

## Nickol Global Solutions Capabilities Statement

December 2023

A growing woman-owned small business (WOSB), Nickol Global Solutions (NGS) is a USAID Implementing Partner dedicated to strengthening public institutions and civil society and amplifying the voice of all citizens for more inclusive, accountable societies. Since our founding in 2017, NGS has emerged as a highly trusted partner for USAID and other development agencies. NGS is certified as a WOSB by the Small Business Administration and the US Women’s Chamber of Commerce. NGS offers the following overarching services and expertise:

### Strengthening Governance and Accountability

NGS specializes in enhancing transparency and accountability through the engagement of civil society and other actors. We served as prime contractor on a three-year, \$3 million prime contract for the One Window for Citizens (OW4C) Project with USAID/Cambodia to tackle one of Cambodia’s development challenges: strengthening the Royal Government of Cambodia’s (RGC’s) accountability for public services offered through their One Window Service Offices (OWSO). In collaboration with two Cambodian partners, we co-designed and piloted a suite of simple civic tech tools to create consistent, efficient access to information regarding OWSO administrative services in a way that accommodated all abilities of the population through a civic tech platform; a broad-based public outreach campaign; and monitoring tools that enabled citizens and businesses to report on efficiency/satisfaction of services. Working in three provinces, OW4C’s District Ombudsperson Working Groups in Cambodia aimed to enhance the quality and service of all OWSOs. In addition, our civic tech tools – which included an interactive voice response (IVR) system, a Facebook Chatbot, and a public dashboard – included feedback mechanisms to ensure citizens were able to provide feedback on the quality of the services rendered by the OWSO. Alongside the civic tech tools, the community scorecards allowed NGS to set a baseline for levels of satisfaction around OWSO services and to continually measure changes to quality of services with our civic tech tools.

In addition, NGS is a major subcontractor to WWC Federal on the institutional support contract to USAID’s Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Bureau. NGS provides strategic communications, strategic planning, and operational support to the DRG Bureau, as well as short- and long-term technical subject matter expertise in key disciplines such as elections and political processes, civil society, media strengthening, rule of law, human rights, and transparent and accountable governance. Recent consultancies have advised the DRG Bureau on labor policy, the intersection of technology and democracy, anticorruption, an updated Rule of Law Policy (including efforts to promote people-centered justice), and international social movements and collective action. NGS expertise supports USG objectives specifically around the Summit for Democracy and its Year of Action, enabling the Department of State to spearhead a global initiative of strengthening democracies globally while working with international partners, including foreign governments, NGOs, and civil society. As a part of the Summit for Democracy, NGS coordinates working groups known as “Cohorts” within USAID and the Department of State to align stakeholder commitment and pledges as part of the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal (PIDR). NGS has also supported the design of the Partnership for Democratic Development (PDD), a Summit for Democracy initiative providing surge assistance across sectors to countries where the government is a genuine democratic partner with demonstrated commitments to inclusive reforms.

NGS also supports the State-Owned Enterprise Reform Activity (SOERA) in Ukraine by engaging an inclusive range of Ukrainian and American stakeholders while promoting transparency and accountability in the Ukrainian government’s decision-making. NGS provides targeted communications assistance, with our experts developing and implementing an overall communications strategy with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Government of Ukraine (GOU), private business, civil society, USAID, and other international donors. NGS has taken the lead in overall messaging, communications, and outreach and promotional activities, coordinating across SOERA’s components. Our experts have raised the public awareness of key reform issues, promoting transparency, counteracting corrupt practices, combating misinformation about the SOE and MOE reform and attracting prospective foreign direct investment. NGS is also supporting GOU engagement of key stakeholders through the development and implementation of a high-level reform coordination mechanism, providing a platform for joint discussion and decision-making for the GOU, civil society, the private sector, and international donor organizations

surrounding economic reform policy.

Finally, holds a five-year subcontract to Tetra Tech ARD, advising on gender mainstreaming across all components of the USAID/Georgia Local Governance Program.

