Competition Overview

The Stevens Initiative invites qualified non-profit organizations and educational institutions to submit proposals for grants to conduct virtual exchange programs that connect young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa. Applicants should review the competition rules below and submit their application **no later than October 13, 2020**. The Initiative is offering three types of grants – Scaling, Efficiency, and Seeding –with different parameters to meet a range of needs in the virtual exchange field. Based on input from an independent review committee, some organizations will start a vetting, revision, and negotiation process that may result in being offered a grant. The grant period of performance will begin in April 2021 and virtual exchange activities will be expected to begin no later than Fall 2021.

The Stevens Initiative is an international effort to build global competence and career readiness skills for young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa by growing and enhancing the field of virtual exchange.

U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens devoted his life to building bridges through open and respectful dialogue and person-to-person diplomacy. As a young man, he taught English in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco as a Peace Corps volunteer. Morocco was his gateway to a life as an intrepid diplomat. He served the majority of his Foreign Service career in North Africa and the Middle East, a region he grew to love, and eventually served as U.S. Ambassador to Libya. The Stevens Initiative, conceived and developed in close partnership with Ambassador Stevens' family, seeks to give a generation of young people the kind of meaningful international experience that shaped Ambassador Stevens as a young man.

Created in 2015, the Initiative is committed to helping expand the virtual exchange field through three pillars of work: investing in promising programs, sharing knowledge and resources, and advocating for virtual exchange adoption. The Stevens Initiative is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, with funding provided by the U.S. Government, and is administered by the Aspen Institute. It is also supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

The Stevens Initiative builds on the pioneering work of the virtual exchange community, which uses technology to connect young people across continents and cultures. Through virtual exchange, youth have access to a substantive international exchange experience by collaborating and learning with their peers abroad without having to leave their communities. Recognizing the impact that virtual exchange promises, and capitalizing on advances in technology, the aim is to make life-changing, cross-cultural experiences available to all young people.

By summer 2021, prior to the start of programs to be funded through this competition, the Stevens Initiative will expand its reach to nearly 40,000 young people in 15 MENA countries and the Palestinian Territories, and in 45 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. Learn more about the goals of the Stevens Initiative, its activities, and the programs it has supported at http://stevensinitiative.org/.

Scaling Proposal Track Parameters

Scaling grants are intended to support organizations to grow and improve established virtual exchange programs. These programs should have a track record of providing a high-quality experience to hundreds of young people over the past few years and should be poised to further expand to reach substantially more young people through Stevens Initiative support.

Each Scaling proposal must simultaneously meet the requirements for all parameters listed below in order to be eligible.

Grant Duration: The period of performance of the grants will be 27 months, beginning April 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023. The first few months of the period of performance are intended to prepare for the virtual exchange activities. At least four rounds of the virtual exchange program should be conducted during the period approximately fall 2021 through spring 2023 (though more rounds are acceptable). Applicants may propose to begin the first round of the virtual exchange program during summer 2021 if they can demonstrate that it will be feasible to start the virtual exchange activities within a few months of the start of the period of performance. Applicants proposing to conduct summer virtual exchange programs may propose to conduct three rather than four rounds of the program (e.g. Summer 2021, 2022, and 2023) as long as all other application parameters are met.

Anticipated Grant Size Range: $250,000 to $750,000. The applicant must request an amount within this range to be eligible for selection. Also note that applicants can request no more than 80% of the amount of their Fiscal Year 2019 operating budget.

Cost per Participant Range and Definition of Meaningful Participation: $100 to $300 per participant. The applicant must submit a proposal to conduct the program for a cost per participant within this range to be eligible for selection. Cost per participant, for the purposes of this application process, is counted as the total amount of funding requested divided by the total number of young people who meet the definition of meaningful participation. The Initiative works with each prospective grantee to agree on the definition of meaningful participation that will apply to that grantee's program; it is typically defined as an individual who (including all of the following that are applicable): attended 75% of the virtual exchange program sessions, completed 75% of the virtual exchange tasks or assignments, and completed the virtual exchange final project. Cost share does not count towards the permissible cost per participant range for this application process, so the cost per participant, when counting the requested funding and cost share, may be higher than the permissible range if the excess is covered by cost share.

Program Duration and Contact Hours: Each participant in a given round of the virtual exchange program must be involved in virtual exchange activities over the course of at least two weeks and no more than 16 weeks. Each participant in a given round of the virtual exchange program must participate in at least 10 hours and no more than 50 hours of a combination of synchronous and/or asynchronous virtual exchange activities over the course of the program duration.

