

**Department of State – US Embassy Kabul Public Affairs Section**

**Program Office:** Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan  
**Funding Opportunity Title:** Regional Media Information Centers  
**Announcement Type:** Cooperative Agreement  
**Funding Opportunity Number:** SCAKAB-12-AW-021-SCA-08152012  
**Deadline for Applications:** September 15, 2012  
**CFDA** 19.501- Public Diplomacy Programs for Afghanistan and Pakistan

**ELIGIBILITY**

Eligibility is open to all U.S., Afghan, and international organizations or companies with direct experience of Afghanistan’s media environment and a proven track record of success implementing projects in Afghanistan.

Cost Sharing or Matching

This program does not require cost sharing.

Other Special Eligibility Criteria

Not Applicable.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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

## **CONTENTS**

Executive Summary.....	3
Background.....	4
Eligibility Requirements.....	6
Application and Submission Information.....	6
Award Selection Criteria.....	8
Award Administration.....	10
Disclaimer.....	10

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan is pleased to announce an open competition for assistance awards through this Request for Proposals (RFP). PAS Kabul invites all eligible organizations to submit a proposal to establish a structure for several regional Media Information Centers to be based in the governors' offices of Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar provinces, with on-going support of Kandahar's established center. Together, these centers will coordinate the dissemination of news and information for surrounding provinces in a regional approach.

The strategic objective of these four centers is to build trust in their government among Afghan citizens, building people-to-people ties while helping to counter extremist messaging. This will be achieved by strengthening provincial capacity to engage in proactive, effective, and truthful media outreach. The proposal should provide for staffing, training, operations, and the renovation of a news conference facility and provision of media and other equipment required (where necessary) to assist provinces in disseminating accurate and timely information -- especially on success stories that extend the Afghanistan narrative beyond security issues.

Currently, the Kandahar Media and Information Center (KMIC) is already in operation and receiving funding from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. The intent of this proposal is to shift annual staffing and operating expenses for the Kandahar MIC to this grant. Therefore, this proposal requires staffing, operations, training, and a follow-on plan for sustainability for all four centers, but only requires training and the renovation and equipping of three news conference facilities for Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar.

The proposed budget must include:

- **Staffing:** 4 press officers per Media Information Center.
- **Staging:** minimal space renovation for a news conference platform and stage for Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar.
- **Equipment:** video and still cameras, laptops, and other press office equipment for Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar.
- **Training and Development:** crisis communications, spokesperson, social media, and website management for Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar.
- **Operations:** minimal operating expenses to include internet, phone, and utilities for the four Media Information Centers.

## II. BACKGROUND

Building Afghan communication capacity is a strategic priority of the U.S. Embassy. Disseminating timely, accurate, and forthright information from the Afghan government to all its citizens is vital to safeguard and support the country's democracy. The objective of this proposal is to enhance provincial communication through a regional approach. The ability of provinces to highlight success stories, develop messaging, and inform and engage with the public—especially during critical issues and crises—is central to the nation's strategic communication capabilities.

Many provinces were considered for this regional approach and Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar were selected because they contain population centers with strong local news media. The fourth, Kandahar, is already in operation.

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

### **Objectives:**

Proposals should address five distinct elements:

#### **1. Professional Communication Staff Hiring and Development**

- A. **Provincial Staffing:** the identification, vetting, and hiring of four (4) professional communicators for each Media Information Center (KMIC already has staff but please note that this proposal only considers funding for four staff members, as explained below):
1. Senior Spokesperson: salary not to exceed \$1,200 per month
  2. Deputy Spokesperson: salary not to exceed \$1,000 per month
  3. Staff News Release Writer: salary not to exceed \$950 per month
  4. Digital Media Editor: salary not to exceed \$1,000 per month
- B. **Website Development:** development of a website for each new Center to use in delivering content to the media. It should envision how to integrate the website with an aggressive social media capability to push messages through both the internet and via SMS text. (Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar)

