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PARTNERSHIPS FOR ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH (PEER) OPPORTUNITY FOR RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS IN BHUTAN

Eligible Countries: Bhutan

TIMELINE

Call for pre-proposals opens: March 22, 2021

Deadline for submission of pre-proposals: May 3, 2021

Invitations to submit full proposals: Rolling, with final notifications sent by May 17, 2021

Deadline for submission of full proposals: June 14, 2021

Award notification: August 16, 2021

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) is a competitive awards program that invites researchers in developing countries to apply for funds to support research and capacity-building activities. The funded projects are conducted in collaboration with researchers based in the United States. The program is supported by USAID and implemented by the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (referred to as the National Academies). US-based partners of PEER awardees must be investigators who will contribute to the scientific merit and impact of PEER projects through expertise, skills, methodologies, resource access, and synergies with ongoing projects.

BHUTAN RESEARCH CALL OVERVIEW

Bhutan is rich in natural resources, carbon-negative, and unique in the world for its Gross National Happiness Index. However, Bhutan faces many challenges that locally-generated scientific research and technological innovation are well-poised to help address. Especially critical in Bhutan are the impacts of and adaptation to climate change and urbanization across multiple sectors; the sustainability of forestry and agricultural practices; diversification of energy production; and challenges in behavioral health and infectious disease.

To enhance opportunities for Bhutanese researchers to collaborate with US-based researchers and advance science and technology activities in Bhutan, PEER will fund collaborative applied research projects within the environment, energy, and public health sectors. More specifically, we will fund

- (1) **environmental research** in the areas of environmental disasters, forestry, biodiversity conservation, agriculture, and water resources;
- (2) **energy research** in the areas of renewable energy technologies (solar, wind, hydroelectric, and modern bioenergy);
- (3) **public health research** in the areas of infectious disease (including COVID-19 and other illnesses) and behavioral health (clinical trials cannot be funded).

We are especially interested in supporting research linked to understanding and adapting to the impacts of climate change and urbanization.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

PEER invites applications from researchers at higher education and government research institutions in Bhutan. In order to be eligible, the principal investigator must be a Bhutanese citizen. Individual applicants may not submit more than one application; however, research institutions may have multiple applicants.

Bhutanese researchers must partner with a US-based researcher. If Bhutanese researchers already have or can identify a US-based partner, we ask that they note this in their pre-proposal. Researchers whose pre-proposals meet a minimum standard of eligibility and include a US-based partner will be asked to submit full proposals.

If an applicant does not currently have or cannot identify a US-based partner, they are still encouraged to submit a pre-proposal. For pre-proposals meeting a minimum standard of eligibility, but without a US-based partner, the PEER Program will attempt to help connect the applicants to US-based scientists. If a suitable and interested US-based partner is identified, then the Bhutanese applicants will be asked to submit a full proposal. If no US-based partner is identified, then a full proposal will not be requested.

AWARDS

Applicants may request up to \$70,000 USD for their projects, which are not to exceed 12 months in duration, with the possibility of a no-cost extension of 6 months if justified.

Although critical equipment purchases are allowed, applicants should justify all expenses in the context of their proposed research. The emphasis of the PEER awards is on the generation of applied collaborative research and not on improvement of research infrastructure.

US PARTNERS

PEER pre-proposals and final proposals may be submitted only by Bhutanese researchers and are not accepted directly from US-based researchers. However, PEER Bhutan researchers will be required to partner with a US-based researcher to receive funding. The role of the US-based partner is to provide complementary expertise and skills to the PEER project, but the US-based partner's research experience does not need to directly overlap. While partnerships are generally based on topical or disciplinary similarities, many US-based PEER partners also provide access to specific methodologies or instrumentation otherwise unavailable to the PEER applicant.

If applicants are invited to submit a full proposal after review of their pre-proposal, the full proposal must include a brief letter of support from the US-based partner that should clearly articulate the benefits of the research partnership to each party. As outlined in the Eligibility Criteria section, researchers may submit a pre-proposal even if they do not have a US-based research partner identified, and the PEER Program will attempt to help connect the applicants to an appropriate partner. However, if no willing US-based partner is found, then the applicant will not be invited to submit a full proposal.

REVIEW PROCESS AND CRITERIA

The pre-proposal and final proposal application and review process will be managed by the National Academies. Pre-proposals will be evaluated jointly by USAID and the National Academies on a rolling basis. Eligibility to submit a full proposal will be determined based on the following factors:

- Compliance with the Applicant Eligibility requirements listed above;
- Alignment with the applied research priorities outlined in the Overview section;
- Development impact of proposed research; and
- Identification (by the applicant or the PEER Program, as appropriate) of a US-based partner.

Final proposals will be reviewed by an independent panel of researchers who will assess them for the following main criteria, as well as others to be listed in the instructions for submitting full proposals, if invited:

- Scientific and technical merit,
- Sound budgetary justification,
- Potential for development impact, and
- Appropriateness of the partnership.

HOW TO APPLY

Pre-proposals must be submitted online, in English, via the program's [application portal](#). Paper and e-mail submissions are not accepted. After the pre-proposals are reviewed, applicants will receive notification from National Academies program staff indicating one of the following:

- Pre-proposal has been accepted; applicant can complete full application
- Pre-proposal has been accepted, pending questions/clarifications and identification of a US-based research partner; upon resolution of necessary questions and/or identification of a US-based partner, applicant can complete full application; or
- Pre-proposal has been declined.

POLICY ON FRAUDULENT OR PLAGIARIZED DATA AND DOCUMENTS IN PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

Applicants to PEER are advised that the program has a zero-tolerance policy regarding the submission of fraudulent or plagiarized data and documents as part of award proposals. Any such cases discovered by PEER staff or brought to their attention by program sponsors, review panelists, partners, or members of the public will be investigated immediately. If the presence of fraudulent or plagiarized materials in a submission is verified, the following actions will be taken:

- The pre-proposal or proposal will be removed from further consideration for funding.
- The applicant will be notified of the findings of the investigation and will be placed on a debarment list prohibiting him or her from submitting any future pre-proposals or proposals to PEER.
- An appropriate official at the applicant's institution will be advised of the case and provided with copies of the fraudulent or plagiarized materials for use in any further investigations or actions in accordance with that institution's policies.
- The USAID Agreement Officer's Representative assigned to PEER will be notified so that information may be forwarded to the USAID Office of Inspector General to assist them in determining the applicant's eligibility for any future support from USAID directly or through other implementing partners.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact National Academies staff at peer@nas.edu.