

**Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot
Call for Proposals, No. MCA-1
Regional Implementation Team
Response to Clarification Questions
23 April 2019**

Per Section 3 of the subject Call for Proposals (CFPs), CEPF held an informational webinar on 16 April 2019, at which participants were able to ask questions. Interested parties were also free to submit written questions up to 22 April 2019. Responses to written questions and from the informational webinar are provided below.

1. Section 1, page 2 of the CFP states, "CEPF will only accept bids from the organizations below acting in a lead role." Does this simply mean that the lead must be chosen from the list of invited organizations? Or does it mean that an invited organization cannot serve as a sub/partner, even if the consortium lead is also an invited organization?

Response: Any of the 13 listed organizations can serve as a lead applicant and can choose one or more of the listed groups to be a subordinate partner. Furthermore, any of the 13 listed organizations can serve as a lead applicant and can choose from among non-listed groups as subordinate partners. Please refer to Slides 3, 4 and 6 of the 16 April information webinar and to the associated recording. Examples provided show acceptable bidding configurations. Invited groups (the 13 listed) can serve in a subordinate role to any of the other invited bidders. However, we advise against any of the 13 listed groups being ***both*** a lead candidate ***and*** a subordinate candidate to another group.

2. Section 6, page 5 states, "CEPF will require staff from the RIT to travel to other CEPF regions for trainings and exchanges." Do those costs need to be considered in the RIT budget or will CEPF cover them from other resources? If it is the RIT who should budget for these travel costs, could CEPF provide some guidance about the frequency or number of trips required?

Response: Budget for one RIT member to visit one international location for CEPF purposes for one week, per year. This could include your team visiting the CEPF Secretariat in Washington D.C., a team member traveling to the location of another RIT in a different hotspot to learn from them, or a team member traveling to a multi-RIT exchange facilitated by CEPF.

3. Section 10, Component 7, page 8-9 outlines considerable effort toward M&E, which is legitimate and part of the capacity building efforts for the hotspot. However, given that good M&E is also very costly (requiring field evaluation and staff), could these costs be

covered to some extent or entirely through the SGM agreement or inserted in large-grant budgets?

Response: As the RIT, you can influence applicants for large and small grants to build impact monitoring into their own budgets. Further, the Secretariat, via large grants, and the RIT, via small grants, can make awards for projects that assess change (e.g., in threat status to a species, in the effective management of a protected area), or that communicate this change (e.g., via images, maps). This fits under the rubric of monitoring, evaluation and impact. However, ultimately, the terms of reference of the RIT requires you to collect and compile data from grantee projects—from their reports, from field visits and via remote mechanisms that you propose. The costs for this should be included in your budget (e.g., in the form of labor, travel, etc.)

4. Section 10, Component 8, page 9 indicates the RIT will “lead the process to develop, over a three-month period, a long-term strategic vision for CEPF investment.” We notice that CEPF already lays out its 5-year investment strategy on pages 116-138 of its MCA Ecosystem Profile, including priority species, sites and corridors, as well as six strategic directions and their various investment priorities. How should the RIT’s development of a long-term strategic vision for CEPF investment relate to or differ from the strategic vision that is included in the ecosystem profile?

Response: The ecosystem profile presents the technical and geographic design of a grants program that will run from October 2019 to September 2024. It is not, explicitly, a long-term vision, although it does express a plan for working with civil society to protect a hotspot. Certainly, CEPF and its donors do not expect all threats to be mitigated throughout the hotspot in the next five years. On the other hand, neither CEPF’s donors, nor any international donor, can plan to stay in a region indefinitely. Component 8 of the terms of reference expects the RIT, sometime at the midpoint of the investment or later, to draft a long-term plan for civil society “graduation” from CEPF donor support. This plan might extend 20-30 years and differ by country. We envision this as a document of roughly 15 pages in length, with additional tables outlining milestones and targets. In other hotspots, this document has served as a fundraising tool and, in part, as the basis of further donor investment.

