

Solicitation of Statements of Interest: English Access Microscholarship Program

Proposed Project:

The Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, is pleased to announce a solicitation of Statements of Interest (SOI) from eligible in-country educational service providers (hereafter referred to as “the Access Provider”) for the English Access Microscholarship Program (hereafter referred to as “the Access Program”). PAS invites all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to submit proposals no later than April 30, 2021.

Program Summary:

The Access Program is a global scholarship program supported by the U.S. Department of State that provides a foundation of English language and computer skills to talented 13 to 20-year-old students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds through after-school classes and intensive sessions. Access students also gain an appreciation of U.S. culture and democratic values through enhancement activities. The Access Program is a two-year program that requires a minimum of 360 hours of instruction reasonably distributed over the two-year period.

Selected in-country educational service providers (providers) will act as sub-grantees or contractors to FHI360, the NGO awarded the cooperative agreement to administer the Access Program in Afghanistan. The period of this award is estimated to be from October 01, 2021 to September 30, 2023. Providers will conduct at least 360 hours of after-school English lessons to talented students, ages 13 to 20, from economically disadvantaged communities through localized Access programs. A portion of these hours (approximately 20 – 60 hours) can be achieved through intensive sessions during the winter or during other school-year breaks. The Access program aim is to increase English language fluency and communication skills of disadvantaged Afghan youth at sites around the country. Enhancement activities familiarize students with U.S. cultural values and encourage them to take an active role in their communities through service projects and sharing what they learn. The program will also provide students with skills to increase workforce readiness and educational attainment. Access will maintain gender balance through the selection of equal numbers of male and female participants. Preference will be given to providers that strive to reach out to underserved and under-resourced communities.

Overall Program Goals:

- Provide a foundation of English language skills to high-performing Afghan students, ages 13 to 20, from disadvantaged and underserved backgrounds.
- Empower students with the tools and motivation to contribute to the socioeconomic development of Afghanistan.
- Equip participants with the knowledge and skills to compete for professional and educational opportunities in Afghanistan and abroad, especially those funded by the United States; and
- Increase participants’ familiarity and appreciation of American culture and democratic values, while countering influences from violent extremism.

Where is the Access program implemented? The in-country educational service provider should implement the program in one of the provinces of Afghanistan, ideally in two locations

for 100 students (50 boys and 50 girls). In each location, students should receive instruction in classes of no more than 25. The locations can be public schools, orphanages, or madrasas.

Access Face-to-Face Classes

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) suspended in-person Access classes. According to ECA guidelines, the Access classes and activities will resume when the Post is in Phase 2 of the Diplomacy Strong Framework. Currently, U.S. Embassy, Kabul is currently in Phase 1.

Access Online Classes:

Given the uncertain nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impossibility of predicting when it will be safe to return to in-person instruction, ECA recommends including a plan for distance learning options in case in-person instruction is impossible. The interested applicants are strongly encouraged to outline a basic plan for delivery of online classes in the technical and cost proposals. This may include purchasing tablets or smartphones, or other such devices, as well as data bundles for students and teachers. Applicants are encouraged to consider that some or all of the course may need to be virtual, but it is hoped at least some of the course will be in-person. Given these uncertainties, we understand it can be difficult to plan an exact budget, but applicants should consider it may be possible to realign the budget after the grant is awarded to accommodate changes.

Details of the Program:

Ceiling amount is \$70,000.

The Access Program is a high-profile public diplomacy initiative that provides U.S. embassies an opportunity to demonstrate the United States' dedication to education and mutual understanding. The Access Program gives the students skills that lead to improved educational prospects and career opportunities. More than 8,000 Afghan public high school students from 12 provinces have benefited from this program since 2006. While the Access Program may differ from country to country, these requirements hold for programs worldwide:

- The Access Program curriculum must include enhancement activities, such as cultural activities, personal development, and community service activities, to increase understanding of U.S. culture and values.
- Access student selection is transparent, reflects the host country's diversity, and is gender balanced.
- Based on minimum requirements of attendance and performance, Access students receive a Certificate of Award and Certificate of Successful Completion signed by the U.S. Ambassador or other U.S. Embassy officer.
- Access Program providers must submit narrative and financial reports that demonstrate the proper management and accountability of U.S. government funds and must complete the student enrollment form and provide alumni data.

