

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY**NIS College and University Partnerships Program; Request for Proposals**

SUMMARY: The Advising, Teaching, and Specialized Programs Division of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for an assistance award program. For applicants' information, on October 1, 1999 the Bureau will become part of the U.S. Department of State without affecting the content of this announcement or the nature of the program described. At the time, the Advising, Teaching, and Specialized Programs Division will be renamed the Office of Global Educational Programs. Accredited, post-secondary educational institutions meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c) may apply to pursue institutional or departmental objectives in international partnerships with counterpart institutions from the New Independent States for the purpose of supporting, through teaching, scholarship, and professional outreach from the partner institutions, the transition of the New Independent States to democratic systems based on market economies, and of strengthening mutual understanding and cooperation between the United States and the New Independent States. Eligible fields are education or educational administration; the social, political or economic sciences; law; business; public administration; or communications. Within these fields, themes of special interest may be described in additional detail in the section on "Country Eligibility."

In general, underlying the specific objectives of projects funded by this program should be the goal of fostering freedom and democracy through a deepened mutual understanding of fundamental issues and practical applications in the encouragement of civil society, economic growth and prosperity, or the free flow of information. Creative, innovative strategies to address these underlying concerns in the pursuit of clearly defined institutional goals are encouraged. The extension of understanding about these issues through outreach from academic institutions to larger communities of citizens and practitioners is also encouraged.

The Bureau supports institutional linkages in higher education with partners from the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union

through the NIS College and University Partnerships Program, for which this Request for Proposals invites applications for funding in FY2000. The Bureau also anticipates issuing a separate and additional Request for Proposals this Fall for a partnership program for community colleges interested in cooperating with institutions in Russia or Ukraine. Eligible community colleges may apply for grants under either or both of the above competitions, but the Bureau will not give multiple awards for duplicate partnerships under these competitions. The Bureau also supports institutional linkages in higher education with partners worldwide through the College and University Affiliations Program; the College and University Affiliations Program was described in a previous announcement and has a deadline of November 15, 1999. Applicants interested in the Bureau's College and University Affiliations Program should contact the Bureau's Specialized Programs Branch at (202) 619-5289. In addition, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the Sustaining Partnerships into the Next Century (SPAN) program, which supports organizational and institutional partnerships, including university partnerships in fields other than those covered by the NISCUPP program, in the Russian Federation. Applicants interested in USAID's SPAN program should contact IREX at (202) 628-8188.

In the NIS College and University Partnerships Program, partner institutions may pursue specific institutional goals with support from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs through exchanges of teachers, administrators or, in limited circumstances, students for any appropriate combination of teaching, consultation, research, and outreach, for periods ranging from one week (for planning visits) to an academic year. The Bureau's support may be used to defray the costs of the exchange visits as well as the costs up to a maximum of 20 percent of the total grant of their administration at any partner institution, including administrative salaries but excluding indirect costs. Although grants will be issued to eligible U.S. colleges and universities, adequate provision for the administrative costs of the project at all partner institutions is encouraged. Administrative salary support may be included for project directors and administrative assistants within the 20 percent maximum that may be allocated to administrative costs, but the Bureau

will not fund salaries, stipends, or honoraria for U.S. program participants, except in the case of advanced graduate students working in the NIS for periods of over 2 months who would otherwise be eligible for U.S. teaching assignments. (See the section of this document on "U.S. Partner and Participant Eligibility" and the section of the POGI on "Allowable costs".) The costs of exchange visits of foreign students and U.S. graduate student teaching or research assistants who are working under the supervision of a faculty participant or project director toward the achievement of project objectives are eligible for support. Other students may participate in the project, but not with the Bureau's support for the costs of their visits. With the Bureau's support, institutions may reinforce the activities of exchange participants through the establishment and maintenance of Internet and/or electronic mail communication facilities as well as through interactive technology or non-technology-based distance-learning programs. Applicants may propose other project activities not specifically anticipated in this solicitation if the activities reinforce exchange activities and their impact.