Deliverables and expectations:
- **Participant notification and information sharing**: Grantees will be expected to notify all participants that they are about to participate in a Stevens Initiative program and explain what the Stevens Initiative is and who supports the Stevens Initiative. Grantees will be expected to collect information, including contact information, about participants

to share with the Stevens Initiative, and in turn with the Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, as part of the Initiative's alumni engagement.

- **Alumni**:
  - o Plan and incorporate alumni action plans (e.g. small grants, continued learning implemented by alumni, community engagement) into your larger program, including support for the implementation of these action plans by your alumni after their virtual exchange participation. This plan should include a specific output and indirect/further reach targets, implemented by grantee with approval and coordination with the Stevens Initiative.
  - o Alumni success story: write one alumni success story and connect the Stevens Initiative to an alumna/us who becomes the focus of a second alumni success story.
  - o Set up and use a channel of regular communication with alumni (e.g. newsletter, Facebook group, etc.).
  - o Encourage but not require alumni-focused activities, such as webinars, reunions, or other opportunities for virtual exchange.

- **Communications**:
  - o Photo: 160 photos, evenly drawn from the U.S. and MENA region
  - o Impact stories: 1 required; grantees may opt to produce additional impact stories
  - o Social media: share grantee announcement, impact stories, alumni success stories, alumni small grants, and other updates that mention the Stevens Initiative and the funded virtual exchange via the grantee organization's social media, no less frequently than once a month
  - o Press: some effort to do outreach and receive press coverage, including grant announcement press release collaboration with the Initiative
  - o Campaign or project: The Stevens Initiative views communications as an opportunity for grantees to highlight the impact of their virtual exchange programs and connect with current and new networks. The Initiative welcomes collaboration with grantees on a special project that will help improve visibility over its program. These projects can vary, but should be a new or innovative addition to the grantee's existing communications work. Examples include creating a participant testimonial page on the program website, developing a newsletter, or posting short testimonial videos on the program's Instagram. A project or campaign is not required and grantees should not plan for these special projects in their application; they will have the opportunity to propose a special collaborative project during their period of performance. Once the collaboration is approved, the Initiative will work alongside the grantee on this project from planning to execution, and the grantee will receive support on all tasks.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**:
  - o Within a week of the start of each round of virtual exchange, submit the partnership table (using an Initiative template) updated to reflect the number of participants that have started the program at each program site.
  - o Host at least one in-person or virtual site visit. Programs that don't host a site visit during the first term or round of the program will be asked to participate in a mid-program spot check of the activities at some program sites.

- o Administer pre- and post-program participant surveys using the Initiative's common survey items. Use the survey administration platform maintained by the Initiative unless an alternative plan is agreed in advance with the Initiative.
- o Submit demographic information about program participants with the quarterly report following each round of VE implementation (January for fall, July for spring, October for summer).

Efficiency Proposal Track Parameters

The Stevens Initiative intends to support a few organizations to conduct virtual exchange programs that can reach young people at a substantially lower cost per participant than traditional programs in order to better understand how programs can be designed and administered to greatly expand access to the field, especially for communities that have not had access to in-person exchange or other international learning.

Each Efficiency proposal must simultaneously meet the requirements for all parameters listed below in order to be eligible.

Grant Duration: The period of performance of the grants will be 15 months, beginning April 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2022. The first few months of the period of performance are intended to be used to prepare for the virtual exchange activities. At least two rounds of the virtual exchange program should be conducted during the period approximately fall 2021 through spring 2022 (though more rounds are acceptable). Applicants may propose to begin the first round of the virtual exchange program during summer 2021 if they can demonstrate that it will be feasible to start the virtual exchange activities within a few months of the start of the period of performance. NOTE: If they are being conducted successfully, Efficiency grants may be considered for renewal once for an additional 12 months, through June 30, 2023, based on a review to be conducted during spring 2022.

Anticipated Grant Size Range: $100,000 to $400,000. The applicant must request an amount within this range to be eligible for selection. Also note that applicants can request no more than 40% of the amount of their Fiscal Year 2019 operating budget.

Cost per Participant Range and Definition of Meaningful Participation: Under $100 per participant. The applicant must submit a proposal to conduct the program for a cost per participant within this range to be eligible for selection. Cost per participant, for the purposes of this application process, is counted as the total amount of funding requested divided by the total number of young people who meet the definition of meaningful participation. The Initiative works with each prospective grantee to agree on the definition of meaningful participation that will apply to that grantee's program; it is typically defined as an individual who (including all of the following that are applicable): attended 75% of the virtual exchange program sessions, completed 75% of the virtual exchange tasks or assignments, and completed the virtual exchange final project. Cost share does not count towards the permissible cost per participant range for this application process, so the cost per participant, when counting the requested funding and cost share, may be higher than the permissible range if the excess is covered by cost share.

