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Approved: October 8, 1998.

Doug Rogers,

*Chief Special Projects & Support Branch,
International District.*

[FR Doc. 98-28284 Filed 10-21-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4830-01-P

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

Fulbright Senior Scholar Program

NOTICE: Request for proposals.

SUMMARY: The Office of Academic Programs of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for an assistance award. Pursuant to its grant guidelines established cooperatively with the Congress, "The Bureau seeks to promote competition and balance in its discretionary grant-making and strives to avoid exclusivity." Public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c) may submit proposals to provide administrative and program services for the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program in Fiscal Year 2000. In this request for Proposals, the U.S. Information Agency is placing the administrative *cooperative agreement award* for the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program in competition for the first time in the 52-year history of the Program. Deadline for receipt of proposals is February 8, 1999. The cooperative agreement will begin o/a October 1, 1999.

Program Information

Overview

The Fulbright Program was created by the U.S. Congress at the end of World War II to exchange U.S. and foreign students and scholars, providing them with the opportunity to experience

firsthand the political, economic and cultural institutions and societies in each other's countries. In the intervening years, the Fulbright Program has evolved into the premier educational exchange program sponsored by the people of the United States through their federal government, and thus an important element in the conduct of U.S. foreign affairs. The Fulbright Program, which now extends to approximately 140 foreign countries and involves 5,000 participants overall every year, has helped to form and inform tens of thousands of the world's leaders in every academic and professional field. The Senior Scholar portion of the Fulbright Program will engage approximately 1500 scholars and professionals in FY 1999.

The hallmark of the Fulbright Program is binationalism. The United States and foreign governments, educational and other public and private institutions are all partners in this enterprise. In many countries of the world, financial contributions from governments or public/private sources match or exceed those of the United States. Because of its binational nature, the profile of the Fulbright Program worldwide reflects a range of objectives and interests.

The Fulbright Program's grant-making authority is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Pub. L. 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 interest, 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 Fulbright Program is funded through annual Congressional appropriations to USIA and receives significant financial support from partner governments and private donors worldwide.

In July 1997, a distinguished group of private U.S. and international professionals organized as the Steering Committee on the Future of the Fulbright Educational Exchange Program, under the auspices of the National Humanities Center, carried out a comprehensive evaluation of all of the components of the Fulbright Program, issuing a formal report entitled "Fulbright at Fifty" (available via internet at www.nhc.rpt.nc.us:8080 or in hard copy as a part of the Solicitation Package). The Steering Committee's report reaffirmed the importance of the Fulbright Program, concluding that it remains "a vital and successful means to address the current issues facing established and emerging nations in the post-Cold War era." With specific reference to the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program the Steering Committee's report made several suggestions that were drawn on by USIA in the preparation of this Request for Proposals.

Fulbright Senior Scholar Program

For more than fifty years, the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program has offered grants for college and university faculty, as well as for non-academic professionals (such as lawyers and journalists) and independent scholars, to lecture and conduct research abroad. Thousands of U.S. and foreign scholars and professionals have participated since the Fulbright Program's inception. In FY 2000, the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program will send abroad approximately 750 U.S. scholars and professionals to lecture and conduct

research and will bring to this country approximately 800 grantees for similar activities.

Responsibility for the management of the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program is currently shared among the U.S. Information Agency in Washington, fifty-one bilateral Fulbright Commissions and ninety U.S. Information Service (USIS) posts (the overseas network of USIA), and a cooperating private sector agency in the United States. Overall policy guidelines for the Senior Scholar Program are determined by the Presidentially appointed J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (JWFFSB).

Under the Board's auspices, U.S. citizens are awarded grants each year through a merit-based, competitive process to teach undergraduate or graduate courses, collaborate with foreign colleagues on projects, pursue individual research, conduct seminars, consult with government ministries and educational institutions, advise on curriculum development, and guest lecture at other universities. Grant opportunities for U.S. scholars are determined overseas by binational Fulbright Commissions and USIS posts in coordination with USIA in Washington.

