



# Request for Applications RFA2024-016

## Prevention Challenges: Overcoming Impediments to HIV Prevention

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**Request for Applications**

**Prevention Challenges: Overcoming Impediments to HIV Prevention**

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## I. Opportunity summary

This is an opportunity to apply for funding to advance research applications related to HIV prevention. **Graduate students and post-doctoral fellows from Kenyan, South African, and Zimbabwean** institutions are invited to apply to this request for applications (RFA) sponsored by MATRIX (Microbicide R&D to Advance HIV Prevention Technologies through Responsive Innovation and eXcellence): A USAID Project to Advance the Research and Development of Innovative HIV Prevention Products for Women. This RFA is designed to support research by a graduate student or post-doctoral fellow to address the critical need for **pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and/or multipurpose prevention technology (MPT) development** that meets the goals of the MATRIX consortium and USAID. This funding opportunity has two objectives: The first is for the applicant to gain, through active mentoring, the professional expertise required to become an independent scientist. The second is for the applicant to acquire research experience by conducting HIV prevention research. Solutions to these challenges can stimulate the development and implementation of effective HIV prevention strategies that meet the diverse HIV prevention needs of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), pregnant and breastfeeding people (PBFP), and female sex workers (FSWs). Successful applications will deliver innovative research while providing training and mentoring to the next generation of African scientists. PATH, a member of the MATRIX project, will oversee application submission and award processes using an oversight structure that draws from US- and Africa-based administrators. The number of awards will be based on meritorious review of the proposals received.

*Key words:* HIV prevention, multipurpose prevention technology, adolescent girls and young women, antiretrovirals, microbiome, delivery technologies.

## II. Key dates

**Table 1. Summary of key dates.**

Letter of intent due (optional)	August 15, 2024 (8:00 a.m. Pacific time)
Fact-finding questions due (optional)	August 15, 2024 (8:00 a.m. Pacific time)
Applicants provided responses to fact-finding questions	August 23, 2024 (8:00 a.m. Pacific time)
<b>Applications due</b>	<b>September 16, 2024</b> (8:00 a.m. Pacific time)
Applicants notified of decision	November 16, 2024
Estimated project start date	February 1, 2025

This RFA expires on September 17, 2024.

MATRIX reserves the right to modify this schedule as needed. Parties who express interest will be notified by email of any changes to the RFA.

### III. Funding opportunity purpose

#### **MATRIX and Technology Accelerator – Domain 1**

The Microbicide R&D to Advance HIV Prevention Technologies through Responsive Innovation and eXcellence ([MATRIX](#)) project is designed to expedite research and development (R&D) of products for prevention of HIV in women. MATRIX is funded by USAID and is led by Dr. Sharon Hillier (Magee-Womens Research Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, USA) and Dr. Thesla Palanee-Phillips (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa). MATRIX's scientific and operational priorities are focused on advancing products that meet the diverse HIV prevention needs of AGYW, PBFP, and FSWs, while ensuring equitable leadership and representation of sub-Saharan African (SSA) researchers and stakeholders in all HIV prevention and MPT development activities.

The overarching scientific objective of the MATRIX program is to create a self-sustaining platform that is driven by milestones and go/no-go criteria for the efficient development of new pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) HIV prevention products and MPTs (combination of drugs to prevent unwanted pregnancies and anti-HIV drugs) that are acceptable, affordable, scalable, and deliverable; that increase end-user choice; and that make a positive public health impact while actively involving SSA researchers and stakeholders. A significant component of MATRIX's SSA product development strategy is the Technology Accelerator – Domain 1, which was designed to accelerate early-phase R&D of novel HIV PrEP products, MPTs (specifically, combinations of contraceptives and anti-HIV drugs), and/or technologies that support drug discovery/development. To that end, Technology Accelerator – Domain 1 is issuing this funding announcement to identify early-stage researchers interested in developing their research skills, with the goal to develop a diverse pool of highly trained Africa-based scientists in the HIV prevention field. Proposed work will be **one year in duration with a maximum budget of \$150,000**. Reviews will identify meritorious applications that **both address the identified challenges in the current HIV prevention toolbox and demonstrate, through the mentoring plan, the training needed to support and advance the awardee's scientific career.**

#### **Mentoring**

An objective of this program is to develop productive, independent research scientists (mentees) in the HIV prevention field. It is expected that the mentee is already embedded in a laboratory as a graduate student or post-doctoral fellow and that the research

conducted as part of this program will contribute to their ongoing education and/or dissertation.

