

Department of State – U.S. Embassy, Kabul

Program Office: Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan
Funding Opportunity Title: Balkh Media Information Center
Announcement Type: Grant
Funding Opportunity Number: SCAKAB-13-GR-006-SCA-12272012
Deadline for Applications: January 27, 2013
CFDA 19.501- Public Diplomacy Programs for Afghanistan and Pakistan

CONTACT INFORMATION

- A) For questions relating to Grants.gov, please call the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726.
- B) For assistance with the requirements of this solicitation, contact **Pedro Palugyai**, Grants Manager, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan, at: Email: KabulPDProposals@state.gov (*Preferred method of communication*)

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan is pleased to announce an open competition for assistance awards through this Request for Grant Proposals (RFGP). PAS invites all eligible organizations to submit a proposal to establish a Media Information Center (MIC) based in the governor's office of Balkh Province. (See eligibility requirements on page 6 below.)

The strategic objective of this center is three-fold: to provide the infrastructure to facilitate government-citizen communications before, during and after the 2014 Afghan Presidential and Provincial elections; to help counter extremist messaging; and to support a strong and sustainable media environment in northern Afghanistan.

The grant's goals will be achieved by strengthening provincial capacity to engage in proactive, effective, and truthful outreach to both public and private media. This solicitation calls for the establishment of the regional Media Information Center (MIC) to include staffing, training, operations, and equipment to provide initial assistance in disseminating accurate and timely information—especially on governance and development success stories that extend the Afghanistan narrative beyond security issues and create a sense of national unity.

As this will be a limited, one-year project to help kick-start the Media Information Center, planning for sustainability after the first year will be a key component of the winning proposal. A successful proposal will show proven ability to partner with the provincial governor's office and local media outlets and organizations, the winning bid will offer a solid plan for the transition of full responsibility for the continued operation of the MIC to the Balkh governor, or other provincial government entity, to continue the center's operations after the first year. The successful applicant will delineate a clear sustainability plan that demonstrates how financial support will be provided for ongoing operations and staff costs (for example, moving the staff to tashkiel positions).

II. BACKGROUND

Building Afghan communication capacity heading into the 2014 Afghan Presidential and Provincial elections is a strategic priority for both the Afghan and U.S. governments. Disseminating timely, accurate, and forthright information from the Afghan government to its citizens is vital to support citizens' connection to the government. The objective of this proposal is to enhance provincial communication through a regional approach. The ability of provinces to highlight success stories, develop messaging, and inform the public—especially during critical issues and crises—is central to the nation's strategic communication capabilities.

Many provinces were considered for this regional approach and Balkh was selected because it contains a major population center with strong local news media. Kandahar Media Operations Center (KMIC) is already in operation.

The KMIC provides a compelling case-study and model for the achievement of this grant. It launched operations in October, 2010 and in 2012 it has developed and distributed hundreds of news releases on development, governance and positive news stories as well as kinetic security issues. It has built and maintained a forward-thinking web presence and social media strategy, actively pushing information through social networks. It has staged dozens of news conferences, managed hundreds of media interviews, synchronized messaging with line ministries and rapidly engaged in crisis communication during high-profile security issues. KMIC's effectiveness has bolstered Kandahar province's ability to provide credible information and this, in turn, has boosted citizens' confidence in their government.

Objectives:

The Governor of Balkh already has in place, inside the Governor's compound, a press office and staff dedicated to running it. However, the existing staff and infrastructure are dedicated to the Governor's use whereas the MIC and staff funded under this grant will be dedicated to the use of the government as a whole, especially the local ministry offices and line directorates. Proposals should address the elements below.

1. Professional Communication Staff Hiring and Development

- A. **Staffing:** The identification, vetting, and hiring of two professional communicators for a total of three staff (the Balkh Governor's office already has a spokesperson on the tashkeel) at the Media Information Center who will be dedicated to supporting the local ministry offices and line directorates.

As this is a one-year project, salaries must be set at a level that will make it possible for them to be absorbed by government entities after the award period, either by the governors' offices through discretionary funds or by other government entities, and in accordance with comparable tashkiel positions.

