

**Department of State  
Public Notice**

**Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Joint  
Request for Statements of Interest: Internet Freedom Programs**

**SUMMARY**

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) announce a Joint Request for Statements of Interest (SOI) from organizations interested in submitting proposals for projects that support Internet freedom under the “Governing Justly and Democratically” Foreign Assistance program objective. This solicitation does not constitute a formal Request for Proposals: DRL and/or NEA will invite select organizations that submit SOIs to expand on their ideas via full proposal at a later date.

**PLEASE NOTE: DRL and NEA strongly urge applicants to access immediately [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) in order to obtain a username and password. It may take up to a week to register with grants.gov. Please see the section entitled, “DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS” below for specific instructions.**

**REQUESTED STATEMENT OF INTEREST PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

DRL and NEA invite organizations to submit statements of interest outlining program concepts and capacity to manage projects that will foster freedom of expression and the free flow of information on the Internet and other connection technologies in East Asia, including China and Burma; the Near East, including Iran; Southeast Asia; the South Caucasus; Eurasia, including Russia; Central Asia; Latin America, including Cuba and Venezuela; and Africa. Programming may support activities in Farsi, Chinese, Russian, Burmese, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, and other languages spoken in acutely hostile Internet environments. Concepts may be global in nature, regional or country-specific.

Statements should clearly address a) support for digital activists and civil society organizations in exercising their right to freedom of expression and the free flow of information in acutely hostile Internet environments, or b) support for ongoing evaluation and research to enhance global Internet freedom policy and diplomacy.

*Supporting digital activists:*

1. Statements of interest should address one or more of the following potential program activities:

- **Counter-censorship Technology:** Development and support of web-based circumvention technology to enable users in closed societies to get around firewalls and filters in acutely hostile Internet environments. DRL and NEA will consider projects that support the deployment of individual technologies in specific environments, as well as projects that identify a lead organization to provide sub-grant and contractual support to non-profit organizations and for-profit companies that develop and maintain circumvention technologies. Statements of interest proposing a consortium of technologies under a lead organization should clearly identify potential technology

partners and include an indication of those organizations' interest in participating in the proposed project. In all cases, preference will be given to peer-reviewed technologies.

- **Secure Mobile Communications:** Development of technologies, techniques, and training to enhance the security of mobile communications. Projects may include components to 1) increase user privacy and security, 2) enhance secure communications, networking, and data storage among advocacy groups, and 3) provide increased access to the uncensored Internet via mobile devices.
- **Digital Safety Training:** Development of a curriculum and training program to build a network of digital safety instructors to deliver trainings in multiple languages and regions where digital activists and civil society organizations are under threat. Proposed projects should include curriculum and training components to develop a network of instructors on digital safety, as well as a proposed schedule of trainings on digital safety targeting civil society organizations and individuals in acutely hostile Internet environments in the regions and languages listed above.
- **Building the Technology Capacity of Digital Activists and Civil Society in Hostile Internet Environments in the Near East:** Training on and access to communication platforms to share electronic information securely; training for activists, bloggers, citizen journalists, and civil society organizations to allow them to safely and anonymously participate in online forums; and promotion of peer-to-peer data sharing between mobile devices.
- **Virtual Open Internet Centers:** Establishment of country- or region-specific centers that follow online dialogue and culture in hostile Internet environments; identify and archive censored content and creatively reintroduce content and counter-censorship tools into those online environments. Programs should facilitate network-building and support for online civil society, human rights and journalism communities. Competitive proposals will include centers focused on two or more of the following languages: Farsi, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, Spanish, and Burmese, in addition to languages of other countries with hostile Internet environments.
- **Emergency funding:** Establishment of an emergency fund for netizens under threat because of their web-based activism. The fund would provide funding to cover costs associated with living expenses or legal fees, in addition to a rapid-response fund to provide short-term funding for civil society organizations that have been targeted by severe hacking or cyber intrusion incidents (such as Distributed Denial of Service attacks) to keep their online operations up and running.
- **Internet Public Policy:** Support for projects focused on media law reform in countries where changing legal and regulatory frameworks for the Internet have the potential to create acutely hostile Internet environments. Projects should include outreach to both civil society and the business community.

