

**Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot
Call for Proposals, No. MCA-1
Regional Implementation Team**

Opening date: Monday, 1 April 2019

Closing date: Monday, 13 May 2019

Location: CEPF, 2011 Crystal Drive, Suite 600, Crystal City VA 22202, USA

Email submission: cepfmca@cepf.net

1. Invitation

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank, is designed to help safeguard the world's biodiversity hotspots. As one of the founding partners, Conservation International administers the global program through a CEPF Secretariat.

The pre-qualified parties named below are invited to apply for a five-year grant to implement a regional implementation team (RIT) that will oversee an US\$8 million CEPF investment strategy for the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot. The maximum funding available for this grant will be US\$1,200,000.

The Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot covers 860,000 square kilometers and includes parts of seven countries: northeastern Afghanistan; western China; southeastern Kazakhstan; most of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan; a small mountainous part of southeastern Turkmenistan; and eastern Uzbekistan. The region is remarkable for its biological and cultural diversity. At the same time, it is undergoing rapid economic transformation. The CEPF investment strategy will focus on the highest priorities for conservation in 28 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and five larger corridors. The investment strategy will attempt to bridge the gap between development and conservation needs, improve protection and management of high biodiversity sites, and develop long-term sustainable funding for conservation through targeted support to civil society in the seven countries.

The CEPF investment strategy is defined by a program design document called an “ecosystem profile.” The ecosystem profile is available on the [CEPF website](#). The document describes the five-year investment strategy and includes maps identifying priority sites for investment. The CEPF Donor Council approved this document in August 2017, which will serve as the guiding technical and geographic strategy throughout the life of the program.

The organizations shown in Table 1 submitted an expression of interest by the previously announced closing date and are thus eligible to bid in a lead role for the RIT. There is no obligation for these organizations to submit a bid. These organizations are free to form partnerships with other organizations, regardless of whether those other organizations submitted an expression of interest. However, CEPF will only accept bids from the organizations below acting in a lead role.

Table 1. Organizations Invited to Submit Proposals in a Lead Role

| No. | Organization | Lead Contact | Contact Information |
|-----|--|----------------------|--|
| 1 | ACTED | Lisa Vader | lisa.vader@acted.org |
| 2 | ARGO - Civil Society Development Association | Jamila Asanova | jamila@argonet.org |
| 3 | Association for Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan | Vera Voronova | vera.voronova@acbk.kz |
| 4 | Biodiversity Conservation Fund of Kazakhstan | Assylbekov Assylkhan | admin@fsbk.kz; fundecology@gmail.com |
| 5 | Ecological Development Information Aarhus Centre | Kanybek Isabaev | aarhus.osh@gmail.com |
| 6 | Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy | Anara Alymkulova | isd.kg.2011@gmail.com; anaraal@gmail.com |
| 7 | Kyrgyz Wildlife Conservation Society | Sergey Kulagin | kulagins1@mail.ru |
| 8 | Panthera | Jared Watkins | jwatkins@panthera.org |
| 9 | Plateau Perspectives | Marc Foggin | foggin@plateauperspectives.org; marc.foggin@gmail.com |
| 10 | Regional Mountain Centre of Central Asia | Ysmayl Dairov | ismaild@mail.ru |
| 11 | Wildlife Conservation Society | Eric Traub | etraub@wcs.org |
| 12 | WWF-Russia | Grigory Mazmanians | GMazmanians@wwf.ru |
| 13 | Zoi Environment Network | Otto Simonett | otto.simonett@zoinet.org |

2. Background

The ecosystem profile for the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot was developed through a process of stakeholder consultation and expert research. More than 250 stakeholders from civil society, government and donor agencies were consulted during the preparation of the document.

The ecosystem profile presents an overview of the hotspot in terms of its biological importance, climate change impacts, major threats to biodiversity, causes of biodiversity loss, socioeconomic context, and current conservation investments. It provides a suite of measurable conservation outcomes, identifies funding gaps and opportunities for investment,

and thus identifies the niche where CEPF investment can provide the greatest incremental value. It also contains a five-year investment strategy for CEPF in the region. This investment strategy comprises a series of funding opportunities, termed strategic directions, divided into several investment priorities outlining the types of activities that will be eligible for CEPF funding. The ecosystem profile does not include specific project concepts, as civil society groups will develop these as part of their applications for CEPF grant funding.

CEPF's niche in the region is to support a diversity of civil society organizations with varying levels of capacity to achieve conservation outcomes and environmental sustainability within the increasingly important national agendas of economic growth. Efforts must be made to demonstrate the link between biodiversity and people by improving livelihoods, and by mainstreaming biodiversity and sustainability into existing policies, plans and development programs.

The ecosystem profile identifies six strategic directions:

1. Address threats to priority species.
2. Improve management of priority sites with and without official protection status.
3. Support sustainable management and biodiversity conservation within priority corridors.
4. Engage communities of interest and economic sectors, including the private sector, in improved management of production landscapes (i.e. priority sites and corridors that are not formally protected).
5. Enhance civil society capacity for effective conservation action.
6. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a regional implementation team.

Each of these strategic directions has related indicators for measuring performance of the overall portfolio. Further, the overall portfolio will contribute to CEPF's [global indicators](#).

The RIT is responsible for Strategic Direction 6, but implicitly becomes a critical partner of the CEPF Secretariat, based at Conservation International headquarters, as well as to the other CEPF donors.

The purpose of this call for proposals is for interested organizations to demonstrate their approach to Strategic Direction 6 within the context of the challenges presented in the ecosystem profile and the other five strategic directions.

The Terms of Reference for the RIT are located in Section 10.

3. Conference Call and Clarifications

CEPF will hold a conference call on/about **Tuesday, 16 April 2019**, at which time CEPF representatives will briefly describe the expectations for the RIT, and respond to oral or previously submitted written questions. All parties that have submitted expressions of interest,

listed in Section 1 above, will receive detailed instructions on how to access this call. An electronic recording of the call may be subsequently made available via the CEPF website.

