NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SOCIAL INSURANCE

Innovative Projects to Strengthen Social Security For Vulnerable Populations

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
January 6, 2010

Project Overview

The Ford Foundation has asked the National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI) to serve as a regranting agent as part of its work on improving long-term economic security for low-income individuals. The purpose of the project is to support constituency building, education outside of the beltway, and the development of user-friendly, research-based information to strengthen the adequacy of Social Security for vulnerable groups, including communities of color, women, people with disabilities, low-wage workers and children. In light of rising out-of-pocket medical costs, declining asset values and job losses, it is more important than ever that groups most reliant on Social Security have their voices heard in policy debates about its future.

NASI anticipates approving several project applications up to a maximum of $100,000. Targeted projects of smaller amounts (e.g., $20,000 to $35,000) are encouraged and will be given special consideration. The application deadline is February 15, 2010. Interested organizations are encouraged to send a notice of intent to apply by January 26, 2010, to Elizabeth Lamme (elamme@nasi.org).

Successful projects will translate existing knowledge about social insurance into messages that strengthen and empower constituencies most reliant on Social Security, develop innovative outreach strategies to more effectively communicate such messages, and/or build practical knowledge about how Social Security could better meet constituency needs. Successful projects will also commit to producing at least one educational deliverable (e.g., pamphlet, YouTube, PowerPoint presentation) with potential for distribution by organizations seeking similar ends. Preference will be given to applications involving organizations with a grass-roots base in vulnerable communities. Proposals involving collaboration among outreach and research organizations are welcome. Applications from large, well-established national organizations will be considered, although substantial cash participation by the organization will be expected. The initiative will seek to fund a balanced mix of projects, which (across all projects) focus on a range of activities, strategies and target constituencies.

Project funds may not be used in any way that violates tax exempt status under section 501(c) 3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Funds cannot be used for political campaign activities or to influence policymakers about a specific policy that has been introduced or enacted. It is permissible to provide policymakers and the media with education about the need for policies to address a particular issue, such as improvements in Social Security. Organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner.

The Problem

Discussion about the future of Social Security focuses primarily on program financing, sometimes framing the issue exclusively in terms of solvency. Missing from public discourse is articulation of the critical importance of exploring options to strengthen the program as a bulwark against economic insecurity for all Americans, especially low-paid workers, women, communities of color, individuals unable to work due to health conditions, widows and orphans. These vulnerable groups have much at stake in the Social Security reform debate, yet their voices are rarely heard. This project aims to enable such groups to further articulate and communicate their interest in Social Security by funding grassroots outreach and education initiatives as well as auxiliary endeavors that create and disseminate user-friendly, research-based information for use by these constituencies.

Social Security Project Advisory Committee

The NASI President has named an independent committee to set criteria, review applications, select awardees, and monitor the overall project. Members of the committee are:

- *Eric Kingson* (Chair), professor of social work, Syracuse University
- *Nancy J. Altman*, pension and Social Security consultant, and chair of the board of the Pension Rights Center
- *William J. Arnone*, consultant, former partner in the human capital practice of Ernst & Young, LLP.
- *Lori L. Hansen*, consultant on Social Security.
- *Lisa Mensah*, executive director of the Initiative on Financial Security of the Aspen Institute
- *Kathleen Romig*, social insurance research analyst at the Social Security Administration, formerly an income security analyst at the Congressional Research Service

Review Process and Criteria

The evaluation process will include an initial screening by NASI staff to ensure that applications are complete. Applications that do not comply with the specifications for submission will not be reviewed.

The project advisory committee will evaluate all applications based on responsiveness and completeness, including the following six criteria.

Reach of Organization(s): Demonstrated ability (either independently or in concert with other organizations) to engage a constituency or constituencies in the policy process, and to leverage this constituency to frame debate on public policy. Special consideration will be given to organizations that have demonstrated such results on other policy issues, but represent new voices in Social Security discussions.

Potential to Enhance Understanding of Social Security among Vulnerable Groups: An action plan that outlines credible and feasible steps to enhance public understanding of social insurance, of how Social Security can benefit vulnerable groups, and of ways to improve the adequacy of Social Security for vulnerable groups as part of Congressional action to strengthen the long-range finances of the program.

Usefulness of Proposed Deliverables (such as pamphlets, YouTube, PowerPoint presentations) for organizations seeking to improve the long-term economic security for low-income groups and other populations at risk.

Quality of Application: Clarity, coherence, organization and comprehensiveness of the application's project summary, project narrative (below) and budget.

Organizational Capacity: The recipient organization(s) should have the capacity to leverage a modest award to inform the policymaking process, as evidenced by their proven record of success in framing messages and/or educating target constituencies in ways that equip and inspire them to participate in the policy process. The application should specify a project leader who has the experience and resources to implement the project successfully in the time allotted.

Budget: The proposal should list the project staff, describe how project funds will be used, establish performance targets and outcome metrics, and specify how the recipient organization(s) will ensure that the project funds are appropriately spent.

Project Examples

Examples of activities appropriate for funding include:

- National Social Security education projects (for example, a series of town-hall style meetings or syndicated radio programming) targeting women, communities of color, and low-wage workers by organizations that have nationwide and state-level chapters, affiliates, and/or members.

- Development of clear, non-technical information and effective messaging about Social Security catered to specific lay audiences of vulnerable groups, with dissemination plans to reach target audiences.

