

Department of State-U.S. Embassy Mexico City

Program Office:	Public Affairs Section
Funding Opportunity Title:	<i>Jóvenes en Acción</i> Program
Announcement Type:	Grant or Cooperative Agreement – New
Funding Opportunity Number:	MX5230-11-GR-001-WHA- 021611
Deadline for Applications:	March 18, 2011
CFDA	00.000

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility is limited to U.S.-based colleges/universities and not-for-profit organizations subject to 501 (c) (3) of the U.S. tax code. Direct funding for Mexican entities is not available under this announcement.

The Department encourages organizations that have not previously received international program funding from the U.S. Government to apply under this announcement. New applicants must have a demonstrated expertise in one or more of the following subject areas: youth exchange, U.S.-Mexico relations, community problem solving, culture of lawfulness, violence/substance abuse prevention, leadership development, civic engagement and education.

Cost Sharing

This program does not require but encourages cost sharing and/or in-kind contributions.

Other Special Eligibility Criteria

Not Applicable.

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 **Caroline Nohr**, Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy Mexico City, at:
 - Email: NohrCC@state.gov
 - Phone: +52 (55) 5080-2667

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of State's U.S. Embassy in Mexico City is pleased to announce an open competition for an assistance award through this Request for Proposals (RFP). The Embassy invites U.S.-based colleges/universities and not-for-profit organizations to submit proposals for a five week high school exchange program called *Jóvenes en Acción*, which will offer at least 50 non-elite Mexican youth the opportunity to hone their leadership skills in the United States while designing their own community service project plans and tackling issues related to violence/substance abuse prevention and the development of a culture of lawfulness.¹ This program will be funded as a joint initiative between the U.S. Department of State, the Mexican government and the private sector for a total grant of approximately \$500,000 USD. The grant will be awarded to one organization which will oversee all aspects of program planning, development, execution and follow-up, with the actual exchange taking place from July 9 to August 13, 2011.

II. BACKGROUND

In 2010, U.S. Embassy Mexico City created a new youth development program called *Jóvenes en Acción*, which offered Mexican high school students the opportunity to develop their leadership and civic engagement skills through intensive workshops in the United States. Launched as a joint initiative between the U.S. Department of State, the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education and the private sector, the pilot program sent 50 Mexican students to Berkeley, CA and Washington, DC for five weeks in July/August. Thematic emphasis was placed on community problem-solving and grassroots action, with a particular focus on how participants might address issues related to gangs, violence and substance abuse among at-risk youth in their schools and hometowns. For their capstone projects, student teams then developed their own local community service projects to be implemented upon return to Mexico. Program sponsors are now actively supporting the project implementation phase of the program by providing students with mentors, contacts and follow-up coaching. Additionally, the U.S. Embassy organized a January 2011 *Jóvenes en Acción* mid-year conference that reunited all 50 students to assist them in tackling their biggest challenges to implementation.

By all accounts, the inaugural *Jóvenes en Acción* program was an overwhelming success. In their written and oral evaluations, participants expressed highly positive impressions of the program content and their own personal growth as leaders and community activists. Students returned to Mexico full of enthusiasm and equipped with the tools necessary to become positive forces for social change and promoters of youth-centered civic engagement. From the U.S. Department of State's perspective, *Jóvenes en Acción* represents a new model for exchange and leadership programming due to its bi-national,

¹ A **culture of lawfulness** is a society in which the overwhelming majority of members are convinced that the rule of law offers the best long-term chance of securing their rights and attaining their goals. They believe that the rule of law is achievable and are committed to upholding it. By marginalizing lawless behavior, a culture of lawfulness helps protect societies against major threats to democracy: organized crime, corruption, extremism, political violence, authoritarianism, and public fatalism. (Source: <http://www.cultureoflawfulness.org>)

public-private partnership structure, its significant follow-up component and its concentration on very specific outcomes tied to key priority themes in the U.S-Mexico relationship. As a result, U.S. Embassy Mexico City believes *Jóvenes en Acción* should be continued and anticipates sending another group of at least 50 students in 2011.

