

Call for Proposals

Evaluation of Lessons Learned in Relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot

Opening Date:	26 July 2024
Closing Date:	15 October 2024, 24:00 hrs (U.S. EST)
Questions Due Date:	10 October 2024 (Questions should be sent to cepf@cepf.net)
Submission:	Proposals should be sent to cepf@cepf.net by the closing date.
Location:	CEPF, 2011 Crystal Drive, Suite 600, Crystal City VA 22202, USA

1. INVITATION

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International (CI), the European Union, Fondation Hans Wilsdorf, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan and the World Bank. CEPF is a global program that provides grants to civil society to safeguard the world's biodiversity hotspots. As one of the founding partners, CI administers the global program through a CEPF Secretariat. CEPF's purpose is to strengthen the involvement and effectiveness of civil society in the conservation and management of globally important biodiversity.

The CEPF Secretariat intends to conduct an evaluation of the regional implementation team (RIT) of the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot to inform future involvement in the region. The RIT provides strategic leadership for the program, which is implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Interested consultants or firms should submit a proposal by the closing date listed above. The successful consultant shall be required to adhere to CI's code of ethics, statement of work, and the terms and conditions of the contract. This call for proposals does not obligate CI to execute a contract nor does it commit CI to pay any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of the proposals. Furthermore, CI reserves the right to reject any and all offers if such action is considered to be in the best interest of CI.

2. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

In each of the biodiversity hotspots where it invests, CEPF selects a RIT to provide strategic leadership for the program. Each RIT consists of one or more civil society organizations active in conservation in the hotspot. The objective of the RIT is to convert the plans in the ecosystem profile into a cohesive portfolio of grants that achieves the objectives outlined in the logical framework. In each hotspot, CEPF will commission an independent evaluation of the incumbent RIT toward the end of the investment phase. This will comprise a review of the performance of the incumbent RIT and challenges, opportunities and lessons learned associated with the RIT role. In combination with the final assessment of the results of the hotspot investment (conducted as a separate exercise), this evaluation will enable future applicants for the RIT role (in the event of a re-investment) to be better informed about the experience of the incumbent RIT and the results achieved, and create a more competitive environment for all applicants.

3. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals shall be submitted in one volume, in English, and consist of:

- Technical Proposal
- Financial Proposal

Technical Proposal

Should comprise the following parts:

- Technical approach, methodology and detailed work plan. This part shall be between three to five pages long but may not exceed five pages.

The technical proposal should describe in detail how the offeror intends to carry out the requirement described in the scope of work below. The technical proposal should demonstrate a clear understanding of the work to be undertaken and the responsibilities of all parties involved.

- Management, key personnel and staffing plan. This part shall be between two and five pages long but may not exceed five pages. CVs for key personnel may be included in an annex to the technical proposal and will not count against the page limit.

Must have:

- Experience in relevant technical areas, e.g., monitoring and evaluation (at least five years).

- Master's degree in relevant natural resources-related field, e.g., monitoring and evaluation, with three years of experience, or bachelor's degree with five years of experience.
 - Experience working with CEPF programs, or equivalent.
- Corporate capabilities, experience, past performance and references. This part shall be between two and four pages long but may not exceed four pages.

Financial Proposal

A detailed budget in USD. The budget shall include a budget narrative that explains the basis for the estimation of expenses. If required, supporting information must be provided in sufficient detail to allow for a complete analysis of the cost.

4. PROCESS AND BASIS FOR AWARD

The evaluation of the RIT will be undertaken by an independent consultant, selected through a competitive procurement process. Selection of consultants will be overseen by the Monitoring, Evaluation and Outreach Unit within the CEPF Secretariat. Award will be made to the consultant whose proposal is determined to be responsive to this call for proposals, meets the technical requirement, and is determined to represent the most advantage to CI.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Technical Approach, Methodology and Work Plan	40
- Personnel Qualification	30
- Past Performance – reference of similar work previously implemented	20
- Lowest Cost	10

Scope of Work, Deliverables and Deliverables Schedule

Evaluation of Lessons Learned in Relation to the Regional Implementation Team for the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot

1) Background

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

In each of the biodiversity hotspots where it invests, CEPF selects a regional implementation team (RIT) to provide strategic leadership for the program. Each RIT consists of one or more civil society organizations active in conservation in the hotspot. The objective of the RIT is to convert the plans in the ecosystem profile into a cohesive portfolio of grants that contributes to CEPF's long-term goals for the hotspot.

In the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot, the RIT, based in Almaty, Kazakhstan, is currently performed by the Conservation Fund for Rare Species of Animals and Plants (FRAP) in partnership with ARGO Civil Society Development Association. From 2019 through 2023, FRAP was part of Vsemirnyi Fond Prirody (WWF Russia), but due to political events in Russia, was forced to disassociate itself from that now defunct group. To date CEPF investment in this hotspot totals approximately US \$7,450,000 for work taking place from 2019 through 2024. The investment includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. (China and Afghanistan are also part of the hotspot. However, work was never approved for China, and while one grant was awarded in Afghanistan, it was almost immediately terminated due to the political transition that took place in 2021.)

To capture lessons learned in relation to the RIT for the hotspot, CEPF will commission an independent evaluation. This evaluation will consider the performance of the RIT in relation to the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society there, the budget allocated to the RIT, and its achievement of individual deliverables as defined in its grant agreement with CEPF. It is

entirely distinct and separate from the formal “final assessment” of the portfolio, which is undertaken at the end of an investment phase to evaluate the overall impacts of CEPF investment in a hotspot.

