

third and fourth (3rd and 4th) grades. Guiding parameters for proposals include that the program:

- Establish school-based libraries in approximately 5,000 schools in the Middle East.
- Each school to receive two libraries, one each for the 3rd and 4th grades.
- Each library to have 40 titles; five (5) copies of each title = 200 books.
- Each library to be accompanied by related teacher training programs and materials.

Books should be ready for placement in schools by January 1, 2004. All Arabic-language reading books should be of high-quality; titles and texts must be carefully vetted and translated to assure cultural appropriateness. Because the impact of this program should be deep and sustained, it is likely that the initial program plan will introduce early reading books in a handful of (TBD) countries in the Middle East. Proposals should, however, contemplate an expansion of the successful completion of this initial phase, and include budget and strategy plans for future years. The expansion must consider the growth of the initial project (3rd and 4th grades) into more schools and in more countries, and also possible program growth into higher grades. Successful applicants must demonstrate an ability to work throughout the Middle East and in the context of a broad range of contrasting political, religious, and cultural views.

Proposals must also address:

- Applicant's experience in working with foreign governments and in the Middle East.
- Cost-sharing by applicant (to include in-kind goods and services contributions such as discounts on U.S. retail prices of books, etc.).
- Explanation of the handling of copyright issues.
- An effective, timely, and cost-effective distribution system for the books throughout the region.
- Related teacher training programs and materials.
- Availability of accessory materials/opportunities for teachers, students, and parents (*i.e.*, posters, take-home exercise, web-based/interactive programs.)
- Integrated roles for parental and community involvement.
- Program monitoring and evaluation standards and methods.
- Public Diplomacy/outreach activities to engage the public in the region.
- Variety of titles available.
- Process by which book titles and texts will be vetted for appropriateness (*i.e.*, cultural and educational).

All products/services bought or produced as a result of this cooperative agreement must clearly acknowledge the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). Similarly, all related written materials, public statements/press or media releases or events must acknowledge MEPI. The grantee will also allow for Internet connectivity with the MEPI Web site.

Successful applicants will be expected to coordinate closely with the Department of State, NEA/PI, in the implementation of all aspects of this program.

The ideal applicant has extensive experience in the business of producing, publishing, and distributing children's reading books into classroom settings. In addition, the ideal applicant will have the tools and experience necessary to develop and implement a program that also engages teachers and parents, and has the flexibility to accommodate and meet the varying and changing levels of learning among young students. As a result of this project, Arabic-speaking children in the Middle East will gain greater access to recreational reading materials through which they will increase their overall literacy, independent thinking, and analytical skills. Teachers will have an enhanced understanding of the need for and a developed capacity to impart the values of independent, recreational reading. In addition, teachers will receive up-to-date training and materials.

Legislative Authority

The authorization for MEPI is Public Law 108–11, Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2003, and chapter 4 of part II of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include all non-governmental institutions, private organizations, and commercial entities.

NEA encourages single applications from partnerships or consortia of more than one organization. In this context, NEA is defining partnership as a negotiated arrangement among organizations that provides for a substantive, collaborative role for each of the partners in the planning and implementation of the project. Applications that represent a coalition of providers should include a signed partnership agreement stating a commitment or an intent to commit or receive resources from the prospective partner(s) contingent upon receipt of funds. The agreement should state how the partnership arrangement relates to the objectives of the project. The

applicant should also include: Supporting documentation identifying the resources, experience, and expertise of the partner(s); evidence that the partner(s) has been involved in the planning of the project; and a discussion of the role of the partner(s) in the implementation of the project.

Funding Availability—NEA expects to award at least \$5.0 million in FY 2003 supplemental ESF through this announcement. NEA will award one or more cooperative agreements.

NEA reserves the right to award less, or more, than the funds described, in the absence of worthy applications, or under such other circumstances as may be deemed to be in the best interest of the government.

Project and Budget Periods—This announcement invites applications for project periods up to three years. Awards, on a competitive basis, will be for a the initial budget period although the full project may indicate Federal Assistance needs for additional budget periods up to three years total. Applications for continuation grants funded under these awards, beyond the initial budget period, but within the three-year project period, will be entertained on a noncompetitive basis, subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the grantee and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the Department of State.

Review Criteria

Eligible applications will be competitively evaluated according to the following criteria:

Results or Benefits Expected—The applicant clearly describes the results and benefits to be achieved. The applicant identifies how improvement will be measured on key indicators and provides milestones indicating progress. Proposed outcomes are tangible and achievable within the grant project period. (30 points)

Approach—The applicant must demonstrate that its strategy and plan are likely to achieve the proposed results; the proposed activities, including Public Diplomacy/outreach component, and timeframes are reasonable and feasible. The plan describes in detail how the proposed activities will be accomplished as well as the potential for the project to have a positive impact on the quality of education in the Middle East. (25 points)

Organization Profiles—Where collaborative partners are proposed, the applicant describes the rationale for the collaboration, each partner agency's respective role, and how the coalition