RFP No. ASLM/IPG/003/2021

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Development of the Pathogen Genomics Initiative (PGI) Operational framework: A guidance to standardize laboratory operations across the network
1 Acronyms

ASLM       African Society for Laboratory Medicine
CDC        Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
NGS        Next generation sequencing
PCR        Polymerase chain reaction
PGI        Pathogen Genomics Initiative
RFP        Request for Proposal
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3 Introduction

ASLM Background

The African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM) is a Pan-African professional body working to advocate for the critical role and needs of laboratory medicine and networks throughout Africa. Africa is rapidly growing but faces major health challenges including epidemics of HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria, and new priorities such as Ebola, COVID-19 and other global health security threats. Strengthened laboratory capacity and surveillance in Africa are critical to overcoming the burden of disease and ensuring a healthy future for the continent. ASLM addresses these challenges by working collaboratively with governments, local and international organizations, implementing partners, and the private sector.

ASLM collaborates with Africa CDC in the implementation of the Africa Pathogen Genomics Initiative (Africa PGI). The Africa PGI was launched with a vision to integrate of pathogen genomics and bioinformatics into public health surveillance, outbreak investigations, and improved disease control and prevention in Africa. ASLM is a recipient of a regional grant dedicated to the building of the Africa PGI and providing support to pathogen genomics centers of excellence (CoE) on the continent.

Africa CDC background

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) was officially launched in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on January 31, 2017. The Africa CDC is Africa’s first continent-wide public health agency and envisions a safer, healthier, integrated and stronger Africa, where Member States are capable of effectively responding to infectious disease outbreaks and other public health threats. The agency's mission is to strengthen Africa’s public health institutions’ capabilities to detect and respond quickly and effectively to disease outbreaks and other health burdens through an integrated network of continent-wide preparedness and response, surveillance, laboratory, and research programmes. Strengthening laboratory network systems and integrated disease surveillance are the core mandates of the Africa CDC.

Africa Pathogen Genomic Initiative
Africa CDC launched the Africa Pathogen Genomics Initiative (Africa PGI) in October 2020. Africa PGI was launched with a vision to integrate of pathogen genomics and bioinformatics into public health surveillance, outbreak investigations, and improved disease control and prevention in Africa. Considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Africa PGI is currently focusing on the identification of new SARS COV-2 variants. Investigations are currently in progress to understand the geographic spread of the new variants, the clinical and public health significance of SARS CoV-2 variants, and guide public health decisions. Africa PGI is however intended to support genomic investigations concerning all pathogens of public health importance in the region.

The Africa PGI network is currently made of 13 centers of excellence serving as hubs and categorized in two tiers (specialized centers and regional centers). The CoEs in the network provide genomic sequencing, data analysis and other technical support services to the countries where they are located as well as to neighboring countries and countries in their sub-regions. Countries with no or less advanced sequencing (tier 3) refer specimen to the hubs for testing. Sequencing results are intended to be shared on the international database GISAID.

Currently, the operations across the network are not formally standardized, which pose challenges in terms of data quality and interpretation at regional level. The consolidation of the Africa PGI network requires

- To optimize the quality and relevance of data generated within the existing network
- To expand the network to include any center of excellence that achieves a set of critical requirements
- To ensure that laboratories referring specimen to the network comply to operational requirement of the pre-analytical phase of sequencing.
- To define tier-specific roles, responsivities and functions and reduce dependency from external expertise

For this reason, Africa PGI intends to develop an operational framework setting clear requirements for the standardization of sequencing activities within the network.

4 Objective of the Request for Proposal
ASLM Request for Proposals

ASLM is soliciting proposals from qualified vendors or consultants for the development of the Africa PGI Operational Network Guidance: The guidance will ensure standardization of operations across the network and in addition, the consultant will adopt a consultative, holistic approach to conduct work.

5 Scope of Work

The successful bidder shall provide consultancy services to develop the Africa PGI Operational framework aiming at standardizing operations across the network of Africa PGI network. The operational framework will provide standards for specimen collection, handling, shipment and storage, laboratory procedures for sequencing; and reporting of results. While the document is expected to cover all procedure for the sequencing of SARS-COV2, it is expected that the guidance will be designed in such a way that it addresses the sequencing of other pathogens. The framework will outline the minimum requirements that need to be achieved and maintained to be part of the network at:

- tier 1 (lab processing specimen and providing supervision to the network)
- tier 2 (labs processing specimen)
- tier 3 (lab referring specimen)

In the long terms, those requirements are intended to form the basis of a designation system, as more centers of excellence might apply to become a formal member or upgrade to a higher tier. The framework will also define tier-specific roles, responsivities and functions including governance of Africa PGI. Furthermore, the guidance will focus on how to perform genomic sequencing within the network. The framework is expected to align to the guidance on quality assurance being developed as a separate project.

