REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

RFP Title	Onboarding a consulting agency to Conduct a Baseline Study of the programme "Strengthening School-based Vocational Education in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh"
Reference No	AKFINDIA/2026/SERVICE/14
Bid Validity	70 Days
Date of Publishing	Friday, 6th November 2026
Deadline for request for clarification	Monday, 16th November 2026
Date of Written Response to bidders' queries	Tuesday, 17th November 2026
Deadline for Submission	Thursday, 19th November 2026
Email ID for Submission	akfindia.helpdesk@akdn.org

1. Instructions

All proposals must be in writing, in the English language, and signed and dated by an authorized person of the bidder. Bidders must use the forms provided in Annexures of this RFP.

2. Validity

The proposal validity period should be at (70) days following the bid deadline. This should be clearly mentioned in both the technical and financial proposal.

3. Costs of preparing bid

No costs incurred by the bidder in preparing and submitting the bid shall be reimbursable. All such costs shall be borne by the bidder. If proposed experts were interviewed or called for presentation, all costs shall be borne by the bidder.

4. Ownership of bid

The Aga Khan Foundation retains ownership of all bids received under this bid procedure. Consequently, bidders have no right to have their bid returned to them.

5. Alteration or withdrawal of bids

Bidders may alter or withdraw their bids by written notification prior to the stated deadline for submission of bids. No bids may be altered after this deadline. Withdrawals must be unconditional and will end all participation in the bid procedure.

6. Opening of bid

The bid will be opened by the Aga Khan Foundation within 15 days from the deadline for the submission of the bid.

Any attempt by a bidder to influence the evaluation committee in the process of examination, clarification, evaluation and comparison of bids, to obtain information on how the procedure is progressing or to influence the contracting authority in its decision concerning the award of the contract will result in immediate rejection of its bid.

7. Submission of bids

The bid has to be submitted in the prescribed format on or before **Thursday, 19th November 2026 by 5 p.m.** Indian Standard Time to akfindia.helpdesk@akdn.org

a. **Technical and financial proposals should be submitted simultaneously, but in separate emails**, with the RFP reference and the clear description of the proposal (technical or financial) by the date and time stipulated in this document. If the emails and email attachments are not marked as instructed, AKF will assume no responsibility for the misplacement or premature opening of the proposals submitted.

b. Both email text bodies should indicate the name and address of the bidder and the description of the proposal (technical or financial). The technical email should not contain any pricing information, nor should the financial email contain any component of the technical proposal.

c. Technical proposals should be submitted in one (1) email accompanied by the forms prescribed in this RFP, clearly marked as "technical proposal"- in the email subject line and corresponding attachment should read: (RFP Reference No.) – (name of bidder) – TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

d. The technical proposal should not contain any details of the financial proposal / budget. **Any financial information contained in the technical proposal will invalidate the proposal.**

e. Financial proposals should be submitted in one (1) email with the email subject line as 'FINANCIAL PROPOSAL' and corresponding email attachment should read: (RFP Reference No.) – (name of bidder) – FINANCIAL PROPOSAL.

f. The **Financial Proposal should contain the budget in a password protected file (excel and/or pdf), which can be opened only with the password. The bidder should not mention any financial amounts in the email text body, or the password.** Passwords should be made available only at a later date, when requested for by AKF.

g. Proposals should be received by the date, time and means of submission stipulated in this RFP. Bidders are responsible for ensuring that AKF receives their proposal by the due date and time. Proposals received by AKF after the due date and time may be rejected. When receiving proposals by email (as is required for the RFP), the receipt time stamp shall be the date and time when the submission has been received in the dedicated AKF inbox. AKF shall not be responsible for any delays caused by network problems, etc. It is the sole responsibility of bidders to ensure that their proposal is received by AKF in the dedicated inbox on or before the prescribed RFP deadline.

h. **Proposals following a Consortium Model for undertaking the given assignment are encouraged to apply.**

8. Request for Clarification

All questions regarding the preparation of proposals must be submitted in writing (by e-mail) to akfindia.helpdesk@akdn.org **by Monday, 16th November 2026**. Responses will be provided to all interested organizations by **Tuesday, 17th November 2026**, through email. Aga Khan Foundation is under no obligation to consider or respond to questions that are not received in a timely manner.

9. Content of bids

Each bid must comprise a technical offer and a financial offer, each of which must be submitted separately.

