



Department of State / Boldline Accelerator  
Category: Ideas

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Religious Freedom in India  
(RFI) Program



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## Introduction:

The Indo-American Center (IAC), headquartered in Washington DC, is a 501(c)(3) independent, non-profit, non-partisan, free-market, political think-and-do-tank. IAC's mission is to strengthen values of personal liberty and economic freedom in India and the US. IAC believes that the emerging partnership between India and the U.S., the world's largest and oldest democracies respectively, has the capacity to become the pivot for a peaceful and prosperous world without the various divides that exist today.

IAC is a highly active community-based organization. In addition to being committed to policy-making and analysis, IAC also dedicates resources and efforts to real-world problem-solving. Its programs and projects are designed to serve immigrant communities and inner cities. IAC spearheads initiatives, in collaboration with dedicated partners, to help immigrants assimilate into American society and reinforce the importance of American values of freedom and liberty.

Also, IAC facilitates and promotes exchanges between India and the US at all levels. These are in the form of student-exchanges, business delegations, expert panels on Indo-U.S. relations, and forums for political discussions where leaders from both countries visit each other. IAC's forte lies in the spheres of education, entrepreneurship, leadership, religious freedom and training. For these, it undertakes focused programs to impart knowledge through training and mentorship. Such efforts bring together experts and youth leaders that are motivated to engage in socio-political dialogue thus creating an improved setting for stronger Indo-U.S. ties. These continuous engagements have helped IAC create and nurture strong relationships with power circles in India too.

IAC's Executive Director, Vinson X. Palathingal, is a technology entrepreneur and an Indo-American community leader. He has a significant presence in Washington DC and across several cities in India. His contribution to the Indo-American diaspora is huge. Vinson regularly features on expert panels and leads delegations that discuss a variety of entrepreneurial, technological, social, economic, cultural and political matters. He has been instrumental in developing partnerships and leading improvements for gender-disparity in STEM education in Washington DC. He has successfully taught coding and essential computer skills to Indian women in USA.

As a transformational leader, Vinson is also committed to improving society and creating a positive impact. He spearheaded campaign management for the 'Washington Chalo' (translates as: Let's go to Washington) initiative (organized after the terrorist attack in Mumbai on November 26, 2008) wherein Vinson, as one of the chief coordinators, brought over 250 prominent Indian American leaders from across the country and directed a movement on the U.S. Capitol, engaging over 50 Congressional leaders and decision-makers, in an effort to suspend military aid to Pakistan. This event was a runaway success and the final objectives were attained.

In an individual capacity, Vinson has made conscious efforts to introduce India to Americans and vice-versa. He managed the Kerala Mela which attracted over 10,000 people from across USA. This mega-event was a melting pot of South Indian and American cultures that were celebrated through dance, drama, food and networking. Vinson has arranged for shows involving respected South Indian artists, theatre personalities and movie stars in Washington DC. Through such events, he has been able to engage large audiences to learn and enjoy an integral part of India's glorious heritage. As the reigning President of Kerala Association of Greater Washington (KAGW), Vinson has conducted several cultural shows, sports events and contests. He has effectively publicized the same and gained interest from American community members to know more about Indians and their culture. As the Vice President of the largest secular Malayalee organization in North America, The Federation of Malayalee Associations of Americas

(FOMAA), Vinson has spearheaded the concept of 'root tourism' to allow American born Indian children to learn and understand their native culture (to which they would otherwise not be exposed to).

Vinson has always been a proponent of American education and values. He has encouraged several young family members from across the globe and other Indian regional contacts to send their children to USA for higher education. He has promoted American culture, the concept of individualism, inclusion and diversity, and religious freedom. He has been successful in promoting cross-cultural ideals to both the Indian and American communities. Vinson hopes to further strengthen bilateral relations between India and USA through education, entrepreneurship, cultural exchanges and seminars. Religious freedom certainly stands out as an inviting step forward for successful Indo-U.S. diplomatic ties. Vinson is influential and has the necessary contacts to help this program succeed in India.

### **Bolstering the concept of religious freedom, national security and U.S. foreign policy:**

IAC and Vinson respect, defend, and promote religious freedom. Freedom of religion is America's first freedom. The Founding Fathers understood this to be a universal human right that is to be protected for the benefit of all. This year, 2018, marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Religious freedom contributes to stability in nations that embrace it. Thus, such freedom needs to be preserved and endorsed for uplifting humanity and developing robust bilateral ties.