CEPF will accept written questions via email to cepfmca@cepf.net up until to **Monday, 22 April 2019**. CEPF will post all questions received and responses for public viewing on www.cepf.net by **Friday, 26 April 2019**.

CEPF may also use www.cepf.net to release other explanatory documents that may assist applicants in completing their proposals.

4. Eligibility and Exclusions

Nongovernment organizations and other civil society applicants with substantial experience in biodiversity conservation, sustainable development or capacity building may apply for funding. Organizations must have their own bank account and be authorized under relevant national laws to receive charitable contributions. Government-owned enterprises or institutions are eligible only if they can establish that the enterprise or institution (1) has a legal personality independent of any government agency or actor; (2) has the authority to apply for and receive private funds; and (3) may not assert a claim of sovereign immunity.

Private, for-profit firms, including consultant groups, as members of civil society, are eligible to apply.

Provided an organization meets the above requirements, groups that participated in the ecosystem profiling process, as a stakeholder, participant, author or consultant, are eligible to apply. Any potential advantage gained as a result of involvement in creating the CEPF Ecosystem Profile for the region will not be considered during selection of the winning bid.

The RIT can consist of a single entity or a consortium of eligible entities. If a consortium is submitting a proposal, then one organization must be clearly identified as the lead. The lead organization will have final responsibility for submitting the consolidated proposal and if successful, will be responsible for leading implementation, reporting to CEPF, receiving and disbursing funds, and coordinating the other members of the consortium.

Individual organizations that lead the RIT, or organizations that are members of the selected RIT consortium, will not be eligible to apply for other CEPF grants within the same hotspot. Applications from formal affiliates of those organizations that have an independent operating board of directors will be accepted and subject to additional external review.

5. Period of Performance

The period of performance is five years from the date of award, currently expected to be 1 October 2019 through 30 September 2024.

6. Place of Performance

The place of performance is predominantly within the hotspot portions of Afghanistan, China, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Further significant work is expected to take place in other parts of these countries to engage with the government and private sector (e.g., capital cities and commercial centers), and it is possible that work could take place elsewhere in the broader region or that CEPF will require staff from the RIT to travel to other CEPF regions for trainings and exchanges.

The expected degree of focus in each country is further described in Section 12.6, with particular reference to China.

7. Award of Two Grant Agreements

The result of this competitive process will be two separate grant agreements between Conservation International, acting on behalf of CEPF, and the lead entity of the RIT.

The first agreement will be to conduct the role of the RIT as described in the terms of reference in Section 10 and as based on the proposal of the lead entity.

For administrative and contractual reasons, the organization/consortium that receives the RIT grant will receive a second, separate grant agreement that consists only of money for small grants. Applicants should include all labor, managerial and administrative expenses associated with managing the small-grants mechanism in their proposal for the RIT.

As described in the terms of reference, the RIT will be responsible for managing a fund and disbursing money via a small-grants mechanism (SGM). The size of small grants will have a maximum ceiling of between US\$20,000 and US\$50,000, and will be determined in negotiations with the selected RIT. The total amount of money for small grants will be determined by the winning applicant and the CEPF Secretariat, but for the entire hotspot is estimated to be between US\$500,000 and US\$1,000,000. This amount is separate from the RIT agreement, which has a ceiling of US\$1,200,000.

Prior to the award of the SGM, the RIT will be required to prepare a template small-grant agreement for CEPF approval. This typically requires three months. Thus, the duration of the RIT agreement will be for 60 months, whereas the SGM agreement will be for marginally less time.

In summary, this solicitation is for one proposal that will lead to two separate agreements with one lead organization.

8. Solicitation, Review and Award

This call for proposals follows the release of a call for expressions of interest that was distributed widely by the CEPF Secretariat, including to all stakeholders who participated in the

ecosystem profiling process for the region, released via the CEPF global website and the CEPF e-newsletter, and via CEPF donor partners and well-known organizations both internationally and within the region.

The CEPF Secretariat is responsible for the analysis and ranking of applications. The Secretariat will present this analysis and all responsive applications to the CEPF Working Group, which consists of representatives from each donor. The Working Group will make a final recommendation to the CEPF Donor Council, which will formally approve the selection of the RIT.

9. Cost Ceiling for the Regional Implementation Team Grant Agreement

As stated in the logical framework of the ecosystem profile, the maximum amount of money allocated to Strategic Direction 6, which provides for the role of the RIT, is US\$1,200,000.

The five investment priorities in Strategic Direction 6 parallel, in a shorter form, the full terms of reference of the RIT described in Section 10.

10. Terms of Reference

There are nine components to the terms of reference, each with a set of functions. There is elaboration on these functions in Sections 11 and 12, below.

Component 1. Coordinate CEPF investment in the hotspot.

Functions

1. Serve as the field-based technical representative for CEPF in relation to civil society groups, grantees, international donors, host country governments and agencies, and other potential partners within the hotspot.
2. Ensure coordination and collaboration with CEPF's donors, in coordination with the CEPF Secretariat and as appropriate in the hotspot.
3. Promote collaboration and coordination, and opportunities to leverage CEPF funds with local and international donors and governments investing in the region, via donor roundtables, experiential opportunities or other activities.
4. Engage conservation and development stakeholders to ensure collaboration and coordination.
5. Attend relevant conferences/events in the hotspot to promote synergy and coordination with other initiatives.
6. Build partnerships/networks among grantees in order to achieve the objectives of the ecosystem profile.

Component 2. Support the mainstreaming of biodiversity into public policies and private sector business practices.

Functions

1. Support civil society to engage with government and the private sector and share their results, recommendations and best practice models.
2. Engage directly with private sector partners and government officials and ensure their participation in implementation of key strategies.

Component 3. Communicate the CEPF investment throughout the hotspot.

Functions

1. Communicate regularly with CEPF and partners about the portfolio through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, the internet (website and electronic newsletter) and reports to forums and structures.
2. Prepare a range of communications products to ensure that ecosystem profiles are accessible to grant applicants and other stakeholders.
3. Disseminate results via multiple and appropriate media.
4. Provide lessons learned and other information to the Secretariat to be communicated via the CEPF website.
5. Conduct exchange visits with other RITs to share lessons and best practices.
6. In coordination with the CEPF Secretariat, ensure communication with local representatives of CEPF's donors.

