

## UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

### Educational Advising Program for International Students From Hong Kong/China; Notice: Request for Proposals

**SUMMARY:** The Advising and Student Services Branch/Advising, Teaching and Specialized Programs Division of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition to operate an educational advising center in Hong Kong/China. Public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c) may submit proposals to facilitate international educational exchange through overseas educational advising, orientation, and information services for international students and scholars seeking information on opportunities in U.S. higher education. On October 1, 1999, the U.S. Information Agency will become part of the United States Department of State without affecting the content of this announcement or the nature of the program described.

#### Program Information

**Overview:** An ideal program would provide a state-of-the-art advising center dedicated to providing information, orientation, and advice to international students in Hong Kong interested in studying in the U.S. We also expect the Hong Kong center to serve as an information resource to the other 48 U.S. affiliated advising centers in the People's Republic of China on advising and other educational issues. The centers are located at United States Information Service posts, universities, language institutes, libraries and at Chinese Service Centers for Scholarly Exchange. The proposal should address the applicant's ability to do the following:

- Produce and disseminate advising information packets and materials both on paper and electronically to advising centers in China.
- Recommend appropriate level of educational advising resource materials supplied by the Advising and Student Services Branch (E/ASA) to advising centers in China.
- Develop and maintain a database of centers in China.
- Provide feedback to E/ASA on site visits, consultations, training activities, and advising needs/concerns after each site visit and upon request from E/ASA.
- Encourage communication and networking among EICs within China.

The center should work with the Regional Educational Advising Coordinator (REAC) to provide in-country and regional workshops and seminars, site visits, needs assessments and consultations training for U.S. affiliated advising center personnel in China as requested. The REAC is responsible for conducting training workshops and needs assessment visits to U.S. affiliated advising centers in the region.

**Guidelines:** We anticipate that the grant will begin October 1, 1999 and end on September 30, 2000. However a final award cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, and allocated and committed through internal Bureau procedures. The proposal should be presented in three parts.

#### I. Applicant's Background and Overview

The first part should contain an overview of the applicant's history and purpose. Evidence of previous experience with advising or educational exchange of international students and scholars should be included. The overview should indicate the total amount of funding requested with a justification as well as a budget presentation outlining the total project costs.

A listing of names, titles, addresses, and telephone numbers of the executive officer(s) and of the person(s) ultimately responsible for the project, must be included in the proposal. Resumes or vitae of key personnel must be provided. USIA also recommends the inclusion of brochures and general information concerning the applicant, e.g., organizational charts, job descriptions, the names of board members (or similar groups), the number of employees, etc.

#### II. Advising Center Operation and Services

The second part of the proposal should contain details on the advising center's proposed location and hours of operations, proposed staffing pattern (including the percentage of time each employee will devote to advising activities and a description of their functions and responsibilities), budget, and advising services to be provided. A resume or brief narrative explaining the qualifications of the person or persons who will have primary responsibility for conducting advising and/or providing oversight of the advising center staff should be included. The proposal should demonstrate the center's ability to provide the following educational advising services to international students and scholars:

1. Information and guidance on U.S. educational institutions, systems, tuition and related costs, fields of study, specialized training, etc.;

2. Information and research on short-term institutional training in technical and professional fields;

3. Information on English language training programs in the U.S.; and

4. Group and individual advising sessions, pre-departure orientation and reentry programs, as appropriate. The applicant should be willing to assist USIS Beijing and support educational outreach activities by developing a network of contacts with the local offices of the Ministry of Education, universities, U.S. government affiliated advising centers and other appropriate institutions.

#### III. Provision of Resource Materials, Equipment and Training

The third part of the proposal should address the extent to which the U.S. headquarters office will support its advising center abroad through the provision of educational advising resource materials and professional development activities and training.

Student access to a comprehensive university catalog collection, in print and/or computer software programs, and an extensive collection of current references on U.S. educational institutions and programs, through print or computer networks, is an integral component of an educational advising center and the applicant's ability to provide such should be made clear in this section.

Office equipment that facilitates the processing of inquiries, such as electronic mail, internet and facsimile machines would be regarded as an asset to the advising function and mention of such equipment should be made in the proposal. The Agency expects the advising center to be equipped with audio visual aids for students' use. Videos/CD-ROMS on U.S. study and life should complement the presentation and materials offered at group and individual advising sessions.

#### Budget Guidelines

Grants awarded to eligible organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$60,000.

Applicants must submit a comprehensive budget for the entire program. Awards may not exceed \$85,000. There must be a summary budget as well as breakdowns reflecting both administrative and program budgets. Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program

component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification. Allowable costs for the program include the following:

- (1) Salary and benefits;
- (2) Budget for travel and per diem;
- (3) Office supplies and expenses;
- (4) Rent and utilities;
- (5) Outreach and publicity; and
- (6) Indirect costs.

The center must agree to provide accurate, free and objective information about all accredited U.S. higher education institutions. The center may charge for services beyond the basic level (to be determined in consultation with the Advising and Student Services Branch) and for the sale/rental of educational advising materials. The proposal should provide details of cost-sharing and fundraising strategies to supplement cost of advising services. Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

#### **Announcement Title and Number**

All correspondence with USIA concerning this RFP should reference the above title and number E/ASA-00-04.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTRACT:** The Advising and Student Services Branch, E/ASA, Room 349, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20547, phone: 202-619-5434, fax: 202-401-1433, to request a Solicitation Package. The Solicitation Package contains detailed award criteria, required application forms, specific budget instructions, and standard guidelines for proposal preparation. Please Specify USIA Program Officer Dorothy Mora on all other inquiries and correspondence.

