

Department of State
Public Notice

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Request for Statements of Interest:
Programs Fostering Civil, Political, Religious, and Labor Rights in Cuba

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 programs that support the U.S. policy objective to foster civil, political, and labor rights in Cuba.

PLEASE NOTE: DRL strongly encourages applicants to immediately access [SAMS Domestic](#) 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: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/275402.pdf>.

The submission of a SOI is the first step in a two-part process. Applicants must first submit a SOI, which is a concise, 3-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 review of eligible SOI's, DRL will invite selected applicants to expand their ideas into full proposal applications.

The Cuban government fails to respect and uphold the fundamental human rights of the Cuban people. The government stifles genuine political debate and civic participation among its citizens, in part by subverting its own electoral processes, resulting in a one-party system that excludes diversity of thought or opinion. The government limits civic participation by blocking the registration of independent civic and political organizations and by harassing, intimidating, and threatening citizens who engage in civic activism outside of officially-sanctioned channels. These measures inhibit constructive dialogue between citizens and their government regarding solutions to the country's social, political, and economic problems. Additionally, the government censors independent journalists, bloggers, artists, and other individuals who seek to exercise their freedom of thought, opinion, and expression, particularly when their views are deemed critical of government policies. The government prevents communities of faith and independent labor unions from organizing outside of officially-sanctioned structures and subjects many individuals who engage in these activities to acts of violence, arbitrary detention, sham trials, raids and confiscation of personal property, and restrictions on freedom of movement both domestically and abroad, all with no possibility of legal recourse or judicial review.

DRL seeks SOI's that address these systematic failures and support the realization in Cuba of the rights and principles enshrined within the following Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, among others:

- Article 5, the prohibition of torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

- Article 9, freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile;
- Article 10, the right to a free and fair trial before an independent and impartial tribunal;
- Article 12, the right to privacy;
- Article 13, the freedom of movement within one's country;
- Article 18, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- Article 19, the right to freedom of opinion and expression;
- Article 20, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, as well as the prohibition of compelling an individual to belong to an association against his or her will;
- Article 21, the right to participate in the government of one's country, which gains its authority only from the will of the people; and
- Article 23; the right to work in conditions of dignity with fair remuneration and the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of the workers' interests.

DRL's programmatic emphasis aligns with the U.S. government policy to promote human rights in Cuba. Specifically, DRL programs in Cuba aim to strengthen the capabilities of on-island, independent civil society to further the above-mentioned rights and interests of all Cuban citizens, and to overcome the limitations imposed by the Cuban government on citizens' civil, political, labor, and religious rights. DRL strives to ensure its projects also advance principles of non-discrimination with respect to race, religion, gender, and disability.

DRL seeks SOI's that inform, educate, and build support among the Cuban people for Cuban-led initiatives promoting the civil, political, labor, and religious rights of all Cuban citizens; strengthen the efficacy and increase the reach of those initiatives in Cuba; document abuses of human rights, including for use in domestic and international advocacy; and increase the free flow of information to, from, and within Cuba. SOI's should offer a specific vision for contributing to change while acknowledging obstacles that would have to be overcome. Projects should be based on consultative dialogue with local Cuban partners and present sound strategies to develop organizational capacity and foster collaboration among diverse segments of Cuba's independent civil society. Proposals should also include concrete initiatives that reflect recent developments on the island and have the potential to generate short-term impacts leading to long-term sustainable change.

DRL prefers creative approaches rather than projects that simply duplicate or add to efforts by other entities. This does not exclude projects that clearly build off existing successful projects in a new way. DRL encourages applicants to foster collaborative partnerships with each other and submit a combined SOI in which one organization is designated as the lead applicant. The applicant should also demonstrate experience programming effectively within Cuba and/or within other closed society environments. Most importantly, the applicant should clearly demonstrate that the proposed activities emanate directly from needs expressed by Cuban civil society organizations.

Successful applications in the past have proposed activities reflective of the skills, knowledge, and linguistic capabilities of target beneficiaries. Successful applications have also considered practical limitations of groups and individuals' ability to participate in project activities and

strive to ensure the beneficiary organizations will continue to function while certain members are participating in off-island activities.

Activities that are typically funded include, but are not limited to:

- Organizational assistance to Cuban civil society to improve management, strategic planning, sustainability, and collaboration of local civil society groups such as labor groups, civil and political rights groups, youth groups, and religious freedom advocates, and assistance that encourages the participation of those who may be discriminated against by society;
- Capacity building on and off the island. Off-island activities sometimes include short-term fellowships;
- Access to software that would be easily accessible in an open society, or the adaption of said software for the Cuban technological environment;
- Assistance mechanisms designed to provide independent Cuban civil society with tools, opportunities, and trainings that civil society counterparts in open societies can access;
- Incorporation of independent Cuban civil society into initiatives, fora, and coalitions led by their regional and global civil society counterparts; and
- Activities which increase access to uncensored information within the island.

Activities that typically are NOT considered competitive include:

- 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-island activities that are not clearly linked to in-country initiatives and impact or are not necessary for 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;
- Activities that go beyond an organization's demonstrated competence, or fail to provide clear evidence that activities will achieve the stated impact;
- Initiatives directed towards a diaspora community rather than current residents of Cuba.

Programs that are NOT funded:

- DRL does not fund programs for Cuba that are directed towards supporting Cuban government institutions, individuals employed by those institutions, or organizations controlled by government institutions.

To maximize the impact and sustainability of the award(s) that result(s) from this RSOI, DRL reserves the right to execute a non-competitive continuation amendment(s). The total duration of any award, including a potential non-competitive continuation amendment(s), shall not exceed 60 months or five years. 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).

