

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/education/rfps>. Please read all information before downloading.

#### **To Receive a Solicitation Package Via Fax on Demand**

The entire Solicitation Package may be received via the Bureau's "Grants Information Fax on Demand System," which is accessed by calling 202/401-7616. Please request a "Catalog" of available documents and order numbers when first entering the system.

Please specify "Advising and Student Services Branch" on all inquiries and correspondence. Prospective applicants should read the complete Federal Register announcement before addressing inquiries to the Advising and Student Services staff or submitting their 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 complete application, including the documents specified under Tabs A through I in the "Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation" (POGI) section of the Solicitation Package, should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency, Ref: E/ASA-99-10, Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 326, 301 4th St., 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 U.S. Information Service (USIS) posts overseas for their review, with the goal of reducing the time needed to make the comments of overseas posts available in the Agency's grant review process.

#### **Diversity, Freedom and Democracy Guidelines**

Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, projects 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. Public Law 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 account for advancement of this goal, in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

#### **Year 2000 Compliance Requirements (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>.

#### **Eligibility**

A proposal will be deemed technically eligible if it:

- (1) Fully adheres to the guidelines established herein and in the Solicitation Package;
- (2) Is received by the deadline;
- (3) Requests an assistance amount not in excess of \$495,000.

#### **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.

#### **Notification**

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal USIA procedures. All applicants will be notified of the results of the review process on or about December 14, 1998. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements.

Dated: October 16, 1998.

**Judith Siegel,**

*Deputy Associate Director, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.*

[FR Doc. 98-28889 Filed 10-28-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8230-01-M

#### **UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY**

#### **Internet Access and Training Program in the New Independent States for Alumni of USIA Academic and Professional Exchanges; Request for Proposals**

**SUMMARY:** The Office of Academic Programs, Academic Exchanges Division, European Programs Branch of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for assistance awards. Public and private non-profit organizations with at least four years experience in conducting international exchange and training programs, and demonstrated experience administering non-commercial Internet projects in the New Independent States, and meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501 © may apply to develop and administer the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) in one or more of the following four categories: (1) Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia; (2) Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova; (3) Russian Federation; (4) Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan.

The goal of the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) is to provide

alumni of USIA academic and professional exchange programs and other audiences identified by the United States Information Service (USIS) with free and open access to and training in the use of the Internet so that they can: (1) Continue information sharing, network building, communication, and collaboration with American counterparts, U.S. host institutions, and each other; (2) Obtain useful online information resources in their academic and professional fields as well as current information about the U.S.; (3) Publish information on the World Wide Web; and (4) Develop Internet-based information resources in local languages and/or English or other electronic projects that promote academic and professional exchange in the information age and strengthen U.S.—NIS cooperation and communication.

USIA program alumni include university and secondary school students, faculty, administrators, and scholars; government officials; NGO leaders; journalists; entrepreneurs; and diverse public, private, and third sector professionals who have participated in a long-term USIA academic program at a U.S. host institution or a short-term USIA professional visit or internship in the United States. Academic and professional fields of USIA program alumni include, but are not limited to, American Studies, Area Studies (NIS), Business, Civic Education, Economics, Education, Government, Journalism, Law, Liberty and Information Science, Political Science, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and Women's Studies.

For its Internet Access and Training Program, USIA seeks proposals that would (1) Provide sustainable, high speed access to the Internet for USIA program alumni and other USIS-identified audiences by upgrading and/or expanding IATP-supported public access Internet sites and/or other non-commercial Internet training centers at NIS libraries, universities, NGOs, government offices, and other venues; and/or by establishing new non-commercial Internet training centers at NIS partner institutions; and/or by upgrading or expanding academic or non-commercial networks, including IATP FreeNets and alumni networks; (2) Train staff at public access Internet sites and/or Internet training centers and/or non-commercial networks to meet the technical, training, and information needs of USIA program alumni, other end-users, and IATP reporting requirements; (3) Conduct systematic outreach to USIA program alumni, develop mechanisms to ensure that USIA program alumni receive free

Internet access, training, and services at IATP sites and/or IATP FreeNets, and site usage reports; (4) Develop curriculum, course descriptions, materials, requirements, and schedules for Internet training courses at public access Internet sites or training centers and topics and schedules for specialized workshops or seminars; (5) Administer an open competition for grants for USIA program alumni and their local colleagues to develop Internet-based educational and professional resources in local languages in fields that support the building of free markets, democracy, and civil society. The program activities for each category of countries and individual countries have separate conditions and requirements which are stated in this announcement and detailed in the full Solicitation Package.

