

Department of State
Public Notice

**Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Request for Statements of Interest: FY 2024
China Programs**

I. Requested Objectives for Statements of Interest

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) seeks Statements of Interest (SOIs) from organizations interested in implementing programs to counter human rights abuses and promote democratic norms and values in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

PLEASE NOTE: Applicants should immediately access [MyGrants](#) or www.grants.gov to set up a username and password. For instructions on how to register with MyGrants 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 SOI process, which is a two-step process, allows applicants to submit program ideas for DRL to evaluate before requiring a full proposal. As a first step, applicants must submit a brief, three-page concept note that clearly explains a program idea and its objectives before developing a full proposal application. After reviewing eligible SOIs, DRL will invite selected applicants to expand on their program ideas by submitting a full proposal application. Full proposals will go through a second review before funding recommendations are submitted to the DRL Assistant Secretary for approval, depending on funding availability.

DRL invites organizations to submit a maximum of two SOIs for programs outlined below.

Applicants may submit one SOI per category, or two statements of interest for a single category, but no more than two SOIs in total for this RSOI.

SOIs should advance objectives in either or both of the following categories:

I. Freedom of Expression and Access to Information. Proposed SOIs should promote freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and/or access to information, and should demonstrate the ability to advance one or more of the following objectives:

- Empower citizens of the PRC, PRC activists and human rights defenders globally to exercise their rights to freedom of expression on topics related to human rights and fundamental freedoms without fear of government reprisal.
- Build resilience against and effectively counter false narratives, censorship and propaganda campaigns implemented by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against human rights defenders, activists, marginalized communities, and other targeted groups in the PRC and around the world.

- Document and counter CCP use of advanced technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), to engage in systematic censorship, surveillance, and repression of targeted individuals and groups.
- Enable citizens of the PRC to freely access and critically evaluate information as it relates to their ability to promote government accountability and engage in civic life.
- Strengthen the capacity of independent journalists, media organizations, and other credible information providers to disseminate uncensored, diverse, and reliable information on human rights, fundamental freedoms, transparent and representative governance, and other socially relevant issues.
- Expand platforms and networks of independent journalists, researchers, civil society organizations, and other groups engaged in evidence-based calls for increased government transparency, governance reform, and implementation of reforms that strengthen protections of human rights and democratic values in the PRC.
- Promote PRC government information transparency and accountability at national and local levels.

II. Human Rights, Rule of Law, and Labor Rights. Proposed SOIs should include efforts to safeguard human rights, promote the rule of law, and/or respect labor rights in the PRC and demonstrate ability to advance one or more of the following objectives:

- Empower and enable human rights defenders, lawyers, and independent civil society actors to advocate for human rights and fundamental freedoms of all PRC citizens.
- Counter human rights abuses of persons or groups targeted by the PRC government both inside and outside of China, including targets of transnational repression.
- Encourage the promotion of government and societal respect for freedom of religion or belief.
- Promote accountability and oversight of PRC government, private sector, and other entities complicit in the perpetration of or failure to prevent systematic human rights abuses and atrocities, including forced labor.
- Raise awareness of and resilience to PRC influence and coercion campaigns and tactics in international and transnational settings and multilateral forums.
- Enable lawyers, human rights defenders, civil society actors, and other activists to advance rights-respecting reforms of PRC policies, governance mechanisms, and practices.
- Strengthen and institutionalize civic engagement and participation in government policy formation and decision-making at all levels of government.
- Improve rights awareness and expand access to justice for PRC citizens.
- Increase the capacities of human rights-focused civil society groups and their ability to work together across movements and sectors to advocate for the rights of the groups they represent.
- Promote internationally recognized labor rights, address forced labor issues, and call for improved working conditions, at the enterprise and/or industry sector level.

- Engage on human rights-focused issues of broad concern to the Chinese public, including environmental issues, food safety, employment discrimination, government corruption, land and property disputes, and other cross-cutting issues.
- Amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized or persecuted communities and enhance capacities of activists to advocate for access to justice, equal rights, and fair treatment of these groups.
- Provide extended professional development opportunities and enhance the resilience of human rights defenders, lawyers, and/or activists.

All SOI proposals must:

- Clearly indicate which category the SOI falls under. A single SOI may include objectives from two different categories, but must clearly indicate which category the SOI falls under overall.
- Include a brief theory of change that clearly outlines how project activities support project outcomes and objectives. Applicants are encouraged to review [DRL's Guide to Program Monitoring and Evaluation](#) and [Sample Logic Model Template](#). Please note that due to the three-page limit, a full logic model is not required at the SOI stage – a brief paragraph outlining the project's theory of change is sufficient.
- Include a brief feasibility analysis, including assessing operating environment risk and potential mitigation measures.
- Demonstrate broad impact (i.e., beyond a small set of participants).

