

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
U.S. Embassy Yerevan / EUR
Notice of Funding Opportunity: Statement of Interest

Funding Opportunity Title: Investigative Journalism Training Program

Funding Opportunity Number: Media-FY24-ARM-02

Deadline for Applications: 18 December 2023, (11:59, Armenian Local Time)

CFDA Number: 19.900

Total Amount Available: Total funding available under this notice is anticipated to be \$500,000 for academic years 2024 – 2026. Depending on the availability of funds, project may be extended to academic year 2026-2027.

A. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Embassy, Yerevan, of the U.S. Department of State, announces an open competition for organizations to submit a statement of interest (SOI) to implement an “Investigative Journalism Training Program” project in Armenia. The initiative will advance the Embassy’s goal of bolstering the ability of independent media in Armenia to effectively inform the public, counter misinformation, and advance shared democratic values by building a pipeline of professionally trained journalists capable of producing quality journalism. The training program will be based on U.S. journalism education best practices and state of the art multimedia production techniques.

Please carefully follow all instructions below.

The submission of the SOI is the first step in a two-step process. Applicants must first submit a concise (1-3 pages) SOI designed to clearly communicate the project idea and objectives. This is not a full proposal. The purpose of the SOI process is to allow applicants to submit project ideas for evaluation prior to requiring the development of a full proposal application. Upon a merit review of eligible SOIs, selected applicants will be invited to expand on their project idea(s) by submitting a full proposal application. Full proposals will go through a second merit review before final funding decision(s) are made.

A.1 Background

In recent years, the Armenian media landscape has witnessed an increase in the level of disinformation. Nevertheless, due to the growing number of methods of disinformation and misinformation, and limited support for the enhancement of traditional journalism education for Armenian aspiring and working journalists, there is a growing gap of disparity between journalism education and current needs of the media market. The need for this training initiative is also supported by the findings of a recent, comprehensive needs assessment of journalism education in Armenia, conducted by the Embassy among a wide range of stakeholders in media field. As revealed by the needs assessment, there is an urgent need to

improve university-level journalism education in Armenia, particularly in investigative journalism, and the latest multimedia production techniques. Hence, the Embassy seeks to fund proposals for establishing an innovative training space that will provide tailor-made, academic curriculum with a strong focus on investigative journalism and the latest audio/visual techniques for media production, as well as will be equipped with necessary state-of-the-art equipment and software resources for hands on learning. The proposal to create the training program will fill a major gap in providing much needed supplemental training for undergraduate journalism students and aspiring journalists. In the long run, it will enhance the overall media environment and, specifically, bolster journalists' capacity in investigative journalism, combating disinformation, equipping citizens with accurate information, which will ultimately uphold the crucial role of media in overseeing democratic institutions, as well as reinforce mission of the media in holding those institutions accountable. The organization should identify U.S. best practices in journalism education as a foundation on which the curriculum for the investigative journalism training program should be based.

Priority Region: Armenia

A.2 Project Goals and Objectives:

The goal of this project is to strengthen the Armenian media landscape and address the existing gaps in journalism education and capacities through building a pipeline of professional journalists capable of producing quality investigative and fact-based journalism content.

The project seeks to fulfill following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Strengthen the core reporting knowledge, skills and abilities of aspiring Armenian journalists to produce quality, fact-based journalism content.
- **Objective 2:** Specifically train aspiring journalists in investigative journalism skills to include data driven reporting, credible sourcing, interviewing skills, and media ethics.
- **Objective 3:** Train aspiring journalists in the latest audio/visual techniques to produce high quality and engaging multimedia content with public impact.
- **Objective 4:** Include the production of an investigative journalism story or multimedia content as a capstone project for each graduate of training program.
- **Objective 5:** Support the professional development and career prospects of the program participants through internship placements with local media outlets.
- **Objective 6:** Support the professional development of program graduates with fellowships to pursue investigative journalism projects, as well as other networking and continuous learning opportunities.

A.3 Expected Results

It is expected that the project will enhance the overall media environment and, specifically, bolster journalists' capacity in combating disinformation, equipping citizens with accurate

information, which will ultimately uphold the crucial role of media in overseeing democratic institutions. By providing much-needed supplemental education for undergraduate journalism students with a focus on investigative journalism, it will constitute an integral component in the pipeline of journalists trained in professional and ethical standards of journalism in Armenia.