## **GESI Assessments, Strategy, Research, and Support**

NGS understands that effective and sustainable development requires addressing identity-based inequities. NGS advisors have conducted research, assessments, and analysis on the contextual challenges facing underrepresented groups with a focus on women and girls, youth, LGBTQ, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities. For instance, one of NGS's roles on the USAID/Georgia Local Governance Program is to lead and integrate GESI sensitivities throughout all program activities. The Program applies a differentiated approach to deal with the needs of underrepresented groups in Georgia to ensure that their concerns, priorities, and experiences are an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the program. NGS also provides international STTA to help carry out gender-sensitive planning and development activities and GESI-focused interventions. On the predecessor project – the USAID/Georgia Good Governance Initiative (GGI) (also implemented by Tetra Tech ARD), NGS carried out research and provided technical support for the design and implementation of select GESI interventions by collecting and synthesizing evidence to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected different groups in the three target municipalities. NGS's research included quantitative data and qualitative data obtained through surveys, FGDs, and KIIs. NGS also advised and built capacity around gender-responsive budgeting at the municipal level, based on stakeholder consultations and other research.

Under the USAID/Ukraine SOERA Activity, NGS plays the critical role of ensuring that GESI considerations are implemented across programmatic activities. NGS's GESI Expert conducted a gender assessment to identify, examine, and describe gender differences in Ukrainian SOEs and private sector, analyzing the underlying reasons for their existence, and determining whether they are a potential impediment to achieving SOERA results. NGS set forth a series of recommendations to address gender barriers in the sector with the aim of increasing employment opportunities for women, with an emphasis on women in decision-making and leadership positions. NGS carried out similar research and advisory services in Ukraine under the USAID Health Reform Support (HRS) project (implemented by Deloitte), exploring collaboration models that infuse GESI sensitivities in health sector activities. In Cambodia, NGS targeted youth, women, and marginalized populations in the design of our civic tech tools to enhance their knowledge about local service delivery and their ability to safely provide feedback about those services.

## **Peacebuilding, Stabilization, and Transition**

NGS works to support peaceful political transitions, help build resilient societies, and empower catalytic change. NGS is supporting the implementation of the Peacebuilding Evaluation, Analysis, Research, and Learning (PEARL) program as a major subcontractor to Integrity Global. PEARL delivers violence- and conflict-related analyses, assessments, and evaluations for USAID's Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention (CVP), in partnership with USAID missions. PEARL builds an evidence base and advances CVP's learning agenda in support of USAID's peacebuilding community of practice through analyses, assessments, evaluations, and knowledge-sharing activities. NGS supports ongoing CVP analytical activities and, through our full-time Learning and Outreach Specialists, NGS serves in a key role to support CVP's Learning Agenda and provides the connective tissue between PEARL activities, disseminating evidence the task order generates. NGS is currently engaged in two PEARL activities with the USAID Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (CDI). NGS currently leads a violence and conflict assessment, focusing on mis-, dis-, and mal-information (MDM) and its impact on health, education, democracy, and security sectors. In the context of the Global Fragility Act, NGS is also leading a mid-term evaluation (anticipated completion date: early 2024) of a USAID program in CDI that aims to strengthen community resilience and prevent violent extremism. NGS is also a subcontractor to Global Communities on the recently awarded USAID Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria (GROW). NGS will apply lessons learned from its work on other third-party monitoring (TPM) and atmospheric research work in Syria to the GROW project in Syria. Using a thinking and working politically (TWP) approach, NGS uses applied political economy analysis (PEA), conflict analysis, and other forms of context assessment to continually inform and update our conflict sensitive, Do No Harm work as part of GROW's broader objectives.

As a major subcontractor to WWC Federal on the institutional support contract to USAID's Office of Transition

Initiatives (USAID/OTI), NGS engages closely in partnership with USAID/OTI and follows a one team approach to help achieve strategic operational goals. NGS responds quickly to evolving issues and opportunities in support of USAID/OTI's mission and objectives. USAID/OTI programs work across sectors to catalyze transitions and help create an environment conducive to longer term development. NGS provides targeted and responsive staffing support that includes a team of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) advisors; Administrative and Operations Specialists; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) specialists; Communications and Knowledge Management Advisors; and conflict/transition specialists.

## **Outreach / Communications / Stakeholder Engagement**

In addition, NGS provides strategic communications support to the USAID/Ukraine SOERA. Under SOERA, NGS leads in the design and implementation of robust communications strategies which generate support for key SOE reform issues. This is accomplished by engaging an inclusive range of stakeholders; aligning project messaging; and continuously refining messaging in response to changing circumstances and political events. In support of SOERA, NGS has developed a Draft Public Communications Strategy for SOE Reform and Privatization, prepared a Wartime Revision Concept Note to pivot to changing needs in light of the war, and conducted a Public Perception Survey with over 2,400 respondents.

