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Deputy Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

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**United States Information Agency
Regional Scholar Exchange Program
With the New Independent States;
Freedom Support Act Fellowships in
Contemporary Issues**

ACTION: Notice—Request for proposals.

SUMMARY: The Office of Academic Programs, Academic Exchanges Division, European Programs Branch of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for two assistance awards. Public and private non-profit organizations with at least four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs with the New Independent States and meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c)(3)-1 may apply to develop and administer one or both of the following two categories of academic exchange programs:

Category A: USIA Regional Scholar Exchange Program with the New Independent States for approximately 60 to 70 pre-doctoral and/or post-doctoral scholars, researchers, and university faculty in the social sciences and humanities who are citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan*, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan and for approximately 10 pre- and/or post-doctoral scholars, researchers, and university faculty in the social sciences and humanities who are citizens of the United States.

Category B: FREEDOM Support Act Fellowships in Contemporary Issues for approximately 60 to 70 highly qualified policymakers, public, private, and third sector professionals, and scholars with advanced degrees—Kandidat preferred—who are citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan*, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan and who are professionally engaged in the building of democracy, free markets, and a civil society in their countries in the post-Soviet era. Interested organizations should read the complete Federal Register announcement and request a Solicitation Package from USIA prior to preparing a proposal.

*Please note: Programs with Azerbaijan are subject to the restrictions of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act of 1992: Employees of the Government of Azerbaijan or any of its instrumentalities are excluded from participation and no U.S. participant overseas may work for the Government of Azerbaijan or any of its instrumentalities.

The goals and objectives of both the USIA Regional Scholar Exchange Program with the NIS and the FREEDOM Support Act Fellowships in Contemporary Issues are to empower outstanding citizens of the countries of the NIS and U.S. to: (1) Obtain access to the resource materials and specialists of the host country so that they can conduct the specific research proposed in their applications; (2) Deliver lectures, make presentations, and write articles, books, policy papers, reports, and/or produce other materials that advance the state of knowledge and practice in their fields in their home countries and institutions; (3) Promote long-term collaborative research projects and cooperation between U.S. and NIS scholars and practitioners.

For both categories, participants from the NIS must demonstrate a high level of fluency in written and spoken English at a level appropriate to achieve the goals and objectives of the program. Participants from the U.S. must demonstrate a high level of fluency in written and spoken Russian and/or another language of the NIS in order to conduct research at NIS host institutions. Escort interpreters will not be provided, nor funded by USIA.

Both categories are open, merit-based competitions that must be conducted nationally in the home countries of the applicants and all applicants must be working or studying in their home countries at the time of application and selection. The fellowship periods for both categories must be for a minimum of three months (or the equivalent of one academic semester), but must not exceed a maximum of eight months (or the equivalent of one academic year). For both categories, all participants must be affiliated with universities, research institutes, or other organizations in the host country which have specialists and resources in the field of the fellows' research. All participants must be matched with a host advisor who serves as a research mentor and guides their professional development during the fellowship. Applicants who have participated in a USIA-funded academic exchange program after June 1994 are not eligible to receive fellowships in either category.

Each category has separate conditions and requirements which are stated in this announcement and detailed in the

full Solicitation Package. Organizations may apply for an assistance award for one or both categories, but must submit a separate proposal and budget for each category. Organizations that apply for assistance awards in both categories are strongly encouraged to craft each proposal and budget in an innovative way that maximizes resources, streamlines program and administrative operations, and achieves economies of scale for the program and administrative activities, practices, and procedures which are common to both categories.

Organizations which wish to work in partnership on one or both categories may apply as a consortia, but must submit one proposal and one budget for each category. All proposals from consortia must identify a lead organization and cite the specific duties, responsibilities, division of labor, and budget for all members of the consortia as well as subcontracts from a lead organization to each member of the consortia.

USIA anticipates awarding one assistance award for each category cited in this announcement. Grants awarded to organizations through this competition must begin no earlier than August 1, 1996 and must be completed by July 31, 1998. USIA expects that NIS participants will begin their U.S. programs as a group in late January 1997 and in late August 1997. However, in instances when it is feasible and advisable, some NIS participants may begin their U.S. programs at other appropriate times during the grant period. USIA expects that U.S. participants will begin their NIS programs at various and appropriate times in 1997 and 1998. At the end of their fellowships, all participants are required to return to their home countries so that they can begin to apply the knowledge, skills, and insights gained as a result of their academic exchange experience.

