

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER
Notice of Funding Opportunity**

Funding Opportunity Title: Addressing Pandemic Propaganda and Disinformation in AF

Funding Opportunity Number: SFOP0007128

Information Call: Friday, June 26, 2020 at 10:00 AM EDT

Deadline for Applications: Wednesday, July 22, 2020, at 11:30:00 PM EDT

CFDA Number: 19.040 – Public Diplomacy Programs

Total Amount Available: \$2,500,000

Maximum for Each Award: \$1,250,000

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE GEC

As mandated by law,¹ the Global Engagement Center (GEC) directs, leads, synchronizes, integrates, and coordinates efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States and United States allies and partner nations. GEC carries out eleven specific functions, among them to lead, direct, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate international efforts to track and evaluate counterfactual narratives abroad that threaten the policies, security, or stability of the United States and United States allies and partner nations. As needed, GEC supports the development and dissemination of fact-based narratives and analysis to counter the propaganda and disinformation of state and non-state actors directed at the United States and United States allies and partner nations. GEC also identifies current and emerging trends in foreign propaganda and disinformation in order to coordinate and shape the development of tactics, techniques and procedures to expose and refute foreign propaganda and disinformation. In addition, GEC coordinates with United States allies and partner nations in order to amplify the Center's efforts and to avoid duplication.

GEC engages through partners to carry out these and other functions and to work toward associated policy goals. GEC does not address United States domestic audiences, nor engage in domestic discussions of United States policy. Therefore, no activities supported under this scope of work shall be directed toward U.S. persons. Any such engagement, if determined by GEC to have been intentional, will constitute grounds for termination for cause of this award.

This is a Notice of Funding Opportunity, outlining the priority program area, target audiences, and the procedures for submitting requests for funding. Please carefully follow all instructions below to be considered for this solicitation process.

A. Funding Opportunity Description

Summary:

This will be a single-stage competitive process. Interested applicants will submit a full proposal addressing all the proposed program objectives. Proposals will be thoroughly evaluated and

scored by a merit review panel. Proposal review will consider the proposal's alignment with program objectives, as well as the applicant's documented capacity to deliver timely results on the proposed objectives.

As COVID-19 continues to spread across sub-Saharan Africa, so too are related cases of propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation surrounding the virus. The constant competition for accurate fact-based, objective information on the pandemic creates additional confusion, fear, and panic, in what many refer to as an "infodemic". Sub-Saharan Africa is rife with conspiracy theories on vaccine testing, fake stories, sensational news, misleading medical advice, statistical manipulation, and influence campaigns from nefarious actors to promote their own agendas. It is increasingly more difficult for African journalists to access experts—particularly in the medical field—in real-time when reporting on COVID-19, and are oftentimes unaware of where news comes from when items are widely shared over platforms like WhatsApp. Disinformation often takes advantage of information vacuums, and it is paramount to fill information spaces with fact-based information on the pandemic for African audiences.

The current global health pandemic underscores the serious threats posed by disinformation and propaganda campaigns pushed by adversaries, both globally and in sub-Saharan Africa. Malign actors and their proxies are taking advantage of the COVID-19 "infodemic" in an effort to undermine the United States and its relationship with allies and partners through disinformation and propaganda campaigns. Russian, Chinese, and Iranian disinformation campaigns have all promoted false narratives in a concerted manner, including by claiming the United States caused or exacerbated the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kremlin, Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and Iranian regime's disinformation and propaganda ecosystems have converged on similar disinformation and propaganda themes intended to advance their own geopolitical positions, while Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) also perpetuate false and misleading information about COVID-19 to cast doubt on the West's ability to manage the health crisis and to encourage attacks against Western interests.

The influx of propaganda and disinformation from foreign state- and non-state actors on COVID-19 complicates efforts by the United States and its African partners to mitigate the spread of the pandemic and inoculate vulnerable populations from malign influence. Credible voices in sub-Saharan Africa compete with an onslaught of other sources of information—with varying degrees of authenticity—to provide accurate updates on the global health crisis. The challenges arising from the COVID-19 "infodemic" represent a broader need to ensure vulnerable populations receive truthful, fact-based information on the pandemic in the near-term and increase their capacity to recognize, understand, expose, and counter malign influence in the long-term.