- C. **Training:** all staff above must complete preparation as spokespersons and in crisis communications. The training should take them beyond technical capability and into the realm of devising and implementing compelling news releases, spokesperson skills, crisis communications and advanced media relations techniques and tactics, including website maintenance and social media. (Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar)

## **2. News Conference and Press Briefing Room (Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar)**

- A. **Location**—applicant must identify actual physical spaces in the governors’ offices that are practical for use as a venue for news conferences and press briefings. The space should be able to accommodate at least 50 members of the media including video and still photographers.
- B. **Renovations**— a request for minimal renovation can be included in the proposal. This would be limited to: painting, carpeting, carpentry, electrical enhancements, minor construction for the stage, window coverings, and other cosmetic enhancements.
- C. **Lighting and Sound**—a lighting and sound system consistent with a room to accommodate 50 people can be included in the proposal.
- D. **Audio**—podium microphone, audio “mult box” for media access, and associated sound equipment should be included in the news conference/press briefing room facility.
- E. **News Conference Stage**—the news conference stage should consist of: a low riser; podium; guest speaker chairs, two flags, blue curtain, and symbol of the Regional Media Information Center.
- F. **Simultaneous Translation Equipment**-include microphone headset, monitoring unit, transmitter, and 20 receivers with headsets. All necessary cables as well as batteries included.

## **3. Media and Other Equipment (Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar)**

Cameras (video and still), tripods, cables, laptops, phones, desks, chairs, telephones, and other standard media center equipment. Generators and other electrical power equipment as necessary for operations.

## **4. Operations (All Four Media Information Centers)**

Minimal operating expenses to include internet, phone, and utilities for the four media information centers.

## **5. Sustainability(All Four Media Information Centers)**

Applicant must demonstrate a salary sustainability plan. Possible initiatives include a verifiable commitment by each governor's office to move staff positions to the government tashkeel or a commitment by NGOs, CSOs, or international donors. Verification should be in the form of a memorandum of understanding.

### **III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

All U.S., Afghan, and international organizations or companies with direct experience in media relations, strategic communication, and public affairs with a proven track record of success implementing projects in Afghanistan (see "Eligibility" on page 1) are eligible to apply. Non-Afghan organizations or companies will be required to partner with an Afghan organization or company.

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

### **IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

**Award Period:** 12 months

**Award Amount:** The award ceiling is set at \$1,000,000 U.S. dollars.

**Application Submission Process:** Applicants must submit concept papers electronically using Grants.gov or submit proposals to PAS Kabul directly at: [KabulPDProposals@state.gov](mailto:KabulPDProposals@state.gov). Thorough instructions on the Grants.gov application process are available at <http://www.grants.gov>. For questions relating to Grants.gov, please call the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726. For questions about this solicitation, contact Pedro Palugyai, Grants Manager, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan, at:

Email: [KabulPDProposals@state.gov](mailto:KabulPDProposals@state.gov) (*Preferred method of communication*)

**Application Deadline:** All applications must be submitted on or before September 15, 2012, 11:59 p.m. Kabul time. Applications submitted after 11:59 p.m. will be ineligible for consideration. **Begin the application process early**, as this will allow time to address any technical difficulties that may arise in advance of the deadline. There will be no exceptions to this application deadline.

All applicants utilizing Grants.gov must register with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application. **Registering with Grants.gov is a one-time process; however, it could take as long as two weeks to have the registration validated and confirmed. Please**

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

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

Proposals may not exceed 10 double-spaced pages in 12-point, Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins. This requirement excludes the allowable appendices, which are identified in Section 6 below. The proposal must consist of the following:

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

This form can be found on-line at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/forms.html>.

**Section 2 - Abstract:**

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

**Section 3 – Implementation Plan:**

The applicant must specify the goals and objectives of the project. The steps involved -- from design to procurement to installation; to staffing and training; to the follow-on sustainability plan -- should be described in sufficient detail to show how objectives and goals will be met. This section should also describe how success will be measured via performance indicators. This section must include a time-task plan that clearly identifies the objectives and major activities.