NGS provides technical expertise to raise awareness of and increase the audience for USAID's DRG Bureau technical leadership activities and programs. This includes the production of written and multimedia content for the DRG Bureau to use for outreach on programs, including blogs, websites, and other online social media. NGS works closely with other USAID regional and technical bureaus, senior leadership, and the DRG global cadre, to develop and promote key DRG messages including collaboration on outreach for the Summit for Democracy, Year of Action, Agency-wide democracy campaigns, and high-level events. Support also includes the development and delivery of communications-related skills training Agency-wide.

For the OW4C Project, NGS prototyped civic tech tools that enabled citizens to communicate with and receive information from the government regarding OWSO services. In addition, created awareness of the OWSO services in communities via public forums, radio spots, social media, and door-to-door information campaigns. Our social media strategy leveraged Cambodia's Facebook-oriented population and includes the development of an OWSO avatar that will convey information to the public, enhancing transparency and quality of services. Furthermore, with the OW4C Project, we conducted community scorecard training with youth to enable an assessment and awareness of the civic tech tools that serve the OWSO. The OW4C District Ombudsman Working Groups have raised a services improvement agenda and engaged the community based on active complaints and recommendations from the community scorecard, baseline survey, and civic tech tools. NGS employed both traditional and non-traditional engagement methods to continuously engage local stakeholders (including community members, government employees, and youth) to ensure our civic tech tools will meet the needs of a wide range of users.

NGS's work with USAID's Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) Bureau involved engaging multiple stakeholders to develop recommendations for a management assessment; it provided a deep and nuanced understanding of USAID's strategic communications structure, including its strengths and weaknesses. This extends beyond the role of LPA's public engagement staff to the Agency's bureau communicators (including PPL, now the Bureau for Policy, Learning, and Resource Management or PLR) to the mission-based development and outreach communicators (DOCs). Activities included mapping of a stakeholder's level of interest and influence and conducting key informant interviews as well as focus group discussions.

## **Political Economy Analysis (PEA)**

NGS's experts have carried out PEAs in Cambodia, Ukraine, Rwanda, South Sudan, Georgia, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Syria, and other countries. NGS recently played a key role in the initial PEA for the Georgia Local Governance Program, aiming to test, validate, and deepen the Program team's understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and resources to inform program interventions to advance Georgia's decentralization and public administration reform agenda. The PEA assessed the motivation and commitment of central and local government actors to equitable services access for minority and marginalized communities. NGS also conducted a sectoral PEA of the OWSO services in Cambodia in which we mapped existing and previous efforts to enhance OWSO service delivery, as well

as mapped influencers, interests, and incentives that would be key to the success of our civic tech tools. This landscape analysis allowed the program to avoid duplication of similar efforts, to coordinate with other donor-funded programs, identify potential champions to support greater accountability in services, and to build on lessons learned from past OWSO-focused projects. NGS is undertaking the initial PEA for the newly awarded Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria (Syria GROW) contract. NGS advisors have facilitated workshops with stakeholders in third countries to examine challenges to basic services delivery, health, and education for designing programming in non-permissive contexts.

## **MEL / CLA / Adaptive Management**

NGS leadership has a strong background in USAID’s Collaborating, Learning, Adapting (CLA) Framework and implementing ADS Chapter 201 (USAID’s Program Cycle). We offer CLA services to USAID and to other implementing partners. In September 2023, NGS completed a full “Learning Review” of the USAID iDesign Team’s Innovative Design Services (IDS) Project. Our review resulted in a lessons-learned report and slide deck that captured and analyzed the project’s key experiences, insights, and processes, which will support more effective program design. Our Cambodia OW4C contract was an applied research activity with an iterative design. The activity addressed key learning questions which generate key knowledge to: help clarify and focus activity objectives; serve as an early warning system; forecast and report; promote ongoing discussions pertaining to activity scope and direction; and aid in effective management and decision making. We designed our Activity MEL Plan to support iterations of the civic tech tools and civic engagement methodologies to scale the civic tech innovations to other provinces. Throughout each phase of the Activity, NGS gathered data through several methods, including feedback mechanisms within the civic tech tools, community scorecards, and regular feedback loops.