5. Section 10, Component 8, page 9 indicates the RIT will “lead the process to develop, over a three-month period, a long-term strategic vision for CEPF investment.” To ensure we understand, we offer an example. Our initial thoughts on the five-year life of the project were as follows: Because of the geographical focus of the hotspot, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are key countries, as they are included almost in their entirety, with other countries having smaller territories falling in the hotspot. Therefore, we think of launching activities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Year One and adding the other countries in Year two and onwards, with heavy emphasis on transboundary projects. While single-country projects might be feasible in the two key countries, we want to make sure that transboundary projects are prioritized in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (and China and

Afghanistan, if feasible). In your opinion, does the above correspond (or at least partially correspond) to what you would consider “strategic vision” in this context?

Response: Please see the response to Question 4 above, regarding a long-term strategic vision for the hotspot. The scenario provided in the example posed here does not correspond to what we mean by this. Rather, the scenario posed in this example corresponds to the following sections of the CFP: 11.1.,3, 11.1.4, 12.6, 12.7 and Evaluation Criteria 4.1. Thus, the scenario posed is relevant for your proposal, but not directly for the long-term strategic vision.

6. Section 10: Several components refer to the possibility of CEPF staff travel. We are unclear on whether the applicant should cover those costs in the RIT budget, or if they will be covered by CEPF. For example:

- Component 9, Function 2, page 9: Are the supervision meetings intended for CEPF staff and, if so, will CEPF staff travel be covered by CEPF?
- Component 9, Function 4, page 9: Will the ‘hosting of donors’ be covered by CEPF?
- Component 7, Function 7 and Function 10, page 9: The mid-term and final assessments are to be conducted “in coordination with CEPF Secretariat.” Will the costs associated with the CEPF Secretariat be covered by CEPF?
- Any additional guidance on when the RIT does or does not have to cover CEPF staff travel in the RIT budget would be appreciated.

Response: As a general response, when CEPF Secretariat staff travel to a region, they are responsible for all their own costs, including air and ground transport, lodging and meals. Typically, RITs often provide ground transport when the travel is part of their normal course of business, but overall, you should not budget for Secretariat travel of any kind. Plan similarly for visits by our donors; in most circumstances, the Secretariat is responsible for the costs of donor travel. That being said, you should budget for your own personnel to accompany CEPF staff or donors. At least when CEPF staff visit, we consider RIT travel to be part of their ordinary course of business and not a marginal cost incurred because of our presence. Broadly speaking, we expect the RIT to see the value of donor visits and budget accordingly, whether directly or indirectly.

7. Section 11.1.6, page 11 states, “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.” We are unable to locate sections 9c and 9d in the CFP. Please clarify.

Response: This is an error on our part. Please replace Section 11.1.6 to read:

If the organization/consortium is proposing to undertake anything less than the entire terms of reference (as described in Section 10, above), then it should discuss how it will ensure the completion of remaining components/functions.

8. Section 11.1.10, page 12 states, “applicants should name all other principal personnel, including, for example, country-based project officers, financial officer, small-grant manager or specialists in biodiversity, capacity building, communications, policy or private sector engagement.” How does CEPF define “principal personnel?” If the applicant has an organization chart but cannot list every principal personnel because those staff will not be recruited until the first three months of the program, will it be an issue?

Response: We require an organization chart listing all positions, ideally also showing the names of proposed individuals. In addition, we recommend a staffing plan similar to Slide 15 in the 16 April 2019 informational webinar. If you prepare these items, it will be evident which positions are “principal”—not merely subject-matter experts for a short period of time, but the people who will make the RIT function. We do not expect you to have already recruited, or to have on staff, all principal personnel. For such people, use the designation “to be determined” (TBD). However, our evaluation will give greater weight to organizations that are better able to name qualified candidates than organizations that use the designation TBD. Your proposal should discuss how you intend to recruit TBD personnel (e.g., through existing networks within a country), when this will happen (e.g., by the close of Month 2), and how you will fulfill those positions prior to a person being recruited (e.g., with existing staff from other parts of the organization).

