

Growth Poles Partnership Opportunity Notice Open Call for Concepts

Partnership Opportunity:	Commercializing Soil Health Improvement for Increased Agricultural Productivity Challenge Competition
Link to Concept Note Template	Concept Note Template.docx
Link to Concept Budget Template	Concept Note Budget Template.xlsx
Opportunity Number:	217815-2024-OPEN-01
Issuance Date:	April 17, 2024
Deadline for Written Questions:	April 24, 2024, 17.00 CAT
Responses to Questions Shared:	May 1, 2024
Deadline for Submission of Concept Note:	May 15, 2024, 17.00 CAT
Eligibility Criteria	See Section 2 of the PON
Funding Amount	\$50,000 to \$150,000 per partnership
Co-Investment Requirement	Minimum 1:1 (e.g. 100%) partner co-investment required See Section 1.E of the PON for additional detail
Submit Questions To:	Aissata Himmelfarb, Senior Manager, Grants & Subawards Aissata.himmelfarb@thepalladiumgroup.com
Submit Concept Papers To:	Aissata Himmelfarb, Senior Manager, Grants & Subawards Aissata.himmelfarb@thepalladiumgroup.com

From: Aissata Himmelfarb, Senior Manager, Grants & Subawards, Growth Poles
To: Offerors
Date: May 1, 2024
Subject: Growth Poles Responses to Offeror Questions
PON: 217815-2024-OPEN-01 Commercializing Soil Health Improvement for Increased Agricultural Productivity Challenge Competition

1. **Offeror Question:** I wanted to check on the matching grant arrangement in case we as a partner have already made some investments in part of the intervention that we would love to carry out. Would our investment stand to match what we require to upscale or add on the intervention? I am asking this in view of some communities that we are working with whom we have mobilized into groups and trained them in some business aspects, leadership and group dynamics using funds from another project/donor plus our own and the groups are in our name; would that qualify in some way to be our contribution?

Growth Poles Response: The 1:1 leverage requirement outlined in the solicitation must be new leverage; that is new investments or activities Offerors will fund and implement, which are directly related to the concept submitted for consideration. Offerors can consider previous investments towards their co-investment/leverage contribution as additionality, however only new co-investment/leverage will be considered for the 1:1 requirement.

2. **Offeror Question:** How does co-creation work?

Growth Poles Response: Co-creation will be an iterative collaboration and negotiation process focused on refining Offerors' concepts in close coordination with the Growth Poles team once applications have advanced past the initial concept stage. It will likely kick off with oral presentations from selected offerors to the Growth Poles technical and senior leadership team, with presentations serving as an opportunity to expand upon the concept and answer questions posed by the Growth Poles team. The goal of co-creation is to ensure Offerors' concepts are closely aligned with Growth Poles objectives and priorities, and are ambitious, while remaining realistic and attainable.

3. **Offeror Question:** If we can see different options for activities or framing of approaches that could fit for this initiative, should we mention ideas for alternatives within the concept note with a request to discuss and create together? Or do we need to be very specific with one approach?

Growth Poles Response: Offeror concepts should be specific and tailored/responsive to the information requested in the solicitation and concept note template. Offerors may submit multiple concepts, or multiple activities within a concept.

4. **Offeror Question:** Can a company submit multiple applications? We would like to submit an acceleration based concept aligned with our core business, but also in consortia with a research based NGO develop another R&D initiative as a separate concept - is this allowed?

Growth Poles Response: Offerors are welcome to submit multiple concepts for consideration for Growth Poles funding.

5. **Offeror Question:** Timing: Is there a rough timeline of the co-creation period and then grant disbursement? The agricultural nature of both our work with farmers and the timing of our soil related product promotion is very seasonal so the specific activities will change through the year depending on when we get going. I see that the period length is up to 18 months, but is there a preferred performance period length within this?

Growth Poles Response: Our goal is for Awardees to be notified with ample time to advance their concepts prior to the 2024/25 cropping season. Along these lines, Growth Poles anticipates co-creation activities to kick off in June 2024, with final selection in July 2024. Kick-off of project activities will depend on the timing of any internal approvals, which Growth Poles anticipates seeking in July 2024. Upon final approval and kick-off of projects, offerors will be required to submit annual workplans to Growth Poles, which will provide an opportunity to refine activities based on when in the agricultural cycle project kick off occurs.