USA promotes freedom of religion and conscience throughout the world as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability for all countries. The Department of State (DoS) assists emerging democracies in implementing freedom of religion and conscience. It also supports religious and human rights NGOs in promoting this concept. It identifies and denounces regimes that are severe persecutors on the basis of religious belief. Similarly, IAC and Vinson's ideologies on religious freedom align with that of the DoS.

Vinson believes that religion is essential in society and people should have the power to follow and practice a religion of their wish. Religion helps to maintain structure in day-to-day life and is fundamental to most people. However, in many societies around the world, religion is an increasingly important force in public life shaping political discourse, social attitudes, institutions, and policy outcomes—both for good and for ill. Religion should help provide a good life on earth. Each religion comes with different traditions and customs. However, individuals must not follow everything blindly. Such ignorance and blind-faith may be detrimental for peace and goodwill in communities. Thus, people must use their judgment to decide what is right and what works best for them. Also, age-old theories may not be workable in today's context. Thus, religious concepts need to evolve with changing times. Understanding religion through a scientific lens will help people to use their discretion and make informed and practical choices rather than have plain blind-faith in religion. This is the objective of the proposed program too. A world where everyone can worship freely truly makes a safer world for everyone.

Promoting religious freedom is a moral imperative and it is also a vital national security issue. Defending religious freedom, the world over leads to greater peace, stability, and economic prosperity in USA and in the countries that guarantee this freedom. Hence, the Trump Administration included the promotion of religious freedom as part of the U.S. National Security Strategy. Faith-based communities represent an important constituency within Trump's domestic base. Thus, religion and religious communities are important priorities on the U.S. foreign policy agenda too. Vice President Pence also stated that, "protecting religious freedom is a foreign-policy priority of the Trump administration." Nationalism, often expressed in religious terms, is a key organizing principle in President Trump's foreign policy. Kristina Arriaga, the Vice Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom aptly points out, "There

has been a treatment of religious freedom in this administration as an indivisible, universal, and interdependent human right.”

The Office of International Religious Freedom has the mission of promoting religious freedom as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. Through the Boldline Religious Freedom accelerator, IAC wants to develop greater capacity to engage with religious stakeholders to advance U.S. policy interests. It wishes to support issues such as governance, peacebuilding, and economic development. Religion seems to grow in salience as a significant force in world affairs. IAC understands the need for integrating religious engagement into diplomacy. It hopes to engage in an effective dialogue by placing forth religious freedom ideas, strategies and solutions that can be explored through an Indo-American perspective.

#### Proposal information as requested:

1. Name of organization submitting partnership:  
Indo-American Center, Inc. (IAC)
2. Full address and postal code:  
Indo-American Center, Inc. (IAC)  
8230 Boone Blvd  
Suite 445  
Vienna, VA 22182-2621.
3. For-profit or not-for-profit status:  
Not-for-profit: 501(c)(3) independent, non-profit, non-partisan, free-market, think-and-do tank.
4. Industry affiliation (e.g., health care, aviation, energy):  
Not-for-profit organization: NAICS industry code: 81331 – social advocacy organization
5. Links to biographies of the participants or LinkedIn profiles (preferable) that will be shared with the other participants:
  - Vinson X. Palathingal from IAC: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/vinsonpalathingal/> and <http://www.palathingal.com/welcome-to-my-site/>
  - Beena Sebastian from Cultural Academy for Peace (CAP): <http://www.culturalacademy.org/founder/> and <http://word.world-citizenship.org/wp-archive/1975>
  - J. Devika from the Center for Development Studies: <http://cds.academia.edu/DevikaJayakumari/CurriculumVitae> and <http://www.cds.edu/people/dr-j-devika/professional-achievements.html>
  - Hameed Chennamangaloor: [https://www.veethi.com/india-people/hameed\\_chennamangaloor-profile-9169-25.htm](https://www.veethi.com/india-people/hameed_chennamangaloor-profile-9169-25.htm), <http://www.keralaliteraturefestival.com/speaker/hameed-chennamangaloor/> and <http://hameedchennamangaloor.blogspot.com/>
  - The above people, in their individual capacities, have stood up for religious freedom and have initiated conversations and activities in this sphere in Kerala.
6. Has your organization ever partnered with the U.S. government? Describe.