All programs should aim to have impact that leads to reforms and the potential for sustainability beyond DRL resources. DRL prefers to support new and creative approaches rather than repeating past efforts. However, programs that build on or expand successful, existing efforts in a new and complementary way are also considered. Programs should be driven by local needs and led by local communities to the extent possible.

DRL will entertain applications for continuation grants funded under these awards beyond the initial budget period on a non-competitive basis subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

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

- Provision of humanitarian aid;
- English language instruction;
- Development of advanced computer or communications software and/or hardware;
- Purely academic research, exchanges, or fellowships;
- Off-shore activities that do not benefit stakeholders or beneficiaries with clear and distinct ties to the target country;
- External exchanges or fellowships lasting longer than six months;
- Theoretical studies 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 single ethnic, religious, or cultural group without consideration of cross-community coordination and/or advocacy;
- Efforts that do not feature significant involvement of individuals or groups from the target country in program design and implementation.

II. Eligibility Information

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- Foreign-based non-profit organizations/nongovernment organizations (NGO);
- U.S.-based non-profit organizations/NGOs with or without 501(c)(3) status;
- Public International Organizations;
- Private, public, or state institutions of higher education;
- For-profit organizations or businesses.

Applicants should have, or be able to develop, active partnerships with thematic or local partners, entities, and relevant stakeholders, including private sector partners and NGOs. Applicants should also have **proven experience** in managing successful and preferably similar projects. DRL encourages applications from foreign-based NGOs located in the regions or countries relevant to this Request for Statements of Interest (RSOI).

Applicants may **form consortia** to combine different expertise into one comprehensive proposal. However, only one organization can be designated as the prime applicant, while the remaining organizations must be designated as partners or sub-awardees. The prime applicant must meet the eligibility criteria listed above. DRL may ask for more background information from applicants without previous federal grant experience, and these applicants might receive limited funding on a trial basis.

DRL is committed to an **anti-discrimination** policy in all its programs and activities. DRL welcomes applications regardless of race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or other status. DRL looks for applications that show the recipient does not discriminate against any beneficiaries when implementing a potential award. This means not withholding, negatively affecting, or denying equitable access to the benefits of the award based on any factor not stated in the award. This includes race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, disability, age, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, or veteran status. The recipient should insert this provision, including this paragraph, in all sub-grants and contracts under a potential award.

Any applicant listed on the Excluded Parties List System in the [System for Award Management \(SAM.gov\)](http://www.sam.gov) (www.sam.gov) or who has a current debt to the U.S. government is not eligible to apply for an assistance award, according to OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 and 12689, "Debarment and Suspension." Additionally, no entity or

person listed on the Excluded Parties List System in SAM.gov can take part in any activities under an award. All applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Excluded Parties List System in SAM.gov to make sure no ineligible entity or person is included in their application.

Organizations do not need a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) or an active SAM.gov registration to apply for this solicitation in MyGrants. **However, if a SOI is approved, they will need to get these before submitting 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 follow DRL's posted Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for Statements of Interest, as updated in December 2024, available at <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/programs-and-grants/>.

Complete SOI submissions **must** include:

1. Completed and signed **SF-424** and **SF-424B** forms, as directed on MyGrants or Grants.gov (refer to DRL's PSI for SOIs for guidance on completing the SF-424); and,
2. A **program statement** (no more than three pages in Microsoft Word) that includes:
 - A table listing:
 - Name of the organization;
 - Target country/countries;
 - Total amount of funding requested from DRL, total amount of cost-share (if any), and total program amount (DRL funds + cost-share); and,
 - Program length;
 - A brief summary of the program, including how it will have a demonstrated impact and engage relevant stakeholders. Identify local partners if appropriate.
 - A clear breakdown of the program's objectives, activities, and expected results for each objective.
 - A brief description of the applicant(s) that shows their expertise and ability to implement the program and manage a U.S. government award.

DRL invites organizations to submit a maximum of two SOIs for this RSOI. Applicants may submit one SOI per category, or two statements of interest for a single category, but no more than two SOIs in total for this RSOI. **SOIs that request less than \$500,000 or more than \$1,500,000 may be deemed technically ineligible.**

Technically eligible SOIs must:

- 1) Be submitted electronically via MyGrants or Grants.gov by **11:59 PM EST on Thursday, January 16, 2025, under the announcement titled "Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Request for Statements of Interest: FY 2024 China Programs," funding opportunity number DFOP0017082;**

- 2) Be in English; and,
- 3) Follow all instructions and not break any guidelines stated in this solicitation and the PSI for Statements of Interest.