Given the crucial importance accurate information plays in fighting this pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa, the GEC seeks unique proposals to proactively address COVID-19-related propaganda and disinformation and to build the capacity of local audiences to inoculate themselves from its adverse effects. If the capacity and capabilities of locally-resonant influencers are increased to recognize, understand, expose, and counter COVID-19-related propaganda and disinformation, then the space for adversarial narratives to thrive will become more narrow and the reach of fact-based information about the pandemic will increase.

The GEC proposes to award two or more cooperative agreements through this NOFO. Organizations must possess experience identifying and countering disinformation and propaganda and/or in building and supporting networks that identify and counter disinformation and propaganda. Activities will preempt, address, and/or expose current Iranian, PRC, Russian, and/or Violent Extremist Organization narratives and propaganda and disinformation campaigns regarding COVID-19 in the one or more of the sub-Saharan African countries listed below.

Award activities will take place in Kenya, Nigeria, and selected countries of the Sahel region (defined for purposes of this NOFO as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, and the northern three provinces of Cameroon), and awardees should have recent prior experience and/or extensive networks in the country(ies) for which the award is made. Organizations or consortia may make a proposal to one or more Priority Program Area, as is appropriate for the scope of the proposed activities and the experience of the organization. Proposals submitted by organizations with an extant physical presence in countries where they propose to conduct activities, or with partners having such a presence, are particularly welcome. Applications that propose countries outside of the geographic scope listed above will not be considered.

Priority Program Areas:

A. Proactively Address Harmful COVID-19-Related Propaganda and Disinformation from Malign State and Non-State Actors Targeting the United States and its Partners

Objective 1. Develop analyses on the tactics, techniques, and procedures of adversarial propaganda and disinformation related to COVID-19 in a priority program area, and disseminate these analyses through a sustained roll-out plan that emphasizes stakeholders in the region; or

Objective 2. Execute a communications campaign to address and expose how disinformation threatens public health in sub-Saharan Africa for local policymakers, health officials, and vulnerable populations in a priority program area, and preempt future disinformation efforts from taking root there.

B. Strengthen Influencers' Capacity to Recognize and Counter COVID-19-Related Propaganda and Disinformation

Objective 1. Measurably increase the capacity and capabilities of influential African individuals and organizations by drawing upon existing networks of media, cultural, religious, and/or community influencers who are best placed to refute COVID-19-related propaganda and disinformation in their own communities through a defined campaign of activities focused on providing accurate information about COVID-19; or

Objective 2. Measurably increase the organic capabilities of journalists to identify and counter COVID-19-related propaganda and disinformation in local contexts through training and tools to monitor and assess adversarial actions; the creation of websites, information infrastructures, or

technologies for longer-term analyses; or other positive developmental approaches as a stark contrast to adversaries' inability to build sustainable solutions locally.

2. Participants and Audiences:

In this announcement, GEC seeks to support projects that help to recognize, understand, expose, and counter malign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation related to COVID-19 in Kenya, Nigeria, and the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, and the northern three provinces of Cameroon. Applicants should demonstrate current capabilities to execute the program in one or more of these specific countries within sub-Saharan Africa.

The audiences for this program will be local civil society, media, cultural, and/or spiritual influencers, drawing upon existing networks of influencers where feasible. Audiences should be as narrowly defined as possible and, where appropriate, executed in local language(s) of the host nation that are key channels for dissemination of COVID-19-related disinformation to increase reach and resonance. For example, programs in Kenya should focus on language groups that the implementer can show to be targets or significant consumers of COVID-19 related disinformation and/or propaganda of the listed state-sponsors and/or VEOs and are under-served with respect to accurate information about COVID-19. Proposed audiences should be selected based on target audience analysis and root cause analysis to maximize the impact of the program and effectively address the problem of COVID-19 disinformation targeting vulnerable audiences. This project will not address U.S. audiences.

The following activities and costs are **not covered** under this announcement:

- Social welfare projects;
- Paying to complete activities begun with other funds (however, new activities that build from lessons learned as the result of an earlier project are acceptable);
- Activities that appear partisan or that support individual or party electoral campaigns;
- Exchange programs (however, reasonable international travel incidental to the accomplishment of program objectives will be considered);
- One-time events, such as stand-alone conferences and one-off round tables (however, a series of workshops within a larger programmatic concept are acceptable);
- Medical research and clinical studies;
- Cultural presentations, cultural research, cultural clubs, or festivals, etc.; and
- Entertainment (e.g., social activities, ceremonies, alcoholic beverages, guided tours).

