

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs
Notice of Funding Opportunity: Statement of Interest

Funding Opportunity Title: Afghan Women Economic Empowerment Through Leveraging the Private Sector

Funding Opportunity Number: SFOP0008919

Deadline for Applications: June 20, 2022

Deadline for receipt of questions: May 30, 2022

CFDA Number: 19.108

Total Amount Available: Up to \$1,481,481

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) announces a Request for Statements of Interest (RSOI) for organizations to submit a statement of interest (SOI) to carry out a \$1.5 million program to advance the economic empowerment of Afghan women in Afghanistan and other South and Central Asian countries. The proposed program would launch a platform through which businesses, non-profits, and international government leaders in the U.S. and countries around the world would be able to sustainably partner with Afghan women leaders and Afghan women-led private and non-profit organizations to co-create programs that advance Afghan women's economic security and economic resilience, including by fostering women's entrepreneurship, participation in agricultural value chains, participation in e-commerce and the digital economy, and women artisans' connectivity with global markets. Priority will be given to organizations that provide cost-share and outline previous experience developing partnerships with the private sector. In addition to proposing activities to take place inside Afghanistan, proposed programs may include activities in support of Afghan women residing in other countries in the region in their scope. The proposed program should build connectivity or allow for connection with other programs that provide women's mental health access, support women's safety and other services critical to support Afghan women following the Taliban takeover. SCA invites organizations interested in potential funding to submit SOI applications outlining program concepts that reflect this goal.

The submission of a Statement of Interest and Capacity (SOI) is the first step in a multi-phased, collaborative program development process. Applicants must first submit a concise statement of interest, up to four-pages, designed to clearly communicate the program idea and objectives. This is not a full proposal. The purpose of the SOI process is to allow applicants to submit program ideas for evaluation prior to requiring the development of a full proposal application. Upon review of eligible SOIs, SCA will invite selected applicants to participate in a virtual one-day co-creation workshop to further develop the proposed concepts through interactive and collaborative discussions with Afghan women leaders and women-led organizations, U.S. government officials, subject matter experts, and other potential implementing partners. Only participants of the workshop will be eligible to submit a full proposal application. Full proposals will go through a second merit review before final funding decisions are made.

PURPOSE:

SCA invites SOIs for programs that will create a self-sustaining platform through which businesses, non-profits, including women-led organizations, and government leaders in the U.S. and countries around the world are able to work together to improve the economic empowerment of Afghan women.

BACKGROUND:

Afghanistan ranks among the least favorable on the Gender Inequality Index with a literacy rate for women that is among the lowest in the world. According to the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 85 percent of Afghanistan's total enterprises yet only three percent of registered SMEs were run by women as of May 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Taliban takeover only exacerbated women's economic vulnerability and marginalization. A survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee found that 63 percent of Afghan women surveyed who work in the informal sector lost their jobs during the pandemic, losses which extended to women entrepreneurs. In a more recent survey, for instance, AWCCI discovered that 80 percent of women-led businesses in Afghanistan closed due to COVID-19. The Taliban takeover has constrained the freedom of women and limited the professions in which women are allowed to work, and many women have been unable to return to work due to these restrictions, the overall economic, banking, and liquidity crisis, as well as general fear and safety.

Forced displacement and migration has further compounded Afghan women's economic vulnerability, leaving Afghan women and Afghan women refugees among the most economically vulnerable populations globally. Economic insecurity exacerbates existing trauma and post-traumatic stress among other mental health challenges and leaves women vulnerable to gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, among other crimes. Further, it robs women of the agency critical to rebuild their lives amidst wholesale change in Afghanistan's economic, social, and political landscape. For refugees, it can severely hinder relocation and a successful transition to a new life.

By creating a coalition of private sector, civil society, and government institutions in the United States, Afghanistan, and third countries, as appropriate, the program would serve to disrupt the economic vulnerability faced by Afghan women amidst the ongoing pandemic, Taliban takeover, and ensuing economic and humanitarian crises.

THE PROCESS:**RSOI and Co-Creation**

Through the RSOI and co-creation workshop process, SCA aims to bring non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the U.S. interagency together to develop creative and inclusive approaches to the creation of a platform through which Afghan women leaders and women-led organizations, businesses, non-profits, and international government leaders in the U.S. and countries around the world will work together to improve the economic empowerment of Afghan women. The intent of the co-creation process is to foster collaboration across organizations with different perspectives and experiences, to co-design, co-develop, pilot, and innovate practical, inclusive, and scalable solutions to complex problem sets.

Due to the collaborative nature of the co-creation workshop, organizations submitting SOICs will need to feel comfortable discussing their proposed approach with other applicants as well as participating experts and observers, including but not limited to non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the U.S. interagency.

Following the co-creation workshop, applicants with accepted SOIs will be invited to submit full proposal applications integrating feedback and recommendations from the workshop through a future limited competition process. **Only applicants who have participated in the workshop will be eligible to submit full proposal applications.**

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Length of performance period: Up to 60 months

Number of awards anticipated: 1 award

Award amount: Up to \$1,481,481

Type of Funding: ESF

Anticipated program start date: Any time before September 30, 2022

This notice is subject to availability of funding.