Each mentee will work closely with an experienced mentor at their home institution who will provide guidance, support, and professional development opportunities throughout the duration of the program. The mentor and mentee will develop a mentoring plan and implement it to achieve the goal of supporting the mentee's development as an independent research scientist. A single mentor or a team of mentors must commit (time and resources) to providing learning opportunities for the mentee, including regular one-on-one meetings and other opportunities to expand their professional profile, including opportunities to meet other scientists and present at local, regional, and international meetings. Additionally, the mentor(s) will instruct and create opportunities for the mentee to obtain skills appropriate for developing and carrying out rigorous experimental study designs that apply the scientific method to conduct the planned research. The mentor(s) will also guide and support the mentee in developing skills for proposal and publication writing and presentation of their experimental results.

The proposed mentoring program will facilitate and provide networking opportunities for participants to connect with peers, mentors, and other stakeholders in the HIV prevention field. This includes participation in conferences and the MATRIX Investigators Meeting (IM) aimed at fostering interdisciplinary collaborations and knowledge exchange.

### **Areas of research interest**

The following areas of research interest are within the scope of this RFA when supporting the overall objective of creating new primary HIV prevention strategies and products:

1. Development of novel anti-HIV active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for HIV PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides.
2. Development of existing broadly neutralizing antibodies for HIV PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides. Responsive applications may include antibody optimization to increase avidity, affinity, stability, and/or compatibility with the vaginal microenvironment.
3. Development/optimization of new approaches for local manufacture of APIs for HIV PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides or for use in an MPT. Approaches that reduce the cost of goods and/or overall cost of manufacturing are encouraged.
4. Investigation of drug-drug interactions (DDI) between HIV-active pharmaceutical ingredients and other commonly used drugs and contraceptives.
5. Development of new or optimized drug delivery systems that address current gaps in HIV prevention products for African women. Systemic (e.g., injectable, implantable) and topical (e.g., intravaginal rings and films) drug delivery systems are responsive.

6. Development of novel, sensitive, and accurate point-of-care HIV diagnostics.
7. Understanding the interaction of the microbiome, virome, and fungome on HIV acquisition, PrEP, and/or vaginal microbicide safety and/or efficacy. Activities may include development of best practices for microbiome analysis in resource-limited areas.
8. Development of techniques for collection and analysis of vaginal pro-inflammatory cytokines.

### **Nonresponsive areas of research**

Applications proposing research that is identified as not responsive to this funding opportunity will be returned without review, including:

1. Development of any drug, product, instrumentation, or process that does not have anti-HIV activity or application to PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides. This specifically includes development of any new products, drugs, drug delivery systems, diagnostics, and/or technologies that do not support advancement of PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides, or MPT product development. Applicants may propose products with a broad spectrum of antiviral/antimicrobial activity or applicability beyond HIV, but the research application must focus on development of the products' role as an HIV prevention strategy.
2. Research that involves first-in-human, phase 1, phase 2, or phase 3 clinical trials. Applicants may propose research using samples from completed or ongoing clinical trials, but applicants may not use this RFA to support any component of a clinical trial or observational study. Applicants may propose to use tissues and/or secretions that have been specifically obtained from volunteers following applicable local laws and ethics committee regulations.
3. Any applications that propose the development of HIV vaccines (or components of vaccines), including combinations of antivirals and vaccines in a single drug delivery system or as an MPT.
4. Applications that focus solely on HIV treatment—for example, tracking of drug mutations in treated populations, product development strategies focused on controlling or eliminating HIV after infection (HIV cure), and product development strategies focused on elimination of or measuring HIV viral reservoirs.
5. Applications for any type of HIV prevention other than PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides-based, such as monitoring or treatment of HIV-infected individuals with new drugs or drug delivery strategies designed to prevent transmission to uninfected individuals, development of drugs or delivery strategies for U=U (undetectable = untransmissible) strategies, or development of drugs or delivery strategies or devices for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

6. Manufacturing of products for testing in humans in a proposed or ongoing clinical trial outside this funding opportunity.
7. Optimization of existing PrEP strategies through repackaging or distribution strategies, such as co-packaging of the drugs.
8. Any applications with proposed innovations that are not supportive of the primary HIV prevention needs of AGYW, PBFP, and FSWs.
9. Any applications focusing on socio-behavioral research, such as end-user and marketing studies to determine general end-user perceptions, acceptability, or market interest for a specific or hypothetical HIV prevention, including MPT strategy.

