

Educational Advising: Supporting Access to Higher Education for Afghans

SCAKAB-24-CA-001-SCA-05092024

Questions and Answer

1. **Question:** We are unable to find the proposal format to apply for this opportunity and will be glad if you kindly forward us the proposal and budget formats so we can prepare our application before the deadline.

Answer: We do not provide a specific proposal template. However, we encourage you to review the details regarding the application package, including the format, content, and required documents, under Section D: Application and Submission Information (Page 8 – 13) of the NOFO. Additionally, you may review Annex 1. Budget category descriptions for guidance on the budget.

2. **Question:** How can the City of Earle, Arkansas apply for Educational Advising: Supporting Access to Higher Education for Afghans Department of State?

Answer: For eligibility, please see section C (page 7) of this NOFO. This funding opportunity is subject to the statutory limitation, and it is open only to the Non-profit organizations.

3. **Question:** I want to know whether an Afghan NGO that is currently active in Afghanistan is eligible to apply.

Answer: Yes, all non-profit organizations including Afghan NGOs with active operation in Afghanistan are eligible to apply for this funding opportunity.

4. **Question:** I am writing to inquire about the eligibility of our post-graduate medical education (PGME) program that spans 3 to 5 years, depending on the specialty for this grant opportunity i.e. SCAKAB-24-CA-001-SCA-05092024.

Answer: For eligibility, please see section C (page 7) of this NOFO. This funding opportunity is subject to the statutory limitation, and it is open only to the Non-profit organizations. Additionally, this funding opportunity is intended to support award with a period of performance up-to 24 months.

5. **Question:** Would you have any time to meet and discuss this grant opportunity? Would a proposal with limited focuses of for instance public health training via YouTube and also working with Afghan women on training beyond preparing for the TOEFL be too focused?

Answer: Unfortunately, we are unable to meet individually with potential applicants. However, we are happy to answer all questions. We encourage you to read thoroughly the NOFO and this Q&A document.

Regarding the design of the proposal and project ideas, we defer to the potential applicants to suggest ideas and strategies that address the program objectives outlined in the NOFO. This program aims to provide a range of educational advising services, in group and individualized sessions, to promote awareness of educational opportunities for Afghans, and build Afghan capacity to successfully apply for and participate in international higher education opportunities. This program supports increasing access to higher education and should focus on improving access to education for Afghan particularly the women. There are no specific limitations on the topics or platforms applicants can focus on to address the project objectives, as long as the proposal achieves the objectives above. When contemplating virtual-only activities, applicants should consider infrastructural realities, such as limited internet availability, bandwidth, and electricity in many areas of Afghanistan.

6. **Question:** Could you provide guidance on which universities or countries we should focus our advising efforts on for the Afghan students? Are there specific institutions or regions you recommend?

Answer: We defer to the potential applicants to identify potential higher education partners in support of this opportunity. The primary audience for this project is currently participating in, or having recently completed, USG sponsored programs.

7. **Question:** Is English proficiency a required criterion for the students we advise? Given the limited availability of standardized test centers in Afghanistan, should we consider including the establishment of a test center in our proposal?

Answer: English proficiency is not a required section criteria. We encourage applicants to recruit a diverse set of participants. It is not recommended to establish an in-person test center in Afghanistan; however, applicants could suggest virtual and online advising centers and test platforms such as TOEFL, and app-based learning platforms , for the students to obtain English proficiency tests.

8. **Question:** How will the success of the project/proposals be evaluated? Is there a specific number of students we should aim to include as our target group for the project?

Answer: The applications will be evaluated and rated based on selection criteria listed under section E of this NOFO.

We defer to the applicants to propose project ideas that are innovative, inclusive, and support the target beneficiaries. We do not have a recommended number of beneficiaries.

9. **Question:** are we expected to assist students with the entire process of university admissions and visa applications, or should our focus be solely on helping them identify suitable universities and advising them on the application process?

Answer: The intent of this funding opportunity is to provide Afghan students, particularly women, with a comprehensive range of educational advising services. This includes offering information about various educational opportunities, application requirements, and the application process as well as provide mentorship to help Afghan students successfully apply for scholarship opportunities, online education programs, and any available private funding. The ultimate goal is to empower Afghan students to navigate the complexities of higher education.

10. **Question:** To ensure that our application is thorough and meets all the requirements, we would like to request your assistance with the specifics of the solicitation. Could you please provide us with detailed guidance on the requirements and expectations for this funding opportunity? Any additional information or resources you can share would be highly appreciated.

Answer: We refer you to the section A - Page 2 – 6 as well as section D of this NOFO.

11. **Question:** Has there been any collaboration with the Taliban regarding approval and security for this project, or will this responsibility fall on us?