Please 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 with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

**To Download a Solicitation Package Via Internet:** The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from USIA's website at <http://e.usia.gov/education/rfps>. Please read all information before downloading.

**To Receive a Solicitation Package Via Fax On Demand:** The entire Solicitation Package may be requested from the Bureau's Grants Information Fax on Demand System, which is accessed by calling 202/401-7616. The Table of Contents listing available documents and order numbers should be the first order when entering the system.

**Deadline for Proposals:** All proposal copies must be received at the U.S. Information Agency by 5:00 p.m.

Washington, DC time on August 6, 1999. Faxed documents will not be accepted at any time. Documents postmarked the due date but received on a later date will not be accepted. Each applicant must ensure that the proposals are received by the above deadline.

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package. The original and eight copies of the application should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency, Ref.: E/ASA-00-04, Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 336, 301 4th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20547.

Applicants must also submit the "Executive Summary" and "Proposal Narrative" sections of the proposal on a 3.5" diskette, formatted for DOS. These documents 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, Freedom, and Democracy Guidelines**

Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, programs must maintain a nonpolitical 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, socioeconomic 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. Pub. L. 104-319 provides that in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy, USIA shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries. Proposals should reflect advancement of this goal in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

#### **Year 2000 Compliance Requirement (Y2K Requirement)**

The Year 2000 (Y2K) issue is a broad operational and accounting problem that could potentially prohibit organizations from processing information in accordance with Federal

management and program specific requirements including data exchange with USIA. The inability to process information in accordance with Federal requirements could result in grantees' being required to return funds that have not been accounted for properly.

USIA therefore requires all organizations use Y2K compliant systems including hardware, software, and firmware. Systems must accurately process data and dates (calculating, comparing and sequencing) both before and after the beginning of the year 2000 and correctly adjust for leap years.

Additional information addressing the Y2K issue may be found at the General Services Administration's Office of Information Technology website at <http://www.itpolicy.gsa.gov>.

#### **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. All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office, as well as the USIA Office of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and the USIA posts overseas, where appropriate. Eligible proposals will be forwarded to panels of USIA officers for advisory review. Proposals may also be reviewed by the Office of the General Counsel or by other Agency elements. Final funding decisions are at the discretion of USIA's 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 and all carry equal weight in the proposal evaluation:

1. **Quality of the program idea:** Proposals should exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to the Agency's mission.

2. **Ability to achieve program objectives:** Objectives should be reasonable, feasible, and flexible. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan.

3. **Multiplier effect/impact:** Proposed programs should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of information and establishment of long-term institutional and individual linkages.

4. **Support of diversity:** Proposals should demonstrate substantive support

of the Bureau's policy on diversity. Achievable and relevant features should be cited in both program administration (selection of participants, program venue and program evaluation) and program content (orientation and wrap-up sessions, program meetings, resource materials and follow-up activities).

5. *Institutional capacity:* Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program or project's goals.

6. *Institution's record ability:* Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful educational advising programs, including demonstrating responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. Proposals should demonstrate an ability to maintain effective relationships with USIS posts, advising centers, and the Agency's Advising and Student Services Branch. The Agency will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.

7. *Project evaluation:* Proposals should include a plan to evaluate the activity's success, both as the activities unfold and at the end of the program. A draft survey questionnaire or other technique plus description of a methodology to use to link outcomes to original project objectives is recommended. Successful applicants will be expected to submit intermediate reports after each project component is concluded or quarterly, whichever is less frequent.

8. *Cost-effectiveness:* 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.

9. *Cost-sharing:* Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions.

10. *Value to U.S.-Partner Country Relations:* Proposed projects should receive positive assessments by USIA's geographic area desk and overseas officers of program need, potential impact, and significance in the partner country.

#### Authority

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Pub. L. 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 above is provided through legislation.

#### 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 and 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.

#### Notification

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

Dated: July 1, 1999.

**Judith Siegel,**

*Deputy Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.*

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#### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

[OMB Control No. 2900-0209]

#### Proposed Information Collection Activity: Proposed Collection; Comment Request

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

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is announcing an opportunity for public comment on the proposed collection of certain information by the agency. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, Federal agencies are required to publish notice in the **Federal Register**

concerning each proposed collection of information, including each proposed revision of a currently approved collection, and allow 60 days for public comment in response to the notice. This notice solicits comments for information needed to determine if a student is eligible for work-study benefits.

**DATES:** Written comments and recommendations on the proposed collection of information should be received on or before September 7, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** Submit written comments on the collection of information to Nancy J. Kessinger, Veterans Benefits Administration (20S52), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. Please refer to "OMB Control No. 2900-0209" in any correspondence.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Nancy J. Kessinger at (202) 273-7079 or FAX (202) 275-5947.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Under the PRA of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13; 44 U.S.C., 3501-3520), Federal agencies must obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for each collection of information they conduct or sponsor. This request for comment is being made pursuant to Section 3506(c)(2)(A) of the PRA.

With respect to the following collection of information, VBA invites comments on: (1) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of VBA's functions, including whether the information will have practical utility; (2) the accuracy of VBA's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (3) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or the use of other forms of information technology.

*Title:* Application for Work-Study Allowance, VA Form 22-8691.

*OMB Control Number:* 2900-0209.

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

*Abstract:* Veterans, Selected Reservists, and other beneficiaries use this form to apply for work-study allowance under 38 U.S.C. chapters 30, 31, 32 and 35, Section 903 of Public Law 96-342, and 10 U.S.C. chapter 1606. The information is used to determine if a student is eligible for work-study benefits.

*Affected Public:* Individuals or households.