Authorizing legislation, type and year of funding:

Any grants and/or cooperative agreements made as a result of this solicitation will be funded by FY2020 CARES Act funds, as authorized by the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (as amended) and are subject to the statutory limitations of such funding.

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Mechanism Type: Cooperative Agreement
Estimated Number of Awards: 2-4
Estimated Total Program Funding: \$2,500,000
Estimated Award Ceiling: \$1,250,000
Estimated Award Floor: \$625,000
Length of Project Period: 6-to-9 months
Anticipated program start date: September 1, 2020

This notice is subject to availability of funding. The U.S. government reserves the right to make an award in excess of the award ceiling and the right to make an award below the floor outlined in this notice. The U.S. government also reserves the right to award funding to applicants under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the application deadline.

Funding Instrument Type: Cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements are different from grants in that U.S. government involvement in cooperative agreement implementation is considered substantial. Substantial involvement in this program will include but may not be limited to: identification and selection of sub-recipients and beneficiaries, program country selection, training curriculum review and approval, approval of social media content, ability to quality-control any deliverables, development of robust Monitoring and Evaluation plans for each deliverable and in aggregate across the project, and re-scoping the geographic/activity selection if security, health, or travel conditions require changes.

Program Performance Period: Proposed programs should be planned for completion in six-to-nine months or less from the start date of the award. GEC will entertain applications for continuation funding under these awards beyond the initial budget period on a non-competitive basis subject to: 1) availability of funds; 2) satisfactory progress of the program; and 3) a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants

The GEC may make awards through this solicitation to U.S. and foreign non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, and commercial entities. Individuals, state and local governments, foreign public entities, and public international organizations are not eligible to apply. Before submitting, potential applicants should ensure that they are eligible to receive a grant or cooperative agreement and prepared to adhere to the terms of [2 CFR 200](#) and [2 CFR 600](#).

GEC welcomes applications irrespective of an applicant's race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing is encouraged, but not required.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements

Applicants may submit one proposal. If more than one proposal is submitted, all proposals from that organization will be considered ineligible for funding.

In order to be eligible to receive an award, all organizations must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet, as well as a valid registration on www.SAM.gov. Please see Section D.3 for information on how to obtain these registrations.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application forms required below are available through SAMS Domestic.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

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

Content of Application

Please ensure:

- The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity
- All documents are in English
 - All budgets are in U.S. dollars
 - All pages are numbered
 - All documents are formatted to 8 ½ x 11 paper, and
- All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.

The following documents are **required**:

1. Mandatory application forms

- a. SF-424 (*Application for Federal Assistance – organizations*)
 - b. SF424A (*Budget Information for Non-Construction programs*)
 - c. SF424B (*Assurances for Non-Construction programs*) (*Note: Form SF424B is not required if an organization has renewed its SAM.gov registration since February 2nd, 2019*)
2. **Summary Coversheet:** Cover sheet stating the applicant name and organization, proposal date, program title, program period proposed start and end date, and brief purpose of the program.

3. **Proposal (20 pages maximum):** The proposal should contain sufficient information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the applicant wants to do. You may use your own proposal format, but it must include all the items below.
- **Proposal 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 ability to carry out the program, including relevant information on previous grants from the State Department and/or U.S. government agencies.
 - **Program Objectives and Outcomes:** The objectives describe what the program is intended to achieve. These should be written in the SMART format. The outcomes refer to the intermediate results-based accomplishments such as changes in attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, or sentiment among the audience or participants. These changes should be logical steps toward achieving the program objectives. These objectives and outcomes should be specific, achievable, and measurable.
 - **Program Activities:** Describe the program activities and how they will help achieve the outcomes and objectives. Each activity should be clearly linked to advancing an identified project objective or outcome. A schedule or Gantt chart of activities should also be included.
 - **Key Personnel:** Names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program. What proportion of their time will be used in support of this program?
 - **Program Partners (if applicable):** List the names and type of involvement of key partner organizations and sub-awardees.
 - **Program Monitoring and Evaluation Plan:** The Monitoring and Evaluation plan should include a Theory of Change (ToC); a Logical Framework which details the goals of the project, the (SMART) objectives of the project and the results-based outcomes, outputs, activities, risks, and assumptions that achieve each objective; and an Indicator Reference Sheet which details the indicators to measure performance and impact; and a Monitoring and Evaluation Narrative which explains how the suggested M&E plan will be implemented. Please see the two attached M&E templates for more details.
4. **Budget Justification Narrative:** After filling out the SF-424A Budget (above), use a separate sheet of paper to describe each of the budget expenses in detail. See section *H. Other Information: Guidelines for Budget Submissions* below for further information.
5. **Attachments**
- 1-page CV or resume of key personnel who are proposed for the program
 - **If applicable**, letters of support from program partners describing the roles and responsibilities of each partner
 - **If applicable**, official permission letters from relevant government agencies

