

Department of State
Public Notice

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Request for Statements of Interest: DRL Local Democracy and Human Rights Initiative

I. Requested Objectives for Statements of Interest

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) announces a Request for Statements of Interest (RSOI) from organizations interested in submitting Statements of Interest (SOI) for locally led programs that support DRL's goal to protect and promote respect for internationally recognized human rights and advance democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

PLEASE NOTE: DRL strongly encourages applicants to immediately access [SAMS Domestic](https://www.grants.gov) or www.grants.gov in order to obtain a username and password. For instructions on how to register with SAMS Domestic for the first time, please refer to the Proposal Submission Instructions for Statements of Interest at: <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/programs-and-grants/>.

The submission of a SOI is the first step in a two-part process. Applicants must first submit a SOI, which is a concise, five-page concept note designed to clearly communicate a program idea and its objectives before the development of a full proposal application. The purpose of the SOI process is to allow applicants the opportunity to submit program ideas for DRL to evaluate prior to requiring the development of full proposal applications. Upon merit review of eligible SOIs, DRL will invite selected applicants to expand upon their program idea(s) through the submission of a full proposal application. Full proposals will go through a second merit review before funding recommendations are submitted to the DRL Assistant Secretary for funding approval, pending funding availability.

SOIs should outline detailed plans for locally led civil society initiatives in DRL priority countries including Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Central America to advance one or more of the following objectives:

Objective 1: Bolster victim-centered approaches to justice and accountability for human rights abuses and corruption. Activities under this objective might include legal assistance and support to political prisoners; documentation of human rights violations for domestic, regional, and international advocacy; development of human rights or corruption cases for international accountability mechanisms; among others.

Objective 2: Strengthen democratic values, practices, and institutions. Activities under this objective might include locally led initiatives to support civic engagement among youth and/or underrepresented populations; community level activities to implement locally identified solutions to issues of public interest; investigative journalism to inform citizens on issues of public interest; civil society led advocacy to improve representation in policymaking processes; among others.

Locally led civil society refers to organizations that are led and operated by human rights defenders, journalists and/or civic activists who are from Latin America and the Caribbean; this may also include individuals forced into exile for their work. Competitive applications will include a locally led civil society organization as the prime implementer. Selected applicants will receive ongoing support throughout the life of the project to strengthen the organizations' financial and administrative capacity to implement DRL-funded programs and comply with U.S. government regulations. Proposals should anticipate a project timeline of 18-24 months starting no earlier than October 1, 2023.

All programs should aim to have impact that leads to reforms and should have the potential for sustainability beyond DRL resources. DRL's preference is to avoid duplicating past efforts by supporting new and creative approaches. This does not exclude from consideration projects that improve upon or expand existing successful projects in a new and complementary way.

DRL is committed to advancing equity and support for underserved and underrepresented communities. Programs should seek strategies for integration and inclusion of individuals/organizations/beneficiaries that can bring perspectives based on their religion, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, national origin, age, genetic information, marital status, parental status, pregnancy, political affiliation, or veteran's status. Programs should be demand-driven and locally led to the extent possible.

To maximize the impact and sustainability of the award(s) that result(s) from this RSOI/NOFO, DRL reserves the right to execute a non-competitive continuation amendment(s). Any non-competitive continuation is contingent on performance and **availability of funds**. A non-competitive continuation is not guaranteed; the Department of State reserves the right to exercise or not exercise the option to issue non-competitive continuation amendment(s).

Activities that are **not** typically considered competitive include, but are not limited, to:

- The provision of large amounts of humanitarian assistance;
- English language instruction;
- Development of high-tech computer or communications software and/or hardware;
- Purely academic exchanges or fellowships;
- External exchanges or fellowships lasting longer than six months;
- Off-shore activities that are not clearly linked to in-country initiatives and impact or are not necessary due to security concerns;
- Theoretical explorations of human rights or democracy issues, including projects aimed primarily at research and evaluation that do not incorporate training or capacity-building for local civil society;
- Micro-loans or similar small business development initiatives;

- Initiatives directed towards a diaspora community rather than current residents of targeted countries.

II. Eligibility Information

Organizations submitting SOIs must meet the following criteria:

- Be a U.S.- or foreign-based non-profit/non-governmental organization (NGO), or a public international organization; or
- Be a private, public, or state institution of higher education; or
- Be a for-profit organization or business (noting there are restrictions on payment of fees and/or profits under grants and cooperative agreements, including those outlined in 48 CFR 30, “Cost Accounting Standards Administration”, and 48 CFR 31, “Contract Cost Principles and Procedures”);
- Have existing, or the capacity to develop, active partnerships with thematic or in-country partners, entities, and relevant stakeholders including private sector partner and NGOs; and,
- Have demonstrable experience administering successful and preferably similar programs. DRL reserves the right to request additional background information on organizations that do not have previous experience administering federal awards. These applicants may be subject to limited funding on a pilot basis.