Proposals should reflect a thorough understanding of the telecommunications infrastructure in each country, technical requirements for implementing all aspects of the project, including procurement of appropriate equipment and services required to connect USIA program alumni and other USIS-identified audiences and institutions to the Internet and establish non-commercial Internet sites and/or enhance non-commercial networks, staff training and team building, curriculum and methodology for Internet courses, knowledge of useful Internet resources in fields of USIA program alumni, procedures for conducting a merit-based open competition for grants, and the political, economic, and social environment in which the program activity will take place.

USIA expects the IATP to achieve results on three levels: By empowering USIA program alumni to obtain and publish useful online information and enrich the content of the Internet in their local languages; by building the internal capacity of NIS partner institutions; and by forging public-private sector partnerships to promote continued academic and professional exchange in the information age between USIA program alumni and their American colleagues and counterparts. Applicant organizations must include a plan with clear benchmarks that demonstrates how permanent results will be achieved on each level, monitored, and reported to USIA.

Interested organizations should read the complete **Federal Register** Announcement and request a Solicitation Package from USIA prior to preparing a proposal and should consult with USIA and USIS posts about a reasonable and appropriate mix of program activities before submitting a

proposal. USIA and USIS posts retain the right to recommend specific project activities and partner organizations and to approve or disapprove project activities and organizations recommended by grantee organizations.

Applicant organizations may apply for an assistance award for one or more of the four eligible categories of countries, but must submit a separate proposal and budget for each category. Applicant organizations may apply individually or join with other organizations in a consortium, via a subcontract arrangement, as long as one organization is designated to be the recipient of the grant. All proposals from consortia must cite the specific responsibilities of each member of the consortium and budget for each subcontract. USIA anticipates awarding one or more assistance awards for each category cited in this announcement. Grants may begin no earlier than January 15, 1999 and must be completed by July 15, 2001, for a maximum of 30 months.

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 Internet Access and Training Program is provided through the Freedom Support Act. The legislation was established to assist the economic and democratic development of the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union. Programs and projects must conform with Agency requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package.

**Announcement Title and Number:** All communications with USIA concerning this RFP should refer to the announcement's title and reference number E/AEE-99-05.

**Deadline for Proposals:** All copies must be received at the U.S. Information Agency by 5 p.m. Washington, D.C. time on Thursday, December 18, 1998. Faxed documents will not be accepted at any time. Documents postmarked by the due

date but received at a later date will not be accepted. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that proposals are received by the above deadline.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** The Office of Academic Programs, Academic Exchanges Division, European Programs Branch, E/AEE, Room 246, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547; telephone number (202) 205-0525; fax: (202) 260-7985 to request a Solicitation Package containing more detailed award criteria. Please request 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/education/rfps>. Please read all information before downloading.

**To Receive a Solicitation Package Via Fax on Demand:** The entire Solicitation Package may be received via the Bureau's "Grants Information Fax on Demand System", which is accessed by calling 202/401-7616. Please request a "Catalog" of available documents and order numbers when first entering the system. Please specify USIA Senior Program Manager Ilo Mai Harding 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/AEE-99-05 (IATP), 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 our overseas posts for 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 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. Public Law 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 account for advancement of this goal in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The IATP is intended to be a collaborative effort between USIA and U.S. and NIS public and private sector organizations. USIA expects applicant organizations to expand connectivity and Internet access by building on existing infrastructure, networks, and equipment, where feasible, and by demonstrating the ability to collaborate with diverse organizations. Such collaboration is intended to expand the scope and impact of USIA funding, avoid duplication of effort, and lay the groundwork for sustaining projects beyond the USIA grant.

USIA expects applicant organizations and other institutions participating in the IATP, including commercial and non-commercial Internet service providers, to provide in-kind contributions and cost-sharing, such as facilities, equipment, and services for public access Internet sites, training centers, and/or non-commercial networks and FreeNets; staff, and training materials, as appropriate. Since USIA grant assistance constitutes only a portion of total project funding, proposals should list and provide evidence of other sources of financial and in-kind support. Letters of support from potential IATP partners, written to USIA on institutional letterhead, may be attached to the proposal.

