Request for Proposals

Structural Transformation of African and Asian Agriculture and Rural Spaces (STAAARS+) Fellows program of the USAID Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy, Research, Capacity and Influence

Background

The STAAARS+ Fellows program, a part of the USAID Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI), is a collaboration between Cornell University, Michigan State University (MSU), and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to advance rigorous, policy-oriented food security research on topics of inclusive agricultural- and rural transformation, development of healthy food systems, and enhanced resilience at individual, household, national and regional levels in Africa and Asia. The objective is to build and reinforce an effective policy research culture within African and Asian policy research organizations that can help build and sustain research capacity beyond the life of PRCI and the STAAARS+ program.

STAAARS+ teams are selected through a competitive process and paired with mentors at Cornell, IFPRI or MSU, with whom they will jointly author a paper on a topic of mutual interest that fits within PRCI's broad research priorities. STAAARS+ will support the development of research findings publishable in high quality, peer-reviewed journals; facilitate access to policy outreach networks and policy engagement materials; provide professional development training; build Fellows' international research networks; and support teams' participation in scientific and policy conferences. The first cohort of STAAARS+ teams was selected in 2020 and a second cohort began in 2021. This RFP marks the beginning of selection for the third cohort of teams.

Scope of Research and Geographic Focus
Prospective STAAARS+ teams are invited to develop proposals in the following thematic areas.
1. Inclusive agricultural and rural transformation to raise rural household incomes (including but not limited to small farmers), and to create more decent jobs, particularly for women and youth;
2. Development of healthy food systems, including regulatory issues and private sector engagement, in ways that address food safety and the triple burden of malnutrition; and
3. Enhanced resilience at individual, household, national and regional levels (to climate, conflict, and other sources of shocks) to achieve economic and environmental sustainability.

STAAARS+ teams' rigorous policy analysis should use existing, high quality data, such as the Living Standards Measurement Study - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA), Demographic and Health Surveys, or similar datasets. High quality data sets collected locally, by an applicant's institution or other research organizations in Africa or Asia, can be proposed and will be considered based on a case-by-case assessment of data quality. Mixed methods research projects are welcome. No funding is available for new data collection nor software purchase. Teams are welcome to approach researchers within the PRCI network for guidance on the suitability of a topic and research design for STAAARS+ support.

Program Structure

The STAAARS+ program spans 18 months from the release of the RFP to the delivery of final outputs by the STAAARS+ teams. Selected STAAARS+ teams are matched with one (or two) faculty or senior research staff mentor(s) who share an interest in the proposed topic and is willing to be available extensively for consultation and collaboration throughout the duration of the fellowship period. Mentorship and collaboration begin immediately with a series of launch workshops involving the fellows, mentors and STAAARS+ leadership occurring during the first six weeks of the fellowship period. A period of regular remote collaboration follows, with weekly or biweekly virtual meetings. During this period, training workshops are held at relevant points in the teams' research process. Training workshops are designed to assist in fellows' professional development and supplement their technical skills. Topics may include but are not limited to: coding and data management skills; reproducible research processes; technical writing; presentation skills; time management; grant writing; navigating peer review; research ethics; and policy engagement planning. Approximately 9 months from the release of the RFP, the STAAARS+ teams spend three to four weeks visiting a US-based host institution (Cornell, MSU or IFPRI) at which the STAAARS+ team works intensively on the research project while participating in network-building and capacity development activities customized to their self-identified specific needs as a team. STAAARS+ teams will also engage with the broader community through presentations of their work, either in-person (travel restrictions pending) or virtually, at the annual ReNAPRI policy conference or other events organized by PRCI.

Tentative Program Schedule

Virtual Launch: Fellows and Mentors Orientation	May 16 – 20, 2022
Virtual Launch: Institutional Orientation	May 30 – June 3, 2022
Virtual Launch: Presentations	June 9, 2022
Virtual Launch: Team Work Planning	June 14, 2022
Virtual Launch: Panel of Past Fellows	June 16, 2022
★Milestone: Final Work Plan Due	June 24, 2022
★Milestone: Individual Meetings with STAAARS+ Faculty Director	June 13 – 24, 2022
Training: Research Ethics	June 21, 2022
Training: Time Management	June 28, 2022
Virtual Launch: PRCI Webinar	June 30, 2022
Training: Transparent and Reproducible Research	July 5, 2022
Training: Data Management	July 7 and 12, 2022
Training: Writing Structure	July 28, 2022

Training: Effective Presentations	August 1, 2022
Research-to-Policy (R2P): Introductory Seminar	August 2, 2022
Seminar: Paper Presentations	August 18, 2022
★Milestone: Paper Draft 1	August 29, 2022
Travel to Cornell (Ithaca, NY)	**September 3 – 24, 2022**
Seminar: Intensive Feedback Workshop(s)	September 6 – 7, 2022
Seminar: Cornell Invited Seminars	September 13 – 15, 2022
Training: Grantsmanship	October 4, 2022
Training: Navigating Peer Review	October 18, 2022
R2P: Individual Meetings with R2P Coordinator	October 31 – November 4, 2022
ReNAPRI Policy Conference (Namibia University of Science and Technology)	(tentative) November 17 – 19, 2022
★Milestone: Paper Draft 2	December 15, 2022
★Milestone: R2P Deliverable	June 30, 2023
★Milestone: Paper Submission to Academic Journal	June 30, 2023