Program Duration and Contact Hours: Each participant in a given round of the virtual exchange program must be involved in virtual exchange activities over the course of at least two days and no more than one month. Each participant in a given round of the virtual exchange

program must participate in at least 3 hours of a combination of synchronous and/or asynchronous virtual exchange activities over the course of the program duration.

Deliverables and expectations:

- **Participant notification and information sharing**: Grantees will be expected to notify all participants that they are about to participate in a Stevens Initiative program and explain what the Stevens Initiative is and who supports the Stevens Initiative. Grantees will be expected to collect information, including contact information, about participants to share with the Stevens Initiative, and in turn with the Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, as part of the Initiative's alumni engagement.

- **Alumni**:
  - Alumni success story: connect the Stevens Initiative to an alumna/us who becomes the focus of an alumni success story
  - Set up and using a channel of regular communication with alumni (e.g. newsletter, Facebook group, etc.)
  - Encourage but not require alumni-focused activities, such as webinars, reunions, or other opportunities for virtual exchange.

- **Communications**:
  - Photo: 80 photos, evenly drawn from the U.S. and MENA region
  - Impact stories: 1 required; grantees may opt to produce additional impact stories
  - Social media: share grantee announcement, impact stories, alumni success stories, alumni small grants, and other updates that mention the Stevens Initiative and the funded virtual exchange via the grantee organization's social media, no less frequently than once a month
  - Press: some effort to do outreach and receive press coverage, including grant announcement press release collaboration with SI
  - Campaign or project: The Stevens Initiative views communications as an opportunity for grantees to highlight the impact of their virtual exchange programs and connect with current and new networks. The Initiative welcomes collaboration with grantees on a special project that will help improve visibility over its program. These projects can vary, but should be a new or innovative addition to the grantee's existing communications work. Examples include creating a participant testimonial page on the program website, developing a newsletter, or posting short testimonial videos on the program's Instagram. A project or campaign is not required and grantees should not plan for these special projects in their application; they will have the opportunity to propose a special collaborative project during their period of performance. Once the collaboration is approved, the Initiative will work alongside the grantee on this project from planning to execution, and the grantee will receive support on all tasks.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**:
  - Within a week of the start of each round of virtual exchange, submit the partnership table (using an Initiative template) updated to reflect the number of participants that have started the program at each program site.
  - Host at least one in-person or virtual site visit during the first year of the grant. Programs that don't host a site visit during the first term or round of the program will be asked to participate in a mid-program spot check of the activities at some program sites.

- Administer pre- and post-program participant surveys using the Initiative's common survey items. Use the survey administration platform maintained by the Initiative unless an alternative plan is agreed in advance with the Initiative.
- Submit demographic information about program participants with the quarterly report following each round of VE implementation (January for fall, July for spring, October for summer).

Seeding Proposal Track Parameters

Seeding grants are intended to support early-stage programs that fill a gap in the field in the virtual exchange field. These programs should have the potential to take hold and grow in the following years. Seeding grants are 15 months, April 2021 through June 2022, and successful Seeding programs may be considered for a 12-month renewal. Seeding grantees will participate in training and mentoring early in the period of performance during spring/summer 2021 to help build capacity, refine the program plan, and go through other preparations for virtual exchange programming. Seeding grantees are expected to include clear plans for partnerships, intended participants, content/topic areas, and staffing, though the plan for activities or curriculum can be at an earlier stage and be refined and finalized early in the period of performance.

Each Seeding proposal must simultaneously meet the requirements for all parameters listed below in order to be eligible.

Grant Duration: The period of performance of the grants will be 15 months, beginning April 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2022. The first few months of the period of performance are intended to be used to prepare for the virtual exchange activities. At least two rounds of the virtual exchange program should be conducted during the period approximately fall 2021 through spring 2022 (though more rounds are acceptable). Applicants may propose to begin the first round of the virtual exchange program during summer 2021 if they can demonstrate that it will be feasible to start the virtual exchange activities within a few months of the start of the period of performance. NOTE: If they are being conducted successfully, Seeding grants may be considered for renewal once for an additional 12 months, through June 30, 2023, based on a review to be conducted during spring 2022.

Anticipated Grant Size Range: $50,000 to $150,000. The applicant must request an amount within this range to be eligible for selection. Also note that applicants can request no more than 40% of the amount of their Fiscal Year 2019 operating budget.