**Section 4 - Organizational Capability:**

Applications must include a clear description of the applicant's management structure, previous experience with media operations in Afghanistan, experience working with Afghan government institutions, and the organizational experience and background in Afghanistan related to the proposed activities. Besides information about the organization as a whole, this section must also identify the proposed management structure and staffing plan for the proposed project.

## **Section 5 - Appendices:**

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

- (a) **Budget (Required)** – the budget must identify the total amount of funding requested, with a breakdown of amounts to be spent in the following budget categories: personnel; fringe benefits; travel; equipment; supplies; consultants/contracts; other direct costs; and indirect costs. The budget may not exceed 1 page in length.
- (b) **Resume (Required)** – a resume, not to exceed 1 page in length, must be included for the proposed key staff person, such as the Project Director. If an individual for this type of position has not been identified, the applicant may submit a 1-page position description, identifying the qualifications and skills required for that position, in lieu of a resume.
- (c) **Letters of Intent (Optional)** – for this project, local partnerships, including with the Afghan government, are critical. Letters of intent should be included with the proposal. The letters must identify the type of relationship to be entered into (formal or informal), the roles and responsibilities of each partner in relation to the proposed project activities, and the expected result of the partnership. Please note that these are not letters of support, and should only be included for those organizations that will play an active role in the project, including those that receive financial support through the project budget. The individual letters cannot exceed 1 page in length, and applicants are limited to submitting up to five letters per proposal.

## **V. AWARD SELECTION CRITERIA**

**Evaluation Criteria:** Applicants should note that the following criteria (1) serve as a standard against which all proposals will be evaluated, and (2) serve to identify the significant matters that should be addressed in all proposals. The USG will award grants to the applicants whose offers represent the best value to the USG on the basis of technical merit and cost.

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

- **Project Goals/Implementation Plan (40 points):** Applicants should describe what they propose to do and how they will do it. The proposed activities must directly relate to meeting the goals and objectives, and applicants should include information on how they will measure activities' effectiveness. The review panel will be viewing the implementation plan in terms of how well it addresses the

stated need for monitoring and evaluation, relevance of the goals and objectives, and feasibility of the proposed activities and their timeline for completion.

- **Organizational Capability (40 points):** Proposals should demonstrate the ability of the applicant's organization to carry out the project. Applicants must demonstrate how their resources, capabilities, and experience will enable them to achieve the stated goals and objectives. In addition, applicants should describe how and with whom they will collaborate to meet project goals.
  
- **Appendices (20 points):**
  - **Budget:** Costs shall be evaluated for realism, control practices, and efficiency. The Department of State must determine that the costs paid for this award are reasonable, allowable, and allocable to the proposed project activities. This will consist of a review of the Budget to determine if the overall costs are realistic for the work to be performed, if the costs reflect the applicant's understanding of the allowable cost principles established by OMB Circular A-122, and if the costs are consistent with the program narrative.
  
  - **Resume:** The review panel will consider the appropriateness of the selected project director, in view of the role and responsibility that person will play in guiding the project through implementation to completion. Position descriptions submitted in lieu of the resume will be reviewed for the appropriateness of the qualifications and skills identified.
  
  - **Letters of Intent:** While submission of Letters of Intent is optional, and applications without will not be penalized, the review panel will favorably view their inclusion. The review panel will consider the types and depth of relationships that the applicant has with local organizations. The panel will also review the letters to determine the willingness of local organizations to participate in the effort, and that all parties have an understanding of their unique roles and responsibilities in terms of the proposed project.

## **VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

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

**Anticipated Time to Award:** Applicants should expect to be notified if their proposal has been selected for award within 30 days after the submission deadline. PAS Kabul will provide information at the point of notification about any modification to the proposal or plan of work that will be required to finalize the grant/cooperative agreement.

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

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

## **VII. DISCLAIMER**

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