Yes, IAC has constantly endeavored to support and promote cooperative Indo-U.S. relations and strengthen people-to-people ties. Currently, IAC is working with the DoS officials in Kolkata to promote higher education opportunities in USA amongst the North-east Indian states. IAC is also working with the DoS representatives in New Delhi for an entrepreneurship and leadership training program. Furthermore, IAC is in contact with the DoS authorities in Kolkata for food diplomacy initiatives and with the DoS officials in Hyderabad for the Games for Good program.

7. What stage is your partnership business plan (new idea, existing program going to scale)?  
Currently, the business plan is in the conception stage. With DoS' guidance and help, IAC and its partners will be able to accelerate efforts in the right direction.
8. Signed commitment statement to participate in the full three-day accelerator program in or around Washington, D.C.  
Please see attached letter at the end of this document

**Problem Statement:**

Religion is important to society and religious freedom is a fundamental human right. Religion helps mankind to lead a better life on earth and the law protects religious freedom. However, in the name of religion, people often end-up doing impractical things that unsettle their lives and that of the others. Even though such actions may be unintentional, in the process, it may create disharmony in society. Such unwarranted acts stem from blind faith and belief without scientific reasoning. This is the critical problem that needs to be addressed.

Especially in a country like India, where diverse religions co-exist, people need to be more mindful of their acts, expressions and speech to avoid any communal disorder. It has become essential that people should realize and question the logic behind religious activities, customs and age-old traditions. Also, concepts that were followed decades ago may not be appropriate in today's context in society. Such customs should be questioned and analyzed pragmatically. Due to the lack of incorporation of a scientific bent of mind while practicing religion, common people may involuntarily continue with religious customs that don't necessarily make a positive impact on modern day society. Here, the top leaders need to support the idea of using logic and science or explaining the scientific meaning/origin of rituals and practices. Thus, people should adapt to the changing times and follow religion in a forward-thinking manner. This will allow for unity in society and a heightened sense of consideration/acceptance of others and their religious beliefs.

**Idea:**

In order to stir in a change in Indian society with respect to religious freedom, IAC and its partners will conduct a seminar. This will be focused on imbibing the idea of thinking logically and scientifically when it comes to practicing religion. This seminar will be delivered by subject-matter-experts to a group of influential yet diverse audience. The objective is to reach people who are in position to inspire a different yet practical way to practice religion. Hence, such information will be effectively disseminated into wider circles thus creating a powerful impact. This is an innovative educational approach to a sensitive topic like religion in a multi-cultural state like Kerala, India.

IAC will shoulder major responsibility of the program. The partner NGO, in Kerala, will support IAC with bringing candidates/participants, helping to secure the event venue and creating course content. Since both NGOs share common objectives of protecting religious freedom, a partnership is beneficial. With combined strengths, resources, and a larger network in Kerala, together, they can effectively achieve such a U.S. foreign policy goal of religious freedom. Vinson from IAC is keen to advance this cause and bring in

the change required by society today. He is invested in forging strategic Indo-U.S. relations. Through this program, IAC aspires that people in Kerala will gradually embrace the new way of thinking behind religious liberty and will practice religion in a logical way. Vinson hopes to inspire them by showcasing U.S. best practices and solutions in this area.

**Resource requirements:**

As partners, combined resources will be pooled in for this program. IAC will shoulder major responsibility and will contribute towards approx. 72% of funds while the partner NGO will provide for approx. 28%. The human resources required will be employees from both NGOs, key personnel, seminar panelists and speakers, and participants. Contractual expenses will be accounted for towards course development charges and creation of marketing material. Apart from on-ground marketing material, online marketing and publicity of this program will also be executed. Physical resources would include a seminar venue. The travel, boarding, lodging expenses and food and beverage costs would contribute towards monetary resources that will be needed. IAC will leverage emerging technologies and its IT expertise to develop databases that will be secure and up-to-date. All such details are explained in the proposal below. More partners and funding will only help enhance this noble cause and IAC seeks such a partnership. DoS' support will be immensely appreciated.

This is an indicative list of resources that IAC and its partners anticipate for this one-year program. It certainly makes the proposal reasonable, feasible and resourceful. This also explicitly displays the level of interest and commitment from IAC and the partner NGO towards religious freedom in Kerala. Through the seminar, the partners will be able to inspire a refreshed outlook towards religion and advocate for religious freedom as a legal right of each citizen.