Cost per Participant Range and Definition of Meaningful Participation: $300 to $500 per participant. The applicant must submit a proposal to conduct the program for a cost per participant within this range to be eligible for selection. Cost per participant, for the purposes of this application process, is counted as the total amount of funding requested divided by the total number of young people who meet the definition of meaningful participation. The Initiative works with each prospective grantee to agree on the definition of meaningful participation that will apply to that grantee's program; it is typically defined as an individual who (including all of the following that are applicable): attended 75% of the virtual exchange program sessions, completed 75% of the virtual exchange tasks or assignments, and completed the virtual exchange final project. Cost share does not count towards the permissible cost per participant range for this

application process, so the cost per participant, when counting the requested funding and cost share, may be higher than the permissible range if the excess is covered by cost share.

Program Duration and Contact Hours: Each participant in a given round of the virtual exchange program must be involved in virtual exchange activities over the course of at least two weeks and no more than 16 weeks. Each participant in a given round of the virtual exchange program must participate in at least 10 hours and no more than 50 hours of a combination of synchronous and/or asynchronous virtual exchange activities over the course of the program duration.

Deliverables and expectations:

- **Participant notification and information sharing**: Grantees will be expected to notify all participants that they are about to participate in a Stevens Initiative program and explain what the Stevens Initiative is and who supports the Stevens Initiative. Grantees will be expected to collect information, including contact information, about participants to share with the Stevens Initiative, and in turn with the Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, as part of the Initiative's alumni engagement.

- **Alumni**:
  - Alumni success story: connect the Stevens Initiative to an alumna/us who becomes the focus of an alumni success story
  - Set up and using a channel of regular communication with alumni (e.g. newsletter, Facebook group, etc.)
  - Encourage but not require alumni-focused activities, such as webinars, reunions, or other opportunities for virtual exchange.

- **Communications**:
  - Photo: 80 photos, evenly drawn from the U.S. and MENA region
  - Impact stories: 1 required; grantees may opt to produce additional impact stories
  - Social media: share grantee announcement, impact stories, alumni success stories, alumni small grants, and other updates that mention the Stevens Initiative and the funded virtual exchange via the grantee organization's social media, no less frequently than once a month
  - Press: some effort to do outreach and receive press coverage, including grant announcement press release collaboration with the Initiative
  - Campaign or project: The Stevens Initiative views communications as an opportunity for grantees to highlight the impact of their virtual exchange programs and connect with current and new networks. The Initiative welcomes collaboration with grantees on a special project that will help improve visibility over its program. These projects can vary, but should be a new or innovative addition to the grantee's existing communications work. Examples include creating a participant testimonial page on the program website, developing a newsletter, or posting short testimonial videos on the program's Instagram. A project or campaign is not required and grantees should not plan for these special projects in their application; they will have the opportunity to propose a special collaborative project during their period of performance. Once the collaboration is approved, the Initiative will work alongside the grantee on this project from planning to execution, and the grantee will receive support on all tasks.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**:

- Within a week of the start of each round of virtual exchange, submit the partnership table (using an Initiative template) updated to reflect the number of participants that have started the program at each program site.
- Host at least one in-person or virtual site visit during the first year of the grant. Programs that don't host a site visit during the first term or round of the program will be asked to participate in a mid-program spot check of the activities at some program sites.
- Administer pre- and post-program participant surveys using the Initiative's common survey items. Use the survey administration platform maintained by the Initiative unless an alternative plan is agreed in advance with the Initiative.
- Submit demographic information about program participants with the quarterly report following each round of VE implementation (January for fall, July for spring, October for summer).

Invitational Priorities

Applicants may indicate that their proposal addresses one or more of the following invitational priorities that are of interest to the Stevens Initiative. Proposals that meet these priorities will not receive additional points.

- Programs that include "open enrollment," meaning young people can independently sign up to participate without necessarily being involved through their course work or academic institution. This mode of recruitment and participation is especially timely while the pandemic has disrupted in-person education and exchange and inspired many young people and their families to seek opportunities to continue international learning.
- Programs that are conducted mainly on mobile phone apps and devices. The pandemic has accentuated the barriers faced by young people who lack access to adequate technology at home (high-speed internet, desktop or laptop computers, etc.) and the need to use tools, applications optimized for mobile devices and cellular data networks, to support these young people to fully participate in online programs.
- Programs centered on pro-social or social impact video games that also include a substantial virtual exchange component (i.e. involve sustained, mutually beneficial communication and collaboration between young people from the United States and the MENA region).

Program Attribute Variation Supplement

The Stevens Initiative aims to embed research on the effect of varied dosage (the amount of involvement in virtual exchange) and the presence of synchronous or asynchronous communication on participants as part of a supplement this competition. Gaining better understanding of the effect of these attributes would be a step toward improving program design and practice.

