

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

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

SUPPLEMENT TO AGREEMENT NO. AID-7200AA18CA00009

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**ACRONYM LIST**

CN	Concept Note
Co-PI	Co-Principal Investigator
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
ERT	Embedded Research Translation
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ITR	Innovation, Technology, Research Hub
LASER PULSE	Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine
LPN	LASER PULSE Network
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
PD	Program Description
PI	Principal Investigator
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SOW	Statement of Work
UIC	USAID Interest Countries
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID M/B/IO	USAID Mission, Bureau, or Independent Office

## PURPOSE OF LASER PULSE'S BUY-IN SOP

The purpose of this LASER PULSE buy-in SOP is to describe LASER PULSE buy-in processes, and to ensure adherence to its procedures. The intended audience for this SOP is for the USAID Operating Units (OUs) and external implementers (researchers and practitioners). Like the source SOP document, this external version is a living document and will be updated periodically to the adaptive management decisions taken to improve the procedures based on lessons learned during implementation.

## BUY-IN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

LASER PULSE defines “Buy-ins” as funding provided to LASER PULSE, in addition to the core award, from various USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Independent Offices to help address their programmatic needs. Buy-in projects are a supplement to the LASER PULSE Cooperative Agreement mechanism. Through the Buy-in process, LASER PULSE seeks to:

- Respond rapidly to USAID requests.
- Assemble a qualified research team from the LASER PULSE Network, including Higher Education Institutions (UICs’ HEIs) in USAID Interest Countries.
- Embed LASER PULSE strategy for translating research to policy, product or practice.

## IMPLEMENTATION TEAM SELECTION TRACKS

1. Depending on USAID OU needs, LASER PULSE follows one of these three options to recruit and select teams to implement the buy-in activity from among the LASER Network:
  - a. **Open track (preferred).** This track is preferred as it provides for the most broad and open competition within the Network. It allows for teams of individuals (researchers and practitioners) to self-identify. In many cases, these individuals will have worked together previously, and so have agreed upon roles, which makes it easier for the team to quickly finalize a Project Description (PD). This track requires more time in identifying reviewers and then holding a Concept Note (CN) review process, but it usually results in time saved creating the PD, as the CN will only require some additional technical and budget detail to serve as the PD.
    - i. USAID OU and LASER PULSE co-create selection criteria for Concept Notes.
    - ii. USAID OU and LASER PULSE co-develop the Request for Concept Note, by adapting the summary SOW with details of qualifications and roles sought; terms of references for CNs; submission date, etc.
    - iii. LASER PULSE releases the CN to LASER PULSE Network (LPN), and/or, if USAID so specifies, to a technical or geographical area-filtered sub-network (USAID will provide rationale for restricting eligibility).
    - iv. LASER PULSE shares the Concept Note announcement with USAID.
    - v. LASER PULSE convenes peer reviewers to evaluate CNs, **or** the review team comprises LASER PULSE and USAID staff.
    - vi. The CNs are reviewed based on LASER’s [CN review criteria](#), which may include additional criteria from the specific USAID OU.
    - vii. LASER PULSE and USAID select up to three top CNs, based on aggregated reviewer ratings. LASER PULSE sends selected CNs to USAID. USAID reviews and selects a successful research team, and provides written responses for CNs not selected.

