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Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
Office of Assistance Coordination
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Supporting Syrian Independent Media
Opportunity Number: SFOP0009333

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Federal Agency Contact:	NEA-Grants@state.gov

Funding Opportunity Synopsis

The Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) aims to support programming to improve access for Syrians to unbiased, accurate, and locally relevant information as a means to empower citizens, promote accountability, and counter violent extremist narratives.

The purpose of this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) is to advance the following U.S. Government policy priorities in Syria:

- Ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS and al-Qaeda to counter violent extremism;
- Support ceasefire agreements to reduce violence;
- Expand humanitarian access and the delivery of humanitarian aid across Syria;
- Promote long-term, locally led, and internationally supported approaches to transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliation; and,
- Advance a political solution to the Syrian conflict under the auspices of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.

NEA/AC aims to advance these policy objectives by supporting the following assistance objectives:

- Improve access for Syrians to unbiased, accurate, and locally relevant information, including through expansion of digital media delivery, to empower citizens, promote accountability, and counter violent extremist narratives;
- Counter disinformation perpetuated by designated terrorist organizations and other malign actors through support for professional Syrian media outlets;
- Improve Syrian media outlets' capabilities to counter regime-affiliated disinformation efforts in Syria, and enhance the ability of Syrians to recognize disinformation;
- Advance human rights and empower marginalized populations, including underserved or minority populations, returnees, and displaced persons, with a particular focus on women and youth, by expanding access to unbiased, professional reporting;
- Address gender, and gender inclusion, as a cross-cutting strategic priority within the media landscape, and the intersectionality of gender as vital and necessary to achieving sustained economic growth and security;
- Support coverage of the Syrian political process to facilitate transparency and enhance public understanding and citizens' engagement;
- Build journalistic production and management capacity, improve media ethics and standards, promote partner sustainability models and trainings, and expand the broadcast and online reach of independent media stations in Syria;
- Increase the ability of independent journalists to operate safely and effectively in conflict and high-risk areas; and
- Promote stability and counter disinformation within internally displaced person (IDP) camps, by providing access to independent media inside the camp as well as programming geared toward helping returnees integrate into their local communities.

Assistance to local media platforms and practitioners who support professional, independent, and ethical journalistic practices continues to be an essential component of the U.S. strategy in Syria.

Since 2011, numerous local media stations and hundreds of media platforms proliferated in territory outside regime-controlled areas and abroad. Professional media organizations continue to grow organically, but support from international donors remains essential to sustain wide-ranging and impactful programming. Development of an independent media environment that encourages and supports ethical, professional journalistic practices will lead to a better informed, empowered citizenry more open to a healthy exchange of ideas and less susceptible to malign influence through the propagation of disinformation. By furthering these outcomes, the project aims to counter violent extremist narratives and enhance security and stability in Syria, with an emphasis on areas formerly controlled by ISIS. By its very nature, media production is inherently adaptable, and transmission of information and reporting can reach deep into restricted spaces. As communities liberated from ISIS control attempt to rebuild and overcome years of ISIS rule, Syrian media stations are expanding their reach to fill the information void and support moderate, pluralistic, and accurate discourse.

All applications must be submitted in English. Complete information on how applicants can submit proposals for this opportunity can be found in Section VI below.

Applicants should read this NOFO in its entirety before writing their proposal, and should refer to the full Evaluation Criteria provided in Section VII while drafting all materials.

Eligible Countries and Territories

In this announcement, we seek to support activities focused on Syria. The project should be implemented from a third country, with a strong justification for why that country was chosen. NEA/AC requires that applicants be in sound legal standing with appropriate government authorities in the country where the project will be managed at the time of award of this funding opportunity. Key overseas personnel must be co-located, while consideration should be taken for minimizing the need for expatriate and/or Third-Country National staff and operational costs. Award recipients will be required to maintain legal standing throughout the life of the award, including for any sub-grant made under its auspices. Please note: Applications that focus on activities for countries and territories other than those listed will NOT be considered.

Background Information about NEA/AC

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) offers Federal assistance to groups and individuals striving to bring about positive change in the Middle East-North Africa region. The Assistance Coordination Office works in 20 countries and territories, partnering with governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), community leaders, youth and women activists and private sector groups to advance their efforts. Competitively selected projects aim to foster participatory governance, economic reform, and educational advancement in response to local interest and needs.

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APPENDICES (*Posted with NOFO*)

- APPENDIX 1— Budget Sample Template and Budget Narrative Guidance**
- APPENDIX 2— Logic Model Template**
- APPENDIX 3— Results Monitoring Plan**
- APPENDIX 4— Application Guidance**

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

Since 2012, the Department of State has assisted in the development of independent Syrian-led media by providing equipment, capacity-building, and financial and technical support to independent radio and TV broadcasters and online outlets. Media partners have the capacity to reach the vast majority of Syria's pre-war population, and a 2022 media consumption survey showed that NEA/AC-supported outlets were consistently ranked as among the most trusted and frequented news sources in their local areas. Support to independent media continues to enable real-time access to hyper-local news and credible information, particularly during emergency or conflict situations, and as malign groups and the Assad regime continue to utilize disinformation platforms to exploit regional and ethnic tensions, recruit terrorists and other violent extremists, and strengthen networks of support for malign actors. Independent media continues to be a source of alternative accounts of news and events and enables channels for discourse among Syrian political opposition and the Syrian diaspora to reach local audiences directly. The value of the independent media landscape is a direct result of the U.S. strategy to protect outlets' editorial independence and freedom, with content not focused or co-opted by groups with malign agendas.

Through this award, it is expected that the recipient will establish a sub-grant mechanism to allow Syrian media outlets and content producers to submit proposals and compete for funding in support of programming and special initiatives. Calls for proposals will be developed to support the production of news and current affairs output, and around certain topics and themes, such as, but not limited to: countering disinformation, multimedia content, investigative reports or programs that support gender equity; youth empowerment and climate change; reintegration of returnees and displaced citizens; accountability or civic priorities; public service announcements; and, short documentaries. NEA/AC anticipates sub-grants will support social media, audio, and visual content. This proposal solicitation process will support creativity, cost savings, and healthy competition. Calls for proposals can also be used to encourage collaboration, program-sharing, and wider distribution, as well as a transition towards digital and online content production. Additionally, the proposal to NEA/AC can seek to support original journalism and sales of content to regional media outlets and will seek to encourage stations to diversify their funding sources as a way of safeguarding their independence and enhancing sustainability.

This project will continually assess the capabilities and needs of each selected beneficiary outlet within the Syrian media market. Successful applicants of this NOFO will demonstrate how their organizational strengths will contribute to ongoing capacity-building and content production trainings for beneficiary media partners. Building journalists' skills and training to improve editorial processes and standards will be an important feature of the capacity-building component. Capacity-building will include outlet-specific trainings for cross-cutting issues like editorial standards and basic journalistic practices, and mixed-group trainings for a wide range of specialized technical fields, such as digital security management for information technology (IT) directors, writing, and picture or video editing for videographers. This approach will also include financial, human resources, and editorial management, as well as digital and physical safety, and will provide assistance to partner outlets on developing safe standard operating procedures (SOPs), contingency plans, and psychosocial self-care support. Capacity-building will include approaches to provide training remotely for journalists working inside Syria.