**Best Potential Partners:**

IAC already has a stronghold in Kerala and language will not be a barrier. Through Vinson, IAC will be able to leverage the necessary contacts in the region to smoothly conduct this seminar and publicize it effectively. IAC's partner NGO, Cultural Academy for Peace (CAP) in Kerala, has set up an Interfaith Study Center with the sole objective of reducing communal disharmony, fundamentalism and violence in India. Just like IAC, CAP believes in spreading knowledge and educating people about understanding religious concepts, their origins, the logic behind religious traditions and customs, and being more accepting of all religions. Thus, with common objectives, IAC and CAP make a robust partnership.

To enhance the power of religious freedom and take forward the commitment to such a U.S. foreign policy priority, IAC along with CAP seeks a partner to bolster the efforts underway. The new partner will ideally be invested in religious freedom initiatives with a focus on educating people about critically questioning the status quo pertaining to religious practices. They can bring in their expertise in terms of content, subject matter experts and funds to help scale the proposed seminar to include more people. Such a partnership will help to reach larger numbers at a time. This ideal partnership will allow for resource sharing, leveraging on the strengths of all partners, and maximizing impact through existing and newly established contacts. The most useful will be sharing knowledge and best practices to avoid mistakes and surge ahead for a common mission.

**Ideal End State:**

The proposed seminar will be a compelling platform to help educate people about using scientific reasoning and logic for understanding religious customs and practices. The objective is to induce a refreshed way of looking at religion for greater religious tolerance, acceptance, and freedom in the community. Education is the key to propel such success and the seminar is focused on this. The aim is to

let such information spread wide and far. The participants being an influential diverse cohort will be able to carry forward the knowledge that they have gained through the seminar and disseminate it further in their networks. Through the seminar, participants will understand that it is incorrect to impose religious beliefs and practices upon others and one should be allowed to rationalize and choose their religious path. It is critical to live and let live and allow people their right to religious freedom.

In due course of executing the Religious Freedom in India (RFI) Program, IAC and partners will encounter useful contacts and cultivate a handy list. IAC will use technology to develop databases and this will be shared with all stakeholders. These are valuable outcomes of using innovative approaches to undertake the program. IAC is determined to accelerate strategic Indo-U.S. relations. Through this program, it will bolster the U.S. foreign policy priority of religious freedom and national defense.

### Stakeholders:

1. Partners on this mission:

For the RFI Program, IAC will join efforts with an Indian NGO based in Kerala, Cultural Academy for Peace (CAP). CAP is committed to nurturing a society based on peace, justice, reconciliation and respect for life. It brings together peace activists, educators and community leaders striving to augment awareness and create a culture of peace and social justice in India. CAP continues its mission through community development work, nonviolent education and training for peaceful co-existence. It focuses on various channels of advocacy, lobbying from the Panchayat to the Parliament level networking with the Government, National and International organizations to work for nonviolent social change and build up a peaceful society. The Founder, Beena Sebastian, has invested her life in helping society develop. Amongst many causes that she gives her time for, the most prominent is where she has fought for gender equality and women's safety in Kerala. She is also enthusiastic about nation progress and religious tolerance and acceptance in Kerala.

Under Beena's mentorship, CAP has a dedicated Interfaith Study Centre that serves as a common platform for men and women to come together, to create multi-religious alliances to uphold a culture of religious tolerance. Interfaith programs are organized through interactive sessions held on the basic concepts of various religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Bahai, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian and Theosophy to help explore the path to peace and fellowship. As partners and allies, CAP will support IAC in its mission for religious freedom in India. It will work with IAC to introduce people to look at religion through a scientific lens and practice it with logic. Beena will be a speaker for some of the sessions at the seminar and one of the key personnel for the RFI Program. Her team will be involved in the program too.

CAP is also reaching out to local people with a grassroots approach. Joining forces with IAC will help it to reach a wider audience and this is beneficial to both NGOs and for the common objective of religious freedom. CAP will primarily be candidate outreach and local partners to IAC as they will support with bringing in participants for the RFI Program, help with content for religious freedom and event venue for the seminar. IAC will partner with this local Indian NGO with a focus on bringing communities together around shared goals and action. IAC will leverage this partnership to encourage common people to effect changes to their lives through a practical and logical thinking process when it comes to practicing religion.



AB Events/American Bazaar will coordinate efforts with IAC's staff on managing logistics, food and beverage, seminar recording and photography activities, development of creatives for event promotion and publicity at venues, and other event management duties.