6. **Offeror Question:** Performance period - should this be defined as specific dates during which the grant is spent? Or does the performance period count for the period that any activities invested in continue? (i.e Our direct activity for this grant might end at a product launch but the effects on yield and therefore customer interest in our soil health solution would come later)

Growth Poles Response: Performance periods can be up to 18 months from Growth Poles issuing the Award. Performance period should include all relevant activities, including monitoring and evaluation of results, that fall within the 18 month period.

7. **Offeror Question:** Can our concept contain elements that are both R&D/Incubation phase, and Acceleration Phase?

Growth Poles Response: Yes. Offerors should be clear which elements of their activities are related to R&D/Incubation, and which to Acceleration. Due to the 18 months period of performance, preference will be given to concepts at the Acceleration Phase.

8. **Offeror Question:** Can we include photos and diagrams in our concept note?

Growth Poles Response: Offerors should submit concept notes responsive to the required criteria in the solicitation, and in conformity with the page limits outlined; photos, diagrams, tables and other graphics may be included if they add clarity and do not result in exceeding the page limits. There may be an opportunity to present additional such materials during a co-creation phase, should Offeror applications advance to this stage.

9. **Offeror Question:** Can relevant/proof point attachments be added as an annex e.g. reports on independent testing of our product?

Growth Poles Response: Growth Poles will not review annexes or materials submitted in excess of the page limits outlined in the solicitation. There may be an

opportunity to present such materials during a co-creation phase, should Offeror applications advance to this stage.

10. **Offeror Question:** How should we assign a value to smallholder time or labour to add their contribution to our leverage total?

Growth Poles Response: The value of smallholder time or labor contributions to leverage may be based on minimum wage rates, or any other reasonable evidence-based method for assigning an estimated value to labor.

11. **Offeror Question:** Will USAID branding be required on soil amendment products sold commercially that are developed or promoted through this project?

Growth Poles Response: Donor co-branding is not expected to be required on the packaging of commercially offered products under this challenge fund.

12. **Offeror Question:** Do we need to allow room in the budget to finance reporting and M&E activities or is that handled from the Growth Poles side on top?

Growth Poles Response: Offers should budget for all costs they anticipate will be required for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of their activity. Part of co-creation will entail discussions with Offerors to ensure these activities are adequately covered.

REF: Diversified Agriculture-led Growth Poles for Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Wealth Creation (Growth Poles Project)

Prime Cooperative Agreement Number: 72061223CA0003

Subject: 217815-2024-OPEN-01 Commercializing Soil Health Improvement for Increased Agricultural Productivity Challenge Competition

To Interested Applicants:

The purpose of this Partnership Opportunity Notice (PON) is to solicit concept note applications from interested parties wishing to partner with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Ireland-funded Diversified Agriculture-led Growth Poles for Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Wealth Creation (Growth Poles, "GP") Project. Growth Poles, implemented by Palladium, will accelerate environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable, resilient, and more inclusive wealth generation in Malawi by mobilizing rural based private sector investments and partnerships with anchor firms and their surrounding communities, smallholder organizations, cooperatives, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) in a growth pole approach, with a youth and gender lens. In short, Growth Poles is a partnership with private sector to drive resilient prosperity that will improve food security, incomes, jobs, and exports in Malawi.

The Partnership Opportunity Notice (PON) provides information on how to submit a concept to be evaluated for further co-creation. The PON is comprised of the following sections:

1. Section 1: Partnership Opportunity Notice
2. Section 2: Eligibility Requirements
3. Section 3: Application and Submission Instructions
4. Section 4: Concept Note Evaluation Criteria
5. Section 5: Award Administration Information

Selected applicants may receive co-funding in the form of a subaward or contract from Growth Poles to achieve program objectives. Please refer to the Partnership Opportunity section of the PON for a complete statement of goals and expected results.

To be eligible for funding or other assistance under this PON, applicants must provide all requested information in their concept note, including the requirements found in any attachments to the PON. Concept notes and applications that are submitted past the PON deadline, or incomplete, will not be considered. Awards will be made to the applicants whose applications best meet the requirements of the PON and the evaluation criteria contained therein.

The selection process will involve a three-stage evaluation that will allow Growth Poles to be highly involved in co-creating and co-designing the partnership structure to achieve the desired objectives:

- Phase 1: Concept Note (CN)
- Phase 2: Co-Creation Presentations & Workshops
- Phase 3: Full technical and budget packages for funding

If potential applicants have any questions, queries, or clarifications, they may forward them to the following email address before the date stated on the cover page of the PON:

Aissata.himmelfarb@thepalladiumgroup.com. Answers will be shared by May 1, 2024.

