**Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information (AWRTI) Bangladesh**
**Request for Applications**
**Subject Line: Priority Area – 1 or Priority Area – 2**

**Terms of Reference**

## 1. Context

The Carter Center (TCC) partners with governments, civil society, and international and regional bodies to enhance governance and transform lives through a meaningful right of access to information and justice for women. Women in Bangladesh face disproportionate challenges in exercising the fundamental right of access to information, which hinders economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of other human rights. Although the Right to Information (RTI) Act went into effect in 2009, the benefits of meaningful access to information for women have not fully been realized.

To address these challenges, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded funding to The Carter Center in 2023 to support the Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information (AWRTI) in Bangladesh Activity (the Project) in target districts. Under this project, the Center is working to implement three mutually reinforcing objectives, with a focus on assisting the most marginalized women:

- A strengthened legal and policy environment has enabled more sustainable access to information for women
- National and target local government have more effectively and equitably provided information to women in target districts, and
- Through civil society organizations, information liaisons, and youth in target districts, women advance their use of the right of access to information

Effective implementation of the RTI Act and other principles guaranteeing the right to information and transparency requires not only the adoption of sound policies but also a deep understanding of the social and institutional dynamics that influence behavior change. AWRTI will support critical research to identify policy gaps and implementation challenges, offering comparative insights and best practices to drive informed decision-making. This approach will facilitate a more responsive and transparent governance system, ultimately leading to improved access to information for women, particularly those from marginalized communities.

AWRTI is also keenly aware that recent political developments are likely to have a profound impact not only on the RTI landscape, but related issues of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation more broadly. The project is particularly interested in research efforts that incorporate

this perspective of political and cultural change, what it may mean for RTI and related issues – especially their impact on women – and how advocacy efforts may be tailored to maximize the opportunities presented by this transitional context.

Given Bangladesh's large pool of skilled academics and researchers, there should be a steady supply of policy briefs to inform the government and lead to evidence-based policies in the RTI landscape. AWRTI seeks to build connections with research institutions and other organizations in Bangladesh to produce original research to inform future policy interventions in the RTI and transparency area and document the impact of greater RTI and citizen influence. AWRTI also seeks to support research that identifies where and how open, transparent, and accountable governance efforts can have the greatest impact on women's lives.

## 2. Objective

The objective of the research is to identify issues and develop strategies to improve the legal and policy environment for increased transparency and access to information for women and other marginalized communities. It specifically seeks:

i. To conduct social and behavior change research that can identify gaps and strategies that can improve access to information, particularly for women and marginalized groups.

ii. To identify the factors contributing to the current state of the RTI and transparency landscape and prioritize research areas where open, transparent, and accountable governance efforts can have the biggest impact in terms of service and needs of women and marginalized groups.

iii. To identify the potential challenges and benefits of digital ID systems, which run the risk of further excluding people if these systems are not carefully designed and deployed.

iv. To produce white papers for national and local governments on key RTI issues, data protection regulations, e-governance readiness assessments, and analysis to identify areas for potential future action, such as potential amendments to the RTI Act.

v. Present the findings of the research, studies, and analyses in a manner that sets forth clear strategies that policymakers, government actors, civil society, working groups, academia, and the international cooperation community can pursue to improve the enabling environment for RTI and transparency such that the lives of women and marginalized communities are improved.

vi. To develop easy-to-use bespoke briefs for the Cabinet Division to inform the adoption of evidence-based policies, including assessment to improve any RTI-related strategic plans.

## 3. Scope of Work

Under the scope of services, this research proposal invites local, established research and academic institutions to develop evidence-based, problem-solving approaches that encourage public dialogue to strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. This will be accomplished through social and behavioral research, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, to identify gaps and formulate strategies that enhance access to information and

transparency, with a particular focus on women and other marginalized communities. Furthermore, the research should recommend new strategies for advancing RTI, identify potential stakeholders, and explore emerging themes that align with the evolving governance landscape.

These research findings will be shared with the government and other relevant stakeholders through policy briefs and other appropriate formats, to inform the adoption of evidence-based policies and enhance RTI-related strategic plans.

AWRTI plans to award two research proposals, allowing for complementary, parallel research efforts. The following are areas of research priority (Table 1) for this assignment and are meant to serve as illustrative examples of potential topics for research. Applicants are encouraged to propose research that aligns these priority areas with the objectives of this initiative. Qualified research institutions or organizations need to submit separate proposals, if interested in both priority areas, each specifying the relevant priority area.