Technical Offer
The Technical offer must include the following documents:

a) Bid form (Annexure I).
b) Technical proposal, as per the guidelines detailed under Annexure II.

Financial Offer
The financial offer should be presented as per the template (Annexure III) provided and if necessary, completed with a separate sheet for details.

10. Evaluation of bids

The criteria presented below have been tailored to the requirements of this RFP. Bidders should note that these criteria serve to:

(a) Identify the significant matters that bidders must address in their proposals and
(b) Set the standard against which all bidders will be evaluated.

All proposals will be evaluated by the review committee based on the extent to which proposals meet the selection criteria outlined below, to the extent that they are deemed necessary, negotiations may be conducted with highest rated bidders. Evaluation percentage scores are also provided against each of the selection criteria. The number of points assigned indicates the relative importance of each factor.

In evaluating proposals, the Aga Khan Foundation will follow a Quality and Cost Based Selection, using a three-stage value selection procedure.

The most economically advantageous bid is established by weighing technical quality against price on an 80/20 basis.

Stage I - Technical Evaluation

Each technical proposal shall be evaluated on:

S. N.	TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT	WEIGHTAGE
1	Organization profile and profile of the team (Subject expert) to be staffed on this project	**20**
2	Demonstrated experience of undertaking research specifically in student vocational competencies and their career aspirations and attitudes, teacher practices, gender dynamics, and school community linkages	**30**
3.	Demonstrated experience of conducting studies in Uttar Pradesh	**10**
4.	Technical Approach and Methodology (methodology, data collection methods, sampling strategies and data analysis techniques).	**30**

5	Timeline and risk mitigation assessment for the evaluation	**10**
	Total - Technical Assessment	**100**

Stage II - Financial Evaluation

Upon completion of the technical evaluation, the financial offers of those bids that were not eliminated during the technical evaluation will be considered.

Stage III - Shortlisting

Based on total scores at the end of Stage Two, the Aga Khan Foundation may shortlist up to three bidders for an in-person presentation as the third stage of the evaluation. The presentation shall discuss and/ or clarify shortlisted bidders' technical and cost proposals. Aga Khan Foundation expects that at a minimum the named bidder's Project Leader shall be in attendance. Once the presentations are completed, the Aga Khan Foundation shall re-score the proposals of the shortlisted agencies and select the firm with the highest total score.

11. Signature of the contract

- The successful bidder will be informed in writing that its bid has been accepted (notification of award). Before the contracting authority signs the contract with the successful bidder, the successful bidder may be required to provide the documentary proof or statement required under the law of the country in which the company (or each of the companies in the case of a consortium) is established.
- If the successful bidder fails to provide, upon request by the contracting authority, the documentary proof or statement or the evidence of the financial and economic standing and the technical and professional capacity within 7 calendar days following the notification of the award or if the successful bidder is found to have provided false information, the award will be considered null and void. In such a case, the contracting authority may award the bid to the next lowest bidder or cancel the bid procedure.
- Within 7 days of receipt of the contract signed by the contracting authority, the selected bidder must sign and date the contract and return it to the contracting authority. On signing the contract, the successful bidder will become the contractor and the contract will enter into force.

12. Confidentiality

The entire evaluation procedure, from the drawing up of the shortlist to the signature of the contract, is confidential. The evaluation committee's decisions are collective, and its deliberations are held in closed session. The members of the evaluation committee are bound to maintain secrecy. The evaluation reports and written records are for official use only and may be communicated to neither the bidders nor to any party other than the contracting authority.

13. Ethical clauses/corrupt practices

- Any attempt by a bidder to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the evaluation committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing bidders will lead to the rejection of its bid and may result in administrative penalties.
- The bidder must not be affected by any potential conflict of interest and shall have no link with other bidders or parties involved in the project.
- The evaluation committee reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the implementation of a contract and if the contracting authority fails to take all appropriate measures to remedy the situation. For the purposes of this provision, "corrupt practices" are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity or commission to any person as an inducement

or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or implementation of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

- Bidders will be rejected, or contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified, or commissions paid to a company which has every appearance of being a front company.
- Failure to comply with one or more of the ethical clauses may result in the exclusion of the bidder or contractor from other commission contracts and in penalties.

14. Cancellation of the bid procedure

In the event of cancellation of the bid procedure, bidders will be notified of the cancellation by the contracting authority.