- Development of new communication methods to educate target audiences about Social Security and encourage their involvement in policy development (websites, blogs, Facebook, etc.).

- Efforts to build coalitions among grassroots organizations of groups most reliant on Social Security with regard to specific proposals (such as a new minimum benefit), or with regard to the program as a whole.

Proposal Requirements for Funding

February 15, 2010 Application Deadline. Applicants should submit a hard-copy of their proposal – postmarked by February 15, 2010 – to Elizabeth Lamme, National Academy of Social Insurance, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 615, Washington, DC 20036. Please also send an electronic version to ELamme@nasi.org by February 15.

Application for Funding. The application should include a letter of transmittal, a one-page single-spaced summary, a project narrative, budget and resumes for key staff.

The project narrative should not exceed 10 pages, using twelve-point Times New Roman font with 1½ line spacing and 1 inch margins. A short technical appendix, though not encouraged, is permissible. More specifically, the application should include:

- **A. Letter of Transmittal**. The letter of transmittal should identify the applicant organization.
- **B. Cover page.** Cover page with project title and applicant's name(s) and organization(s).
- **C. Project Summary.** The summary should describe the 1) problem and target population; 2) approach to promoting understanding of Social Security and engagement of the target constituency in the Social Security debate; and 3) expected outcomes. This summary should not exceed 1 page, single-spaced, 1" margins.
- **D. Project Narrative.** The narrative should not exceed 10 pages (1½ spaced). It should address questions identified in the box below.
- **E. Budget.** The budget and one-page justification of expenditure categories should include time commitments of key personnel and travel expenses for attending the convening of awardees at the Ford Foundation in New York.
- **F. Resumes.** Resumes of key staff. Individual resumes should not exceed four (4) pages.

Applicants will be notified by March 8, 2010, of the outcomes.

Project Narrative

1. **Problem and target population.** What is the problem and target population? Why is this an important problem?
2. **Approach.** What constituency building, educational and/or knowledge building approaches do you plan to employ?
3. **Precedents.** Has this approach been tried before by your organization or others? What was the experience? What evidence suggests the likelihood of success?

4. **Outcomes.** What is your strategy for informing the policymaking process, whether directly or indirectly? What outcomes (e.g., constituent involvement, written products) do you anticipate achieving through this project? Include performance metrics such as press coverage, letters written, people reached, Op-Eds, town hall meetings or house parties held, observed changes in media coverage, evidence of constituent engagement, broadened understanding, etc.
5. **Deliverable(s).** What deliverable(s) (pamphlets, YouTube videos, model letters to the editor, public service announcements, PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets) will your project provide as part of its final report? What do you hope to accomplish through this deliverable? How might this dissemination tool be used by other groups?
6. **Evaluation.** How will you measure success? What is your evaluation plan?
7. **Organizational capacity.** Do you have the organizational capacity to achieve the project objectives? Does the project leader have the experience and resources to implement the project successfully in the time allotted?
8. **Workplan and timeline.** Provide a detailed plan for progress toward your project outcomes.

Reports: Two reports are to be submitted over the course of the project. The Interim Report (no more than 5 pages, 1½ spaced) should document progress toward achieving the specified project outcomes and discuss any necessary adjustments to the workplan and timeline, both retrospectively and looking forward. The final report (no more than 8 pages, 1½ spaced, plus appendices), on Project Achievements and Lessons Learned, should document the ways in which the project informs the policymaking process, discuss challenges encountered, provide at least one deliverable with explanation of how this product may be used by other organizations, and articulate lessons learned – both for one's own organization and for others pursuing similar efforts in the future. The project will present this report at a meeting at the Ford Foundation in April 2011.

Convening of Awardees

The culmination of this regranting project will be a convening of all awardees in New York at the Ford Foundation for the purpose of learning from each other and furthering collaboration and coalition-building. The awardees will be expected to pay their own travel expenses to the convening from their project funds.

Synthesis Report

NASI will produce a synthesis report of the achievements and lessons learned from all projects. This will be distributed to Members of Congress, the press, and to other interested parties, as well as to the Ford Foundation.

Key Project Dates:

(a) Application deadline...Feb. 15, 2010

(b) Notice of award .... March 8, 2010
(c) First installment of payment (50% of approved funds)............................ March 8, 2010
(d) Interim Report .... Sept. 30, 2010
(e) Second installment of payment (40% of approved funds) ....Oct. 15, 2010
(f) Final Report on Project Achievements and Lessons Learned .... March 8, 2011
(g) Final installment of payment (10% of approved funds)......................... March 15, 2011
(h) Convening of Awardees at Ford Foundation .... April, 2011
(i) NASI Synthesis Report on Projects' Achievements, Lessons Learned .... May, 2011

Additional Resources

Reno, Virginia P. and Joni Lavery. 2009. "Fixing Social Security: Adequate Benefits, Adequate Finances." Washington, DC: National Academy of Social Insurance http://www.nasi.org/usr_doc/Fixing_Social_Security.pdf

Reno, Virginia P. and Joni Lavery. 2009. "Economic Crisis Fuels Support for Social Security: Americans' Views on Social Security." Washington, DC: National Academy of Social Insurance http://www.nasi.org/usr_doc/Economic_Crisis_Fuels_Support_for_Social_Security.pdf

If you have any questions about this request for proposals, please contact Elizabeth Lamme (ELamme@nasi.org) or Ben Veghte (BVeghte@nasi.org). Both can be reached at 202-452-8097.