

## ONLINE NGO RESOURCE CENTER

Iran

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|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Grantee:            | National Iranian American Council      |
| Subrecipient:       | None                                   |
| Dates of Project:   | April 1, 2005 - March 31, 2006         |
| Amount Recommended: | \$64,000 (special funds <sup>1</sup> ) |

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The Islamic Revolution of 1979 established a polity based on two contradictory elements: a republic of equal and sovereign citizens, and a hierarchal theocracy of pastoral power descending from an unelected religious leader. The political culture remained authoritarian as the regime tried to dominate all public space and every autonomous public institution. Ten years after the demise of the revolution's leader Ayatollah Khomeini, the overwhelming majority of Iranians realized the political contradictions within the regime and pinned its aspiration for democratic reforms in electing President Mohammed Khatami in 1997. Three years later, the reform movement controlled the legislative council and launched a campaign to legislate reforms, ensure separation of powers, purge police and security departments and reform the judiciary. Meanwhile, Iran has been confronting momentous social, economic and political problems. The population has doubled since the 1979 revolution while relative resources have significantly dwindled. The country's overwhelmingly young population is urban and educated; its aspirations are fundamentally modern, secular and middle class. Irrespective of the reform movement's setbacks and lack of real prospects, many reformers in Iran found strength and a new ally in the rapid growth of grassroots civic groups, who share mutual goals with the reformists in opposing authoritarianism.

Despite many political and legal restraints, civic groups have been resilient, effective and continue to expand their activities and increase in numbers. Still, they are in need of technical support and contact with international NGOs and donor agencies. In the past few years, many of these local civic groups have successfully partnered and cooperated with expatriate Iranian groups on low key issues such as the environment, women's rights, social care, education and culture. Traditionally, local civic groups have relied on Iranian communities abroad for support, including Iranian Americans who are one of the largest and most successful Iranian communities in the world. In order to bridge the gap between Iranian groups and international NGOs and donors, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), a nonprofit organization registered in January 2002, will use renewed Endowment support to create an interactive website for Iranian civic groups to develop their capacity and improve their access.

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<sup>1</sup> The NED has received special funds from the U.S. Department of State for projects in the Muslim World.

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### **I. BACKGROUND:**

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 established a polity based on two contradictory elements: a republic of equal and sovereign citizens, and a hierarchal theocracy of pastoral power descending from an unelected religious leader. The political culture remained authoritarian as the regime tried to dominate all public space and every autonomous public institution. Ten years after the demise of the revolution's leader Ayatollah Khomeini, the overwhelming majority of Iranians realized the political contradictions within the regime and pinned its aspiration for democratic reforms in electing President Mohammed Khatami in 1997. Three years later, the reform movement controlled the legislative council and launched a campaign to legislate reforms, ensure separation of powers, purge police and security departments and reform the judiciary. Meanwhile, Iran has been confronting momentous social, economic and political problems. The population has doubled since the 1979 revolution while relative resources have significantly dwindled. The country's overwhelmingly young population is urban and educated; its aspirations are fundamentally modern, secular and middle class. Irrespective of the reform movement's setbacks and lack of real prospects, many reformers in Iran found strength and a new ally in the rapid growth of grassroots civic groups, who share mutual goals with the reformists in opposing authoritarianism.

Despite many political and legal restraints, civic groups have been resilient, effective and continue to expand their activities and increase in numbers. Still, they are in need of technical support and contact with international NGOs and donor agencies. In the past few years, many of these local civic groups have successfully partnered and cooperated with expatriate Iranian groups on low key issues such as the environment, women's rights, social care, education and culture. To date, local civic groups have relied on Iranian communities abroad for support, including Iranian Americans who are one of the largest and most successful Iranian communities in the world. In order bridge the gap between Iranian groups and international NGOs and donors, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), a nonprofit organization registered in January 2002, will use renewed Endowment support to create a website on capacity building for Iranian groups.

### **II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

- To foster cooperation between Iranian civic groups and international civic groups and foundations
- To strengthen the capacity of civic organizations in Iran on the use of fund raising and project development tools.