Applicants must submit concept notes via email to Aissata Himmelfarb (aissata.himmelfarb@thepalladiumgroup.com); subject line 217815-2024-OPEN-01. Paper applications will not be accepted.

All CNs are due no later than May 15, 2024 by 17.00 CAT. No CNs received after this deadline will be

considered.

The Concept Note Template and the Concept Note Budget Template can be downloaded from the links indicated above. If unable to download the templates, applicants responding to this PON must email Yvonne Kalongonda (yvonne.kalongonda@thepalladiumgroup.com) to receive the required application templates.

Issuance of the PON does not constitute an award commitment on the part of Growth Poles, nor does it commit Growth Poles to pay for any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. Further, Growth Poles reserves the right to reject any or all applications received. Applications are submitted at the risk of the Applicant; all preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's own expense.

Sincerely,

The Growth Poles Team

1. SECTION 1: PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

A. PROJECT SUMMARY

The purpose of the Diversified Agriculture-led Growth Poles for Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Wealth Creation Project (Growth Poles, or GP) is to accelerate environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable, resilient, and more inclusive wealth generation in Malawi by mobilizing rural based private sector investments and partnerships with anchor firms and their surrounding communities, smallholder organizations, cooperatives, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) in a growth pole approach, with a youth and gender lens. In short, Growth Poles is a partnership with the private sector to drive resilient prosperity that will improve food security, incomes, jobs, and exports in Malawi.

Growth Poles uses the GP Development Facility (GPDF) to provide flexible, tailored support to partners and their communities, while maximizing the impact of private sector funding and co-investment. The GPDF targets subawards, contracts, and other support to private sector anchor firms or lead firms (GP Partners), as well as to other market system actors (GP Actors) that provide sustainable services to GP Partners, their farmers, and their communities. The GPDF's aim is to facilitate investments capable of generating systems-level change, where such investments do not distort markets or create dependencies.

Via this PON, the GPDF is opening a **GP Commercializing Soil Health Improvement for Increased Agricultural Productivity Challenge Competition**, specifically targeting partnerships supporting soil health through commercial, scalable approaches. Under the **GP Commercializing Soil Health Improvement for Increased Agricultural Productivity Challenge Competition**, Growth Poles seeks Concepts from potential partners for activities that target development, production, commercialization and distribution of sustainable soil health products and services at scale, through at least one of the following mechanisms:

- **Research & Development (R&D) / Incubation:** Support for demand-driven research and development, including product release; or support for pilots of commercial models for production, commercialization, and distribution.
- **Acceleration:** Investment in technologies for the production of soil health products at scale; scaling existing evidence-based technologies, products and services through commercial mechanisms; or scaling commercial partnerships that support soil health product market systems development.

C. GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Applicants with operations anywhere in Malawi are eligible for consideration. Applicants should specify the proposed geographic area for the partnership and provide information about their footprint in the proposed partnership area, including existing investments, infrastructure, staffing, extension, community relations, and service networks.

B. AWARD INFORMATION

Applying to this PON may result in receipt of a subaward or contract depending on the nature of the proposed activity. Growth Poles will determine the appropriate mechanism through a pre-partnership determination process based on the nature of the proposed activity. If a subaward is determined appropriate, a Fixed Amount Subaward will be issued. The award/contract size, number of awards, and the amount of available funding is subject to change.

C. ESTIMATED FUNDING LEVEL & PERFORMANCE PERIOD

The award amount will depend upon: 1) the proposed activities; 2) potential partner contributions; and 3) final negotiation that will take place in Phase 3. Applicants are encouraged to consider the budget-to-impact ratios and their ability to use their own investments or the investments of other non-USAID sources to match or exceed Growth Poles funding.

The period of performance of awarded grants will be for up to 18 months.

D. CO-INVESTMENT / LEVERAGE

Leveraging represents all the non-USAID/Growth Poles resources that are expected to be applied to a partnership initiative or activity. It includes resources that applicants bring to the partnership. While leverage is not intended to be binding or auditable, Growth Poles takes leverage commitments seriously. Failure of a funding recipient to meet their stated leverage contribution, without strong justification, is grounds to corrective action up to and including termination of the partnership.