Component 4. Build the capacity of local civil society.

Functions

1. Undertake a capacity needs assessment for local civil society.
2. Support implementation of a long-term strategic vision for the hotspot geared toward enabling civil society to "graduate" from CEPF support.
3. Assist civil society groups in designing projects that contribute to the achievement of objectives specified in the ecosystem profile and a coherent portfolio of mutually supportive grants.
4. Build institutional capacity of grantees to ensure efficient and effective project implementation.
5. Build capacity of civil society to engage with and influence government agencies.
6. Build capacity of civil society to engage with and influence the private sector.

Component 5. Establish and coordinate a process for large-grant (>US\$20,000) proposal solicitation and review.

Functions

1. Establish and coordinate a process for solicitation of applications.
2. Announce the availability of CEPF grants.
3. Publicize the contents of the ecosystem profile and information about the application process.
4. With the CEPF Secretariat, establish schedules for the consideration of proposals at pre-determined intervals, including decision dates.

5. Establish and coordinate a process for evaluation of applications.
6. Evaluate all letters of inquiry.
7. Facilitate technical review of applications (including, where appropriate, convening a panel of experts).
8. Obtain external reviews of all applications more than US\$250,000.
9. Decide jointly with the CEPF Secretariat on the award of all grant applications of more than US\$20,000 (or the limit of small grants).
10. Communicate with applicants throughout the application process to ensure applicants are informed and fully understand the process.

Component 6. Manage a program of small grants (\leq US\$20,000) (US\$50,000 or less in select approved regions).

Functions

1. Establish and coordinate a process for solicitation of small-grant applications.
2. Announce the availability of CEPF small grants.
3. Conduct due diligence to ensure sub-grantee applicant eligibility and capacity to comply with CEPF funding terms.
4. Convene a panel of experts to evaluate proposals.
5. Decide on the award of all grant applications of US\$20,000 or less (US\$50,000 or less in select approved regions)
6. Manage the contracting of these awards.
7. Manage disbursement of funds to grantees.
8. Ensure small-grant compliance with CEPF funding terms.
9. Monitor, track, and document small-grant technical and financial performance.
10. Assist the Secretariat in maintaining the accuracy of the CEPF grants management database.
11. Open a dedicated bank account in which the funding allocated by CEPF for small grants will be deposited, and report on the status of the account throughout the project.
12. Ensure that grantees complete regular (based on length of the project) technical and financial progress reports.
13. Prepare semi-annual summary report to the CEPF Secretariat with detailed information of the small-grants program, including names and contact information for all grantees, grant title or summary of grant, time period of grants, award amounts, disbursed amounts, and disbursement schedules.

Component 7. Monitor and evaluate the impact of CEPF's large and small grants.

Functions

1. Collect and report on data for portfolio-level indicators (from large and small grantees) annually as these relate to the logical framework in the ecosystem profile.
2. Collect and report on relevant data in relation to CEPF graduation criteria for the hotspot.
3. Collect and report on relevant data for CEPF's global monitoring indicators.
4. Ensure quality of performance data submitted by large and small grantees.

5. Verify completion of products, deliverables, and short-term impacts by grantees, as described in their proposals.
6. Support grantees to comply with requirements for completion of tracking tools, including the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool.
7. In coordination with CEPF Secretariat, conduct a mid-term assessment and a final assessment of portfolio progress (covering large and small grants).
8. Conduct regular site visits to large and small grantees to monitor their progress and ensure outreach, verify compliance and support capacity building.
9. Provide guidance to grantees for the effective design and implementation of safeguard policies to ensure that these activities comply with the guidelines detailed in the CEPF Operations Manual and with the World Bank's environmental and social safeguard policies. Provide additional support and guidance during the implementation and evaluation cycles at regular field visits to projects.
10. In coordination with CEPF Secretariat, conduct a final assessment of portfolio progress and assist with preparation of report documentation.

Component 8. Lead the process to develop, over a three-month period, a long-term strategic vision for CEPF investment.

Functions

1. Mobilize expertise and establish an advisory group to ensure that the long-term vision engages with appropriate stakeholders.
2. Undertake a review of relevant literature to ensure alignment of the long-term vision with other initiatives and avoid duplication of effort.
3. Consult with key stakeholders to solicit their input into the development of the long-term vision.
4. Synthesize the results of the literature review and stakeholder consultations into a long-term strategic vision document.
5. Present the draft long-term vision to key stakeholders and revise the document according to their comments.
6. Prepare a progress report for presentation to the CEPF donors' Working Group.

Component 9. Reporting

Functions

1. Participate in initial week of RIT training.
2. Participate in two "supervision missions" per year, each to include at least two days in the office and a visit to grantees in the field (approximately two weeks).
3. Prepare quarterly financial reports and six-monthly technical reports.
4. Respond to CEPF Secretariat requests for information, travel, hosting of donors and attendance at a range of events to promote CEPF.

11. Instructions for the Preparation of Proposals

Proposals must be submitted in English.

The application process for the RIT involves completion of several separate elements, described below. Please consult the [CEPF Operational Manual](#) as the RIT will be responsible for helping CEPF fulfill the policies and procedures contained therein.

Applicants are advised to read this section carefully in conjunction with Section 15 (Evaluation Criteria) in order to understand the relative weighting CEPF will use in evaluating proposals.

11.1 Proposal Files in Microsoft Word, Excel or PDF

Applicants should provide Microsoft Word, Excel or PDF files that address all the items below.

