SECTION 1: GENDER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Question 1: Ref. Grant Evaluation Criteria No. 4 on Commitment to Gender Diversity and Inclusion: Will a diverse core team count towards addressing this criteria?

Response: The proposed program and activities should contribute towards enhancement of gender diversity, ensure inclusion, engage and promote women leaders and entrepreneurs across the region and contribute to SAREP performance indicators given on page 38 of the RFA. Please refer to the section on 'Gender diversity and inclusion' on page 7 of the RFA for more details. The core team will be evaluated based on their expertise, experience and relevance to the proposed activities as per the Evaluation Criteria in Section 6 of the RFA.

Question 2: Is it mandatory to include gender diversity and inclusion in every proposal submitted? For eg: Bringing the aspect of gender diversity and inclusion in a proposal aligned with Objective 3: “High performing modern utilities” might be challenging. Will this imply deduction in total scores?

Response: Since Gender Diversity and Inclusion is a cross-cutting theme, applicants are encouraged to attempt integrating them in one or more ways as this is a part of the evaluation criteria. Innovative ways to integrate gender and inclusion considerations are possible even in technical areas which are typically dominated by men. Applications that do not include gender and inclusion will not receive points for this evaluation criterion.

Question 3: How should sub-applicants of a consortium demonstrate gender diversity?

Response: Gender diversity should be integrated in the program and activities proposed by the applicants. Consortium members can also contribute towards integrating gender and inclusion considerations by incorporating their concepts and activities in the applicant’s overall implementation plan.

SECTION 2: ELIGIBILITY AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

Question 4: Is there any minimum threshold for the age of the applicant entity particularly for evaluating past performance?

Response: Please refer to Para 3 ‘Organisational Capability’ on page 14 of the RFA. If the applicant is a start-up or a new entity, SAREP will evaluate the capability and experience of its core team to evaluate the skills of its personnel and the “track record,” service quality, client satisfaction, and achievements related/similar to the grant opportunity. These can be demonstrated in the CVs and in other documents as relevant and listed in Section 9 of the RFA.
Question 5: What criteria will be used to determine the maximum financial threshold for the sub-award?

Response: Please refer to Table 1 Page 5 of the RFA. It is for the prime applicant to decide what their proposed budget shall be. In case the prime applicant is a US entity, the maximum award ceiling is $250,000 and for non-US entities, the ceiling is $500,000.

Question 6: Will date of incorporation, turnover, number of employees, funding received from other agencies, etc., be considered as part of the eligibility criteria? Does the information filled in the Organizational Control Environment Questionnaire impact the overall marking/evaluation/assessment of the proposal?

Response: Evaluation criteria are provided in Section 6 and eligibility criteria are provided in Section 5 of the RFA respectively. The Organizational Control Environment Questionnaire is related to ‘Organisational Capabilities’ under point 3 of the evaluation criteria. Overall marking/evaluation will be based on Evaluation Criteria provided in Section 6 of the RFA.

Question 7: Will existing associations/engagements which started more than 3 years ago will be considered towards past performance indicators?

Response: SAREP shall evaluate the applicants’ recent performance in similar programs over the last three years for which information is available (2018, 2019 and 2020 or 2019, 2020 and 2021). Information for three complete years maybe provided, based on the fiscal year adopted by the applicants. Programs which started more than three years ago and were continuing over the last three years can be included and will be considered for evaluation.

Question 8: Can the evidence of collaboration be a milestone for release of grant after the award is signed instead of being a criteria for selection of the application?

Response: Release of grant amount shall be linked to the achievement of outcomes or deliverables or as otherwise agreed in the grant agreement. Evidence of collaboration is an evaluation criterion to ensure buy-in for sustainability and scaling of activities.

SECTION 3: CONSORTIUM

Question 9: Can entities registered in countries other than those specified in the RFA apply? Would you recommend applying for a waiver or partnering with a local entity?

Response: Please refer to Section 5, Page 11 of the RFA. As per ADS 310, Source and Nationality Requirements for Procurement of Commodities and Services Financed by USAID, entities registered in developing countries, the cooperating country (India), are eligible to apply in addition to countries in South Asia and US. Waiver to this requirement is not possible.

Partnering with a local entity is part of the prime applicant’s strategy and responsibility. SAREP cannot make any recommendation to that effect.

Question 10: Is there a requirement for the consortium to be registered?

