

**NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO)**  
**Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs**  
**U.S. Department of State**

Announcement Type: New Announcement

Funding Opportunity Title: Women’s Empowerment Through Economic Inclusion

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 19.700

Funding Amount: \$987,654.32

Number of Awards: One (1)

Cost Sharing Requirement: Not Required

Assistance Type: Cooperative Agreement

Funding Type: Discretionary

Authority: Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as amended

Source of Funding: Economic Support Fund

Funding Activity Category: Economic Growth

NOFO Issuance Date: May 19, 2020

Closing Date for Submission of Applications: Complete proposal packages must be submitted through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by **June 28, 11:59 pm EST**

Electronic Requirement: Yes  
E-mailed, faxed or mailed proposal packages, or individual documents, that failed to transmit during application submission will **NOT** be considered.

Deadline for Receipt of Questions: June 2, 2020, 5:00 pm, EST

Eligibility Category: U.S. - based non-profit/non-governmental organizations having a 501(c) (3) status with the IRS; overseas non-governmental non-profit organizations; for-profit organizations;

For-profit commercial firms are **not** eligible to apply in response to this NOFO. No exceptions.

Type of Applicant: Organizations. Individuals are not eligible to apply.

Number of Applications: One (1) per applicant organization

Note: Organizations may form consortia and submit a combined proposal. However, only **one** organization may be designated as the lead applicant. The lead applicant must meet the eligibility criteria listed in this NOFO.

Anticipated Award Date: The successful applicant will receive notification within approximately nine to twelve weeks of the closing of this announcement. The U.S. Department of State is under no obligation to fund any of the proposals submitted under this funding opportunity.

Est. Project Start Date: September 2020

Est. Project End Date: September 2023

Project Duration: Up to 36 months

This funding opportunity is posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and SAMS Domestic and may be amended. Answers to questions from potential applicants will be posted as an attachment to this NOFO. Applicants should regularly check the websites for the most recent information pertaining to this NOFO. **Department of State bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes associated with electronic submissions via [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Incomplete application packages will not be considered.** Missing e-mailed, faxed or mailed documents will NOT be considered.

Applicants must provide a Unique Entity Identifier, or Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS), when submitting application on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) in response to this NOFO.

SAM.gov registration ([www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov)) is required. **Applicants that do not have a valid DUNS number and completed [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov) registration will NOT be eligible for consideration.**

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the application package has been received by SAMS Domestic or Grants.gov in its **entirety**. Incomplete applications will be considered **ineligible**. Individual e-mailed or faxed documents that failed to transmit during application submission will **not** be considered.

The decision for the final eligibility and award determination rests with the Grants Officer.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The United States Department of State’s Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) announces a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for a project that focuses on women’s empowerment through economic inclusion in South Asia.

Pending availability of funds and satisfactory performance, including compliance with the award’s terms and conditions SCA may consider adding funds to the award. SCA intends to support one (1) award as a result of this NOFO.

**Department of State reserves the right to fund any or none of the proposals submitted and reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase the budget in accordance with the needs of the project and the availability of funds.**

The Federal award signed by the State Department Grants Officer is the **only** authorizing document.

This NOFO consists of the following sections:

- I. Funding Opportunity Description
- II. Award Information and Application Evaluation and Scoring
- III. Eligibility Information
- IV. Agency Contacts

Eligible organizations interested in submitting an application are encouraged to review this NOFO thoroughly to understand the type of project sought and the application submission requirements and review process as outlined in this NOFO.

## **I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

To counter debt-based development that has left countries vulnerable, the United States supports women’s economic empowerment, private sector-led growth, and regional cooperation<sup>1</sup> in the Indo-Pacific, including in South Asia. The United States promotes global women's economic empowerment through the Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative, the first-ever, whole-of-government approach.

Women’s economic inclusion through business ownership enables positive development outcomes, including increased female employment rates, GDP growth, and inclusive and

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<sup>1</sup> National Security Strategy “VI. Advancing American Values and Influence” and “The Strategy in a Regional Context; The Indo-Pacific”.

sustainable economic development.<sup>2</sup> Studies have also shown that individual companies greatly benefit, not only from increased leadership and employment opportunities for women, but from diversifying their supply chains to include women's businesses.<sup>3</sup> Cross-border cooperation also spreads best practices and supports connectivity in an economically divided region.

Donors, governments, educational institutions, business associations, and other entities have provided support in recent years to help women's businesses access sustaining corporate supply chain markets. However, barriers that affect women's businesses disproportionately still remain.

