. Provide evidence to indicate that the Arab-Israeli cooperation and project impact will be sustainable beyond the life of the project (e.g., other sources of financial support or institutional commitments; other people and organizations that will begin implementing or using research results such as extension agents, service providers, private sector, etc.).

11. Budget: (approx. ½ page) See SECTION I. BUDGET GUIDANCE. A budget template and more detailed budget guidelines will be provided to applicants invited to submit a full proposal. At this stage, applicants should prepare a budget based on realistic anticipated costs associated with the proposed work plan. The budget must be prepared in U.S. dollars, indicating projected expenses in the budget categories listed below, entering the amounts in a table like the example provided below.

- Personnel: List each individual salary or personnel cost on a separate line, using as many lines as necessary.
- Equipment, and Materials and supplies: Estimate materials costs, such as reagents and other expendables, on a separate line from equipment. Equipment is defined as any individual item over \$5,000. Items under \$5,000 should be included under materials. At the full proposal stage, applicants will be required to provide price quotes for requested equipment.
- Indirect costs: See SECTION I for guidance on how to calculate indirect costs (i.e., overhead).
- Use a separate single column for each participating institution, and estimate any cost share that might be expected from each institution.
- Projects are not required to spend in every category.
- At the bottom of the budget table, include total expense (sum) by institution and by country, the overall total project cost to MERC, and specify the duration of the project (number of years).
- In a short footnote, briefly justify any requested equipment, describe the types of expenses under “Other direct costs,” and clarify any other line items that may not be intuitive from the pre-proposal.

Example budget table

	Institute 1		Institute 2		Sum	
	USAID	Cost Share	USAID	Cost Share	USAID	Cost Share

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

Personnel						
Position 1 (% effort, rate)						
Position 2 (% effort, rate)						
Equipment						
Equipment item 1						
Equipment item 2						
Materials and supplies						
Materials type 1						
Materials type 2						
Travel						
International travel						
Domestic travel						
Other direct costs						
Indirect costs						
Totals (# of years)						

If the MERC Committee recommends to invite a full proposal from the applicants, guidelines for preparing a full proposal and specific invitation conditions will be provided to the applicants.

B. Required Documents

Applicants under this category are only required to submit a 6-page pre-proposal as described above.

If the MERC Committee recommends to invite a full proposal, guidelines for preparing a full proposal and specific invitation conditions will be provided to the applicants. The full proposal will detail and expand upon the concept outlined in the pre-proposal and require signatures from the applicants and authorizing officials at the applicant institutions. As a requirement of the full proposal, applicant organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, and an active account with the System for Award Management (SAM) (See SECTION F, Part III. Federal Registrations for more details). Prime applicants will also need to provide a completed SF-424 as part of the full proposal.

Pre-proposals for applied research grants need not include their UEI, signatures of the applicants or authorizing officials, nor provide a completed SF-424.

C. Submitting the Pre-Proposal

Applicants must submit pre-proposals in the required format as an email attachment to **merc@usaid.gov** by **11:59pm EST on December 15, 2022** with the email subject “MERC Applied Research Grant Pre-Proposal - LAST NAME” including the last name of the principal investigator. MERC will acknowledge receipt of pre-proposals by email. Hard copies are not accepted.

II. Continuation Grants

A. Proposal Format and Requirements

The main body of the proposal (Parts 1-13, below) should be approximately 10 pages (U.S. Letter, 8.5 x 11 inches) with one-inch margins, single spaced, using a full-size font (e.g., 12 pt Times New Roman). All proposals must be prepared in English, in the following format, and contain each of the following elements. Letters of support, CVs of newly added investigators, and other supporting documentation should be included as appendices and are not counted as part of the 10-page estimate. The entire proposal and appendices should be saved as one PDF document.

Submissions that do not follow the format, or are incomplete, may be declined without review.

Investigators from all participating institutions must collaborate in writing the proposal. Proposals are not binding agreements; however, to demonstrate commitment to the concept applicants are required to include a signature page (Part 13).

1. **Title:** Provide a concise, descriptive title for the proposed event or activity.

2. **Contact information:**

- a. **Investigators:** List the full name (first and LAST name, using all uppercase letters for surname only), title, affiliation, full mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address of every investigator. Clearly identify the primary investigator at the submitting institution to whom all correspondence should be addressed. If more than one investigator is listed at the other cooperating institution(s), identify the primary point of contact.
- b. **Institutional administrative officials:** Provide the full name (first and LAST name, using all uppercase letters for surname only), title, affiliation, full mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the officials at each investigator’s institution authorized to negotiate a legal agreement for that institution or organization.

3. **Technical summary:** (½ page) Provide a brief technical summary of the project, similar to the abstract for a scientific paper or meeting, structured per the following outline. Summarize each of the following components in 1-2 sentences. Ensure that it is concise yet accurately summarizes the proposed work.