Proposals must be submitted by the U.S. institutional partner and must include a letter of commitment from the foreign partner(s). While the benefits of the project to each of the participating institutions may differ significantly in nature and scope, proposals should outline well-reasoned strategies leading to specific, demonstrable changes (for example, new courses, new research or teaching capacities or methodologies, new programs or revised curricula) that are anticipated for each participating department or for the institution as a whole as a result of the project. The strategy for achieving project goals may include exchange visits in either or both directions, but no single formula is anticipated for the duration, sequence, or number of these visits. However, visits of one semester or more for participants from each of the institutional partners are encouraged. Although strong budgetary and programmatic emphasis may be given to visits in one direction over another, the benefits of these visits to the sending as well as the receiving sides should be clearly explained in terms of their contributions to the departmental or institutional objectives which the project is designed to achieve.

In addition to demonstrating the capacity of each participating institution to contribute to its partner(s), proposals should also explain how this cooperation will enable each of the

institutions to address its own needs. Accordingly, applicants are encouraged to describe the needs as well as the capabilities of each participating department. Effective proposals will explain the anticipated cooperation in ways that demonstrate that the institutions proposed for participation in the partnership clearly understand one another and are committed to support one another in project implementation. If the proposed partnership would occur within the context of a previous or on-going project, the proposal should explain how the request for Bureau funding would build upon the pre-existing relationship or complement concurrent projects and cooperation.

The commitment of all partner institutions to the proposed project should be reflected in the cost-sharing which they offer in the context of their respective institutional capacities.

To provide adequate time to meet institutional goals, the program awards grants for periods of approximately three years. The maximum award in the FY2000 competition will be \$300,000. Request for amounts smaller than the maximum are eligible. Grants awarded to organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$60,000. Grants are subject to the availability of funds for Fiscal year 2000.

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 is provided through the Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act of 1992 (Freedom Support Act).

Projects must conform with the Bureau's requirements and guidelines outlined in the solicitation package for this RFP, which can be obtained by following the instructions given in the section below entitled "For Further Information." The "Project Objectives,

Goals, and Implementation" (hereafter, POGI) and the "Proposal Submission Instructions" (hereafter, PSI), which contain additional guidelines, are included in the Solicitation Package. Proposals that do not follow RFP requirements and the guidelines appearing in the POGI and PSI may be excluded from consideration due to technical ineligibility.

Announcement Title and Number

All communications with the Bureau concerning this RFP should refer to the NIS College and University Partnerships Program and reference number E/ASU-00-03.

Deadline for Proposals

All copies must be received at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs by 5 p.m. Washington, DC time on Wednesday, January 19, 2000. Faxed documents will not be accepted at any time, nor will documents postmarked on Wednesday, January 19, 2000 but received on a later date. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure compliance with the deadline.

Approximate program dates: Grants should begin on or about August 15, 2000.

Duration: Approximately August 15, 2000—August 14, 2003.

For Further Information, Contact

The Specialized Programs Branch, E/ASU [as of October 1, 1999, the Institutional Linkages Branch, ECA/ASU], room 349, 301 4th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20547, phone (202) 619-5289; fax: (202) 401-1433; e-mail affiliat@usia.gov to request a Solicitation Package containing more detailed award criteria; all application forms; and guidelines for preparing proposals, including specific criteria for preparation of the proposal budget. Please specify Bureau Program Officer Jonathan Cebra (telephone: 202-619-4126, e-mail: jcebra@usia.gov) on all inquiries and correspondences regarding partnerships with institutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, or Ukraine.

To Download a Solicitation Package Via Internet

The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from the Bureau's website at <http://e.usia.gov/education/rfps>. Please read all information before downloading.

Interested applicants should read the complete **Federal Register** announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the RFP deadline has passed, Bureau 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. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Ref.: E/ASU-00-03, Office of Grants Management, ECA/EX/PM, 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. This material must be provided in ASCII text (DOS) format with a maximum line length of 65 characters. The Bureau will transmit these files electronically to the public diplomacy sections at US Embassies for their review, with the goal of reducing the time it takes to get Embassy comments for the Bureau'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 programs 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", the Bureau "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 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 the Bureau. 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.