Please note: Other items NOT required for submission but which may be requested if your application is selected to move forward in the review process include:

- Copies of an organization or program audit within the last two (2) years

- Copies of relevant human resources, financial, or procurement policies
- Copies of other relevant organizational policies or documentation that would help the Department determine your organization's capacity to manage a federal grant award overseas
- Completion of a pre-award organizational information sheet to determine what financial controls and standard operating procedures an organization uses to procure goods and services, hire staff and track time and attendance, pay for grant-related travel, and execute other financial transactions that may be necessary to undertake the activities in your application
- GEC reserves the right to request any additional programmatic and/or financial information regarding the proposal.

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

Required Registrations:

All organizations applying for grants (except individuals) must obtain these registrations. All are free of charge:

- Unique Identifier Number from Dun & Bradstreet (DUNS number)
- NCAGE/CAGE code
- www.SAM.gov registration
- SAMS Domestic Registration

Step 1: Apply for a DUNS number and an NCAGE number (these can be completed simultaneously)

DUNS application: Organizations must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet, if your organization does not have one already, you may obtain one by calling 1-866-705-5711 or visiting <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/displayHomePage.do;jsessionid=81407B1F03F2BDB123DD47D19158B75F>. <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>

NCAGE application: Application page here

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

Instructions for the NCAGE application process:

<https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/Docs/US%20Instructions%20for%20NSPA%20NCAGE.pdf>

For help from within the U.S., call 1-888-227-2423

For help from outside the U.S., call 1-269-961-7766

Email NCAGE@dliis.dla.mil for any problems in getting an NCAGE code.

Step 2: After receiving the NCAGE Code, proceed to register in SAM by logging onto: <https://www.sam.gov>. SAM registration must be renewed annually.

System for Award Management (SAMS Domestic) Registration:

The Department of State's System for Award Management (SAMS Domestic) provides the only portal through which applications to this opportunity will be accepted. Please refer to the SAMS Portal Info for Applicants pdf, included with this opportunity, for instructions on how to register for SAMS Domestic. Please note: Although this opportunity will be published on grants.gov, all applications must be submitted through the SAMS Domestic portal. Applications may not be submitted through grants.gov.

4. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be time stamped before 23:30:00 U.S. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on July 22, 2020. **There will be no grace period, and any application not received by the application deadline will not be considered.**

GEC encourages applicants not to wait until the final day of the competition to submit. Early submission provides time for applicants to alert GEC (GEC-programs@state.gov) of any technical difficulties, affording sufficient time to resolve difficulties before the deadline. Although GEC will work with applicants to resolve technical issues, it is not in a position to grant exceptions to the submission requirements, notably the submission deadline, as outlined in this announcement.

5. Funding Restrictions

Alcoholic Beverages: Please note that award funds cannot be used for alcoholic beverages.

6. Other Submission Requirements

All application materials must be submitted electronically through the State Award Management System (SAMS Domestic).

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Criteria

Each application will be evaluated and rated on the basis of the evaluation criteria outlined below. The criteria listed are closely related and are considered as a whole in judging the overall quality of an application.

Organizational capacity and record on previous grants (20 points): The organization has expertise in its stated field and the GEC's confidence in the applicant's ability to undertake the program. This includes a financial management system and a bank account.

Quality and feasibility of the program idea (30 points) The proposed project plan is well developed, with detail about how program activities will be carried out; responds to the objectives outlined in the solicitation; and demonstrates originality. It is clearly and accurately written, substantive, and sufficiently detailed. The program plan adheres to the program overview and guidelines described above.