The Stevens Initiative invites organizations applying for a Scaling grant to propose to conduct additional work through a Program Attribute Variation Supplement. **This supplement is optional and submitting a supplement proposal is not required or expected of applicants.** Applying for one of these supplements does not confer any additional points or priority on the organization's main proposal. The main proposal will be considered first and the supplement will be considered only if the main proposal is being put forward for funding. If the Supplement is rejected, the main application must still be practicable.

The supplement proposal budget range is $50,000 to $100,000. The supplement must show how the applicant would have 150-200 youth participants meet the definition of meaningful participation in an alternative version of the program alongside the youth participants who meet the definition of participant in the main version of the program (covered in the main part of the proposal).

Applicants are expected to give participants in the main and alternate version of the program similar experiences aside from the variation in dosage or the presence of just one of synchronous or asynchronous communication or the other. Unless a compelling case is made for a higher dosage alternate version, the alternate version would have lower dosage than the organization's main virtual exchange program; the Initiative is more interested in learning about the plausibility of lower dosage versions rather than higher dosage versions of what already exists. For a supplement regarding synchronous and asynchronous communication, the two versions should include only synchronous and only asynchronous communication unless there is a compelling case for including both modes of communication in one of the versions. Applicants are asked to show how they will identify and assign comparable groups of participants into the main and alternate versions of the program. Applicants are asked to show how they will use evaluation and statistical methods to ensure that they are accounting for risks or challenges to data quality, such as ensuring the group sizes are appropriate, that matched groups are happening concurrently, and that they get sufficient response rates or have some buffer built into program design and recruitment.

The submission deadline for the supplement proposal is the same as the deadline for the main proposal. The period of performance parameters for the supplement are the same as those for the main proposal. If a supplement is offered, it will be incorporated into the main grant agreement.

Likely expenses for the supplement include but are not limited to: staffing and/or contracts for program/curriculum design to create or update the alternate version of the program; modification of online platforms or other technology to serve the alternate version participants; recruitment of alternate version participants; logistical support of alternative version participants; and facilitator training, support, and stipends for facilitators of alternate version participants/groups/classes.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria (described below) will be worth up to the following number of points depending on the track within which a proposal is submitted.

Maximum points per criterion by grant track

	Scaling & Efficiency	Seeding
Content and plan for activities	15	10
Facilitation and Facilitator Training	10	10
Participants	5 + 20	5 + 20
Partnerships	10	15
Capacity, Feasibility, and Logistics	20	20
Unique contribution to field	5	10
Cost-effectiveness	5	5
Sustainability and scalability	10	5

Content and Plan for Activities

The Initiative intends to support virtual exchange programs that use online technology to connect young people in the United States with young people in the Middle East and North Africa. Grantees are expected to put in place a plan for activities that includes a mix of activities over a sustained period of time to allow international groups of varying sizes to have in-depth dialogue and/or collaboration. These activities can include a mix of synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous communication and a mix of discussion-based activities and collaborative projects. A well-designed plan for activities focuses on a compelling topic or topics and empowers the participants learn about the topic or topics and also gain communication, collaboration, language, and problem-solving skills, as well as the familiarity with and empathy for different perspectives that they need to thrive in a globalized world.

Priority Topics: Proposed projects are encouraged to focus on one or more of the following topics:
1. Technology and computing
   - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields give young people skills critical to the 21st century workforce. Virtual exchange is particularly well suited to facilitating hands-on, collaborative projects – on a range of topics, including programming, web design, robotics, and many others – that help young people gain technology and computing knowledge and skills. Vocational and job skills training in technology and computing are encouraged.
2. World affairs and global studies
   - Courses in a range of disciplines or departments – particularly across social studies and the social sciences – focus on places and topics beyond the borders of the country where the course is being conducted. Global education is increasingly recognized as critical for young people, who need to understand global issues and trends as they prepare for jobs that involve international communication and cooperation and as they prepare to be informed, active citizens in their globally connected communities. Direct communication with peers from other places and backgrounds through virtual exchange gives young people the opportunity to see the world and their own society from new perspectives and with greater empathy.
3. Business and entrepreneurship
   - Virtual exchange can give young people the opportunity to practice the cross-cultural communication and digital literacy skills, such as through international

projects or case studies, they need as they enter the private sector. Using technology to connect with peers around the world is especially important in a world facing enormous changes to 'business as usual' in practically all sectors in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and the economic and social upheaval it has wrought. Virtual exchange can empower young people to collaborate with peers around the world to envision and shape their future in a rapidly changing world.

4. Language learning and practice
   - Virtual exchange can give young people the opportunity to practice communicating in a world language, building confidence and communication skills alongside increased language proficiency. Proposals focusing on this topic may be designed to give young people in the Middle East and North Africa the opportunity to practice English, to give young people in the United States the opportunity to practice a language spoken in the Middle East or North Africa, or to give both groups of young people the opportunity to practices the language spoken by their peers abroad. Note that while the primary purpose of these programs may be language learning and practice, the subject or topic of the communication between participants should be any topic of relevance and interest to all participants.