Applicants should submit proposals for the media project as a whole, encompassing all of the assistance objectives above. NEA/AC seeks proposals to carry out targeted assistance programming in partnership with local media entities to: strengthen the organizational capacity of the independent media sector; provide access to accurate and reliable information; counter violent extremist narratives and disinformation; address the needs of women and youth; support the political transition process; amplify moderate voices; and, promote human rights, justice, accountability, and social cohesion. Proposals shall also present options for promoting professional independent media in Syria.

Applicants must take into consideration that award activities will be coordinated through the Syria Regional Platform (SRP) in Turkey and NEA/AC in Washington, D.C. Each applicant must present a plan on how it will be flexible and responsive to time-sensitive requirements as well as monitor and evaluate activities inside Syria. Applicants should consider the context of Syria's dynamic and challenging operating environment in their proposals, especially in terms of project implementation and monitoring. Applicants must demonstrate the ability to conduct baseline and needs assessments of potential Syrian beneficiaries. The award mechanism will be a cooperative agreement, with substantial involvement from NEA/AC and SRP in the recipient's implementation of this project. As such, NEA/AC and SRP staff will work closely with the recipient and provide direction regarding planned beneficiaries of assistance, including but not limited to the selection of beneficiary organizations and scope of programming.

Applicants must have experience implementing programs in conflict and/or restrictive media environments, ideally including experience working on or in Syria. Applicants must detail their ability to: deliver cash into Syria; provide technical assistance training and delivery or procurement of broadcast equipment inside of Syria; manage stabilization projects in complex environments; produce analytical research on conflict dynamics; and, conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation.

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Decades of authoritarian rule and restrictions on political and social life outside of state-sanctioned activity severely hindered the growth and development of an independent Syrian media environment. In 2011, civil demonstrations protesting the Syrian regime catalyzed the growth of independent media outlets and broadcasters, many of whom operate in Syrian territory outside the regime's control and among expatriate Syrian communities in neighboring countries. Concurrently, the Syrian regime, Russia, and Iran launched a concerted and coordinated disinformation campaign intended to distort understanding of the conflict, undercut stabilization efforts, and impede progress toward a political resolution to the conflict under UNSCR 2254.

Over a decade of brutal conflict in Syria has brought enormous suffering and challenges to Syrian civilians including: mass displacement due to violence by the regime and other armed actors; gross human rights violations and politically motivated detentions and killings; the emergence of violent extremist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates; fragmented opposition governance and military structures; acute shortages of basic needs such as food and shelter; and a collapse of essential service infrastructure and economic opportunities, among others. Facing and overcoming these challenges requires an informed and aware citizenry able

to detect and reject misinformation campaigns and malign groups' recruitment efforts to participate in violent extremist activities.

The current media environment in Syria is deeply polarized and fragmented between pro-regime and opposition outlets, as well as Kurdish and Arabic-language outlets, posing challenges for independent media that seeks to provide balanced coverage and build trust across divergent constituencies. Propaganda efforts by violent extremist groups and systematic disinformation operations by the Syrian regime, Russia, and Iran distort understanding of the conflict, undercut stabilization efforts, and impede progress toward achieving a peaceful political transition under UNSCR 2254. Stability and a sustainable resolution to the conflict require Syrians of all backgrounds to have access to moderate, balanced, non-sectarian sources of news and information in order to contribute effectively to a political resolution in the best interests of the Syrian people.

B. ACHIEVABLE OBJECTIVES

A successful proposal will demonstrate how to best support the independent media landscape in addressing the challenges and needs enumerated above. Proposed project activities should achieve the following objectives:

- Improve independent media platforms' capacity, journalistic production and management to ensure access for Syrians to unbiased, accurate, and locally relevant information, to empower citizens, promote accountability, and counter violent extremist narratives; and
- Counter disinformation perpetuated by designated by the Assad regime, terrorist organizations and other malign actors through support for professional Syrian media outlets

C. PROJECT DESIGN

This solicitation invites proposals from applicants with experience implementing media programming in restrictive and/or conflict environments, ideally in Syria. Successful proposals shall describe a clear theory of change integrating all project objectives into a coherent and convincing project that advances U.S. Syria objectives. Applicants should also articulate approaches to identifying any appropriate partners and relevant activities to advance project objectives. Additionally, proposals should explain a logical approach to delivering training and organizational capacity-building support to Syrian media entities based in Syria, Turkey, or elsewhere, and describe how the impact of these efforts will be assessed. Proposals should demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the particular challenges and opportunities to build capacity and sustainability, as well as enhance the market position of media entities.

Furthermore, proposals should elaborate on strategies to improve the media program offerings of Syrian partners, enhance the resonance and appeal of content, and increase audience share.

Applicants should also describe mechanisms for monitoring and providing feedback on station performance and content, both to ensure professional standards and to guide capacity building and development. Additionally, applicants should outline how the reach and market share of Syrian partners will be assessed. NEA/AC welcomes evidence-based approaches to achieving project objectives.

Applicants should consider how to foster productive relationships between media outlets, as well as between media outlets and local governance entities and civil society organizations in Syria. Additionally, NEA/AC requires that all activities fully address gender considerations, ensuring that both men and women benefit from support and that gender awareness is built into all project activities. This should be documented by a gender analysis that identifies relevant gender gaps and ways the activity will address those gaps. Proposals should demonstrate how addressing relevant gender gaps will enhance the project's goals and objectives.

Support Media Subaward Activities

Assistance may include, but is not limited to, subgrants to established and emerging Syrian media outlets in order to:

- Enhance the reach and appeal of sources of accurate, trusted, and locally relevant news and information for Syrian citizens;
- Support moderate voices and counter the violent extremist ideology and influence of ISIS, the Assad regime, and other malign actors;
- Expose and counter state-backed disinformation operations that distort understanding of the Syrian conflict;
- Support programming to enhance social cohesion and community reconciliation in non-regime controlled areas, with a special emphasis on women and youth;
- Support programming to raise awareness, enhance understanding and support opportunities for civil engagement in the political transition process under UNSCR 2254;
- Promote accountability and bolster the transparency of local governance entities, especially to provide an alternative to violent extremist groups;
- Improve the organizational capacity, structure, production and editorial processes and standards of Syrian independent media outlets; and
- Provide equipment and technical assistance to enhance the capacity of Syrian media organizations to reach target audiences.

Project Priorities

NEA/AC seeks applications that address the unique conditions found in the following priority areas:

- ***Syria-Wide:*** State-backed propaganda and disinformation operations, led by the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran, and other malign actors are a pervasive feature of the information landscape in Syria. These purveyors of disinformation create false narratives by distorting the reality of events on the ground, fabricating stories and misrepresenting events, locations, and timelines, often through use of out of context images and videos. Efforts seek to sow confusion, undermine stabilization efforts in northeast Syria, erode international support for the Syrian opposition, and weaken measures to isolate and hold the Syrian regime accountable for its crimes. The scale and predominance of these disinformation operations, and the distorted and partisan coverage from Syrian state-owned and affiliated broadcasters, threaten to drown out accurate and credible sources of information, and call for a systemic, rigorous response.

To address this concern, NEA/AC has previously supported a core group of independent Syrian media outlets to provide accurate, reliable, and locally relevant news and

information. While this support has enabled extensive media outlets to reach across opposition-controlled areas, challenges remain to: strengthen audience reach in all geographic regions, including regime-controlled areas; deepen connections with audiences and users; and, build trust across political faultlines. Applicants should propose innovative solutions for delivering training, capacity building, technical assistance, and operational and programmatic support to Syrian independent media to extend reach and build audience share in both opposition and regime-controlled areas. Furthermore, proposals should address measures to amplify moderate voices, counter violent extremist discourse, illuminate the activities that malign actors seek to obscure, and highlight strategies to educate audiences to recognize disinformation.