Ability to achieve program objectives (20 points): Goals and objectives are clearly stated, and the program approach is likely to provide maximum impact in achieving the proposed results. Objectives are reasonable and feasible. The application clearly demonstrates how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan. Proposed personnel, institutional resources, and partner organizations are adequate and appropriate to achieve the program goals.

Budget (10 points): The budget justification is detailed. Costs are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results. The budget is realistic, accounting for all necessary expenses to achieve proposed activities.

Monitoring and evaluation plan (20 points): Applicant demonstrates it can measure program success against key indicators and provide milestones to indicate progress toward objectives outlined in the proposal. The program includes output and outcome indicators and shows how and when those will be measured.

2. Review and Selection Process

A Merit Review Panel will evaluate all eligible applications based on the above criteria. Once the merit review process is completed, unsuccessful applicants will be offered a debrief based on the review committee's feedback on their proposal.

3. Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS)

I. The Department of State, prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (currently FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313);

II. An applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM;

III. The Department of State will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in §200.205 Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

1. Federal Award Notices

The grant award or cooperative agreement will be written, signed, awarded, and administered by the GEC Grants Officer. The assistance award agreement is the authorizing document and it will

be provided to the recipient for review and countersignature. The recipient may only start incurring program expenses beginning on the start date shown on the grant award document signed by the Grants Officer.

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

Issuance of this NOFO 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.

Payment Method: Payments under any awards made as a result of this solicitation will be processed through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Payment Management System (PMS).

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Terms and Conditions: Before submitting an application, applicants should review all the terms and conditions and required certifications which will apply to this award, to ensure that they will be able to comply. These include: 2 CFR 200, 2 CFR 600, Certifications and Assurances, and the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, all of which are available at: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>. Note the U.S Flag branding and marking requirements in the Standard Terms and Conditions.

3. Reporting

Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify the frequency of required reporting.

G. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACTS

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact GEC at: GEC-Programs@state.gov. A Q&A document will be posted as an attachment to this notice.

The GEC Programs Team will conduct a virtual question and answer session on Friday, June 26, 2020 at 10am EDT.

Please email GEC-Programs@state.gov by Thursday, June 25, 2020 for dial in information.

We do not provide any pre-consultation for application related questions that are addressed in the NOFO. Once an application has been submitted, State Department officials and staff — both in the Department and at embassies overseas — may not discuss this competition with applicants until the entire proposal review process is completed.

H. OTHER INFORMATION

Guidelines for Budget Justification

Personnel: Describe the wages, salaries, and benefits of temporary or permanent staff who will be working directly for the applicant on the program, and the percentage of their time that will be spent on the program.

Fringe benefits: Calculate any allocable fringe benefits for personnel to be working directly on the program. Fringe benefits must be justified by an organization's written HR policies or NICRA.

Travel: Estimate the costs of travel and per diem for this program. If the program involves international travel, include a brief statement of justification for that travel.

Equipment: Describe any machinery, furniture, or other personal property that is required for the program, which has a useful life of more than one year (or a life longer than the duration of the program), and costs at least \$5,000 per unit.

Supplies: List and describe all the items and materials, including any computer devices, that are needed for the program. If an item costs more than \$5,000 per unit, then put it in the budget under Equipment.

Contractual: Describe goods and services that the applicant plans to acquire through a contract with a vendor. This includes independent consultants. Also describe any sub-awards to partners that will help carry out a substantial portion of the scope of work.

Other Direct Costs: Describe any other costs directly associated with the program, which do not fit in the other categories. For example, shipping costs for materials and equipment or applicable taxes. All "Other" or "Miscellaneous" expenses must be itemized and explained.

Indirect Costs: These are costs that cannot be linked directly to the program activities, such as overhead costs needed to help keep the organization operating. If your organization has a

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA) and includes NICRA charges in the budget, attach a copy of your latest NICRA. Organizations that have never had a NICRA may request indirect costs of 10% of the modified total direct costs as defined in 2 CFR 200.68. For-profit entities with a formally established overhead rate may apply that rate.

"Cost Sharing" refers to contributions from the organization or other entities other than the U.S. Embassy. It also includes in-kind contributions such as volunteers' time and donated venues.