A.4 Main Activities

The main activities of the two-year project will be establishment of the training program, design of the necessary curriculum, enrollment of students, and delivering two iterations of the one-year training programs for a minimum of 50 aspiring journalists (minimum 25 participants each year). The recipient is required to utilize U.S. expertise and best practices in journalism education when designing the program curriculum. While the SOI should communicate the project idea and objectives, the applicants selected for the second stage of the application process will be required to submit proposals that will incorporate the following components into their activities, clearly indicating which activities will advance the stated objectives:

- Establishment of a training program where Armenian aspiring journalists and journalism students will be trained with a strong focus on investigative journalism.
- Development of a curriculum for the training program. Courses may include, but not be limited to, the following fields: Investigative Journalism, Data Journalism, Photo Storytelling, Video Storytelling, Video Shooting and Editing, Design, Visualization and Animation, Intro to Journalism and Creative Writing, English for Journalists, Fact-Checking, Ethics and Media Law, and Tech in Journalism.
- Ensuring the admission and a year-long training program for 25-30 students per year, for two academic years (minimum of 50 students total).
- Inclusion of the production of investigative journalism piece as a capstone project for each graduate of school/training center.
- Ensuring the attendance of at least one U.S. expert for a master class for the training program students/graduates during two-year project.
- Placement of at least 20 students of the training program in internships at local media outlets.
- Provision of graduates/alumni with follow-up fellowships for production of pieces of public interest journalism and in-depth investigative stories.

The full proposal should include a clear methodology of achieving the mentioned objectives and the clearly outlined timeline and schedule of activities, allowing time for school/training center establishment, curriculum development, program design, and enrollment of students for two academic years.

A.5 Participants and Audiences:

Primary beneficiaries for this project will be Armenian aspiring journalists (journalism students, early-career journalists). Secondary beneficiaries of the project will be the Investigative Journalism Training Program alumni.

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Length of performance period: up to 24 months (*upon availability of funds may be extended for another 12 months*).

Number of awards anticipated: 1

Award amounts: Total funding available under this notice is anticipated to be \$500,000 for academic year 2024-2026. Depending on the availability of funds, project may be extended to FY 2026.

Type of Funding: FY 23/24 Assistance to Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AEECA) funds under the Foreign Assistance Act

Anticipated project start date: 1 September 2024

This notice is subject to availability of funding.

Funding Instrument Type: Cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements involve “substantial involvement” or greater U.S. government participation in the project. U.S. Embassy Yerevan will undertake reasonable and programmatically necessary substantial involvement. Examples of substantial involvement can include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Remaining closely involved in the communication with the recipient throughout the project implementation
- 2) Approval of the consultants and international experts to be involved in the project
- 3) Approval of the list of beneficiaries / prospective students of the school/training center
- 4) Approval of the fellowship winners to be issued within the grant, including the budget and the project scopes
- 5) Approval of the sustainability model developed for the school/training center
- 6) Approval of the scope of work for the external monitoring and evaluation of the project

Project Performance Period: Proposed projects should be completed in 24 months.

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- ***Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations in Armenia***
- ***Educational institutions in Armenia***

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing or matching is not required.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements

In order to be eligible to receive an award, all organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number issued via www.SAM.gov as well as a valid registration on www.SAM.gov. Please see Section E.4 for more information. Individuals are not required to have a UEI or be registered in SAM.gov.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Content and Form of Application Submission

Please follow all instructions below carefully. SOIs that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated requirements will be ineligible.

Content of SOI must include:

- A brief project description summarizing goals, objectives outcomes, performance indicators, beneficiaries, and proposed timeline
- A clear statement of the applicant's organizational capacity to carry out the proposed activity and manage U.S. Government funds.
- Documents fully in English
- The anticipated total budget amount (in U.S. dollars)
- Brief information on the project key personnel.

2. Submission Dates and Times

SOIs are due no later than 18 December 2023, (11:59, Armenian Local Time).

3. Funding Restrictions

The funds requested under this project CANNOT fund partisan political activity; humanitarian aid and charities or charitable activities; scientific research; fundraising campaigns; commercial projects; trade activities; conferences and individual trips abroad; projects aimed primarily at the institutional development of the recipient organization. Please note that award funds cannot be used to purchase alcoholic beverages.

4. Other Submission Requirements

All application materials must be submitted by email to yerevangrants@state.gov.

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Criteria

Each SOI will be evaluated and rated on the basis of the evaluation criteria outlined below.