As in 2010, students selected for the 2011 program will spend their summer vacation participating in an intensive immersion tailored to meet the needs and concerns of Mexican at-risk youth. Thematic emphasis should continue to be placed on civic engagement and youth leadership, with a particular focus on how local communities can develop a culture of lawfulness by addressing problems related to gangs, violence and substance abuse. Features of the program should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Significant interaction with American peers and/or families to provide cultural context and give students the chance to learn about U.S. society and values. Such interaction could take the form of home stays, dorm-style accommodations with American roommates, academic/social activities jointly attended by American teenagers, contact with Mexican-American community leaders and discussions with American subject matter experts from NGOs or local business organizations.
- Intensive English language workshops, particularly during the first 1-2 weeks of the program, to help students gain confidence in their speaking ability and ensure they receive maximum benefit from all other program content (most of which should be conducted in English).
- Incorporation of service-learning activities that allow students to meet local community leaders and witness how they go about organizing neighborhood projects, fundraisers, and advocacy campaigns that benefit the public good and promote a culture of lawfulness.
- Detailed development of individual community service projects for students to implement upon return to Mexico, including seminars on: creating step-by-step implementation plans, finding resources, gathering community support, working effectively as a team, etc. Note that students will submit project proposals as part of their program application, so they will come prepared with basic project ideas at the start of the program—the role of the *Jóvenes en Acción* curriculum is to help participants translate these ideas into concrete, implementable plans.
- Short 4-5 day visit to Washington, D.C. to learn how civic engagement operates on a national level, meet with relevant NGO/government groups and present final community service project plans to U.S. Department of State leadership.
- Rigorous follow-up mechanisms to provide students with significant support as they work to implement their community service projects throughout Mexico over the course of the following academic year. This follow-up should be conducted with the assistance of a local Mexican organization or branch office and in

conjunction with resources provided by the U.S. Embassy/Consulates and other program partners.

Participants will apply and be selected in teams of 4-5 students. The selection process will focus on non-elite Mexicans who attend public school and can demonstrate strong leadership potential as well as a commitment to community service and academic achievement. Special consideration will be given to students who have displayed such qualities while growing up in communities acutely impacted by gangs, violence and drug-related crime. An intermediate level of English proficiency will be required to ensure participants benefit from workshops and peer-to-peer interaction.

III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility is limited to U.S.-based colleges/universities and not-for-profit organizations subject to 501 (c) (3) of the U.S. tax code. Direct funding for Mexican entities is not available under this announcement. The Department encourages organizations that have not previously received international program funding from the USG to apply under this announcement (see “Eligibility” on page 1).

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

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Award Period: up to 12 months

Award Amount: Approximately \$500,000 USD is available for this grant program. Should your proposal not include plans to manage in-country aspects of the program, such as pre-departure logistics/orientation and extensive post-exchange follow-up, this amount will be reduced by approximately \$100,000 USD to cover such expenses through a separate organization. A portion of the total funds will come directly from Department of State funds through the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. The remainder will be financed by contributions from both the Mexican government and private sector donors.

Application Submission Process: Applications may be submitted in one of two ways:

(1) Electronically through Grants.gov. Thorough instructions on the Grants.gov 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.

(2) Via electronic mail to Caroline Nohr, Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy Mexico City (NohrCC@state.gov).

For questions related to the requirements of this solicitation, please also contact Caroline Nohr by email (NohrCC@state.gov) or phone (+52 (55) 5080-2667).

Application Deadline: All applications must be submitted on or before March 18, 2011, 11:59 p.m. eastern time. Applications submitted after 11:59 p.m. will be ineligible for consideration. **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. Once the RFP deadline has passed, Embassy staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

All applicants choosing to submit applications through Grants.gov must register prior to submission. **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, and notify the Embassy if your application submission might be delayed due to complications arising from registration.** 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 Central Contractor Registry (CCR); (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 CCR registration must be annually renewed. Failure to renew your CCR registration may prohibit submission of a grant application through Grants.gov.

Application Content: Applicants must follow the RFP 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 RFP. The penalty for making false statements in proposals to the USG is prescribed on 18 U.S.C.1001.

Each submitted proposal must consist of the following:

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

This form can be found online 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 objectives, proposed activities, and expected results.

Section 3 – Strategic Objectives:

Each applicant must detail the ways in which their proposal addresses the problems and needs unique to non-elite Mexican youth as outlined in Section II of this document. Specifically, it should discuss how the proposed program will give Mexican participants a new perspective and assist them in overcoming the hurdles associated with gangs, violence and substance abuse among at-risk youth in their country. The proposal should also address how the applicant will help participants incorporate culture of lawfulness principles into their community service projects. Finally, it should discuss how the proposed activities work at a strategic level to help participants utilize the tools of civic engagement and youth leadership to become positive forces for social change in their communities.

Section 4 – Project Goals/Implementation Plan:

Applicants should describe what they propose to do and how they will do it. The proposed activities must directly relate to meeting the strategic objectives, and applicants should include information on how they will measure program effectiveness. This section must also include a detailed schedule that clearly identifies the major activities to take place. Note that because the development of a community service project plan is a featured component of the curriculum, extensive follow-up throughout the academic year following the exchange is essential in order to ensure students receive the assistance and support needed to successfully implement their projects. If applicants plan to manage this follow-up themselves (i.e. through their branch office in Mexico), they should provide a detailed plan for doing so. If applicants prefer to manage the follow-up process by working with a separate local organization, they should discuss how this relationship will function and indicate whether they have identified an appropriate local organization to play this role.