Similarly, visiting scholars and professionals travel to the U.S. each year for research, teaching and guest lecturing. Grantees for this Program are chosen through open, merit-based competitions in each country, which are conducted by the Fulbright Commission and, in the absence of a Commission, by USIS posts. Through the Scholar-in-Residence component of the Senior Scholar Program, USIA brings scholars and professionals to U.S. campuses that do not often host foreign visiting scholars. These campuses are selected through a competition managed by the cooperating agency.

Special project activities involving U.S. and foreign scholars include the NATO program, Fulbright German Studies Seminar, U.S./German International Educational Exchange of Administrators, Japanese International Education Exchange Administrators and the Southeast Asia Summer Studies Institutes.

Though the majority of grants under the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program are and will continue to be individual awards for lecturing and research for a semester or one-year period, the Program encompasses other scholarly activities consistent with Fulbright principles. Current examples include shorter-term awards for distinguished senior scholars to lecture abroad; serial grants for multi-year exchange

programs; and professional exchanges in such fields as law and journalism.

Eligibility Guidelines

Public and private non-profit organizations with at least four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs and meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c) may apply to provide administrative and program services for the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program in Fiscal Year 2000.

Because of its binational character, the Fulbright Program is both programmatically and administratively complex. It must accommodate a variety of circumstance in every geographic region of the world and be responsive to and supportive of many different constituencies in the United States and abroad, each with its own set of goals and concerns. At the same time, the integrity of the Program requires that it maintain the highest and most consistent standards of academic and professional quality in the selecting of candidates and implementation of projects as well as a single worldwide identity. USIA has therefore determine that the overall coherence and quality of Fulbright exchanges can be sustained only through a unified approach to program administration. Applicants—whether single organizations or consortia—must therefore present a plan for administration of the Program worldwide.

A single organization may apply to administer the entire Fulbright Senior Scholar Program. Alternatively, organizations may apply as a consortium, using subcontract arrangements, with each partner having a specialized regional, exchange, or other kinds of expertise; in this arrangement, one organization should be designated to be the recipient of the cooperative agreement award. Applications proposing administration of the Program by a consortium should provide a detailed description of arrangements for cooperative work among the partners and between the partners and the U.S. and overseas academic communities, bilateral commissions and other entities responsible for the Fulbright Program to ensure consistent Program quality.

Organizations contemplating applying for this award may wish to consult the Steering Committee Report (July 1997), "Fulbright at Fifty," also referred to in the opening paragraphs of this RFP, which makes a number of thoughtful recommendations about the program. The Agency views this open competitions as an important opportunity to elicit program ideas to

support the Report's objectives and will carefully consider the variety of ideas that this competition will elicit.

Application Guidelines

USIA will work cooperatively and closely with the recipient of this cooperative agreement award and will maintain a regular dialogue on administrative issues and questions as they arise over the duration of the award. Contingent upon satisfactory performance based on annual reviews, USIA intends to renew this award each year for a period of not less than four additional years. USIA reserves the right to renew the award beyond that period.

The recipient of this cooperative agreement award will be responsible, under USIA supervision, for the following activities beginning in FY 2000: program planning; publicity; receipt of applications; applicant screening and nomination; post-nomination services; fiscal management and program monitoring and reporting. Responsibilities under the terms of the FY 2000 agreement will not include monitoring of the FY 1999 (or earlier) scholars. The FY 1999 cooperative agreement award will support that activity.

Program Planning: Applicants should, as part of the proposal, submit a detailed plan for administration of both the U.S. and Foreign Senior Scholar Programs. The plan should include the following: strategies for recruitment of U.S. scholars; planning for the placement of visiting foreign scholars at U.S. institutions (Note: some foreign scholars are self-placed); plans for tracking and monitoring of grantees; and plans for the orientation of U.S. grantees and enrichment activities for foreign grantees. The description of recruitment strategies should address the applicant's capacity to respond with flexibility to unanticipated needs and its ability to develop innovative models of grant awards. Proposals should include plans for enhancing the visibility for the Senior Scholar Program and broadening engagement with the U.S. and overseas academic communities, and may include other innovative activities, all in cooperation with USIA and other overseas administrative partners, as appropriate.

In addition, applicants may propose, on a pilot basis and consistent with J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board guidelines, new program models such as projects in which U.S. and foreign experts consult abroad on educational reform and curriculum development; collaborative research projects involving scholars from multiple countries or regions; and

awards to institutions linking faculty from institutions in the U.S. and abroad; or other innovative projects which would enhance the traditional Fulbright model. The proposals must conform with USIA requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package. USIA projects and programs are always subject to the availability of funds.

