

## UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

### Office of Citizens Exchange; NIS Secondary School Initiative; Secondary School Linkage Program

**ACTION:** Notice—Request for proposals.

**SUMMARY:** The Office of Citizen Exchanges, Division of the NIS Secondary School Initiative, of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for an assistance award to conduct exchanges through the multiple secondary school linkage program with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Public or private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c)(3)–1 may apply either to enhance/expand existing linkages or to develop new school linkage programs. All submissions must contain a Student exchange component and an Educator (teacher and/or administrator) exchange component. The maximum grant award will be \$400,000.

Overall grant-making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87–256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act.

The purpose of the Act is “to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries \* \* \* ; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations \* \* \* and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.” The funding authority for the program cited above was originally provided through the FREEDOM Support Act of 1992. Programs and projects must conform with Agency requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package. USIA projects and programs are subject to the availability of funds.

**ANNOUNCEMENT TITLE AND NUMBER:** All communications with USIA concerning this announcement should refer to the above title and reference number E/P–97–13.

**DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS:** All copies must be received at the U.S. Information

Agency by 5 p.m., Washington, D.C. time on *Friday, January 31, 1997*. Faxed documents will not be accepted, nor will documents postmarked *January 31, 1997* but received at a later date. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that proposals are received by the above deadline. Subject to the availability of funding, grants will be awarded by April 1997, for programs to begin after September 1, 1997.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

The NIS Secondary School Initiative E/PY, Room 320, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547, Telephone: (202) 619–6299; fax: (202) 619–5311; E-mail: bbeemer@usia.gov to request a Solicitation Package containing more detailed award criteria, required application forms, and standard guidelines for preparing proposals, including specific criteria for preparation of the proposal budget.

#### TO DOWNLOAD A SOLICITATION PACKAGE VIA INTERNET:

The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from USIA's website at <http://www.usia.gov/> or from the Internet Gopher at [gopher://gopher.usia.gov/](http://gopher.usia.gov/). Under the heading “International Exchanges/Training,” select “Request for Proposals (RFPs).” Please read “About the Following RFPs” before downloading.

Please specify USIA Program Officer Brent Beemer on all inquiries and correspondences. Interested applicants should read the complete Federal Register announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the RFP deadline has passed, Agency staff may not discuss this competition in any way with applicants until the Bureau proposal review process has been completed.

**SUBMISSIONS:** Applicants must follow all instructions given in the Solicitation Package. The original and 10 copies of the application should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency, Ref.: E/PY–97–13, Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 326, 301 4th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547.

Applicants must also submit the “Executive Summary” and “Proposal Narrative” sections of the proposal on a 3.5” diskette, formatted for DOS. This material must be provided in ASCII text (DOS) format with a maximum line length of 65 characters. USIA will transmit these files electronically to USIS posts overseas for their review, with the goal of reducing the time it takes to get posts' comments for the Agency's grants review process.

#### Diversity Guidelines

Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, programs must maintain a non-political character and should be balanced and representative of the diversity of American political, social, and cultural life. “Diversity” should be interpreted in the broadest sense and encompass differences including, but not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, and physical challenges. Applicants are strongly encouraged to adhere to the advancement of this principle both in program administration and in program content. Please refer to the review criteria under the “Support for Diversity” section for specific suggestions on incorporating diversity into the total proposal.

**Overview:** The short-term goal of the school linkage program is to provide partial funding for linkages between U.S. and NIS schools featuring student and educator exchanges for the purpose of collaborative substantive projects. Grant-funded exchanges must have a thematic focus and have tangible outcomes (such as development and use of educational materials). The long term goals are to:

- (1) Advance mutual understanding between the U.S. and the NIS;
- (2) develop lasting institutional ties between U.S. and NIS schools and communities;
- (3) promote U.S. government/educational and not for profit sector cooperation by supporting linkages which hold promise for a sustainable program beyond the grant term and serve the needs and interests of the schools.

The linked networks of secondary schools in the U.S. and networks of schools in the NIS must establish ties between the schools in the network through two sets of exchange programs: 1) the exchange of secondary school students, from 14 to 18 years of age, between the U.S. and participating NIS countries; and 2) the exchange of secondary school educators between the U.S. and NIS countries.

