



# Increasing Collaboration Between USAID Feed the Future Innovation Labs and MSIs: Conclusions from a USAID Consultancy Project

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# Overview

1. Highlight conclusions from a USAID consultancy project focused on increasing collaboration between USAID Feed the Future Innovation Labs and MSIs.
2. Highlight recommendations that could lead to enhanced engagement of MSIs in USAID Feed the Future Innovation Lab projects.



# Innovation Lab Council's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Pledge\*

**Purpose:** We demonstrate our commitment to the principles of equitable representation of historically underrepresented (or excluded) identities in our goals, objectives, actions, work, and in our communities around the globe.

**Goal:** We aim to cultivate environments of equitable representation and belonging to foster mutual respect and trust within the Innovation Lab Council community and beyond.

“The Feed the Future Innovation Lab Council members pledge to create spaces of belonging where all identities feel welcome in our activities, funding opportunities, partnerships, collaborations, professional development, conferences, and other external and internal events. Our goals reflect a desire for equitable representation of voices and perspectives without judgement of gender expressions, varying identities, backgrounds, age groups, ethnicities, national origins, tribal affiliations, cultural identities, and abilities. We offer fair, equal, equitable, and just opportunities to contribute meaningfully to our goals and objectives. We aim to foster environments of mutual respect and open communication to serve all our members, clientele and audiences.”

**\*Adopted July 23, 2021**



# Introduction

- Many MSIs are prepared for collaborative opportunities.
- MSIs of all types have a number of strengths that would enhance Innovation Lab projects:
  1. Extensive experience working with populations who reflect ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.
  2. Cultural sensitivity to the conditions in developing countries that can be used to foster strong collaborations with individuals and institutions overseas.
  3. Well-established networks of international relationships with various types of individuals (faculty, staff, students).
  4. Considerable agricultural-related technical expertise among their faculty and students.
  5. Familiarity with the constraints experienced by low-income, dispersed, and rural communities in the U.S., and have the experience and capacity to work effectively with similar types of populations in developing countries.
  6. Enthusiasm about creating new partnerships across the different MSIs and between MSIs and other types of universities.



# Problem

- Despite MSIs having the characteristics previously described and faculty with the expertise to contribute to addressing global grand challenges tied to agriculture and food security; there still has not been much progress made at USAID in increasing collaboration between ILs and MSIs.



# Consultancy Project Goals

- Short-term consultancy project focused on how to increase collaboration between ILs and MSIs. Four tasks as part of the Scope of Work:
  1. Conduct an anonymous survey in advance of the work session to identify current knowledge, practices and concerns by the ILs.
  2. Develop an agenda for work session in collaboration with the USAID and IL Point of Contacts (POCs).
  3. Facilitate a 90 minute virtual session.
  4. Provide a written report which summarizes the session discussion, conclusions, and recommended next steps.



# Methodology

- **Pre-Survey Instrument:**
  - Administered via Qualtrics to 18 USAID Innovation Lab directors, one USAID IL Program Manager, and one USAID Program Administrator.
  - Eleven questions pertaining to:
    1. Demographics
    2. Knowledge of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)
    3. Collaboration with MSIs
    4. Interests in attending the work-session
- **Pre-Work Session Phone Interviews**
  - Selected group ( $N=6$ ) of the 21 IL Directors.
  - Gain a better understanding of their level of engagement and collaboration with MSIs.



# Methodology

- **Post-Survey Instruments**

- **Innovation Lab Personnel Post-Survey**

- Administered via Qualtrics to 59 IL individuals
    - 11 questions pertaining to:
      1. Work-session's usefulness
      2. Knowledge gained from attending the work-session
      3. Work-session critiques
      4. Collaboration with MSIs





# Methodology

- **Post-Survey Instruments**
  - **USAID Personnel Post-Survey**
    - Administered via Qualtrics to 40 USAID individuals
    - 10 questions pertaining to:
      1. Work-session's usefulness
      2. Knowledge of MSIs
      3. Collaboration with MSIs
      4. Work-session critiques



# Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the findings of the data collected:

1. Overall, work session participants had very little knowledge about the various types of MSIs.
2. Overall, work session participants indicated low levels of networking and collaboration with MSIs.
3. Work session participants expressed interest in collaborating with MSIs, however, they were unaware of how to approach engaging in collaborative relationships.



# Conclusions

## Cont'd

4. Overall, participants found the work session very useful and informative.
5. Works session participants indicated collaborating with MSIs would enhance the impact and expand the reach of their IL projects.
6. Works session participants indicated future Innovation Lab & USAID Annual Meetings should include work sessions focusing on increasing collaboration with MSIs.
7. Work session participants indicated USAID should explore strategies that would help ensure MSI collaboration.



# Recommendations

1. Innovation Labs should avoid performative MSI engagement.
2. Create a permanent Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD) subcommittee that focuses on MSI collaboration.
3. The USAID/MSI Task Force that was recommended and approved by BIFAD in 2011 should be re-established and fully supported.
4. USAID in partnership with BIFAD should commission a white paper or study that addresses the topic of MSI collaboration.



# Recommendations

5. USAID should create an ongoing program/session as part of the Innovation Lab & USAID Annual Meeting that focuses on MSI collaboration.
6. USAID in partnership with BIFAD, the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and U.S.D.A.-NIFA should organize a convening on MSI collaboration.
7. USAID should host workshops for MSIs that focus on how to develop competitive applications for USAID funding as well as a workshop for IL personnel that focus on evaluating proposals in a fair and equitable manner.
8. USAID should create a program that sets aside funds for MSIs to serve as leads on FtF ILs projects.



# Questions

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