

**Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER)
Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (PULSE)**

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR
BUY-IN ACTIVITIES**

LASER Internal version

SUPPLEMENT TO AGREEMENT NO. AID-7200AA18CA00009

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ACRONYM LIST

AD	Academic Director
AOR	Agreement Officer Representative
BM	Business Manager
CN	Concept Note
Co-PI	Co-Principal Investigator
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CS	Communication Specialist
DDI	Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation
ERT	Embedded Research Translation
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ITR	Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub
LASER PULSE	Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine
LPCT	LASER PULSE Core Team
LPMT	LASER PULSE Management Team
LPN	LASER PULSE Network
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
OU	Operating Unit
PD	Program Description
PDr	Program Director
PI	Principal Investigator
RPM	Research Project Manager
RTA	Research Translation Advisor
RTCL	Research Translation Communication Lead
RTSL	Research Translation Strategy Lead
RTT	Research Translation Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SOW	Statement of Work
TD	Technical Director
UIC	USAID Interest Countries
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID M/B/IO	USAID Mission, Bureau, or Independent Office

Purpose of LASER's Buy-in SOP

The purpose of this LASER buy-in SOP is to provide a process mechanism to the LASER PULSE staff, so that buy-ins are processed and implemented according to standard terms. This is a living document and will be updated periodically. The intended audience for this SOP is LASER management, and not necessarily external researchers. External researchers hired on will receive separate information throughout the buy-in process.

BUY-IN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Respond rapidly to USAID requests.
- Assemble a qualified research team, including members of USAID Interest Countries' Higher Education Institutions (UICs' HEIs).
- Minimize risk by reducing the level of effort in preparing for Buy-ins before securing funding.
- Embed LASER PULSE strategy for translating research to policy, product or practice.

PHASE I: CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

1. USAID communicates Buy-in opportunities directly to Purdue as lead organization on LASER PULSE, through LASER PULSE Management Team (LPMT), via Program Director (PDr), Technical Director (TD), Academic Director (AD), and Director.
2. Within 24 hours, LPMT conducts an internal review/discussion of Statement of Work (SOW) to determine if LASER PULSE can undertake the opportunity, and makes initial go/no-go decision.
3. The Agreement Officer Representative (AOR) or USAID Innovation, Technology, Research Hub (ITR) Activity Manager shares the three options for call for Application ([bullet # 7](#)) with USAID entity [Mission, Bureau, or Independent Office (USAID M/B/IO)], proposing the buy-in and arranging an introductory phone conversation.
4. Buy-In SOW may not be shared beyond LPMT until USAID M/B/IO approves doing so. Pending that approval, Buy-In SOW is marked "Confidential: Do not distribute beyond LASER PULSE".
5. LPMT (TD) shares SOW with the Research Translation Team [Research Translation Strategy Lead (RTSL), Research Translation Communication Lead (RTCL), and Research Translation Advisor (RTA)] for immediate thoughts on research translation.
6. LPMT (PDr, TD) and one representative from the RTT (RTSL, RTCL or RTA) hold first call with USAID; AOR; and representative of Operating Unit (OU) issuing Buy-in (e.g., USAID M/B/IO) to:
 - a. Determine if opportunity is within LASER PULSE's scope, interest, and general capability.
 - b. Introduce LASER's Embedded Research Translation (ERT) model as a core component that is embedded in all of LASER PULSE projects
 - c. Seek additional information and ask clarifying questions on opportunity.
 - d. Seek feedback on which option described in 2.7 [Open track (2.7.1), Team member selection track (2.7.2), or LASER PULSE-guided track (2.7.3)] to pursue. If 2.7.1 or 2.7.2 is chosen, it must allow sufficient lead time for the competitive process; if 2.7.3 is selected, USAID OU must provide justification.
7. USAID OU selects and follows one of these three options to recruit teams to implement the buy-in activity:

- a. **Open track (preferred).** This track is preferable to recruit a pre-assembled team of individuals (researchers and usually practitioners as well) who may have worked together previously. It is more time-consuming to review Concept Notes (CN)s than Request for Capacity Statements (RCS), but may result in less time creating the Program Description.
 - i. USAID OU and LASER co-create selection criteria for Concept Notes.
 - ii. LPMT (TD) develops the template for Request for Concept Note, by adapting the summary SOW to LASER requirements, and works with USAID to ensure all sensitive information is removed.
 - iii. LPMT (TD) releases the Request for CNs to LASER PULSE Network (LPN), or, if USAID so specifies, to a technical or geographical area-filtered sub-network (USAID will provide rationale for restricting eligibility). TD will specify a due date for response with a CN.
 - iv. GA shares the Concept Note announcement with USAID (ITR and OU).
 - v. TD assembles peer reviewers to evaluate CNs. CNs are rated based on the criteria co-created by USAID OU and LASER, or
 - vi. Review team comprises LASER and USAID staff, who review CNs based on LASER's [CN review criteria](#).
 - vii. LPMT or USAID selects up to three top CNs, based on aggregated reviewer ratings. TD sends selected CNs to USAID OU with copy to AOR. USAID OU reviews and selects a successful research team and provides written feedback for CNs not selected.
- b. **Team member selection track** (team members must be affiliated with an institution eligible to receive US government funding). This track allows LASER and/or USAID to approve each team member where they are interested in specific experience and expertise. This track saves the time to review CNs, but will need more time to create a PD.
 - i. LPMT (TD) and USAID develop the Request for Capacity Statements (RCS), by adapting the summary SOW to LASER PULSE requirements and ensuring all sensitive information is removed.
 - ii. LPMT (TD) and USAID adapt a decision-making selection criteria framework (e.g., Kepner-Tregoe decision-making framework) with criteria for team members (must-have – go/no go; like-to-have ranking).
 - iii. LPMT (TD) sends RCS and USAID summary SOW to Network members.
 - iv. Interested Network members return RCS by set deadline.
 - v. LASER PULSE sorts RCS Applications according to role, and sends them to USAID for review and selection.
 - vi. USAID selects team members based on agreed-upon criteria.
 - vii. LPMT (TD) invites selected team members to submit letters of commitment for themselves and their affiliated institutions. NOTE: LASER PULSE will enter into an agreement with a team member's affiliated institution – not with an individual team member.
 - viii. LPMT (TD) and USAID organize a first team discussion to co-create PD.
- c. **LASER PULSE-guided track** (only when Buy-in conditions are such that USAID requires LPMT to assemble a team). This track can be used in cases where the activity is politically

sensitive and can't be publicly announced, and in cases where there is a very tight timeline and budget support uncertain.

- i. USAID OU justifies this option in SOW it provides to LPMT.
- ii. LPMT (TD) shares SOW/available information with Steering Committee members and LPCT.
- iii. Through Consortium and USAID suggestions, plus additional desk research, LPMT assembles a strong Research Awards Team committed to ERT, including UIC Network members where possible. If USAID approves the team, LPMT proceeds to the next step of co-creation. If USAID does not approve the team, LPMT revisits strategy (a., b., or c.).

PHASE II: CO-CREATION OF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND BUDGET

The co-creation process brings together the selected research team, USAID and LASER PULSE Core Team (LPCT) to develop Program Description (PD), including project design; management structure; definition of deliverables, and work plans, using the [standard template](#) provided by USAID ITR. The co-creation process also includes support to the research team to embed research translation, and to develop a project budget with the Purdue Sponsored Programs Pre-Award Office.

1. Initial Activities
 - a. TD shares Subawardee-focused Buy-in SOP with the selected research team members.
 - b. AD notifies Purdue Sponsored Programs Pre-Award Office of upcoming Buy-in so they can gather entity profiles, and assist buy-in team organizations with budgeting and pre-award preparation.
2. Initial Call with Principal Investigator
 - a. Once research team members are identified, the team proposes a project-level Principal Investigator (PI) (i.e., technical lead from the lead institution).
 - b. TD holds a teleconference with PI to discuss how he/she will work with LASER PULSE Management Team (LPMT), USAID ITR and the OU requesting Buy-in, to develop PD and budget within USAID deadlines.
3. Teleconferences with Research Team
 - a. Initial teleconference: At start of co-creation process, LPMT (TD), USAID (ITR and OU), and research team hold introductory teleconference on SOW and project expectations/timelines. A Research Translation Team (RTT) representative (RTSL, RTCL or RTA) joins to introduce LASER PULSE's Embedded Research Translation model and talk about the project's research translation strategy and budget. A regular teleconference cadence also is discussed.
 - b. Regular teleconferences: LPMT, USAID and research team participate in several regularly scheduled teleconferences. Most calls are scheduled during the initial teleconference, but others are scheduled by USAID or the research team (led by PI) as needed. Likewise, some calls may be scheduled by LPMT (TD) with RTT to discuss ongoing plans to incorporate research translation.
 - i. NOTE: LPMT (TD) will ensure all team members can join calls in a way that optimizes their ability to communicate, and does not require financial resources (unless resources have been allocated for this purpose, in lieu of other viable