- b. **Team member selection track:** This track involves a call for individual researchers and practitioners with select expertise or experience who will ultimately be asked to form the Buy-in research team (team members must be affiliated with an institution eligible to receive US government funding). The track allows LASER PULSE and/or USAID to approve each team member when specific experience and expertise is needed and may not be found in currently collaborating groups. This track saves the time on the review process, but will usually require more time for the team to create a PD. This is because a CN can readily be adapted to a PD, but a response to **Request for Capacity Statement (RCS)** does not contain project detail.
- i. LASER PULSE and USAID develop the RCS, by adapting the summary SOW to USAID and LASER PULSE requirements, and ensuring all USAID sensitive information is removed.
  - ii. LASER PULSE and USAID determine the decision-making selection criteria for the framework (e.g., Kepner-Tregoe decision-making framework) with criteria for must-have – go/no go; like-to-have rankings.
  - iii. LASER PULSE sends the RCS to Network members, as well as to any other potential researchers that may have been identified as having expertise in the sector focus area(s).
  - iv. Interested applicants return RCS by the stated deadline.
  - v. LASER PULSE sorts RCS Applications according to role, and sends them to USAID for review and selection.
  - vi. USAID reviews applications, and selects team members based on agreed-upon criteria.
  - vii. LASER PULSE 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 a consultancy to an individual team member.
  - viii. LASER PULSE and USAID may hold initial calls with selected team members to confirm interest and assess availability for regular co-creation calls.
  - ix. LASER PULSE will organize the regular team discussions to co-create the PD.
- c. **LASER PULSE-guided track.** In this track LASER PULSE , in consultation with USAID, selects Buy-in research team members directly from the network with limited competition. It is only used when conditions are such that USAID requests LASER to assemble a specific team from among consortium members). This track can be used in cases where the activity is politically sensitive and cannot be publicly announced, and in cases where there is a very tight timeline and budget support is uncertain.
- i. USAID justifies this option in SOW it provides to LASER.
  - ii. LASER shares SOW/available information with Consortium members.
  - iii. Through Consortium and USAID suggestions, and additional desk research, LASER assembles a strong Research Awards Team that comprises a mix of researchers and implementers, including UIC Network members where feasible. If USAID approves the team, LASER proceeds to the next step of co-creation. If USAID does not approve the team, LASER revisits the selection strategies (a., b., or c.).

## CO-CREATION OF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND BUDGET

The co-creation process brings together the selected research team, USAID and LASER PULSE Core Team members to develop a Program Description (PD), including design; roles and management structure; definition of deliverables, and work plan, 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. LASER PULSE shares this external-focused Buy-in SOP with the selected research team members.
  - b. LASER PULSE 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. The Principal Investigator (PI) has not already been identified, the Buy-in team identifies the person (from the lead institution) who will serve in this role.
  - b. LASER PULSE holds an initial teleconference with the PI to discuss how he/she will work with LASERPULSE and USAID to develop the PD and budget within the USAID timeframe.
3. Teleconferences with the Research Team
  - a. Initial teleconference: At start of co-creation process, LASER PULSE, USAID, and the proposed research team hold an introductory teleconference on the project SOW, and the project expectations/timelines. A LASER PULSE Research Translation Team (RTT) representative joins to introduce LASER PULSE's Embedded Research Translation model and initiate discussion about the project's research translation strategy and budget. A regular teleconference schedule also is planned.
  - b. Regular teleconferences: LASER PULSE, USAID and the research team participate in regularly scheduled teleconferences discussing any issues that arise during the co-design of the PD. Some additional calls may be scheduled LASER PULSE to discuss elements of research translation, or other issues as they arise.
    - i. NOTE: LASER PULSE 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). LASER PULSE 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 during this phase (Co-Creation)
    - i. Lead the design of proposed research activities and the draft work plan; provide discussion topics on agendas, and take the lead on the regular calls with LASER, USAID and partners; and ensure timely completion of the PD and the associated budgets.
    - ii. Ensure that PD documents are properly formatted and copy-edited.
    - iii. Ensure gender elements are embedded into the PD. Please refer to the [LASER Gender Analysis in Research and Application](#) course, accessible to registered LASER PULSE Network members.
    - iv. Ensure PD embeds research translation across all phases of the buy-in project. Please refer to [LASER Introduction to Embedded Research Translation \(ERT\) Training](#) course, also available to registered LPN members.