- a. **Background:** An overview of the challenge the research addresses.
- b. **Aims:** The aim and technical objectives of the project.
- c. **Methodology:** The approach to be taken to address the project’s objectives.
- d. **Expected outcomes:** The anticipated deliverables and/or potential scientific and development benefits of the research.
- e. **Implementation:** Indicate how the results will be put into practice through stakeholder engagement, trainings, workshops, technology transfer, demonstration sites, etc.

4. **Overall aim and technical objectives:** State the overall aim of the project in one sentence or very short paragraph. State the specific technical objectives (typically 3 or 4 objectives, presented as a short list). The

specific objectives should each be instrumental to achieve the overall aim of the project. If they are not otherwise clear, it may be appropriate to explicitly articulate the hypotheses being tested.

5. Summary of prior work: (½ page) Summarize earlier studies, the technical basis and starting point for the work proposed, preliminary data if available, and citations of a few key literature references, as appropriate. Describe the outcomes under the current or recently ended MERC award that established the basis for this proposal.

6. Technical work plan: (approx. 3 to 5 pages) Describe the experimental design, methods to be used (including any special techniques), and research protocols (including any statistical designs of experiments and statistical analyses of results). Ideally, describe the approach step-by-step. Cite appropriate references throughout. Also, include the following:

- a. Technical contingencies: Potential points of failure in the work plan and associated risk mitigation measures or alternatives;
- b. Time chart: Include research milestones, project meetings, training/exchanges, outreach events;
- c. Location information: Present as a map or chart, for any field plots or sampling locations involved in the proposal research; and
- d. Data management plan: Describe the kinds of data the project will generate, how data and/or research products will be made available to the public, industry, and scientific community, and any ethical or privacy issues associated with sharing generated data.

7. Management and cooperation (approx. 2 to 3 pages) Clarify whether the overall management structure differs from the current or recently ended MERC award and identify which single institution would serve as the prime grantee and be responsible for technical and financial reporting. (Note: It is generally preferred to maintain the prime institution from any current MERC award.) Also, include the following:

- a. Joint activities: Provide a table specifying the anticipated joint Arab-Israeli activities, training or researcher exchange, and outreach with stakeholders, including their timing within the project, duration, location(s), what would occur, and number and composition of participants to the extent they can be determined at this time. Activities should be planned in one of the partner countries.
- b. Facilities: Describe the institutional facilities and resources available for the proposed research. Demonstrate that the required facilities are indeed available to accomplish the specified functions, including equipment currently in use that will be used to accomplish the goals of the proposed project. Justify the acquisition of any additional facilities (e.g., land leasing, rental space) if requested in the budget.

8. Expected benefits of the project: (approx. ½ page) Identify who would be the primary beneficiaries of the information, technologies, or management practices developed by the project; if possible include numbers affected, their socio-economic status, and gender. Also describe how impact would be assessed. Describe how the project results would be disseminated to those beneficiaries, and in what form, to ensure that the impact of the program is realized. Provide evidence to indicate that the Arab-Israeli cooperation and project impact will be sustainable beyond the life of the project (e.g., other sources of financial support or institutional commitments; other people and organizations that will begin implementing or using research results such as extension agents, service providers, private sector, etc.).

9. Special concerns analysis: (approx. ½ page) Revisit the “Special Concerns Analysis” from the current or recently ended award and update the narrative as appropriate for this additional proposed work plan. Specifically address any potential gender-related biases (e.g., equitable participation, benefit from the outcomes) inherent in the planned activity. Consider any difference in how women, men, youth, those with disabilities, or other minority groups might engage with, benefit from, or equitably participate in the activity.

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

10. **Budget:** (1 to 2 pages) Provide a budget table for each year of the proposed project and a summary budget table with the life-of-project budget totals. Screenshots of MS Excel Budget Template tables (see below in Part B) are appropriate to insert in this section, but the images must be legible.

11. **Budget justification:** (1 page) A narrative must explain how the individual items of the budget were derived and calculated. Explain the basis of the proposed costs for each line item and confirm adherence with the policies described in SECTION I. BUDGET GUIDANCE, or justify any deviation. Take great care to ensure that the budget justification matches the amounts listed in the budget spreadsheet, and that those costs also match the details of the work plan and joint activities described in the proposal.

12. **NCAGE and SAM registration:** The submitting institution (i.e., the prime recipient/grantee) must provide both their NCAGE code and Unique Entity Identification (UEI) from SAM.gov with their proposal package. See SECTION F, Part III. Federal Registrations for more information. Sub-recipients/awardees are not required to have a UEI number prior to the submission of a proposal but must have one prior to a sub-award being issued.

13. **Signature page:** Include a signature page as indicated below.

- a. **Investigators' signatures:** Provide signatures of the primary investigator and co-investigators from each of the cooperating institutions, affirming the following declaration:

The undersigned affirm that this proposal represents their individual and collective original work, and that they individually and collectively agree to participate in the activity as described if funded.