**Table 1: Research Priority area under the scope of services**

| Priority Area – 1 | Priority Area – 2 |
|---|---|
| **Access to Information, Implementation Gaps, and Socio-Economic Empowerment** | **Enhancing Transparency and Accountability to the Right of Access to Information** |
| • Conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing legal frameworks (Acts, rules, and regulations) related to access to information; identify gaps and propose strategies for strengthening their effectiveness in the lives of women and marginalized groups.<br>• Investigate barriers faced by women, and marginalized groups, including Dalit communities, in exercising their right to information and develop strategies to overcome these barriers. Identifying where open, transparent, and accountable governance efforts can have the biggest impact in terms of services and needs of women and marginalized groups;<br>• Assess the effect and impact of access to information on the socio-economic opportunities and prospects of women and marginalized communities; assess the quantifiable socio-economic benefits of access to information on the lives of women and marginalized communities and make recommendations for maximizing these benefits;<br>• Explore the relationship between women's access to information and their civic engagement and governance influence; propose strategies for increasing this engagement and influence.<br>• Research the use of technology in improving access to information and aspects of the legal | • Develop strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the Information Commission in promoting transparency and accountability, particularly for women and marginalized populations;<br>• Investigate the current e-Governance infrastructure and related issues, such as digital ID systems, through an e-Governance readiness assessment, analyzing existing systems, addressing data protection issues, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying areas for improvement, with careful attention to issues of inclusion and equal access for marginalized communities;<br>• Identify examples of the most effective RTI - related interventions where facilitating access to information results in greater transparency and more effective anti-corruption efforts; make recommendations for replicating good practices;<br>• Evaluate how the current political context may affect RTI and transparency-related issues, particularly for women and marginalized communities, to include a political economy analysis that offers strategies to maximize opportunities and overcome challenges presented by the ongoing transition<br>• Other closely related topics calculated to meet the objectives of this RFA |

| framework, with careful attention to issues of inclusion and equitable access<br><br>• Other closely related topics calculated to meet the objectives of this RFA | |
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## 4. Methodology and Data Collection Plan

The organization selected for the research study will propose a methodology that may require refinement during the research development process. The organization's technical proposal should outline a detailed design of the research methods, including, for example, data sampling and collection instrument, plan and strategy, including pre-testing methodology, data quality control, and analysis timeline, assessment report finalization, and the overall execution plan in consultation with the AWRTI team.

## 5. Research Area (Geographical):

Research proposal/s must prioritize giving specific focus to the following districts: Moulvibazar, Sylhet, Satkhira, Khulna, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Khagrachari, Rangamati, Netrakona, Dinajpur, and Dhaka District.

## 6. Research Duration:

The Research and associated deliverables should be completed within five (5) months of signing the award.

## 7. Reporting:

The selected applicants will work under the technical direction of the Chief of Party and coordinate administratively and submit deliverables to the Carter Center's MEL Director.

## 8. Qualifications:

- The applicant can be a local university/institution, research organization, or think tank.
- 5 years of demonstrated experience in conducting any project evaluation/assessment & policy research.
- At least 3 years' experience in, conducting multi-stakeholder consultations – leading large surveys for USAID, FCDO, UN or other donor-funded projects and writing technical reports, conducting both qualitative and quantitative research with a strong understanding of research design and statistical analysis tools and methods.
- Experience working with electronic-based data capture, monitoring, and evaluation tools.
- Strong financial capability to carry out the assignment in a financially sound and transparent manner, to include regular expenditure reporting
- Valid Trade License, TIN, and VAT Certificates, if applicable.
- Staff availability of assignment-related professional skills and necessary logistics (e.g., vehicles, office equipment, etc.).
- Experience of coordinating with stakeholders from government, private sector, academia/ research, and development agencies.
- Demonstrated ability to work in teams and deliver tasks within set deadlines.

## 9. Team Composition

The organization is expected to propose a qualified research team with demonstrated expertise in conducting assessments in governance and development sectors. The team should possess strong analytical skills for compiling reports and presenting findings clearly and accessible. **It is strongly encouraged that women researchers be included in the leadership and/or membership of proposed teams**.

The organization may include a team leader and relevant subject matter experts, statisticians/analysts, data collection supervisor/s, and enumerators who speak the local dialect and understand the nuances in the target districts where AWRTI is implemented. The proposal should provide details about the number of researchers that will be deployed to various data collection sites. The subject matter experts must have a profound understanding of the Bangladeshi context. All team members will have extensive experience in conducting studies of similar complexity, size, and value of the assignment.

The team leader must have a strong research background in good governance, policy research, and experience in preparing policy briefs & report writing. Good understanding of the local institutional landscape & experience in coordinating with key stakeholders from the government, private sector, academia/ research, NGOs, CSO, and development agencies.

### 9.1 Team Members' Qualification:

The suggested composition of the team includes the following positions. The preferred qualification of key experts will be:

- Team leader: Master's/Ph.D. with a social science degree from a recognized university with a relevant background; ideally will have 8+ years of experience (preferably previous work on a USAID-funded project and solid understanding of international donor data requirements).
- Subject Matter Experts: Master's/Ph.D. from relevant fields with 5+ years of relevant experience and explicit knowledge about the respective sectors.
- Data Management Expert: Graduation with a degree related to data management; 3+ years of experience in analyzing large volume of data; should have a solid understanding of international donor data quality compliance standards.