Response: It is for the applicant/s to decide based on the legal and regulatory requirements applicable to them under the law. SAREP does not require consortiums to be registered, independent of legal or regulatory provisions.

Question 11: Will reporting and audit requirements be applicable to sub-partners of a consortium?

Response: Section 8, sub-sections D and E shall be applicable to all sub partners.
Question 12: Do sub-partners also have to indicate number of employees?

Response: Information asked for in Section 9 i.e., ‘Grant Application Form Instructions’ of the RFA needs to be submitted. Please refer to Para 11 (Organizational capabilities, technical and management team) in Section 9 of the RFA.

Question 13: In case the applicant is using organizational capacities of another organization (having the same set of promoters and directors) are Commitment letters/scope/budget etc. required separately for each entity or only for the entity which will be submitting the application?

Response: Organizations submitting applications are required to present their organizational capacity to demonstrate their capability to manage and deliver the proposed program and activities. Organizational capabilities of related firms, not proposed to be involved in implementation, are not required. Organizational capabilities of consortium members involved in implementation along with their commitment letters is required.

SECTION 4: BUDGET, COSTING AND TIMEFRAME

Question 14: Are taxes, duties, freight, insurance etc. included in the overall threshold of USD 250,000 / USD 500,000?

Response: The proposed budget should be inclusive of taxes, duties, freight, insurance, etc. except GST in India. GST, if applicable, may additionally be reimbursed.

Question 15: Are construction costs allowed in order to demonstrate pilot interventions?

Response: As mentioned under section 4, page 9 of the RFA, no construction activity of any kind allowed using SPF funds. However, construction, if essential for delivering proposed results, maybe undertaken by stakeholder beneficiaries using their own funds or funds from other sources, under the applicable laws and regulations they are required to follow. For sake of clarity, applicants are advised to note that Ineligible Activities, as mentioned in Section 4 of the RFA cannot be funded by SPF.

Question 16: Please elaborate on indirect / overhead costs?


Question 17: Will SAREP provide additional grant if the project cost exceeds the budgeted amount?

Response: No, additional grant funding is not anticipated. SPF encourages applicants to leverage funds from other organizations and or beneficiaries to ensure that total cost of the proposed activities is available before proceeding with the implementation.

Question 18: In case a company is incorporated in India, will it be eligible for a $500K grant?

Response: Applicants registered in India are eligible to receive grants up to US$ 500,000. Applicants should note that the mentioned amounts are ceilings. Therefore, applicants (a) should prepare budgets which are reasonable and can be justified and (b) are encouraged to leverage funding from other sources. All budget proposals will be scrutinized for reasonableness and used to evaluate the return on investment as well as efficiency of achieving results as per the prescribed evaluation criteria.
Question 19: Will the project allow "Seed funding for start-ups" in clean energy sectors with matching co-investment from private organizations? Can the applicant hold equity in the incubated start-ups?

Response: Seed funding in form of equity contribution or in form of debt is not possible. The agreement between SAREP and the recipient would imply privity contractual relationship where any other party or seed funding investor cannot make profit or any other financial benefit through SAREP funds. Funding for select activities by a start-up such as market assessment, proof of concept testing, feasibility analysis etc. can be considered if an entrepreneur or a start-up applicant can demonstrate a sound and sustainable business plan with the required capital for formation of the company and its initial operations. The applicant can hold equity in the start-up, but not out of funds provided by SPF.

Question 20: Are applicants required to co-finance the proposed activities? Whether there are any Pre- Requisites for Co-funding from the partner organizations?

Response: Please refer to Section 8B of the RFA. Leveraging as defined in this section is encouraged but not required. Note that Leverage is also included as part of the Technical Merit evaluation criteria. The application must include details of collaboration or partnership, that result in additional resources being leveraged.

SECTION 5: DISBURSEMENTS AND PAYMENTS

Question 21: Can the grant disbursement process be explained in detail?

Response: Payments will be made only to the prime applicant and the payment terms that shall be negotiated with the selected grantees and prescribed in the grant agreement to be entered with the applicants.

Question 22: Whether the Grant process will involve firstly providing in-principal approval letter for specified Grant amount and then the Grantee will need to undertake the investment (from own funds) and submit of bill/expense statement to USAID for approval/re-imbursement.