- B. **Training:** The two staff hired under this grant must complete training so they are able to act as spokespersons and in crisis communications. The training should take them beyond technical capability and into the realm of devising and implementing compelling news releases, spokesperson skills, crisis communications and advanced media relations techniques and tactics, including website maintenance and social media. Additionally, training should include a strong focus on balanced, transparent outreach and relationship-building with local, national, and international private media outlets—not solely government media outlets—including quick reaction “push back” capability to correct inaccurate stories in a timely manner.
- C. **Website Development:** Develop a website for use in delivering content to both local and national media, as well as a system for and maintaining it that is time-efficient and cost-effective. The applicant should envision how to integrate the

website with an aggressive social media capability to push messages through both the internet and via SMS text.

2. News Conference/Press Briefing Room

The Balkh Governor's compound is currently equipped with a large conference hall which is dedicated to press events for the Governor. This grant will establish a separate MIC, on the Governor's compound, which is dedicated to supporting the local ministry offices and line directorates.

- A. Location:** The Governor has agreed to provide space that is practical for use as a venue for news conferences and press briefings. The space should be able to accommodate at least 25 members of the media including video and still photographers. There should be space for a press filing center at this press site.
- B. Lighting and Sound:** A lighting and sound system consistent with a room to accommodate 25 people may be included in the proposal.
- C. Audio** Podium microphone, audio "mult box" for media access, and associated sound equipment for the news conference/press briefing room should be included in the proposal.
- D. News Conference Stage:** The news conference stage should consist of: a low riser; podium; two flags, and backdrop. A long table should be provided at which up to three individuals may be seated for press conferences. Provide 25 chairs for the media and a press camera riser. A long table should be included for a press filing center, which will accommodate five reporters.
- E. Electrical:** Proposal may include upgrades for wiring the lighting load and proper outlets for the media, as needed.

3. Hardware/Media Equipment

In addition to the items described above, the proposal may include the following equipment for the MIC:

- One professional grade camera for still photography
- Hard drives for video and photo storage
- Three audio recorders and laptops
- Up to five computers for the press filing center

4. Operations

The Governor's office shall pay for the cost of electricity to the MIC. UN Development Program (UNDP) currently pays for internet connectivity. Following

the end of UNDP support, the Governor's office shall be responsible for the cost of internet service.

5. Sustainability

Applicant must demonstrate a sustainability plan for operations beyond the one-year period of this grant. The successful applicant should address the key issues of salaries for each staffer as well as ongoing operations costs and how it intends to work with the governor's office or other government offices to ensure transition of responsibilities and sustainability.

III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility is open to all U.S., Afghan, and international organizations or companies with direct experience in media relations, strategic communications, and public affairs, and a proven track record of success implementing projects in Afghanistan. U.S. organizations or companies are required to partner with an Afghan organization or company.

Applicants are not required to include funding from other donors. However, applications that include additional in-kind and/or cash contributions from non-U.S. Government sources will be more competitive, since cost-sharing demonstrates a strong commitment to the planned activities and will be considered to show greater cost effectiveness.

Applicants must:

- A. Be registered in the System for Award Management SAM located at www.sam.gov prior to submitting an application or plan; AND
- B. Maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by an agency.

IV. APPLICANT VETTING AS A CONDITION OF AWARD

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. Applicants may 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 DOS as presenting a risk of terrorist financing. When vetting information is requested by the Grants Officer, information may be submitted on the secure web portal at <https://ramportal.state.gov>, via Email to RAM@state.gov, or hardcopy to the Grants Officer. Questions about the form may be emailed to RAM@state.gov. Failure to submit information when requested, or failure to pass vetting, may be grounds for rejecting your proposal.

V. SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Award Period: 12 months

Number of Awards Anticipated: 1

Award Amount: The award ceiling is set at \$250,000.

Application Deadline: All applications must be received on or before January 27 2013, 11:59 p.m., Kabul time. Applications received after 11:59 p.m. will be ineligible for consideration. Applicants are encouraged to begin the application process early, as this will allow time to address any technical difficulties that may arise in advance of the deadline. There will be no exceptions to this application deadline.

Question Deadline: For questions on this solicitation please contact Pedro Palugyai, Grants Manager, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan, at: Email: KabulPDProposals@state.gov (*Preferred method of communication*).

Questions must be received on or before January 12, 2013, 11:59 p.m., Kabul time.

Application Submission Process: There are two submissions methods available to applicants. Applicants may submit their application using Submission Method A or Submission Method B outlined below.