*Ongoing evaluation and research to enhance global Internet freedom policy and diplomacy:*

2. **Evaluation:** A project to conduct outcome-based evaluations of existing U.S. Government-funded Internet freedom programs, including measuring the effectiveness of circumvention technologies, efforts to propagate those technologies, and the impact of digital safety trainings.

3. **Internet freedom fact base:** Compile, publish, and distribute an expanded annual study of Internet freedom around the world for five years. Projects should include a five-year plan to cover a significant percentage of countries around the world. Competitive proposals will identify sources of additional funding support for the study beyond U.S. Government funding.

## TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

An organization may submit no more than two (2) SOIs of three pages each. SOIs that do not meet the requirements of the announcement may not be considered.

For all application documents, please ensure:

- 1) All pages are numbered,
- 2) All documents are formatted to 8 ½ x 11 paper, and
- 3) All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.

### SOIs must include:

- 1) Brief description of the organization, including the organization's mission statement and previous work in the area of Internet freedom, particularly in acutely hostile Internet environments. Due to page limitations, a general organizational history is not recommended. Information should clearly demonstrate an institution's record and capacity and may include previous grant management experience, whether funded through private or United States Government resources.
- 2) Description of how the project is innovative, sustainable, and does not duplicate current efforts. See "Additional Information" below.
- 3) Project description, including estimated project duration and objectives. Outputs and outcomes should also be provided. Outputs and outcomes should clearly link to project objectives and include target benchmarks. Please include the appropriate "Standardized Program Structure" Program Area(s) and Element(s) to be addressed. More information on the Standardized Program Structure and Definitions is available on DRL's Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI), which is found at [http://www.state.gov/g/drl/p/august\\_2010/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/p/august_2010/index.htm).
- 4) Brief statement on the methodology to be used in the project evaluation. Please see the PSI and the DRL Monitoring and Evaluation Primer ([www.state.gov/g/drl/p/c12302.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/p/c12302.htm)) for general information.
- 5) An estimated budget figure. The budget should include intended: Primarily Headquarters-Based Costs, Primarily-Field Based Costs, Indirect Costs, and Cost-Share. Please see DRL's PSI for general guidelines on budget categories and DRL standard budget definitions. Please note that while a detailed budget is not requested at this time, organizations invited to submit full proposals must not exceed the estimated SOI budget figure.

Organizations **must also** fill out and submit SF-424, SF-424a (Budget Summary) and SF-424b (Assurances) forms as directed on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

DRL and NEA support programs that uphold democratic principles, support and strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, and build civil society in countries and regions of

the world that are geo-strategically important to the United States. Funds are available to support projects that have the potential to have an immediate impact leading to long-term sustainable reforms. Projects should have potential for continued funding beyond DRL and NEA resources. Projects must not duplicate or simply add to efforts by other entities.

DRL and NEA will not consider projects that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative of a designated terrorist organization, whether or not elected members of government. Organizations that are invited to submit proposals and subsequently approved for an award may be required to submit additional information on the organization and key individuals for vetting. In such cases, issuance of an award is contingent on the timely receipt of the information requested and the successful completion of the vetting process.

The bulk of project activities must take place within one (1) to three (3) years, with the exception of proposals for the "Internet freedom fact base," which should take place over five (5) years. Study tours, scholarships or exchange projects will not be deemed competitive. Projects that focus on commercial law or economic development will not be rated as competitive.

Approximately \$30 million total in Internet freedom funds are available from the FY 2010 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act. To support direct and indirect costs required for implementation, DRL and NEA anticipate making awards in amounts of \$500,000 - \$8,000,000 for Internet freedom programs. SOIs that request more than the award ceiling will be deemed technically ineligible.

