Consultancy on Common Administrative, Financial and Research Support Services in the new Consortium of the CGIAR Centres

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **Question**: What is the "Consultancy on Common Administrative, Financial and Research Support Services in the new Consortium of the CGIAR Centres"?
   Answer: An essential element in the design of the new Consortium is a review and analysis of the opportunities for common administrative, financial and research support services. The consultancy will inform the inaugural Consortium Board, and the 15 Centres, on the type of shared services and research support functions which the Consortium needs to provide to the Centres and on the most effective and efficient way of providing these services, including the location of the shared services units.

2. **Question**: What are the objectives of the consultancy?
   Answer: The objectives of the consultancy are to:
   1. Identify the needs, at Consortium level, for shared financial, administrative and research support services over the coming few years, in particular for supporting the Consortium level research agenda
   2. Review and assess the current arrangements of shared services at the System level, including drawing lessons from our previous experiences at the System level
   3. Assess the current costs and benefits of the individual provision by each centre of financial and administrative services to its research programmes and scientists
   4. Assess the current costs and benefits of the individual provision by each centre of research support functions to its research programmes and scientists
   5. Propose the most effective and efficient options to:
      o increase the quality and effectiveness of all these services so they provide enhanced support to staff, programmes and the Consortium in general, and at the same time
      o Increase the efficiency of the provision of these services, to strengthen delivery systems and impact of the Consortium research agenda through appropriate shared delivery mechanisms, including the possibility to outsource some of these services and functions. This will include a list of the services best provided in a shared manner, those that should continue to be provided at centre level and those that should be outsourced. It will also provide indicative staging and sequencing of transitions from current arrangements to shared or outsourced services.
      o Locate geographically those shared services that are not outsourced. Proposals for location should take into consideration the distributed nature of the 15 Centres and the virtual functioning of any shared service unit at the scale of the Consortium. Notwithstanding the strong presence of the Centres in some locations (e.g., East Africa and Nairobi), all potential locations should be carefully assessed on their own merits in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of provision.

3. **Question**: How does this consultancy fit with the other work in designing the Consortium?
   Answer: The Alliance has engaged the services of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in furthering the design of the Consortium (Phase I was the draft Consortium constitution). In Phase II, BCG will work with the Alliance in finalizing the Constitution, conduct a 'net cost

assessment' of the Consortium Board and Office relative to the current system and to propose design options for the Consortium Office, including an analysis of possible locations for the office. The functions of the Consortium Office are based on the constitution and best practices in similar types of offices. Parts of the roles of the current CGIAR Secretariat, Science Council Secretariat and Alliance Office as well as responsibilities not assumed by any office today, will form the functions of the Consortium Office.

There are links between the work being undertaken by BCG and the "Shared Services" consultancy. The Consortium Planning Team[1] is monitoring both consultancies to ensure cohesion. Additional guidance and review is provided through a reference group formed for both consultancies. There are shared members of each reference group to further strengthen the linkages.

4. **Question**: What is "Shared Services"?
   Answer: Shared Services seeks to standardize processes and technologies across the enterprise to achieve greater processing efficiency. Through sharing common services, Centres can potentially realize a wide range of benefits – leverage services across Centres to increase service levels, introduce new services needed to support programs, increase efficiency and effectiveness of services (allowing us to "do more with less"), standardize common services to reduce inefficiencies and "reinventing of the wheel" across Centres, allow staff to focus on more mission-critical, value-added activities, etc.

   Additionally, a Shared Services operating model changes the manner in which organizations view the functions being performed. No longer are functions seen as merely a "back-office." By putting these functions in an organization which focuses solely on service delivery they become part of a "front-office."

5. **Question**: What kind of services can be shared?
   Answer: A large number of support functions can be considered for Shared Services. Typical Shared Services include traditional support functions, such as IT, Finance, HR, Procurement, etc. Ideal processes for Shared Services have low strategic impact and significant economies of scale – i.e. processes that are not unique to a particular Centre and can be shared across Centres at a lower cost than within each individual Centre.

6. **Question**: How are shared services different from *common* systems and standards?
   Answer: Many centers may use the same system or vendor to support their activities (e.g. same email provider). The Consortium may also decide to recommend that certain standards be introduced across the centers (e.g. standard accounting codes). While using the same systems and introducing standards often reduces complexity and may take advantage of leveraged buying, they do not necessarily equate to services being shared across centers. Shared services go beyond common systems and standards to sharing processes and people and focusing on outcomes delivered (e.g. % of service levels met).