Leverage includes all resources and investments contributing to the success of the activity. This can include financial matching or in-kind contributions to the activity budget. Examples of in-kind contributions include office space, equipment, or staff/volunteer time. Leverage may also include investment that is stimulated by the activity, such as expected investments made by small businesses or smallholders as a result of the activity.

Leverage may also include:

- new private sector investment by a GP Partner;
- new investment by other partners, including other donors or NGOs;
- existing investments that have not previously been leveraged for development goals – For ex., infrastructure investments that can be leveraged to support new activities;
- Investments made by smallholder participants in activities, including labor.

Applicants must propose a leverage ratio of at least 1:1 or at least 100%. For example, if a partner's proposal is for \$100,000 of GP funding, the partner must provide \$+100,000 of leverage, for an activity total of \$130,000. Applicants must clearly define the nature and amount of their leverage in their Concept Notes and accompanying budgets.

E. PHASE 2 CO-CREATION

Successful applicants in Phase 1 will be invited to Phase 2 to present their concept to Growth Poles as part of a co-creation process. Growth Poles will provide detailed instructions and templates to applicants selected to advance to Phase 2.

This PON does not commit Growth Poles to make an award. Palladium at its own discretion can accept or reject any or all applications, at any step, in part or in full without assigning a reason. Growth Poles and USAID reserve the right to award any or none of the applicants at any stage of the process. Proceeding to co-creation does not guarantee a final award and neither Growth Poles nor USAID will cover any costs associated with participating in this process.

2. SECTION 2: ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligible entities: Any private sector business enterprise, cooperative, non-profit, foundation, donor project, or research institution with activities in Malawi is eligible to apply. Entities who are not for-profit entities should make a particular effort to clearly articulate how the activity will support the

development of sustainable, commercial markets for soil health products and services. Multiple entities may submit joint concepts; such partnership applications are encouraged.

The following criteria will be applied to all applicants in Phase I to determine the eligibility of applicants:

- Legally registered per the laws of Malawi;
- Applicant (including its Principals) is not on any list of debarred or suspended entities (as found on www.sam.gov), or on any terrorist watch list or other published list of ineligible recipients (i.e. US Department of Treasury OFAC designated nationals and blocked persons list);
- For applicants who are non-profits, non-governmental organizations, and academic/research institutions, applicants must include at least one business partner in their application. **(NOTE: If applicant is a business or social enterprise, they do not need to include another business in their application).**
- Applicant has, or can provide proof of requesting, a Unique Entity ID (UEI). UEI can be obtained through www.sam.gov through an online registration process. Instructions can be found at <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>.

3. SECTION 3: APPLICATION & SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

A. PHASE 1: CONCEPT NOTE PACKAGES

Applicants are required to submit a technical concept note that is specific, complete, and concise (no more than 5 pages). Concept notes should be prepared using the templates in Annexes A and B and according to the structural format set forth below:

Section	Max. Pages	Required Content
Cover Page	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concise title of proposed activity • Proposed performance period • Legal Name of Applicant • Physical address of Applicant • Mailing address of Applicant • Tax ID Number • UEI Number or a screenshot documenting their submission of an application via SAM.gov. • Applicant technical point of contact (name, title, email address, and telephone number) • Applicant authorized representative (name, title, email address, and telephone number) • Specification of whether applying for R&D/Incubation funding, or Acceleration funding • Consortium Members: Primary applicants who are non-profits, non-governmental organizations, or research institutions must apply in tandem with a business partner (private business, social enterprise, etc.) • Signature of authorized representative of the applicant
Technical	3	A brief description of the proposed activity including:

Proposal		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A description of the problem statement, including an analysis of the current state of the value chain, and current barriers to private sector investment in this area (maximum 250 words) ○ A brief description of the solution statement, including specification if the solution is for R&D/Incubation or Acceleration (maximum 250 words) • Problem Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A two-paragraph problem analysis (maximum 400 words) ○ A one-paragraph business match statement detailing why applicant is suited to solve the problem (maximum 200 words) • Proposed Solution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Details on the proposed solution, including anticipated results, validation of the proposed solution, explanation of how applicant will measure the solution's efficacy, and an assessment of the solution's scalability (maximum 300 words) ○ Clear activity objectives (maximum 100 words) ○ A high-level workplan outlining how applicant proposes implementing this partnership and anticipated results (to be detailed in the workplan table provided in the Concept Note Template Annex A)
Organizational & Capability Statement	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and capabilities of the applicant; • Applicant's experience in the geography of operation • Past initiatives relevant to or demonstrative of Applicants' ability to successfully implement the Concept
Initial Cost Proposal	N/A - Annex	<p>Using the Concept Budget template in Annex B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total anticipated cost; • Proposed amount of funding requested per expenditure category; • Proposed non-USAID/US Government / Growth Poles funding or resources to be co-invested (may include an estimated value of in-kind contributions)
Due Diligence Attachments	N/A - Annex	Applicant must provide proof of ability to operate in Malawi (registration certificate).