Applicants may **form consortia** and submit a combined SOI. However, one organization should be designated as the lead applicant with the other members as sub-award partners.

DRL’s preference is to work with **non-profit** entities; however, there may be some occasions when a for-profit entity is best suited. Applications submitted by for-profit entities may be subject to additional review following the panel selection process. Additionally, the Department of State prohibits profit to for-profit or commercial organizations under its assistance awards. Profit is defined as any amount in excess of allowable direct and indirect costs. The allowability of costs incurred by commercial organizations is determined in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) at 48 CFR 30, Cost Accounting Standards Administration, and 48 CFR 31 Contract Cost Principles and Procedures. Please see 2 CFR 200.307 for regulations regarding program income.

DRL is committed to an **anti-discrimination policy** in all of its programs and activities. DRL welcomes SOI submissions irrespective of race, color, religion, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, pregnancy, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, veteran’s status, or other status. DRL requires all programs to be non-discriminatory and expects implementers to include strategies for nondiscrimination of individuals/organizations/beneficiaries.

Any applicant listed on the Excluded Parties List System in the [System for Award Management \(SAM.gov\)](https://www.sam.gov) (www.sam.gov) and/or has a current debt to the U.S. government is not eligible to

apply for an assistance award in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR,1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR,1989 Comp., p. 235), “Debarment and Suspension.” Additionally, no entity or person listed on the Excluded Parties List System in SAM.gov can participate in any activities under an award. All applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Excluded Parties List System in SAM.gov to ensure that no ineligible entity or person is included in their application.

Organizations are not required to have a valid Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number—formerly referred to as a DUNS (Data Universal Numbering System) number—and an active SAM.gov registration to apply for this solicitation through SAMS Domestic. **However, if a SOI is approved, these will need to be obtained before an organization is able to submit a full application. Therefore, we recommend starting the process of obtaining a UEI and SAM.gov registration as soon as possible.** Please note that there is no cost associated with UEI or SAM.gov registration.

III. Application Requirements, Deadlines, and Technical Eligibility

All SOIs must conform to DRL’s posted Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for Statements of Interest, as updated in December 2022, available at <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/programs-and-grants/>.

Complete SOI submissions **must** include the following:

1. Completed and signed **SF-424** and **SF-424B**, as directed on SAMS Domestic or Grants.gov (please refer to DRL’s PSI for SOIs for guidance on completing the SF-424); and,
2. Program Statement (not to exceed five (5) pages in Microsoft Word) that includes:
 - a. Summary Table:
 - i. Organization name
 - ii. The target country/countries;
 - iii. The total amount of funding requested from DRL, total amount of cost-share (if any), and total program amount (DRL funds + cost-share); and,
 - iv. Program length;
 - b. Problem Statement: To what need identified by independent civil society in the country of focus does the proposed project respond? Please be specific and avoid broad references to improving human rights. (not to exceed two paragraphs);
 - c. **Theory of Change:** Describe how the proposed project will address the problem statement. DRL encourages applicants to cite available research, impact evaluations or lessons learned from organizational experience to substantiate the proposed project approach. *(not to exceed two paragraphs)*;
 - d. **Project Objectives and Activities:** Clearly outline the proposed objectives and supporting activities. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable,

relevant and time bound. Activities should include detail on the number of anticipated participants, thematic focus of workshops/events/meetings, target audiences, etc. If working with a subaward partner(s), clearly delineate the role and responsibility of the primary implementer and that of the subaward partner(s) for each activity. The SOI should identify local partners as appropriate. *(between 2-3 pages);*

- e. **Expected Outcomes:** List the anticipated outcomes and provide illustrative indicators that would be used to measure impact. Avoid output-level measures as outcomes (e.g., number of people trained or percent knowledge gains). Instead, describe the impact you expect to see by the end of the project. *(not to exceed two paragraphs);*
- f. **Organizational Capacity:** Include a brief description of the applicant and partner(s) that demonstrates the applicant's and partners' expertise and capacity to implement the program and manage a U.S. government award. *(not to exceed one paragraph).*

Primary organizations can submit one SOI in response to the RSOI. SOIs that request less than \$100,000 or more than \$500,000 may be deemed technically ineligible.