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[1] Consortium Planning Team: Steve Hall (Chair), Pamela Anderson, Andrew Bennett, Julio Berdegué, Guido Gryseels, Robert Zeigler and Anne-Marie Izac.

6. **Question**: Is Shared Services just centralizing all of our resources into one place?
    Answer: For many, the first thought that comes to mind at the mention of Shared Services is the centralization of resources. Indeed, it is true that much of the benefit to be achieved by adopting a Shared Services model is through the co-location of resources performing similar functions to one physical environment. At the same time, there are some Shared Services (e.g. hosting of applications) that can be provided virtually. Determining *how* Shared Services will be delivered will come after determining *which* services are the best candidates to be shared across Centres.

7. **Question**: Is this all about cost savings?
    Answer: Cost savings are an expected outcome of most Shared Services initiatives and are in line with the move toward a more cost effective Consortium. We are also focused on other benefits from Shared Services, including increased quality and effectiveness of services, increased staff focus on mission-critical activities, increased availability of shared information for decision-making, increased transparency and reporting. Overall, Shared Services should help increase our ability to support our research efforts and planned mega-programs over the next several years.

8. **Question**: Are we outsourcing our services to some other low-cost location?
    Answer: As mentioned above, determining *how* Shared Services will be delivered will come after determining *which* services are the best candidates to be shared across Centres. The cost of labor is just one factor in determining the overall cost of a service and its fit to shared across Centres. Determining how services should be sourced (in-house, outsourced, offshore vs. onshore, etc.) will be part of the overall recommendations on a service-by-service basis.

9. **Question**: How will you get input from the Centres?
    Answer: The consultancy team will be visiting CGIAR Centres over the next several weeks. Site visits will be important to gather input on different shared service opportunities plus provide overall awareness of the initiative. Site visits will be 2-3 days in order to handle scheduling issues and to cover several subject areas.
    The visits will occur between September and early October. A detailed schedule of visits and the agenda for the visits will be communicated in August.

10. **Question**: To whom does the consultancy report?
    Answer: The consultants will work closely with and report directly to the Consortium Planning Team (CPT), providing regular progress reports to the CPT and the Shared Services Reference Group.

11. **Question:** Who is on the Shared Services Reference Group?
    Answer: The Shared Services Reference Group is made up of the following Center staff: Abeysekera, Laksiri (ICRAF); Alonso, Carlos (CIP); Chandler, Fiona (Alliance of the CGIAR Centers); Crissman, Charles (CIP); Governey, David (IFPRI); Harding, Paul (Bioversity); O'Donoghue, Gerard (Bioversity); Oliver, Jamie (WorldFish); Ortiz, Rodomiro (CIMMYT); Rogers, Wayne (WorldFish), and (to be confirmed) van Ginkel, Maarten (ICARDA).

12. **Question**: When will the consultancy findings and recommendations be presented?
    Answer: A draft report will be presented to the Alliance on October 15th, with final recommendations due on November 10th. This final report will be shared by the Alliance with all the donors at the Business Meeting in December 2009 and will be part of the documentation provided by the Alliance on the establishment of the Consortium.

13. **Question:** How do I get more information, ask a question or provide some feedback?
    Answer: If there are any questions, feedback or input you wish to provide, please contact any member of the Shared Services Reference Group (an email address in the Global Address List is being established for the Reference Group); your Center focal point (initially the Director of Corporate Services or Finance) or the Accenture team (Tom Abell thomas.e.abell@accenture.com and/or Jessica Long jessica.l.long@accenture.com). There is a web site on the Consortium design with a page dedicated to this project. This site houses documents not only on this project but other work streams that the Alliance is engaged with in designing the Consortium.

14. **Question**: Which consultancy has been engaged for this project?
    Answer: Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP) is a not-for-profit group within Accenture with access to the organization's full array of skills and assets. Their aim is to help Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and donor organizations involved in international aid or development achieve their goals by offering high quality business and technology consultation on a not-for-profit basis. They deliver the same high level of innovation and leading practices to all Accenture clients, but at rates in line with development industry norms. ADP focuses on supporting economic and social development by assisting projects that aim to benefit communities in the developing world.