- 11.1.1. Applicants should include a **cover note** to their proposals listing all documents submitted. The cover note should clearly list the name of the organizational chief executive, and, if different, the name(s) of all parties with the ability to legally bind the organization and the name(s) of all parties whom CEPF should contact for clarifications and negotiations. The cover note should also provide complete mailing address, street address (if different), electronic mail address(es) and telephone number(s).
- 11.1.2. **Organizational experience** related to the tasks described in the terms of reference and ecosystem profile, including demonstrated experience in the following areas:
 - i. Playing a leadership role in biodiversity conservation and civil society capacity building in the hotspot.
 - ii. Working with diverse civil society organizations, including providing assistance for project proposal development and implementation.
 - iii. Conducting performance, programmatic, and financial management monitoring.
 - iv. Working with donors, governments, communities, the private sector, and other stakeholders on conservation and development issues, including building alliances and networks of stakeholder groups to achieve conservation goals.
 - v. Managing multi-faceted programs and grants of similar size, scope, and complexity as the RIT and small-grants mechanism.
 - vi. This section should also include such basic information as:
 - History and Mission Statement
 - Year Organization Established
 - Total Permanent Staff
- 11.1.3. **Project rationale and project approach** demonstrating a clear understanding of: the Ecosystem Profile, including the conservation issues in the hotspot, the strategic directions and investment priorities, and overall

mission and strategic approach of CEPF; the role of civil society to achieve the investment strategy set out in the Profile; and the constraints and opportunities of working in a diverse and broad political, socioeconomic, and geographic environment. Applicants should demonstrate a clear approach to working with civil society and an understanding of the different contexts/challenges facing civil society organizations in the hotspot.

The project approach should show a similarly clear understanding of grant-making requirements from international donors. (Applicants are referred to the CEPF Operational Manual, which includes the CEPF Grant Agreement.)

- 11.1.4. Supplemental text to the project approach that explains how applicants will (1) work with grantees and other important stakeholder groups to build a grant portfolio that encourages collaboration and synergy to implement the CEPF investment strategy, and (2) ensure sustainability and the ability to replicate their efforts.
- 11.1.5. If a consortium of organizations is applying, applicants should explain the contractual arrangements that will be made between the lead applicant and subordinate partners.
- 11.1.6. If the organization/consortium is proposing to undertake anything less than the entire terms of reference (as described in 9c and 9d, above), then it should discuss how it will ensure the completion of remaining components/functions.
- 11.1.7. Management systems and/or approach to the requirements of the Terms of Reference. This includes systems or demonstration of administrative capacity and systems for monitoring grants and for managing a small-grants mechanism (including solicitation, award, monitoring and evaluation, and modification and/or resolution of non-performing grants).
- 11.1.8. An organizational chart describing the lines of authority between individuals or organizational relationships between consortium members to achieve desired results. This figure should show where individuals are placed (e.g., city, country) and relationships between the RIT, the CEPF Secretariat and other relevant stakeholders.
- 11.1.9. As appropriate, work flow diagrams (e.g., for soliciting and awarding grants), work plans (e.g., Gantt charts), or any other visual element better explaining how technical activities will take place, when they will take place and who will be responsible for leading them.
- 11.1.10. Curricula vitae of all principal personnel making up the RIT.

Applicants must propose, by name, a single, dedicated team leader with appropriate managerial and technical experience who is fluent in written and spoken English. CEPF's expectation is that this person will be recruited now and named in the proposal. Applicants that do not name a team leader—but intend to recruit one after project award—must name appropriately qualified full-time organizational staff who will fill this role until the permanent team leader is engaged.

Applicants should name all other principal personnel, including, for example, country-based project officers, financial officer, small-grants manager or specialists in biodiversity, capacity building, communications, policy or private sector engagement.

- 11.1.11. Budget in Microsoft Excel, per the template included with this request for proposals. If a consortium of organizations is applying, list subordinate partners as "sub-grants," then include all details for these groups on a separate worksheet, all of which feed into the lead applicant's worksheet.

Each worksheet should have subtotals for salaries/benefits; professional services; rent and storage; telecommunications; postage and delivery; supplies; furniture and equipment; maintenance; travel; meetings and special events; miscellaneous; and management support costs.

Worksheets should show all calculations, including unit costs, total units and totals per year over five years.

CEPF allows for a maximum management support cost of 13 percent. Management support costs must be justified with supporting documentation such as audited financial statements, organizational policies or precedent contracts.

The proposed budget should be only for the RIT award and not the separate SGM. The SGM will consist of only the money for the small grants themselves. Otherwise, the RIT grant budget should incorporate all costs associated with implementing the terms of reference, including the labor associated with managing the SGM.

- 11.1.12. All offers are expected to use the following fixed figures, subject to negotiation prior to grant finalization.

- US\$25,000 for translation and interpretation, per Item 12.19, below.
- US\$20,000 under Meetings and Special Events for a mid-term assessment, per Item 12.20, below.
- US\$30,000 under Meetings and Special Events for a final assessment, per Item 12.20, below.

11.2 Financial Questionnaire

Top-ranked applicants, including members of a consortium, will be required to complete a financial questionnaire as part of their final proposal. The questionnaire itself requests further documentation about the organization, including financial statements, auditor statements and registration/incorporation certification.

11.3 Security Screening

The highest-rated applicant will subsequently be required, per United States law, to complete forms demonstrating compliance with counter-terrorism and anti-money laundering laws.

11.4 References

Provide the complete names and contact information of contract managers or project officers from three programs/contracts/grants of similar size, scope and complexity, either ongoing or completed within the last three years.

12. Approach to the RIT Terms of Reference

Items 11.1.3 through 11.1.11 above all refer to the applicant's *approach to performing the role of the RIT*. Good proposals will address the following issues discussed below.

Applicants should refer, as well, to Figure 1. As shown, there is a financial, contractual and technical relationship between CEPF's six donors and the CEPF Secretariat. In turn, there is a financial, contractual and technical relationship between the CEPF Secretariat and (1) the RIT and (2) all recipients of "large" grants. There is no **direct** financial, contractual relationship between the Secretariat and the recipients of "small" grants. The RIT maintains a financial, contractual and technical relationship with the recipients of "small" grants. The CEPF Secretariat and the RIT collaborate to manage the entire portfolio of large and small grants, and all the grant agreement terms and conditions between CEPF and recipients of large grants also apply between the RIT and recipients of small grants. Applicants are encouraged to consider further the items discussed below.

