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Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund

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Guidelines

The [Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund](#) is intended to provide support for our alumni activities in innovative ways that reach from a local to international level. Because we are encouraging innovation, we have not imposed many restrictions on the content of your proposals. Nevertheless, there are standards applied to U.S. grants overseas that will also apply to these proposals.

Please read the guidelines and frequently asked questions below for more details and ways to make your project idea successful. You may also [read the transcript of the Q&A Live with Dr. Lisa Heilbronn](#) from the Office of Alumni Affairs about the AEIF.

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Application Process

- Each project must have one team leader.
- Alumni, in general, may offer to support a project by "liking" it or offer critiques and/or suggestions.
- All initial projects must be submitted between Wednesday, February 16 and Sunday, March 13, 2011.
- Comments, edits, and "likes" of posted ideas were accepted through March 16 due to site performance issues.
- Finalists were announced on April 4, 2011. More detailed instructions have been sent to finalists.
- Each project team must finalize their proposal on State Alumni by April 15, 2011.
- Voting will take place between April 18 and May 1, 2011.
- Winners will have one year to complete the project.
- Winners will be required to blog about their project on the State Alumni website.

What are the responsibilities of the AEIF project leader and team?

The first round of the AEIF is intended to give the alumni who post projects the opportunity to receive comments and advice from fellow alumni, to edit and improve their proposals, grow their teams, and in general to strengthen their original proposals. They should be prepared to log in regularly to read comments, to solicit comments and support from other State Alumni members through posting in relevant State Alumni communities and to update their project proposals as needed.

How can alumni participate beyond submitting an AEIF proposal?

The AEIF is designed to give all alumni the opportunity to enter into dialogue with those among them who choose to submit project proposals to the

AEIF Information

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competition. This is an opportunity for alumni to mentor each other, to offer constructive criticism and advice to the project teams, and to indicate their support for innovative alumni activities around the themes of:

- democracy and human rights;
- economic opportunity and prosperity;
- women's empowerment;
- promoting a better environment;
- food security;
- global health; and
- outreach to marginalized communities.

For some, it will offer the chance to join a team and engage, either virtually or empirically, in making a difference.

Alumni are encouraged to visit State Alumni regularly during the competition to watch the project evolve, read new proposals as they are posted and to "like" their favorite ideas. Positive comments made by other alumni will be taken into consideration when the finalist projects are chosen.

What is an innovative project?

Innovation is not easily defined. For the purpose of this competition, something will be considered innovative if it employs out of the ordinary methodology, subject matter, location, audience or results.

Methodology: It is a form of mentoring, outreach, community service or other alumni-originated activity that has not been undertaken previously in the applicant country or region.

Subject-matter: The submission categories are deliberately broad: democracy and human rights; economic opportunity and prosperity; women's empowerment; promoting a better environment; food security; global health; and outreach to marginalized communities.

Location: AEIF grants are not limited to a single country and can be used to support collaboration between countries within a region, or across regions. In addition to this innovation, projects can propose innovative use of public affairs spaces such as American Corners, Binational Centers (BNCs), and English Language Learning Centers. Projects might also propose alumni activities in regions or communities that have not previously been addressed by the alumni or the post.

Audience: The intended partner(s), audience or beneficiary of the project could include individuals or groups who are not typically reached.

Results: The outcome of the proposed project could achieve unusual or innovative results.

How long will the winning teams have to implement the project activities?

The Office of Alumni Affairs will announce the results of the AEIF competition by May 23, 2011, and each winning team will have up to 12 months thereafter to implement the project. There is no fixed number of events, or duration for the project. Proposals could range from several months preparation for a single training or conference session, a publication or for regular monthly activities, or the daily production of a web-based product over the course of 12 months.

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Eligibility

To submit a proposal for the AEIF competition, you must:

- Be a registered and verified member of the website. State Alumni membership is available to current and former participants of qualifying

- U.S. government-funded exchange programs; and
- Be a current citizen or resident in a country where the project will take place, i.e. countries with U.S. missions.

Are U.S. alumni eligible to apply?

U.S. citizens may participate in project teams, but they may not submit proposals or serve as the project leader. U.S. alumni and exchange program participants are encouraged to support or mentor other alumni teams.