The Bureau 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>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Guidelines

The NIS College and University Partnership Program is limited to the following academic fields:

- (1) Law;
- (2) Business/accounting/trade;
- (3) Education/continuing education/educational administration;
- (4) Public administration/public policy analysis;
- (5) Journalism/communications; and
- (6) Social, political, or economic sciences.

Proposals must focus on curriculum, faculty, and staff development at the NIS partner institution(s) in one or more of these eligible disciplines. Administrative reform at the foreign partner should also be a project component. Projects should involve the development of new academic programs or the building and/or restructuring of an existing program or programs, and should promote higher education's role in the transition to market economies and open democratic systems. Feasibility studies to plan partnerships will not be considered.

Whenever feasible, participants should make their training and personnel resources, as well as results of their collaborative research, available to government, NGOs, and business.

Participating institutions should exchange faculty and/or staff members for teaching/lecturing and consulting. At least once during the grant period, one U.S. participant should be in residence at the foreign partner institution for one semester to serve in a coordinating role. (Exception: proposals for partnerships with institutions in Tajikistan should not

include travel by U.S. participants to Tajikistan.)

U.S. institutions are responsible for the submission of proposals and should collaborate with their foreign partners in planning and preparing proposals. U.S. and foreign partner institutions are encouraged to consult about the proposed project with program office staff in Washington, DC.

U.S. Partner and Participant Eligibility

In the United States, participation in the program is open to accredited two- and four-year colleges and universities, including graduate or professional schools. Applications from consortia of U.S. colleges and universities are eligible. Secondary U.S. partners may include relevant non-governmental organizations, non-profit service or professional organizations. If a lead U.S. institution in a consortium is responsible for submitting an application on behalf of a consortium, the application must document the lead school's stated authority to represent the consortium. With the exception of outside evaluators on contract with the U.S. institution, participants representing the U.S. institution(s) who are traveling under Bureau grant funds must be faculty, staff, or advanced graduate students from the participating institution(s) and must be U.S. citizens.

Foreign Partner and Participant Eligibility

In other countries, participation is open to recognized, degree-granting institutions of post-secondary education. Secondary foreign partners may include relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations, non-profit service or professional organizations. Participants representing the foreign institutions must be faculty, staff or advanced students of the primary or secondary partner institution, and be citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the country of the foreign partner, and be qualified to hold a valid passport and U.S. J-1 visa.

Foreign partners from the following countries are eligible:

- Armenia;
- Azerbaijan;
- Belarus—foreign partners must be independent institutions; state universities are not eligible;
- Georgia;
- Kazakhstan;
- Kyrgyzstan;
- Moldova;
- Russia—preference will be given to proposals which designate partner institutions outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg; proposals for partnerships with institutions located

in Moscow or St. Petersburg should clearly indicate how those partnerships will have impact on other regions. The Bureau anticipates issuing a separate request for proposals in the Fall for a partnership in the field of public administration with Moscow State University. Proposals which designate a partner institution in the Sakhalin Region are encouraged.

Tajikistan—in consideration of the State Department Warning advising U.S. citizens to defer travel to Tajikistan, proposals should not include travel by U.S. participants to Tajikistan;

Turkmenistan;

Ukraine—proposals for partnership with institutions located in the Kharkiv region are encouraged;

Uzbekistan.

Partnerships including a secondary foreign partner from a non-NIS country are eligible; however, with the exception noted below, the Bureau will not cover overseas non-NIS partner institution costs.

Central European Partners

The Bureau encourages proposals which build upon established collaboration between U.S. institutions and partners in Central and Eastern Europe in order to support faculty and curriculum development in the NIS and to promote regional cooperation. Within the context of this partnership agreement and under the guidance of the U.S. partner institution, funds may be budgeted for the exchange of faculty between NIS institutions and institutions of higher learning in Central and Eastern Europe (applicants planning to submit proposals for trilateral partnerships with a partner from Central and Eastern Europe are encouraged to contact the program office).