Three (3) main areas to be covered by the consultant/ vendor are as follows:

a. Guidance for the pre-analytical, analytical and post analytical phases of genomic sequencing. This will include specimen types, testing protocols, availability of meta data, traceability of results, results interpretation, laboratory safety, among others.

b. Guidance for submitting the genomic sequencing results to the countries and the international database GISAID including data ownership and data flow from designated laboratories in the network

c. Laboratory network membership requirements and review procedures detailing the steps for 3 phases i.e. application phase, review phase and designation phase
NB: These 3 components are part of the operational framework being developed by ASLM and Africa CDC. The vendor / consultant will work closely with ASLM, Africa CDC and partners to incorporate these 3 components into the operational framework.

Standard operating procedures (SOP) for the different components within the 3 focus areas will also be required to ensure standardization of the operations across the network.

**Deliverables**

a. An initial outline of the operational guidance with a list of annexes for review and approval at month 1
b. At least 2 interim drafts of Africa PGI network operational framework for review
c. The final operational framework ready for validation, and the plan for implementation

**Timelines**

The maximum contract period will be 9 months

6 Instructions for submitting proposals

A. The format of the submission, in response to this RFP, must include, but is not limited, to the following:

I. Short methodological proposal (Technical) on the basis of the scope of work
II. Financial proposal in United States Dollars
III. The Service Provider must provide:
   i. Names and qualifications of the key personnel that will perform the services indicating who is Team Leader, who are supporting, etc.;
   ii. CVs demonstrating qualifications must be submitted and
   iii. Written confirmation from each personnel that they are available for the entire duration of the contract. ASLM will give special attention to verify that the staff proposed is dedicated to the project, as no delays in deliverables will be accommodated.
IV. An authorized individual representing the vendor will sign and date the proposal cover sheet. The signatory agent’s printed name, title, name of the organization, address, phone and fax numbers
and email address must be provided. Failure to provide a signed copy of the affirmation statement below will be cause for the proposal not to be considered.

I affirm that the information within this proposal, to the best of my knowledge, is true and accurate. Further, I am duly authorized to sign and submit this proposal on behalf of this company. I fully affirm and understand that failure to meet the requirements of this proposal at the submitted price may result in my organization’s contract being terminated.

B. Send your completed application by email to RFP submission at: rfpsubmission@aslm.org copying eshumba@aslm.org. Submit your application no later than 29 December 2021 (11:59 pm East African Time).

Point of contact:
Direct any written questions or request for information about this RFP to:
Edwin Shumba
Africa PGI Senior Project Manager
Email: eshumba@aslm.org

7 Evaluation and Award Process

An ASLM procurement committee will evaluate the applications based mainly on preset criteria. An evaluation matrix with assigned weighted numerical values will be used to rate each vendor.

ASLM reserves the right, but is under no obligation, to enter into discussions with one or more Respondents in order to obtain clarifications or additional details, to suggest service delivery refinements in the proposal or other aspects of the proposal, or to negotiate the cost of the proposal.

Each vendor submitting a proposal will be notified in writing or via e-mail of ASLM’s decision concerning their proposal. Should your organization be recommended for acceptance, the contract shall be effective on the contract execution date and shall run for a period of one year. All work must be scheduled and completed within the contract period timeframe. Any modifications or extensions must be
negotiated in advance and submitted to ASLM for review and approval. The selected vendor's proposal, and any subsequent material submitted in response to requests for additional information, will become the basis of contractual agreements with said vendor.

8 Contractual Terms and Conditions

Responses must be in accordance with the guidelines as specified in this RFP. This RFP does not commit ASLM to accept any proposals submitted, nor is ASLM responsible for any costs incurred in the preparation of responses to this RFP. The detailed itemized costs must be submitted in US dollars and will be evaluated in terms of best value to ASLM.

ASLM reserves the right to delay, amend, reissue or cancel all or part of this RFP at any time without prior notice. ASLM discourages ex parte communication with any Board member, the public and/or staff member after the deadline for the receipt of proposals. ASLM will be under no obligation to reveal, or discuss with any vendor on how a proposal was assessed, or to provide any other information related to the selection process. Vendors whose proposals are not selected will be notified in writing and shall have no claim whatsoever for any kind of compensation.