- **Submission Method A:** Submitting all application materials directly to the following email address: KabulPDProposals@state.gov. Applicants opting to submit applications via email to KabulPDProposals@state.gov **must** include the Funding Opportunity Title and Funding Opportunity Number in the subject line of the email.
- **Submission Method B:** Submitting all application materials through grants.gov. For those opting to apply through Grants.gov, thorough instructions on the application process are available at <http://www.grants.gov>. For questions relating to Grants.gov, please call the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726. Please note, KabulPDProposals@state.gov is unable to assist with technical questions or problems applicants experience with grants.gov.

Applicants utilizing Grants.gov must register with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application. **Registering with Grants.gov is a one-time process; however, it could take as long as two weeks to have the registration validated and confirmed. Please begin the registration process immediately to ensure that the process is completed well in advance of the deadline for applications.** Until that process is complete, you will not be issued a user password for Grants.gov, which is required for application submission. There are four steps that you must complete before you are able to register: (1) Obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet (if your organization does not have one already) by calling 1-866-705-5711; (2) Register with System for Award Management (SAM); (3) Register yourself as an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR); and (4) Be authorized as an AOR by your organization. For more information, go to www.grants.gov. Please note that your SAM registration must be annually renewed. Failure to renew your SAM registration may prohibit submission of a grant application through Grants.gov.

VI. APPLICATION CONTENT

Applicants must follow the RFGP instructions and conditions contained herein and supply all information required. **Failure to furnish all information or comply with stated requirements will result in disqualification from the competition.** Applicants must set forth full, accurate, and complete information as required by this RFGP. The penalty for making false statements in proposals to the USG is prescribed on 18 U.S.C.1001.

Applications are accepted in English only, and final grant agreements will be concluded in English. Proposals may not exceed 22 double-spaced pages in 12-point, Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins. Shorter applications are encouraged. Longer applications will be considered non-responsive and will not be reviewed. This requirement excludes the allowable appendices, which are identified in Section 6 below. The proposal must consist of the following:

Section 1 - Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) and SF424A:

The SF424 is the standard cover sheet for grant applications. The SF424A is a budget summary sheet for grant proposals. Please refer to page 6-8 for a description of budget categories. Both these forms can be found on-line at:
http://fa.statebuy.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=20&menu_id=68.

Section 2 - Abstract:

The abstract is limited to 300 words in length. It must provide a summary of the project to be undertaken, expected timeline, and cost.

Section 3 – Implementation Plan:

The applicant must specify the goals and objectives of the project. Goals are general statements of intent; Objectives define a specific problem or task to be accomplished. The objective should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-framed). The applicant should describe in detail the steps which will be taken to achieve these goals. This description should include all components of the proposed project including, as needed, procurement, installation, and training. The proposal should clearly demonstrate how each of these project components directly relates to the project's stated goals. This section should also describe how success will be measured, and should propose specific performance indicators which can be used to track progress and determine the project's success. This section must include a time-task plan that clearly identifies the timeline for carrying out the project's major activities.

Applicants are recommended to present the following for each project component:

- An overview of the proposed project component and its respective activities.
- A description of how the project component supports the overall goal of the project.
- A detailed outline of the methodology that will be used to implement the proposed component.
- An analysis of anticipated implementation risks and challenges.

- A summary of expected outputs with their expected impact, using performance indicators that will be used to track progress towards the anticipated results.

The proposal should also describe the applicant's sustainability plan and what measures will be taken to ensure that the benefits of the proposed project continue to be realized after the completion of grant performance. This can include, for example, discussion of the transition of responsibility for operations and costs from the grantee to the government, methods for ensuring the government's buy-in of the project, and any mentoring, training, or phasing which will be implemented to ensure sustainability

Section 4 - Organizational Capability:

Applications must include a clear description of the applicant's management structure, previous experience working in Afghanistan, experience working with Afghan government institutions (if applicable), previous experience with U.S. Government grants, and the organizational experience and background in Afghanistan related to the proposed activities. Besides information about the organization as a whole, this section must also identify the proposed management structure and staffing plan for the proposed project. The applicant should describe how its previous experience relates to the proposed project.