Cancellation may occur where:

- The bid procedure has been unsuccessful, i.e., no qualitatively or financially worthwhile bid has been received or there is no response at all;
- the economic or technical data of the project has been fundamentally altered.
- Exceptional circumstances or *force majeure* render normal performance of the contract impossible.
- All technically compliant bids exceed the financial resources available.
- There have been irregularities in the procedure, which have prevented fair competition.

In no event shall the contracting authority be liable for any damages whatsoever including, without limitation, damages for loss of profits, in any way connected with the cancellation of a bid even if the contracting authority has been advised of the possibility of damages. The publication of a procurement notice does not commit the contracting authority to implement the programme or project announced.

Annexure I - Bid Form

Bidder's DetailsKR

1.	Name of the Agency / Indlvisual	
2.	Name and Designation of Authorized Signatory	
3.	Communication Address	
4.	Office Phone No, Mobile No:	
5.	E-Mail ID of key contact person	
6.	GST registration Number:	
7.	PAN Number	

Details of Bidder's representative

8.	Name of the Contact Person:	
9.	Designation:	
10.	Phone No:	
11.	E-Mail ID:	

Authorized Signatory (Signature In full): _____

Name and title of Signatory: _____

Stamp of the Company: _____

DECLARATION

I, _____, Resident of _____, Proprietor / Director / Authorized Signatory of the Company / Firm, mentioned above, is competent to sign this declaration and execute this bid document.

I / We hereby certify that I / we have read the entire terms and conditions of the bid documents, including all documents like annexures etc., which form part of the contract agreement and I / we shall abide hereby by the terms / conditions / clauses contained therein.

The rates quoted by me / us are valid and binding upon me for the entire period of contract and period of extension.

The information / documents furnished along with the above application are true and authentic to the best of my knowledge and belief. I / we are aware of the fact that furnishing of any false information / fabricated document would lead to rejection of my / our bid at any stage besides liabilities towards prosecution under appropriate law.

The corrigendum(s) issued from time to time by your department/organization too have all been taken into consideration, while submitting this declaration letter.

I / we hereby unconditionally accept the bid conditions of above-mentioned bid document(s) in its totality. In case any provision of this bid is found violated, then your organization shall without prejudice to any other right or remedy be at liberty to reject this bid.

Authorized Signatory (Signature In full): _____

Name and title of Signatory: _____

Stamp of the Company: _____

Annexure -II

Terms of Reference
Baseline Study of the programme "Strengthening School-based Vocational Education in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh"

1. INTRODUCTION

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) brings together human, financial and technical resources to address some of the challenges faced by the poorest and most marginalized communities in the world. Special emphasis is placed on investing in human potential, expanding opportunity, and improving the overall quality of life, especially for women and girls. The Foundation primarily works across seven thematic areas - agriculture and food security, building community resilience to climate change, work and enterprise, education, early childhood development, health, nutrition, and WASH, and the strengthening of community institutions to lead development interventions. AKF is a member of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a group of 11 development agencies addressing the needs of poor and marginalized communities in more than thirty countries where it operates. AKF started its operations in India in 1978, and today implements programs in both rural and urban areas across six states (Bihar, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Delhi).

With support from Tata Trusts, AKF is commencing a three-year programme, "Strengthening School-based Vocational Education in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh" (June 2026 – May 2029), in 50 government schools across the Chittaura, Risia, Huzurpur and Tejwapur blocks of Bahraich district.

This Terms of Reference (ToR) invites qualified research and evaluation agencies, with established experience in education assessment and a robust understanding of vocational education in school settings, to submit proposals for conducting the baseline study.

2. ABOUT THE PROJECT

2.1 Project Overview

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 and NCERT's Kaushal Bodh[1] curriculum mandate the integration of vocational education from Grade 6 onwards. Despite this progressive policy environment, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in NITI Aayog aspirational districts such as Bahraich in eastern Uttar Pradesh. According to UDISE+ 2021–22, fewer than 8% of government secondary schools in Uttar Pradesh offer vocational education, and in Bahraich this drops below 5%. Where VE exists, it is largely theoretical and lacks hands-on learning and career exposure.

Gender disparities compound these challenges. The district's female literacy rate is 39.18%, well below the state average of 67.7%, and dropout rates exceed 13% in Grades 9–12, disproportionately affecting girls and SC/ST students. Many students cite a lack of relevance between schooling and future employment as a reason for disengagement.