Publicity and Applications: The recipient of the grant award will be responsible for the preparation and distribution of an "awards booklet" announcing grant opportunities, application packets and general program announcements, annual directories of scholars, and flyers to publicize the program. Proposals should address written and electronic communication, professional networking and other means which will be used to enhance recruitment efforts. The award recipient will be responsible for establishing and maintaining a Website for the Senior Scholar Program with appropriate links to USIA and binational commissions overseas. Publicity and outreach efforts should include special emphasis on recruitment of those currently underrepresented in the Fulbright program, including non-academic professionals in fields consistent with broad program goals such as journalism and law, people with disabilities and racial and ethnic minorities.

Screening and Selection Process: The recipient of the cooperative agreement award will: provide and accept applications from U.S. program applicants; provide appropriate notification to applicants of their status on an on-going basis; and pre-screen for eligibility all U.S. applicants. Suggested procedures should take into account the goal of USIA to convert from paper-based processing to electronic applications. The award recipient will be responsible for convening scholarly/professional peer review committees to screen U.S. applications to determine which among them will be recommended to U.S. Information Service posts and Fulbright Commissions overseas and to the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. In addition to coordinating the assessment of applicants' scholarly and professional credentials, the award recipient will also develop procedures to evaluate applicants' motivation, cross-cultural sensitivity and flexibility to ensure a successful exchange experience.

The award recipient will also screen and place candidates for the following special countries and programs: Africa professional and research scholars, Southeast Asia Summer Studies Institute, Persian Gulf Review, and the

Scholar-in-Residence program. Additional information on these programs is included in the Solicitation Package.

Post-Nomination Services: The award recipient will be responsible for the following services for U.S. grantees: prepare letters for the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board informing successful candidates of their selection; prepare letters for all candidates not selected or in alternate status; prepare grant award packages for candidates going to countries where the program is administered by USIS and to certain Commission countries; respond to queries from grantees; assist with pre-departure orientation for grantees going to China, Africa, the NIS, Eastern Europe and the Baltics; maintain data on participants; review medical forms and identify health problems; electronically enroll some grantees in health insurance; monitor and provide grantee reports; prepare recognition certificates for all grantees; and assist with emergencies.

The award recipient will be responsible for the following services for foreign grantees: prepare awards packages for foreign scholars and professionals from non-Commission and approximately twenty Commission countries; confirm the U.S. affiliation of "self-placed" foreign scholars from certain Commission countries; arrange enrichment seminars, guest lecturing and other activities; maintain data on participants; review medical forms and identify health problems; electronically enroll some grantees in health insurance; monitor and prepare grantee reports; prepare recognition certificates for all grantees; serve as "alternate responsible office" for issuance of IAP-66 forms and submit appropriate annual reports on the use of IAP-66 authority; and assist with emergencies.

Fiscal Management and Program Reporting: The cooperative agreement award recipient will: manage grantee stipend payments, including tax withholding for foreign grantees, non-Commission and certain Commission countries; provide quarterly reports on actual and projected expenditures; transmit electronically program information for inclusion in Congressional correspondence and in USIA's Exchange Visitor Database and other reports; provide statistical, insurance and other ad hoc periodic reports; and monitor and audit internal functions and systems in accordance with U.S. Government and USIA guidelines.

Budget Guidelines

A comprehensive line item administrative budget must be submitted with the proposal by the deadline. It is anticipated that funding for the cooperative agreement award for program administration will be approximately \$4.5 million. In addition, a program budget totaling approximately \$28 million for the global Fulbright Senior Scholar Program will be transferred to the recipient of the award in quarterly installments. As result of this competition, if the cooperative agreement is awarded to an organization not previously associated with the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program, the amount of the FY 2000 award will be adjusted downward to reflect a reduced level of administrative responsibilities in FY 2000. (The FY 1999 cooperative agreement awardee would continue to monitor and provide support for FY 1999 and earlier grantees.) Renewal awards to the FY 2000 awardee in subsequent years would be at levels commensurate with full levels of administrative responsibility.