- ***Northeast Syria:*** Syrian civilians in areas liberated from ISIS in Aleppo, Hassakeh, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzour governorates have struggled to return to their homes and rebuild their lives. The dearth of essential services and employment opportunities, as well as a polarized information space, impedes IDP returns and creates a power vacuum for ISIS and other violent extremist groups to rebuild networks and propaganda platforms. ISIS sleeper cells and sympathizers continue to plague the region, including in IDP camps such as Al Hol, actively seeking to exploit the grievances and needs of the population as well as fuel tensions with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to undercut stabilization efforts and build support for ISIS resurgence. While the repressive reigns of the Syrian regime and ISIS have given way to a more favorable environment for media in some parts of northeast Syria, independent journalism is still taking root and media restrictions remain.

To address these challenges, NEA/AC has worked since 2016 to help establish and maintain a small number of local independent media outlets to provide accurate and trusted information, amplify moderate voices, promote human rights, counter violent extremist narratives, and enhance understanding and dialogue between different groups. NEA/AC seeks applications that build on and advance ongoing USG work with local independent media organizations in areas liberated from ISIS to: develop capacity; expand audience reach; produce locally-relevant content, especially for Syrian IDPs reintegrating into home or host communities; and, deepen audience/user engagement. This should include training, technical and capacity building support, and support to independent media outlets to cover production and operational costs. Applicants should propose innovative solutions for delivering training, capacity building, and technical assistance in a restrictive environment. Furthermore, applicants should address measures to amplify moderate, non-sectarian discourse, provide voice to women and youth, and counter violent extremist propaganda and the narratives supporting radicalization. Proposals should also highlight opportunities for media to enhance community cohesion, civic participation, and dialogue between citizens and local authorities, and promote effective reintegration.

- ***Political Process Support:*** A Syrian-led political process facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva, as called for by UNSCR 2254, remains the sole pathway towards resolving the Syrian conflict. NEA/AC seeks applications supporting the engagement of Syrians, civil society, independent actors, and local and national opposition bodies in all

aspects of the political process under UNSCR 2254 through independent media coverage. NEA/AC encourages applicants to propose measures to facilitate transparency, improve awareness, and promote discussion among Syrian constituents – both inside Syria and in the diaspora community – about the political process. Additionally, applicants should propose media-related efforts to facilitate dialogue and constructive engagement between the Syrian political opposition, civilian opposition actors, and Syrian citizens.

- ***Gender Equity and Inclusion:*** Initial analysis of the recent media consumption survey conducted by the project demonstrates that women in Syria are enthusiastic consumers of media across all mediums. Women in the survey expressed strong preferences for targeted content on education and literacy, women’s safety in the home and community, women’s rights, and economic resilience. NEA/AC requires that all activities fully address gender considerations, ensuring that both men and women benefit from support, where applicable, and that gender awareness is a built-in component of project activities such as, but not limited to, content production and the intersection of gender and key priority policies in Syria such as climate change. This should be documented through gender analysis in the project narrative that identifies any relevant gender gaps and ways the proposed activities will address those gaps. Proposals should demonstrate how addressing relevant gender gaps will enhance the project’s goals and objectives. Additionally, applicants should propose efforts to ensure women are trained, mentored, and promoted across all levels of staffing and leadership within the media outlets and platforms, or opportunities for support or expansion of a women-centered media platform.

Monitoring & Evaluation; Lessons Learned; Research

- Successful applicants will work with NEA/AC to build flexible and effective methods for monitoring and evaluating ongoing and completed project activities to ensure programmatic interventions achieve targeted outputs and outcomes. Applicants should address how the proposed project will incorporate best practices for lessons learned to enhance overall effectiveness of programmatic activities.
- Rapidly changing conditions in Syria present ongoing challenges to programs and partners, requiring vigilant observations and monitoring of local conditions, conflict dynamics, security, and access. Additionally, applicants must demonstrate they are able to continually assess the suitability of potential local partners during the life of the project based on capacity and compatibility with project goals. Applicants should present scalable options for conducting research to enhance, complement, and monitor programmatic activities.
- Applicants should demonstrate understanding of methodologies used to evaluate broadcast market share and the appeal and impact of the program content of Syrian partners, as well as digital analytics to assess online reach and engagement.

NEA/AC might implement this project in collaboration with other U.S. entities and international donor governments supporting independent media in Syria.

NEA/AC will require weekly reporting on project activities and standard quarterly reporting (at a minimum) in addition to ad hoc reporting requests.

The following activities and costs are **NOT ALLOWED** under this announcement:

- Exchange activities with other countries or territories;
- Activities that appear partisan or that support individual or party electoral campaigns;
- Academic or analytical research (if not necessary as part of a larger project);
- Medical and psychological research and clinical studies;
- Projects of a commercial or profit-making nature; and
- Entertainment costs (e.g., receptions, social activities, ceremonies, alcoholic beverages, guided tours); these are different than costs for cultural activities integral to programming

NOTE: Applications that include any of these activities or costs above may be eliminated at the Technical Eligibility Review stage and will not advance to the Merit Review Panel.

D. GENDER INTEGRATION

NEA/AC requires that all activities fully address gender considerations, ensuring that both men and women benefit from support where applicable, and that gender awareness is a built-in component of project activities. Proposals should also identify how activities will encourage more substantive representation of women and members of religious / ethnic minority groups in local governance. This should be documented through gender analysis in the project narrative that identifies any relevant gender gaps and ways the proposed activities will address those gaps. Proposals should demonstrate how addressing relevant gender gaps will enhance the project's goals and objectives. Applicants who are unfamiliar with integrating gender in foreign assistance programming should view the training video located here:

https://encompassworld.com/elearningfiles/DOS/DOS_Gender_Integration_E-Course/story_html5.html

E. DEFINITIONS

The following are **definitions** of activities and terms detailed in this announcement:

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):

For the purposes of this NOFO, CSOs include, but are not limited to, community-based organizations, human rights organizations, non-governmental service providers, women's groups, labor unions, business and professional associations, youth movements, think tanks, and organizations representing vulnerable populations.

Capacity Building:

For the purposes of this NOFO, this means strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations to effectively undertake advocacy, coalition-building, internal governance, membership representation and services; and to engage in other activities aimed at fostering more peaceful and democratic societies. Areas of capacity-building may include, but are not limited to, technical expertise (e.g. human rights, community reintegration); CSO self-regulation (e.g. establishing NGO Codes of Conduct); organizational capacity (e.g. strategic planning, financial management and accountability, human resources, media and public outreach,

sustainability and fundraising, cybersecurity); and targeted advocacy training and technical assistance.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA):

For the purposes of this NOFO:

Diversity means the practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of a community, including underserved communities; *Equity* means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment;

Inclusion means the recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of persons of all backgrounds; and

Accessibility means the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them.

Underserved communities refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of equity.