## IV. Key definitions

The following definitions are used for key terms throughout this document:

- **Milestone:** A milestone is a measure of progress. Milestones identify critical junctures or steps in the research process that must be accomplished or completed to successfully complete the proposed research.
- **Multipurpose prevention technology (MPT):** The combination of drugs delivered through a single drug-delivery system to provide combined protection against at least two sexual and reproductive health risks, such as unintended pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.
- **Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP):** The act of using a drug or device to prevent primary HIV infection in an HIV-negative individual.
- **Primary HIV prevention:** The inhibition of HIV transmission from an infected individual to an uninfected woman using a drug or device that prevents systemic or vaginal viral infection.

## V. Award information

- **Number of awards:** The number of awards will be based on the meritorious review of the submitted proposals. The total number of awards is contingent upon the number of submissions, available funds, and the applications' applicability to MATRIX's mission and objectives.
- **Award budget:** MATRIX will award up to \$150,000 per award. Budgets should be detailed, reasonable, and realistic.
- **Award project period:** The duration of the awarded project is 12 months, depending on the proposed scope of work and timeline.

## VI. Eligibility information

- The proposed research project must address a **critical need for PrEP and/or vaginal microbicide prevention product or MPT development** that meets the goals and objectives of the MATRIX consortium and USAID. The proposed scope of work must focus on HIV PrEP or vaginal microbicides.
- The applicant (mentee) must be **currently enrolled as a graduate student or employed as a post-doctoral researcher** who received their degree within the last two years. The applicant must be working in the field of pharmacy, engineering, biology, or other related disciplines directly applicable to the responsive areas of scientific support for this RFA and contribute to the development of PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides.
- Applicants **MUST BE** based in **Kenya, South Africa, or Zimbabwe at an accredited university, research institution, or facility.**
- The primary mentor **MUST BE** employed by a university or research institution where the mentee resides and be in one of the three African countries identified above.
  - A mentoring team may be proposed in cases where additional expertise and experience are needed to support the proposed research or mentoring plan. Mentoring teams may include mentors from the private sector, such as pharmaceutical companies and other commercial entities; however, the primary mentor must be academically affiliated.
  - Members of the mentoring teams may be located in the US, EU, UK, Kenya, South Africa, or Zimbabwe; however, the primary mentor must be co-located with the mentee in Africa.
- Projects that would use any funds to provide any material support or resources to individuals, entities, or organizations of countries that have been identified by the United States Department of State as state sponsors of terrorism are ineligible. The countries currently identified are Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Syria.
- Project applications can be submitted by USAID award holders, including MATRIX's existing partners.
- Only one application per mentee will be accepted, and mentors may only be the primary mentor on one application. Mentors may participate in multiple applications as part of mentoring teams, assuming they have appropriate time and resources to devote to each mentee.



## VII. How to respond to this request for application

During the application and award processes, operational and research oversight for this funding opportunity will be provided by PATH ([www.path.org](http://www.path.org)), a member of the MATRIX project. PATH will provide guidance on the RFA application submission process and budgeting, should questions arise prior to the award. Applicants are asked to submit an optional letter of intent to PATH via email to [MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org](mailto:MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org). Applicants may submit questions via the same email; questions and answers will be sent to all those who express interest. Following submission, applications will be screened for responsiveness to this RFA. PATH will manage the review using procedures designed to minimize conflicts of interest and ensure confidentiality of the applications. The review committee will be cochaired by PATH personnel, and the review committee will be composed of internal MATRIX and external subject matter experts. After the award, PATH will be responsible for management of the award.