Section 5 – Monitoring and Evaluation Plan:

Applications must include a monitoring and evaluation plan (M&E plan), sometimes also referred to as a performance monitoring or performance management plan. The M&E plan is a systematic and objective approach or process for monitoring project performance toward its objectives over time. The plan consists of indicators with baselines and targets; means for tracking critical assumptions; plans for managing the data collection process; and regular collection of data. Evaluations should be scheduled and carried out throughout the course of the program. More information on M&E plans is located [here](#).

Section 6 - Appendices:

The proposal submission must include three appendices. Only the appendices listed below may be included as part of the application:

- 1. Budget Detail (Required)** – Applications will not be considered complete unless they include budgets that respond to the solicitation guidelines. Complete budgets will include detailed line-items outlining specific cost requirements for proposed activities. Applicants must adhere to the appropriate regulations found in 2 CFR 220 (previously OMB circulars A-21, cost principles for education institutions) and 2 CFR 230 (previously OMB circular A-122, cost principles for non-profits).

The Detailed Line-Item Budget (in Microsoft Excel or similar spreadsheet format) will delineate funds requested from the Embassy and any cost-sharing (see below for more information on budget format). All costs must be in U.S. Dollars. The budget must identify the total amount of funding requested, with a breakdown of amounts to be spent in the following budget categories: personnel; fringe benefits; travel; equipment; supplies; consultants/contracts; other direct costs; and indirect costs.

The following provides a description of the types of costs to be included in each budget category.

A. Personnel – Identify staffing requirements by each position title and brief description of duties. For clarity, please list the annual salary of each position, percentage of time and number of months devoted to the project. (e.g., Administrative Director: \$30,000/year x 25% x 8.5 months; calculation: $\$30,000/12 = \$2,500 \times 25\% \times 8.5 \text{ months} = \$5,312.$).

B. Fringe Benefits - State benefit costs separately from salary costs and explain how benefits are computed for each category of employee - specify type and rate.

C. Travel - Staff and any participant travel

- 1) International Airfare
- 2) In-country Travel
- 3) Domestic Travel in the U.S., if any
- 4) Per diem/maintenance: Includes lodging, meals and incidentals for both participant and staff travel. Rates of maximum allowances for U.S. and foreign travel are available from the following website: <http://www.policyworks.gov/>. Per diem rates may not exceed the published U.S. government allowance rates; however, institutions may use per diem rates lower than official government rates. Please explain differences in fares among travelers on the same routes. Please note that all travel, where applicable, must be in compliance with the Fly America Act.

D. Equipment – Please provide justification for any equipment purchase/rental, defined as tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more.

E. Supplies - List items separately using unit costs (and the percentage of each unit cost being charged to the grant) for photocopying, postage, telephone/fax, printing, and office supplies (e.g., Telephone: \$50/month x 50% = \$25/month x 12 months).

F. Contractual -

a) Sub-grants and sub-contracts. For each sub-grant/contract please provide a detailed line item breakdown explaining specific services. In the sub-grant budgets, provide the same level of detail for personnel, travel, supplies, equipment, direct costs, and fringe benefits required of the direct applicant.

b) Consultant Fees. For example lecture fees, honoraria, travel, and per diem for outside speakers or independent evaluators: list number of people and rates per day (e.g., 2 x \$150/day x 2 days).

G. Construction – For this solicitation, construction costs are not applicable.

H. Other Direct Costs - these will vary depending on the nature of the project. The inclusion of each should be justified in the budget narrative.

I. Indirect Costs - See OMB Circular A-122, "Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations or the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) at 48 CFR part 31"

- 1) If your organization has a negotiated indirect cost-rate agreement (NICRA) with the U.S. Government, please include a copy of this agreement. This does not count against submission page limitations.
- 2) If your organization is charging an indirect cost rate, please indicate how the rate is applied--to direct administrative expenses, to all direct costs, to wages and salaries only, etc.

J. Cost-Effectiveness/ In-Kind Contributions – There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this competition. However, the Embassy encourages applicants to provide the highest possible levels of cost sharing in support of its projects. Cost sharing demonstrates the applicant's commitment to the project, belief in the achievability of its goals, and prospects for long-term sustainability. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its application and later included in an approved grant agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, written records must be maintained to support all costs which are claimed as contributions, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with OMB Circular A-110, (Revised), Subpart C.23 – Cost Sharing and Matching.