II. MEASUREMENT OF RESULTS

Applicants shall provide a logic model with a theory of change to demonstrate how the proposed project (including activities, the project design, and the surrounding context) will achieve the stated objectives. The logic model and theory of change statements can be generated using the template in Appendix 2. Applicants shall also provide a Results Monitoring Plan (RMP) to describe how the proposed project will capture and measure data that demonstrates progress toward achieving the specific objectives of the proposed project. The RMP may also include project-specific sub-objectives (i.e. project outcomes). Please see Appendix 3 for the RMP template. Please see Section VI below for more information.

Successful applicants will work with the NEA/AC program and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) teams to finalize a RMP based on the proposed logic model to measure qualitative and quantitative indicators as part of the award negotiations process. The successful applicant will be responsible for collecting data against these indicators – which will be monitored throughout the period of performance of the award to gauge necessary modifications to the project’s design – and assess the results of the project’s success in meeting expected outcomes.

All projects funded as a result of this NOFO will be required to complete a final evaluation of the project at the end of the period of performance with support from the NEA/AC MEL team. Successful applicants will dedicate between 3% and 5% of their total budget to monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Selected applicants are required to have project information available

for up to three years after the project closeout for the NEA/AC and SRP team to evaluate long-term outcomes.

Below is a list of U.S. Department of State standard development indicators for foreign assistance that are commonly used for measuring and reporting project results. Not all indicators below will be applicable to the proposed project, though the applicant is encouraged to use them where relevant in developing the logic model and associated RMP. NEA/AC's MEL team will work with the successful applicant on finalizing indicators as part of a RMP that will be utilized for the negotiated award.

- DR 5.2-2 Number of journalists trained and supported
- DR 5.3-1 Number of non-state news outlets assisted by USG
- DR 5.3-2 Number of USG-assisted media-sector civil society organizations (CSO) and/or institutions that serve to strengthen the independent media or journalists

III. AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement
Estimated Number of Awards:	One (1)
Estimated Total Program Funding:	\$15,000,000
Estimated Base Year Award Ceiling:	\$5,000,000
Estimated Base Year Award Floor:	\$3,000,000
Cost-Sharing or Matching:	Encouraged; NOT Required
Estimated Length of Project Period:	One to Three (1-3) Years

Contingent on the availability of funds, approximately \$15,000,000 in Economic Support Funds for one (1) award will be awarded through this announcement. If selected to receive an award, an applicant will be awarded funds for one base year with the potential to be awarded an additional two option years, depending on the activities proposed. The estimated start date for this project is April 1, 2023.

NEA/AC reserves the right to award more or less than the estimated program funding, and reserves the right to award funding under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

This request for full applications **does not** constitute an award or commitment on the part of the U.S. government to make any awards, **nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.**

Non-Competing Continuation

Continuation grants funded under these awards, beyond the initial budget period, will be contingent upon the availability of funds; grantee's progress in meeting grant requirements, including timely submission of required reports and compliance with all terms and conditions of the award; timely submission of a request for additional funding; and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the Department of State.

Pending successful implementation of this project for the initial estimated length of time as indicated above, and pending the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, NEA/AC may extend this grant for additional time, not to exceed a three (3) year total project period. Please note that this NOFO requires that applicants submit additional budget materials to plan for potential out-years of non-competing continuations. See Section VI Application and Submission Information for more details.

IV. SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT

NEA/AC and SRP will be involved in the project and management performance of this cooperative agreement through consultation and technical collaboration on project activities. It is expected that the recipient will remain adaptable to the requests of both NEA/AC and SRP team members.

NEA/AC and SRP Responsibilities

Examples of NEA/AC and SRP responsibilities for a cooperative agreement may include:

- Collaboration in establishing annual project objectives and approval of an annual work plan;
- Collaboration in identifying and developing opportunities to expand programming;
- Collaboration in identifying and designing on-the-ground activities;
- Collaboration in the creation and development of training and other materials provided to beneficiaries;
- Collaboration with the Department of State in areas which the Department of State's technical knowledge would benefit the Recipient's successful accomplishment of stated project objectives;
- Selection of local partners to implement activities and project participants; and
- Facilitating coordination with other donors and related projects (including projects funded by NEA/AC and other U.S. entities).

V. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

All applicants will be screened by NEA/AC to determine whether they meet all of the eligibility requirements detailed below.

NOTE: Applications that do not demonstrate that they meet all of the eligibility requirements in Section A and Section B will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage and may be deemed ineligible for funding under this announcement. Nothing can be added to an application once the competition deadline has passed.

A. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants include:

- U.S. or foreign
 - o Non-profit organizations;
 - o For-profit organizations;
 - o Private, public, or state institutions of higher education; and
 - o Public international organizations

NEA/AC is committed to an anti-discrimination policy in all of its programs and activities. NEA/AC welcomes applications irrespective of an applicants' race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. We encourage applications from organizations working with underserved communities, including women, people with disabilities, and youth.

NEA/AC strongly encourages applications from civil society organizations headquartered in the Middle East and North Africa region. International non-governmental organizations with principal bases of operations outside the Middle East and North Africa are also encouraged to apply, **but the percentage of total budget actually spent in the region through local partners will be among the elements of evaluation for this competition.**

A.1. Prime Applicant

To be considered for funding under this opportunity, applicants SHALL:

- Have demonstrable previous experience working in closed or conflict environments, preferably in Syria. This should be addressed within the project narrative section of the application.
- Have experience in conducting risk assessments and monitoring and evaluating projects and sub-recipients in order to document and assess the short- and long-term outcomes of proposed projects.
- Demonstrate the ability to advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) through a project team inclusive of Syrian nationals with previous experience managing stabilization programming in the region reflected at all levels of project management.
- Meet ALL of the registration requirements listed below.
- Meet any requirements listed as MANDATORY in *Additional Eligibility Considerations*, below.

Additionally, applicants should:

- Demonstrate experience managing and monitoring a significant number of sub-recipients and/or direct assistance projects. Applications should clearly outline this experience, including total volume (total dollar amount, number of partners, and number of projects), scope and length of sub-awards managed, and geographic and thematic focus. If the applicant has provided capacity-building support to sub-recipients, please indicate the type of support.
- Demonstrate in the project and budget narratives how the assistance mechanism will be managed, monitored, and evaluated to ensure compliance with the project objectives and Federal regulations. The successful applicant will be responsible for overseeing the

implementation of all sub-recipients, and/or other direct assistance to ensure completion of activities, programmatic efficacy, institutional strengthening, and financial propriety.

- Demonstrate the ability to accomplish the required activities with efficient staffing and without establishing a dedicated local office in Syria.
- Demonstrate the ability to recruit/hire technical consultants with subject matter expertise relevant to organizational capacity strengthening interventions.
- Demonstrate a successful track record of building a cohesive and effective team consisting of diverse and geographically dispersed members and clear plan for continuing success under this funding opportunity.

A.2. Local Partners

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit a proposal that include partnerships with local organizations that would work together on specific programmatic objectives or priorities and that utilize local expertise. In particular, NEA/AC strongly encourages applicants not based in the MENA region to partner with local organizations working in or on Syria.

B. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

To apply for NEA/AC (Federal) funding, organizations, whether based in or outside the U.S., must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number and an active account with the System for Award Management (SAM). Applicants who do not meet all registration requirements are NOT eligible for funding under the opportunity.

UEI Number

All applicants must have a Unique Entity Identification (UEI) number.

On and after April 4, 2022, entities can register in SAM.gov and will be assigned their Unique Entity ID (SAM) within SAM.gov. Entities will no longer obtain or use a UEI (DUNS) for entity registration or reporting.