Overall grantmaking authority for the USIA Regional Scholar Exchange Program for the New Independent States is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries . . . ; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations . . . and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic

and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program cited above is provided through the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended. Programs shall also maintain their scholarly integrity and shall meet the highest standards of academic excellence. . . .

Overall grantmaking authority for the FREEDOM Support Act Fellowships in Contemporary Issues is made possible through legislation sponsored by the U.S. Congress and incorporated in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of FY 1993. The legislation was established to assist the economic and democratic development of the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union. The funding authority for the program cited above is provided through the FREEDOM Support Act.

Programs and projects must conform with Agency requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package. USIA projects and programs are subject to the availability of funds. USIA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the programs.

ANNOUNCEMENT TITLE AND NUMBER: All communications with USIA concerning this announcement should refer to the above title and reference number E/AEE-04.

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: All copies must be received at the U.S. Information Agency by 5 p.m. Washington, DC time on Thursday, June 13, 1996. Faxed documents will not be accepted, nor will documents postmarked June 13, 1996 but received at a later date. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that proposals are received by the above deadline.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The Office of Academic Programs, Division of Academic Exchanges, European Programs Branch, E/AEE, Room 246, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20547; telephone number (202) 205-0525; fax (202) 260-7985; Internet address rboris@usia.gov to request a Solicitation Package containing more detailed award criteria, required application forms, and standard guidelines for preparing proposals, including specific criteria for preparation of the proposal budgets.

TO DOWNLOAD A SOLICITATION PACKAGE VIA INTERNET: The Solicitation Package may be download from USIA's website at <http://www.usia.gov/> or from the Internet Gopher at <gopher.usia.gov>. Select "Education and Cultural Exchanges", then select "Current

Request for Proposals (RFPs)." Please read "About the Following RFPs" before beginning to download.

Please specify USIA Program Officer Rhonda E. Boris on all inquiries and correspondence. Interested applicants should read the complete Federal Register announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the RFP deadline has passed, Agency staff may not discuss this competition in any way with applicants until the Bureau proposal review process has been completed.

SUBMISSIONS: Applicants must follow all instructions given in the Solicitation Package. The original and ten copies of the application should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency, Ref.: E/AEE-96-04, Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 326, 301 4th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20547

Applicants must also submit the "Executive Summary" and "Proposal Narrative" sections of the proposal on a 3.5" diskette, formatted for DOS. This material must be provided in ASCII text (DOS) format with a maximum line length of 65 characters. USIA will transmit these files electronically to USIS posts overseas for their review, with the goal of reducing the time it takes to get posts' comments for the Agency's grants review process.

DIVERSITY GUIDELINES: Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, programs must maintain a non-political character and should be balanced and representative of the diversity of American political, social, and cultural life. "Diversity" should be interpreted in the broadest sense and encompass differences including, but not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, and physical challenges. Applicants are strongly encouraged to adhere to the advancement of this principle both in program administration and in program content. Please refer to the review criteria under the 'Support for Diversity' section for specific suggestions on incorporating diversity into the total proposal.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: For both categories, U.S. organizations will be required to: advertise, announce, and explain the program to target audiences in the U.S. and NIS; recruit a large, diverse group of qualified applicants from each eligible country; select finalists via merit-based open competition that incorporates peer group review mechanisms; affiliate participants with diverse host institutions and place participants with host advisors who are knowledgeable about the participants' field of research;

arrange program logistics in a timely and effective manner, track and monitor participants; develop alumni and other follow on activities; evaluate programs for short-term and long-term evidence of effectiveness and in support of the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA); and conduct other required program activities and operations.

Organizations are required to plan and implement all program activities and operations in close coordination with USIA in Washington and USIS posts in the NIS. Further details about specific program requirements and additional information can be found in the Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation (POGI) Statement which are part of the full Solicitation Package.

Guidelines

Visa/Health Insurance/Tax Requirements: Programs must comply with J-1 visa regulations. Exchange program regulations require that all J visa holders carry health and accident insurance. Please refer to the guidelines in the Solicitation Package for further details. Administration of the program must be in compliance with reporting and withholding regulations for federal, state, and local taxes as applicable. Recipient organizations should demonstrate tax regulation adherence in the proposal narrative and budget.

Proposed Budget

For Category A: FY 1996 USIA funding is anticipated at \$1,000,000.

For Category B: FY 1996 FREEDOM Support Act funding is anticipated at \$960,000.