- options). LPMT will provide call notes in Google Shared Drive, and ensure all participants have access to and knowledge of associated folder(s).
- c. Roles and Responsibilities of Principal Investigator
 - i. Ensure that PD documents are properly formatted and copy-edited.
 - ii. Ensure gender elements are embedded in the project. Please refer to LASER PULSE [Gender Analysis in Research and Application](#) course, accessible to registered LPN members.
 - iii. Ensure PD demonstrates how research translation is embedded across all phases of a research project. Please refer to [LASER PULSE Introduction to Embedded Research Translation \(ERT\) Training](#) course, also available to registered LPN members.
 - d. Roles and Responsibilities for LASER PULSE Core Team
 - i. Ensure engagement of USAID Interest Country HEIs in Buy-in project teams.
 - ii. Serve as the liaison between USAID and the Buy-in project team.
 - iii. Work in collaboration with USAID Activity Managers to arrange periodic meetings between USAID and the Buy-in project team.
 - iv. Provide the PD template and guide the Buy-in project team to develop the PD, according to USAID guidelines.
 - v. Link the lead institutional representatives of the Research Awards Team with Purdue Sponsored Programs Pre-Award Office, so they can assist with budgeting and pre-contract preparation.
 - vi. Ensure the PD and budget are finalized in a timely manner and submitted to the AOR for signature.

PHASE III: BUY-IN IMPLEMENTATION

1. Roles and Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator
 - a. Organize research activities; lead calls with USAID and partners; and ensure that acceptable, professional-level deliverables are sent to TD and Research Project Manager (RPM), copying MEL Specialist, on time and on track according to the work plan.
 - b. Ensure any virtual or in-person events related to Buy-in, or any release of Buy-in reports, presentations or other deliverables, are shared with TD, who will share them with PDR, AD and key personnel.
2. Roles and Responsibilities of LASER PULSE Core Team
 - a. PD and GA hold a kick-off face-to-face meeting (if possible) or teleconference with the research team to discuss project expectations. A Research Translation Team (RTT) representative (RTSL, RTCL or RTA) joins to reinforce LASER PULSE's Embedded Research Translation model, to introduce the ERT processes (1.b. below) and discuss any initial support needed for implementing the project's research translation strategy.
 - b. The RRT (RTSL, RTCL, RTA) integrates ERT across all phases of the project.
 - i. Administer a biannual Research Translation Needs Assessment survey for research teams to identify any research translation support needs.
 - ii. Support research teams in monitoring research translation. Help them use ERT Progress Tracker to monitor and consolidate all activities, timelines and deliverables identified in the annual research translation work plan.