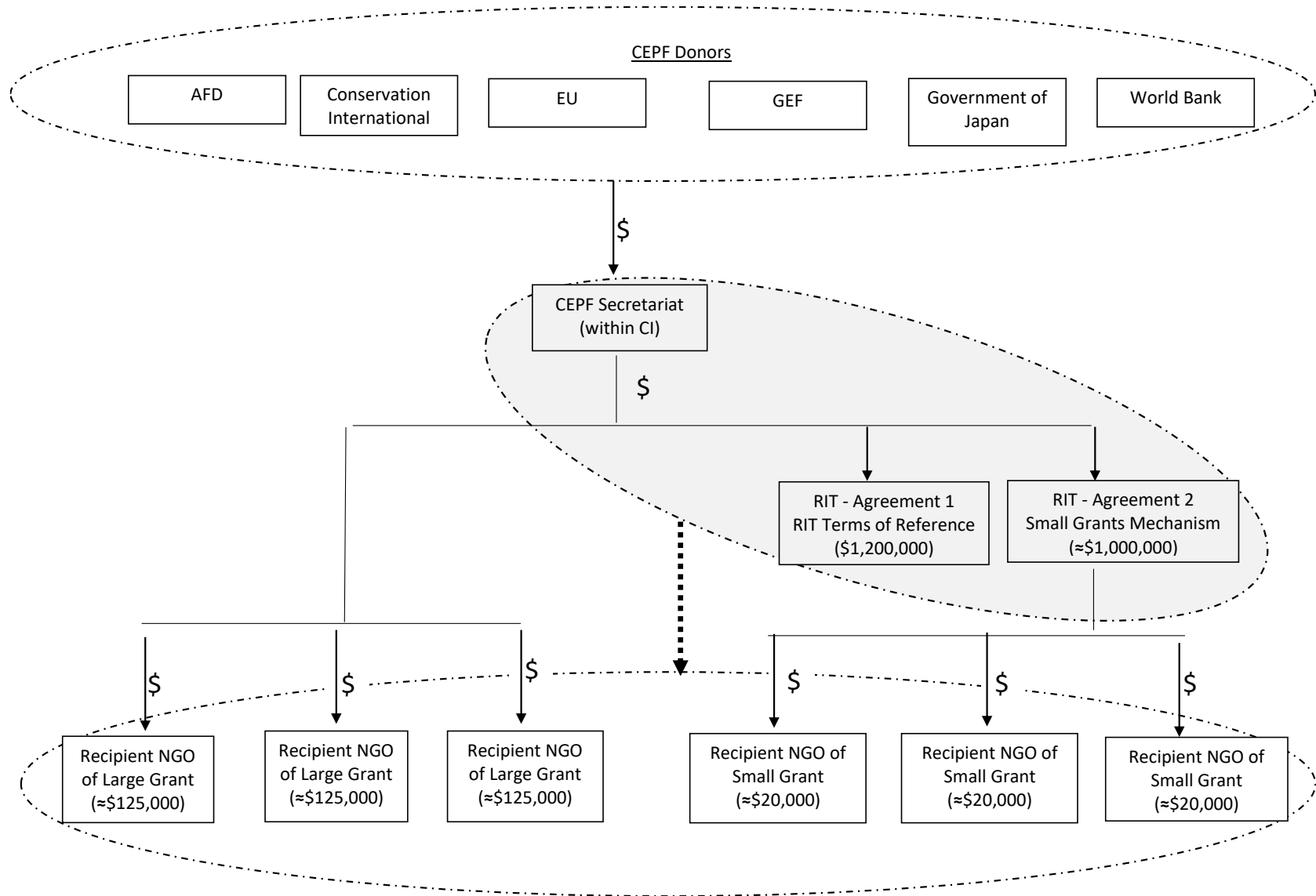
12.1. **Number of grantees.** CEPF has allocated US\$1,200,000 for the RIT. This leaves US\$6,800,000 to award as "large" and "small" grants. Typical large grants in the CEPF portfolio range between \$80,000 and \$250,000. Further, over a five-year portfolio, the typical allocation for all small grants is about US\$1,000,000. This suggests a small-grant portfolio of about 50 awards (i.e., 50 small grants at \$20,000/grant) and a large-grant portfolio of about 45 grants (i.e., 45 large grants at \$125,000/grant). Thus, the RIT could expect as many as 95 different relationships with grantees. (Consider this in terms of Components 1-9 in the RIT terms of reference, above.)

12.2. **Ratio of applicants to grantees.** Applicants should consider the sophistication of civil society organizations active in the hotspot, their operational capacity in relation to

CEPF requirements, how well they write proposals, and how well they can be expected to respond to the goals of the ecosystem profile. Applicants should assume they will receive as many as 500 applications to yield 95 award-worthy grants.

- 12.3. **Timing of solicitations, awards and monitoring.** The RIT should expect that all large and small grants are fully complete three months prior to the close of the RIT grant (i.e., by 30 June 2024).
- 12.4. **Review processes.** Applicants should consider how proposal reviews will occur. Will the RIT convene a panel of experts to assist in reviews? Will the RIT screen proposals and only submit a short-list of those to the experts? Will the RIT decide on its own which proposals should move forward and, instead, use a panel of experts to advise on the overall direction of the program?
- 12.5. **Obligation of CEPF funds.** Each year, the Secretariat and RIT will agree upon an annual spending target (also called an “obligation” target). The RIT will help CEPF obligate US\$6,800,000 for large and small grants over the five-year period. RIT proposals should anticipate the work effort and processes that lead to such awards, including applicant outreach, grant solicitation, proposal reviews, revisions and due diligence prior to awards.

Figure 1. Relationship between Secretariat, RIT and Grantees



12.6. **Geographic or technical plan for awards.** One “approach” to making grant awards is to accept proposals from any priority geography for any strategic direction, starting immediately. In that sense, the “approach” of the RIT is to build a coherent portfolio from the project concepts that applicants put forward. Alternatively, the RIT could have a geographic plan, focusing on one sub-region in the first year, or a technical plan, focusing on one strategic direction in the first year. The RIT could opt to focus on the lowest capacity groups early in the portfolio, or it could focus on the “easy victories” first. In some hotspots, RITs have created “cornerstone” grants around which other activities, and grantees, are built. There is no correct answer, and certainly strategies evolve, but applicants should suggest an approach and a rationale for doing so.