AKF's needs assessment in three government schools of Bahraich (Government Girls Inter College, Maharaj Singh Inter College and the KGBV in Chittaura block) found that only one school had a trained vocational instructor. Other schools lacked trained teachers, infrastructure and relevant learning materials, and teachers reported limited pedagogical capacity to deliver vocational content. Students' aspirations showed ambition but limited awareness:

[1] *Kaushal Bodh is NCERT's pre-vocational education curriculum for the middle stage (Grades 6–8), organised around three forms of work: work with life forms, work with machines and materials, and work in human services.*

girls mostly aspired to be doctors, teachers or bankers, boys named digital marketing and nursing, and very few identified agriculture, a key local livelihood, as a career of choice.

The programme will reach approximately 9,000 students (Grades 6–10) and 100 teachers and Headmasters in 50 government schools, using a school-to-community model. It will introduce pre-vocational exposure and foundational VE skills in Grades 6–8, and advance to higher-order competencies in Grades 9–10, supported by hands-on vocational labs, teacher capacity-building and gender-responsive pedagogy. The long-term goal is to institutionalise vocational education as a core component of holistic schooling, where students, teachers and communities collaboratively nurture skill-based, experiential and future-ready learning environments.

Table 1: Intervention schools by block

Block	Upper Primary Schools	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas	Inter Colleges	Total
Chittaura	10	1	2	13
Risia	10	1	1	12
Huzurpur (aspirational block)	10	1	1	12
Tejwapur	11	1	1	13
Total	**41**	**4**	**5**	**50**

2.2 Project Objectives

- Introduce pre-vocational exposure and foundational VE skills in Grades 6–8, and advance students to higher-order vocational competencies in Grades 9–10, in line with NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023 and Kaushal Bodh.
- Integrate vocational subjects with mainstream academics by mapping existing textbooks with Kaushal Bodh and developing contextual learning materials, including a Teacher's Handbook on location-specific vocational areas.
- Build the capacity of 100 teachers and Headmasters to deliver project-based vocational learning, so that 50 teachers teach VE as per policy directions by Year 3.
- Make vocational labs functional in all 50 schools by strengthening existing Learning by Doing (LBD) rooms and establishing new labs where none exist.
- Enable 5,400 students to perform at stage-level vocational skills and competencies, and 2,200 quality group projects to be completed by students.
- Strengthen school–community linkages through 1,300 learning-sharing sessions and functional Meena Manch / Bal Sansad[2] platforms for VE in 30 schools (60%).
- Promote gender-inclusive participation in vocational learning, including access to emerging areas such as IT, AI and digital technologies, and gradually break gender stereotypes in vocational choices.

[2] *Meena Manch and Bal Sansad are existing student-led platforms in government schools of Uttar Pradesh (a girls' forum and a children's parliament, respectively), which the programme will use for storytelling sessions, peer learning and vocational activities.*

2.3 Project Strategy and Key Components

The project is built on six integrated components:

- **Pre-vocational exposure (Grades 6–8, ages 11–14):** project-based experiential learning in classrooms across the three forms of work; short skill workshops aligned with Kaushal Bodh (e.g. kitchen garden and plant nursery; tie and dye, wheat-stalk art, robotics and computer literacy; health, comic-book making, family budgeting and school food stalls); "beyond the classroom" exposure to local farmers, carpenters, potters and artists; and storytelling sessions with local artisans and professionals through Meena Manch / Bal Sansad.
- **Advanced vocational learning (Grades 9–10, ages 14–16):** vocational workshops in areas recommended by government guidelines, such as agriculture (crop cultivation, dairy), apparel and home furnishing, health and wellness, and retail; community projects in which students apply skills in the school and community; structured mentorship and value-reflection activities; and mixed vocational clubs that encourage cross-gender participation.
- **Vocational education labs, corners and skill kits:** making school rooms designated as LBD labs fully functional and equipped with learning kits based on each school's needs, and establishing new labs in schools without LBD facilities.
- **Teacher and Headmaster capacity-building:** annual NCF-aligned training, visioning and perspective-building on VE, on-site demonstrations, classroom observation, exposure visits and half-yearly review meetings, with technical support from a partner such as Vigyan Ashram / Vigyan Ashram Technology Foundation / STARS Forum.
- **School–community engagement:** learning-sharing sessions, parent and SMC engagement, and Skill Pride Days / Kaushal Melas where students present their work to parents, panchayat members and local employers.
- **Gender inclusion and localisation (cross-cutting):** gender-responsive pedagogy, IT and AI as cross-cutting themes across Grades 6–10, and localisation of learning to Bahraich's economy (high-value farming, livestock, handicrafts and eco-enterprises).