### Step 1. Letter of intent (optional)

By the date listed in Section II of this document, prospective applicants can submit a letter of intent that includes the following information:

- Descriptive title of proposed activity.
- Name, address, and telephone number of the mentee.
- Mentee's organization.
- In a table, detail the mentor or team of mentors by including:
  - Name(s) of mentor(s).
  - Mentor's organization.
  - Mentor's country of residence.
  - Expertise provided by the mentor.
  - Mentor's expected contribution to the mentoring plan.
  - If a mentoring team is proposed, identify the primary mentor.
- Names of suggested reviewers or people who should not review the application due to potential conflict of interest.
- Names of any potential conflict(s) of interest with individuals or organizations within MATRIX.

The letter of intent should be sent via email to [MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org](mailto:MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org).

The subject line of the email should read as *RFA2024-016\_letter of intent\_organization\_Mentee Name*. For example, an application from PATH would read as *RFA2024-016\_letter of intent\_PATH\_J Doe*.

## **Step 2. Fact-finding questions (optional)**

Questions concerning this opportunity are welcome. The questions and answers will be provided to all participants who confirm interest. See Section II of this document for related dates. Questions received after the due date may not be accommodated. At its discretion, MATRIX reserves the right to have additional rounds of fact-finding questions, which would be sent out to all participants who confirm interest.

The fact-finding questions should be sent via email to [MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org](mailto:MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org).

The subject line of the email should read as *RFA2024-016\_Organization\_fact-finding questions*. For example, an application from PATH would read as *RFA2024-016\_PATH\_fact-finding questions*.

## **Step 3. Applications**

Completed applications should be submitted via email to [MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org](mailto:MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org).

The subject line of the email should read as *RFA2024-016\_application\_Organization\_Mentee Name*. For example, an application from PATH would read as *RFA2024-016\_application\_PATH\_J Doe*.

## **Formatting requirements**

Applications that do not follow the requirements below will be returned without review.

- Applications must be in English.
- Budgets must be in US dollars.
- The technical application and budget narrative must be written in 11-point font or larger in a standard font (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman). Their pages should be on US letter-sized paper (8.5 x 11 inches or 22 x 28 cm) with 1-inch (2.54 cm) margins. Pages should be numbered using an X of Y format in the lower left-hand corner (e.g., 3 of 5).
- Biographical sketches, or biosketches, should follow the United States National Institutes of Health biosketch requirements, without the “Contributions to Science” section (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>). An eRA Commons account is not required for application.
- Tables and charts can be in 10-point font and must be readable without magnification.
- The detailed budget must be submitted in an Excel file, and all other files must be submitted as PDF files. Do not send locked or password-protected files.

- If confidential data or information is contained in the application, the phrase “Confidential—do not disseminate” should be placed in the footer of each page that contains confidential information.
- Each submitted document should follow this naming convention: *RFA2024-016\_file name\_Mentee name*.

## Application components

Your submission should include the following attachments:

1. **Main narrative (use the template provided):** A template for the research statement is attached to this RFA. Label this file *RFA2024-016\_main narrative\_Mentee name*. The narrative should describe how your project addresses the research and mentoring objectives of the RFA and how you will assess progress. See Section VIII of this document for detailed requirements.
2. **Biosketches (for primary mentor):** Label this file *RFA2024-016\_mentor biosketch\_Mentee name*. The suggested format is a US National Institutes of Health biosketch, without the “Contributions to Science” section (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>). An eRA Commons account is not required for this application.
3. **CV for mentee (no page limit):** Provide a full CV, including academic history, publications, and research interests. Label this file *RFA2024-016\_CV\_Mentee name*.
4. **Institutional letter of support (no page limit):** Provide a letter of support from your university indicating that they support your participation in the MATRIX program. Label this file *RFA2024-016\_letter of support\_Mentee name*.
5. **Detailed budget (use the template provided; no page limit):** See Section IX of this document for detailed budget requirements. The detailed budget template is attached to this RFA. Label this file *RFA2024-016\_detailed budget\_Mentee name*.
6. **Budget narrative (use the template provided; no page limit):** The budget narrative should describe how you arrive at your total dollar amount in each line item of your detailed budget. It should also provide justifications for each proposed budget item. See Section IX of this document for detailed budget narrative requirements. The budget narrative template is attached to this RFA. Label this file *RFA2024-016\_budget narrative\_Mentee name*.
7. **Tax information (W8-BEN-E):** Label this file *RFA2024-016\_W8\_Mentee name*.
8. **Risk assessment questionnaire (use form provided):** The template is attached to the RFA. Label this file “*RFA2024-016\_RAQ\_Mentee name*.” To fill out this form electronically (preferred), the latest version of Adobe Acrobat is

required. If you have challenges filling out the form electronically, you may fill out the form in hard copy and send a scanned file with any required sub-attachments.