DRL anticipates supporting \$5.6 million in programming for Cuba, subject to the availability of funds.

II. Eligibility Information

Organizations submitting SOI's 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"); and
- 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 occasions when a for-profit entity is best suited. For-profit entities should be aware that its application may be subject to additional review following the panel selection process, and that the Department of State generally prohibits profit under its assistance awards to for-profit or commercial organizations. 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. Program income earned by the recipient must be deducted from the program's total allowable costs in determining the net allowable costs on which the federal share of costs is based.

DRL is committed to an anti-discrimination policy in all of its programs and activities. DRL welcomes SOI submissions irrespective of race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or other status.

No entity listed on the Excluded Parties List System in the [System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#) is eligible for any assistance or can participate in any activities under an 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 listed on the EPLS can participate in any activities under an award. All applicants are strongly encouraged to review the EPLS in SAM to ensure that no ineligible entity is included.

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 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 SOI’s must conform to DRL’s posted Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for Statements of Interest, as updated in October 2017, available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/275402.pdf>.

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

1. Completed and signed SF-424 and SF424B, as directed on SAMS Domestic or Grants.gov (please refer to DRL’s PSI for SOI’s for guidance on completing the SF-424); and,
2. Program Statement (not to exceed three [3] pages in Microsoft Word) that includes:
 - a) A table listing:
 - i. Name of the organization;
 - 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) A synopsis of the program, including a brief statement on how the program will have a demonstrated impact and engage relevant stakeholders. The SOI should identify local partners as appropriate;
 - c) A concise breakdown explicitly identifying the program’s objectives and the activities and expected results that contribute to each objective; and,
 - d) 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.

An organization may submit **no more than two SOI’s. SOI’s that request less than \$500,000 or more than \$2,000,000 may be deemed technically ineligible.**

Technically eligible SOI's are those which:

- 1) Arrive electronically via SAMS Domestic or Grants.gov by **11:59 p.m. ET on Monday, February 12, 2018 under the announcement titled "DRL FY17/18 Cuba SOI," funding opportunity number SFOP0003688**
- 2) Are in English;
- 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 a submission is made, and the Department of State will use this information to determine whether it has been submitted on time. Late submissions are neither reviewed nor considered unless the DRL point of contact listed in section VI is contacted prior to the deadline and is provided with evidence of a system error caused by www.grants.gov or [SAMS Domestic \(https://mygrants.service-now.com\)](https://mygrants.service-now.com) that is outside of the applicant's control and is the sole reason for a late submission. Applicants should not expect a notification upon DRL receiving their SOI. It is the sole responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all material submitted in the SOI package is complete, accurate, and current. DRL will **not** accept SOI's submitted via email, fax, the postal system, delivery companies, or couriers. DRL strongly encourages all applicants to submit SOI's before February 4, 2018 to ensure that the SOI has been received and is complete.

IV. Review and Selection Process

The Department's Office of Acquisitions Management (AQM) will determine technical eligibility for all SOI submissions. All technically eligible SOI's will then be reviewed against the same four criteria by a DRL Review Panel: quality of program idea, inclusivity of marginalized populations, program planning, and ability to achieve objectives/institutional capacity. Additionally, the 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 SOI's. To ensure all SOI's 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 SOI's. Unless directed otherwise by the organization, DRL may also refer SOI's for possible consideration in other U.S. government related funding opportunities.

The Panel may provide conditions and/or recommendations on SOI's 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

SOI's should be responsive to the program framework and policy objectives identified 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. Proposals that promote creative approaches to recognized ongoing challenges are highly encouraged. DRL prioritizes project proposals with inclusive approaches for advancing these rights.

Inclusivity of Marginalized Populations

DRL strives to ensure its projects advance the rights and uphold the dignity of all persons. The Bureau requests an inclusive programming approach, which should encompass marginalized populations, especially those facing discrimination and violence that undermines society's collective security. To the extent possible, applicants should identify and support marginalized populations in all proposed project activities and objectives, and should provide specific analysis, measures, and corresponding targets to include them as appropriate. It assumes that interventions will not affect all segments of society in the same way. It requires stakeholders to identify and address the difference between the opportunities and barriers to equality and to design programs in a way that does not perpetuate inequality.

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

SOI's 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. SOI's 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 October 2017, available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/275402.pdf>.

V. Additional Information

DRL will not consider SOI's that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative of a designated terrorist organization.

Project activities that directly benefit foreign militaries or paramilitary groups or individuals will not be considered for DRL funding given purpose limitations on funding.

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 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.

Organizations should be aware that DRL understands that some information contained in SOI's 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, 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. Please note that as of December 26, 2014, 2 CFR 200 (Sub-Chapters A through E) now applies to foreign organizations, and Sub-Chapters A through D shall apply to all 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 on DRL's Resources page at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/p/c72333.htm>.

The information in this solicitation and DRL's PSI for SOI's, as updated in October 2017, 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 SOI's 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 \(https://mygrants.service-now.com\)](https://mygrants.service-now.com) and DRL's website <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/275402.pdf>.

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 www.state.gov/j/drl and www.humanrights.gov.

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 for international callers) or through the Self Service online portal that can be accessed from <https://afsitsm.service-now.com/ilms>. Customer Support is available 24/7/365.

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/snow-dismissal-procedures/federal-holidays/> for a list of federal holidays.

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

With the exception of technical submission questions, during the solicitation period U.S. Department of State staff in Washington and overseas shall not discuss this competition until the entire review process has been completed and rejection and approval letters have been transmitted.