From Year 1 (2026-27) the intervention covers Grades 6–8 in Upper Primary Schools, KGBVs and Inter Colleges. From Year 2 (2027-28), Grades 9–10 may be added in Inter Colleges only.

2.4 Project Plan

The following table lists the key outcomes, outputs, activities and indicators for the project, with targets for the project period:

Indicator Type	Indicator
Outcome	50 teachers/instructors teaching vocational education as per policy directions (meeting at least 70% of the classroom-observation checklist criteria)
	60% students performing on stage-level vocational skills/competencies, assessed using learning-outcome-aligned tools
	2,200 quality group projects completed by students in intervention schools (groups of 5–6 students; a working model with basic documentation)
	30 schools (60%) having interactive, functional platforms (Meena Manch / Bal Sansad) for vocational education
Output	9,000 students receiving a robust VE programme
	50 functional vocational labs in schools[3]
	50 schools implementing the vocational education programme (at least one school team participating in the competition)
Activity	100 teachers/Headmasters receiving training on VE as per policy directions
	1,300 learning-sharing sessions held for school–community collaboration

Impact-level indicators in the project's logical framework also require a baseline: utilisation of lab materials by students (target: at least 60% of students by Year 3), and student participation in Kaushal Melas and community events (target: 70%).

3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary focus of the baseline study is to generate robust evidence on the programme's key indicators before substantial roll-out, so that targets can be validated and change measured at endline, and to inform programme design, adaptive management and engagement with the education department. It will include four components: (i) student vocational competency assessment, (ii) assessment of teachers' VE classroom practice and capacity, (iii) school-level assessment of VE labs, student projects and student platforms, and (iv) a study of student aspirations, stakeholder attitudes and school–community linkages.

[3] *As defined in the programme KPI sheet, a functional vocational lab has a designated space, is equipped with the required tools and materials, and is used consistently as per the school timetable.*

4. PROGRAMME COVERAGE AND TARGET BENEFICIARIES

The agency is expected to propose the sampling methodology. The estimated reach through programme intervention is as follows:

S.No.	Description	Details / Estimated Coverage
1	Intervention schools	50 government schools (41 Upper Primary Schools, 4 KGBVs and 5 Inter Colleges) across Chittaura, Risia, Huzurpur and Tejwapur blocks, as listed in Table 1
2	Students	Approximately 9,000 students of Grades 6–10; Grades 6–8 in all school types during Years 1–2, and Grades 9–10 in Inter Colleges from Year 3
3	Target respondents: students	Statistically defensible sample of students from intervention schools, gender-balanced, for competency assessment and student survey
4	Teachers and Headmasters	100 teachers and Headmasters/Principals of intervention schools
5	School Management Committees (SMCs) and parents	Sample from intervention schools
6	Local artisans, professionals and industry	Sample of artisans, professionals and local enterprises linked to intervention schools
7	Key informants	Block and district education officials (BEO, BSA, DIOS), Samagra Shiksha officials, RSETI, technical partner (Vigyan Ashram / STARS Forum) and AKF programme staff

5. SCOPE OF WORK

5.1 Need for Research

The baseline study is essential to:

- Generate credible, pre-intervention benchmark evidence on student competencies, teacher practice, school infrastructure and community engagement, against which endline changes can be measured.
- Provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform adaptive programme management, including localisation of vocational themes and gender-responsive strategies.
- Provide accountability to the donor and to government partners (Basic and Secondary Education Departments, Samagra Shiksha).