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 Calibri font, with 1-inch margins.

DRL is not responsible for disqualification due to applicants not being registered before the due date, system errors in MyGrants or Grants.gov, or other errors in the application process. Applicants must save a screenshot of the checklist showing all documents submitted in case any document fails to upload successfully. DRL encourages organizations to **submit applications during normal business hours** (Monday – Friday, 9:00 AM-5:00 PM EST).

IV. Review and Selection Process

The warranted Grants Officer will determine technical eligibility for all applications. A review panel will evaluate all eligible SOIs based on the same criteria: quality of program idea, program planning/ability to achieve objectives, institution's record and capacity, and addressing barriers to equal participation. DRL may also take into consideration the balance of the current portfolio of active projects, including geographic or thematic diversity, if needed.

In most cases, the DRL review panel includes representatives from DRL policy and program offices. All panelists must sign non-disclosure agreements and conflicts of interest agreements. Once a SOI is approved, selected applicants will be invited to submit full proposal applications based on their SOIs. Unless directed otherwise by the applicant, DRL may also refer SOIs for possible consideration in other U.S. government funding opportunities.

DRL's review panel may give conditions and recommendations on SOIs to improve the proposed program. These must be addressed in a full proposal application. To use DRL funds effectively, conditions and recommendations may include requests to increase, decrease, clarify, or justify costs and program activities. DRL's Front Office has the final determination on all funding decisions, depending on the availability of funds.

Review Criteria

Quality of Program Idea

SOIs should align with the program framework and policy objectives in the NOFO; be suitable for the country/region; and show originality, substance, precision, and relevance to DRL's mission of promoting human rights and democracy. Programs should aim for immediate impact leading to long-term, sustainable reforms. DRL prefers new approaches that do not duplicate efforts but will consider programs that improve or expand existing successful programs in a new way. In countries where similar activities are already happening, explain

how new activities will not duplicate or just add to existing ones and how these efforts will be coordinated. Proposals that offer creative solutions to ongoing challenges are encouraged. DRL prioritizes programs with inclusive approaches for advancing these rights.

Addressing Barriers to Equal Participation

DRL aims to advance the rights and dignity of all persons. As the U.S. government's lead bureau dedicated to promoting democratic governance, DRL requests program approaches 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 programs that assess and address barriers to access for individuals and groups based on race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. The proposal should show how the program will further engagement in underserved communities and with individuals from these communities. This approach should be included in the program concept and design, as well as in implementation of all proposed activities, objectives, and monitoring. Strong proposals will provide specific analysis, measures, and targets to enhance programmatic impact by including all people in society. The goal of this approach is to bring communities and those in power together in support of more stable and secure societies.

Program Planning

A strong SOI will show how the proposed activities contribute to the overall program goal and objectives, with each activity included. Objectives should be ambitious yet measurable, results-focused, and achievable within a reasonable timeframe.

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 prime applicant and any local partners.

Institution's Record and Capacity

DRL will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants. SOIs should show a record of successful democracy and human rights programs, responsible fiscal management, and compliance with reporting requirements. Programs should have potential for continued funding beyond DRL resources.

For additional guidance, please see DRL's posted Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for Statements of Interest, as updated in December 2024, available at

<https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/programs-and-grants/>.

V. Additional Information

DRL will not consider SOIs that include support for any member, affiliate, or representative of a designated terrorist organization. For more information, refer to the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

Program activities that directly benefit foreign militaries or paramilitary groups or individuals will not be considered for DRL funding due to funding restrictions.

According to Department of State policy on terrorism, applicants are advised that successful passing of a vetting process to evaluate the risk that funds may benefit terrorists or their supporters is a condition for receiving an award. If selected for an award, applicants will need to provide information required by DS Form 4184, Risk Analysis Information 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 having a risk of terrorist financing. Vetting information may also be requested for program beneficiaries and participants. Failure to provide the requested information or to pass the vetting process may result in the proposal being rejected.

The Leahy Law prohibits Department of State 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, program 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.

Applicants 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, applicants 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 [Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations](#) (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register’s 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, and the [U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#).

The information in this RSOI and “Proposal Submission Instructions for Statements of Interest” is binding. Explanatory information provided by DRL that contradicts this language will not be binding.

Issuance of this RSOI does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

Background Information on DRL and DRL Funding

Background information on DRL and its programs 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

For **technical submission questions** related to this NOFO, please contact DRL-ChinaProgramInfo@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.

For assistance with **MyGrants** 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://afsism.servicenow.com/ilms>. Customer support is available 24/7.

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.