

Department of State
Public Notice

**Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Request for Statements of Interest: FY23
China Programs (SFOP0010099)**

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 protect and promote human rights in China.

PLEASE NOTE: DRL strongly encourages applicants to immediately access [SAMS Domestic](https://www.grants.gov) 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: <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/programs-and-grants/>.

The submission of a SOI is the first step in a two-part process. Applicants must first submit a SOI, which is a concise, three-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 merit review of eligible SOIs, DRL will invite selected applicants to expand upon their program idea(s) through the submission of a full proposal application. Full proposals will go through a second merit review before funding recommendations are submitted to the DRL Assistant Secretary for funding approval, pending funding availability.

With the above in mind, DRL invites organizations to submit a maximum of two (2) statements of interest, one per category, for programs in the following categories:

- I. ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.** SOI program concepts should promote freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and/or access to information, and should demonstrate ability to address one or more of the following objectives:
- Expand Chinese citizens' awareness of the Chinese Communist Party's censorship, disinformation, and propaganda efforts.
 - Enable citizens of the PRC to freely access and critically evaluate information.
 - Raise awareness of the diversity of locally driven narratives on human rights and fundamental freedoms, in contrast to CCP propaganda narratives to the contrary.
 - Increase PRC citizens' access to and ability to share information about human rights and governance. This may include, for example, information on the intersection of human rights and the principles of representative governance in areas such as economic development, infrastructure development, or environmental policy.

- Improve reliable and independent media, online reporting, and documentation of human rights and governance issues, including through citizen journalists and diaspora groups, and increase demand among Chinese information consumers for that information.
- Elevate diverse voices within content about PRC human rights and governance, including voices of women, LGBTQI+ people, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minority groups.
- Promote PRC government information transparency and accountability at national and local levels.
- Increase the ability of citizens of the PRC and civil society to demand responsive governance institutions.

II. CIVIC PARTICIPATION, RULE OF LAW, AND LABOR RIGHTS. SOI program concepts should promote democratic norms and human rights in China and demonstrate ability to address one or more of the following objectives:

- Improve rights awareness and access to justice for PRC citizens.
- Protect fundamental freedoms for PRC human rights lawyers and provide technical assistance to ensure they are able to continue safely operating within the PRC or from exile.
- Document and raise awareness of the use of PRC laws that infringe on the rights of minorities and other citizens.
- Strengthen and institutionalize civic engagement and citizen participation in government policy formation and decision-making at all levels of government.
- Increase the resilience of human rights-focused civil society groups and their ability to work together across sectors to advocate for the rights of the groups they represent.
- Empower independent gender activists to improve women's awareness of their rights and available remedies.
- Encourage the promotion of government and societal respect for freedom of religion or belief.
- Raise awareness of and strengthen protection against PRC efforts to suppress minority culture and identity.
- Promote the rights of persons marginalized by society within China, including persons with disabilities, migrant workers and their families, and LGBTQI+ persons.
- Strengthen LGBTQI+ groups' ability to operate in an increasingly repressive environment.
- Enable diaspora groups to engage with host governments regarding PRC transnational repression and harassment.
- Support documentation of human rights abuses against persons or groups targeted by the PRC government both inside and outside of China.

- Promote accountability efforts targeting human rights abusers that carry out their crimes as a part or on behalf of the PRC government.
- Promote internationally recognized labor rights, address forced labor issues, and call for improved working conditions, at the enterprise and/or industry sector level.
- Engage on human rights-focused issues of broad concern to the Chinese public, including environmental issues, food safety, employment discrimination, anti-corruption, and other such cross-cutting issues.
- Provide extended professional development opportunities and resilience training/support to human rights defenders, lawyers, and/or activists.

All SOI proposals must:

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

All programs should aim to have impact that leads to reforms and should have the potential for sustainability beyond DRL resources. DRL's preference is to avoid duplicating past efforts by supporting new and creative approaches. This does not exclude from consideration projects that improve upon or expand existing successful projects in a new and complementary way.