Technically eligible SOIs are those which:

- 1) Arrive electronically via SAMS Domestic or Grants.gov by **11:59 PM EST on May 24, 2023, under the announcement titled "DRL Local Democracy and Human Rights Initiative," funding opportunity number SFOP0009316;**
- 2) Are in English; and,
- 3) Heed all instructions and do not violate any of the guidelines stated in this solicitation and the PSI for Statements of Interest.

For all SOI documents please ensure:

- 1) All pages are numbered;
- 2) All documents are formatted to 8 ½ x 11 paper; and,
- 3) All documents are single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins. Captions and footnotes may be 10-point Times New Roman font. Font sizes in charts and tables can be reformatted to fit within one page width.

Grants.gov and SAMS Domestic automatically log the date and time an application submission is made, and the Department of State will use this information to determine whether an application has been submitted on time. Late applications are neither reviewed nor considered. Known system errors caused by Grants.gov or SAMS Domestic (<https://mygrants.service-now.com>) that are outside of the applicant's control will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should not expect a notification upon DRL receiving their

application. DRL will **not** accept SOIs submitted via email, fax, the postal system, delivery companies, or couriers. DRL strongly encourages all applicants to submit SOIs before **May 24, 2023**, to ensure that the SOI has been received and is complete.

IV. Review and Selection Process

DRL strives to ensure that each application receives a balanced evaluation by a DRL review panel. The Department's Office of Acquisitions Management (AQM) will determine technical eligibility for all SOI submissions. All technically eligible SOIs will then be reviewed against the same four criteria by a DRL review panel: quality of program idea, addressing barriers to equal participation, program planning, and ability to achieve objectives/institutional capacity.

Additionally, the review panel will evaluate how the SOI meets the solicitation request, U.S. foreign policy goals, and DRL's overall priority needs. Panelists review each SOI individually against the evaluation criteria, not against competing SOIs. To ensure all SOIs receive a balanced evaluation, the DRL review panel will review the first page of the SOI up to the page limit and no further. All panelists must sign non-disclosure agreements and conflict of interest agreements.

In most cases, the DRL review panel includes representatives from DRL policy and program offices. Once a SOI is approved, selected applicants will be invited to submit full proposal applications based on their SOIs. Unless directed otherwise by the organization, DRL may also refer SOIs for possible consideration in other U.S. government related funding opportunities.

The review panel may provide conditions and/or recommendations on SOIs to enhance the proposed program, which must be addressed by the organization in the full proposal application. To ensure effective use of limited DRL funds, conditions and recommendations may include requests to increase, decrease, clarify, and/or justify costs and program activities.

DRL's Front Office reserves the right to make a final determination regarding all funding matters, pending funding availability.

Review Criteria

Quality of Program Idea

SOIs should be responsive to the program framework and policy objectives identified in the RSOI, appropriate in the country/regional context, and should exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to DRL's mission of promoting human rights and democracy. Projects should have the potential to have an immediate impact leading to long-term, sustainable reforms. DRL prefers new approaches that do not duplicate efforts by other entities. This does not exclude from consideration projects that improve upon or expand existing successful projects in a new and complementary way. In countries where similar activities are already taking place, an explanation should be provided as to how new activities will not duplicate or

merely add to existing activities and how these efforts will be coordinated. SOIs that promote creative approaches to recognized ongoing challenges are highly encouraged. DRL prioritizes project proposals with inclusive approaches for advancing these rights.

Addressing Barriers to Equal Participation

DRL strives to ensure its projects advance the rights and uphold the dignity of all persons. As the U.S. government's lead bureau dedicated to promoting democratic governance, DRL requests a programming approach dedicated to strengthening inclusive societies as a necessary pillar of strong democracies. Discrimination, violence, inequity, and inequality targeting any members of society undermines collective security and threatens democracy. DRL prioritizes inclusive and integrated program models that assess and address the barriers to access for individuals and groups based on their race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. Applicants should describe how programming will impact all of its beneficiaries, including support for underserved and underrepresented communities.

Program Planning

A strong SOI will include a clear articulation of how the proposed program activities and expected results (both outputs and outcomes) contribute to specific program objectives and the overall program goal. Objectives should be ambitious, yet measurable, results-focused, and achievable in a reasonable time frame.

Ability to Achieve Objectives/Institutional Capacity

SOIs should address how the program will engage relevant stakeholders and should identify local partners as appropriate. If local partners are identified, applicants should describe the division of labor among the applicant and any local partners. SOIs should demonstrate the organization's expertise and previous experience in administering programs, preferably similar programs targeting the requested program area or similarly challenging environments.

For additional guidance, please see DRL's posted Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for Statements of Interest, as updated in December 2022, available at <https://www.state.gov/proposal-submission-instructions/>.