Such partnerships and societal upliftment efforts will only build on national priorities and boost local capacities. Thus, developing such a coalition and partnership will help each NGO as there will be mutual sharing of knowledge and best practices to enhance the outcome of the RFI program. Together, they will usher in a new era of productive and practical outlook through a socially transformative and context specific approach towards religion and religious practices that common people will embody. Together as partners, they will alleviate people from the status quo and help them gain a broader perspective towards religion thus enabling improved community life, better democratic practice and safeguarding religious freedom as a fundamental human right in India.

2. IAC and team:

Along with the above partners, IAC will spearhead this initiative in India. Vinson will be the U.S. expert and one of the key personnel. He will conduct the seminar and be a speaker for some of the sessions. Vinson will use his contacts and connections to secure the best possible distinguished speakers and participants for this program. IAC's local coordinator will be Ansum Mishra. Under Vinson's guidance, he will be responsible for all program related activities at the ground, coordination with partners, online publicity, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

3. Participants:

The seminar will be free-of-cost to attend for all. The participants will be literate and well-educated cohort of people who are established in their careers and in society. They will be influential in their respective fields and networks. The participants will include journalists, teachers and professors, bloggers and writers, community/societal leaders, youth and youth leaders, film/TV personalities and independent lawyers. The idea of choosing such participants is so that the seminar's information will be accepted more openly. These individuals will be broad-minded and inspired by secularism in India. Thus, such information can be usefully dispersed within such circles. Like-minded individuals can realize the potential of positive impact. 20-30 such participants will be selected for the seminar.

The participants can capably interweave all that they have learnt through the seminar in their day-to-day work. This will lead to a gradual but exponential change in the way other common people look at religion. IAC and its partners hope that, sooner than later, society puts logic, reasoning and scientific thinking before blindly believing in age-old religious customs, or superstitions or self-proclaimed god-people. Participants like these will be able to take the learnings of the seminar forward. People in such diverse fields will be able create a desired outcome by: regulating stories in the media, creating multi-media content useful for the masses, teaching classes of children to be practical in their outlook, and creating laws and policies to protect the religious freedom in the state and country at large. This is what IAC and its partners want as long-term success.

4. Speakers/ panelists:

IAC will reach out to well-known local personalities who are experts in their fields and in their capacities. With Vinson's help, IAC will contact individuals who believe in religious freedom, free expression, and societal upliftment. IAC aims to leverage these contacts to bring in Indian experts.

It will provide a suggestive list to DoS. These experts will participate as speakers and panelists for the seminar. They will discuss their stories and seek thoughts from participants on new possibilities for religious freedom. Currently, IAC is reaching the Indian experts to be a part of the RFI Program. A suggestive list is detailed below:

a) Jayakumari Devika:

Dr. Jayakumari Devika or J. Devika is a Malayali historian, social critic, and feminist from Kerala. She currently teaches and researches in Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum as an associate Professor and has authored several books, and articles on gender relations in early Kerala society. Her work is interdisciplinary, and she brings to bear her training as a historian on contemporary issues. Devika is also a social and political commentator who writes regularly on social and political issues focused on Kerala. She is [against](#) extreme Hindutva, the religious divide and communalism that is being driven into the minds of young people in Kerala. She believes in freedom of expression and equality rights. She is assertive on her views of intercommunity marriage, choice of faith, and religious freedom. J. Devika will speak fervently at the seminar on topics that she cares about.

b) Hameed Chennamangaloor:

Professor Hameed Chennamangaloor is a prominent social critic and political analyst in Kerala. He is a staunch critic of religious fundamentalism. He does not appreciate acts that are anti-democratic and non-secular in nature. He is a columnist on leading Malayalam newspapers, a public speaker, and frequently gives radio talks too. He has voiced his opinion through numerous multi-media channels on religion and politics. For the RFI seminar, Hameed will add immense value through his talk on religious freedom in secular India and will capably quote examples from contemporary affairs in the state.

c) Justice Mohammed Mushtaq:

Justice Mohammed Mushtaq is a Kerala High Court judge. He was recently involved in several cases connected to religion and law like reforming the dress code for students to appear in exams and regulating the triple *talaq* law to protect Muslim women. Justice Mushtaq has also expressed his views on children, education, and society: 'there is a need of redefining the education system to give focus on moral studies. In order to ensure a society in which they could live a peaceful and secured life, an awareness of the concept of justice and the rule of law has to be inculcated among the children.' He is a proponent of gender equality, and religious freedom and expression. He will add valid points to the discussions at the seminar and participants will benefit from it.