This stipulation is in order to maximize the local ownership and sustainability of the project. Furthermore, funding for the AEIF will be dispersed through U.S. embassies and consulates overseas. It cannot be dispersed to individuals or organizations in the United States of America.

Do all AEIF team members have to be resident in the country or region in which the project will take place?

The AEIF encourages regional cooperation, bi-national projects, as well as partnerships and activities on a global level between alumni. We encourage projects that feature collaboration across different regions and exchange programs or groups of alumni as well as innovative uses of social media. Each project should, nevertheless, have an "anchor" U.S. mission and team leader that will take the administrative lead in the project.

Do I have to submit a detailed budget with my project idea?

Projects that include the participation and support of an existing alumni association will be more competitive in the finalist round. All projects selected as finalists will be asked to include a plan with any existing alumni organizations in their final proposal.

The AEIF project teams will not be required to submit a detailed budget during the first round of submissions. But a rough budget estimate of key categories of expenses such as transportation, salaries, expendable and durable goods, and equipment is required.

If a project is chosen as a finalist and continues into the second phase of the competition, the project team leader will need to submit a more detailed budget at the beginning of the second round.

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Budget and Funding

Allowable costs for the 2011 AEIF include, but are not limited to:

- Intra-regional or internal transportation.
(If alumni from multiple countries propose a joint project, reasonable transportation costs related to that project will be considered.)
- Trainer or speaker expenses.
- Reasonable equipment or materials.
- Meals or refreshments that are integral to the overall project goals.
- Communications.
- Publications such as booklets, short informational publications, manuals, and public informational campaign materials.
(A clear and achievable plan detailing the distribution plan of the research, the need, and a instrument for determining the impact and distribution of publications will be required.)

The prohibited budget items for the 2011 AEIF include, but are not limited to:

- International airfare to or from the United States of America.
- Sustained staff salaries, office space, and overhead/operational expenses (furniture, utilities, office rental, car and building purchase etc).
(Salaries, overhead, equipment, and other administrative expenses are allowable only as they relate to specific project activities.)
- Large items of durable equipment.

- Excessive representational meals or entertainment
(*Food costs should be clearly justified and limited to a maximum of 10% of the total award amount. This does not include expenses associated with individual per diems for grant-related activities.*)
- Academic research.
(*Funding academic research projects as ends in themselves. A clear and achievable plan detailing the distribution plan of the research, the need, and a instrument for determining the impact and distribution of the publication will be needed.*)
- Provide direct social services to populations.
- Support or oppose partisan political activity.

Can the AEIF be used to fund an existing project or organization?

The AEIF is intended to fund innovative projects and it is unlikely that a proposal to assume financial support for an existing program would be reviewed favorably.

However, a proposal that seeks to transform an existing alumni activity in one of the thematic areas or that would engage the alumni in a novel way could meet the program criteria.

What is the minimum and maximum amount of funding available for AEIF projects?

For the 2011 AEIF competition, micro projects for less than \$5,000 will not be considered. The likely sustainability and success of a project or activity is usually greatly enhanced by a reasonable budget that considers the realities of local funding and looks for opportunities for cost-sharing. Alumni can submit proposals for funding up to \$35,000 USD.

Teams may be asked to re-evaluate and refine their budgets during Phase Two and before final authorization is granted to winning projects.

How much detail should I provide for the budget of my finalist project?

Finalist projects should provide a fully detailed and itemized budget request (in U.S. dollars). Budget requests should include:

- Key categories of expenses such as transportation, honorarium, expendable and durable goods, etc.
- Itemized expenses for each category.
- Detailed unit costs (e.g. costs per person, per day).
- In-kind donations and contributions from third parties, which should be itemized and labeled as "cost-share." In-kind donations and contributions should not be included in the total amount requested, but must be listed in your budget outline.

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Building a Team

- Each project must have at least 10 team members.
- A project may have more than 10 members on a team, but at least 10 members must be from a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program (and at least one of those members being from a U.S. Department of State program).

Who can be on an AEIF project team?

The initial submission of an AEIF project idea must be from a registered and verified member of State Alumni. Other team members may be alumni or current participants of Department of State exchange programs and alumni or current participants of other exchange programs funded by the United States

government.