Response: A formal Grant will be issued based on which the grantee can start incurring expenses under the grant. Expenses incurred prior to signing of the Grant Agreement cannot be paid by SPF. All payments shall be made by SAREP upon receipt of a valid claim (such as invoice or utilisation statement) from the grantee as per the terms of the grant agreement entered into with the applicant.

SECTION 6: M&E TEMPLATE

Question 23: Whether the 'Target' as sought in the M&E template, should be amongst the Expected Results as highlighted in figure 1 (page 7)? In case the expected results may not be visible or measurable immediately but are anticipated to emerge over a longer period of time, owing to support from SAREP funds, can alternate / intermediate milestones which ultimately lead to ‘expected results’ and are accurately measurable be used instead?

Response: Targets to be proposed in the M&E template should count toward a SAREP performance indicator (full list can be found in Attachment E of the RFA). High priority indicators are identified in Figure 1, Section 2 of the RFA.
It is possible that some activities contribute toward multiple expected results of SAREP; however, applicants are encouraged to list one indicator in the M&E template that has a direct correlation to the activity the applicant is proposing. SPF will evaluate the results proposed by applicants based on SAREP’s logical framework and performance indicators. Applicants are encouraged to align their programs and activities to maximize outcomes consistent with the logical framework, and accompanying indicators to measure our progress toward achieving SAREP’s overall goal and technical objectives.

Programs which deliver results over an extended period or where outcomes are indirect, difficult to measure or attribute, and therefore do not contribute to SAREP performance indicators will be less attractive for SAREP.

Question 24: Please suggest the page limit for the narrative to be provided as part of the Grant Application M&E Template.

Response: Refer page 19 - Point No. 10. The specified page limit is within 2 pages maximum

Question 25: There is no reference to Attachment D (Grant Application M&E Template) in the Grant Application form Instructions

Response: Please refer Section 9 - Part II - Page 18 of the RFA which specifies the requirement for submission of a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

Question 26: Should the applicants include the Log frame into the proposal?

Response: The applicant’s proposal should indicate how and to what extent the proposed outcomes are aligned to Attachment E - SAREP Logical Framework and M&E indicators.

Question 27: There is no reference to Attachment E (SAREP Logical Framework and M&E Indicators) in the Grant Application form Instructions

Response: Attachment E is provided as additional information to enable applicants to align the proposed program and activities to SAREP performance indicators. Applicants should use one or more of the performance indicators provided in Attachment E, when preparing their respective Grant Application M&E Template (Attachment D).

Question 28: How are the Goal – Level Indicators expected to be aligned to the “Activities” in Attachment D? Are G1, G2, G3 and G4 the overarching indicators to the indicators mentioned below it from 1 – 5?

Response: Attachment E provides a comprehensive list of performance indicators. Goal Level indicators are those which are broader than one of the four technical objectives and therefore categorized as such. However, SAREP’s interventions under Workstreams 1 and 2 will still contribute toward results measured by goal-level indicators. Activities proposed by applicants should enable achievement of one or more performance indicators as provided in Attachment E of the RFA. High priority indicators are identified in Figure 1, Section 2 of the RFA.

SECTION 7: ANTI-TERRORISM CERTIFICATION

Question 29: Is there a separate format for the Anti-Terrorism Certification?

Response: The certification format is included in Part II of the Grant Application Instructions on Page 20 of the RFA. Applicants are required to complete, sign this certification, and submit it as a part of their application. Detailed instructions are provided in Section 9 of the RFA.
Question 30: Are any additional attestations/ certifications required to confirm to anti-terrorism?

Response: For the purposes of submitting the grant application, this is the only certification required. Other certifications may be required at the time of award.

SECTION 8: SUBMISSION OF MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS

Question 31: Can an applicant submit multiple applications under the RFA? Can an applicant apply with different consortium partners for different proposals?

Response: Applicants can submit multiple applications provided they present different programs with distinct activities under each of the applications. Further, no application should be dependent on another, for example, outcomes in one application should not be dependent on achievement of outcomes in another application. Also, same activities should not feature in multiple proposals i.e., applications should be standalone, different, and independent of each other. Consortium members can vary from one application to another depending on program and activities. Each application will be evaluated independently on its own merit.

Question 32: Can an applicant submit multiple proposals in different countries towards different projects?

Response: The eligible country for performance is India and activities are to be performed mainly in India. However, activities outside India, to enable Objective 1, maybe considered on a case-to-case basis.