5. Public health and/or the coronavirus pandemic
   - Young people can benefit from learning about public health and can explore how they might serve their communities in the future at a time when the pandemic is showing the urgency and importance of international understanding and cooperation. Virtual exchange on these topics can empower young people to take an active role in addressing the health of their communities and communities around the world.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Are the proposed activities clear, appropriate, and valuable for the intended participants?
- Is it clear from reading the proposal what your experience as a participant in the program would involve, on a week-to-week, session-to-session, or activity-to-activity basis?
- Will the proposed activities foster sustained cross-cultural communication/collaboration among clearly identified youth participants in the United States and MENA region?
- Is the topic or topics appealing, valuable, and appropriate for the intended participants?
- Does the topic or topics include at least one of the Initiative's priority topics?
- Does the applicant demonstrate how virtual exchange activities would add to the participants' learning about the topic or topics?
- Are the modes of communication and participation engaging and well aligned with the needs, abilities, and interests of the participants?
- Would this program be likely to help the participants gain global competencies and other knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences?
- Is the program mutually beneficial for participants in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa?
- Is the plan for activities suitable given the possible impact of the pandemic? If proposed activities would likely be disrupted by social distancing, are appropriate alternative plans described?

Facilitation and Facilitator Training

The proposed program should involve facilitators, either educators or other adults responsible for helping the participants have a productive learning experience. The grantee is expected to prepare facilitators for their role and oversee and support facilitators throughout the program.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Are the facilitators – educators or others taking this role – clearly identified and appropriate?
- Is the facilitation style clear and appropriate for the age level of the participants, the proposed content and activities, and the setting in which the exchange activities will occur?
- Is there adequate facilitator training and preparation?
- Is there an adequate plan for recruiting facilitators and maintaining an adequate number of facilitators for the planned activities for the duration of the period of performance?

Participants

Participants should be young people in the age range that corresponds to the K-12 school age level –including primary school, middle school, and high school – or postsecondary education age level, including undergraduate and graduate education levels as well as young professionals under the age of 35. Educators, facilitators, or group leaders who work with the youth participants are not counted as part of the youth participants number.

Up to 5 points for the participant plan in general:

- Clear and specific description of who the participants would be
- Clear and compelling articulation of how the program addresses the needs and interests of the intended participants
- Participation numbers approximately balanced between the regions
- Clear participant recruitment and incentives to join/complete the program
- Demonstrated effort to ensure equal access for and empower participation by women and girls, young people from minority groups, and young people with disabilities

Priority points for reaching youth people whose access to exchange has been limited:

Virtual exchange programs can give young people in underserved communities new opportunities to gain critical skills and see the world from new perspectives even if they are not able to participate in an in-person exchange. Proposals can receive additional points for addressing the following priorities in their proposal. Applicants will be asked to state clearly in their proposal whether and how they commit to meeting one or both of these optional priorities. Grantees that propose to meet these priorities will be accountable to meet their commitments over the course of the grant.

U.S. priorities (up to 10 points)

- students from minority-serving institutions (MSIs) at the higher education level
- students from higher education institutions with a high percentage of Pell grant recipient students
- students from Title I Schoolwide Program schools
- or other marginalized youth as specified by the applicant

NOTE that Pell grant statistics are available at https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/pell20/#table.

MENA priorities (up to 10 points)

- Refugees from MENA countries
- Students from institutions where English is not the main language of instruction
- Young people from Iraq, Libya, Syria (including Syrian refugees), Yemen, and the Palestinian Territories

The number of additional points earned by the proposal will be determined by the following factors: the proportion of participants who will meet the priorities; the degree to which the program meets the needs and interests of young people from these groups and empowers them to fully participate; and the feasibility of the plan to recruit these participants and support them to have an impactful virtual exchange experience and meet the definition of meaningful participation.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Are the participants clearly identified and appropriate?
- Are the participants' need and interest clear and well matched to this program?
- Is there a feasible and clear plan to ensure equal access for empower participation by women and girls, young people from minority groups, and young people with disabilities?
- Is the program designed to serve the proposed participants?
- If the applicant states that their program will meet the U.S. or MENA Region Participant Priority/ies, is the plan to meet these priorities clear and feasible?
- Does the applicant show evidence of a track record of having reached underserved youth?