12.7. **Geographic focus.** The hotspot includes all or parts of seven countries. However, where work actually takes place—or the relative emphasis and physical presence of the RIT in each of those countries—is a function of CEPF rules for engagement in a country and political reality. Strong applicants will show a consideration of the following.

- Physical presence in seven countries is not necessary, or even likely, given the limited budget.
- CEPF requires endorsement by the government to make grants in an individual country. At the time of this call for proposals, CEPF is assured of its ability to work in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- We anticipate receiving approval to work in Afghanistan prior to any grants being made there.
- For planning purposes, applicants should anticipate ability to make grants in Uzbekistan by mid-2020.
- The reality of grant-making in Afghanistan, due to security and capacity issues, limits the number of viable partners.
- The reality of grant-making in Turkmenistan and the limited overlap of the biodiversity hotspot, limits the number of viable partners.
- RIT applicants should not plan to make small grants or have a long-term personnel presence in China at this time. CEPF hopes to make grants in China at some point over the five-year investment period, and the RIT would be responsible for incorporating data and results into the overall portfolio. Similarly, we expect activities centered around any of the other six countries to possibly include interaction with Chinese civil society or government. RIT applicants should demonstrate their knowledge of the socio-political context in the Chinese part of the hotspot and their knowledge of civil society active there. RIT applicants should describe their operational flexibility if conditions change but, otherwise, should not allocate unique budgetary elements to working in China.

12.8. **Mentoring and capacity building.** Further to Components 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Terms of Reference (Section 10), applicants should describe their ability and plan to mentor civil society organizations—as recipients of large grants, as recipients of small grants,

as applicants or as part of the larger collective of organizations promoting conservation in the region.

This could take place in ways both general and specific, including:

- Civil society organization (CSO) understanding of the ecosystem profile and conservation of Key Biodiversity Areas.
- CSO understanding of CEPF bio-physical, economic, social and organizational goals for the purposes of monitoring.
- CSO understanding of CEPF's requirements for financial management (and financial management capacity).
- CSO understanding of CEPF policies on safeguards, gender, ethics and procurement.
- Grantee understanding of CEPF's requirements to build a proposal budget.
- Grantee understanding of the CEPF grant agreement.
- Grantee ability to manage the finances of CEPF grants.
- Grantee ability to report, technically and financially to CEPF.
- Site visits, thematic dialogues, learning exchanges and writing workshops.

12.9. **Approach to public policy and private sector engagement.** Component 2 requires the RIT to take a leadership role on behalf of CEPF, the grantees, and broader civil society in relation to the public and private sectors in the region. This could require presence in national capitals or other locations that are not necessarily in priority KBA clusters and will require working with individuals who are not grantees. The successful RIT applicant will anticipate the direction such work might go, particularly in terms of sections of the ecosystem profile that discuss links to CEPF's long-term goals and sustainability.

12.10. **Ability to operate in multiple languages.** The RIT will serve as the interface between the CEPF Secretariat and applicants/grantees in up to seven countries. As such, the RIT, as a team, must be multilingual. The predominant language of communication between the CEPF Secretariat and recipients of large grants will be English. RITs should anticipate dealing with documentation that includes grant agreements, administrative instructions to grantees, proposal templates, and impact monitoring guidance. The successful RIT applicant will propose a team that meets these requirements.

12.11. **Staffing strategy.** Based on the above, the successful RIT applicant will anticipate what type of personnel it needs and where they need to be placed, physically. Proposals should include a plan for staff placement, travel, and communication (e.g., with grantees and with other members of the RIT) that reflects the approach to the items above.

Apart from the position of a single, dedicated team leader, applicants are free to propose a team in whatever fashion and with whatever commitment of time they

like. However, the Secretariat has found that over five years, successful RITs have had the equivalent of 3-5 full-time personnel fulfilling the following roles.

- Team leader as primary interlocutor for the CEPF Secretariat, strategic leader for the portfolio, lead contact for host country governments and senior members of civil society, and as a project officer.
- Country-specific project officers for, variously, program development, CSO support and mentoring, and/or technical/operational/financial supervision.
- Financial manager overseeing the RIT's use of US\$1.2 million for the RIT grant and US\$1,000,000 for the SGM.
- Small grants manager and/or contract manager for, variously, contract preparation, award, oversight and payment authorization.

The lead financial manager and/or small grants manager should have, individually or collectively, experience as a qualified accountant with an understanding of transaction tracing and financial reviews of smaller organizations. Either the lead financial officer or small grant manager will be in a position of reading contractual provisions, communicating with the CEPF Secretariat, and ensuring these are appropriately followed by the recipients of large and small grants. Thus, one of these people must be comfortable operating in English regarding common contractual and financial terms.

As noted previously, there are multiple other roles: biodiversity expertise, capacity building, policy, government or private sector engagement, administrative support, communications, translation/interpretation, monitoring, GIS, etc. Each applicant will address these requirements differently, if at all, based on its own organizational structure.

Applicants should anticipate that roles, placement of personnel and time commitment of personnel will change over the life of the portfolio.

12.12. **Management of large grants.** While the CEPF Secretariat maintains the contractual and financial relationship with the recipients of large grants, the RIT is required to support the Secretariat in the overall management of these grants. This includes:

- Support to the Grant Director in the strategic development of the grant portfolio, annual portfolio overviews, mid-term and final assessments, and the review of proposals, performance reports, and grantee results reporting.
- Support to the Grants and Contracts Unit in the collection and review of financial supporting documentation for proposals, quarterly financial reports, supporting documentation for quarterly financial reports, and administrative, financial, and contractual inquiries.
- Support to the Communications Team in the production or collection of stories, photographic or video content, or Secretariat-led outreach.

- Support to the Monitoring, Evaluation and Outreach Unit in the collection, tabulation, and verification of results and data from individual large and small grantees.
- Support to the Secretariat in maintaining the online grants management database in Salesforce, called Conservation Grants.