2) Objective of the Evaluation

The objective of the evaluation is to inform decisions around CEPF’s future involvement in the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot, in the event that future funding becomes available. This may include decisions by CEPF donors regarding selection of a RIT for a future phase of investment, and the optimum programmatic and management approaches for coordinating any future investment.

3) Criteria for Evaluation

The evaluation will look closely at the components and functions of the Mountains of Central Asia RIT, as set out in the terms of reference, and evaluate the performance of each member against the following criteria:

i) Relevance

Were the activities undertaken relevant to the ecosystem profile, RIT terms of reference, the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society there, and the global monitoring framework of CEPF?

ii) Efficiency

How efficiently was the budget allocated to the RIT converted into results?

iii) Effectiveness

What were the strengths and weakness of the RIT structure and capacities with regard to effective delivery of results?

In addition to directly evaluating the performance of the RIT, lessons learned from the CEPF grants portfolio with regard to the RIT role will be compiled and reviewed in the context of against the following themes:

iv) Coverage

To what extent does the portfolio of grants awarded to date cover the strategic

directions and investment priorities set out in the investment strategy for the hotspot?

v) Impact

To what extent have the targets set in the hotspot ecosystem profile for impacts on biodiversity conservation, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions been met?

vi) Accessibility

Does the grant portfolio involve an appropriate balance of international and local grantees, taking into account the relative strengths of different organizations with regard to delivery of the investment strategy and considering the priority given by CEPF to building the capacity of local civil society?

vii) Adaptive management

In what ways has the development of the grant portfolio been constrained by risks (political/institutional/security/health) or taken advantage of unanticipated opportunities?

4) Formally Agreed Duties of the Regional Implementation Teams

The terms of reference of the Mountains of Central Asia RIT consist of nine components, which are:

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 learnt 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 (>\$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 over \$250,000.
9. Decide jointly with the CEPF Secretariat on the award of all grant applications of more than \$20,000.
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 (≤\$20,000)

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 \$20,000 or less.
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.

5) Duties

A consultancy firm (hereafter "the consultant") is required to undertake an evaluation of lessons learned to inform reinvestment in the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot, in the context of the abovementioned objective (Section 2). The consultant is required to field a team with experience of evaluating biodiversity conservation programs, and with adequate knowledge of the countries covered by the RIT.

The evaluation will consider the performance of the RIT in relation to the geography of the hotspot, the capacity of civil society there, the budget allocated, and their achievement of deliverables as defined in their individual grant agreement with CEPF. It will also consider the impacts of the investment to date (in terms of biodiversity, human wellbeing, civil society capacity and enabling conditions for conservation), based on the findings of the mid-term assessment for the hotspot and annual portfolio overviews.

Finally, the consultant will review the institutional landscape in the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot and identify candidate organizations that could potentially perform the RIT role (either alone or as part of a consortium). The consultant will prepare a list of potential

candidate organizations with information to include a brief description of the organization, their grant-making experience, their experience managing a project similar to that of the RIT and the pros and cons associated with their assuming the role of RIT as lead or consortium member.

The evaluation will begin with a desk review based on the following documentation:

- The ecosystem profile for the hotspot.
- The final proposal for the RIT grant.
- The RIT grant agreement plus any amendments.
- Semi-annual performance reports prepared by the RIT.
- Supervision and monitoring reports prepared by the CEPF Secretariat.
- Summary data on the grant portfolio in the hotspot, exported from CEPF's grant management system.

The desk review will be complemented by interviews with relevant CEPF Secretariat staff, relevant RIT staff, staff of the host organization, a selection of CEPF grantees and applicants, and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., representatives of other donors, government agencies, etc.). The consultancy may be conducted virtually, and may also include in-person interactions, if deemed necessary. The consultant will be expected to organize all necessary meetings with stakeholders.

6) Deliverables

There will be three deliverables from the consultancy. The consultant will be responsible for preparing a report on lessons learned regarding the RIT role, suitable for inclusion in a future ecosystem profile. The consultant will also be responsible for preparing a confidential report, on the programmatic and financial performance of the RIT, and the identification of potential candidate organizations. The chapters in this confidential report will not be included in a future ecosystem profile. These two documents will inform investment decisions by CEPF and its donors, should there be a future phase of investment in the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot. Both documents must be in English. The third deliverable is a (virtual) briefing for the CEPF Secretariat on the findings of the consultancy, to include a presentation of results and discussion.

7) Timeframe

The evaluation will be conducted between 1 November 2024, and 15 March 2025. Draft deliverables will be prepared no later than 31 January 2025 and submitted to the CEPF Secretariat for review. Final deliverables, incorporating comments from the CEPF Secretariat, will be completed by 28 February 2025. The tentative date for a virtual presentation to CEPF is 5 March 2025.

The consultant shall also provide the CEPF Secretariat with periodic verbal briefings and meet with Secretariat staff, as requested.

The total amount of time for the assignment is 20 days and should include: allocations for literature review and interviews with CEPF Secretariat staff, RIT staff and grantees; preparation of the draft deliverables; a briefing for the CEPF Secretariat on the findings; and finalization of deliverables following incorporation of Secretariat comments.

8) Reporting

The consultant will work under the close supervision and direction of the senior director for monitoring, evaluation and outreach, or any other individual that the CEPF Secretariat may designate.