- b. **Authorizing signatures:** Provide signatures of authorized officials from the institution designated to be the prime grantee, and from each institution that is proposed to receive a sub-grant, affirming the following declaration:

Each of the undersigned affirms that this proposal represents an authorized submission of the institution that the undersigned represents, that it has been prepared using the appropriate accounting and other practices of that institution, and that the institution intends to devote the specified staff, facilities, and financial resources to the project if funded.

B. Required Documents

Proposal: As described above in Part A and saved as a PDF. If provisionally approved, MERC may request revisions, or additional details or clarification to the proposal.

Budget: Review SECTION I. BUDGET GUIDANCE. Applicants should use the template provided in APPENDIX B (“Continuation” tabs) to prepare a budget based on realistic anticipated costs associated with the proposed work plan. Submit as a MS Excel file.

SF-424: The submitting institution must provide the completed Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424). Instructions relevant to MERC applicants are included in APPENDIX A. A fillable PDF can be downloaded here: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-family.html>

C. Submitting the Proposal

Submit the required documents in one email with attachments to merc@usaid.gov by **11:59pm EST on December 15, 2022** with the email subject “MERC Continuation Grant Proposal - LAST NAME” including the last name of the principal investigator. MERC will acknowledge receipt of proposals by email. Hard copies are not accepted.

III. Travel and Workshop Grants

A. Proposal Format and Requirements

The main body of the proposal (Parts 1-12, below) must be no more than 6 pages (U.S. Letter, 8.5 x 11 inches) with one-inch margins, single spaced, using a full-size font (e.g., 12 pt Times New Roman). All proposals must be prepared in English, in the following format, and contain each of the following elements. Additional pages (such as letters of support, biographies of organizers or key individuals, or relevant workshop/training materials) may be included, but any pages beyond the 6-page limit may not be evaluated by the review committee or considered as part of the proposal. The entire pre-proposal should be saved as one PDF document.

Submissions that do not follow the format, or are incomplete, may be declined without review.

Investigators from all participating institutions must collaborate in writing the proposal. Proposals are not binding agreements; however, to demonstrate commitment to the concept applicants are required to include a signature page (Part 12).

1. **Title:** Provide a concise, descriptive title for the proposed event or activity.
2. **Contact information:**
 - a. **Organizers:** List the full name (first and LAST name, using all uppercase letters for surname only), title, affiliation, full mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address of every organizer. Clearly identify the primary organizer at the submitting institution to whom all correspondence should be addressed. If more than one organizer is listed at the other cooperating institution(s), identify the primary point of contact.
 - b. **Institutional administrative officials:** Provide the full name (first and LAST name, using all uppercase letters for surname only), title, affiliation, full mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the officials at each organizer's institution authorized to negotiate a legal agreement for that institution or organization.
3. **Abstract:** (3 or 4 sentences) Provide a general, summary description of the activity's overall aims and scope. Specify whether the proposal is for a workshop, meeting, training, or a researcher exchange. Summarize the activity's rationale, anticipated participants, and anticipated outcomes (paraphrasing the subsequent sections below).
4. **Rationale:** (approx. ¼ to ½ page) Define the overall aim and specific objectives. Describe the current status of the research on the topic of focus, justify why there's a need for Arab-Israeli cooperation on this issue, and discuss how the topic relates to Middle East development.
5. **Agenda:** (approx. ½ to 1 page) Provide an agenda for the activity, identifying the timeframe of the activity, topics to be covered, location, and facilities to be used. Indicate whether the activity is dependent upon occurring on a specific date or in coordination with another event. Preference is given to applicants seeking support for travel and activities within Israel and the Middle East and North Africa region.
6. **Organization and structure:** (approx. ½ page) Specify who will organize/administer the activity and their qualifications to do so. Specify which institution(s) will handle the management and disbursement of funds and activity logistics, travel arrangements, and their capacity to do so. Describe the roles of any additional key individuals or institutions. Note: Neither USAID nor the U.S. Department of State will assist organizers or participants in obtaining travel documents or visas.

7. **Participants:** (approx. ½ page) Estimate the total number of participants and indicate the country(ies) they will be joining from. If applicable, describe how participants will be contacted or recruited to participate. Activities should aim to primarily benefit participants from developing Arab countries. Travel support for individuals or institutions from outside the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., U.S., Europe), even if the activity is hosted in the MENA region, will not be considered.

- a. **Equitable participation and benefit:** Address any potential gender-related biases (e.g., equitable participation, benefit from the outcomes) inherent in the planned activity. Consider any difference in how women, men, youth, those with disabilities, or other minority groups might engage with, benefit from, or equitably participate in the activity.
- b. **Contingencies:** Describe any contingency plans. For example, consider the options in the event the estimated number of participants are not able or willing to attend, cancel their attendance with short notice, or an emerging situation in the region prevents cross-border travel.

8. **Outcomes:** (approx. ¼ to ½ page) Describe the anticipated outcomes from the activity, including submission of pre-proposals to MERC or another donor, follow-on activities, publications, or any other intended continued contact with participants.