Eligibility

This call is open for teams of two to three early career African or Asian researchers currently working for eligible policy research institutions based in sub-Saharan Africa or Asia. Team members must be actively engaged in research, as manifest in published work within the past four years, and hold an M.S. or Ph.D., or equivalent degree – with a strong preference for teams containing multiple Ph.D.-holders – in agricultural economics, economics, geography, sociology, statistics, or a related field. Team members with PhDs should have completed their PhD no more than five years prior to the application deadline, although in exceptional cases a team of three could include one member whose PhD was awarded no more than ten years prior. Priority is given to proposals from PRCI-affiliated institutions[1], but teams

---

[1] These include all members of ReNAPRI – the Regional Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes – all centers selected under PRCI as Centers for Policy Leadership. Current members of ReNAPRI are Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (IRES), Universite de Kinshasha, DRC; Institute for Statistical, Social, and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana; Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development, Kenya; Lilongwe University of Agriculture & Natural Resources (LUANAR), Malawi; Research Center for Agriculture Policy and Agri-systems (CEPPAG), Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique; Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP), University of Stellenbosch, South Africa; School of Agriculture Economics and Business Studies (SAEBS), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Tanzania; Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics, Makerere University, Uganda; Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI), Zambia; and Department of Agricultural Economics & Extension, University of Zimbabwe. Centers for Policy Leadership are the Center for Petroleum, Energy Economics and Law and the Department of

from other research institutions based in sub-Saharan Africa or low- and middle-income countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia will be considered. Teams from government-affiliated universities or research institutions in Myanmar or Cambodia are ineligible, per USAID restrictions. Qualified female researchers are particularly encouraged to apply and topics with an explicit gender dimension are of particular interest. For guidance, we recommend reviewing training materials on integrating gender into policy research and outreach.

The institutions of successful applicants are required to support STAAARS+ team members in their STAAARS+ work. Sending institutions must provide all STAAARS+ team members with adequate funded time to carry out their research during the remote program periods as well as during travel periods to conferences, workshops, and the mentor's institution in the United States (US).

All travel is contingent on safety with respect to public health risks at the time of travel. Team members must be fully released from other obligations for travel during a three-to-four-week intensive collaboration visit to Cornell, IFPRI, or MSU (depending on their mentor's institution). Teams will also participate in a roughly weeklong policy conference hosted by ReNAPRI during or shortly after the fellowship period. In 2022, the annual conference will be hosted by the Agricultural Trade Policy Institute at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. STAAARS+ through PRCI will provide financial support to cover travel expenses for two team members to attend the three-to-four-week visit to Cornell, IFPRI or MSU. Covered expenses will include visa application, airfare, per diems and accommodation at the U.S. institution, as well as to the one-week ReNAPRI policy conference. Teams' institutions must facilitate the visa application and any other local actions that need to be taken to make the travel possible. Teams will be required to submit a letter of support from their institution as part of their application.

Application Process
STAAARS+ will hold an informational webinar on **Friday, February 18th from 8:00 – 9:00am Eastern Time**. Please register for webinar here. For those unable to attend, the materials will be available here after the webinar has taken place.

The STAAARS+ fellowship application process is managed by Cornell University. A team of two or three researchers from one or more eligible policy research institution(s) submits one application. Applicants must prepare a concept proposal (maximum 2500 words), which motivates the selected research issue(s) and objectives, outlines data sources and proposed analytical methodology. The team must document it has access to the data proposed for analysis and is free to produce publishable research using those data. The proposal must also contain a feasible and detailed division of labor, explicitly outlining the roles and responsibilities of each team member and a timeline for completing a rigorous paper ready for submission to a peer-reviewed international journal, as well as policy engagement

---

Agricultural Extension and Rural Development (CPEEL-DAERD), University of Ibadan, Nigeria; Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Uganda; and Bureau d'Analyses Macro-économiques (BAME) de l'Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA-BAME), Senegal; Other eligible centers within the PRCI network are Economic Research Institute for Industry and Trade (ERIIT), Laos; Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal; Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) , Sri Lanka; Kasetsart University department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Bangkok; Research and Information System For Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi).

materials based on the research, within the 18-month fellowship period. All proposals must be submitted in English. All proposals will be peer reviewed by experts from Cornell, MSU and/or IFPRI. Finalists will be expected to demonstrate adequate competence within the team in statistical analysis software (Stata or R) prior to final selection, established via a structured assessment.

The deadline to submit a concept proposal is March 15, 2022 at 11:59 PM New York time. Applicants should submit their completed proposals via the STAAARS+ online application link. Accepted applicants will be notified by early May 2022 and are expected to begin remote collaboration with their mentor and be prepared to join launch activities immediately upon acceptance. Any questions about the application process or program should be directed to staaars_plus@cornell.edu.

Proposal Template

Within the online application, please complete the team information and research sections. At the end of the application form please attach, as a ZIP folder or merged PDF, the following materials:

1. Concept Proposal (2500 word limit):
    a. Title page (not included in the 2500 word limit)
        i. Title of the proposed research
        ii. Targeted country (countries)
        iii. Host policy research institution(s)
    b. Introduction and motivation that includes clear statement of research objectives, policy relevance, and testable hypotheses
    c. Description of data source(s), documentation of access to the data for publishable research, and any prior experience working with the proposed data
    d. Proposed empirical analysis methodology(ies)
    e. If applicable, summarize any preliminary results
    f. Proposed division of labor among team members
    g. Proposed timeline
    h. Bibliographic references (not included in the 2500 word limit)
2. CVs of each individual team member
3. If proposing to use data that are not publicly available, a letter or other documentation from the data steward(s) indicating that the applicant will have access to the data to use in the proposed project
4. Letter of support from each team member's home policy research institution(s), explicitly committing to provide team members with adequate paid time to undertake the research and to provide local assistance for any travel planning associated with the fellowship (see above).