Note that Section 14 of the CFP states that CEPF must approve the team leader and, if relevant, subsequent replacements in advance.

9. Section 12.3, page 14 states, “the RIT should expect that all large and small grants are fully complete three months prior to the close of the RIT grant.” Are there any requirements or restrictions for the duration of an individual small or large grant?

Response: There are no such restrictions for large or small grants. Large grants are typically awarded with a duration of 12-36 months, although in unique cases or with amendments allowing for extensions, there are large grants that last longer. Small grants are typically awarded for a period of 12-18 months, but this is more a function of the limited dollar value of small grants and RIT discretion than any rule from CEPF. Small grants also receive extensions upon request.

10. Section 11.2, page 13 states, “top-ranked applicants, including members of a consortium, will be required to complete a financial questionnaire as part of their final proposal.” Later in section 15, page 21, the introductory paragraph on evaluation criteria states that “applicants should ensure that each of these points is adequately addressed in either their proposal files or financial questionnaire.” Then, criterion 6.5 on page 24 asks, “does the applicant provide supporting documentation with its financial questionnaire?” We are unclear on how the proposal will be evaluated based on the financial questionnaire if the questionnaire will not be submitted until applicants have already been evaluated as “top-ranked.” Please clarify.

Response: Thank you for your careful reading. We will require completed financial questionnaires from top-ranked candidates, and their subordinate partners, in order to do a final evaluation and scoring. While we do not want you to complete this questionnaire now, we are posting it to the CFP page of the CEPF website, and sending it directly to each of the 13 organizations listed in Section 1 of the CFP so that you understand what to expect. We are not requiring the questionnaire with the 13 May proposal submission because, while your responses to the financial questionnaire are critical to an eventual award, we do not expect the answers, alone, to affect our first ranking of proposals. Further, we would like to know which organizations are part of your consortium before providing you more detailed instructions on who/how to complete the questionnaire.

11. Section 12.7, page 16 states, “physical presence in seven countries is not necessary, or even likely, given the limited budget.” Can you please define what CEPF means by “physical presence”? For example, does this refer to the presence of an in-country office, country-based personnel or country-based activities?

Response: Section 12.7 asks you to describe where your team will be based, literally. Refer, again, to the requested organization chart and the suggested staffing plan model (Slide 15 in the 16 April 2019 informational webinar). The staffing plan will show people (or positions) by location, ideally with some estimate of level of effort. An organization chart might show something similar, but could also show the location of subordinate partner organizations, other office locations that your organization maintains, network connections you may have, or other partners with which you intend to work that might not be formal parts of the RIT. Your proposal should describe how you will use these personnel and organizational assets to conduct the work of the RIT in any or all of the seven countries.

12. What is the role of the RIT in relation to work in the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), or in relation to the strategic directions?

Response: The RIT’s responsibilities are encompassed in the terms of reference (Section 10 of the CFP) and summarized in Slide 16 of the 16 April 2019 informational webinar. Unless the RIT already has work from other donors funding work in a particular KBA, the RIT’s role in any KBA or in implementing any specific strategic direction is limited—the RIT is guiding, monitoring and communicating. Certainly, the RIT influences in which KBAs we will work and how much money (how many grants) we will devote to a KBA. The RIT builds coalitions of grantees and other stakeholders around KBAs and within the strategic directions. The RIT leads broader civil society to effect the goals of the ecosystem profile. The RIT will find itself working inside of particular KBAs to support grantees. However, the goals outlined in the ecosystem profile logical framework are for the entirety of the portfolio—the work of all grantees, not the RIT alone.

13. Must we propose the limit to the size of small grants—between US\$20,000 and US\$50,000—or is this something that can be determined later?