9. **Budget:** (1 to 2 pages) Provide a budget table. A screenshot of MS Excel Budget Template tables (see below in Part B) are appropriate to insert in this section, but the images must be legible. Specific notes on the anticipated expenses under this funding opportunity follow:

- **Personnel:** Applicants may include costs associated with staff time for organization and travel coordination. Preferably these costs would be shared by the applicant institution(s).
- **Activity costs:** Individually itemize any facility rental fees, and materials and supplies for participants. Travel and transport costs of participants during a training, workshop, or seminar (e.g., hiring a bus to visit field sites as part of a meeting or workshop) may be included here.
- **Participant costs:** Separate into the categories below. If participants are joining an event from multiple international locations, it may be helpful to duplicate the participant cost section for each set of travelers from each location.
 - **Air travel:** All U.S. federal government financed international air transportation is required by [49 U.S.C. 40118](#), commonly referred to as the "Fly America Act," to use U.S. air carrier service for all air travel and cargo transportation services. Exceptions vary depending on the direction of travel and are outlined in [41 CFR 301-10.136](#) and [41 CFR 301-10.137](#). Budget accordingly. Tickets should be economy class and any exceptions must be justified and approved by MERC.
 - **Lodging:** Rates must not exceed the [U.S. Government rates](#).
 - **Per diem:** Costs should be modest, and must not exceed the [U.S. Government rates](#).
 - **Ground transportation:** Costs associated with participant arrival/departure from the activity.
 - **Other expenses:** May include border crossing fees, visa fees, etc.
- **Indirect costs:** See SECTION I for guidance on how to calculate indirect costs (i.e., overhead). Note that the *de minimus* indirect cost rate may not be applied to per diem.

10. **Budget justification:** (½ to 1 page) A narrative must explain how the individual items of the budget were derived and calculated. Explain the basis of the proposed costs for each line item and confirm adherence with the policies described in SECTION I. BUDGET GUIDANCE, or justify any deviation. Take great care to ensure that the budget justification matches the amounts listed in the budget spreadsheet, and that those costs also match the details of the proposal.

11. NCAGE and SAM registration: The submitting institution (i.e., the prime recipient/grantee) must provide both their NCAGE code and Unique Entity Identification (UEI) from SAM.gov with their proposal package. See SECTION F, Part III. Federal Registrations for more information. Sub-recipients/awardees are not required to have a UEI number prior to the submission of a proposal but must have one prior to a sub-award being issued.

12. Signature page: Attach a signature page as indicated below.

- c. **Organizers' signatures:** Provide signatures of the primary organizer and co-organizers from each of the cooperating institutions, affirming the following declaration:

The undersigned affirm that this proposal represents their individual and collective original work, and that they individually and collectively agree to participate in the activity as described if funded.

- d. **Authorizing signatures:** Provide signatures of authorized officials from the institution designated to be the prime grantee, and from each institution that is proposed to receive a sub-grant, affirming the following declaration:

Each of the undersigned affirms that this proposal represents an authorized submission of the institution that the undersigned represents, that it has been prepared using the appropriate accounting and other practices of that institution, and that the institution intends to devote the specified staff, facilities, and financial resources to the project if funded.

B. Required Documents

Proposal: As described above in Part A and saved as a PDF. If provisionally approved, MERC may request revisions, or additional details or clarification to the proposal.

Budget: Review SECTION I. BUDGET GUIDANCE. Applicants should use the template provided in APPENDIX B ("Travel & Workshop" tab) to prepare a budget based on realistic anticipated costs associated with the proposed work plan. Submit as a MS Excel file.

SF-424: The submitting institution must provide the completed Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424). Instructions relevant to MERC applicants are included in APPENDIX A. A fillable PDF can be downloaded here: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-family.html>

C. Submitting the Proposal

Submit the required documents as one email with attachments to **merc@usaid.gov** by **11:59pm on December 15, 2022** with the email subject "MERC Travel/Workshop Grant Proposal - LAST NAME" including the last name of the primary organizer. MERC will acknowledge receipt of proposals by email. Hard copies are not accepted.

SECTION D. PROPOSAL REVIEW INFORMATION

MERC is committed to ensuring a competitive and standardized process for awarding funding. Proposals will be screened to determine whether they meet the eligibility requirements outlined in SECTION B and have followed the required format in SECTION C. Proposals that do not meet these requirements may not advance to review and may be deemed ineligible for funding under this NOFO.

Proposals will be reviewed by an Interagency Committee composed of U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Department of State representatives from technical and regional offices. This

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

committee meets to review each eligible proposal and decide which to invite for full proposal submission, or to otherwise advance. Final award decisions will be influenced by whether the proposal meets MERC's programmatic goals and objectives

I. Applied Research Grants

The MERC Interagency Committee uses the following criteria to evaluate pre-proposals (and full proposals) under the applied research grants and continuation funding categories:

Strength and durability of Arab-Israeli cooperation: The project should be a collaborative effort between Arab and Israeli partners. Both Arab and Israeli institutions should have full intellectual roles in the partnership. The project should include joint activities such as frequent meetings, workshops and training of students through exchanges between countries. U.S. partners and support for the participation of individuals or institutions from outside the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., Europe) is not a key feature of the MERC Program, but may be considered for modest roles in exceptional cases to meet an essential technical need that is not available in the region.