On the supplier side, women's businesses still lack capacity, finance, and business environment reforms needed to access local and international corporate supply chains, especially in a post-COVID environment. On the procurement side, both local companies and local branches of larger corporations still require procurement reform, C suite commitment, accountability, and program staffing, and access to certified and competitive women SME candidate pools in order to diversify supply chains effectively.

## **PROJECT GOALS AND STRATEGY**

To advance Department of State (DOS) policy priorities in the Indo-Pacific, the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) seeks to implement a regional pilot project in South Asia. The goals of the SCA project are to support private sector-led growth, increase women's economic empowerment, and strengthen regional cooperation.

These mutually reinforcing goals will be pursued simultaneously by preparing and then connecting women-led SMEs to corporate supply chains through a regional program that provides training, networking, and other means of assistance. When possible, input from relevant regional leadership platforms and other regional stakeholders should be used to inform the project's implementation in critical areas of regional need, as should advice and lessons from expert international organizations.

Focusing at the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) level would multiply impact. As SME's grow by accessing local or international corporate markets, they create new employment opportunities in their operations, including for women. As their own procurement grows, they can diversify further by adding smaller women suppliers and service providers.<sup>4</sup>

Assistance should incorporate lessons learned, and should be tailored to address local needs and take advantage of local momentum. Areas of assistance will likely include: strengthening the capacity of women business owners, support for regulatory and tax reforms, increasing access to

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<sup>2</sup> [World Bank](#) and many other studies show that income in the hands of women is a development multiplier.

<sup>3</sup> [World Bank/IFC 2018](http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/731411532465604455/pdf/128789-WP-v2-IFC-Gender-Report-2018-Tool-Suite-2-Women-owned-businesses-PUBLIC.pdf): <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/731411532465604455/pdf/128789-WP-v2-IFC-Gender-Report-2018-Tool-Suite-2-Women-owned-businesses-PUBLIC.pdf> and [UN Women](https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures): <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

<sup>4</sup> [Supplier diversity benefits both small and large businesses](#).

finance, and increasing access to local, regional and global procurement markets and technology needed to sustain and grow businesses.

An additional program goal is the creation of a virtual “Women’s Business Forum” in the form of web-based or local networking events and trainings during the life of the project. Contingent on the identification of a suitable regional partner, the Forum would be expanded on to include additional countries. The network would serve as a platform to encourage women-friendly corporate and financial institution reforms; enable corporations to identify women’s business training program gaps and propose improvements; identify and advance business environment reforms with government partners; help women’s businesses access corporate procurement markets; and link corporations to women job candidates and potential women suppliers.

Indirectly, the activities of the project are expected to contribute to affecting normative aspects of gender discrimination at the immediate level of the beneficiary (e.g., families reducing adverse societal norms, stimulating advocacy for legal reforms, etc.).

Initial beneficiary countries include Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Following the development of a successful program and depending on source and availability of funding, the program must be able to expand implementation to include additional countries in access to developed training and/or forums, including one or more Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) member states.

There will be substantive involvement on the part of SCA throughout the implementation of this program.

## **PROJECT’S DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

“Women’s Empowerment through Economic Inclusion” project has 3 key objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Enhance the skills and abilities that women entrepreneurs leading women-owned businesses (with a focus on SMEs or high potential smaller businesses) require to sustain and grow their businesses, including by entering and succeeding in corporate supply chains.
  - Conduct a pilot program with women’s SMEs that would ideally include a focus on the following sectors: COVID response, coastal tourism, disaster risk management, fisheries, aquaculture, ports management, shipping, and/or additional promising sectors where women’s businesses in the region may thrive.
  - Program activities should address critical, game-changing gaps and barriers and are expected to include a feedback loop to integrate company, donor, and other expert inputs able to spur innovation and improve effectiveness (e.g., by identifying knowledge gaps or new markets). Knowledge, skills, and linkages to resources are expected to be provided from within and outside of the region, including through expert speakers, professional exchanges, study tours, local and regional workshops, corporate mentoring and internships, financing solutions, access to new local and international corporate markets, and other opportunities.