**Guidelines:** USIA funding may not be used to supplant existing private sector funding. Applicants must indicate how activities have been funded in the past and how the activities will be expanded with assistance from USIA. Proposals that successfully address the following factors will receive priority consideration:

- (1) All school linkages must clearly describe and define substantive thematically based projects that are the focus of the exchange for both students

and educators. This applies to the United States portion of the program as well as the NIS portion. Specific activities, products, curriculum materials, and pre-planning are areas that can be addressed. For example, what will the participants be doing? Where will they be doing this? Why is it important and relevant to the thematic focus of the program? Proposals that clearly answer these questions will be more competitive. In an effort to clarify possible thematic foci, suggested themes for exchange projects include but are not limited to the following: civic education, health education (including the issues of alcohol abuse and other substance abuse), environmental issues, youth leadership training, volunteerism, computer technology, agriculture, and business administration/management (including entrepreneurship).

(2) Significant cost-sharing is mandatory in ALL proposals. Moreover, those proposals that show more generous and creative cost-sharing will be more favorably viewed. Proposals that contain non-USIA funded items such as: additional students and/or educators on the exchange, U.S. participants paying for some of their own costs, computer software purchases, cultural excursions, state/national capital civics programs, and other significant items will be more competitive proposals than those that do not. However, NIS participants may not be charged to participate in the program, aside from paying for in-country costs (such as transportation to the point of departure), the costs of hosting the U.S. students and educators, and miscellaneous expenses such as pocket money.

(3) Proposals that clearly present independent educator programs for teachers/administrators will be more competitive than those that do not. These programs could include curriculum development seminars, "shadowing" host peers in the classroom, university-level courses, or other substantive activities. A program that relies on the educator to act as just an escort will be viewed much less favorably. Although educators can certainly travel with student groups, a group of educators could travel separately if an organization developed such a program.

The U.S. recipient of the grant is responsible for recruiting/selecting/organizing a minimum of three U.S. secondary schools to form the U.S. network, strengthening an existing working relationship with an organization or agency of government in the NIS responsible for a network of schools there, and linking the two

networks through substantive exchange activities.

Because the ultimate goal of this program is self-sufficiency, individual schools that have received USIA funding under the NIS Secondary School Initiative for a total of three years are not eligible for USIA funding for participant travel costs, per diem, or allowances under this grant.

Partnerships should have an existence beyond the scope of this initiative; that is, there should be an inherent reason for their linkage apart from the availability of grant funds. Competitive proposals must demonstrate a solid and comprehensive follow-on plan to continue after the grant has expired.

An ideal project builds upon previous contacts and interaction between the proposed networks to help ensure a solid foundation for the linkage. The U.S. schools should collaborate with the NIS schools in planning and preparation. Proposals should support a working relationship that will produce something tangible and lasting in addressing the interests of both sides, beyond the confines of the exchange. The proposal should specify up front what the measurable goals and objectives of the program will be. Each school partnership must also provide a statement of goals and objectives for their exchange.

In general, new school linkages should target under-served countries or regions. For programs with Russia, priority will be given to linkages with schools located outside of the Moscow and St. Petersburg regions. Programs in Ukraine must have a Ukrainian partner organization that has its base of operation in Ukraine and not in another country.

The U.S. recipient of the grant will: design the overall plan that integrates the two components of the linkage, ensure quality control for all program elements, manage all travel arrangements, logistics, passports, visas, etc., provide competent and informed escorts for student groups, and disburse and account for grant funds. Recipients of the assistance award are responsible for ensuring the selection of exchange participants who are most suited for the program. Participants (both Educators and Students) from the U.S. and NIS countries should represent a diversity of backgrounds (racial, geographic, economic status, religious, etc.) to give greater understanding to the culture and society as a whole. Selection of individual participants from the U.S. and the NIS in the exchange components of the program must be merit-based; the proposal should

describe the mechanisms used for participant selection.

Applicants should be familiar with the "General Provisions" of J-1 visa regulations. The Agency will process the IAP-66 forms for travel to the U.S. Applicant organizations are required to use the USIA Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) for participants in USIA funded exchanges. Applicants who choose not to use the USIA plan must demonstrate that an alternative plan: (1) provides comparable or better coverage and (2) costs less. Please refer to the Program Objectives, Goals, and Implementation section of the Solicitation Package for greater detail regarding the design of the component parts as well as other program information.