Regarding submission of multiple applications, please refer to answers under the question above.

Question 33: Can multiple awards be issued under this RFA? If yes, will the total amount be divided between successful applicants?

Response: There may be more than one award under this RFA. Each application will be evaluated on its own merit and considered separately for award. The award ceilings specified in the RFA (page 5 of the RFA) will apply to each award separately.

Question 34: Is the total grant value capped at $500,000 for non-US organizations and $250,000 for US Organizations, irrespective of the number of proposals submitted under the four technical objectives?

Response: The above grant value ceilings relate to a single grant.

Question 35: Can the organization submit multiple proposals aligned to the four technical objectives? Is there an upper limit on the number of proposals that may be submitted? If multiple proposals are allowed, can they be submitted as one single submission, or the organization needs to submit them as individual submissions?

Response: It is up to the applicant to decide if they want to submit one single application covering all the objectives, or separate applications for each objective. Please also refer to response to Q 31 above on submission on multiple application. Each application will be evaluated on its own merit and considered separately for award.
SECTION 9: PROJECT TIMEFRAME

Question 36: Can the proposed project timeframe be less than 2 years? For example, can the project be wrapped up in 3-6 months if accepted business KPIs are successfully demonstrated?

Response: The proposed timeframe is the maximum time allowed for implementation under this RFA. Applicants can propose programs which can be achieve outcomes or results in shorter timeframe. Applicants are required to provide details of their implementation plan and strategy, which will be evaluated as per prescribed criteria. Further, a sustainability plan is also required, as provided in Part 7 of Section 9 of the RFA.

Question 37: Whether project can be proposed for duration greater than 24 months considering SAREP will continue till 2026.

Response: As mentioned, the performance period for program and activities under this RFA is 24 months. Applicants are required to propose activities which can be completed within this timeframe. Any potential grant extension renewal (within overall SAREP duration) may be considered on a case-by-case basis towards the end of the grant performance period.

SECTION 10: OTHER

Question 38: Can preparatory activities of a larger planned intervention be considered for funding under the SAREP Partnership Fund?

Response: Preparatory or start-up activities can be considered provided the program and activities proposed contribute toward achievement of SAREP performance indicators as provided in Attachment E. As indicated in the RFA, SPF will evaluate applicants’ sustainability and funds leveraging plans for demonstrated evidence of subsequent funding to ensure continuity of the proposed program and activities.

Question 39: In regard to the Section 2, Figure 1: “expected results of SAREP of strengthening a capacity of 10,000+ professionals and technicians” of the SAREP guidelines- Will the program consider proposals for capacity building for early stage, first generation entrepreneurs in clean energy sectors and pipeline creation of innovation and entrepreneurship at pre-deployment stages?

Response: Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals that enable and deliver strong and long-lasting development results, consistent with SAREP’s performance indicators.

Applicants can propose programs and activities which they believe are best placed to achieve these outcomes and results. All applications will be evaluated as per the evaluation criteria in Section 6.

Question 40: To apply for the Partnership Fund, we understand that there isn’t a mandatory requirement to present the project together with a distribution company, meaning that the applicant will be able to apply for funding to implement the solution for any distribution company in India. Please confirm.

Response: As provided in the evaluation criteria, applicants should demonstrate evidence of collaboration/commitment with one or more host institutions, i.e., a beneficiary that will enable sustainability and scaling of the grant funding activities. The type, purpose, and role of a “Host Institution” can vary depending on the context. Applications should identify the relevant host institution(s) for the activities proposed. A distribution company can be a host institution, but the definition of a host institution is not limited to distribution companies only.
Question 41: Should the technical proposal specify the exact name of the host agency with whom the project is proposed to be implemented? Does the proposal require local utility support letter to strengthen the proposal?

Response: Yes, demonstrated evidence of collaboration must be provided with relevant letter of intent or MoU or other such document, along with the contact details of the concerned official and the agency.

Question 42: What could lead to the rejection of an application? Will an unsuccessful applicant be notified by SPF?

Response: If the application is not in compliance with the RFA requirements or is incomplete, it will be rejected i.e., not considered for evaluation. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified. However, SPF will not enter into discussions with applicants regarding missing information or details in their applications.

Question 43: Please elaborate on the generation and use of Grant Program Income


Question 44: Is there any minimum number of past performance references to be submitted?