Relevance to regional development: The project should advance practical applications to development in the Middle East and North Africa and address an issue of humanitarian, economic, and/or environmental importance. The proposed work should be relevant to the Middle East and North Africa region and stand to benefit from a regional approach opposed to separate local or national efforts.

Likely impact and pathway to implementation: Benefits should target developing USAID-presence countries, not primarily accrue to the more affluent partner country(ies), and potentially benefit a large number of people (for example, via jobs, health, environmental protection, etc.). Investigators must demonstrate that there is a need for the potential benefits realized from the project. There should be specific mechanisms to put the research results into practice, particularly in developing USAID-presence country(ies).

Technical merit and innovation: The project should have a sound, credible step-by-step technical work plan, supported by technical background and documentation of relevant previous work. The work should be based on clearly stated hypotheses and objectives. It should explore original concepts and either advance the state of the science or provide an innovative regional application.

Capacity building: The project should advance the research capacity of scientists, students, and institutions, for example through training, provision of equipment, and mentoring. Enhancing the capacity of decision makers and end-users of project technologies is also encouraged. The project must be cost-effective, and the budget primarily directed towards building technical capacity in the developing or USAID-presence countries in the region.

Management structure: The project should be led by qualified investigators, and have an effective institutional management structure likely to achieve its stated goals and capable of managing U.S. federal funds.

II. Continuation Funding

Same as above: I. Applied Research Grants. Past performance at achieving the above criteria will also be considered.

III. Travel and Workshop Grants

The MERC Interagency Committee uses the following criteria to evaluate travel and workshop grant proposals:

Potential to contribute to future cooperation: The project should facilitate a collaborative activity between Arab and Israeli partners. The joint activity should have well defined anticipated outcomes that would lend themselves to continued cooperation and, ideally, the submission of a pre-proposal(s) to the MERC program in a future cycle. Preference is given to applicants seeking support for travel and activities within Israel and the Middle East and North Africa region. Travel support for individuals or institutions from outside the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., U.S., Europe), even if the activity is hosted in the MENA region, will not be considered.

Relevance to regional development: The proposed activity should focus on an issue of humanitarian, economic, and/or environmental importance to the Middle East and North Africa region and stand to benefit from a regional approach opposed to separate local or national efforts.

Likely impact: Investigators must demonstrate that there is a need for the potential benefits associated with the activity's central topic, and that travel or workshop funding is the first step in formulating a partnership and/or project design that has the potential to reach a large number of people (for example, via jobs, health, environmental protection, etc.) particularly in developing or USAID-presence countries in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Technical merit: The focus of the proposal should be well-justified and supported by a discussion of current knowledge, knowledge gaps, or dissemination needs that would benefit from future research or outreach efforts.

Management structure: The activity should be led by qualified individuals/institutions with a demonstrated track record of convening productive scientific meetings, handling complex international travel logistics, and capable of managing U.S. federal funds.

SECTION E. FUNDING LIMITATIONS, RESTRICTIONS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This section is provided for informational/reference purposes. No action is required by the applicant.

I. Awards to Commercial Firms or For-Profit Organizations

MERC prohibits profit under its assistance awards to commercial organizations. No funds will be paid as profit to any recipient that is a commercial organization. Profit is defined as any amount in excess of allowable direct and indirect costs. The allowability of costs incurred by commercial organizations is determined in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) at 48 CFR Part 31. Program income earned by the recipient may be:

- Added to the total of the amount of this award, including the required cost sharing or matching, and use it to further eligible project objectives;
- Used to meet the Recipient's cost sharing or matching requirement;
- Deducted from the total project or program allowable cost in determining the net allowable costs on which the federal share of costs is based.

II. Audit Requirements

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

Domestic and foreign organizations that expend \$750,000 or more in a fiscal year in federal assistance must perform an independent, recipient-contracted Single Audit or Program Specific Audit. (***Program-specific Audit*** means an audit of one Federal award program. ***Single Audit*** means an audit which includes both the entity's financial statements and the Federal Awards to be conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). The audits must be independently and professionally executed in accordance with GAGAS either prescribed by a government's Supreme Audit Institution with auditing standards approved by the Comptroller General of the United States, or the host country's laws or adopted by the host country's public accountants or associations of public accountants, together with generally accepted international auditing standards. However, foreign entity audits consistent with International Standards for Auditing or other auditing standards are acceptable with the Grants Officer's approval. More information can be found at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/693136.pdf>

For sub-non-Federal entities expending \$750,000 or more in Department of State award funding during their fiscal year, Department of State standard audit provisions require that Prime non-Federal entities certify that audits of sub-non-Federal entities are performed annually and according to the standards described above. The cost of audits required under this policy may be charged either as an allowable direct cost to the award OR included in the organizations established indirect costs in the award's detailed budget.