- iii. Provide support materials, training, and advice for projects identified in the Research Translation Needs Assessment survey and ERT Progress Tracker to implement ERT.
 - iv. Participate in research translation debrief at the end of a program, to learn and to gather information and insight to communicate.
 - v. Based on the dissemination activities identified in the buy-in PD, share project findings, outputs and successes with LPN.
 - vi. Identify opportunities to promote Buy-in project successes (TD, GA, CS) with target audiences. Working closely with Buy-in PI, ensure effective communication through such channels as press releases, news articles, website, newsletters, and speaking engagements.
 - c. Ensure accurate, quality, timely reporting of MEL data and deliverables related to Buy-in indicators (MEL Specialist).
 - d. Provide project deliverables in time for review (TD, GA).
 - e. Ensure learning mechanisms are built into Buy-in to facilitate adaptive management and to compile relevant evidence and knowledge across sector-specific Buy-ins (PDr, TD, MEL Specialist).
- 3. Financial Management
 - a. BM provides administrative and fiscal oversight for sub-agreements between LPMT and partner institutions throughout the project.
 - b. Purdue Sponsored Programs Contracting Office develops sub-agreements directly with institutions selected for Buy-ins.
 - c. BM or Pre-Award Specialist provides informational request forms to all sub-recipient institutions in anticipation of Buy-in sub-agreements with those institutions (e.g., Entity Profile form, which includes requests for certain requirements and standard provisions, such as Federal Wide Assurance number and conflict of interest statements).
 - d. Institutions should budget their approved federally-negotiated indirect cost rate, if they have one. Institutions that do not have an approved rate may budget indirect costs at a flat rate of 10 percent of total direct cost.
 - e. Upon receipt of award and subrecipient information from, BM initiates the subaward process. Prime institution assigns a contracting analyst. This analyst develops contractual language requirements based on sub-recipient entity information, criteria, and experience provided by BM and sub-recipient.
 - i. Cost reimbursement agreements are the default agreement type of Prime institution.
 - ii. New partner institutions may request or be required to operate on a “milestones” basis or other agreement type dependent upon BM review of these new partners, which will occur on a case-by-case basis.
 - iii. When applicable and allowable, BM ensures Pre-Authorization Letters are issued for each sub-award institution/entity so work can proceed immediately (letters contain specified dates when spending may begin, activities covered, timeline, and spending cap).
 - f. LPMT reviews project SOW and budget for ERT (RTSL, RTCL, RTA).
 - g. TD/GA/AD review and submit program description (PD) and final budget to AOR and Activity Manager, copying research team.

4. Technical Management

- a. In addition to PI, the research team identifies Co-PI (i.e., co-lead) for Buy-in, to assist with program implementation and reporting to TD and USAID. All other contributors (researchers and/or practitioners) are considered collaborators.
- b. Buy-in project PI ensures timely implementation of work, with technical support of TD and GA. For evaluation projects, PI keeps a record of site and demographic-group selection criteria.
 - i. GA works with PI to develop a deliverables tracker for the project.
- c. If a buy-in activity has not been previously reviewed by the cognizant Bureau Environmental Officer, BEO (this should be noted in the scope document), LPMT will work with the buy-in Project PI to submit an environmental impact assessment form to the LASER AOR who will then submit that form to the DDI BEO for review. In the event that it is determined that the activity will have an environmental impact that needs to be mitigated, LASER will work with the buy-in PI to draft an Initial Environmental Examination form and based on the response from BEO, possibly create an [Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan](#) and to report on it to the LPMT on a biannual basis.
- d. Buy-in meetings
 - i. USAID Buy-in Activity Manager schedules regular progress meetings with other USAID personnel and the research team. TD and/or GA participates in these meetings. Buy-in project PI attends and is prepared to lead regularly scheduled USAID meetings to provide project updates and discuss challenges. If PI is unavailable, Co-PI attends. If both are unavailable, a collaborator designated by PI attends.
 - ii. Buy-in PI schedules regular research team calls to cover updates and resolve any issues. TD and/or GA attends these calls.
- e. If a Buy-in sub-awardee fails to comply with terms of this SOP and/or contract deliverables and milestones, LPMT (with USAID approval) may restructure the Buy-in team and adjust budget – to ensure timely, and quality deliverables to USAID. LPMT will follow these incremental steps in dealing with an underperforming Buy-in recipient:
 - i. Hold informal conversations with the recipient, providing specific reasons/examples of underperformance.
 - ii. Discuss issues with USAID.
 - iii. Write, and deliver to the recipient, formal letters outlining changes recipients must make to keep the project on track.
 - iv. Withhold payment for a recipient who fails to make specified changes following a formal letter.
 - v. Terminate subaward based on agreement terms.
- f. TD, GA, and the MEL Specialist look for opportunities to connect Buy-in outputs to USAID's goal of resilience/journey to self-reliance and to learnings across similar Buy-ins.
- g. TD and GA ensure timely development and delivery of the following items by PI:
 - i. Project outputs, such as survey tools, websites, webinars, and training courses
 - ii. Periodic reports (semi-annual and annual for projects lasting more than one year, and quarterly and annual for projects lasting less than one year)
 - iii. Key deliverables (e.g., desk reports, research translation products, and evaluation and research reports)

5. Data management
 - a. Project PI develops a data management plan.
 - b. Raw data is deposited on the project management site on laserpulse.org.
 - c. All project datasets that consist of quantitative data are submitted to MEL Specialist for upload to USAID Development Data Laboratory. Datasets must be anonymized (respondent information deleted) before submission. Buy-in PIs will receive information on requirements (e.g., file format and supplemental files).
 - d. MEL Specialist oversees all data management and associated MEL procedures. Please see the guidance manual [M&E Reporting Instructions for LASER PULSE Buy-Ins](#) for details on the MEL reporting process and associated tools.