12.13. **Management of small grants.** The RIT is tasked with creating a system for management of small grants or using/adapting its existing system if it has one. At the same time, CEPF has its own database called ConservationGrants. The RIT will have access to ConservationGrants for the entire period of the grant agreement and may use it as a grant management tool. However, due to licensing costs and security requirements, it may not have access to this system after the RIT agreement ends. Regardless of the system used, CEPF requires RITs to use ConservationGrants in relation to small grant recipients, including for storing required documentation for each grantee, recording individual payments on each grant, recording amendments, recording close-out documentation, and entering basic monitoring data.

12.14. **SGM operational controls.** The RIT must institute a system of operational controls for the management of small grants, including, but not limited to: solicitation, review, award, supervision, signatory authority, payments, and payment approval authority. CEPF recommends creation of an SGM operational manual, or if the RIT already is managing a similar program, adaptation of an existing manual to include operations of the CEPF SGM.

12.15. **Preparation of a small-grant agreement template.** The RIT must prepare a small grant agreement template that (1) reflects all the standard terms and conditions that CEPF requires of recipients of large grants, (2) is in compliance with its own organizational policies and financial control systems, and (3) is in compliance with local laws where grants are awarded, as appropriate. The RIT must present this agreement to the CEPF Secretariat prior to CEPF awarding the overall SGM agreement.

12.16. **Supervision of small grants.** The RIT bears responsibility for ensuring small grantee compliance with the terms of the small grant agreement. This leads to risk for the RIT: if a small grantee is in non-compliance, CEPF could hold the RIT financially responsible. The implication is institution of risk mitigation measures by the RIT during the application process, orientation upon award, and regular visits or receipt of documentation (for technical, financial and operational requirements).

12.17. **Small grant ceiling.** The formal limit to the size of a small grant from the RIT to a local recipient can be set anywhere between US\$20,000 and US\$50,000 depending on conditions in the hotspot. Applicants should suggest a ceiling for small grants and provide a rationale for this in their proposals, although as stated in Section 7, ultimately, this will be negotiated and agreed upon with the CEPF Secretariat.

- 12.18. **Small-grant mechanism pool.** CEPF will increase the obligation for the Small Grant Mechanism grant agreement over five years. Obligations often start at an amount less than US\$250,000 and then increase as the RIT, itself, shows managerial ability and technical need for small grants. The final size of the SGM is not pre-determined but experience elsewhere suggests around US\$1 million is a reasonable final amount.
- 12.19. **Communication strategy and products.** Further to Component 3 of the Terms of Reference (Section 10), applicants should describe their own organizational communication strategy, or their plan for coordinating such a strategy, that leads to the promulgation of CEPF goals in the hotspot. Applicants should further describe their ability to collect and share multi-lingual communication products, high-quality project photos, photo licensing agreements, success stories, authentic quotes from beneficiaries, and media placements.
- 12.20. **Translation and interpretation.** Further to Item 11.1.12, all applicants should budget US\$25,000 for translation (of written materials) and interpretation (of spoken language). In this context and in the context of Item 12.8 on mentoring, applicants should consider the following. CEPF's primary operational language is English. This includes, at the current time, large-grant contractual agreements, the large-grant applications, and the reporting database (called ConservationGrants), at a minimum. While some of this may change over time, the RIT needs to envision ways in which it will engage applicants and recipients of large grants whose primary language is likely Russian, if not a national language.

Outright translation of every document and message between CEPF and grantees is not a viable option for cost and practicality. Similarly, requiring all large-grant applicants and awardees to have English language capacity would be contrary to the mission of CEPF. RIT applicants should consider alternatives to these two scenarios, including where bilingual RIT personnel serve as mentors and an interface for CSOs; where the RIT uses its own physical space or other venues to assist CSOs; a mix of CSOs with English capacity serving as mentors to others; staged or focused granting to groups of different levels of capacity, or some other method to ensure civil society access to CEPF funding.

- 12.21. **Mid-term and final assessments.** Further to Item 11.1.12, all applicants should budget \$20,000 for a mid-term assessment and \$30,000 for a final assessment. These events each be assumed as two days with up to twenty participants that do not otherwise have funding or the ability to attend.

13. CEPF Donor Council Approval and Negotiations

The CEPF Secretariat will evaluate and rank the bids it receives and present this analysis and all responsive applications to the CEPF Working Group, which consists of representatives from each donor. The Working Group will then make a final recommendation to the CEPF Donor

Council. Upon receiving the approval of the Donor Council, the Secretariat will engage in negotiations with the selected organization/consortium.

At the time of negotiations, CEPF will ask the selected organization/consortium to prepare a *pro forma* proposal in its online grants management system, ConservationGrants. Critically, the proposal will include a table of components and deliverables against which the RIT will report over the life of this grant. These components and deliverables will correspond to the terms of reference listed above and will reflect the approach and expected outcomes proposed now.

14. Team Leader

Applicants that do not name a permanent team leader now must submit the name and curriculum vitae of the person to CEPF for approval in advance of his/her engagement. CEPF must approve of the team leader prior to his/her engagement and must approve any replacement of the team leader during the period of engagement.

Prior to final selection, top-ranked applicants will be asked to provide a written confirmation of the availability and commitment of the proposed team leader.

15. Evaluation Criteria

CEPF will use the scorecard in Table 2 for evaluating proposals. The scorecard shows the questions that reviewers will use and the relative weighting of each category. Applicants should ensure that each of these points is adequately addressed in either their proposal files (discussed in Section 11.1) or financial questionnaire (discussed in Section 11.2.). If a group of organizations apply as a consortium under a lead applicant, CEPF will consider the collective ability of the group for each of the scored items listed below.