5.2 Key Research Areas and Information Domains

The study will assess the following information domains:

Research Domain	Key proposed Research Questions / Indicators	Proposed Respondent / Data Source
Student vocational competencies	% of students at or above stage-level benchmark across life forms, machines and materials, and human services; variation by grade, gender, social group and school type	Performance-based competency assessment (Tool will be provided by AKF) of sampled students
Student projects	Number of group projects completed in the last academic year meeting the grade level competencies (working model plus documentation); per-school average; quality against the recommended NCF-SE 2023 parameter.	Project records; review of available projects in sampled schools
Teacher practice and capacity	Number and % of teachers meeting ≥70% of classroom-observation criteria; integration of project-based, hands-on and locally linked pedagogy; VE training received to date and its type; confidence and support gaps	Classroom observation; teacher survey; training records
Student platforms	Number of schools where Meena Manch / Bal Sansad exists, meets regularly and has taken up VE	School records; Headmaster interview; student FGDs
Career aspirations and attitudes	Students' career aspirations and awareness; attitudes of students, parents and teachers towards VE, dignity of labour and non-traditional choices for girls	Student survey; FGDs with students and parents
School community linkages	Number of learning-sharing sessions held in the last 12 months; participation in Kaushal Melas, competitions and community events; engagement of artisans and local industry	School and SMC records; SMC interviews; KIIs with artisans
Institutional and system support	Reach of UP government VE guidelines, Samagra Shiksha provisions and skill partners (, Kaushal Kendras) to intervention schools; enablers and barriers	KIIs with BEO/BSA/DIOS, Samagra Shiksha, ; secondary data
Gender and social inclusion	Gender- and social-group-disaggregated participation, competencies and aspirations; barriers to girls' participation in VE	Student survey; separate FGDs with girls and boys; teacher survey

5.3 Study Design and Methodology

The evaluating agency is expected to propose a robust, mixed-methods design with both quantitative and qualitative components:, a sample-based student assessment and survey, teacher observation, and qualitative interviews. The design will be refined in the inception report. Bidders should cost two options:

- **Option A (minimum):** pre–post design in all 50 intervention schools.

- **Option B (preferred):** add a comparison group of 10–15 non-intervention schools, matched on block, school type and enrolment, so that endline change can be better attributed.

Quantitative Component

- **Student competency assessment:** performance-based practical tasks plus short oral/written items, administered one-to-one or in small groups. The tool will be developed or adapted with AKF and its technical partner (Vigyan Ashram / STARS Forum), aligned to Kaushal Bodh learning outcomes and stage-level benchmarks.
- **Student survey:** administered to the same students, covering aspirations, career awareness, attitudes towards VE, gender norms and prior vocational exposure.
- **Teacher survey:** VE-relevant teachers (especially Science and Maths) and Headmasters, covering training history, confidence, practice and support needs.
- **Classroom observation:** 1–2 teachers per school, using a structured checklist aligned to the programme's observation tool and its 70% threshold.
- **Project quality review:** all available student projects in sampled schools, assessed against the NCF-SE 2023 rubric.
- Sample sizes are indicative. The agency must justify final numbers with a power calculation for the student competency indicator, allowing for clustering at school level and disaggregation by gender.
- Data to be collected using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) on tablets/smartphones, with GPS and time stamps, back-checks on at least 5-10% of surveys, and daily data-quality checks.

Qualitative Component

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**, held separately with girls and boys, parents and SMC members, on perceptions, aspirations, gender norms and community links.
- **In-depth / Key Informant Interviews (IDIs/KIIs):** interviews with Headmasters, BEO/BSA/DIOS, Samagra Shiksha officials, RSETI, local artisans and AKF programme staff, on system support, enablers and barriers.
- Qualitative interviews will be recorded with consent, transcribed, translated and coded thematically.
- Qualitative findings must complement, contextualise and explain quantitative results.

Ethical Considerations

Most respondents are minors aged 11–16, so the agency must meet AKF's child safeguarding standards and obtain ethical clearance before fieldwork.

- Secure informed consent from parents/guardians (via schools) and assent from each student; obtain consent from adult respondents and for any audio recording or photographs.
- All field staff sign AKF's safeguarding and code-of-conduct policies and are trained on them. Assessments of children take place in visible school spaces, never alone behind closed doors.
- Use female enumerators for girls' assessments and girls' FGDs, especially in KGBVs.
- Keep assessments low-stakes and time-bound; results must not be used to rank or penalise individual students or teachers.
- De-identify data before analysis, store it encrypted and restrict access, in compliance with India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.
- Report any safeguarding concern immediately through AKF's designated focal point.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AGENCY