6. General Implementation Management
 - a. TD/GA provides appropriate USAID templates for each deliverable for which templates are available.
 - b. LPMT has created a project management site on STEMEd hub that is password-protected and accessible only to Buy-in research team:
<https://stemedhub.org/groups/laserpulse/aboutus/wherewework>
 - c. IT/Data Specialist supports the research team for virtual working space and knowledge management.
 - d. CS ensures deliverables comply with requirements in Branding and Marking Plan. For example:
 - i. External communications/documents (*e.g.*, project deliverables that will be uploaded on USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse) must appear first in bottom-left, in the logo bar consisting of all partner logos of equal visual weight. Cooperative agreement number appears on the front page as well.
 - ii. Internal communications/documents (*i.e.*, documents that are used within the project for reference) only bear LASER PULSE letters in the top-left corner of the cover page, as well as USAID, Purdue and partner institution logos at the bottom of pages.
 - e. RTT works with the research team to provide support in areas identified by biannual Research Translation Needs Assessment Survey and ERT Progress Tracker.
 - i. Support may be provided for an individual project or in conjunction with other projects.
 - ii. Support types may include materials, training and one-on-one time, as requested by the research team(s).
 - f. Project PIs are encouraged to contact RTT with specific questions or support requests as needed.
 - g. RTT helps TD/GA and the research team identify opportunities to disseminate key findings and promote learning from Buy-in projects. Channels include
 - h. Events for LPN practitioners (CRS)
 - i. Efforts to build capacity of researchers and project teams to identify practitioner conferences for presenting findings (CRS)
 - j. LPMT packaging of Buy-in successes in Research Translation (RTCL)
 - k. Presentations to LPN (research teams and RTCL)

PHASE IV: BUY-IN CLOSE OUT

1. Research Project Manager (RPM) shares and reviews [Buy in Reporting Closeout Template](#) and closeout steps with the PI
2. The PI writes and submits the final buy-in report
3. The MEL Specialist fills in the Monitoring and Evaluation Table section of the Template
4. GA updates environmental compliance information if the buy-in did not receive categorical exclusion.
5. Business Manager prepares financial closeout reports

APPENDIX 1: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR REMINDER SHEET

1. All members of Buy-in implementation team (researchers and practitioners) must enroll in LASER PULSE NETWORK ([LPN](#)) or https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AhZcWIGps5kyjP).
2. Prepare an agenda and take notes for buy-in calls/meetings, with support from LASER point of contact.
3. Due dates for Buy-in PIs to report data and/or information updates to MEL Specialist, for required reporting to USAID:
 - a. April 7 (for LASER PULSE bi-annual report; reporting period is October 1 - March 31)
 - b. October 7 (for LASER PULSE annual report; reporting period is April 1 - September 30)
4. All communications related to LASER PULSE, such as press releases, other news articles, websites, newsletters, and conference presentations, need to be approved by designated LPMT members.
 - a. These materials should be sent to TD (copy GA), who will provide first approval, then on to CS to ensure branding compliance, and then back to TD. LPMT will provide a template for communication pieces.
 - b. TD will send the final version of a communication piece to LASER PULSE AOR, who is responsible for sending it to appropriate USAID contacts. Once AOR approves a communication piece, it is sent to appropriate channels for distribution.
 - c. Purdue will do a press release every fall for the buy-ins and for individual buy-ins.

NOTE: Press releases go to Director of Communications, College of Engineering, Purdue University, unless LPMT determines another appropriate channel.
5. All contractual and risk-related issues for a Buy-in must flow through LASER PULSE leadership.
6. All Buy-in PIs must refer to and abide by LASER PULSE SOP throughout project implementation.