

SOLICITATION

For

Universities, Colleges, Community Colleges, Public or Private Schools/Districts, and/or Not-for-Profit Entities

2024 STARTALK Programs

CFDA # 12.900

Estimated Period of Performance:

FORMAT 1 – Summer 2024 – Summer 2025
(Camps: Summer 2025)

FORMAT 2 - Summer 2024 – Summer 2026
(Camps: Summer 2025)

SECTION I – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

This solicitation sets forth guidelines for areas of interest in language education for eligible academic institutions for the STARTALK program. This solicitation is issued under Section 6.102(d) (2) of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), and under section 22.315 of the Department of Defense Grant and Agreement Regulations (DoDGARs), which provides for the competitive selection of proposals. Proposals submitted in response to this BAA and selected for award are considered to be the result of competition in accordance with 10 U.S.C. 2361 and 32 C.F.R. Section 22.315 and 22.325.

The National Security Agency's STARTALK program is soliciting proposals from eligible institutions for grants to conduct language education and skills development programs. Proposed programs should use innovative and creative approaches to teach Russian and/or Chinese to students.

1.2 STARTALK PROGRAM

The NSA's National Cryptologic University manages STARTALK to provide language training programs for elementary, middle, high school, and college (K-16) students and teachers to meet future national security challenges.

STARTALK responds to a recognized need to develop and teach critical-need world language skills at the K-16 levels. The program achieves this by providing grants to universities, public or private schools, school systems, and not-for-profit entities to conduct in-residence, commuter, virtual, or hybrid learning events for students and teachers.

The STARTALK program follows the STARTALK Principles for Effective Teaching and Learning (described at the end of this solicitation).

STARTALK is funded by the National Security Agency (NSA). Other federal partners may contribute funding on an annual basis.

1.3 STARTALK MISSION AND VISION

STARTALK is a federal grant program funded by the National Security Agency with the objective of increasing the number of U.S. citizens learning and teaching less-commonly-taught languages throughout our nation and inspiring those students to explore language careers, thereby contributing to language workforce development for the Federal Government. Established in 2006 in response to the President's National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), STARTALK provides funding and support to institutions to conduct K-16 student language education and teacher development programs that meet national security and defense priorities. The only languages funded for this solicitation are Chinese and/or Russian.

1.4 STARTALK PROGRAM GOALS

By funding these language education programs, STARTALK seeks to achieve four goals:

- Increase the number of students enrolled in the study of critical languages
- Increase the number of highly effective critical-language teachers in the U.S.
- Increase the number of highly effective materials and curricula available to teachers and students of critical-need languages
- Enhance workforce development in the federal government to meet national security needs through the study of critical languages

1.5 SCHEDULE

Program proposals are due no later than Monday, 25 March 2024, at 11:59 p.m. EDT, after which they will go through a competitive selection process. Format 1 STARTALK programs awarded will have a one-year grant agreement. Format 2 STARTALK programs awarded will have a two-year grant agreement.

1.6 PROPOSED TIMELINE for FORMAT 2 STARTALK Programs

If funded, the following is an estimated timeline for **Format 2** (see below):

- *Summer 2024*: Notification of selection (Period of Performance approximately summer 2024-summer 2026)
- *Fall/Winter 2024*: Awardee planning, marketing, recruiting
- *Winter 2024/Spring 2025*: Awardee holds pre-camp activities
- *Summer 2025*: Awardee hosts summer camp experience
- *Fall/Winter 2025/Spring 2026*: Awardee holds post-camp activities
- *Summer 2026*: Finalize grant paperwork

1.7 ELIGIBILITY

Applying institutions must be a university, college, community college, public/private school or school system, and/or a not-for-profit entity. Having been awarded a STARTALK grant in the past does not guarantee award. Institutions currently managing an active STARTALK program awarded from a previous solicitation should carefully consider current commitment levels before investing in a proposal to lead another initiative under this proposal. Any proposals submitted in this situation should clearly state how taking on this responsibility will not impact other commitments.