2. Budget Narrative (Required) - The purpose of the budget narrative is to supplement the information provided in the budget spreadsheet by justifying how the budget cost elements are necessary to implement project objectives and accomplish the project goals. The budget narrative is a tool to help the Embassy staff fully understand the budgetary needs of the applicant and is an opportunity to provide descriptive information about the costs beyond the constraints of the budget template. Together, the budget narrative and budget spreadsheets should provide a complete financial and qualitative description that supports the proposed project plan and should be directly relatable to the specific project components described in the applicant's Implementation Plan. The description provided on the budget spreadsheets should be very brief.

3. Resume (Required) – a resume, not to exceed 1 page in length, must be included for the proposed key staff person, such as the Project Director. If an individual for this type of position has not been identified, the applicant may submit a 1-page position description, identifying the qualifications and skills required for that position, in lieu of a resume.

VII. AWARD SELECTION CRITERIA

U.S. Embassy Kabul Public Affairs will review all proposals for eligibility. Eligible proposals will be subject to compliance of Federal regulations and guidelines and may also be reviewed by the Office of the Legal Adviser or by other Department elements. The U.S. Embassy reserves the right to request any additional programmatic and/or financial information regarding the proposal.

Proposals will be funded based on an evaluation of how the proposal meets the solicitation review criteria, U.S. foreign policy objectives, and the priority needs of the U.S. Embassy. An Embassy Review Committee will evaluate eligible proposals submitted under this request. Committee members may make conditions and recommendations on any given proposal in order to enhance the proposed program.

Proposals will be scored based on the applicants' response to each Review Criteria listed below. Review criteria will include:

- 1. Quality of the program idea and program planning (20%):** The proposed project should be well developed, respond to the design outlined in the solicitation and demonstrate originality. The project should have clear goals and objectives and metrics for determining whether the project goals were met. It should be clearly and accurately written, substantive and with sufficient detail. The program plan should adhere to the program overview and guidelines described above, and should reference the applicant's capacity to meet all needs specified in the RFGP.
- 2. Ability to achieve program objectives (20%):** Objectives should be reasonable and feasible. Applications should clearly demonstrate how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan. Proposed personnel, institutional resources and partner organizations should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program goals.
- 3. Institution's record and capacity (20%):** The application should demonstrate an institutional record, including successful programming, responsible fiscal management, and compliance with reporting requirements, especially for U.S. Government grants.
- 4. Sustainability (20%):** Proposed project should address the applicant's strategy for ensuring that the project benefits will continue to be realized on a long-term basis after the conclusion of the period of performance of the grant.
- 5. Monitoring and Evaluation (20%):** Applications should demonstrate the capacity for engaging in impact assessments and providing objectives with measurable outputs and outcomes. The applicant should describe its plan for monitoring and reporting project outcomes.
- 6. Cost-effectiveness (Acceptable or Not Acceptable):** The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries, should be consistent with prevailing market rates in Afghanistan. All other items should be necessary, appropriate, and

directly relatable to the project's goals and objectives. Cost sharing is encouraged but not required.

VIII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

Award Notices: The grant shall be written, signed, awarded, and administered by the Grants Officer. The Grants Officer is the Government official delegated the authority by the U.S. Department of State Procurement Executive to write, award, and administer grants and cooperative agreements. The assistance award agreement is the authorizing document and it will be provided to the Recipient through email transmission. Organizations whose applications will not be funded will also be notified in writing.

Anticipated Time to Award: Applicants should expect to be notified if their proposal has been selected for award within 90 days after the submission deadline. PAS Kabul will provide information at the point of notification about any modification to the proposal or plan of work that will be required to finalize the grant.

Issuance of this RFGP 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. The U.S. government also reserves the right to make an award in excess of the award ceiling.

- **Reporting Requirements:** Grantees are required to submit quarterly program progress and financial reports throughout the project period. Progress and financial reports are due 30 days after the reporting period. Final programmatic and financial reports are due 90 days after the close of the project period.

IX. DISCLAIMER

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding in connection with the award. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the total discretion of the Department of State.

X. AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

This Request for Grant Proposal (RFGP) is subject to funds availability. Awards will be granted only if appropriated funds are allocated to the United States Embassy in Kabul by Department of State central budget authorities.