The selected agency will be responsible for the overall design, implementation and reporting of the baseline study. Responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Design a rigorous, mixed-methods methodology incorporating the student competency assessment, student survey, teacher survey, classroom observation, school and lab audit, and qualitative components.
- Submit an Inception Report detailing the study design, sampling strategy and power calculation, analysis plan, indicator reference sheets, first draft of all data collection tools, ethics plan and field plan for review and approval by AKF.
- Develop, pre-test and finalise all data collection tools (except competency assessment), student and teacher questionnaires, classroom observation and lab audit checklists, FGD guides and KII protocols in consultation with AKF and its technical partner, mapped to project indicators.
- Translate all research tools into Hindi (and local dialect where needed), back-translate, and finalise in both Hindi and English prior to CAPI programming.
- Pre-test the tools in at least 2 non-sample schools and submit a pre-test report to AKF.
- Hire, train and deploy assessors, enumerators, supervisors and field monitors (at least 50% women), and ensure a shared understanding of study objectives, tools, sampling protocols, quality control, child safeguarding and ethics.
- Design and implement rigorous quality control protocols for data collection, entry and analysis.
- Undertake timely fieldwork as per agreed timelines,
- Hold weekly check-ins with AKF during fieldwork and flag risks and sample deviations within 48 hours.
- Share topline findings with AKF within two weeks of completion of field data collection.
- Prepare a detailed analysis plan and data tables in consultation with AKF.
- Prepare a chapterisation plan for the baseline report for AKF approval prior to drafting the report.
- Present raw data in accessible digital formats: quantitative data in Excel/SPSS/Stata/CSV with codebook and cleaning and analysis syntax; qualitative data as audio recordings with full transcriptions.
- Submit the draft report and presentation to AKF for review, and submit the final report incorporating AKF's comments. The draft report (excluding annexures) should not exceed 40 pages and the presentation of key findings should be limited to 25 slides. It is essential that the report is succinct with sufficient clarity.
- Ensure consistency and calibre of the project team, and communicate in advance any turnover of senior team members.
- Collaborate with the AKF team and its technical partner throughout the assignment to revise tools and methods as needed.
- Transfer all tools, raw data and reports to AKF on completion; these become the property of AKF.

7. SUPPORT TO BE PROVIDED BY AKF

AKF (India) will provide the following support to the selected agency:

- The project documents like KPI sheet and logical framework.
- List of all 50 intervention schools, with school type, block and grade-wise enrolment.
- Inputs for finalisation of the study design, sampling strategy and data collection tools, and access to the technical partner (Vigyan Ashram / STARS Forum) for design of the competency assessment.
- Support in the orientation and training of the field data collection team.
- Introductions to and facilitation of cooperation from schools, Headmasters, SMCs and block and district education officials.
- Timely review and feedback (within 10 working days) on the inception report, draft tools, analysis plan and draft reports.

8. KEY DELIVERABLES

The assignment is expected to be completed in about 12 weeks from contract signing (indicatively mid-December 2026 to mid-March 2027). The following deliverables are expected from the selected agency:

1. Inception Report, including sampling plan and power calculation, tool design framework, analysis strategy, indicator reference sheets, first draft of all data collection tools and field plan (Week 2).
2. Pre-testing report with updated tools based on pre-test findings.
3. Final data collection tools, translated into Hindi and programmed on CAPI (Week 4).
4. Field completion note with achieved sample against plan, deviations and data-quality summary (Week 7).
5. All primary quantitative data in SPSS/Stata/CSV format, with codebook and cleaning and analysis syntax (Week 9).
6. Transcriptions and audio recordings for all qualitative components (FGDs and IDIs/KIIs).
7. Submission of the draft baseline report and PowerPoint presentation for AKF's feedback and review (Week 10), and a findings workshop with AKF, Tata Trusts and the technical partner (Week 11).
8. Submission of the final report and presentation based on AKF's review and feedback, with a 4-page summary brief and a table of baseline values for each KPI (Week 12).

9. ELIGIBILITY AND QUALIFICATIONS OF APPLYING AGENCIES

AKF invites proposals from reputed research and evaluation organisations, academic institutions and consultancy firms.