- Transparent participant and activity criteria, and transparent selection processes will be used to improve the likelihood of measurable success.
  - Activities to support women’s businesses, such as improving access to finance, regulatory reform advocacy, networking, and capacity building will be focused on equipping women’s SMEs to compete for tenders, win selection, and succeed in corporate supply chains.
  - To include smaller, start-up, and underprivileged women entrepreneurs, transparent project criteria will seek SME candidates that include women’s small and micro businesses among their own suppliers and service providers.
- **Objective 2:** Help sustain and grow women-led SMEs by networking them with public and private partners able to work towards business environment reforms, provide access to finance, and increase access to new corporate and government procurement markets and other resources.
  - This is expected to be accomplished through prepared public-private networking events, whether virtual or actual, that bring women-led businesses together with public and private sector partners.
- **Objective 3:** Establish a virtual “Women's Business Forum” platform covering the southern coastal states of South Asia
  - The Forum should encourage women-friendly corporate and financial institution reforms; enable corporations to identify women’s business training program gaps and propose improvements; identify and advance business environment reforms with government partners; help women’s businesses access corporate procurement markets; and link corporations to women job candidates and potential women suppliers.
  - The forum should be expandable in order to include other countries, contingent on DOS identifying a regional partner and additional funding from cost-sharing partners.
    - As the Forum helps prepare women’s businesses to compete and succeed in corporate supply chains, it should ensure to transmit lessons and tailor activities to address remaining corporate challenges, such as the learning and reforms required to diversify supply chains. These may include C suite commitment, staff resources to find and recruit women suppliers, and support and training within supply chains, especially in markets where barriers are strong.

## **II. AWARD INFORMATION AND APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SCORING**

SCA will issue an award to the applicant whose proposal represents the best value to the U.S. Government on the basis of technical merit, efficient use of U.S. Government funds, and satisfactory organizational capacity.

The Department of State reserves the right to make an award on the basis of initial

application received with or without discussion or negotiations. Therefore, applications should contain the applicants' best terms from both cost and technical standpoints.

It is Department of State policy that English is the official language and U.S. dollar is the controlling currency. Proposal and related supporting documents must be English and accompanying budget in U.S. dollars.

Eligible applications will be evaluated by an independent review panel consisting of subject matter experts from other DOS bureaus/or offices or other USG agencies.

Bureau will conduct a merit review of all eligible applications as outlined in this NOFO. Applications will be reviewed by an independent review panel consisting of qualified subject matter experts from other DOS bureaus and offices, U.S. Embassies, or other USG agencies. Final approval resides with the DOS Grants Office.

The independent review panel will evaluate each application individually against the following criteria, listed below in order of importance.

The review panel will apply the following criteria when rating proposals:

**1. Quality of Project Idea**

- The proposal responds to the NOFO and is appropriate in the regional context;
- The proposal exhibits originality but is feasible;
- The proposal directly connects proposed activities with the desired outcomes (goals and objectives).

**2. Project Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives**

- The proposal provides a detailed work plan of proposed project activities and includes a clear articulation of how these activities will contribute to the overall project's goals and objectives;
- The proposal-articulated the project activities are specific, measurable, attainable, and placed in a reasonable time frame (SMART).

**3. Organizational Capability and Record of Performance**

- The proposal demonstrates an institutional record of previous successfully-implemented projects in one or more of the initial beneficiary countries outlined in this NOFO;
- The proposal demonstrates a clear plan to implement in the initial beneficiary countries, and in the event DOS identifies further sources of funding, expand implementation to include other countries, including IORA member states;
- Demonstrate ability to coordinate and work with International Organizations;
- The proposal articulates past performance and experience in working with relevant SMEs, large scale private sector organizations, host governments, local organizations, and communities;
- The proposal clearly demonstrates the organizations ability to adapt and continue implementation in the event of increasing or decreasing COVID-19 related restrictions;

- The proposal demonstrates the organization’s expertise working in the context of South Asia;
- The proposal clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of primary staff under this project;
- The proposal describes the division of labor among the Recipient organization and potential implementing partner organization(s) and identifies local partner organization(s) that would assist with implementation, where appropriate;
- Proposal addresses how the project will engage or obtain support from relevant stakeholders.

**4. Cost Effectiveness**

- The administration of the proposal budget, including salaries and honoraria, are explained and justified for the work involved;
- Proposed costs are reasonable and necessary and linked to program objectives and demonstrate efficient use of U.S. Government funds.

**NOTE:** This NOFO does not require cost-share. Applicants may voluntarily offer cost share; however, cost share will not be factored in during proposal review.

**5. Project Monitoring and Evaluation**

- The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan includes narrative explaining how monitoring and evaluation will be carried out and who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation activities (including potential contracted M&E experts, if applicable).

**6. Sustainability of Impact**

- Clearly delineates how impact will be sustainable beyond the life of the grant.