Applicants shall adhere to the following criteria:

- Applicants with previously-awarded STARTALK grant(s) may not be delinquent in submission of invoices.
- Applicants with previously-awarded STARTALK grant(s) must be current on all reporting requirements and be in compliance with all other conditions of previous awards, to include attendance at mandatory meetings.
- Institutions proposing to conduct a Chinese language program must provide a non-affiliation statement acknowledging that:
 - Confucius Institute employees and instructors will not provide instruction or educational support to the program; and
 - Confucius Institute employees and instructors will have no authority with regard to the curriculum and activities of the program.
- Applicants must submit a certificate of Assurance of Compliance with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and be constantly in compliance with the Act.

1.8 MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN NATIONAL INVOLVEMENT ON GRANTS RESULTING FROM THIS SOLICITATION

Individuals supported by a grant awarded as a result of this solicitation must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents admitted to the U.S. for permanent residence prior to award. It is the responsibility of the grantee to validate the citizenship of proposed individuals.

- Faculty (principal investigators (PI)/ program director (PD)/Co-PIs), administration, other support staff, all research assistants, student workers, and anyone receiving a salary from the grant must be a U.S. Citizen or permanent resident admitted to the U.S. for permanent residence.
- All instruction must occur in the United States (with the potential for U.S. territorial or tribal participation). STARTALK funds cannot be used to fund study programs abroad. The applying organization must not be organized, chartered, or incorporated under the laws of any country other than the U.S. or its possessions or be controlled by an individual who is not a U.S. citizen. STARTALK funds may not be used to support a foreign-owned entity.
- All student program participants must reside in the U.S. and be enrolled in a U.S. school or be home-schooled.

1.9 HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

The NSA STARTALK Program Management Office strongly discourages proposals that include the use of human subjects' research. Should the offeror believe that the proposed project would absolutely need the use of human subjects, the offeror must follow Department of Defense and NSA rules and policies. The use of human subjects is required to be coordinated through the funding entity prior to the grantee performing any human subjects research activities funded by the grant. Once coordinated, human subject research, prior to occurring, shall adhere to DoDI 3216.02, NSA/CSS Policy 10-10, and any requirement imposed by the NSA/CSS Human Protections Administrator, including review by an applicable Institutional Review Board (IRB), the IRB's determination and post-IRB determination, Human Research Protections Official review by the grantor.

1.10 PROPOSAL

Concise proposals addressing the academic institution's program are requested. Focus on the institution's commitment to the proposal, faculty, and staff qualifications, and what the proposal offers to the subject of the project. Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with guidance in Attachment A, Proposal Preparation Instructions (PPI).

At the time of proposal, a proposed budget should also be submitted, also in accordance with the PPI.

1.11 AWARD TYPES AND FUNDING.

Awards made as a result of this solicitation will be in the form of a grant. Grant funds are not awarded up front, but rather through a cost-reimbursement model.

Grant awards go into effect on the date indicated by the NSA Grant Officer signature on the grant agreement. There will be no extensions beyond period of performance end date indicated on the grant agreement. Please consider this when writing the proposal.

STARTALK grant awards are anticipated to be between \$137,500 to \$181,500 each, depending on the format proposed. The STARTALK Program Management Office reserves the right to request modifications to proposed budgets prior to final grant status notification.

Applicants may submit a proposal for each of the two (2) formats below, but one proposal cannot be dependent on a proposal for another format. Each proposal will be evaluated separately; therefore, one proposal must not be dependent upon another in any way.

See Figure 1 for maximum funding amounts for each format. Programs that charge a fee must reflect a reduced grant amount request commensurate with anticipated income from fees, with explanation of fees and budget reductions reflected in the proposal. Commensurate reduction of grant budget request also applies to programs receiving support from sponsors. To meet STARTALK diversity objectives, camps charging low or no fees will be given priority.