V. Additional Information

DRL will not consider applications that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative of a designated terrorist organization. Please refer the link for Foreign Terrorist Organizations: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>. Project activities whose direct beneficiaries are foreign militaries or paramilitary groups or individuals will not be considered for DRL funding given purpose limitations on funding.

In accordance with Department of State policy for terrorism, applicants are advised that successful passing of vetting to evaluate the risk that funds may benefit terrorists or their

supporters is a condition of award. If chosen for an award, applicants will be asked to submit information required by DS Form 4184, Risk Analysis Information (attached to this solicitation) about their company and its principal personnel. Vetting information is also required for all sub-award performance on assistance awards identified by the Department of State as presenting a risk of terrorist financing. Vetting information may also be requested for project beneficiaries and participants. Failure to submit information when requested, or failure to pass vetting, may be grounds for rejecting your proposal prior to award.

The Leahy Law prohibits Department foreign assistance funds from supporting foreign security force units if the Secretary of State has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. Per [22 USC §2378d\(a\) \(2017\)](#), “No assistance shall be furnished under this chapter [FOREIGN ASSISTANCE] or the Arms Export Control Act [22 USC 2751 et seq.] to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country if the Secretary of State has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.” Restrictions may apply to any proposed assistance to police or other law enforcement. Among these, pursuant to section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (FAA), no assistance provided through this funding opportunity may be furnished to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country when there is credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. In accordance with the requirements of section 620M of the FAA, also known as the Leahy law, project beneficiaries or participants from a foreign government’s security forces may need to be vetted by the Department before the provision of any assistance. If a proposed grant or cooperative agreement will provide assistance to foreign security forces or personnel, compliance with the Leahy Law is required.

Organizations should be aware that DRL understands that some information contained in SOIs may be considered sensitive or proprietary and will make appropriate efforts to protect such information. However, organizations are advised that DRL cannot guarantee that such information will not be disclosed, including pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or other similar statutes.

Organizations should also be aware that if ultimately selected for an award, DRL requires all recipients of foreign assistance funding to comply with all applicable Department and Federal laws and regulations, including but not limited to the following: The Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards set forth in 2 CFR Chapter 200 (Sub-Chapters A through F) shall apply to all non-Federal entities, except for assistance awards to Individuals and Foreign Public Entities. Sub-Chapters A through E shall apply to all foreign organizations, and Sub-Chapters A through D shall apply to all U.S. and foreign for-profit entities. The applicant/recipient of the award and any sub-recipient under the award must comply with all applicable terms and conditions, in addition to the assurance and certifications made part of the Notice of Award. The Department’s Standard Terms and Conditions can be viewed at <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>.

The information in this solicitation and DRL's PSI for SOIs, as updated in December 2022, is binding and may not be modified by any DRL representative. **Explanatory information provided by DRL that contradicts this language will not be binding.** Issuance of the solicitation and negotiation of SOIs or applications does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government. DRL reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program evaluation requirements.

This solicitation will appear on www.grants.gov, [SAMS Domestic \(https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com\)](https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com), and DRL's website <https://www.state.gov/statements-of-interest-requests-for-proposals-and-notices-of-funding-opportunity/>.

Background Information on DRL and DRL Funding

DRL has the mission of promoting democracy and protecting human rights globally. DRL supports programs that uphold democratic principles, support and strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, prevent atrocities, combat and prevent violent extremism, and build civil society around the world. DRL typically focuses its work in countries with egregious human rights violations, where democracy and human rights advocates are under pressure, and where governments are undemocratic or in transition.

Additional background information on DRL and the human rights report can be found on <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-civilian-security-democracy-and-human-rights/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/>.

VI. Contact Information

SAMS Domestic Help Desk:

For assistance with SAMS Domestic accounts and technical issues related to the system, please contact the ILMS help desk by phone at +1 (888) 313-4567 (toll charges apply for international callers) or through the Self Service online portal that can be accessed from <https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com/>. Customer support is available 24/7.

Please note that establishing an account in SAMS Domestic may require the use of smartphone for multi-factor authentication (MFA). If an applicant does not have accessibility to a smartphone during the time of creating an account, please contact the helpdesk and request instructions on MFA for Windows PC.

Grants.gov Helpdesk:

For assistance with Grants.gov accounts and technical issues related to using the system, please call the Contact Center at +1 (800) 518-4726 or email support@grants.gov. The Contact Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except federal holidays.

See <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/federal-holidays/> for a list of federal holidays.

For technical questions related to this solicitation, please contact DRLWHAGrants@state.gov.

Except for technical submission questions, during the RSOI period U.S. Department of State staff in Washington and overseas shall not discuss this competition with applicants until the entire proposal review process has been completed and rejection and approval letters have been transmitted.