In addition, Access Providers will:

- Use modern, communicative English language textbooks that promote critical thinking and learner-centered classrooms, and include a focus on the culture of the U.S. These materials must use American English.
- Provide an Access Program to 100 students from disadvantaged communities. While classes do not need to be mixed gender, overall class participation should be gender-balanced where possible with the aim of achieving an overall gender breakdown of 50% girls and 50% boys.
- Implement the program in one of the provinces of Afghanistan with the possibility of two locations in the province. The U.S. Embassy will have final approval of proposed locations.

For more information about the Access Program, refer to the attached Access Handbook.

Key Roles of Partner Organization (in-country educational service provider)

The responsibilities of a successful NGO partner include but are not limited to:

- Exercising overall responsibility for the effective implementation and accountability of the Access Program, reporting any malfeasance, concerns, and/or noteworthy incidents to the U.S. Embassy in a timely manner.
- Implementing the selection criteria for Access students and conducting the selection process, ensuring a transparent and competitive process that result in gender-balance in classes and/or across the program.
- Administration of the program, purchasing and carrying out English teaching using prescribed English language instruction textbooks and materials and developing enhancement activities at least twice a month, based on models suggested in the Access Program proposal template
- Selecting appropriate English teaching curriculum and instructional materials in consultation with the U.S. Embassy, subject to final approval by the U.S. Embassy
- Providing basics of computer instruction to complement English language instruction and enhancement activities.
- Ensuring the completion of the student record enrollment form.
- Developing and enacting mechanisms to prevent fraud or mismanagement of funds.
- Facilitating U.S. Embassy monitoring of the Access Program, which could include site visits of U.S. Embassy staff to Access classes, both to assess the quality of the program and to show Embassy support and involvement.
- Submitting quarterly program narrative and financial reports according to the schedule provided by the U.S. Embassy.
- Monitoring periodically (at least monthly) Access Program lessons and activities to ensure the program is proceeding as planned and ensuring that required and/or requested reports are delivered to the U.S. Embassy according to schedule.
- Distributing pre- and post- perception surveys to students.
- Conducting pre- and post-instructional test to determine language gain in the program and submit results in reports as instructed.
- Obtaining, when needed, video and photo release forms for Access Program participants.

- Obtaining prior approval from the U.S. Embassy before hiring a Program Coordinator and English Language Instructors.
- Recruiting students from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds and verifying their disadvantaged economic status at the selection stage.
- Once students are selected, providing the list of names and contact information to the U.S. Embassy.

The partner organization (in-country educational service provider) may include in the budget administrative costs of 10% of the total budget proposed in return for supplying basic overhead and assistance/monitoring of Access Program implementation.

For more information about the Access Provider responsibilities, refer to the attached Access Handbook.

Key Roles of the U.S Embassy will include:

- Final selection of the partner in-country educational service providers to implement the Access Program.
- Final approval of student recruitment and selection process. The selected student list should include information including, but not limited to, age, gender, home city and province, and school.
- Participating in enhancement activities for Access students, when possible.
- Monitoring of the Access Program.
- Providing certificates signed by a U.S. Embassy representative to Access graduates.
- Proposing participants for U.S. Embassy-supported workshops for Access teachers or students in and/or outside the country.
- Providing templates for quarterly narrative and financial reports. The U.S. Embassy will inform applicants of the reporting schedule.
- Providing approval/disapproval within 10 days of receiving resumes of proposed individuals for the Program Coordinator, Computer and English Instructor positions.

Eligible Applicants

Eligibility is open to all non-profit and non-governmental organizations except to individuals. Applicants must submit proof of their non-profit status, such as official NGO registration and documents to show successful implementation of previous projects in the proposed provinces where they would like to implement the Access program. In addition, the organization:

- Is required to have been registered with the Ministry of Economy of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for at least one year.
- Must have documented experience working in the field of education or in teaching English language and computer skills.
- Will demonstrate familiarity with U.S. culture and values and the ability to explain and/or otherwise commemorate cultural events of value during the enhancement activities.

Selection Criteria

The evaluation of proposals will include but not be limited to the following considerations:

- Successful completion of the narrative and financial proposal
- Demonstration that the NGO has the capacity and English teaching experience to successfully implement the program
- Cost-effectiveness, cost competitiveness, and best value for services as demonstrated in the financial proposal
- Preference is given to proposals which propose programs in provinces and areas where Access program or similar programs have never been implemented.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Anticipated Award Period: 2 years

Proposal Deadline: All proposals must be received on or before **April 30, 2021 at 11:59 p.m. Kabul time.** Applicants are encouraged to begin the process early, as this will allow time to address any technical difficulties that may arise. There will be no exceptions to this application deadline.