System for Award Management (SAM)

SAM is a U.S. government wide registry of vendors doing business with the Federal government and requires annual renewal. The system centralizes information about grant applicants/recipients, and provides a central location for grant applicants/recipients to change organizational information.

Further, each applicant must maintain an active account, with current information, while its application is under consideration for funding. To keep an active SAM.gov account, an applicant must renew it at least once each year. If an organization's account expires, the organization cannot submit a grant application until it is renewed.

To create a new SAM account, go to <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>.

U.S.-based organizations must have a UEI number and a CAGE number. The CAGE code will be issued by SAM.gov. **Please note that as of December 2022, organizations based outside of the United States that do not intend to apply for U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) awards are no longer required to have a NATO CAGE (NCAGE) code to apply for non-DoD**

foreign assistance funding opportunities. If an applicant organization is mid-registration and wishes to remove an NCAGE code from their SAM.gov registration, the applicant should submit a help desk ticket (“incident”) with the Federal Service Desk (FSD) online at www.fsd.gov to seek guidance on how to do so. **Organizations based outside of the U.S. are still required to have a UEI and SAM.gov registration.**

For help with SAM.gov, please visit their support page at <https://www.fsd.gov> or contact them at: 866-606-8220 (U.S.) or +1-334-206-7828 (international).

Note: Obtaining an active SAM.gov registration may take **12-15 business days** to complete the process of creating an account in the system.

C. ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

C.1 Cost-Sharing or Matching

There is no minimum or maximum percentage required for this competition. However, NEA/AC encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its projects.

Cost-sharing or matching is not an evaluation criteria of this NOFO.

C.2 Host Country Legal Compliance

NEA/AC requires that applicants be in sound legal standing with appropriate host government authorities at the time of application to this funding opportunity. If the applicant is not currently based in Berlin, Germany and intends to operate from that location, they should demonstrate the ability to establish a base there in a timely manner following notification of the award. Award recipients will be required to maintain legal standing throughout the life of the award, including for any sub-grant made under its auspices.

VI. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

All applications must include the application components detailed below. **All application documents must be submitted in English.** Applicants may submit only one (1) application. Please refer to Section B below for additional submissions guidance and requirements.

NOTE: Applications that do not include all the required documentation described in Section 1 below will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage. Further, applications that exceed the allowable page limits will not be reviewed by the review panel. **Applicants may not add any materials to an application once it has been submitted and the competition deadline has passed.**

A.1. Required Documents

Federal Assistance Application Forms (SF-424 and SF424a)

Applicants must complete each of these forms online to be considered for funding. **Guidance on how to complete the SF-424 and SF424a is provided in Appendix 4.**

NOTE: In addition to following all guidance outlined below regarding application materials, applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Application Evaluation Criteria section of this NOFO closely as they prepare their proposal. The Evaluation Criteria section is the rubric by which each application will be scored.

Project Narrative

The Project Narrative describes the efforts the applicant will undertake to address the priorities and goals of this announcement. **This section of the application may be no longer than 12 pages.** More details on preparing the Project Narrative are provided in Appendix 4. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to review Appendix 4 before preparing their Narrative.**

Budget & Budget Narrative Submission

Applicants must provide the following three elements as part of their budget submission:

- Summary Budget
- Detailed Line Item Budget
- Budget Narrative

A detailed budget for 12 months is required as well as a notional budget for two additional out (option) years, with each option period being one year. The option periods should be their own detailed tabs (one year per tab) within the budget.

There is no page limit for this section of an application. A sample fillable template can be found in Appendix 1. This template includes three tabs: The first tab includes written guidance on preparing the **Budget Narrative**. Applicants are strongly encouraged to create their Budget Narrative in Word and submit as either a Word Doc or PDF file. Please note that the Budget Narrative should include designations of who is considered Key Personnel for this project. As defined in the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (for assistance awards, Key Personnel means, "...key professional and supervisory personnel; i.e., the members of the professional staff in a program supervisory position engaged for or assigned to duties under the award." The second tab has the template for the **Summary Budget**. This tab will auto-fill as you complete the Detailed Line Item Budget, which can be found on the third tab. The third tab is where you can fill in the template for the **Detailed Line Item Budget** as stated above. **NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as provided in the template, and to submit summary and detailed line item budgets in Excel form, and the Budget Narrative as either a PDF or Word file.** If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. The template, which includes more detailed instructions, can be found in Appendix 1. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to review Appendix 1 before preparing their Budget and Budget Narrative.**

Logic Model and Theory of Change

Applicants shall provide a logic model and theory of change statement to demonstrate how the proposed project (including activities, the project design, and the surrounding context) will achieve the stated objectives. A theory of change statement describes how and why a program is expected to achieve its stated outcomes using if-then language. The logic model and theory of change statements can be generated using the template in **Appendix 2**. **NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as found in the sample.** If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. **This section of the application may be no longer than 3 pages.**

Results Monitoring Plan

Applicants shall provide a Results Monitoring Plan (RMP). The RMP can be generated using the template in Appendix 3. **NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as found in the sample.** If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. The RMP shall be submitted as a separate document from the Logic Model and Theory of Change. **There is no page limit for this section of the application.**

Project Timeline

Applicants must provide an overall breakdown of the order and timeframe in which all project activities will take place. This item should provide a macro snapshot of what will take place from beginning to end of the project. Applicants must ensure that the timeline of activities/events corresponds with details provided in the Project Narrative and Logic Model/Theory of Change. **This section of the application may not exceed 2 pages.**

Security, Risk Mitigation, & Contingency Planning Summary

This item should provide detail regarding the applicant's intended due diligence to assess and mitigate risks, and put in place adequate security measures to ensure the safety and well-being of project staff, participants, and partners, if applicable. This should include specific actions by the applicant to ensure risks are adequately and routinely assessed, and that security measures are commensurate with operational concerns specific to the locale. The applicant should also include a contingency plan that highlights potential challenges and limitations to project implementation in the operating environment and propose contingency plans should program activities be impacted. Please note that this section should not be limited to physical security and risk but should cover any applicable factors relevant to the given operating environment. **This section of the application may be no longer than 5 pages.**

Project Organizational Chart

The organizational chart outlines the clear lines of responsibility and authority in the applicant organization to include budgeted level of effort listed by each person. All proposed staff for the project shall be included, with location detailed. **This section of the application may be no longer than 1 page.**

Job Descriptions/Biographical Info for Key Personnel Positions

For each position designated as key personnel for this project, applicants must provide the following:

If the position is already filled: Provide brief biographical information summarizing the person's qualifications, as well as a brief description of the roles or responsibilities pertaining to this project.

OR

If the person to fill a key position has not yet been hired: Provide a brief summary of the job description, which should include a description of the roles and responsibilities pertaining to this project, as well as a description of qualifications of eligible candidates.

NOTE: If an applicant is proposing sub-grant partner(s) as part of their project design, **Key Personnel/Positions of the sub grantee must also be included. This section of the application may be no longer than 5 pages.**

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement **NOTE: This item is required only IF applicable.**

Applicants proposing indirect costs in the budget greater than a 10% de minimis rate must provide a copy of their Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA). **There is no page limit for this section of the application.**

A.2. Optional Documents

Applicants may submit additional documents for consideration with their application. These documents are not required, though if any are submitted, they will need to be submitted as one attachment. **This section of the application may be no longer than 10 pages.**

NOTE: Applicants must adhere to all maximum allowed page counts. Applications that exceed any of the allowable page limits will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage.