Response: Reference Point 14 on page 20 - Applicants are required to provide references from partners they have worked with in the implementation of a similar program during the last 3 years. Each applicant should include minimum 7 past performance references. Past performance details should preferably be in activities or technical work similar to the program and activities proposed by applicants. SPF reserves the right to cross-check with any or all of the references provided.

Question 45: Should the references be from South Asia, or can these be from any other region?

Response: References provided should be related to similar activities carried out by the applicant during the past three years, regardless of region. SPF retains right to cross-check and request details from any or all of the references provided by the applicants.

Question 46: Is a local entity which does not yet have an FCRA registration eligible to apply?

Response: It is the applicant's responsibility to check if FCRA is applicable to them. Applicants are encouraged to carefully review the regulatory requirements and if required, seek legal advice. In case FCRA is applicable, the applicant must have an active FCRA registration when they submit their application.

Question 47: Does 'Return on Investments' mean returns in terms of objectives set by USAID as target metrics or tangible returns in terms of financial savings?

Response: SPF will evaluate based on outcomes proposed in terms of performance indicators as well as how efficiently these results are proposed to be achieved.

Question 48: Does the mandate require any level of effort from resources in United States?

Response: No, it is not mandatory. It is for the applicant to decide.
Question 49: Will BIO-CNG, Bio-Hydrogen, Bio-ethanol sectors be allowed under this RFP?

Response: Applicants are encouraged to focus activities around SAREP’s technical objectives and performance indicators as provided under the RFA. Further, please refer to Section 4 on Page 9: Support expansion of capacity or extend the operational life of carbon-intensive fossil fuel-based energy projects (e.g., oil, fossil [natural] gas, and coal). Support for natural gas for household energy access projects, in particular clean cooking projects, can be considered, if no cleaner options are feasible.

Question 50: Can the required forms be shared in editable format?

Response: Yes, the forms will be available in Microsoft Word format.

Question 51: S.No. 1.3 in Attachment E should be replaced with 1.2

Response: This is a typographical error and should be read as 1.2. Corrected version of the RFA has been uploaded and applicants are encouraged to review the same.

Question 52: Who would hold the IPR as may be generated through the proposed project concept?

Response: All reports generated, and data collected as part of the award funded through SPF will be considered the property of USAID. USAID reserves royalty free, worldwide, nonexclusive, and irrevocable right to use, disclose, reproduce, prepare derivative works, distribute copies to the public, perform publicly, and display publicly in any manner and for any purpose. IPR for products (such as software) previously owned by the applicants and used for the proposed program and activities will continue to be owned by the applicants.

For unsuccessful applications, SAREP will maintain confidentiality of the proposed concept and the applicant will retain the IPRs. All reviewers of the applications will be required to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA) as per SAREP policies.

Question 53: Which themes/ideas/organisations SAREP would be more inclined to support?

Response: Applicants should propose program and activities consistent with SAREP’s performance indicators. High priority indicators are identified in Figure 1, Section 2 of the RFA.

Question 54: Is there specific preference to any of the Indian states?

Response: Activities can be implemented in any or all of the Indian states.

Question 55: In light of the abovementioned queries and corresponding uncertainty around the submission, we request you to kindly extend the deadline for consideration of applications for SAREP Partnership fund till at least 5 February 2022 along with subsequent deadlines.

Response: Based on the request, SAREP is able to extend the last date for submission of applications to January 27, 2022, 2359 HRS Indian Standard Time (IST).

Question 56: Will the awardees be able to issue further sub-grants under this project?

Response: Sub-grants under SPF may be allowed subject to grantees compliance with all applicable legal and regulatory provisions including the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Even under circumstances when sub-grants are allowed, a review of the sub-grantee’s internal grant administration policies and grant management systems will be required. Procurement of technical
and commercial services through direct contracting under SAREP Partnership Fund may also be allowed subject to all applicable legal and regulatory provisions. Applicants are encouraged to seek legal advice if they are considering sub-grants.

SPF will evaluate applications with respect to their ability to achieve results efficiently as per prescribed evaluation criteria in Section 6 of the RFA. Applicants are therefore encouraged to assess their implementation plan and strategy with respect to complex management structures such as sub-grants.

**Question 57: Submission of digitally signed documents**

**Response:** Wherever required, documents must bear the digital signatures of the applicant’s authorised signatory.