Access Provider Checklist: All applicants are required to submit their proposals along with the completed checklist. This checklist will help us in reviewing your proposals.

The applicant must submit the following documents and information (format: single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, 25-page limit):

1. Cover Page: Cover sheet stating the applicant's name and organization, proposal date, program title, program period proposed start and end dates, and brief purpose of the program (not included in the 25-page limit).

2. Proposal Narrative: The proposal must include all the items below:

- **Executive Summary:** Short narrative that outlines the proposed program, including program objectives and anticipated impact.
- **Introduction to the Organization Applying:** A description of past and present operations, *showing experience, qualifications, and ability to carry out the program*, including information on previous grants from the U.S. Embassy, U.S. government agencies, and other donors.
- **Needs Statement:** Clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the needs to be addressed and why the proposed program is needed.
- **Program Goals and Objectives:** The "goals" describe what the program is intended to achieve. The "objectives" refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be achievable and measurable.
- **Program Activities:** Describe the program activities, how they will be implemented, and how they will help achieve the objectives. Also, include how the program will engage local communities. *Providers should outline separate plans of program activities for after-school hours and intensive session.*
- **Program Methods and Design:** A description of how the program is expected to work to address needs and achieve goals. This section could include the organization's

pedagogical approach and vision for classroom design. In addition, it should include the student selection process and sample test/interview questions/or any other document which will be used in selection process.

- **Proposed Program Schedule and Timeline:** A proposed timeline for program activities. Include dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.
- **Key Personnel:** Short summary of key personnel for the project. At a minimum, program coordinator, teachers, and administrators will be designated key personnel. Include names, titles, roles, and summary of experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program. If an individual for a key personnel position has not been identified, the applicant may submit a 1-page position description in the attachments, identifying the qualifications and skills required for the position in lieu of a resume.
- **Program Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan:** Throughout the timeframe of the grant, how will the activities be monitored to ensure they are occurring in a timely manner, and how will the program be evaluated to ensure it is meeting the goals of the grant? The plan should assess students' English language development; if/how students gained exposure to and appreciation for American culture; if/how students contributed to their own communities through community service projects; and if/how students gained the ability to compete for U.S. Embassy Kabul-sponsored cultural and educational opportunities.

3. Required Attachments:

Note that attachments are not included in the 5-page proposal limit.

- CVs of key staff, who will most likely take on the administrative positions such as project manager, program coordinator, and a completed Applicant Organizational Information Survey. If key staff are yet undecided and will be selected later, clearly indicate as "To Be Determined (TBD)."
- Proof of the applicant's non-profit status
- Organization's profile
- Access Cost and Technical Proposals Templates
- New Potential Access Provider or Site Checklist

Questions: Please email PAS's English Language Programs Unit at KabulPASEngLangProg@state.gov

Application Submission Process: Email proposal materials to KabulPASEngLangProg@state.gov by April 30, 2021.

Additional Considerations:

- Applicants must have a valid Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet.
- Any applicant listed on the Excluded Parties List System (EPLS) in SAM is not eligible to apply for an assistance award in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR, 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension." Additionally, no entity listed on the EPLS can participate in any activities under an award. All applicants

are strongly encouraged to review the EPLS in SAM to ensure that no ineligible entity is included.

- There is no limit on the number of applications an entity may submit for this SOI.
- **Risk Analysis Management** To qualify for final consideration, certain applicants must undertake the Risk Analysis Management (RAM) vetting process by providing Risk Analysis Information (RAI) about their “key individuals” (i.e., individuals with the ability to control applicant organizations’ funds). **Please note: these individuals *could* be different from the key personnel listed in the section 4 of required documents.** The purpose of vetting potential contractors and grantees is to reduce the risk that foreign assistance funding is provided to terrorists or their supporters. **Potential grantees will be notified separately if RAI is required.** Failure to submit information when requested, or failure to pass vetting, may be grounds for rejecting your proposal. When vetting information is requested by the Grants Officer, information may be submitted on the secure web portal at <https://ramportal.state.gov> or via email to RAM@state.gov. Questions about the form may be emailed to RAM@state.gov. Failure to submit information when requested or failure to pass vetting may be grounds for rejecting your proposal.

Important Documents for Your Application:



Before submitting the proposal, please read the attached Access Provider Handbook.