B. APPLICATION FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

The required font is 12-point, Times New Roman. All application documents must be single spaced, with all margins (left, right, top, and bottom) of at least one inch each. Also, applicants should ensure all pages in the application package are numbered consecutively and meet the page limit requirements outlined in Section VI above. **The Standard Forms 424 (SF-424 and SF-424a) are excluded from the page numbering.**

It is strongly recommended that applicants submit grant applications using Microsoft Office. If applicants do not have access to Microsoft Office products, Adobe PDF files may be submitted.

C. SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

Applicants must submit their application electronically using SAMS Domestic. Applications will **NOT** be accepted from grants.gov. SAMS Domestic requires that the applying organization have an account with the system and both require a UEI number and SAM.gov account as detailed in Section V. **It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they have an active account and will be able to submit its application.** NEA/AC is not in a position to grant exceptions to these requirements.

The application process is not complete until the applicant receives notification that its application has been validated and forwarded to the granting agency (NEA/AC). Please allow sufficient time for entering the application into these systems. It is the responsibility of the applicant to monitor its application to ensure that it is successfully received and validated.

SAMS Domestic

SAMS Domestic is a comprehensive grants management system that allows applicants to apply for, manage, and report on the use of U.S. government funds for multiple projects, accessed online at mygrants.service-now.com.

To create an account, go to <https://afsism.servicenowservices.com/ilms/>, and click the “create an account” hyperlink, located above the user name prompt. Users will be directed to a page entitled “User Registration Request;” complete the online form and click the “Submit” button. Users will receive an activation email entitled “Verify Your Grants Account Registration;” click the activation link within the email to receive a username and password.

SAMS Domestic has Quick Tours available to educate users about the system. These documents can be found on the Support tab upon logging into the system.

For questions regarding creating an account or using SAMS Domestic to submit an application, contact the ILMS Help Desk. The Help Desk is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, excluding Federal holidays. The ILMS Help Desk utilizes a user-facing ticketing interface that allows users to submit and monitor their SAMS Domestic tickets. The ILMS Self Service Portal can be accessed by going to <https://afsism.servicenowservices.com/ilms/>.

D. SUBMISSION DATES AND TIMES

Applications must be time stamped before 17:00:00 eastern time (ET) on February 16, 2023. There will be no grace period, and any application not received by the application deadline will be deemed ineligible and will not advance to be reviewed. **Each applicant is encouraged to submit an application far enough in advance of the deadline so that the applicant can alert NEA/AC (nea-grants@state.gov) of any technical difficulties and allow sufficient time to resolve difficulties before the deadline.** Although NEA/AC will work with applicants to resolve technical issues, it is not in a position to grant exceptions to the submission requirements outlined in this announcement.

VII. FUNDING LIMITATIONS, RESTRICTIONS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

A. AWARDS TO COMMERCIAL FIRMS OR FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Department of State prohibits profit under its assistance awards to commercial organizations. No funds will be paid as profit to any recipient that is a commercial organization. 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 Part 31. Program income earned by the recipient may be:

added to the total of the amount of this award, including the required cost sharing or matching, and use it to further eligible project objectives;
 used to meet the Recipient's cost sharing or matching requirement;
 OR deducted from the total project or program allowable cost in determining the net allowable costs on which the federal share of costs is based.

B. AUDIT REQUIREMENTS

Domestic and foreign organizations that expend \$750,000 or more in a fiscal year in federal assistance must perform an independent, recipient-contracted Single Audit or Program Specific Audit. (***Program-specific Audit*** means an audit of one Federal award program. ***Single Audit*** means an audit which includes both the entity's financial statements and the Federal Awards to be conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). The audits must be independently and professionally executed in accordance with GAGAS either prescribed by a government's Supreme Audit Institution with auditing standards approved by the Comptroller General of the United States, or the host country's laws or adopted by the host country's public accountants or associations of public accountants, together with generally accepted international auditing standards. However, foreign entity audits consistent with International Standards for Auditing or other auditing standards are acceptable with the Grants Officer's approval. More information can be found at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/693136.pdf>

For sub-non-Federal entities expending \$750,000 or more in Department of State award funding during their fiscal year, Department of State standard audit provisions require that Prime non-Federal entities certify that audits of sub-non-Federal entities are performed annually and according to the standards described above. The cost of audits required under this policy may be charged either as an allowable direct cost to the award OR included in the organizations established indirect costs in the award's detailed budget.

C. COMPLIANCE WITH APPLICABLE FEDERAL FUNDING REGULATIONS AND DOS TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Payment of funds awarded under this Notice of Funding Opportunity will not be disbursed until the DOS has been assured that the Recipient's financial management system will provide effective control over and accountability for all Federal funds in accordance with 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable. Awards issued under this NOFO are subject to the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/U.S.-Department-of-State-Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-10-01-2019508.pdf>) and 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable.

VIII. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

Achievable Objectives (20 points)

Each of the project objectives listed above (in Section I) are clearly addressed.

- **Impact and Effectiveness:** The applicant describes the project's potential contribution to solving the problem addressed in the problem statement and achieving results.

- **Timeframe:** The applicant describes realistic results to be accomplished within the timeframe of the proposed award.
- **Beneficiaries:** The applicant clearly identifies the anticipated beneficiaries and explains how the project's objectives will positively affect them.
- **Milestones:** The applicant provides realistic milestones to indicate progress toward goals and objectives as described in the program announcement.
- **MEL:** The applicant explains how monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities will be carried out throughout the award's period of performance and who will be responsible for them. Ideally, the applicant will have an embedded team member specialized in MEL that can offer regular feedback to NEA/AC and assist with adjusting the project in response to monitoring and evaluation findings.

Project Design (40 points)

The applicant clearly describes how each proposed project activity will address each of the objectives outlined in the requested priority area above (Section I).

- **Responsiveness to NOFO:** The applicant describes how the proposed activities respond to the objectives listed in the NOFO.
- **Logic Model and Theory of Change:** The applicant details how the proposed Logic Model and Theory of Change clearly links project activities, outputs, and outcomes to objectives.
- **Results Monitoring Plan:** The applicant details how they intend to monitor project progress towards outputs, outcomes, and objectives.
- **Rationale:** The applicant justifies how the proposed activities will achieve the above objectives in this context.
- **Project Management:** The applicant provides a clear description of how the project will be managed in terms of initiation, planning, implementation, and closing. The applicant should detail experience implementing programming in conflict zones.
- **Partnerships and Buy-ins:** The applicant addresses how the project will engage or obtain support from relevant stakeholders and identified local partners.
- **Feasibility:** The applicant proposes activities that are feasible, practical, and/or experiential in nature to encourage innovation.
- **Beneficiaries Selection Criteria and Process:** The applicant explains how participants will be selected (e.g., criteria for selection, selection process).
- **Duplication:** The applicant acknowledges if activities similar to those proposed are already taking place or have taken place previously, and provides an explanation as to how proposed new activities will not duplicate or merely add to existing/recent activities, but rather expand upon.
- **Contingency Plan:** The applicant articulates programming assumptions and potential challenges to project implementation and proposes contingency plans.
- **Division of Labor:** The application describes the division of labor among the applicant and any partners.
- **Gender Considerations:** The applicant includes gender analysis in the project narrative that identifies relevant gender gaps and ways the proposed activities will address those gaps. The applicant demonstrates how provision of essential services and capacity building training for local actors will benefit both men and women.