4. SECTION 4: CONCEPT NOTE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Growth Poles will convene a Concept Evaluation Committee to formally evaluate Concepts after Phase 1, prior to launching co-creation (Phase 2). The Committee will take into consideration the extent to which each proposal is well-reasoned, technically sound, considers the objectives identified in the PON, and reflects understanding of the local context. CNs will be evaluated based on adjectival ratings and ranked across the cohort of concepts received. Concepts will be reviewed against the following criteria:

Criteria	Scoring Factor
1 – Very Poor; 2 – Poor; 3 – Acceptable; 4 – Good; 5 – Very Good	
Sound Technical Approach	Clear articulation of the problem statement and how the proposed activity will address the challenge. Soundness of the proposed solution and implementation. Operational feasibility and appropriateness of the proposed solution in the Malawian context.
Relevance & Impact	Relevance of the proposed activity to addressing the challenges identified in Section 1 above.
Potential Scalability	Clear pathway to scalability for the initiative to ensure successful approaches are continued, replicated, and scaled with minimal dependency on grant funding in the future.
Applicant Capabilities	Extent to which Applicant demonstrates relevance of its past experience/expertise to the proposed activity/objectives.
Co-investment Commitment	Demonstrated commitment to leveraging private sector or other non-USAID resources to achieve program objectives (financial and in-kind).

5. SECTION 5: AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. AWARD ADMINISTRATION STANDARDS

Subawards resulting from this PON will be administered by the following regulations (as applicable):

- Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 303: “Grants and Cooperative Agreements to Non-Governmental Organizations”
- ADS 303.3.24.a: “Renewal Awards”
- ADS 303.3.24.b: “Simplified Grants”
- ADS 303.3.25: “Fixed Amount Awards to Non-Governmental Organizations”
- A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 303: “Fixed Amount Award Entity Eligibility Checklist”
- An Additional Help Document for ADS Chapter 303: “Fixed Amount Awards to Non-Governmental Organizations”
- A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 303: “Standard Provisions for Non-U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations”
- A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 303 “Standard Provisions for U.S. Non-Governmental Organizations”
- A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 303: “Standard Provisions for Fixed Amount Awards to Nongovernmental Organizations”
- 2 CFR 200.1: “Definitions”
- 2 CFR 200.201: “Use of grant agreements (including fixed amount awards) awards, cooperative agreements, and contracts”
- 2 CFR 200 Subpart E: “Cost Principles” for nonprofit and educational organizations—used to negotiate award amounts and terminations per 2 CFR 200.201 (b)(1)
- Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 31: “Contract Cost Principles and Procedures” for for-profit organizations used to negotiate award amounts and terminations per 2 CFR 200.201 (b)(1)
- 2 CFR 25: “Unique Entity Identifier”
- 2 CFR 183: “Never Contract with the Enemy”
- 2 CFR 700: USAID Supplement “UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST

PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL AWARDS”

B. BRANDING & MARKING REQUIREMENTS

Co-branding of any communications materials or deliverables such as inputs or equipment will be by mutual consent of both parties. Growth Poles will provide guidance and oversight during the co-branding process to ensure that co-branding follows donor guidelines and protocols.

C. ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

The grants program anticipates funding only activities that fall under the categorical exclusions of “USAID Environmental Guidelines”. Therefore, if all activities under a specific grant are identified as categorical exclusions, the project will not conduct any additional environmental assessment or will not require prior review by USAID’s environmental officer. However, in instances where the proposed activity may directly affect the environment outside the exclusions, the project will seek guidance from the Agreement Officer Representative to ensure compliance with 22 CFR 216 and the “USAID Environmental Guidelines.”

Growth Poles will ensure all stipulated environmental measures and conditions in the award are implemented throughout the life of the award, and that timely amendments are undertaken, as needed, by obtaining the relevant USAID Environmental Officer’s prior approval in writing to ensure compliance with 22 CFR 216 and the applicable USAID Environmental Guideline.