A list of key professionals, along with their profiles, who will be involved in completing this assigned task should be submitted with the proposal.

## 10. Deliverables, Schedule and Payment:

The selected organization shall adhere to the following deliverables and schedule. Payment will be issued upon successful completion of the specified deliverables and after receiving the necessary approvals from the Project/TCC.

| Deliverables | Task | Deadline | Payment (% of Contract Price) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Draft Inception Report | • Provide a detailed description of the study methodology and the sample selection process.<br>• Outline the scope of the evaluation.<br>• Present the evaluation framework.<br>• Include the evaluation tools and questionnaires.<br>• Provide the template for the evaluation report.<br>• Inception presentation. | 3 weeks from the date of contract signing | - |
| Final Inception Report | • Incorporate feedback from the AWRTI team into the final version of the inception report. | 2 weeks following receipt of feedback on the draft inception report | 20% |
| Interim Progress Reports / Data Analysis Report (2 reports) | • Regular updates outlining key milestones achieved during the study.<br>• Insights and information on data collection processes, including data validation.<br>• Comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected during fieldwork.<br>• Prepare detailed progress and monitoring reports in accordance with the agreement with AWRTI/The Carter Center. | Upon submission and acceptance of the data analysis report | 10% |
| Preliminary Research Findings | • Data gathered (including raw data) and preliminary research findings. | 14 weeks from the date of contract signing | 20% |
| Draft Report | • Prepare a draft final report that consolidates all findings, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations, following the agreed-upon reporting template.<br>• PowerPoint presentation and 2-page policy briefs. | 17 weeks from the date of the contract signing | 20% |

| | • Conduct a workshop to gather feedback from relevant stakeholders. | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Final Report | • Incorporate feedback from the workshop, as well as from AWRTI/TCC and USAID, into the final report.<br>• Submit the final, complete dataset in STATA/SPSS/other (as applicable) and Excel formats, along with the analysis syntax, to AWRTI /TCC after the final report has been finalized and accepted.<br>• Final product/document for policymakers.<br>• Final versions of the final report, PowerPoint, and 2-page policy briefs. | 20 weeks from the date of contract signing. | 30% |

**All the deliverables shall be submitted in English. The policy brief/white paper, final report, and presentation shall be submitted in both English and Bangla.**

## 11. Selection Criteria:

The organization(s) will be selected based on the evaluation of technical and economic proposals, each scored out of a maximum of 100 points. The total score for each application will be calculated with the technical proposal accounting for 80% and the economic proposal for 20% of the overall score.

AWRTI reserves the right to reject or disqualify any proposal at its sole discretion and without obligation to provide an explanation.

## 11.1 Technical Evaluation Criteria

| SL | Requirements | Scoring (%) |
|---|---|---|
| A | Overall Proposal Suitability | 40% |
| A.1 | Understanding of the assignment and methodology of the research (Sampling strategy, data collection methods (including the data collection tools, learning questions), and data quality assurance plan | 30% |
| A.2 | Capability to meet the specified delivery timeline | 10% |
| B | Previous Work and Awards | 20% |
| B.1 | Provide at least three client testimonials or references that align closely with AWRTI's environment, size, and project scope. Include reference contact names, with telephone numbers and email addresses. | 10% |

| B.2 | Previous performance of the organization, including demonstrated capability in management, technical expertise, and financial capacity, specifically relevant to access to information. | 10% |
|---|---|---|
| C | Technical Expertise and Organizational Experience | 20% |
| C.1 | Availability of subject matter experts within the proposed study team. | 15% |
| C.2 | Number of years of experience in providing similar services. | 5% |
| Sub-total (Total Score) | | 80% |

**11.2 Financial Evaluation Criteria**

For technically qualified bidders, proposals with more competitive pricing, while realistically anticipating and justifying costs, will receive higher scores for the financial component. Proposals with higher financial estimates will receive proportionally reduced scores, in line with the 20% weighting allocated to financial evaluation.

The final score for each proposal will be the combined result of both technical and financial evaluations, converted to a scale of 100.

**12. Questions and/or clarifications**

For any questions and/or clarifications regarding this RFP, please submit your inquiries via email to **procurementbd@cartercenter.org** no later than December 10, 2024. The subject line should read: "Research Proposal Priority Area – 1" or "Research Proposal Priority Area – 2". Applicants can choose the specific subject line. Please note that no phone calls or in-person inquiries will be entertained; all questions and inquiries must be submitted via email.

**13. Application Process:**
Applications are due by **December 21, 2024** at 5:00 PM EST. Qualified organizations should send their application to **procurementbd@cartercenter.org**
Applicants must submit the following:
1. Proposed methodology and technical approach.
2. Economic proposal (budget).
3. Two written samples from prior research conducted on topics relevant to the illustrative focus areas outlined above.
4. CVs of proposed research team members.
5. Demonstrated capacity to conduct sound research on topics relevant to access to information, including three references as mentioned above