Figure 1. Summer Camp Formats and Maximum Funding

SECTION II – PROPOSED PROGRAMS

STARTALK PROGRAM FORMATS (Chinese and/or Russian)	Maximum Funding (each)
Format 1. STARTALK Student Program (Grades 9-16) – minimum 40 hours of summer camp. (face-to-face, virtual, hybrid)	\$137,500
Format 2. STARTALK Student Program (Grades 9-16) – minimum 60 hours of summer camp and a minimum of 60 total hours of pre-camp and post-camp activities <u>which are solely to be focused on language acquisition</u> (face-to-face, virtual, hybrid)	\$181,500

2.1 FORMATS

The STARTALK Program Management Office is looking for creative, innovative, and out-of-the-box thinking in submitted proposals for Russian and/or Chinese languages only. Programs described in a proposal should meet the requirements of one of the following formats:

Format 1: STARTALK Student Program (Grades 9-16). Student participants will be in grades 9-16 at the beginning of the academic year 2024. Requires a minimum of 40 hours of summer camp, preferably face-to-face, but may be virtual or hybrid, should any public health/safety concerns make in-person impractical

Format 2: STARTALK Student Program (Grades 9-16). Student participants will be in grades 9-16 at the beginning of the academic year 2024. Requires a minimum of 60 hours of summer camp, preferably face-to-face, but may be virtual or hybrid, should any public health/safety concerns make in-person impractical. Requires a minimum of 60 hours of pre- and post-camp activities a minimum of 60 total hours of pre-camp and post-camp activities, which are solely to be focused on language acquisition, that may be live, virtual, or hybrid.

SECTION III – PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INFORMATION

3.1 APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for STARTALK grant funding under this solicitation, all proposal submissions must meet the following threshold criteria.

- **STARTALK PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING:** Proposed programs should incorporate the Six STARTALK Principles (full description at the end of this solicitation).
- **BRANDING:** All activities funded under this grant must be branded as STARTALK activities, to include using “STARTALK” in the program name.
- **STAFF EXPERTISE:** Student programs that target students in grades 9--12 must employ a pedagogical expert (an individual with grades 9-12 classroom experience) to oversee curriculum development and instructional delivery. This should be addressed in the proposal.
- **COST:** Programs are to be low cost or free to all participants.
- **SAFETY:** All programs funded under this grant **must** include a safety plan to ensure that all participants (students/staff/teachers) can learn in a safe, secure environment for the duration of the program.
- **Curriculum Development:** The STARTALK Program Management Office does not create or provide curriculum. Proposed programs may develop their own curricula or use pre-existing resources. Proposals should address plans for curriculum development. If using pre-existing curricula, proposal narratives and budgets should demonstrate less time spent on curriculum development.
- **508 Compliance:** All delivered materials, documentation and information technology will meet the NSA Information Communications Technology Accessibility Standards, derived from Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 USC 795d) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 AA requirements.

3.2 GRANT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

See Attachment A – Proposal Preparation Instructions

3.3 SELECTION PROCESS

The STARTALK Program Management Office anticipates multiple awards as a result of this grant solicitation, however, the STARTALK Program Management Office reserves the right to select all, some, or none of the proposals for award, if it is determined to be in the best interest of the Government. The actual number of grants awarded will depend on the number of complete and acceptable proposals, cost of individual awards, availability of funds, and geographic locations. The STARTALK Program Management Office makes **all** final decisions.

3.4 EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of Department of Defense language professionals and other subject matter experts.

The evaluation is a complete assessment of the proposal. Decisions to fund selected proposals are based on the identified selection criteria and fund availability. Not all proposals deemed selectable may be funded. Selections will be made based on cost and non-cost factors. Where there are no significant differences in the evaluation of non-cost factors between proposals determined selectable, and such proposals are found to equally support critical-need world languages education, then fund availability alone will be the determining criterion for award. **Prior STARTALK grantee status does not assure a 2024 grant award.**

The STARTALK Program Management Office shall use price analysis techniques to determine price reasonableness. These methods of evaluation may include information/input from sources such as, but not limited to, other grant programs and personnel. The STARTALK Program Management Office reserves the

right to require the submission of any data (e.g., data other than cost and pricing) necessary to validate the reasonableness of costs.