Organizations must submit a comprehensive line item budget based on the specific guidance in the Solicitation Package. There must be a summary budget as well as a breakdown reflecting both the administrative budget and the program budget. It is required that requested administrative funds, including indirect costs and administrative expenses, not exceed 20 percent of the grant amount requested from USIA. Preference will be given to organizations whose administrative cost request is below 20 percent.

Administrative and program expenses should be cost-shared to maximize all available program resources from the private sector, host institutions, and applicant organization.

Allowable costs for each category include the following:

(1) General Program Costs (program materials; advertising and outreach; recruitment travel and per diem in the NIS; application review and/or selection

committee; finalist interviews in the NIS; group program orientation for NIS participants, listserv; on-line journal, alumni data base, alumni activities for NIS participants, follow on e-mail/Internet assistance for selected NIS participants);

(2) Participant Program Costs (visas; roundtrip travel to and from home city to host institution via American flag carrier; monthly maintenance (based on average MMR); stipend; professional development for NIS participants; participant taxes)

(3) Administrative Costs (staff salaries and benefits; communications, facilities (U.S. and NIS), office supplies audit, and indirect costs).

Please refer to the full Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

Review Process

USIA will acknowledge receipt of all proposals and will review them for technical eligibility. Proposals will be deemed ineligible if they do not fully adhere to the guidelines stated herein and in the Solicitation Package. Eligible proposals will be forwarded to panels of USIA officers for advisory review. All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office, as well as the USIA Office of East European and NIS Affairs and the USIA post overseas, where appropriate. Proposals may be reviewed by the Office of the General Counsel or by other Agency elements. Funding decisions are at the discretion of the USIA Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Final technical authority for assistance awards (grants or cooperative agreements) resides with the USIA grants officer.

Review Criteria

Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered and all carry equal weight in the proposal evaluation:

1. Quality of the Program Plan

Proposals should include academic rigor and scholarly excellence, thorough conception of program, demonstration of meeting participants' needs, contributions to understanding the partner country, specific details of recruitment, selection, affiliation, placement, professional development, and monitoring processes, proposed alumni activities, alumni tracking, and follow on activities, qualifications and expertise of program staff and participants, and relevance of program plan to USIA's mission and U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives in the NIS.

2. Program Planning and Organizational Capacity

A detailed work plan and timeline should demonstrate the organization's logistical and administrative capacity to implement the program. Proposals must demonstrate how the organization and its staff will meet the program's objectives and work plan. Proposed personnel and organizational resources should be adequate and appropriate to implement the program requirements and achieve program objectives.

3. Organization's Track Record

Relevant USIA and outside assessments of the organization's experience in developing, implementing, administering, and evaluating scholarly research exchanges with the NIS, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. The Agency will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.

4. Multiplier Effect/Impact

Proposed programs must demonstrate an impact on the wider community of scholars, students, policymakers, opinion-leaders, and public, private, and third sector professionals and organizations through the sharing of information and the establishment of long-term institutional and individual linkages among U.S. and NIS scholars and practitioners.

5. Cost-Effectiveness

A key measure of cost-effectiveness is USIA's cost per participant. This is the total funds requested from USIA divided by the number of participant-months (number of participants multiplied by the number of program months). The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate.

6. Cost-Sharing

Preference will be given to outstanding proposals that also seek to maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions.

7. Value of U.S.-Partner Country Relations

The assessment by USIA's geographic area office of the need potential impact,

and significance of the project with the partner country.

8. Support of Diversity and Pluralism

Proposals should demonstrate substantive support of the Bureau's policy on diversity through the recruitment, selection, affiliation, and placement of participants, to the extent feasible for the applicant organizations.

9. Alumni and Follow-On Activities

Proposals should provide a plan for alumni and other follow on activities (without USIA support) which ensures that USIA supported programs are not isolated events.

10. Program Evaluation

Proposals should include a plan to evaluate the program in ways that support the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. An evaluation plan and draft survey questionnaire or other technique plus a description of a methodology to be used to link outcomes to original project objectives is required as well as a comprehensive plan to track participants before, during, and after their fellowships. Organizations will be expected to submit intermediate programmatic and financial reports after each project component is concluded or quarterly, whichever is less frequent.

Notice

The terms and conditions published in this RFP are binding and may not be modified by any USIA representative. Explanatory information provided by the Agency that contradicts published language will not be binding. Issuance of the RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. The Agency 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.

Notification

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal USIA procedures.

Dated: April 25, 1996.

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