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### **III. PROJECT ACTIVITIES:**

NIAC will use renewed Endowment support to develop and launch a website, Online NGO Resource Center, to strengthen organizational capacity of local groups in Iran and foster cooperation between Iranian NGOs, international NGOs and foreign funding institutions. NIAC will translate resource materials and manuals on capacity building into Persian to be posted on the website. Currently, access to Persian-language resource materials is minimal and cross border relationships are practically nonexistent. The website is an attempt to provide resources and expertise to Iranian groups through an interactive website. NIAC will also hire a Persian-English speaking resource expert to advise local groups on project development, proposal writing and foreign donor relations. The resource expert will work full-time until the website is launched and continue as a part-time employee from that point onward.

The resource expert will identify, translate and “Iranize” relevant capacity building materials to fit the political and cultural context of Iran. NIAC will create a database of donor agencies in Europe and the United States that consider Iran to be a priority and translate respective funding procedures into Persian to post on the website. NIAC plans to launch the website in mid-July 2005 and will partner with a credible and respected Tehran-based organization with extensive contacts in the NGO community, to broadcast the website to local groups. NIAC will also link the website to its IraNexus database, a network of Iranian-American NGOs, to foster cooperation between Iranian groups and American expatriate groups, in addition to distributing brochures about the endeavor to Iranian American organizations.

The main purpose of the website is to advise local groups on capacity building and to cultivate relationships between Iranian NGOs and international donors. To meet this end, the resource expert will correspond by phone and by e-mail with local groups on capacity building, project development and proposal writing issues. NIAC will also circulate an electronic Persian-language monthly newsletter to local groups on resource material updates, new funding opportunities and upcoming training activities. NIAC will continue to update the website to include additional materials on capacity building and foreign donors, and strategize on more effective ways to reach out to local groups in Iran.

### **IV. EVALUATION PLAN:**

To evaluate the impact of the project, NIAC will:

- Track the number of visitors to the website and local groups that join the network of Iranian NGOs on the website.
- Track the number of exchanges between Iranian NGOs and international NGOs and funding agencies.
- Conduct follow-up interviews with local groups on the content of the website.

### **V. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND:**

The National Iranian American Council (NIAC), a nonprofit organization registered in January 2002, and founded by Iranian-Americans, is mainly dedicated to promoting Iranian-American participation in American civic life. The NIAC website ([www.niacouncil.org](http://www.niacouncil.org)) is the main vehicle to facilitate the exchange of information and resources while building a collaborative national network among Iranian-American organizations. Its executive director, Trita Parsi, is a Ph.D. student at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies with a Master’s degree in international

relations from Uppsala University and a second Master’s degree in economics from the Stockholm School of Economics. Mr. Parsi is an active member of the Iranian-American community, and in 1997 founded Iranians for International Cooperation, one of the first Iranian advocacy groups promoting Iranian-American interests. Other board members include Ms. Marjan Ehassi, director of legal programs, and member of the New York Bar and the Law Society of Upper Canada; Mr. Alex Patico, treasurer and an expert with twenty years experience in nonprofit organizations; and, the Honorable Jim Moody, former Congressman of the 5<sup>th</sup> district of Wisconsin (1983 – 1993).

**VI. BUDGET:**

National Iranian American Council requests the following budget for FY 2005:

**PROGRAM COSTS**

|  |               |              |                 |
|--|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Salaries, 12 months                            |               |              |                 |
| Resource expert                                | \$25,000      |              |                 |
| Project manager                                | <u>10,500</u> |              |                 |
|  |               | \$35,500     |                 |
| Space and Utilities, 12 months                 |               | 10,200       |                 |
| Supplies and Equipment                         |               |              |                 |
| Office supplies, including stationary          | 490           |              |                 |
| Computer                                       | <u>1,000</u>  |              |                 |
|  |               | 1,490        |                 |
| Communications and Postage                     |               |              |                 |
| Telephone, fax, Internet, & postage            |               | 1,800        |                 |
| Contractual Services                           |               |              |                 |
| Web design & maintenance                       | 7,000         |              |                 |
| Translator                                     | <u>6,000</u>  |              |                 |
|  |               | 13,000       |                 |
| Other Direct Costs                             |               |              |                 |
| Printing & distribution of pamphlets/brochures | 700           |              |                 |
| Internet advertisement                         | 1,200         |              |                 |
| Bank fees                                      | <u>110</u>    |              |                 |
|  |               | <u>2,010</u> |                 |
| <b>TOTAL PROGRAM COSTS</b>                     |               |              | <b>\$64,000</b> |
| <b>ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS</b>                    |               |              |                 |
| None   |               |              |                 |
| <b>TOTAL ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS</b>              |               |              | <b><u>0</u></b> |