Proposals will be evaluated against the following criteria:

Eligibility – Proposal, applying institution, and all team members meet the eligibility requirements listed in section 1.7 of this solicitation.

Sound & Reasonable Methodology – Demonstrates a sound method for achieving the stated goals. Includes a timeline and description of pre- and post-camp activities and the summer camp requirement, meeting the minimum qualifications as described in the solicitation.

Quality and Experience – Clearly states the qualifications of the applying institution and proposed team members to fulfill the objectives of the solicitation and verifies that each team members' professional commitments allow time to perform on the grant. The STARTALK Program Management Office reserves the right to consider past performance and demonstrated competence in final award decisions.

Deliverable – Specifies plans to meet the required deliverables, to include progress/final reports and three lesson plans. The proposal acknowledges the deliverables will be provided to the STARTALK Program Management Office and/or contractor support and will be made available to the STARTALK Community, as appropriate.

Cost – Describes how costs are reasonable in proportion to the scope of the proposal. In cases where multiple proposals meet requirements and are evaluated to be equal in quality and ability to fulfill objectives, the STARTALK Program Management Office will evaluate the cost of the proposal against the proposed methods and deliverables, selecting the best return on investment.

Clarity – Clearly accounts for all solicitation requirements.

Other Items – The Government intends to evaluate proposals and make awards without discussions; however, STARTALK Program Management Office reserves the right to conduct discussions, at its discretion. Due to the unique nature of each proposal, one or more individual proposals may be up for discussion. Selection of one or more proposals for discussion will not obligate the STARTALK Program Management Office to enter into discussions with any other applicant.

3.5 DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

See attached Proposal Preparation Instructions (PPI) for details on the submission of proposals.

Institutionally approved, signed, and completed proposals must be entered in our application tool at the website <https://easy-amps.startalk.info> on/before Monday, 25 March 2024, 11: 59 p.m. EDT.

3.6 LATE SUBMISSIONS

The institution is responsible for completing the application in the application tool at the website <https://easy-amps.startalk.info>. If receipt is not acknowledged within 24 hours, please contact website support immediately at help@startalk.info. Institutions who do not follow up on a missing proposal will not be considered.

3.7 INCOMPLETE PROPOSALS

Proposals submitted in the wrong format, using wrong forms, or missing items will be deemed incomplete and will not be considered for an award.

SECTION IV – GRANT AWARD REQUIREMENTS

As defined in the DOD Grants and Agreements Regulations, DoD 3210.6-R, a grant is “A legal instrument which, consistent with 31 U.S.C. 6304, is used to enter into a relationship:

(a) Of which the principal purpose is to transfer a thing of value to the recipient to carry out a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by a law of the United States, rather than to acquire property or services for the Department of Defense's direct benefit or use.

(b) In which substantial involvement is not expected between the Department of Defense and the recipient when carrying out the activity contemplated by the grant.”

The Government is not obligated to make any award as a result of this solicitation. Institutions receiving a grant as a result of this solicitation have several obligations related to the maintenance of the agreement and relationship.

4.1 REPORTING

Awardees are required to submit a mid-cycle report and a final report no later than 90 days after completion of the grant to the STARTALK PMO. Barring any proprietary information, the reports may be published on an internal government database to share among those doing similar work.

Awardees will also be required to submit SF-425, Federal Financial Report (found at www.grants.gov) along with the final invoice (SF-270) within 60 days of completion of the grant.

Awardees may be required to submit DD-882, Report of Inventions and Subcontracts (<https://www.onr.navy.mil/en/Contracts-Grants/manage-grant/grants-forms-download>).