#### **APPLICANT/ORGANIZATION CRITERIA**

Organizations submitting SOIs must meet the following criteria:

- \* Be a U.S. non-profit organization meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3). Applicants in the process of registration must submit proof that they are seeking non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service at the time of SOI submission. Should the applicant be selected for a grant award, funding will be contingent upon 501(c)(3) status; or
- \* Be a U.S. university or research institution meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c) (3); and
- \* Have demonstrated experience administering successful projects, preferably targeting the requested country and/or region, or similarly challenging program environment. DRL and NEA reserve the right to request additional background information on organizations that do not have previous experience administering federal grant awards. These applicants may be subject to limited funding on a pilot basis; and
- \* Have existing, or the capacity to develop, active partnerships with organization(s) in the target country and/or region.
- \* Organizations may form consortia and submit a combined SOI. However, one organization should be designated as the lead applicant.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

DRL and NEA will review all SOIs for eligibility. Eligible proposals will be subject to compliance of Federal and Bureau regulations and guidelines and may also be reviewed by the Office of the Legal Adviser or by other Department offices. Final technical authority for assistance awards resides with offices such as the Department's Office of Acquisition Management.

DRL and/or NEA will solicit for full proposals based on an evaluation of how the SOI meets the solicitation review criteria, U.S. foreign policy objectives, and the priority needs of DRL and NEA. A State Department Review Committee will then evaluate proposals submitted under this request. Standard review criteria include:

### **1) Quality of Program Idea**

Proposals should be responsive to the solicitation and exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to the Bureau's mission.

### **2) Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives**

A relevant work plan should demonstrate substantive undertakings and logistical capacity of the organization. The work plan should adhere to the program overview and guidelines described above. Objectives should be ambitious, yet measurable and achievable. For complete proposals, applicants will have to provide a monthly timeline of project activities.

**3) Impact/Sustainability** Proposed programs should address how the expected results will be achieved within the proposed grant period and address long-term institution building with an emphasis on moving towards sustainability, garnering other donor support, or demonstrating capacity-building results.

### **4) Program Evaluation Plan**

Programs should demonstrate the capacity for engaging in impact assessments and providing objectives with measurable outputs and outcomes. Projects that propose an external evaluation with a clear plan will be viewed favorably in this category.

### **5) Institution's Record and Capacity**

The Bureaus will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past grants. Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the project's objectives.

### **6) 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. Given that the majority of DRL-funded programs take place overseas, U.S.-based costs should be kept to a minimum. Cost sharing is strongly encouraged and is viewed favorably by DRL reviewers.

## **DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

Applicants must submit proposals using [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) on **February 7, 2011**. DRL and NEA will **not** accept proposals submitted via email, Fax, the U.S. postal system, FedEx, UPS and similar delivery companies, or courier.

**Please note:** In order to safeguard the security of applicants' electronic information, [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) utilizes a credential provider.

The credential provider for [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) is Operational Research Consultants (ORC). Applicants **MUST** register with ORC to receive a username and password, which you will need to register with [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) as an authorized organization representative (AOR). Once your organization's E-Business point of contact has assigned these rights, you will be authorized to submit grant applications through Grants.gov on behalf of your organization.

Each organization will need to be registered with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) and you will need to have your organization's DUNS number available to complete this process. After your organization registers with the CCR, you must wait approximately 3-5 business days before you can obtain a username and password. This may delay your ability to post your proposal.

**Therefore, DRL and NEA strongly urge applicants to begin this process on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) well in advance of the submission deadline.**

No exceptions will be made for organizations that have not completed the necessary steps to post applications on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The information contained in this solicitation is final and may not be modified by any DRL or NEA representative. Explanatory information provided by DRL or NEA that may alter or contradict this information has no effect on the information and requirements of this solicitation. Issuance of the solicitation does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. DRL and NEA reserve the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program evaluation requirements.

This request for proposals will appear on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and DRL's website, [www.state.gov/g/drl](http://www.state.gov/g/drl).

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT**

For questions related to SOI submissions please contact [ifRFP@state.gov](mailto:ifRFP@state.gov).

Once the SOI deadline has passed, U.S. Government officials - including those in the Bureaus, the Department and at embassies/missions overseas - are not permitted to discuss this competition with applicants until the entire proposal review process is completed.