Response: Section 12.17 of the CFP asks you to suggest a ceiling for the small grants and a rationale for this, but also states that this will be finalized during negotiations. Ultimately, the amount of money agreed to by the Secretariat is a reflection of risk assumed by the RIT: The ceiling may be different in each country, and the ceiling may change over the life of the program. At this stage, we are more curious about your assessment of the costs in each country and the absorptive capacity of local civil society to use funds of this magnitude.

14. Do you have suggestions for how we budget for travel? At this stage, it is difficult to predict where the team will travel or how frequently.

Response: We expect, with programs like this, that after personnel costs, travel is often the largest budget line. Travel will be a function of the array of your team, as described in organization charts and staffing plans and by any geographic or technical staging of grants you propose. Your staffing plan may include multiple people in multiple cities, thereby decreasing air travel. Conversely, your staffing plan may include a small number of centrally located people who travel to multiple countries per year for five years. At this stage, present your assumptions for travel or provide a rationale for the estimate you propose. We may revisit several elements of your proposed budget during negotiations. However, note Slide 11 of the 16 April 2019 informational webinar and Section 9 of the CFP: Submit a proposal that allows adequate budget for all the tasks of the RIT within US\$1,200,000, including travel. CEPF regards monitoring of project activities as essential to effective grant-making.

15. Apart from the US\$25,000 plug figure, what assumptions should we make regarding translation/interpretation?

Response: This encompasses several items. (1) There are core documents from CEPF that we have already begun to translate from English to Russian, such as the CEPF grant agreement. For these, there will be no cost to the RIT. (2) There are other documents for which we will pay the cost of translation, or events for which we will hire interpreters, but where we will require the RIT to facilitate the exchange or review the quality of the translator's outputs, such as guidance on environmental and social safeguards. For these, the only cost to the RIT will be the time of personnel conducting the normal course of business of providing support to the Secretariat. (3) There will be multiple documents where the RIT, in order to complete its mission of engaging local civil society, will need to translate materials into any of the relevant languages in the region. For these, we have instructed you to budget US\$25,000. (4) We expect grantees to prepare materials in several languages (including English), depending on the audience, which, from time to time, will need to be translated into English. Ideally, in such cases, we will build the cost of translation into the grantee's budget. However, there may be times where the RIT needs to translate materials into overall summaries of accomplishment in the hotspot. If those costs are outside of grantee budgets, for the moment, the

presumption is that this is covered in the US\$25,000 plug figure. As with other elements of the budget (e.g., travel), we may revisit this during negotiations.

16. Notwithstanding the CFP's instructions to not anticipate working in China in the near-term, if we have our own offices in China, or have a possible subordinate partner with operations in China, should we include this in our proposal?

Response: As described in Section 12.7 of the CFP, please describe your operational flexibility for working in China if and when we receive approval to work there.

17. Are UN agencies, such as UNEP, eligible to be subordinate partners in a proposed RIT consortium?

Response: No.

18. In our experience, "mainstreaming" usually refers to the process by which activities and conservation outcomes under a grants program or a large conservation project are taken up by local or national governments and included in their legislatures, or by large for-profit stakeholders, who can take up conservation goals into their infrastructure or economic projects, and bring them in line with the overall goals of the conservation project in the target region. However, since it seems that CEPF has previously discussed taking up of goals into the legislation during the consultation process, do you have a different meaning in mind? For example, our idea about mainstreaming could be as follows: Provide help and capacity building to countries of the hotspot, to include the aims and results of projects funded by CEPF in each country's fulfillment of Aichi Targets, NBSAPs, national legislation, etc. Does it seem like we understand the meaning you put into the word "mainstreaming"?

Response: RIT Terms of Reference Component 2 describes the functions of mainstreaming for the RIT. The ecosystem profile also makes various reference to this as a goal of CEPF and of many other donor-funded programs. The understanding suggested in this question is in accord with CEPF's.