DRL is committed to advancing equity and support for underserved and underrepresented communities. Programs should seek strategies for integration and inclusion of individuals/organizations/beneficiaries that can bring perspectives based on their religion, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, national origin, age, genetic information, marital status, parental status, pregnancy, political affiliation, or veteran's status. Programs should be demand-driven and locally led to the extent possible.

To maximize the impact and sustainability of the award(s) that result(s) from this RSOI/NOFO, DRL reserves the right to execute a non-competitive continuation amendment(s). 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).

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

- 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;
- Off-shore activities that are not clearly linked to in-country initiatives and impact or are not necessary due to 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;

II. Eligibility Information

Organizations submitting SOIs 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”);
- 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 some occasions when a for-profit entity is best suited. Applications submitted by for-profit entities may be subject to additional review following the panel selection process. Additionally, the Department of State prohibits profit to for-profit or commercial organizations under its assistance awards. 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. Please see 2 CFR 200.307 for regulations regarding program income.

DRL is committed to an **anti-discrimination policy** in all of its programs and activities. DRL welcomes SOI submissions irrespective of race, color, religion, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, pregnancy, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, veteran's status, or other status. DRL requires all programs to be non-discriminatory and expects implementers to include strategies for nondiscrimination of individuals/organizations/beneficiaries.

Any applicant listed on the Excluded Parties List System in the [System for Award Management \(SAM.gov\)](https://www.sam.gov) (www.sam.gov) and/or has a current debt to the U.S. government is not eligible to apply for an assistance 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 or person listed on the Excluded Parties List System in SAM.gov can participate in any activities under an award. All applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Excluded Parties List System in SAM.gov to ensure that no ineligible entity or person is included in their application.

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 UEI and SAM.gov registration as soon as possible.** Please note that there is no cost associated with UEI or SAM.gov registration.

III. Application Requirements, Deadlines, and Technical Eligibility

All SOIs must conform to DRL's posted Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for Statements of Interest, as updated in November 2022, available at <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/programs-and-grants/>.

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 SOIs 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.

Primary organizations can submit two (2) SOIs in response to the RSOI – one (1) per category. If an applicant chooses to submit multiple applications to this RSOI, it is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate the competitiveness and uniqueness of each SOI. **SOIs that request less than \$500,000 or more than \$1,500,000 may be deemed technically ineligible.**

Technically eligible SOIs are those which:

- 1) Arrive electronically via SAMS Domestic or Grants.gov by **11:59 PM EST on Friday, January 12th, 2024 under the announcement titled “DRL FY23 China Programs – Statements of Interest,” funding opportunity number SFOP0010099;**
- 2) Are in English; and,
- 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 an application submission is made, and the Department of State will use this information to determine whether an application has been submitted on time. Late applications are neither reviewed nor considered. Known system errors caused by Grants.gov or SAMS Domestic (<https://mygrants.service-now.com>) that are outside of the applicant's control will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should not expect a notification upon DRL receiving their application. DRL will **not** accept SOIs submitted via email, fax, the postal system, delivery companies, or couriers. DRL strongly encourages all applicants to submit SOIs before Friday, January 12th 2024 to ensure that the SOI has been received and is complete.

IV. Review and Selection Process

DRL strives to ensure that each application receives a balanced evaluation by a DRL review panel. The Department's Office of Acquisitions Management (AQM) will determine technical eligibility for all SOI submissions. All technically eligible SOIs will then be reviewed against the

same four criteria by a DRL review panel: quality of program idea, addressing barriers to equal participation, program planning, and ability to achieve objectives/institutional capacity.

Additionally, the review 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 SOIs. To ensure all SOIs 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 SOIs. Unless directed otherwise by the organization, DRL may also refer SOIs for possible consideration in other U.S. government related funding opportunities.