## Guidelines

Administration of the program must be in compliance with reporting and withholding regulations for federal, state, and local taxes as applicable. Organizations should demonstrate tax regulation adherence in the proposal. Procurement of required computer and networking equipment and applications software must be in compliance with "Year 2000" requirements (Y2K). Applicant organizations should demonstrate compliance with Y2K requirements in the proposal.

## Proposed Budget

For Category One, Freedom Support Act (FSA) funding is anticipated at \$150,000 for Armenia; \$350,000 for Azerbaijan; and \$150,000 for Georgia. For Category Two, FSA funding is anticipated at \$400,000 for Ukraine; \$300,000 for Belarus; and \$150,000 for Moldova. For Category Three, FSA funding is anticipated at \$1,000,000 for the Russian Federation. For Category Four, FSA funding is anticipated at \$400,000 for Kazakhstan; \$200,000 for Kyrgyzstan; \$300,000 for Uzbekistan; and \$60,000 for Turkmenistan.

Applicant organizations must submit a comprehensive line item budget request for program and administrative costs based on the specific guidance in the Solicitation Package. Subcontracts should be cited as program expenses. There must be a summary budget as well as a break-down reflecting both the administrative budget and the program budget, and a budget narrative demonstrating how costs were derived. Organizations whose proposals include an administrative budget that is less than 20% of the grant amount requested will be considered highly competitive.

Allowable program costs include computer and network equipment, hardware, software, peripherals, supplies, services, monthly Internet access fees (if required), training materials, technical consultants, and salaries or honorarium for project personnel; advertising, materials, and honorarium for grants review committee. Allowable administrative costs include salaries and benefits for grantee organization employees, staff travel, shipping, and other direct and indirect costs. Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting 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 and NIS Affairs and the USIA post overseas, where appropriate. 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 and all carry equal weight in the proposal evaluation:

1. Program planning and ability to achieve objectives: Program objectives should be stated clearly and precisely and should reflect the applicant organization's experience implementing Internet projects, training programs, developing Internet courses, and administering grants competitions. A detailed work plan should explain how objectives will be achieved and include a timetable for completion of all technical and programmatic components of the project. Responsibilities of in-country partners should be clearly described.

2. Institutional capacity: Proposed personnel and organizational resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the project's goals. The narrative must demonstrate proven ability to handle the technical and programmatic requirements of the project and to effectively coordinate logistics and project components with diverse organizations.

3. Organization's track record: Relevant USIA and outside assessments of the organization's experience with exchange programs and Internet projects, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts.

4. Multiplier effect/impact: Proposed programs must demonstrate an impact on the wider community through the sharing of information and the establishment of long-term institutional and individual linkages and network building.

5. Cost-effectiveness: Overhead and program and administrative costs should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and

appropriate. Proposals should show cost-sharing from the applicant and from other sources.

6. Support of diversity and pluralism: Proposals should demonstrate substantive support of the Bureau's policy on diversity throughout the program.

7. Program evaluation: USIA is results oriented. Proposals must include a plan to evaluate the project's success, both as activities unfold and at the end of the project. A draft survey questionnaire plus a description of a methodology to be used link outcomes to original project objectives is required. USIA recommends that the proposal include draft questions for focus groups for staff and end-users at the public access Internet sites. Proposals must thoroughly discuss the methodology to be used in program evaluation.

#### 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 report and evaluation requirements.

#### Notification

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

Dated: October 19, 1998.

**Dr. John P. Loiello,**

*Associate Director for  
Educational and Cultural Affairs.*

[FR Doc. 98-28890 Filed 10-28-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8230-01-M

#### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

[OMB Control No. 2900-0103]

#### 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 extension of a currently approved collection, and allow 60 days for public comment in response to the notice. This notice solicits comments on the information needed to determine whether a child under 18 is entitled to benefits where the surviving spouse was not or is no longer entitled to benefits or whether a child age 18 or over is entitled to benefits regardless of the surviving spouse's entitlement.

**DATES:** Written comments and recommendations on the proposed collection of information should be received on or before December 28, 1998.

**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. 2900-0103" 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 Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by Child, VA Form 21-4183.

*OMB Control Number:* 2900-0103.