#### **Step 4. Conclusion of process**

Applicants will be notified of MATRIX and USAID's decision after completion of the review and post-review selection of applications to be awarded. See Section X of this document for the review criteria that will be used to evaluate submissions. Final awards are subject to the terms and conditions included in this solicitation, as well as successful final negotiations of all applicable terms and conditions affecting this work.

Unsuccessful applicants will receive feedback from the review panel. Applicants are welcome to modify their applications and submit a new application in future rounds of the RFA.

### **VIII. Application requirements—main narrative**

The main narrative should be no more than ten pages (project overview: one page; technical narrative: three pages; mentorship plan: five pages; timeline: one page) and follow the template provided.

#### **Project overview**

The project overview should describe how your project will accomplish the objectives of this RFA, including:

- Mentee details: Name, job title, organization, department, country, email address, project name.
- Project overview: Describe the research plan and how mentoring will facilitate success of the mentee.

#### **Technical narrative**

Include a narrative on your technical approach to accomplish the scope of work, including:

- Significance and innovation of the proposed work.
- Description of the technical approach broken down into one to three specific aims.
- Anticipated problems and solutions.
- A brief discussion of major internal and external resources, including facilities and essential equipment available to support the mentee and proposed research.

## **Mentorship plan**

The mentorship statement will determine the largest portion of the application's score. It should document the need for the proposed mentored research and training in relationship to the applicant's career goals. The mentoring plan should ensure that the mentee obtains individualized training from outstanding faculty sponsors while conducting research identified as responsive to this RFA in scientific, health-related fields relevant to the mission of MATRIX. A single mentor or a team of mentors can work to support the mentee. The mentoring plan should describe the approach to achieving the applicant's career goals, including:

- Clearly define the research and career goals of the mentee to be facilitated by this opportunity. Outline a plan for obtaining necessary skills to achieve goals. Outline how the mentee will be trained in the skills necessary to become an independent research scientist. Alternatives should be identified if the plan cannot be implemented as outlined.
- Provide a brief personal biosketch detailing your motivations to work in this field.
- Describe the specific research and career goals of the mentee to be addressed through this opportunity.
- Describe the mentor or team of mentors.
  - Provide statements of the mentor's expertise and previous experience mentoring graduate students and/or post-doctoral fellows. Summarize how each mentor will apply their past experience and expertise to contribute to the training of the mentee.
  - It is expected that each mentor will commit sufficient time to the mentoring process to assure the mentee has adequate access to their expertise and guidance. This may be demonstrated through inclusion of specifics about mentoring meetings and opportunities during the award.
  - Metrics for monitoring progress during the course of the program. Specific outcomes for the mentee should be identified. The outcomes should be related to specific research outcomes and mentoring opportunities provided during the award.

## **Timeline**

The application should include a timeline that describes the research and how the mentoring plan is integrated with the proposed research. It is preferred that the timeline be depicted as a graphical representation (e.g., Gantt chart), although a table format is also acceptable. The application should propose specific milestones to be achieved at the halfway point and at the end of the proposed research and mentoring program. Milestones

should not be restatements of specific aims; rather, they should be independent descriptive statements that quantify success or failure of the research and mentoring plan. Examples of milestones are included in the attached technical application template.

## **IX. Application requirements—financial**

### **Detailed budget (use template provided)**

Budgets must be in US dollars. The budget limit for total costs is \$150,000.

Budgets must list itemized costs for the total scope of the project based on the scope of work. The final scope of work may be subject to negotiation. However, application selection will be made based on the original scope of work.

The budget template provides more instructions and separates costs into the cost categories outlined below.

### **Personnel—inclusive of salary and leave**

- Salary rates of key staff.
- Total number of days in the budget for each staff member.
- Note the salary for the mentee should be entirely covered by the award. Time for mentoring is not covered by the award.