- d. Roles and Responsibilities for LASER PULSE Core Team during Co-Creation
  - i. Serve as the liaison between USAID and the Buy-in project team.
  - ii. Arrange regular meeting calls between USAID and the Buy-in project team.
  - iii. Ensure accurate notes are taken during calls, and curated as a record of the PD co-creation. (This responsibility passes to the PI's team upon approval of the PD).
  - iv. Provide the PD template and guide the Buy-in project team to develop the PD, according to USAID guidelines.
  - v. Provide technical backstopping (including on gender integration and research translation) as needed in the design of the PD.
  - vi. Link the lead institutional representatives of the Buy-in project team with Purdue Sponsored Programs Pre-Award Office, so they can assist with budgeting and pre-contract preparation.
  - vii. Ensure the PD and budget are finalized in a timely manner and submitted to USAID for signature.

## BUY-IN WORKPLAN IMPLEMENTATION

1. Roles and Responsibilities of Principal Investigator during Implementation
  - a. Lead the implementation of the proposed research activities according to the approved work plan, as described in detail further on.
  - b. Provide discussion topics for regular call agendas, and take the lead on those calls with LASER PULSE, USAID and partners
  - c. Ensure quality completion of the professional-level deliverables to LASER, copying the MEL Specialist, on time and on track according to the workplan.
    - i. Ensure that deliverable documents are properly formatted and copy-edited.
    - ii. Ensure gender considerations are applied as described in the PD and/or the [Gender Analysis Template](#) submitted to USAID.
    - iii. Ensure timely recording of progress and deliverables in the Project Tracker.
  - d. Ensure any virtual or in-person events related to the Buy-in, or any release of Buy-in reports, presentations or other deliverables, are shared with LASER.
  - e. Complete the [Project Successes Template](#) upon close of project to facilitate sharing of project successes with LASER PULSE for streamlined communication about the project to the LASER PULSE Network.
2. Roles and Responsibilities of LASER PULSE Core Team
  - a. 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 joins to reinforce the ERT processes and to discuss any initial support needed for implementing the project's research translation strategy.
  - b. LASER PULSE works with the research team to integrate 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. Embedded Research Translation Team is copied on final deliverables and research translation products to ensure effective Embedded Research Translation strategy, implementation, and communication. The team will provide comments as applicable.
  - v. Lead research translation debrief at the end of a program, to provide feedback and lessons learned on the application of the ERT model.
  - vi. Based on the dissemination activities identified in the buy-in PD, share project findings, outputs and successes with LPN.
  - vii. Identify opportunities to promote Buy-in project successes 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.
  - 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.
3. Financial Management
- a. LASER PULSE provides administrative and fiscal oversight for sub-agreements with the partner institutions throughout the project.
  - b. Purdue Sponsored Programs Contracting Office develops sub-agreements directly with institutions selected for Buy-ins.
  - c. The LASER PULSE (Purdue) 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 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 subrecipient information, LASER PULSE initiates the subaward process. The lead institution (the PI's institution) provides LASER PULSE with a contact in their business/ contracts office. This contact provides financial and contractual award information to LASER PULSE as needed.
  - f. Cost reimbursement agreements are the default agreement type for LASER to make for sub-agreements.
    - i. New partner institutions may request or be required to operate on a "milestones" basis or other agreement type dependent upon a case-by-case review of these new partners.
    - ii. When applicable and allowable, LASER PULSE can issue Pre-Authorization Letters to sub-award institutions so that work can proceed immediately (letters contain specified dates when spending may begin, activities covered, timeline, and spending cap).