Answer: The grantee will be responsible for any coordination with local authorities needed to successfully conduct in-person, on-the-ground activities and or virtual programming.

12. **Question:** Part of the eligibility process involves obtaining a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number from www.sam.gov. They charge \$599.00 for this service. Is this fee applicable to us, or is there a waiver available for this project?

Answer: SAM.gov is an official website of the United States government. SAM.gov is FREE to use. There is no charge or fees to get a Unique Entity ID, register your entity, and maintain your entity registration at SAM.gov.

13. **Question:** The grant is described as being for Educational Advising, Supporting Access to Higher Education for Afghans. Does this encompass the university admission and scholarship application process as well?

Answer: We defer to the applicants to propose project ideas that are innovative, inclusive, and support the target beneficiaries. Educational advising services includes all aspects of the process to find and attain educational opportunities.

14. **Question:** After the advising process is complete, what are the next steps for the selected students? Are they expected to financially sponsor themselves and handle the student visa preparations independently?

Answer: The intent of this grant is to assist students in all aspects of the process to find and attain educational opportunities.

15. **Question:** In terms of enrollment, are there opportunities for online classes as part of a university enrollment?

Answer: We defer to the applicants to identify and propose innovative and inclusive online or university enrollment opportunities that support the target beneficiaries. The Public Diplomacy Section is happy to collaborate with the selected grantee in sharing resources and information to increase Afghan students' access to higher education opportunities.

16. **Question:** Are online classes in areas like critical thinking, research, and writing considered important to the project envisioned by the NOFO?

Answer: We are open to reviewing project ideas that would enhance students' competitiveness for higher education opportunities. Writing skills needed to apply for and gain access to educational opportunities falls under this objective.

17. **Question:** Would the online enrollment be permanent or only while they are waiting for passports and visas?

Answer: The primary objectives for this program are to provide a range of educational advising services, in group and individualized sessions, to promote awareness of educational opportunities for Afghans, and build Afghan capacity to successfully apply for and participate in international higher education opportunities. We defer to the applicant to design innovative activities and strategies to address the project goal including online education activities and advising.

18. **Question:** How do you define "in-country advising network?" What would be the expectations for the implementor?

Answer: We welcome creative and innovative proposals that take steps towards in-person educational advising activities, including collaborating with local universities to offer advising educational services to Afghan youth.

19. **Question:** The NOFO says the implementer should measure success by student enrollment. How do you define enrollment? Is enrollment admission to the university or physical presence at the university?

Answer: This funding opportunity aims to provide a wide range of educational advising and services to empower Afghan students to identify, apply to, and enroll in universities, either independently or with the help of a mentor. This support may include facilitating and assisting in securing financial resources to enable participation in educational opportunities. We will evaluate the proposed activities and interventions as indicators of the project's potential success, monitoring and verifying progress through quarterly project reviews, with the expectation that these efforts will result in increased enrollment rates.

20. **Question:** Is the priority only for US institutions or does it include universities closer to Afghanistan?

Answer: The intent of this grant is to aid Afghan youth, particularly women, finding and gaining educational opportunities, wherever those opportunities may be.

21. **Question:** Does this NOFO target past USG participants living in Afghanistan or both living in and out of Afghanistan? Approximately, how many USG participants would be eligible?

Answer: There are two objectives of this grant; to aid current USG program participants in finding and attaining follow-on educational opportunities. The second objective is to support and benefit the youth, particularly women and girls, residing in Afghanistan. The grant may include a virtual activity involving Afghans in diaspora communities outside of Afghanistan for the purpose of establishing or maintaining networks and relationships for Afghans inside Afghanistan with their counterparts outside the country.

22. **Question:** Are these USG participants students from the American University in Afghanistan?

Answer: Participants of USG funded programs may include students at any institution, including the American University of Afghanistan or the American University of Central Asia, or other institutions, as well as alumni of USG programs.

23. **Question:** How will Afghan USG students be identified in the future?

Answer: Applicant can purpose a recruitment plan that may include public outreach as well as utilizing Department of State, Public Diplomacy Section's database of USG Alumni.

24. **Question:** What are the expectations for English language proficiency?

Answer: We do not have a pre-set requirement for English language proficiency but students should be competitive for placement at international institutions. We defer to the applicant to determine the level of proficiency necessary to ensure their success in the project.

25. **Question:** Afghans have major issues applying for U.S. visas and visas for other countries. How are implementors expected to support Afghan students attending universities abroad with these major visa challenges?

Answer: Issuing or getting a visa is not within the scope of this project and we do not anticipate the applicant to manage the visa process, but the applicant could connect students to the resources about visa processes and requirements.