*Proposed budget:* Awards may not exceed \$400,000. Applicants must submit a comprehensive budget for the entire program. There must be a summary budget as well as a breakdown reflecting both the administrative budget and the program budget. All program costs should clearly indicate whether they cover U.S. or NIS participants. The cost per NIS student, NIS educator, U.S. student, U.S. educator should be listed separately. Grants awarded to eligible organizations with fewer than four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$60,000. Be sure to note the statement on cost-sharing in the Guidelines section. Please refer to the POGI and Proposal Submission Instructions sections of the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and format instructions.

#### Review Process

USIA will acknowledge receipt of all proposals and will review them for technical eligibility. Proposals will be deemed ineligible if they do not fully adhere to the guidelines stated herein and in the Solicitation Package. Eligible proposals will be forwarded to panels of USIA officers for advisory review. All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office, as well as the USIA Office of East European Affairs (EEN) and the USIA posts overseas. Proposals may be reviewed by the Office of the General Counsel or by other Agency elements. Funding decisions are at the discretion of the USIA Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Final technical authority for assistance awards (grants or cooperative agreements) resides with the USIA grants officer.

## Review Criteria

Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered:

### 1. Programmatic Planning, Objectives, and Quality

Proposed programs should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of information and establishment of long-term individual and institutional linkages. A detailed agenda and plan should adhere to the program overview and guidelines described above. Proposals must provide a plan for continued follow-on activity (without USIA support) that ensures that USIA-supported programs are not isolated events.

### 2. Organizational Capacity and Track Record

Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the Program or project's goals. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. The Agency will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants. An organization's track record will be evaluated based on the achievement of stated goals and impact on schools in the U.S. and NIS.

### 3. Support of Diversity

Proposals should demonstrate the recipient's commitment to promoting the awareness and understanding of diversity. Applicants should review the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs "diversity flyer." Additionally, the geographic diversity of programs in both the U.S. and the NIS will be a significant factor in USIA's award decisions.

### 4. Cost-effectiveness/Sharing

The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate. Overall costs of participants will be a major factor in the review of the proposal. Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through United States participant contributions and other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding

contributions. Source of funds for cost-sharing should be indicated.

### 5. Project Evaluation

Proposals must include a plan to evaluate the program, both as the activities unfold and at the end. USIA recommends that the proposal include a draft survey questionnaire or other technique plus description of a methodology for use in linking outcomes to original project objectives for each school linkage. Award-receiving organizations/institutions will be expected to submit reports on each separate linkage.

## Notice

The terms and conditions published in this RFP are binding and may not be modified by any USIA representative. Explanatory information provided by the Agency that contradicts published language will not be binding. Issuance of the RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. The Agency reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements. Organizations will be expected to cooperate with USIA in evaluating their programs under the principles of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which requires federal agencies to measure and report on the results of their programs and activities.

## Notification

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal USIA procedures.

Dated: November 20, 1996.

John P. Loiello,

Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

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## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

### Proposed Information Collection Activity; Public Comment Request

**AGENCY:** Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** As part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) invites the

general public and other Federal agencies to comment on this information collection. This request for comment is being made pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Public Law 104-13; 44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(2)(A)). Comments should address the accuracy of the burden estimates and ways to minimize the burden including the use of automated collection techniques or the use of other forms of information technology, as well as other relevant aspects of the information collection.

**DATES:** Written comments and recommendations on the proposal for the collection of information should be received on or before January 27, 1997.

**ADDRESSES:** Direct all written comments to Nancy J. Kessinger, Veterans Benefits Administration (20S52), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. All comments will become a matter of public record and will be summarized in the VBA request for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval. In this document VBA is soliciting comments concerning the following information collection:

*OMB Control Number:* 2900-0215.

*Title and Form Number:* Request for Information to Make Direct Payment to Child Reaching Majority, VA Form Letter 21-863.

*Type of Review:* Extension of a currently approved collection.

*Need and Uses:* The form letter is used to gather the necessary information to determine the address of a child attaining majority and to determine the child's student status.

*Current Actions:* The information is needed to pay a child directly when the child attains majority. VA procedures provide that a competent child who is entitled to benefits in his or her own right should be paid directly upon attaining majority.

*Affected Public:* Individuals or households.

*Estimated Annual Burden:* 3,767 hours.

*Estimated Average Burden Per Respondent:* 10 minutes.

*Frequency of Response:* Generally one-time.

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 22,600.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Requests for additional information or copies of the form should be directed to Department of Veterans Affairs, Attn: Nancy J. Kessinger, Veterans Benefits Administration (20S52), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, Telephone (202) 273-7079 or FAX (202) 275-4884.