Funding Instrument Type: Cooperative agreement

SCA retains the right to execute non-competitive continuation amendment(s). Any amendment(s) is based on performance, is pending availability of funds and is not guaranteed.)

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants

- The following organizations are eligible to apply:
- ***Both U.S. and foreign Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations***
- ***Both U.S. and foreign Educational institutions***
- ***Both U.S. and foreign For-profit organizations***
- ***Both U.S. and foreign Public Entities (FPE)***

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing is highly encouraged. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal.

3. In order to be eligible to receive an award, all organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number issued via www.SAM.gov as well as a valid registration on www.SAM.gov. Please see Section E.2 for more information. Individuals are not required to

have a UEI or be registered in SAM.gov.

4. Other Eligibility Requirements

Applicants are only allowed to submit one SOI per organization, per round though applicants can form partnerships to support multiple applications. If more than one SOI is submitted from an organization, all SOIs from that institution will be considered ineligible for funding. An organization or individual selected for participation in the co-creation workshop may not be considered for additional funding.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Application Package

Application forms required below are available at SAMS Domestic and grants.gov

2. Content and Form of Application Submission *(NOTE: Below is sample language -- Post/bureau should review and edit this section as appropriate)*

Please follow all instructions below carefully. SOIs that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated requirements may be ineligible.

Content of application

Please ensure the following:

- Documents are in English
- All documents are formatted to 8 ½ x 11 paper
- All pages are numbered
- All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.
- The anticipated total budget amount is in U.S. dollars

The following documents are **required**:

1. **Concept Note (4 pages maximum):** The concept should contain sufficient information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the applicant wants to do. You may use your own format, but it must include all the items below.
 - **A table listing:**
 - Name of the organization;
 - The target country/countries;
 - The total amount of funding requested, total amount of cost-share (if any), and total program amount; and,
 - Program length;

- **A synopsis of how the program will advance Afghan women's economic security in Afghanistan or in third countries. The following elements should be included:**
 - A reflection of the applicant's understanding of the economic landscape for Afghan women in third countries and inside Afghanistan;
 - A general plan to incorporate Afghan women, civil society leaders, and/or women-led organizations;
 - A general description of the platform the program will create, including:
 1. A general plan of how the platform will enable co-creation processes with partners
 2. A general plan for identifying, soliciting, and on-boarding new partners and affiliates
 3. A draft governance structure that allows for Department of State, applicant and future partners to shape programming decisions and make shared decisions including but not limited to: initiatives, partner onboarding, branding, communication, and public events etc.
 4. A general description of how the platform will receive, manage, and make use of additional resources received outside of the initial program budget, including from private sector partners, to further the program goal.
 - How the program will leverage private sector partnerships that support one or more of the following key pillars:
 1. **Women's entrepreneurship:** this could include efforts to propel women forward as entrepreneurs or micro-entrepreneurs advancing livelihoods, access to supply/value chains; e-commerce and the digital economy; financial access and inclusion and sustainable; or market driven economic opportunities, including as artisans;
 2. **Foster women's workforce participation and career enhancing educational opportunities:** foster partnerships with the private sector that offer women new or advanced opportunities in the workforce, including through recruitment, career enhancing capacity building, upskilling or mentorship; and access to ICT; and/or
 3. **Foster rural women's economic advancement:** efforts that promote women's leadership in the rural economy including through value added agro-processing; ownership over productive assets; and women's leadership in agricultural supply chains.
 - How the program might coordinate with, involve, leverage, or tie-in existing initiatives that support gender-based violence prevention and response, foster women's mental health access and resilience; and/or foster accessibility for individuals living with disabilities to increase program efficacy in support of the overall goal.
- **How the applicant will conduct a gender and inclusion analysis, apply Do No Harm principles, and conduct robust risk mitigation planning, including safeguards to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).**

- **A brief description of the applicant(s) that demonstrates the applicant(s) expertise and capacity to implement the program and manage a U.S. government award.**

3. Submission Dates and Times

SOIs are due no later than 11:59 PM EST June 20, 2022.

4. Funding Restrictions

None at this stage.

5. Other Submission Requirements

All application materials must be submitted **electronically through www.Grants.gov or SAMS Domestic.**

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Criteria

Each SOI will be evaluated and rated on the basis of the evaluation criteria outlined below. Criteria are listed in order of importance.

Quality and Feasibility of the Program Idea (40 points):

- The concept responds to the RSOI and is appropriate in the context of the proposed country/region.
- The concept exhibits originality but is feasible.
- The concept includes a reasonable implementation timeline.
- The concept directly connects proposed activities with the desired outcomes (goals and objectives).
- The concept has demonstrated consultation with Afghan women leaders and/or Afghan women-led organizations

Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives (20 points):

- The concept provides a general plan of proposed project activities and includes a clear articulation of how these activities will contribute to or align with the overall project's goals and objectives.
- A general plan to incorporate Afghan women, civil society leaders, and/or women-led organizations
- Concept provides a summary of how the implementer will monitor and evaluate the project's progress and overall achievement of its objectives.