Partnerships

Applicants are expected to develop the proposal in conjunction with the partners with whom the program will be conducted. This includes the institutions where virtual exchange activities will occur as well as other organizations that may be involved in conducting the program. Grantees are expected to establish and maintain these partnerships through consistent collaboration and communication throughout the planning, implementation, refinement, and wrap-up stages of the proposed program.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Are partners listed?

- Are the partnerships appropriate?
- Are partnerships concrete and confirmed and clear or vague and speculative?
- Are partnerships equitable (in terms of involving input and ownership from all partners, and serving the interests of all partners and involved communities)?
- Are partner organizations and participating communities, particularly those that are often underserved by international opportunities, genuinely included and empowered throughout design and implementation?
- Would the proposed partners build capacity as a result of their involvement?

Capacity, Feasibility, and Logistics

Grantees are expected to manage the logistics of running an international virtual exchange program, ensuring activities are occurring on schedule and appropriately across all participating sites. Grantees are also expected to properly administer the Stevens Initiative grant, which includes following federal guidelines, terms, and conditions, regularly communicating with the Stevens Initiative, and submitting quarterly program, evaluation, and financial reports.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Does the staffing level evidenced in the budget seem appropriate to carry out the proposed program?
- Does this organization have the capacity and knowledge to conduct this program?
- Is it feasible to set up, manage, and monitor a program of this scale and complexity?
- Is there a clear and suitable plan for the tech platform or platforms that will be used?
- Is there a clear and appropriate plan for staffing the program, particularly for administration and logistics?
- Are there clear and appropriate contingency plans in place to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic? This can include steps taken to continue the virtual exchange activities and to support uninterrupted participation for youth people, especially those in underserved communities whose access to technology is most impacted by the pandemic.
- Especially for "open enrollment" programs that intend for youth participants to independently join the program, does the applicant have the capacity and suitable approach to review a substantial number of participant applicants and to support the involvement of all accepted participants?

Unique Contribution to the Field

The Initiative seeks to support programs that address particular needs in the virtual exchange field in the communities they intend to serve. While using promising practices common in the field is encouraged, distinct and innovative features or approaches are also valued, particularly in Seeding grant proposals.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Is the model of this proposed program distinctive in the virtual exchange field?

- Would supporting this program allow the Stevens Initiative and the virtual exchange field to learn something new and different about how virtual exchange can work?
- Are the applicants thoughtful about how they'd capture, share, and apply lessons learned?

Cost-effectiveness

All proposals must have a cost per participant (the total amount of funding requested divided by the total number of young people who meet the definition of meaningful participation) within the allowable range for their grant type. Within these ranges, the Initiative seeks to support programs that demonstrate an appropriate cost and use of funds and are likely to deliver a meaningful experience for participants.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Is the cost per participant reasonable for the likely value of the experience?
- Are the most significant expenses clearly described and appropriate?
- Does the budget narrative make clear what the program expenditures will be?

Sustainability and Scalability

Proposals should demonstrate the potential to scale up to reach more participants by either being replicated widely across several institutions or being incorporated into the main, ongoing work of one institution following the grant period of performance. Proposals should also demonstrate the potential to be sustained without Initiative funds following the grant period of performance.

Illustrative Review Questions
- Is there a clear and compelling explanation of how the program would be sustained without Initiative funds?
- Would the grant involve building systems to establish the virtual exchange program and virtual exchange generally as a part of the institution's work?
- Does this program have the potential to scale up to reach many more participants in the future, either by being replicated widely across several institutions or by being incorporated into the main, ongoing work of one institution?

Competition and Grant Rules

- **Deadline:** The deadline for submitting the application is **October 13, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time**. Applications will not be accepted after the deadline.
- Applications may only be submitted online through https://stevensinitiative.smapply.io/.
- **Forms and Templates:**
    - Download a sample application form (each grant type has a separate sample) including the questions and prompts here: Scaling Grant Application Sample; Efficiency Grant Application Sample; Seeding Grant Application Sample. The downloaded form is for your reference only; all forms must be

completed and submitted through the online format
https://stevensinitiative.smapply.io/.
- o Multiple attachments are required as a part of the application. You can download these templates here and also in the appropriate section of the application.
  - Scaling Grant Required Attachments: Scaling Budget Template; Scaling Timeline Template; Scaling Partnership Tracking Template; Scaling Program Attribute Variation Supplement Template
  - Efficiency and Seeding Grant Required Attachments: Efficiency & Seeding Budget Template; Efficiency & Seeding Timeline Template; Efficiency & Seeding Partnership Tracking Template
  - Common Templates (the same template is required for all three grant types): Budget Narrative Template; Foreign Subrecipient Profile Questionnaire; Domestic Subrecipient Profile Questionnaire
  - These templates are for your reference only; all required attachments must be completed and uploaded in the appropriate applications section and submitted through the online form.