- g. LASER PULSE reviews and submits the program description (PD) with the final budget, workplans, and other other linked documents to USAID for approval.
4. Technical Management
- a. In addition to PI, the research team identifies a 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, including the curation of data and selection criteria for any project decisions. For evaluation projects, for example, the PI keeps a record of site and demographic-group selection criteria.
    - i. LASER PULSE works with PI to develop a deliverables tracker for the project.
  - c. If a buy-In activity has not been previously reviewed by the USAID Environmental Officer, LASER PULSE will work with the buy-In Project PI to submit an environmental impact assessment form to USAID 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. If further action is required to monitor and mitigate potential environmental impact, the team will create an [Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan](#) and report on monitoring to LASER on a biannual basis.
  - d. Buy-in meetings
    - i. The 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, the designated 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.
  - e. If the Buy-in sub-awardee fails to comply with terms of this SOP and/or contract deliverables and milestones, LASER PULSE may restructure the Buy-in team and adjust budget – to ensure timely, and quality deliverables to USAID. In case of compliance issues, or failure to produce deliverables according to the workplan, LASER 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.
5. Data management
- a. Project PI develops a data management plan.
  - b. Raw data is deposited on the project management site on [laserpulse.org](http://laserpulse.org).
  - c. All project datasets that consist of quantitative data are submitted to the LASER 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. 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. LASER PULSE provides appropriate USAID templates for each deliverable for which templates are available.
  - b. LASER PULSE 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. The LASER PULSE IT/Data Specialist supports the research team for virtual working space and knowledge management.
  - d. LASER PULSE provides 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).
    - iii. Project PIs are encouraged to contact LASER with specific questions or support requests as needed.
    - iv. LASER PULSE helps the research team identify opportunities to disseminate key findings and promote learning from Buy-in projects. Channels include
      1. LASER PULSE network member practitioner events, such as conferences
      2. LASER PULSE packaging of Buy-in successes in Research Translation (RTCL)
      3. Virtual or in-person (R4D workshop) presentations to LASER PULSE members
      4. Presentations and capacity workshops for USAID teams

## DELIVERABLES REVIEW AND APPROVAL

1. Research teams are required to incorporate 45 Days after the completion of the project for conducting in-depth reviews to ensure all final deliverables meet the USAID quality standards in terms of research rigor, translation effectiveness, and branding.
2. The reviews will be supported by LASER PULSE's 'Research and Publication Working Group' (RPWG)
  - a. The RPWG has created the [Review Guidelines Document](#) that highlights the review process, outlines the threshold criteria and provides guidance, templates and additional materials that could be useful to research teams.

**Note:** All deliverables submitted to USAID by LASER PULSE are expected to meet USAID quality standards in terms of research rigor and translation effectiveness, and ultimately requires AOR's approval.

## BUY-IN CLOSE OUT

1. LASER PULSE will provide the PI with a [Buy in Reporting Closeout Template](#) that details the closeout steps.
2. The PI writes, and submits, the final buy-in report to LASER PULSE

3. The PI is responsible to provide final financial reporting documents to the LASER Business Manager.
4. The LASER PULSE MEL Specialist fills in the Monitoring and Evaluation Table section of the Template
5. The PI ensures the update of environmental compliance information if the buy-in did not receive categorical exclusion.
6. The PI, Co-PI, practitioners, and USAID are responsible to complete the final biannual Research Translation Needs Assessment survey for research teams to provide feedback on the project management support, application of the ERT model and lessons learned to LASER PULSE.
7. The PI, Co-PI, practitioners, and USAID are responsible to participate in a research translation debrief at the end of a program with the RTT, to provide feedback on the ERT model and lessons learned.

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR REMINDERS

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](https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AhZcWIGps5kyjP).
2. All meetings with LASER PULSE and USAID will require an agenda and a person designated to take notes. The PI will be required to ensure this preparation.
3. Due dates for Buy-in PIs to report data and/or information updates to the LASER PULSE 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. Bi-annual reporting comprises buy-in progress updates (see reporting template); Progress Marker reporting; environmental impact updates (if the buy-in does not have categorical exclusion); gender disaggregated data and reporting.
5. All communications related to LASER PULSE, such as press releases, other news articles, websites, newsletters, and conference presentations, need to be approved by LASER PULSE, to ensure compliance with quality and with LASER PULSE and USAID requirements in the Branding and Marking Plan. For example:
  - a. External communications/documents (*e.g.*, project deliverables that will be uploaded on USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. The logo bar must appear on the cover page. All logos must be of equal visual weight in the following order: USAID, Purdue, all other participating partner logos. The Cooperative agreement number for LASER PULSE (AID-7200AA18CA00009) must appear on the cover page as well.
  - b. 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.
6. All contractual and risk-related issues for a Buy-in must flow through LASER PULSE.
7. All Buy-in PIs must refer to and abide by this LASER PULSE SOP throughout project implementation.