- The concept addresses how the project will engage or obtain support from the private sector and other relevant Afghan and international stakeholders.

Organizational Capacity and Record on Previous Grants (20 points):

- The concept demonstrates an institutional record of previous successfully implemented projects in Afghanistan and on the issues and regions outlined in this RSOI.
- The concept articulates past performance and experience in working with local, Afghan-led organizations, communities, and the private sector.

Coordination with Existing initiatives (10 points):

- The concept provides a general plan of how existing initiatives would be leveraged to support gender-based violence prevention and response, foster women's mental health access and resilience; and/or foster accessibility for individuals living with disabilities.

Gender and Inclusion Analysis, Do No Harm (10 points):

- Applicant demonstrates plans and capacity for effectively applying a gender and inclusion analysis to project design and implementation.
- Applicant describes sound approaches to inclusion, including but not limited to ethnic and religious minorities and other underrepresented and historically marginalized groups.
- Applicant demonstrates application of Do No Harm and ability to conduct robust risk mitigation planning, including safeguards to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).

2. Review and Selection Process

SCA will conduct a merit review of all eligible applications as outlined in this RSOI. SOIs will be reviewed by an independent review panel consisting of qualified subject matter experts from other Department of State bureaus and offices, U.S. Embassies, or other U.S. Government agencies to be invited to participate in co-creation workshop.

The submission of a SOI is the first step in a multi-phased, collaborative process. Applicants must first submit a SOI, which is a concise concept note designed to clearly communicate a program idea and its objectives before the development of a full proposal application for this project.

SCA will review SOIs and based on favorable evaluation by the panel, selected participants will receive an invitation from SCA to participate in the virtual co-creation workshop, which will likely be **held in early July 2022**. Please note that selected participants for the workshop are not guaranteed funding. The amount of resources made available under this RSOIC will depend on the number of concept notes received and the availability of funds. SCA reserves the right to fund any or none of the proposals submitted and discussed at the co-creation workshop.

The SOIC process is to allow applicants the opportunity to submit program ideas for SCA to evaluate prior to a co-creation workshop and development of full proposal applications. The co-creation workshop is meant to develop some or all of their ideas into full proposal applications.

Following the co-creation workshop and the selection of participants whose ideas are ripe for potential implementation, recipients will be invited to submit applications via a limited competition notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) process in SAMS Domestic and write formal proposal applications with the end goal of signing at least one federal award by September 2022.

Required Registrations:

All organizations applying for grants (except individuals) must obtain these registrations. All are free of charge:

- www.SAM.gov registration which will generate a UEI
- NCAGE/CAGE code

Any applicant with an exclusion in the System for Award Management (SAM) 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.”

The Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards. SAM.gov is the Federal government's primary database for complying with FFATA reporting requirements. OMB designated SAM.gov as the central repository to facilitate applicant and recipient use of a single public website that consolidates data on all federal financial assistance. Under the law, it is mandatory to register in SAM.gov.

Starting April 2022, the UEI will be assigned when an organization registers or renews its registration in SAM.gov at www.SAM.gov. To access SAM.gov an organization is required to have a Login.gov account. Organization can create an account at <https://login.gov/>. As a reminder, organizations need to renew its sam.gov registration annually.

US-based organizations: A CAGE code will be automatically assigned when the U.S. organizations registers in www.sam.gov. CAGE must be renewed every 5 years. Site for CAGE: <https://cage.dla.mil/Home/UsageAgree>. Grantees may be asked for more information to finalized and must comply.

Foreign-based organizations: Must apply for a NCAGE code before registering in SAM.gov. Go to: <https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/CageTool/home> to apply for a NCAGE code. NCAGE codes must be renewed every 5 years.

It is in the organization’s best interest to check if their CAGE/or NCAGE codes are active. Organizations are required to register/or renew their CAGE or NCAGE codes **prior** to

registering or renewing www.sam.gov . Both registration and renewals for both CAGE and NCAGE can take up to 10 days. Organization's legal address in NCAGE/CAGE must mirror www.sam.gov.

www.sam.gov requires all entities to renew their registration once a year in order to maintain an active registration status in SAM.gov. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure it has an active registration in SAM.gov.

If an organization plans to issue a sub-contract or sub-award, those sub-awardees must also have a unique entity identifier (UEI number). Those entities can register for a UEI only at SAM.gov.

If an organization does not have an active registration in SAM.gov prior to submitting an application, the application will be deemed **ineligible**. All organizations applying for grants (except individuals) must obtain these registrations, the latter are free of charge.

Note: As of April 2022, a DUNS number is no longer required.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Terms and Conditions: Before submitting the SOIC, applicants should review all the terms and conditions and required certifications which will apply if a full proposal application is requested and awarded, to ensure that they will be able to comply. These include:

2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 600, and the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions which are available at: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>.

G. FEDERAL AWARDED AGENCY CONTACTS

If you have any questions about the SOI application process, please contact: (pritchardch@state.gov)

A Bidding Conference will be held via Microsoft Teams video conference in early June (date to be determined) to answer questions from all potential applicants. Please contact pritchardch@state.gov for an invitation to this conference.