Announcement Title and Number

All communications with USIA concerning this RFP should refer to the announcement's title and reference number E/AE-00-01.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: Ms. Rosalind Swenson, Office of Academic Program, Academic Exchanges Division, E/AE, Room 234, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20547, phone: (202) 619-4360, fax: (202) 401-5914; email: rswenson@usia.gov to request a Solicitation package containing more detailed information. The package will include all required application forms, standard guidelines for preparing a proposal, including specific criteria for preparation of the proposal budget and materials describing the special programs mentioned above.

All inquiries about the Request for Proposals or any aspect of the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program should be submitted in writing to Ms. Swenson. Interested applicants should read the complete **Federal Register** announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Any questions or requests for information that applicants wish to make to overseas Fulbright Commissions or USIS post also should be submitted in writing to Ms. Swenson for transmission to those overseas offices.

To Download a Solicitation Package Via Internet

The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from USIA's website at <http://www.usia.gov/education/rfps>. Please read all information before downloading.

To Receive a Solicitation Package Via Fax on Demand

The entire Solicitation Package may be requested from the Bureau's "Grants Information Fax on Demand System," which is accessed by calling 202/401-7616. Please request a "Catalog" of available documents and order numbers when first entering the system.

Deadline for Proposals

All proposal copies must be received at the U.S. Information Agency by 5 p.m. Washington, D.C. time on February 8, 1999. Faxed documents will not be accepted at any time. Documents postmarked the due date but received on a later date will not be accepted. Each applicant must ensure that the proposals are received by the above deadline.

Applicants must follow in instructions in the Solicitation Package. The original and 15 copies of the application should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency, Ref.: E/AE-00-01, Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 326, 301 4th Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20547.

Applicants must also submit the "Executive Summary" and "Proposal Narrative" sections of the proposal on a 3.5" diskette, formatted for DOS. These documents 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, Freedom and Democracy 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 proposals. Pub. L. 104-319 provides that "in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy," USIA "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunity for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries." Proposals should reflect advancement of this goal in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

Review Process

USIA will acknowledge receipt of all proposals and will review them first for technical eligibility. Proposals must conform with Agency requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package. Proposals will be deemed ineligible if they do not fully adhere to the guidelines established herein and in the solicitation packet. Eligible proposals will undergo further advisory professional review at USIA which may include the use of advisory external consultants. Proposals may be reviewed by the Office of the General Counsel or by other Agency elements. Final funding decisions are at the discretion of USIA. All programs and activities are subject to the availability of funds. Final technical authority for assistance awards resides with the USIA grants office.

Year 2000 Compliance Requirement (Y2K Requirement)

The Year 2000 (Y2K) issue is a broad operational and accounting problem that could potentially prohibit organizations from processing information in accordance with Federal management and program specific requirements including data exchange with USIA. The inability to process information in accordance with Federal requirements could result in grantees' being required to return funds that have not been accounted for properly.

USIA therefore requires all organizations use Y2K compliant systems including hardware, software, and firmware. Systems must accurately process data and dates (calculating, comparing and sequencing) both before and after the beginning of the year 2000 and correctly adjust for leap years.

Additional information addressing the Y2K issue may be found at the General Services Administration's Office of Information Technology website at <http://www.itpolicy.gsa.gov>.

Review Criteria

Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to

the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank-ordered.

1. *Quality*: Proposals should display an understanding of and respect for the goals and distinguished traditions of the Fulbright Program, as reflected in the requirements and priorities of this RFP. In their approach to program management, including the recruitment of scholars, proposals should demonstrate a commitment to excellence and creativity, including innovative collaborations with appropriate academic and professional partners.

2. *Program Planning*: Proposals should respond to the planning requirements outlined in the RFP. Planning should demonstrate substantive rigor. A detailed agenda and work plan, including a timeline, should demonstrate feasibility and the applicant's logistical capacity to implement the Program.

3. *Ability to Achieve Program Objectives*: Proposals should demonstrate clearly how the applicant will fulfill the Program's objectives and implement plans, while demonstrating innovation and a commitment to academic excellence. Proposals should demonstrate a capacity for flexibility in the management of the Program.