Awardees must ensure that their contact information is up-to-date with the STARTALK Program Management Office, and readily respond to requests for information (i.e., emails/surveys/etc....) from the STARTALK Program Management Office and/or contractor support.

4.2 LESSON PLANS

Awarded institutions must submit a minimum of three lesson plans at the conclusion of their period of performance to STARTALKgrants@nsa.gov.

4.3 ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Certificate of Assurance or Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** – Applicants must provide this certificate and be constantly in compliance with this Act.
- **Certificate of Liability Insurance** - Applicants must provide a certificate of liability insurance to document that student safety, liability, and insurance issues are addressed. This certificate must be submitted with the proposal.
- **Executive Order 12549** – In accordance with this order, “...Executive departments and agencies shall participate in a government wide system for non-procurement debarment and suspension. A person who is debarred or suspended shall be excluded from Federal financial and non-financial assistance benefits under Federal programs and activities. Debarment or suspension of a participant in a program by one agency shall have a government wide effect.”

- **NSA ICT Accessibility Standards** – The Awardee shall follow the guidance provided within the NSA ICT Accessibility Standards and the NSA ICT Accessibility Score Sheet to conduct a self-evaluation of their course materials, and vendor delivered information technology (software and hardware). The Offeror shall identify how materials, documentation, and information technology can be interacted with the keyboard only, a third-party screen-reader (JAWS or NVDA), and that no information/instruction is presented in single-sense format only (auditory, color, visual, etc.), through the completion of the self-evaluation. Additionally, if the Offeror's individual criteria scores fall below a 5.0, they shall provide documentation regarding those criteria, why they fail, the deliverables negatively impacted, how it will affect end-users, and a procedure and report that demonstrates how they plan to remediate or alternatively meet the Agency Accessibility Standards.

The Awardee shall document and demonstrate any instance where the NSA ICT Accessibility Standards and Score Sheet Requirement are not directly applicable to the ICT under procurement. If the Awardee demonstrates non-applicability, they must document how the ICT meets the NSA ICT Fundamental Accessibility Requirements. If they are unable to demonstrate for all fundamental requirements, they shall provide documentation regarding those criteria, why they fail, the deliverables negatively impacted, how it will affect end-users, and a procedure and report demonstrating how they plan to remediate or alternatively meet the Agency Fundamental Accessibility Requirements. All solicitation response documentation delivered will also be produced in an accessible format that meets the NSA ICT Fundamental Accessibility Requirements, and will additionally be available in braille format, upon request.

4.4 SYSTEM OF AWARD MANAGEMENT (SAM)

SAM is the primary Government repository for prospective federal awardee information and the centralized Government system for certain contracting, grants, and other assistance related processes. All institutions must be registered in the SAM to receive grant awards and grant payments. **You must be registered in SAM to submit a grant proposal.** To register in the SAM, you may use any one of the following methods:

- Telephone: 1-866-606-8220
- SAM Website: sam.gov.

4.5 ELECTRONIC INVOICING

Awardees do not receive grant funds up front, but must incur expenses and invoice regularly to receive reimbursement for grant-related costs. In order to invoice and receive reimbursement, awardees must register with the Acquisition Resource Center (ARC), a business registry required to do business (to include grants) with NSA. The awardee must be registered in the ARC Business Registry prior to award, during performance, and through payment of any contract resulting from this solicitation. Lack of registration in the ARC Business Registry shall make an offeror ineligible for award. The awardee is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the data within the ARC, and for any liability resulting from the Government's reliance on inaccurate or incomplete data. ARC Business Registry shall register via the internet at: <http://www.nsaarc.net/>.

Effective January 1, 2018, per 17(b) of the standard Terms and Conditions incorporated into all grants, invoices must be submitted electronically through the Maryland Procurement Office (MPO) website. Invoice submission through the MPO website is MANDATORY for organizations that have grants with the National Security Agency (NSA). Grantees must have a current PKI Certificate to utilize this function. Hardcopy invoice

will no longer be accepted after this date. Be advised that hardcopy invoices will be rejected unless otherwise approved by the Office of Contracting and Accounts Payable.