**7. Gender Analysis, Inclusion, Do No Harm:**

- Application includes a thoughtful gender analysis and reflects the gender analysis in the program design;
- Application presents a thoughtful analysis of the needs affecting vulnerable populations;
- Application includes a plan for: a) conducting gender analyses for additional specific countries or geographic areas that may be added during implementation; b) an iterative, regular process with local partners/beneficiaries for review of progress in addressing gaps and opportunities identified in the gender analysis, and reflection of results and updates in subsequent implementation;
- Staff / consultants / local partners have relevant expertise in gender, safeguarding / Do No Harm, gender-based violence, and conflict transformation;
- Application includes the required information on Do No Harm and Safeguarding policies and how the applicant will work on related areas with partners.

**APPLICATION SUBMISSION INFORMATION:**

Please refer to the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for additional application submission

instructions, including information on required documents and format.

Please follow both, the PSI and the NOFO, to ensure that the proposal package submission is in full compliance with the requirements. Proposal submissions that do not meet all of the requirements outlined in this NOFO and PSI will **not** be considered.

#### **FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION:**

Issuance of this NOFO does **not** constitute a commitment on the part of the Department of State to issue an award nor does it commit the U.S. Government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. Furthermore, award cannot be issued until funds have been fully appropriated, allocated, and committed through internal DOS procedures. While it is anticipated that these procedures will be successfully completed, potential applicants are hereby notified of these requirements. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.400 g, it is U.S. Department of State policy **not** to award profit under assistance instruments.

2 CFR §200.501 requires domestic/US non-federal entities that *expend* \$750,000, or more, in federal assistance during organization's fiscal year to have a single or program-specific audit conducted for that year. In addition, the entity must report the collected audit data elements on the form SF-SAC and submit it to the FAC. Any findings such as material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, or material noncompliance are reported on the SF-SAC.

The Federal award signed by the Grants Officer is the only authorizing document.

#### **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:**

Recipient will be required to submit Quarterly Progress and Quarterly Financial Reports (SF-425), unless special conditions apply, describing key activities undertaken during the reporting period towards accomplishment of the stated objectives. Financial Reports provide a means of monitoring expenditures.

**NOTE:** It is Department's of State policy that English is the official language of all award documents. If reports or any other supporting documents are provided in both English and a foreign language, it must be stated in each version that the **English language version is the controlling version. U.S. dollar is the controlling currency.** Financial reports must be submitted in U.S. dollars.

#### **OTHER INFORMATION:**

##### **Mandatory disclosures (2 CFR 200.113)**

Non-federal entity, recipient or applicant for a federal award must disclose, in a timely manner,

in writing to the federal awarding agency or pass-through entity all violations of federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the federal award. Non-federal entities that have received a Federal award including the term and condition outlined in Appendix XII of the 2 CFR 200—Award Terms and Conditions for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters -- are required to report certain civil, criminal, or administrative proceedings to [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov).

Failure to make required disclosures can result in any of the remedies described in §200.338 Remedies for Noncompliance, including suspension or debarment.

### **Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIS)**

A federal awarding agency, prior to making a federal award, will review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov) (currently FAPIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313). Applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov) 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 [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov). Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system. Applicant organizations must demonstrate adherence to equal opportunity employment practices and commitment to non-discrimination with respect to beneficiaries. Non-discrimination includes equal treatment without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and political affiliation. Applicants are reminded that U.S. Executive Orders and U.S. law prohibits transactions with or support to individuals or organizations associated with terrorism.

**Proposals that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative or a designate to terrorist organization or narcotics trafficker, including elected members of government, will NOT be considered.** This provision must be included in any sub-awards/sub-contracts issued under this award.

## **III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

See the cover page, Eligibility Category.

Applicants should also demonstrate in-depth understanding of South Asian cultural contexts.

Previous experience working in the South Asian region is preferred.

## **IV. AGENCY CONTACTS**

Any prospective applicant desiring an explanation or interpretation of this NOFO must request it in writing by the *deadline for questions* specified on page 1 (cover page). Information given to a prospective applicant concerning this NOFO will be furnished promptly to all other prospective applicants as a 'Questions and Answers' attachment to this NOFO.

Any questions concerning this NOFO should be submitted in writing, by email, to Charles Pritchard at [PritchardCH@state.gov](mailto:PritchardCH@state.gov) along with the project's title as outlined in the NOFO; the funding opportunity number; and applicant's legal name and organizational status.