### **Fringe benefits**

- Costs associated with benefits.

### **Travel**

- Transportation and per diem costs (other travel-related costs, such as vaccines and passports, should be listed in the “Other direct costs” section). Travel is limited to one scientific meeting annually plus well-justified travel necessary for coordination among collaborators.
- All mentees will be expected to attend the MATRIX Investigators’ Meeting, held annually in August in SSA. Exact details will be made available closer to the date. Through a separate mechanism, MATRIX will cover the cost of your hotel, transport to and from the airport, and breakfast/lunches during the meeting. Budgets should include cost of travel to the location (assumed not in your home country) and other associated travel expenses.

## **Equipment**

- Equipment is defined as an item costing US\$5,000 or more and having a useful life of more than one year.
- Equipment purchases are not permitted under this award. Applications with requests for equipment purchases will be returned without review.

## **Supplies**

- Supplies required to perform the proposed research and mentoring plan.
- Animal acquisition and handling costs must be kept as separate line items.
- Electronic technology—such as computers, tablets, and smartphones—must be essential to support the mentee’s research and mentoring and be well justified to support the proposed research and mentoring plan. They should be listed as a separate line item in the budget.

## **Contractual costs**

- Consultants.
- Subagreements.
- Subcontractors.

## **Construction—not applicable for this scope of work**

- Applications with requests for costs to construct or modify research spaces to conduct the proposed work will be returned without review.

## **Other direct costs**

- Itemization of all other direct costs that do not fall under the categories above.
- Additional costs associated with a mentee’s training, such as university tuition and fees, can be included as indirect costs in the budget. An amount equal to 75% of the level requested by the university can be provided by this award.
- Non-allowable direct costs include construction of or modifications to research spaces; rent; general office equipment; and transportation costs not associated with described travel. Applications with such requests will be returned without review.

## **Indirect costs**

- Organizations with a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the US government may use that rate.
- Organizations that do not have a NICRA may submit an application to PATH justifying an indirect cost rate that will be consistently charged across all of the entity’s programs.

- If an indirect cost rate is budgeted, a NICRA or other supporting documentation that outlines a cost allocation policy and methodology must be provided.

### **Total project costs**

- State the total project costs.

### **Cost share**

Applicants must address the USAID 5% cost sharing requirement. Applications that do not will be returned without review.

USAID requires a 5% cost sharing for all awards. Awards will not be made without a commitment by your institution or partners for cost sharing. Cost sharing can come from various sources, including, but not limited to, volunteer services, donated employee time, donated supplies, cash contributions, donated equipment, or project co-funding. Resources must come from non-US-government funds; NIH and USAID grants cannot be used to meet the cost sharing requirement. The cost sharing requirement can be met throughout the life of the award. In the template for budget narrative, describe how your project will meet the cost sharing requirements and reflect the cost share amount in the detailed budget.

Please refer to [2 CFR 200.306](#) for additional information.

### **Budget narrative (no page limit, use template provided)**

The budget narrative should follow the layout of the detailed budget and describe how you arrived at the total dollar amount for each line item of your detailed budget. For each item, provide a concise statement of how the line item supports a specific component of the application (research and/or mentoring plan).

## **X. Review criteria**

Each responsive application (i.e., those not returned due to missing components or inclusion of non-responsive research) will be reviewed and given a priority score.

The following is a list of review criteria against which applications will be assessed. Mentoring will constitute the most significant component of the overall review process and resulting priority score, emphasizing the pivotal role of mentoring in the application. Applicants are strongly encouraged to create robust mentoring plans that align with project research objectives to maximize their competitiveness in the selection process.



- Significance and impact
  - Does the proposed research address a critical need in PrEP and/or vaginal microbicides for MATRIX's targeted populations?
  - Does the proposal outline a mentoring plan that will lead to the mentee's scientific development?
  - Will the mentee learn critical skills to support future scientific endeavors?
- Approach
  - Is the proposed research and mentoring plan adequately described and realistic for the time frame of the award?
  - Are the proposed research and mentoring plan well integrated?
  - Does the application include appropriate time-bound milestones and metrics for both research and mentoring outcomes?
  - Are the timeline and budget appropriate and realistic for the proposed research and mentoring plan?
  - Will the generated data support the proposed outcomes and provide new scientific insights while advancing the mentee's career?
- Mentorship
  - Does the proposed mentoring plan describe how the mentee will gain relevant skills to advance their scientific career? Will the proposed plan provide the applicant with the basic skills required to become an independent researcher?
  - Does the proposed mentor or mentorship team have the expertise to mentor the mentee? Does the proposed mentor or mentorship team have the time and resources to mentor the mentee?
  - Is there appropriate institutional support for the mentor and mentee to achieve the goals described in the application?