NGS is an active partner on the USAID/PPL Monitoring Evaluation Learning Services (EVAL ME II) IDIQ, including providing supporting the learning function on the CVP PEARL task order. Additionally, NGS team members have helped USAID adapt CDCS-level and project-level PMP development, and adaptive management practices. In Cambodia, and Zimbabwe for example, NGS team members facilitated a comprehensive review of CDCS-level PMPs. Working with those missions and their implementing partners, NGS team members facilitated a process to adapt those strategic M&E frameworks to accommodate real-time changes and improved measurement of results. NGS team members have also worked with USAID to conduct training on improved indicator development, site visits with implementing partners, and data quality assurance practices. Finally, NGS also carries out context monitoring and TPM in Syria for GiZ (under a DT Global contract), providing research and technical support for TPM and atmospheric reporting across four geographic zones of territorial control. NGS provides information relevant for donor decision-making on projects in Syria, with a geographical focus on, but not exclusively limited to, the “de-escalation zone Idlib” in the northwest and areas under SANES-control in the North-East.

## **Co-Design and Co-Creation Facilitation**

Importantly, NGS has honed its experience in carrying out fully virtual research, project implementation, and co-design of USAID programming. Collectively, NGS staff members have designed and facilitated more than 100 co-creation workshops around the world using a variety of methodologies. For instance, under the Innovative Design Services IDIQ, NGS provided fully virtual support and facilitation services for a series of three week-long co-creation workshops for the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) in Ethiopia in 2021. NGS worked closely with BHA Activity Managers and the design team to further refine and prioritize objectives of the workshops. NGS also led a consultative process with the much larger community of USAID personnel and apparently successful applicants (ASA), using Advanced Participatory Methods (APM) to ensure that work planning is built on the interests of and led by the key stakeholders involved. We carried out this work with a geographically dispersed staff and set of stakeholders, all during a time of conflict in northern Ethiopia. The mission in Ethiopia was so pleased with NGS’s facilitation that they rehired us to support the CLA Platform Co-Creation Workshop in 2022.

NGS has also supported other co-creation efforts for USAID using participatory approaches to inspire new partnership opportunities, share innovative approaches, foster knowledge management (KM), and come to a common vision. For example, our Learning and Outreach Specialists have been instrumental in designing and conducting co-creation and data synthesis workshops with USAID Missions in Thailand and Kenya to ensure PEARL learning is



shared across activities, and lessons learned are immediately looped back into the overall Violence and Conflict Assessment (VCAF) design and approach for more effective applications. We have designed agendas and collateral materials for varying levels and types of co-creation workshops, balancing facilitated sessions for networking and idea generation with concrete feedback and guidance from USAID on the prototype ideas being developed. In addition, NGS staff has completed more than 25 USAID activity designs, many of which included co-creation with Offerors and some of which were co-designed with host country governments. NGS's other co-creation clients include the LPA Bureau, the Global Health Bureau, and USAID/Cambodia's Office of Global Health. Finally, for the OW4C Project, NGS used co-creation and human-centered design to develop and iterate on civic tech tools and outreach efforts to enhance transparency around OWSO services.

## **Institutional Support Services**

NGS has a deep understanding of USAID's missions, bureaus, and independent offices; the technical sectors of international development; the Automated Directives System (ADS); the USAID Program Cycle; and the complexities of working in a variety of local contexts with USAID and with local partners. The amalgamation of this knowledge is manifested in our increasingly extensive institutional support services portfolio. Through the institutional support contract for the USAID's DRG Bureau, implemented by WWC Federal, NGS is a major subcontractor that supports the DRG Bureau's operational, technical, and administrative functions. We provide long-term strategic communications, funds administration, and programmatic support, as well as myriad short-term technical expertise for the DRG Bureau's teams. Our role is to provide compliant, timely, high-quality, and flexible support to the DRG Bureau so that they can maintain high-quality staff for long-term needs and respond quickly with highly qualified personnel to surge needs. Under the USAID/Management Excellence for Operations IDIQ, NGS supported the human resources function for USAID/DRC and has completed a management review for the USAID/LPA Bureau. Under two separate USAID IDIQs for institutional support for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, NGS has provided a variety of short- and long-term technical and operational assistance. As a major subcontractor on our largest subcontract to date (\$24.5 million over five years), NGS provides a broad spectrum of support to USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) on its Institutional Support Contract, including M&E advisory services; communications and knowledge management; subject matter expertise; and operational and administrative support.