- **Eligible Applicants:**
  - o Applying organizations must be based in the United States or in the Middle East and North Africa.
  - o Applicants based in the United States must be tax-exempt non-profit organizations, including educational institutions. U.S. applicants in the process of registration must submit proof that they are seeking non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service at the time of submission. Should the applicant be selected for a grant, funding will be contingent on the organization receiving tax exempt status. Grant recipients must be registered to conduct proposed activities in the countries where the activities would take place, if applicable.
  - o Applicants based in the Middle East or North Africa must be non-profit organizations, including educational institutions, that can demonstrate current in-country registration. Other organizations are not eligible to apply, though they may be included as sub-awardees or contract recipients. Staff should be proficient in English, able to file reports and conduct evaluations in English as well as in Arabic or French as appropriate.
  - o Fiscally sponsored organizations are eligible for funding; the application should be submitted by the fiscal sponsor and should make clear the arrangement between the fiscal sponsor and those carrying out the work.

- **Other Grant Rules:**
  - o An organization can request no more than 80% of the amount of their Fiscal Year 2019 operating budget.
  - o Organizations may submit more than one application if the proposed programs are distinct and do not involve any overlap in staff, curriculum, participants, deliverables, etc.
  - o Activities must be conducted in the United States and in one or more of the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Programs involving refugees

from these countries who are currently in countries not listed above are also eligible.

- o Participants may not be asked to pay in order to participate in Stevens Initiative-funded activities.
- o Past recipients of Stevens Initiative grants are eligible to submit applications.
- o Current recipients of U.S. Government funds are eligible to submit applications. These applications must be for programs that are different from currently U.S. Government-funded activities and do not involve any overlap in staff, curriculum, participants, etc.
- o In-person exchange for young people, educators, facilitators, or program organizers may be included to complement the virtual exchange activities. Travel to the United States for youth or adult participants from the Middle East and North Africa must occur through the J-1 visa program. Strong preference for travel will be given to candidates that have never traveled to the United States before (for participants from the Middle East and North Africa) or have never traveled to the host country in the Middle East or North Africa (for U.S. participants). Youth or adults who are alumni of other U.S. Government-sponsored exchange programs are not eligible to travel. No participant under the age of 15 is eligible to travel. Additional guidelines may apply and will be discussed in detail with grantees during grantee orientation.
- o Organizations are encouraged to collaborate to develop a proposed program. The full application should be submitted by one organization and may list partners as sub-awardees or contractors. The lead applicant should be the organization that will conduct the largest portion of the proposed work.
- o Organizations that receive a grant may be asked to work with the Stevens Initiative to incorporate new implementing partners (such as educational institutions and community organizations) into their programs as appropriate.
- o In administering grants and the grant competition, the Stevens Initiative follows, and expects applicants and grant recipients to follow, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State's Diversity Statement: "The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State strives to ensure that its efforts reflect the diversity of U.S. society and societies abroad. The Bureau seeks and encourages the involvement of people from traditionally underrepresented audiences in all its grants, programs and other activities and in its workforce and workplace. Opportunities are open to people regardless of their race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic location, socio- economic status, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. The Bureau is committed to fairness, equity and inclusion."
- o Applicants must demonstrate the capacity to meet U.S. reporting requirements as specified in the "Office of Management and Budget" and "Department of State" sections of "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards" (2 CFR sections 200 and 600).
- o Applicants are reminded that U.S. Executive Orders and U.S. law prohibits transactions with, and the provision of resources and support to, individuals and organizations associated with terrorism. It is the legal responsibility of the grant

recipient to ensure compliance with these Executive Orders and laws. This provision must be included in any sub-awards issued under this grant.
- o The second year of funding will be contingent on the successful conduct of the first year.

Support for Applicants

- Prospective applicants are encouraged to visit stevensinitiative.org to learn more about the goals of the Stevens Initiative, its activities, and the programs it has supported. The site's Resources page includes links to the webinars hosted by the Initiative as well as many other videos and documents that may be useful in developing a program plan.
- Applicants may be particularly interested to read feedback compiled by the Initiative in response to proposals submitted during previous grant competitions.
- The Initiative is hosting two webinars related to this competition: one on general questions on August 11 at 12 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time (register here), and another to answer questions about budget and compliance issues on August 27 at 12 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time (register here). Recordings of the webinars will be posted online for those who are not able to attend.
- Responses to frequently asked questions are included an FAQ document which can be downloaded here. This may be updated periodically.
- Those who are interested in finding another way to get involved in virtual exchange are encouraged to contact the Stevens Initiative at stevensinitiative@aspeninstitute.org.