4. *Institutional Capacity*: Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve Program goals. Applicants should demonstrate established links to the scholarly and professional communities in the U.S. and knowledge of other overseas educational environment, particularly an awareness of conditions in societies and educational institutions outside the United States as they apply to academic and professional exchange programs. Applicants should also demonstrate their capacity to provide an information management; database system that meets Program requirements, is compatible with USIA's systems and, in general, will advance the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program's ongoing conversion of paper-based processing to electronic applications and data storage.

5. *Institutional Performance*: Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of managing successful exchange programs including: significant experience in developing and administering international exchange programs, sound fiscal management, and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency cooperative agreement awards as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. In its review of proposals, USIA will consider the past performance of Agency award recipients

and the demonstrated potential of organizations which have not previously received USIA awards.

6. *Cost-effectiveness*: Overhead and administrative components including salaries should be economical while adequate and appropriate to provide the required services. Proposals should document plans to realize cost-savings and other efficiencies through the use of technology, administrative streamlining and other management techniques.

7. *Cost-sharing*: Proposals should maximize cost-sharing. Preference will be given to proposals which demonstrate innovative approaches to leveraging of funds, fund-raising and other sharing of costs.

8. *Support of Diversity*: Proposals should demonstrate the applicant's awareness and understanding of diversity and a commitment to its achievement through individual grant awards and institutional participation and in other ways in both administrative and programmatic aspects of the Fulbright program.

9. *Evaluation*: The grant recipient should anticipate working closely with USIA to evaluate the program consistent with requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act.

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.

Programs must comply with J-1 visa regulations. Please refer to the Solicitation Package for further information.

Notification

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

Dated: October 16, 1998.

Judith Siegel,

Deputy Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

[FR Doc. 98-28288 Filed 10-21-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8230-01-M

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

[OMB Control No. 2900-0427]

Proposed Information Collection Activity: Proposed Collection; Comment Request

AGENCY: Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is announcing an opportunity for public comment on the proposed collection of certain information by the agency. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, Federal agencies are required to publish notice in the **Federal Register** concerning each proposed collection of information, including each proposed reinstatement of a previously approved collection for which approval has expired, and allow 60 days for public comment in response to the notice. This notice solicits comments on information needed to assess the health care disability compensation or rehabilitation needs of former Prisoners of War (POW).

DATES: Written comments and recommendations on the proposed collection of information should be received on or before December 21, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments on the collection of information to Ann Bickoff, Veterans Health Administration (191A1), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. Please refer to "OMB Control No. 2900-0427" in any correspondence.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ann Bickoff at (202) 273-8310.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under the PRA of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13; 44 U.S.C., 3501-3520), Federal agencies must obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for each collection of information they conduct or sponsor. This request for comment is being made pursuant to Section 3506(c)(2)(A) of the PRA.

With respect to the following collection of information, VHA invites comments on: (1) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of VHA's functions, including whether the information will have practical utility; (2) the accuracy of VHA's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (3) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4)

ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or the use of other forms of information technology.

Title and Form Number: Former POW Medical History, VA Form 10-0048.

OMB Control Number: 2900-0427.

Type of Review: Reinstatement, without change, of a previously approved collection for which approval has expired.

Abstract: The information is obtained from former POWs to assess the medical care needs of these veterans. The information will be used to determine the present and future needs of POWs in the areas of disability compensation, health care and rehabilitation.

Affected Public: Individuals or households.

Estimated Total Annual Burden: 750 hours.

Estimated Average Burden Per Respondent: 1 hour.

Frequency of Response: On occasion.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 750.

Dated: August 4, 1998.

By direction of the Secretary.

Donald L. Neilson,

Director, Information Management Service.

[FR Doc. 98-28295 Filed 10-21-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8320-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

[OMB Control No. 2900-0496]

Proposed Information Collection Activity: Proposed Collection; Comment Request

AGENCY: Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is announcing an opportunity for public comment on the proposed collection of certain information by the agency. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, Federal agencies are required to publish notice in the **Federal Register** concerning each proposed collection of information, including each proposed extension of a currently approved collection, and allow 60 days for public comment in response to the notice. This notice solicits comments for information needed to authorize payment of Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance.

DATES: Written comments and recommendations on the proposed