MATRIX reserves the right to include additional criteria.

## **XI. Terms and conditions of the solicitation**

### **Notice of nonbinding solicitation**

MATRIX and PATH reserve the right to reject any and all applications received in response to this solicitation. MATRIX and PATH are in no way bound to accept any application.

### **Confidentiality**

All information provided to MATRIX and PATH by the applicant as part of this solicitation will be treated as confidential. If any information is inappropriately released, MATRIX and

PATH will seek appropriate remedies as allowed. All letters of interest, applications, discussions, and information received in response to this solicitation will be held as strictly confidential within the MATRIX project and its partners, except as otherwise noted.

## **Conflict of interest disclosure**

Applicants must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest (COI) via email to [MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org](mailto:MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org). COI could be present if there is a personal relationship with a MATRIX and/or PATH staff member that constitutes a significant financial interest, board memberships, other employment, and ownership or rights in intellectual property that may be in conflict with the applicant's obligations to MATRIX and/or PATH. When necessary, a management plan that provides mitigation of potential risks presented by the disclosed conflict of interest will be created. Not reporting any COIs via email indicates that no COIs are present. Failure to disclose any actual or potential COIs can result in the application being returned without review or in funding being revoked.

## **Communication during application process**

All communications regarding this solicitation shall be directed to [MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org](mailto:MatrixTechAcceleratorRFA@path.org). Contacting third parties that are not part of the research team but are involved in MATRIX or operations of the technology accelerator, the review panel, or any other party may be considered a COI and could result in disqualification of the application.

## **Acceptance**

Acceptance of an application for evaluation/review does not imply funding of the application as submitted, nor does it imply acceptance of its terms and conditions. MATRIX and PATH reserve the right to negotiate on the final terms and conditions of the award. MATRIX and PATH additionally reserve the right to modify the substance of the finalist's application, such as milestones, if appropriate.

## **Third-party limitations**

MATRIX and PATH do not represent, warrant, or act as an agent for any third party as a result of this solicitation. This solicitation does not authorize any third party to bind or commit MATRIX and PATH in any way without our express written consent.

## **Application validity**

Applications submitted under this request shall be valid for 90 days from the date the application is due.

## **Intellectual property**

Intellectual property generated under this award will be owned by awardees who are nonfederal entities. USAID can access the intellectual property and may authorize it for US federal purposes.

## **Conflict resolution and oversight**

The awarded mentor is responsible for conducting the research and mentoring plan in accordance with the agreed upon scope of work. Additionally, it is their responsibility to manage research collaborations and any conflicts that arise within the proposed research/mentoring team.

Throughout the award period, project teams are expected to meet with an assigned technical liaison to track progress and risks. Any disagreements that may arise in scientific or programmatic matters (within the scope of the award) or any missed milestones will necessitate a meeting with the technical liaison, Technology Accelerator Domain 1 cochairs, and the MATRIX leadership to discuss the project's future. MATRIX leadership will make the final decision on how the project will proceed.

## **Terms and conditions of the award**

USAID, the federal awarding agency for this award, specifies requirements to be placed on all funded research. These terms and conditions are non-negotiable upon acceptance of the award. Applicable links to 2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 700, and Standard Provisions are included below as a reference.

- 2 CFR 200, applies to US- and non-US-based organizations: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200?toc=1>
- 2 CFR 700, applies to US- and non-US-based organizations: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-B/chapter-VII/part-700>
- Mandatory Standard Provisions for US-based organizations: <https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303maa>
- Mandatory Standard Provisions for non-US-based organizations: <https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303mab>
- Additional Mandatory Standard Provisions for fixed amount awards for US- and non-US-based organizations: <https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/303mat>