Quality of Project Idea – 50 points: The SOI is responsive to project framework. The idea is communicated well and is feasible. SOI's that promote creative approaches to address project objectives are highly encouraged. The proposed timeline is reasonable.

Organizational Capacity and Record on Previous Grants –35 points: The SOI should demonstrate the organization's expertise and previous experience in administering projects. If a local partner is identified SOI should briefly describe the partner's role and experience.

Project Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives – 15 points: The SOI should clearly articulate proposed project activities and expected results towards achieving project objectives and goal(s).

Posts and Bureaus can define their own criteria for the SOI. Generally, a SOI has fewer criteria than a full proposal, due to its more concise format.)

2. Review and Selection Process

A Grants Review Committee will evaluate all eligible SOIs. All eligible SOIs will be reviewed against the criteria listed above. SOIs are reviewed individually against the criteria and not against competing SOIs. For a fair review all panelists will review the first page of the SOI up to the page limit and no further. The panel may provide conditions and/or recommendations on SOIs to enhance the proposed project. Conditions must be addressed, and recommendations should be addressed, in a full proposal application.

3. Following the review, any successful SOI applicants will be contacted and instructed to submit full applications. A full application will include:
- **SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations)**
 - **SF424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction projects)**
 - **SF424B (Assurances for Non-Construction projects) for individual or organization exempted from registering in SAM.**

4. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM.gov)

Required Registrations:

All organizations, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and an active registration with the SAM.gov. A UEI is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards.

Note: As of April 2022, a DUNS number is no longer required for federal assistance applications.

The 2 CFR 200 requires that sub-grantees obtain a UEI number. Please note the UEI for sub-grantees is not required at the time of application but will be required before an award is processed and/or directed to a sub-grantee.

Note: The process of obtaining or renewing a SAM.gov registration may take anywhere from 4-8 weeks. Please begin your registration as early as possible.

- Organizations **based in the United States** or that pay employees within the United States will need an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and a UEI number prior to registering in SAM.gov.
- Organizations **based outside of the United States** and that do not pay employees within the United States do not need an EIN from the IRS but do need a UEI number prior to registering in SAM.gov.
- **Please note that as of November 2022 and February 2022 respectively, 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 Commercial and Government Entity (NCAGE) code or CAGE code to apply for non-DoD foreign assistance funding opportunities.** If an applicant organization is mid-registration and wishes to remove a CAGE or 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 using the following language: “I do not intend to seek financial assistance from the Department of Defense. I do not wish to obtain a CAGE or NCAGE code. I understand that I will need to submit my registration after this incident is resolved in order to have my registration activated.”

Organizations based outside of the United States and that DO NOT plan to do business with the DoD should follow the below instructions:

Step 1: Proceed to SAM.gov to obtain a UEI and complete the SAM.gov registration process. SAM.gov registration must be renewed annually.

Organizations based outside of the United States and that DO plan to do business with the DoD in addition to Department of State should follow the below instructions:

Step 1: Apply for an NCAGE code by following the instructions on the NSPA NATO website linked below:

NCAGE Homepage:

<https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/sc/CageList.aspx>

NCAGE Code Request Tool (NCRT):

Exemptions

An exemption from the UEI and sam.gov registration requirements may be permitted on a case-by-case basis if:

- An applicant's identity must be protected due to potential endangerment of their mission, their organization's status, their employees, or individuals being served by the applicant.
- For an applicant, if the Federal awarding agency makes a determination that there are exigent circumstances that prohibit the applicant from receiving a unique entity identifier and completing SAM registration prior to receiving a Federal award. In these instances, Federal awarding agencies must require the recipient to obtain a unique entity identifier and complete SAM registration within 30 days of the Federal award date.

Organizations requesting exemption from UEI or SAM.gov requirements must email the point of contact listed in the NOFO at least two weeks prior to the deadline in the NOFO providing a justification of their request. Approval for a SAM.gov exemption must come from the warranted Grants Officer before the application can be deemed eligible for review.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Terms and Conditions: Before submitting the SOI, applicants should review all the terms and conditions and required certifications which will apply if a full proposal application is requested and awarded, to ensure that they will be able to comply. These include:

2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 600, and the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions which are available at: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>.

G. FEDERAL AWARDCING AGENCY CONTACTS

If you have any questions about the SOI application process, please contact: yerevangrants@state.gov