Table 2. Mountains of Central Asia RIT Proposal Scorecard

| 1 | Organizational Experience: Technical/Programmatic | Points: 10 |
|----------|---|-----------------------|
| 1.1 | Is the organization’s mission statement congruent with the objectives and priorities identified for the region in the ecosystem profile? | |
| 1.2 | Does the applicant present experience working with potential partner NGOs, academic institutions, local and national government agencies, and donors? | |
| 1.3 | Does the applicant have an acknowledged position of leadership within the region's civil society sector? | |
| 1.4 | Does the applicant have demonstrated experience in working with partners (such as NGOs, community organizations, and the private sector) to improve the effectiveness of conservation programs? | |
| 1.5 | Does the applicant have a demonstrated commitment to strengthening other less developed civil society organizations? | |
| 1.6 | Does the applicant have well-established professional relationships with national and local government agencies and other sectors in the region? | |

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| 1.7 | Does the applicant have the ability to represent and widely communicate the CEPF mission, objectives, and opportunities, as well as experiences, lessons learned, and results? |
| 1.8 | Does the applicant have a strong commitment to monitoring and evaluation as indicated by functioning systems to monitor and evaluate the applicant's own programs? |
| 1.9 | Does the organization have an existing conservation or development program in the region, demonstrated by its duration and record of support by other donors? |
| 2 | Organizational Experience: Management/Administrative |
| | Points: 10 |
| 2.1 | Does the organization demonstrate experience managing programs of similar size, scale, and complexity as that of the regional implementation team? |
| 2.2 | Has the organization managed the both the technical and financial elements of a small-grants program in the past, and was this program of a size (e.g., total amount of money, total number of grants) and complexity (e.g., technical components and recipients) that is comparable to what it will undertake with CEPF? |
| 2.3 | Has the applicant demonstrated ability to track, record, and account for funds received and disbursed? |
| 2.4 | Does the applicant have a segregation of duties for financial and contractual management? |
| 2.5 | Does the applicant have defined administrative/financial roles and a chart indicating the leadership and employee structure of the organization? |
| 2.6 | Does the applicant regularly complete reconciliations of money received and disbursed, in comparison with bank statements? |
| 2.7 | Does the applicant have internal controls and objective criteria that guide the review of payment requests and other invoices? |
| 2.8 | Does the applicant maintain a system for regular record keeping? |
| 2.9 | Does the applicant maintain systems to safeguard against fraud and embezzlement? |
| 2.10 | Does the applicant have the ability to carry out the CEPF mission using locally appropriate languages in work with applicants and government officials, and to use English for all evaluations of proposals and reporting on grantee performance? |
| 2.11 | Does the applicant have certified audits conducted on an annual basis with no material findings? |
| 3 | Personnel |
| | Points: 30 |
| 3.1 | Does the applicant propose a clear and viable personnel plan, including names, resumes, position titles, job descriptions, level of effort, work location and reporting lines of authority? |
| 3.2 | Does the applicant submit the name and resume a single, dedicated team leader, and does this person have the appropriate technical skills/experience and appropriate managerial skills/experience? |
| 3.3 | Does the applicant propose, by name and resume, personnel other than the team leader, and do these people have appropriate technical skills/experience and appropriate managerial skills/experience? |

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| 3.4 | Do the proposed team members have, individually or collectively, the language skills necessary to operate effectively in the hotspot? | |
| 3.5 | Does the applicant propose a plan for recruitment and/or mobilization of “to be determined” personnel (if any), including job descriptions, job qualifications, and curricula vitae of personnel from the applicant’s organization who will perform relevant duties while recruitment is pending? | |
| 4 | Proposed Technical Approach | Points: 20 |
| 4.1 | Does the applicant discuss the differing challenges of conservation and engagement with civil society in the countries in the hotspot, demonstrating an anticipation of the types of grants to be funded, the viability of targets, and the capacity of potential grantees? | |
| 4.2 | Does the applicant describe how its own organizational strategy will be advanced by serving as the lead entity for CEPF in the region and how this will help to ensure sustainability of results beyond the CEPF implementation period? | |
| 4.3 | Does the applicant address all components of the RIT as described in the Terms of Reference? | |
| 4.4 | Does the applicant demonstrate its plans to work with partners speaking relevant languages or with civil society organizations that have very different levels of capacity from one country or region to the next? | |
| 4.5 | Does the applicant propose a method to effectively communicate and coordinate the funding opportunity, results and lessons learned? | |
| 4.6 | Does the applicant propose a system for soliciting proposals for projects conforming to the strategy described in the ecosystem profile and establish an effective, transparent review process to evaluate these applications? | |
| 4.7 | Does the applicant propose a system to monitor and evaluate individual projects and assist in monitoring portfolio performance overall? | |
| 4.8 | Does the applicant propose a system to directly award and manage all small grants for civil society of up to US\$20,000? | |
| 5 | Proposed Management Approach | Points: 25 |
| 5.1 | Does the applicant demonstrate its understanding of the legal requirements to make grants in the hotspot countries, employ people or engage organizations in these countries, and foreign exchange restrictions? | |
| 5.2 | Does the applicant have defined administrative/financial roles demonstrating a segregation of duties and a chart indicating the leadership and employee structure of the organization? | |
| 5.3 | Does the applicant propose a method to track, record, and account for funds received and disbursed, and does it propose a method for regular completion of reconciliations of money received and disbursed in comparison with bank statements? | |
| 5.4 | Does the applicant propose a system for internal controls and objective criteria that guide the review of payment requests and other invoices, systematic record keeping, and fraud and embezzlement safeguards? | |
| 7 | Budget | Points: 5 |

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| 6.1 | Is the budget complete and within the allocated amount named in the Request for Proposals? |
| 6.2 | Are all costs mathematically justified through the clear presentation of unit costs, total units, and total costs? |
| 6.3 | Are all unit costs, total units, and total costs appropriate in relation to the proposed technical and managerial activities? |
| 6.4 | Are proposed unit rates in accord with market rates in the region? |
| 6.5 | If the applicant claims indirect costs, does it clearly show the base of application and is this distinct from any previously enumerated direct costs; does the applicant provide an explanation of how the indirect cost rate has been determined (e.g., historical averages, audited financial statements, precedent contracts); and does the applicant provide supporting documentation with its financial questionnaire? |
| 6.6 | If the applicant proposes to work in only a subset of the eligible countries, is the total budget proportionately less than the maximum allowable amount and is this amount adequately justified? |

END OF CALL FOR PROPOSALS