Projects may be posted with as little as one initial project participant, but must have a team with at least 10 people who are members of State Alumni or eligible for membership by the close of Phase One of the project competition on March 13, 2011.

Project team leaders are responsible for verifying the eligibility of team members and listing them as team members under the proposal.

Can U.S. citizens participate on an AEIF project team?

U.S. citizens cannot post an original project, but can join teams and volunteer to mentor projects. U.S. citizens may participate on an AEIF team if they are:

- Currently participating in a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program in the country or region where the project is taking place;
- An alumnus/a of a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program and are living and/or working in the country or region of the project;
- Serving as a Peace Corps volunteer overseas in the country or region of the project;
- Serving as a Foreign Service officer or are an eligible family member or contractor working within the U.S. mission or on a U.S.-funded project in the country or region of the AEIF project.

Funding for the AEIF will be dispersed through U.S. embassies and consulates overseas. It cannot be dispersed to individuals or organizations in the United States of America. U.S. alumni and exchange program participants are encouraged to support or mentor other alumni teams.

Examples:

- *A current or former U.S. English Language Fellow could join a project team that intends to build on the English Access Microscholarship Program or other English language learning program;*
- *A current or former Peace Corps volunteer who worked on environmental issues or entrepreneurship could join a project on promoting a better environment or economic opportunity and prosperity;*
- *A current or former Fulbright researcher could partner with an alumni group in their country to work on outreach in one of the categories.*

Can one alumni member be a member of multiple AEIF project teams?

One alumnus can submit no more than one project per theme per country.

If you wish to volunteer to join a project team, you must contact the team leader, offer your support and establish your eligibility. We suggest that individuals consider volunteering for no more than one project per theme.

Team leaders are responsible for adding you to their project team list.

How do I get in touch with other alumni and invite them to join my AEIF project team?

The State Alumni website offers tools to help you find other alumni who may be interested in joining your AEIF project.

- Visit the Find Fellow Alumni section to do a basic or advanced search for members of the site.
- Visit the Alumni Associations section to find contact information for alumni associations around the world.
- Browse Alumni News Stories or Alumni Articles to find alumni who might share your interest.
- Spread the word to alumni who might not yet be registered on State Alumni through the Invite a Friend link.
- Find alumni through social networking sites such as [Facebook](#) or

[ExchangesConnect](#).

Do all team members have to be in the same physical location or be able to meet in person?

No, it is not necessary for everyone to be physically in the same location. Alumni may work together from many countries virtually. Travel costs should not consume a substantial percentage of the overall project budget, so innovative means of communication and collaboration are preferred when incorporating team members from different geographic locations.

My project was selected as a finalist. Can I add or change my team members?

Team leaders should feel free, in fact be encouraged, to grow their teams during this phase. People are welcome to join or drop out in support of a project. Team leaders should [update their proposal](#) by April 15, 2011, in order to present their full team listing on State Alumni prior to the beginning of voting (April 18 – May 1). While teams may grow or change, final composition of a team must still meet the basic criteria of having at least 10 alumni team members ([see above for details](#)).

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Partnerships

Alumni are encouraged to work with partner organizations if it will support their innovative project idea.

Do AEIF projects have to come from a country or region with a pre-existing, formally recognized alumni association?

No. AEIF projects can be submitted by a single person initially. Support from or participation of an alumni association, either formally recognized or informal, is not a prerequisite for consideration, nor is it a substitute for participation and support from individual members of State Alumni. Projects must eventually have the support of at least 10 individual alumni or participants of U.S. government-funded exchanges.

If an AEIF project is proposed for a country or countries with existing alumni associations, do they need the approval of the association to apply?

Any AEIF project can be submitted directly through State Alumni in the initial round by an eligible member of State Alumni.

Can AEIF project teams collaborate with civil service organizations or form a private-public partnership?

The AEIF, as the name implies, is intended to support innovative ways for alumni to give back to their society based on the knowledge and experience they gained in the United States. Engagement with civil society, as well as a private-public partnership, can both be innovative in this sense. However, leadership of the project must, in all cases, reside with the alumni team.