Access to the MPO website requires an External Certificate Authority/Interim External Certificate Authority (ECA/IECA) PKI Certificate. Information on purchasing an ECA/IECA Certificate, including its initial and annual cost, is available on the internet at: <http://iase.disa.mil/pki/eca> (must be a Medium Assurance Certificate). The cost of obtaining this certificate is an allowable expense under the grant.

SECTION V – CONTACT INFORMATION

The central points of contact for information regarding this solicitation is:

STARTALK Program Management Office
National Security Agency
9800 Savage Road
SUITE 6805
Fort George G. Meade, MD 20755-6805
STARTALKgrants@nsa.gov
startalk@uwe.nsa.gov

STARTALK Principles for Effective Teaching and Learning

The STARTALK Principles for Effective Teaching and Learning describe characteristics of highly effective language teaching and learning. Each STARTALK principle is focused on creating learning experiences that allow learners to develop their linguistic and cultural competence. Educators apply the STARTALK principles to ensure that learners are engaged in meaningful, real-world learning experiences that prepare them to use the target language beyond the classroom. Each of the STARTALK principles is explained in the context of teaching and learning, identifying learner experiences that are possible because of the work done by the teacher. Application of the six STARTALK principles require:

Implementing a Standards-Based and Thematically Organized Curriculum: Teachers use units that incorporate the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, providing a meaningful and purposeful context that is cognitively engaging and relevant to learners. Units follow the backward-design process by stating what learners will be able to do for each mode of communication, aligning performance assessment tasks and learning experiences. Lessons support the goals of the unit by sequencing clearly stated lesson can-do statements that indicate what learners will know and be able to do in order to prepare them for the performance assessment tasks.

Conducting Performance-Based Assessment: Teachers share unit and lesson goals with learners and monitor how well learners are doing in meeting those goals. Learners engage in relevant real-world performance tasks to demonstrate how well they are meeting the performance targets and goals of the unit for each mode of communication. Teachers use evidence from performance assessment tasks and formative checks for learning during lessons to provide timely descriptive feedback to learners and adjust instruction as needed.

Integrating Culture, Content, and Language: Teachers use units and design lessons that are culturally rich and cognitively engaging, creating a context in which learners use their language skills to learn more about the target culture(s) and the world they live in. Learners build, reinforce, and expand their knowledge of other disciplines and the world while using the target language. Learners interact frequently with authentic resources, exploring the products, practices and perspectives of the target culture(s). They have opportunities to communicate and interact appropriately with others who speak the target language.

Using the Target Language and Providing Comprehensible Input: Teachers facilitate learning through the use of the target language and ensure that the target language is used at least 90 percent of the time. Teachers deliberately determine if and when it is necessary to translate. Teachers use a variety of strategies to make the target language comprehensible and frequently check for understanding in a variety of ways in order to modify input as necessary. Learners have frequent meaningful opportunities for target language production and are able to engage in learning activities without resorting to their native language.

Facilitating a Learner-Centered Classroom: Learners benefit from an environment in which teachers and learners collaborate as partners in the learning process. Teachers make instructional decisions based on learners' ages, interests, abilities and needs. Teachers create multiple opportunities for learners to engage in real-world tasks in the target language that spark curiosity and invite inquiry. Teachers plan multiple opportunities for learner-to-learner interaction, enabling learners to collaborate and communicate about topics that are meaningful to them.

Adapting and Using Age-Appropriate Authentic Materials: Teachers select authentic texts and resources appropriate for the theme and performance targets of the unit. Teachers plan how to make the texts and resources comprehensible and accessible to learners. Learners engage frequently with age-appropriate resources that are intentionally selected to appeal to the interests, preferences, and life experiences of members of the target culture