The review panel may provide conditions and/or recommendations on SOIs 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

SOIs should be responsive to the program framework and policy objectives identified in the RSOI, appropriate 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. SOIs that promote creative approaches to recognized ongoing challenges are highly encouraged. DRL prioritizes project proposals with inclusive approaches for advancing these rights.

Addressing Barriers to Equal Participation

DRL strives to ensure its projects advance the rights and uphold the dignity of all persons. As the U.S. government's lead bureau dedicated to promoting democratic governance, DRL requests a programming approach dedicated to strengthening inclusive societies as a necessary

pillar of strong democracies. Discrimination, violence, inequity, and inequality targeting any members of society undermines collective security and threatens democracy. DRL prioritizes inclusive and integrated program models that assess and address the barriers to access for individuals and groups based on their race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. Applicants should describe how programming will impact all of its beneficiaries, including support for underserved and underrepresented communities.

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

SOIs should address how the program will engage relevant stakeholders and should identify local partners as appropriate. If local partners are identified, applicants should describe the division of labor among the applicant and any local partners. SOIs 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 November 2022, available at <https://www.state.gov/proposal-submission-instructions/>.

V. Additional Information

DRL will not consider applications that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative of a designated terrorist organization. Please refer the link for Foreign Terrorist Organizations: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>. Project activities whose direct beneficiaries are foreign militaries or paramilitary groups or individuals will not be considered for DRL funding given purpose limitations on funding.

In accordance with Department of State policy for terrorism, 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. If chosen for an award, applicants will 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 the Department of State as presenting a risk of terrorist financing. Vetting information may also be requested for project beneficiaries and participants. Failure to submit information when requested, or failure to pass vetting, may be grounds for rejecting your proposal prior to award.

The Leahy Law prohibits Department foreign assistance funds from supporting foreign security force units if the Secretary of State has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. Per [22 USC §2378d\(a\) \(2017\)](#), “No assistance shall be furnished under this chapter [FOREIGN ASSISTANCE] or the Arms Export Control Act [22 USC 2751 et seq.] to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country if the Secretary of State has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.” Restrictions may apply to any proposed assistance to police or other law enforcement. Among these, pursuant to section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (FAA), no assistance provided through this funding opportunity may be furnished to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country when there is credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. In accordance with the requirements of section 620M of the FAA, also known as the Leahy law, project beneficiaries or participants from a foreign government’s security forces may need to be vetted by the Department before the provision of any assistance. If a proposed grant or cooperative agreement will provide assistance to foreign security forces or personnel, compliance with the Leahy Law is required.

Organizations should be aware that DRL understands that some information contained in SOIs may be considered sensitive or proprietary and will make appropriate efforts to protect such information. However, 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, DRL requires all recipients of foreign assistance funding to comply with all applicable Department and Federal laws and regulations, including but not limited to the following: 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. Sub-Chapters A through E shall apply to all foreign organizations, and Sub-Chapters A through D shall apply to all U.S. and foreign 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 at <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>.

The information in this solicitation and DRL’s PSI for SOIs, as updated in November 2021, 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 SOIs 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 \(https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com\)](https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com), and DRL's website <https://www.state.gov/statements-of-interest-requests-for-proposals-and-notice-of-funding-opportunity/>.

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 <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-civilian-security-democracy-and-human-rights/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/>.

VI. Contact Information

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 apply for international callers) or through the Self Service online portal that can be accessed from <https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com/>. Customer support is available 24/7.

Please note that establishing an account in SAMS Domestic may require the use of smartphone for multi-factor authentication (MFA). If an applicant does not have accessibility to a smartphone during the time of creating an account, please contact the helpdesk and request instructions on MFA for Windows PC.

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/pay-leave/federal-holidays/> for a list of federal holidays.

For technical questions related to this solicitation, please contact DRL-ChinaProgramInfo@state.gov.

Except for technical submission questions, during the RSOI period U.S. Department of State staff in Washington and overseas shall not discuss this competition with applicants until the

entire proposal review process has been completed and rejection and approval letters have been transmitted.