Section 5 - Organizational Capability:

Applications must include a clear description of the applicant's management structure, previous experience with youth exchange, leadership development, civic engagement and/or culture of lawfulness-related projects and organizational experience as it relates to the proposed activities. Applicants must demonstrate how their resources, capabilities and experience will enable them to achieve the stated goals and objectives, including their current presence and capacity on the ground in Mexico. Besides information about the organization as a whole, this section must also identify the proposed management structure and staffing plan for the project. In addition, applicants should describe how and with whom they will collaborate to meet project goals, including but not limited to any local organizations they plan to involve in the follow-up process. The application must distinguish all key partners and organizations that will be involved in the identification of, and service delivery to, exchange program participants.

Section 6 - Appendices:

The submission must include two appendices, with a third, optional appendix to be submitted at the discretion of the applicant. Only the appendices listed below may be included as part of the application:

- (a) **Budget (Required)** – the budget must identify the total amount of funding requested, with a breakdown of amounts to be spent in each category. Suggested categories include but are not limited to: travel (international and domestic); per diem (lodging, meals, incidentals); ground transportation; pre-departure logistics and orientation; tuition; materials; speaker travel/fees; cultural and educational activities; health insurance; administrative expenses; follow-up; and other program costs. If cost sharing or in-kind contributions are to be included, this should be clearly identified in the budget breakdown. Note that the successful applicant will be responsible for all program costs with the exception of candidate recruitment and selection, which will be managed directly by U.S. Embassy Mexico City and the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education. If the applicant does not have the capacity to manage in-country aspects of the program related to pre-departure activities and follow-up, please state this in the concept paper and do not include these items in the budget. Keep in mind that doing so will reduce the total available funds by approximately \$100,000 USD. Also, applicants should consider that students will be selected from various regions throughout Mexico and will need to travel to Mexico City for the pre-departure orientation prior to arriving in the United States, all of which needs to be accounted for in the budget.
- (b) **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.
- (c) **Letters of Intent (Optional)** – if U.S. or Mexican partners have been identified, letters of intent should be included with the concept paper. The letters must identify the type of relationship to be entered into (formal or informal), the roles and responsibilities of each partner in relation to the proposed project activities and the expected result of the partnership. Please note that these are not letters of support, and should only be included for those organizations that will play an active role in the project, including those that receive financial support through the project budget. The individual letters cannot exceed 1 page in length, and applicants are limited to submitting up to 5 letters per concept paper.

V. AWARD SELECTION CRITERIA

Evaluation Criteria: Applicants should note that the following criteria (1) serve as a standard against which all proposals will be evaluated and (2) serve to identify the

significant matters that should be addressed in all proposals. The USG will award the grant to the applicant whose offer represents the best value to the USG on the basis of technical merit and cost.

Each application will be evaluated by a peer review committee of Department of State and other experts as deemed appropriate. The evaluation criteria have been tailored to the requirements of this RFP.

1. *Quality of the program idea and program planning:* The proposed program should be well developed, respond to the design outlined in the solicitation and demonstrate originality. 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 of the program's design—from pre-departure logistics and orientation to the actual exchange program to extensive follow-up in Mexico.

2. *Ability to achieve program objectives:* Objectives should be reasonable, feasible and flexible. Proposals 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. The proposal should demonstrate an institutional record, including solid programming and responsible fiscal management. Note that applicants will be more competitive if their proposed Project Director speaks fluent Spanish and if the applicant can demonstrate the organizational capacity to manage pre-departure activities and follow-up, either through the applicant's pre-established in-country network or through a local partner organization on the ground in Mexico.

3. *Program evaluation:* The proposal should include a plan to evaluate the program's success, including as the activities unfold, at the end of the actual exchange program and at the conclusion of all follow-up activities. The proposal should include a description of a methodology used to link outcomes to original project objectives.

4. *Cost-effectiveness:* The applicant should demonstrate efficient use of funds. The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate. Costs shall be evaluated for realism, control practices and efficiency, as well as the inclusion of cost sharing and/or in-kind contributions. The Department of State must determine that the costs paid for this award are reasonable, allowable and allocable to the proposed project activities. This will consist of a review of the Budget to determine if the overall costs are realistic for the work to be performed, if the costs reflect the applicant's understanding of the allowable cost principles established by OMB Circular A-122, and if the costs are consistent with the program narrative.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

Award Notices: The grant award or co-operative agreement 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 either mail or facsimile transmission. Organizations whose applications will not be funded will also be notified in writing.

Anticipated Time to Award: U.S. Embassy Mexico City expects to review all proposals and select the successful applicant within 14 calendar days of the deadline for submission. The selected organization will be notified immediately and a schedule for the distribution of funds will be agreed upon at that time. As stated earlier, this project is considered time sensitive due to the current political climate and concerns related to the drug/violence crisis, especially along the border. In order to ensure the program takes place this summer, Embassy officials will make every effort to expedite the grants process so that sufficient time is available to organize a quality program.

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

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. Progress reports at a minimum should be submitted via electronic mail to an address to be provided in the award.

VII. 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.