The primary objectives for the programs are to provide a wide range of educational advising services including information about education opportunities, application requirement, securing funding, the process of attaining educational opportunities, and provide mentorship to help Afghan students to successfully apply for and complete all the required steps.

26. **Question:** Will the implementor be expected to support participants (financially and otherwise) to attend their visa appointments?

Answer: Issuing or obtaining visas is not within the scope of this project, and we do not expect the applicant to manage the visa process. However, the award recipient may provide students with resources and information regarding visa processes and requirements.

27. **Question:** If a firm does not register with System for Award Management (SAM) , can they apply for this bid. If a firm registration is under process what will be the criteria for that firm.

Answer: 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. There is no exception to this requirement.

28. **Question:** After the advising process is complete, what are the next steps for the selected students? Are they expected to financially sponsor themselves and handle the student visa preparations independently?

Answer: The intent of this funding opportunity is to provide Afghan students, particularly women and girls, with a comprehensive range of educational advising services. This includes offering information about various educational opportunities, application requirements, funding options, and the application process as well as provide mentorship to help Afghan students successfully apply for scholarship opportunities, online education programs, and any available private funding. The ultimate goal is to empower Afghan students to navigate the complexities of higher education and achieve their academic aspirations.

29. **Question:** Could you please confirm whether it is mandatory for a sub-consultant firm to be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) to participate in the aforementioned project? Alternatively, would holding a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) be considered adequate for meeting the compliance requirements?

Answer: At this stage of application process, only the prime applicant is required to have an active SAM registration and UEI number. If an award is issued to the prime applicant, the sub-awardee/sub-contractor will be required to have an active SAM registration and UEI number.

30. **Question:** I would like to understand if there are any restrictions or specific regulations that apply to a firm wishing to be involved in multiple grant applications for this funding opportunity. Is such participation allowed, and if so, what are the guidelines that need to be adhered to?

Answer: There is no limit on the number of applications an entity may submit for this NOFO.

31. **Question:** Is it necessary to cover all provinces of Afghanistan, or would it be sufficient to establish educational advising courses in select important provinces?

Answer: No, it is not required that project activities to cover all provinces of Afghanistan. however, we encourage the applicants to consider project activities and participants to reflect the diversity of Afghanistan and include women and men, Afghans from urban and rural areas, as well as a mix of ethnic groups.

32. **Question:** Are all eligible participants required to be female, or is there a chance for male participants as well?

Answer: Project participants can be both men and women; however, priority should be given to women due to the limited higher education opportunities available for women in Afghanistan.

33. **Question:** If two organizations work in partnership, do both entities need to have a SAM number, or is it only required for the entity leading the project?

Answer: At this stage of application process, only the prime applicant is required to have an active SAM registration and UEI number. If an award is issued to the prime applicant, the sub-awardee/sub-contractor will be required to have an active SAM registration and UEI number.

34. **Question:** Are we permitted to rent consultancy course offices in the targeted areas across different provinces?

Answer: Rent for office and cost in support of constancy is an allowable cost under this NOFO.

35. **Question:** Can we purchase educational equipment for mentees and hire mentors as part of the project?

Answer: Yes, it is an allowable cost.

36. **Question:** Is the selection of eligibility the responsibility of the entity or the PDS?

Answer: We anticipate issuing this award via a cooperative agreement that require substantial involvement from Department of State. The exact details will be discussed at the time of the award, but we require the prime recipient to work closely with PDS in developing selection criteria and determining eligibility.

37. **Question:** How many awards are available under this NOFO?

Answer: One award.

38. **Question:** Having an active bank account is necessary or the award be transferred via another route?

Answer: Yes, the funds will be transferred electronically via a bank account.

39. **Question:** Could the U.S. Mission extend the deadline for proposal submission to July 21?

Answer: Unfortunately, we cannot extend the deadline for proposal submission. All the application packages must be received electronically via Grants.gov before July 07, 2024, 11::59 p.m. EST.

40. **Question:** Will the U.S. Mission be open to proposals that include activities that focus exclusively on the primary audience (ages 18-35)?

Answer: Yes, we are open to receive a proposal that supports only one category of the audiences listed in the NOFO.

41. **Question:** We do not have or intend to have staff in-country. A) Would the U.S. Mission be open to proposals that include virtual activities only? B) Will the U.S. Mission accept security plans that reflect virtual activities only?

Answer: Yes, we are open to reviewing project ideas that exclusively provide virtual activities benefiting Afghans inside Afghanistan. If all project activities are designed to be virtual, a security plan reflecting only virtual activities is acceptable.

42. **Question:** Can the funding cover student costs such as exam fees and test preparation courses for required tests?

Answer: Yes, students exam fees and test preparation costs are allowable cost under this NOFO.

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