Organizational Capacity (20 points)

- The applicant demonstrates experience (e.g., has previously worked and/or has established contacts/partners) implementing programming in conflict areas similar to Syria.
- The applicant demonstrates its ability to start project activities quickly after award, thereby minimizing gaps in service.
- The applicant demonstrates an institutional record of successful projects in the content area proposed.
- The applicant demonstrates capacity for responsible fiscal management of donor funding (e.g., successful management of a previous sub-award or grant).
- The applicant demonstrates the ability to meet monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- The applicant has adequate staffing and demonstrates the capacity to manage the proposed project.

Staff and Position Specifications (10 points)

- The applicant details pre-identified key staff members – including volunteers – with demonstrable experience working in the country/territory/region proposed, in the proposed content area (e.g., language skills, cultural understanding).
- The applicant provides a description of the roles of each person or position on the project – whether staff, partner, consultant, or volunteer – demonstrating that the project will be sufficiently staffed but will avoid redundancy or duplication of effort.
- The applicant details job descriptions, including hiring criteria, for each open key position.
- The applicant details a reasonable staffing pattern to effectively and efficiently implement and manage project activities. The location of staff identified to work on the project is detailed and clearly articulates the necessity for the proposed staffing plan.
- The applicant discusses the proposed office posture for staff, as well as how effective management of staff will occur if a hybrid staffing model and/or remote staff – to include consultants – is detailed.
- The leadership/management and staff proposed by the applicant and partners have relevant language competencies.
- The applicant convincingly details how it will incorporate Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) principles in its approach to staffing.

Budget & Budget Narrative (10 points)

- The applicant proposes reasonable costs in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results, which are clearly explained in the budget narrative.
- The applicant's budget provides details of calculations, including estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail sufficient for the calculation to be duplicated.
- The applicant provides a budget with a preponderance of the proposed costs spent on programmatic activities supporting subawards implemented by independent Syrian media organizations.
- The applicant includes costs dedicated to management, monitoring, and evaluation, and any costs needed for further gender analysis and for addressing gender gaps.
- The applicant proposes adequate travel costs.

B. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

NEA/AC is committed to ensuring a competitive and standardized process for awarding funding. Applications will be screened initially in a Technical Eligibility Review stage to determine whether applicants meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Section V and have submitted all required documents outlined in Section VI. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not advance beyond the Technical Eligibility Review stage and will be deemed ineligible for funding under this NOFO.

NEA/AC reserves the right to have all applications deemed to be technically eligible undergo a Subject Matter Expert (SME) review prior to the Merit Review Panel. Applications that do not pass SME review will not proceed to the Merit Review Panel.

All applications that proceed to the Merit Review Panel will be evaluated by U.S. government and non-governmental subject matter and/or country-specific experts and will be rated on a 100-point scale. Point values for individual elements of the application are presented in Section VIII. Panel Reviewers' ratings, and any resulting recommendations, are advisory.

Final award decisions will be influenced by whether the application meets NEA/AC's programmatic goals and objectives, how it supports the Department's overarching foreign policy priorities, and the geographic distribution of the top-ranking applications.

IX. ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. AWARD NOTICES

Applicants who do not advance beyond the Technical Eligibility Review stage will be notified 30 business days after the closing of the announcement. The authorized representative and program point of contact listed on the SF-424 will receive the notification via email. If an applicant does not receive such a notification, their submission was put forward for review.

NEA/AC expects to notify applicants who proceeded past the Technical Eligibility Review stage about the status of their application by March 31, 2023. Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal bureau procedures. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from the bureau's Grants Office. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer identified in the application. NEA/AC reserves the right to award funding to applicants under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

B. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting is critical to effective program management and oversight. Reports are required as a means of evaluating the recipient's progress and utilization of resources. They are divided between a performance progress report and a financial status report.

Recipients will, at a minimum, be required to submit Quarterly Performance Reports (QPR) and a Quarterly Financial Report (QFR). The QPRs will compare actual to planned performance and indicates the progress made in accomplishing each assistance award tasks/goals noted in the grant agreement and will contain analysis and summary of findings, both quantitative and qualitative, for key indicators. The QFRs provide a means of monitoring expenditures and comparing costs incurred with progress.

Recipients must report ***immediately*** when a program faces unplanned delays in implementation, fails to meet program targets or milestones, or costs increase. Any changes or revisions to the approved budget require prior approval from the NEA/AC Grants Officer.

Recipients are required to report program and beneficiary achievements on a quarterly basis (or provide written confirmation that there is no related news for the given quarter) beginning with second quarter's program report.

C. TRAVEL NOTIFICATIONS

Successful applicants will be required to provide prior notification of all international travel as a requirement of their agreement. This includes travel which is already included in the approved budget and Scope of Work. The purpose of this notification is to enable NEA/AC to inform the relevant U.S. Embassy or post of the recipient's intent to travel. The recipient must notify the Grants Officer at least three (3) business days prior to any travel. The Grants Officer reserves the right to advise against specific travel arrangements for security-related reasons.

D. APPLICANT VETTING AS A CONDITION OF AWARD

Applicants are reminded that U.S. Executive Orders and U.S. laws prohibit transactions with, and the provision of resources and support to, certain individuals and organizations associated with terrorism. Applicants proposing activities in Syria are advised that successful passing of vetting to mitigate the risk that funds may benefit terrorists is a condition of the award.

It is the legal responsibility of a recipient and any sub-recipient to ensure that all activities covered under an award issued under this NOFO conform to applicable U.S. laws and related provisions, including Executive Order 13224, and other statutory and regulatory limitations on the provision of material support or resources or other benefit to designated entities and individuals.

The State Department has implemented a Risk Analysis and Management (RAM) Program to vet potential contractors and grantees seeking funding from the Department of State to mitigate the risk that such funds might benefit entities or individuals who present a national security risk. To conduct this vetting program the Department collects information from contractors, subcontractors, grantees, and sub-grantees regarding their directors, officers and/or key employees through mail, fax or electronic submission. The information collected is compared to information gathered from commercial, public, and U.S. government databases to determine the risk that the applying organization, entity, or individual might use Department funds or programs in a way that presents a threat to national security. The Grants Officer will inform the recipient

of when vetting will be initiated and provide the complete details and requirements prior to the issuance of the award.