III. Compliance with Applicable Federal Funding Regulations and DOS Terms and Conditions

Payment of funds awarded under this Notice of Funding Opportunity will not be disbursed until the DOS has been assured that the Recipient's financial management system will provide effective control over and accountability for all Federal funds in accordance with 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable. Awards issued under this NOFO are subject to the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/U.S.-Department-of-State-Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-10-01-2019508.pdf>) and 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable.

SECTION F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

This section is provided for informational/reference purposes. No action is required by the applicant.

I. Award Notices

MERC expects to notify applicants regarding the status of their proposal (invitation to submit a full proposal, provisional approval, or decline) by **March 2023**. Refer to the figure under SECTION A, Part V for additional details about the process and timeline.

The ultimate decision to fund your project will still require the concurrence of other offices at USAID, and is contingent upon the availability of funds. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from MERC's DOS Grants Office. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer identified in the proposal. MERC reserves the right to award funding to applicants under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

Payment method: Payment to the prime recipient will be made by electronic funds transfer. Payment schedules will be determined by the Grants Officer and specified in the award document.

II. Reporting Requirements

Reports are required as a means of evaluating the recipient's progress and utilization of resources. They are divided between a performance progress report and a financial status report.

Recipients will be required to submit Semi-Annual Performance Reports (SAR) and a Quarterly Financial Reports (QFR). The SARs will compare actual to planned performance, contain analysis and summary of findings, share preliminary results as well as published and publicly available materials related to the project's outcomes, and report on joint activities and outreach. The QFRs provide a means of monitoring expenditures and comparing costs incurred with progress. Final performance and financial reports will also be required as part of award close-out.

Recipients must report immediately when a program faces unplanned delays in implementation, fails to meet program targets or milestones, or costs increase. Any changes or revisions to the approved budget require prior approval from the MERC.

III. Federal Registrations

If your organization does not already have a SAM account and Unique Entity Identification (UEI) number, follow these steps:

For non-U.S.-based organizations:

1. Gather your information. Collect details on your organization's key points of contact and banking information.
2. Obtain your UEI in SAM.gov – this 12-digit alphanumeric ID confirms your organization's legal status: <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>
3. Get your NCAGE code. Apply for the code from the NATO Support and Procurement Agency: <https://portal.nspa.nato.int/Codification/CageTool/request-new-cage>
4. Get to know SAM. Study the guides available at SAM.gov to become familiar with the system.
5. Create a Login.gov account. You will use this account to register your organization in SAM.
6. Complete registration in SAM. Use your UEI, NCAGE code, and Login.gov account to register in SAM.

For U.S.-based organizations:

1. Gather your information. Collect details on your organization's key points of contact and banking information.
2. Get to know SAM. Study the guides available at SAM.gov to become familiar with the system.
3. Create a Login.gov account. You will use this account to register your organization in SAM.
4. Obtain your UEI in SAM. This 12-digit alphanumeric ID confirms your organization's legal status.
5. Complete registration in SAM. At the end, SAM will automatically assign you a five-character CAGE code.

For help with SAM.gov, please visit their support page at <https://www.fsd.gov> or contact them at: 866-606-8220 (U.S.) or +1-334-206-7828 (International).

Obtaining an active SAM.gov registration may take 12-15 business days. SAM.gov registration is valid for one year and should be renewed on an annual basis. If your institution previously had an active registration but your renewal date was missed, your entity administrator should download a notarized letter template.

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

A notarized letter is to be submitted to the Federal Service Desk (<http://www.fsd.gov>) prior to attempting renewal.

Additional guidance can be found here: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Registering-to-Work-USAID-Main-Step-by-Step.pdf>

IV. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Before submitting a proposal, applicants should review all the terms and conditions and required certifications which will apply to this award, to ensure that they will be able to comply. These include:

- [2 CFR 25 - Universal Identifier and System for Award Management](#)
- [2 CFR 170 - Reporting Subaward and Executive Compensation Information](#)
- [2 CFR 175 - Award Term for Trafficking in Persons](#)
- [2 CFR 182 - Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace \(Financial Assistance\)](#)
- [2 CFR 183 - Never Contract with the Enemy](#)
- [2 CFR 600 – Department of State Requirements](#)
- [U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions](#)

In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget’s guidance located at 2 CFR 200, all applicable Federal laws, and relevant Executive guidance, the Department of State will review and consider proposals for funding, as applicable to specific programs, pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity in accordance with the [Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations](#) (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register’s 85 FR 49506 on August 13, 2020, particularly on:

- Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an objective process of evaluating Federal award proposals (2 CFR part 200.205),
- Prohibiting the purchase of certain telecommunication and video surveillance services or equipment in alignment with section 889 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2019 (Pub. L. No. 115—232) (2 CFR part 200.216),
- Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
- Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and
- Terminating agreements in whole or in part to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340).

V. Applicant Vetting as a Condition of Award

No action is required by the applicant at this time. Applicants requiring vetting will receive instructions from the Grants Officer.