GRAND TOTAL

\$64,000

The Endowment staff recommends a grant of \$64,000.

## **ONLINE NGO RESOURCE CENTER INTERIM ASSESSMENT (FY 2003)**

### **PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

- To foster cooperation between Iranian civic groups and American expatriate civic groups
- To strengthen the capacity of civic organizations in Iran on the use of media tools in advocacy

### **PROJECT ACTIVITIES:**

NIAC requested and received a NED grant in June 2002 to design and implement a two-day media training workshop in Tehran for five NGOs from different sectors, including health, environment, women, youth and cultural sectors. NIAC was to emphasize the technical side of the use of media in developing messages and explore in this pilot workshop the interest in and receptiveness of the participants to other aspects of civic activities. Due to political complications in Iran, NIAC was forced to delay and was one-year behind schedule. In mid-2003, a number of key student leaders disappeared, and an Iranian-Canadian photo-journalist, Ms. Zahra Kazemi, was arrested and later killed during detention. Under these circumstances, Iranian NGOs were hesitant to work with outside groups, in particular US groups. However, NIAC continued to establish links with local groups, and moved ahead on workshop preparations. In late 2003, NIAC met with the executive director of a credible and respected Tehran-based NGO resource center in Washington, D.C., and agreed to jointly administer the media training workshop. The Tehran-based organization handled the logistical and administrative aspects of the workshop while NIAC's provided the technical expertise.

On January 21 – 22, 2004, NIAC, in cooperation with a Tehran-based NGO resource center, conducted a two-day media training workshop in Tehran. Forty representatives from five Iranian NGOs from different sectors, including research, health, children, environmental and cultural affairs, participated in the workshop, which covered topics such as message development, script writing and editing, graphics and video production. On the first day of the workshop, Mr. Hadi Ghanemi, media expert, began by providing a theoretical and practical overview on video documentary production. In the morning session, instruction on the importance of video documentary, message development and public outreach, pre-production and usage of a digital camera was presented to participants. In the afternoon session, participants were divided into three groups to develop and write scripts. On the second day of the workshop, participant groups conducted interviews and shot footage. Throughout the course of the day, individual demos on the editing software, *Premier*, were given to participants to begin editing the footage taken from the first day. Production of the group video documentaries took more time than anticipated. Instead, participants opted to produce one documentary video on the workshop.

NIAC was unable to include in the training an item on project development, proposal writing and fundraising. In addition, follow-up support on how to disseminate campaign messages and accessing Iranian television airtime was not covered. Both items are expected to be covered in future workshops when partnerships with additional Iranian media and capacity building experts are secured.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

Overall, the media training workshop was a success, although some components of the program were not actualized. The media training workshop provided participants with a tool to enhance

organizational capacity and outreach. Participants with little or no exposure to video documentation acquired technical know-how and hands-on experience with video recording devices. The workshop provided instruction on video production, yet more time was needed for each group to complete their documentary. Participants recommended that the workshop be for one-week in order to ensure completion of the individual group documentaries. In addition, due to time constraints, NIAC was unable to include in the workshop an item on project development, proposal writing and fundraising.

NIAC carefully observed and assessed the media training program and plans to repeat the workshop with other organizations in different sectors or different parts of the country in the future. NIAC has demonstrated its ability to conduct an Iranian-based program that aims to foster capacity building among members of Iran's civil society and stronger ties to expatriate groups. NIAC willingness to continue the work remains exceptionally important in view of Iran's difficult politics and complex conditions. Endowment staff recommends continued support.