19. In our proposal, can we suggest quotas for what proportion of the grants will be disbursed for what priorities? This might prove helpful if we want to avoid a situation where in response to the call for proposals, it turns out that 90 percent of the received proposals are regarding priority species, and zero regarding priority corridors (for example)? Do you expect the RIT to preemptively resolve such a possibility? If not, we will simply finance the projects that pass initial review, regardless of their distribution across the strategic directions. Or are we, for example, expected to fund projects in each country in such a way that ensures coverage of all five strategic directions in each country?

Response: We expect the RIT, working with the CEPF Secretariat, to ensure that grants adequately address the technical and geographic priorities outlined in the ecosystem profile. This requires an active strategy by the RIT to engage civil society throughout the hotspot to solicit award-worthy applications. The CEPF Donor Council's initial allocations

by strategic direction are indicated in the logical framework of the ecosystem profile. As time goes by, awards are made, grantee achievements are tallied, and new threats and opportunities arise, the RIT and CEPF Secretariat will make adaptive management decisions regarding emphasis on any strategic direction, geography, country or type of grantee.

20. Section 12.13 of the CFP refers to the RIT's system for management of small grants. Please confirm (1) Use of ConservationGrants will come at no cost to the RIT.

Response: (1) Use of ConservationGrants will come at no cost to the RIT. However, to be clear, we will not modify the system to meet unique RIT requests.

21. Section 12.13 of the CFP refers to the RIT's system for management of small grants. Please confirm (2) ConservationGrants includes functionality for grant proposal submissions and scoring in addition to its grants management functions.

Response: (2) ConservationGrants includes functionality for submission of large-grant proposals by the applicants themselves, accessing the system through a web-accessible grantee "portal." On the other hand, ConservationGrants does **not** include functionality for submission of small-grant proposals by the applicants, the assumption being that such groups lack capacity to access a Web-based portal. Rather, the RIT manually uploads small-grant applicant information into the database. For both large- and small-grant proposals, the system includes functionality for storing reviewer comments, but it does **not** include functionality for scoring.

22. Section 12.13 of the CFP refers to the RIT's system for management of small grants. Would you please confirm (3) If the RIT chooses to use ConservationGrants as its primary grant application and management system, it will not be required to create or use any additional management systems.

Response: (3) There is no requirement for the RIT to create any other online, multi-user management system beyond ConservationGrants. However, in broad terms, every CEPF RIT has applied some other "system" for managing work (e.g., maintaining reviewer comments and scoring), be that in shared databases (e.g., Google Docs), internal networks or offline spreadsheets. Our expectation is that qualified candidates will demonstrate past experience managing programs of similar size, scope and complexity and thus have the ability to apply this as the RIT.

23. Would it be possible for CEPF to provide us with access to the full functionality of ConservationGrants so we can explore its capabilities? If not, we would appreciate the opportunity to speak with someone who manages the database in order to better understand its functionality.

Response: We are not able to provide you with access to the system and will not be providing a separate discussion on the functionality of the system prior to the

submission date of proposals. For proposal purposes, understand ConservationGrants as a grants management system built on a modern, commercially-developed, web-accessible database on a Salesforce platform. Its capabilities are sufficient for many, but not all RIT purposes. There will be opportunity for the top-ranked applicant(s) to view the system in July-August as part of negotiations. At this stage, we advise that you propose processes and systems as you understand are necessary to manage a successful program, either based on systems you already have in place, systems you propose to develop, or ConservationGrants, making your assumptions clear.

24. Is CEPF willing to allow an indirect cost rate that is higher than 13 percent?

Response: CEPF is not able to allow a charge for management support costs in excess of 13 percent, regardless of other negotiated rates you may have with other donors. If you have documented rates that are higher than 13 percent and can present these as part of your proposal, then we advise that you budget in such a way so as to reflect the marginal amounts (i.e., the costs between 13 percent and your higher indirect cost) as direct costs, understanding that all CEPF grants are cost reimbursable. We are able to support direct costs (including those that are split among multiple donors, such as office rent or designated office and executive personnel costs) provided that these are justified and apportioned in a fair and reasonable manner.