Applicants are advised that successful passing of vetting to evaluate the risk that funds may benefit terrorists or their supporters is a condition of award. Applicants may be asked to submit information required by DS Form 4184, Risk Analysis Information about their company and its principal personnel. Vetting information is also required for all sub-award performance on assistance awards identified by the Grants Officer, information may be submitted on the secure web portal at <https://ramportal.state.gov>, via email to RAM@state.gov, or hardcopy to the Grants Officer. Questions on the form may be emailed to

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

RAM@state.gov. Failure to submit information when requested, or failure to pass vetting, may be grounds for rejecting a proposal for award.

Only individuals, sub-recipients and beneficiaries who have successfully passed vetting may receive assistance or participate in this award. Individuals refusing to provide vetting data – or who provide false data – will not be eligible to receive assistance. Individuals who do not successfully pass vetting will not be eligible to receive assistance. Vetting must be completed 10 business days prior to an activity and may not occur retroactively.

VI. Special Provision for Performance in a Designated Combat Area (SPOT) Requirements

Applicants proposing activities in **Iraq** are required to adhere to the following:

All recipient personnel deploying to an area of combat operations, as designated by the Secretary of Defense under federal assistance over \$150,000 or performance over 30 days must register in the Department of Defense maintained Synchronized Pre-deployment and Operational Tracker (SPOT) system. Recipients of federal assistance awards shall register in SPOT before deployment, or if already in the designated operational area, register upon becoming an employee under the assistance award and maintain current data in SPOT. Information on how to register in SPOT is available from your Grants Officer or Grants Officer Representative.

Recipients utilizing personnel who are not performing private security functions must account for personnel within the SPOT system anonymously through the use of the aggregate count functionality. This includes U.S. Citizens, Third Country Nationals (TCN), and Locally-hired Iraqi personnel except as noted in the following paragraph.

Recipients utilizing personnel who are performing a private security function; are performing duties as a translator or interpreter; require access to U.S. facilities, services, or support; or desire consideration for refugee or special immigrant status under the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007 (subtitle C of title XII of Public Law 110–181 must be entered into SPOT individually with all required personal information. If a locally-hired Iraqi falls into one of these categories, the recipient must enter all of the required identification data into SPOT.

When the Recipient is ready to enter U.S. Citizens, Third Country Nationals (TCN), and/or locally-hired individuals using the Aggregate Count method, the Recipient will notify the Grants Officer who will contact the Department SPOT Program Manager (A/LM/AQM) to obtain the “Aggregate Count” template. The Recipient will complete the “Aggregate Count” template and return to the SPOT Program Manager who will ensure that aggregate counts are loaded into SPOT.

The Recipient’s SPOT Administrator is responsible for updating the aggregate locally hired national count on a quarterly basis by providing updated information via the “Aggregate Count” template to the GO/GOR for each award who will forward to the Department SPOT Program Manager for SPOT entry.

Recipient performance may require the use of armed private security personnel. To the extent that such private security contractors (PSCs) are required, recipients are required to ensure they adhere to Chief of Mission (COM) policies and procedures regarding the operation, oversight, and accountability of PSCs.

Recipient performance may require the use of armed private security personnel. To the extent that such private security contractors (PSCs) are required, recipients are required to ensure they adhere to Chief of Mission (COM) policies and procedures regarding the operation, oversight, and accountability of PSCs.

Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program

As specific COM policies and procedures may differ in scope and applicability, recipients of federal assistance awards are advised to review post policies and procedures carefully in this regard and direct any questions to the Embassy Regional Security Office (RSO) via the Grants Officer Representative (GOR). Any exclusion to these policies must be granted by the COM via the RSO. COM policies and procedures may be obtained from the RSO via the GOR. Recipients of federal assistance awards are also advised that these policies and procedures may be amended from time to time at the post in response to changing circumstances.

Recipients of federal assistance awards are advised that adherence to these policies and procedures are considered to be a material requirement of their award. Recipients of federal assistance awards are reminded that only the Grants Officer has the authority to modify the Notice of Award. Recipients shall proceed with any security guidance provided by the RSO, but shall advise the Grants Officer and the GOR of the guidance received and any potential cost or schedule impact.

VII. Branding and Marking Requirements for Grantees

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to make all materials produced under the award with the USAID red, white, and blue emblem. Materials are defined as but not limited to: training materials, materials for recipients, or materials to communicate or promote with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity under this award, including but not limited to invitations to events, press materials, event backdrops, podium signs, etc. In addition, sub-recipients or sub-awardees are subject to the marking requirements and the grantee shall include a provision in the sub-recipient or sub-awardee's agreement indicating these marking requirements. Exceptions to this requirement can be discussed when negotiating an award.

VIII. Sub Awardee Reporting Requirement

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to report all sub-awardees receiving funds of \$25,000.

SECTION G. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions regarding this funding opportunity including contact: merc@usaid.gov

SECTION H. DISCLAIMER

The terms and conditions published in this NOFO are binding and may not be modified by any Program representative. Explanatory information that contradicts public language will not be binding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government. MERC reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements listed in this NOFO.