Review Process

The Bureau 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 forwarded to independent reviewers and to Bureau and U.S. Embassy officers for advisory review.

The independent reviewers, who will be professional, scholarly, or educational experts with appropriate regional and thematic knowledge, will provide recommendations and assessments for consideration by the Bureau. The Bureau will consider for funding only those proposals which are

recommended for further consideration by the independent reviewers.

Proposals will also be reviewed by Bureau officers as well as by the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Senior Coordinator for the Newly Independent States and the public diplomacy sections of U.S. Embassies. Proposals may also be reviewed by the Department of State, Office of the Legal Advisor or by other Bureau elements. Funding decisions will be made at the discretion of the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Final technical authority for assistance awards (grants or cooperative agreements) will reside with a contracts officer with competency of Bureau programs.

Review Criteria

Independent reviewers and State Department officers in Washington, DC., and overseas will use the criteria below to reach funding recommendations and decisions. Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank-ordered or weighted.

1. **Quality and Clarity of Program Objectives:** Proposed programs should outline clearly formulated objectives for each participating institution that will also contribute to the transition of the New Independent States to market economies and democracies and to a deepened mutual understanding of fundamental issues and practical applications in the themes eligible for consideration in this competition.

2. **Program planning:** Proposals should include appropriate and feasible project plans and a detailed schedule which should include a well-reasoned combination of useful and appropriate teaching, faculty development, curriculum development, and outreach. The various activities should be clearly related to project objectives, but need not be equally emphasized within the proposal. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the partnership will meet the program's objectives and plan.

3. **Impact of Program Objectives:** Proposal objectives should have sustainable consequences for the participating institutions and the societies and communities which these institutions serve.

4. **Support of Diversity:** Proposals should demonstrate substantive support of the Bureau's policy on diversity by outlining relevant aspects of the institutional profile of each participating institution together with the relevancy of issues of diversity to program objectives and implementation.

5. **Institutional Capacity and Commitment:** Proposals should demonstrate commitment of institutional resources adequate and appropriate to achieve program goals. Proposals should demonstrate significant understanding at each institution of its own needs and capacities and of the needs and capacities of its proposed partner(s), together with a strong commitment, during and after the period of grant activity, to cooperate with one another in the mutual pursuit of institutional objectives. Relevant factors include: the financial and political stability of partner institutions and the availability of a critical mass of faculty willing and able to participate. Proposals which include multiple quarter- or semester-length stays will be more competitive. Proposals should provide evidence of relevant and successful prior interactions between institutions and an indication of collaborative program planning. The Bureau will consider the past performance of prior grant recipients and all reviews will consider the demonstrated potential of new applicants. Reviewers will also consider the quality of exchange participants' academic credentials, skills, and experience relative to the goals and activities of the project plan (e.g. language skills).

6. **Project Evaluation:** Proposals should include a plan and methodology for evaluating the project's degree of success in meeting program objectives. The plan should include an updated assessment of the current status of each department at the time of program inception; on-going formative evaluation to allow for prompt corrective action; and summative evaluation of the degree of achievement of project objectives together with recommendations for further activities and projects to build upon project achievements.

7. **Cost-effectiveness:** Administrative costs should be reasonable and appropriate with cost-sharing provided by all participating institutions within the context of their respective capacities and as a reflection of their commitment to cooperation with one another in pursuing project objectives.

Ineligibility

A proposal will be deemed technically ineligible if:

- (1) It does not adhere to the guidelines established herein and in the Solicitation Package;
- (2) It is not received by the deadline;
- (3) It is not submitted by the U.S. partner;
- (4) One of the partner institutions is ineligible;
- (5) The academic discipline(s) is/are not listed as eligible in the RFP, herein;
- (6) The amount requested of the Bureau exceeds \$300,000 for the three-year project.

Please refer to program-specific guidelines (POGI) in the Solicitation Package for further details.

Notice

The terms and conditions published in this RFP are binding and may not be modified by any Bureau representative. Explanatory information provided by the Bureau 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 Bureau 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 Bureau procedures.

Dated: September 8, 1999.

William P. Kiehl,

Acting Deputy Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

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