Do I need formal U.S. embassy or consulate approval to post an AEIF project idea on State Alumni?

No. The AEIF process is designed to give all initial project submissions access to the global alumni community in order to maximize transparency and the opportunity for the global community to provide feedback and guidance to

the project team.

Nevertheless, all finalist projects will be reviewed by the relevant country's public affairs professionals from the U.S. embassy or consulate (U.S. mission). Project leaders will be expected to meet with their local public affairs office during the second round and selected projects will carry out their projects in consultation and partnership with a U.S. mission. The U.S. mission that would be responsible for overseeing funded projects must send the Office of Alumni Affairs an assessment of the finalist project and an agreement to support it if it is selected for funding.

Does an AEIF team need to represent or have formed a formal alumni organization to carry out the project?

No. Individuals or groups do not need to represent an existing organization at the time of application for the AEIF.

However, because successful project proposals will have to be funded in a way that meets the transparency and accountability standards of the U.S. government, we suggest that the project teams consider how they will organize themselves to receive funding early in the process. Please note, funds will be dispersed through a U.S. mission, so projects must take place in a country or region that currently has U.S. representation (i.e., a U.S. embassy or consulate).

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Selection Process

How were AEIF finalist projects selected?

Nearly 700 project ideas were submitted by our deadline. Of these, 515 satisfied the initial eligibility criteria of a team of at least 10 alumni and estimated budgets of \$35,000 or less. Proposed project ideas were rated according to a number of considerations, such as:

- Support from the State Alumni community: based on the number of "likes" received by the deadline.
- Evaluators ratings: project ideas were evaluated by the relevant U.S. embassy or consulate, regional experts from the U.S. State Department and the Office of Alumni Affairs staff based on the following criteria:
 - How well does the project address the selected category?
 - To what degree is the project innovative?
 - How feasible is the project to implement?
- Geographic balance: projects from all regions of the world were chosen as finalists.
- 137 were chosen as 2011 AEIF finalists.

What is required of finalist project leaders?

All finalists should expand upon their project ideas and give more detail. The project submission form now includes new fields, which require that finalists provide a more detailed budget, project goals and objectives, a timeline and activity list, and outcomes. For example, finalist projects should provide a fully detailed and itemized budget request (in U.S. dollars).

For each field, project leaders may enter up to 3,500 characters.

Only the person who submitted the project idea can edit the proposal on the website, but we encourage team members to work together and to consult with the public affairs section at their U.S. embassy or consulate to further develop the proposal.

Original project ideas will remain on the site for reference, but project leaders should edit the finalist version, which can be found at:

<https://alumni.state.gov/aeif2011/finalist>.

How does voting work?

All State Alumni members, including guests and staff members, may vote for their five [5] favorite proposals from April 18 – May 1, 2011. You may not vote for an individual project more than once. If your project is a finalist, you may vote for your own project one time. Voting is not required, and you do not need to use all of your votes.

We encourage you to browse all finalist projects before you vote. The website will track how many times you have voted and it will be displayed on the site at <https://alumni.state.gov/aeif2011/finalist>. Make sure you have reviewed your selections carefully before you vote because you may not change your votes or undo any of your selections once you have clicked the link to vote.

Voting has now ended. Thank you for your votes!

What if my project wasn't selected as a finalist?

Many alumni submitted innovative projects but were not selected as finalists in the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund. We encourage you to:

- Support other projects submitted by your peers. Perhaps you could provide expertise or volunteer your time to help other teams.
- Seek other sources of funding to carry out your project. Perhaps there are local funding sources or partner organizations to implement your idea. Visit the Grant & Funding Opportunities section of State Alumni for more funding ideas (<https://alumni.state.gov/online-resources/grant-opportunities>).
- Refine your project, seek more partners, and try again next time! Pending availability of funds, we hope to offer the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund again in the future.

How will winning proposals be chosen?

Winning proposals will be selected from the 137 finalist project ideas based on support from the State Alumni community (votes received) and the evaluation of a U.S. State Department panel. The panel will include State Department personnel who are experts in the topic areas addressed in the project proposal or region where the project takes place.

When will results be announced?

Results of alumni voting and the evaluation of the panel will be announced on May 23, 2011.

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