SECTION I: BUDGET GUIDANCE

I. Personnel

Personnel costs must be consistent with the cost-of-living in the recipient countries and they should be consistent with the previous three-year compensation history of the recipient or position. MERC may request institutional pay scales to confirm the rates are appropriate.

Investigators: Salary support for principal investigators and other professional-level staff is generally not supported. Institutionally supported salaries should be listed as cost share support at the appropriate level of effort and corresponding amount per year.

Consultants: Consulting fees may be included when necessary for the professional services of outside experts, but not for the project team. For example, fees may be paid to an outside economist for a cost-feasibility analysis, or an outside attorney if needed to assist in securing patents, but consultant fees are not to be paid to investigators. Very few MERC projects include any paid consultants.

Students and staff: Salaries or stipends for students, post-doctoral fellows, research assistants, technicians, laborers, interns, etc. are allowed. Institutions in Israel and other affluent countries where salaries and the cost of living are comparatively high are expected to provide cost share to help support their students, post-doctoral fellows, technicians, etc. in order to partially offset higher salary costs. MERC funds should be preferentially targeted to ensure the full participation of the students and research staff in the participating countries that are less economically advantaged.

II. Equipment

Equipment is defined as any item valued at \$5,000 or more and an expected life of two years or more. Only request equipment that is critical to the proposed research and not available in existing facilities. Maintenance for existing or proposed equipment may be included under “Other Direct Costs.”

Equipment expenditures are expected to benefit laboratories in economically disadvantaged settings. Purchase of vehicles with MERC funds is prohibited.

III. Materials and Supplies

This category includes individual items with value of less than \$5,000. Materials and supplies may be estimated as a single line item sum in a pre-proposal for applied research grants, but costs will be required to be justified to the maximum extent possible in any invited full proposal and in proposals for Continuation Grants and Travel and Workshop Grants.

IV. Travel

For Applied Research Grants, travel costs may be estimated as a single sum in the pre-proposal, but costs will be required to be justified to the maximum extent possible in any invited full proposal. For Continuation Grants, applicants should complete the “Continuation - Travel” tab of the budget template (APPENDIX B) and itemize travel costs on a trip-by-trip basis, and then reflect those trips in the budget for year they would occur. For Travel and Workshop Grants, participant travel should be itemized under “Participant Costs” in the “Travel and Workshop - Total” tab of the budget template.

V. Other Direct Costs

Typical items under this category include expenses associated with workshops and training, stakeholder outreach, equipment maintenance, and publication fees. Services, rental fees, website hosting fees, communications costs, etc. can also be included here.

VI. Indirect Costs

If a proposal is advanced for award negotiation, MERC will work with applicants to ensure indirect costs are calculated appropriately, but it is imperative that the rest of the budget be clearly itemized.

Option 1: Applicants with a currently valid Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) on file with the U.S. Government may use their NICRA rate to request indirect costs. A NICRA is a formal agreement between the U.S. Government and an organization that provides a rate (specified as a percentage) the organization may use to request indirect costs, as well as details on how the organization should apply the rate in their proposed budget. A copy of the NICRA should be submitted with the proposal. (Note: This documentation is not required of pre-proposals for Applied Research Grants.) *Organizations may choose to voluntarily reduce the NICRA rate charged to the award in order to be more cost effective and competitive.*

Option 2: Applicants without a NICRA may charge a *de minimus* rate of 10% on allowable cost categories. Allowable categories include: direct salaries and wages, materials and supplies, travel, services, and up to \$25,000 of each sub-award agreement (i.e., \$2,500 per sub-award) which is intended to cover any administrative and legal support associated with the management of the sub-award.

The *de minimus* rate cannot be applied to equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships, fellowships, participant support costs (e.g., per diem or compensation for participation in a study), or the portion of a sub-award agreement in excess of \$25,000.

Option 3: If the recipient does not have a NICRA and elects not to use the *de minimis* rate, then overhead costs may be broken out by individual item (e.g., office rent, electricity, accountant fees, etc.) and charged as direct costs. The applicant must explain their calculations in the Budget Justification and MERC may question or disallow costs and calculations that seem unreasonable. In general, the amount charged should be relative to the resources being spent on the award activity.

VII. Cost Sharing

The non-Federal share of costs, frequently called “cost share,” “matching funds,” or “in-kind” refers to that portion of the project or program costs not borne by the U.S. federal government. No minimum or maximum percentage is required for this competition; however, institutions in Israel and other affluent countries are expected to provide cost share in order to offset comparatively higher salaries and costs. MERC funds should be preferentially targeted to ensure the full participation of the students and research staff in participating countries that are less economically advantaged. The value of any cost share should be estimated in the proposal. Contributions may be cash or in-kind (staff time, facilities, etc.). "Blending" MERC-funded research with complementary, additional funding from other sources is allowed and encouraged wherever possible and appropriate. Cost share must be realistic and cannot come from another grant or subcontract issued by USAID, U.S. Department of State, or any other U.S. Government Agency.