9.1 Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- At least three years of experience in conducting quantitative and qualitative surveys of a similar nature (scale, scope and sector), preferably school-based studies and student learning or skills assessments in India.
- Proven experience and expertise in conducting mixed-design studies using participatory methodologies and tools (FGDs, IDIs, KIIs) with children, teachers, parents and communities, as required for this assignment.
- Capacity to manage Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) data collection and quality assurance on tablets/smartphones.
- A technical team with relevant expertise: a Team Leader (postgraduate in education, social sciences, economics or statistics, with 10+ years leading education evaluations in India); an assessment / VE specialist (5+ years designing competency or skills-based assessments); a data analyst with experience of clustered school data (Stata/R); a qualitative researcher experienced in FGDs/IDIs with children, parents and officials in rural Uttar Pradesh; and a gender-balanced, Hindi-speaking field team trained in child safeguarding.
- Sound understanding of and experience in school education and vocational education will be an advantage and should be clearly mentioned. This includes familiarity with NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023, NCERT's Kaushal Bodh, the Handbook for Implementation Guidelines for Vocational Education (Middle and Secondary Stage), and Samagra Shiksha provisions for vocational education.
- Prior experience in Uttar Pradesh or similar aspirational districts, with demonstrated data collection capability in rural school settings, will be an advantage.

9.2 Guidelines for Submitting the Technical Proposal

The technical proposal should be in English, typed, single-spaced, with each page numbered consecutively. The maximum number of pages for each component of the technical proposal is given below.

1. Technical Approach (not to exceed 6 pages)

The proposal should provide a detailed description of how the agency will approach and complete the scope of work, including:

- Research design, including how the agency will address Option A and Option B (Section 5.3)
- Sampling strategy and sample size
- Methods of data collection, including the approach to the student competency assessment
- Confidentiality and ethical concerns, including child safeguarding
- Detailed areas of enquiry
- Assurance of quality in data through the collection, synthesis and analysis process
- Data analysis plan

2. Capability Statement (not to exceed 4 pages)

A statement including:

- Organisation portfolio outlining areas of expertise and years of experience.
- Details of completed assignments of a similar nature (scale, scope, sector etc.) in the last three years.
- A current list of clients and any direct experience that the organisation has of working on qualitative and quantitative studies, particularly in school education, learning assessments and vocational education.
- Evidence that the agency meets the eligibility criteria in Section 9.1, including at least three years of experience in similar surveys, capacity to manage CAPI data collection, and experience of mixed-design studies using participatory methodologies.

3. Basic Profiles of Key People Associated with the Organisation

The applicant will propose personnel who will be responsible for carrying out various aspects of the study, such as the programme lead, assessment / VE specialist, data analyst, qualitative researcher and field manager. An updated resume for each key person shall be included in the proposal, detailing their skills, competencies, and roles and responsibilities in conducting the study.

4. Work Plan / Implementation Plan (not to exceed 4 pages)

As part of the proposal, a work plan / implementation plan should be prepared that includes major activities as they relate to the scope of work, demonstrating how this work will be accomplished within the timeline and deliverables in Section 8. The implementation plan should include an analysis of risks and mitigation strategies, and exhibit the responsiveness and adaptability of the agency to prioritise. In addition, a Gantt chart detailing the implementation plan for the study should also be submitted.

Annexure III - Financial Proposal

To be on the organisation Letter head

RFP Title : **Onboarding a consulting agency to Conduct a Baseline Study of the programme "Strengthening School-based Vocational Education in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh"**

Reference (RFP) No : AKF INDIA/2026/SERVICE/ 14

Part A – Baseline						
S/No	**Particular**	**Unit**	**Time Unit**	**Unit Cost**	**Total (INR)**	**Remarks**
1	Professional Fee & Other related Cost				-	
1.1					-	
1.2					-	
1.3					-	
1.4					-	
1.5					-	
1.6					-	
1.7					-	
1.8					-	
1.9					-	
	Total				-	
2 Reimbursable Cost (All the reimbursable costs will be paid only on submission of supporting documents. The travel expenditure should be supported by tickets for train/bus/air, vehicle hire bills, Hotels Bills & Food Bills and any other expenditure should also be supported by original bills/invoices. Further the air tickets should be accompanied with invoice and Boarding passes. Please note that we will not be able to reimburse any perdiem and expenditure supported by self-declaration)						
	2 Reimbursable Cost				-	
					-	
					-	
					-	
					-	
	Total				-	
	Total (A)				**-**	
	Add : GST					
	Grand Total				-	

Authorized Signatory (signature in full): _____

*If the budget is not in the above format, it will not be accepted