For awards issued under this NOFO, vetting is required for three general categories of individuals as follows:

1. Prime Awardee

- a. All Key Personnel of a Prime Awardee must be vetted.
- b. The following Key Individuals must be vetted:
 - i. All field-based (i.e., Turkey-, Jordan-, or Syria-based) Key Individuals.
 - ii. Key Individuals who are based elsewhere but travel to Turkey, Jordan, or Syria for more than 25 percent of the Award's period of performance to deliver trainings and support.
- c. *For clarity, vetting is not required for Key Individuals based elsewhere who do not travel to Turkey, Jordan, or Syria for more than 25 percent of the Award's period of performance.*

2. Sub-Awardee

- a. All Key Personnel of a Sub-Awardee must be vetted.
- b. The following Key Individuals must be vetted:
 - i. All field-based (i.e., Turkey-, Jordan-, or Syria-based) Key Individuals.
 - ii. Key Individuals who are based elsewhere but travel to Turkey, Jordan, or Syria for more than 25 percent of the Sub-Award's period of performance to deliver training and support.
- c. *For clarity, vetting is not required for Key Individuals based elsewhere who do not travel to Turkey, Jordan, or Syria for more than 25 percent of the Award's period of performance.*

3. Recipients of Assistance and Participants in Award-Funded Activities

Recipients of award-funded assistance and participants in award-funded activities must be vetted in accordance with the following:

- a. **Training Activities:** Unless otherwise approved in writing by the GO, all participants and Syrian trainers involved in trainings held outside Syria (e.g., in Turkey or Jordan) must be vetted. For training activities taking place inside Syria, unless otherwise determined by the GO, vetting will generally be required for Syrian trainers but not for participants. However, the GO may require additional vetting of participants on a case-by-case basis. The GO will review risk profiles prior to training activities to determine the appropriate level of vetting.
- b. **Recipients of cash or in-kind support:** Vetting of Key Individuals is required when DOS-funded cash (e.g., operational or project funds) or in-kind assistance (e.g., medical equipment, community center users, food baskets) is provided to a recipient entity, whether or not such entity is a Sub-Awardee. For example, vetting would be required for Key Individuals of a local council or other group

that receives DOS-funded communications equipment or specific project support via a Sub-Award or other means.

Even if vetting would not otherwise be required under these three categories, on a case-by-case basis, and prior to GO approval of a Sub-Award or project activity, the GO may require additional vetting for specific activities funded under an award.

All individuals meeting these specifications, whether previously vetted or not, must be submitted for vetting. When vetting information is requested by the Grants Officer, RAM usually requests the vetting information via emails to the recipient's Authorizing Official. The recipient should submit the required information on the secure web portal at <https://ramportal.state.gov>, via email to RAM@state.gov, or hardcopy to the Grants Officer. Questions regarding the form may be emailed to RAM@state.gov. Forms must be submitted no later than five business days after RAM provides the Authorizing Official (identified by the Grants Officer) with a username and password for the secure portal.

Only those individuals for whom vetting is required and who have successfully passed the required vetting may receive assistance or participate in an Award. Individuals refusing to provide vetting data – or who provide false data – will not be eligible to receive assistance. Vetting must be completed 10 business days prior to an activity and may not occur retroactively.

The government reserves the right to terminate awards for convenience based on vetting results. For activities lasting more than one year, in accordance with the vetting policy, the recipient must resubmit required individuals to maintain compliance with this award requirement.

For the lifetime of the award, no funds from Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO), Specially Designated Global Terrorists, or other prohibited groups will be used to finance activities or organizations associated with the award, including but not limited to advertising, program performance/support, etc.

To mitigate the risk of prohibited dealings with or for the benefit of terrorists, the recipient must check the System for Award management (SAM) (www.SAM.gov) for all individuals and entities associated with this project.

E. SPECIAL PROVISION FOR PERFORMANCE IN A DESIGNATED COMBAT AREA (SPOT) REQUIREMENTS

Applicants proposing activities in **Iraq** and **Syria** are required to adhere to the following:

All recipient personnel deploying to an area of combat operations, as designated by the Secretary of Defense under federal assistance over \$150,000 or performance over 30 days must register in the Department of Defense maintained Synchronized Pre-deployment and Operational Tracker (SPOT) system. Recipients of federal assistance awards shall register in SPOT before deployment, or if already in the designated operational area, register upon becoming an employee under the assistance award and maintain current data in SPOT. Information on how to register in SPOT is available from your Grants Officer or Grants Officer Representative.

Recipients utilizing personnel who are not performing private security functions must account for personnel within the SPOT system anonymously through the use of the aggregate count functionality. This includes U.S. Citizens, Third Country Nationals (TCN), and Locally-hired Iraqi personnel except as noted in the following paragraph.

Recipients utilizing personnel who are performing a private security function; are performing duties as a translator or interpreter; require access to U.S. facilities, services, or support; or desire consideration for refugee or special immigrant status under the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007 (subtitle C of title XII of Public Law 110–181 must be entered into SPOT individually with all required personal information. If a locally-hired Iraqi falls into one of these categories, the recipient must enter all of the required identification data into SPOT.

When the Recipient is ready to enter U.S. Citizens, Third Country Nationals (TCN), and/or locally-hired individuals using the Aggregate Count method, the Recipient will notify the Grants Officer who will contact the Department SPOT Program Manager (A/LM/AQM) to obtain the “Aggregate Count” template. The Recipient will complete the “Aggregate Count” template and return to the SPOT Program Manager who will ensure that aggregate counts are loaded into SPOT.

The Recipient’s SPOT Administrator is responsible for updating the aggregate locally hired national count on a quarterly basis by providing updated information via the “Aggregate Count” template to the GO/GOR for each award who will forward to the Department SPOT Program Manager for SPOT entry.

Recipient performance may require the use of armed private security personnel. To the extent that such private security contractors (PSCs) are required, recipients are required to ensure they adhere to Chief of Mission (COM) policies and procedures regarding the operation, oversight, and accountability of PSCs.

As specific COM policies and procedures may differ in scope and applicability, recipients of federal assistance awards are advised to review post policies and procedures carefully in this regard and direct any questions to the Embassy Regional Security Office (RSO) via the Grants Officer Representative (GOR). Any exclusion to these policies must be granted by the COM via the RSO. COM policies and procedures may be obtained from the RSO via the GOR. Recipients of federal assistance awards are also advised that these policies and procedures may be amended from time to time at the post in response to changing circumstances.

Recipients of federal assistance awards are advised that adherence to these policies and procedures are considered to be a material requirement of their award. Recipients of federal assistance awards are reminded that only the Grants Officer has the authority to modify the Notice of Award. Recipients shall proceed with any security guidance provided by the RSO, but shall advise the Grants Officer and the GOR of the guidance received and any potential cost or schedule impact.

F. BRANDING AND MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTEES

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to make all materials produced under the award with the standard U.S. flag in a size and prominence equal to (or greater than) any other logo or identity. Materials are defined as but not limited to: training materials, materials for recipients, or materials to communicate or promote with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity under this award, including but not limited to invitations to events, press materials, event backdrops, podium signs, etc. In addition, sub-recipients or sub-awardees are subject to the marking requirements and the grantee shall include a provision in the sub-recipient or sub-awardee's agreement indicating that the standard, rectangular U.S. flag is a requirement. Exceptions to this requirement can be discussed with NEA/AC when negotiating an award.

G. UEI NUMBER REQUIREMENT FOR SUB AWARDEES

All sub-awardees are required to have a UEI number. For information on obtaining a UEI number, please see Section V. B. **Proposed sub-awardees are not required to have a UEI number prior to the submission of an application but must have one prior to a sub-award being issued.**

X. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions regarding this funding opportunity including: completing an application, financial and grants management issues, or technical matters, contact: nea-grants@state.gov

All questions must be submitted in writing to nea-grants@state.gov by January 26, 2023 at 17:00:00 eastern time (ET). All questions should include the opportunity number (SFOP0009333) in the subject of the email. NEA/AC will create a document of the submitted questions along with the answers and post it on SAMS Domestic and Grants.gov. Questions submitted after the deadline will not be addressed.

XI. DISCLAIMER

The terms and conditions published in this NOFO are binding and may not be modified by any Bureau representative. Explanatory information provided by the bureau that contradicts public language will not be binding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government. The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements listed in this NOFO.