5. Department of State (DoS) officials:

The DoS will be involved in all initiatives planned out for the RFI Program. At their will, they may attend the seminar. They will also have full access to the registration details, publicity efforts, seminar curriculum, speaker profiles, reference material, recording of the seminar, partners' details and a detailed participant database.

### Program flow:

Religion is a powerful force, capable of shaping people's thoughts, opinions and actions, and mobilizing them at a moment's notice. These characteristics make religion ripe to be harnessed by societal and political forces. IAC and its partners aim to promote religious freedom in society.

To give a context of the problems that India faces with respect to religion: As Hindu nationalism is on the rise, [incidents](#) of abuse against Christians went up to 177 in 2015, then rose to 300 in 2016, the Evangelical Fellowship of India reported. Over the past five years, India has risen from No. 31 to No. 15 on the World Watch List. Also, according to the MHA 2016-17 Annual Report, from January through May, there were 296 conflicts between religious communities, resulting in 44 deaths and 892 injuries. MHA reported 703 [communal incidents](#) in 2016, resulting in 86 deaths and 2,321 injuries, compared with 751 such incidents in 2015, resulting in 97 deaths and 2,264 injuries. MHA defined communal incidents as violent conflicts involving religious communities on the issues of organizing religious congregations, desecration of religious symbols, and the ownership of community properties and facilities. In other cases, according to [media data](#) project IndiaSpend, 63 incidents of cow-linked violence occurred between 2010 and June 2017, leading to 28 deaths. 97% of those incidents occurred between 2014 and 2017, and 86% of those killed were Muslim. Over the recent past, due to greater awareness, people have come forth with [complaints](#) against self-proclaimed godmen. Most of these god-men and women are charged with human trafficking, rape, drug dealing, sex trade, murders, money laundering and political lobbying. However, their fan-following and people's blind faith in them have led to polarizing the case often ending up in mass protests and conflicts.

With such problems, it becomes imperative to take action and maintain societal peace. The RFI Program's objective is to inform people and educate them on thinking in a logical and scientific way when it comes to practicing religious customs or adopting religious beliefs. IAC and its partners will do this through a seminar. It is apparent that the need-of-the-hour is to educate people and show them how to incorporate a scientific bent of mindset and thinking and not to blindly believe in illogical processes, people, or things like superstitions (for example). This is where IAC and its partners step-in to bring in such a change in a small, gradual, assertive and significant way.

IAC has chosen Kerala for the RFI Program as there are several sects and religions that co-exist here. According to a report by [Centre For Development Studies](#), Kerala has three major religious denominations – Christians, Muslims and Hindus. According to the 2011 census, Christians are 6.141 million in number or 18.4% of the total population of the state, the Muslims stand at 8.9 million or 26.6% and the majority community, the Hindus are at 18 million or 54.9%. Thus, Kerala will prove to be an ideal location to start the program.

This partnership will take a people-centered approach which will work from the bottom-up with an all-hands-on-deck policy for planning, implementing and executing the seminar. Such kind of social activism and advocacy will promote a fresh way of thinking in society. The target audience (participants) will be able to relate to this style and will appreciate it. This program's name is *Religious Freedom in India (RFI)* and the duration will be almost *1-year*. It will be accomplished in a phased manner. The media plan will run in synchrony with the flow of activities. For this, IAC and its partners will dedicate a total of \$27,240 as funds to manage and execute the program. The expenses will be split between IAC and CAP in the ratio of 72:28. Details of the budget sheet are provided in Attachment B.

The following is the program flow. Also, Attachment A gives the program design:

**Phase 1:** Program preparation and developing an online educational-learning platform:  
Duration: 6-months

During the initial months of the program, IAC will use its technological edge to create an online registration platform on the IAC website. Here, all interested candidates can register for the seminar at Kochi in Kerala. IAC's candidate outreach partner will help in securing participants for the program. From these, 20-30 participants will be shortlisted for the seminar. This process will also help with database cultivation and will be most useful to the State Department for its efforts towards international religious freedom. This will include particulars like participant names, demographic details like: age, region, ethnic group/sect; profession, field of work (sector), education, associations to organizations, involvement in gender equality, societal upliftment and religious freedom efforts, professional goals for the next 1-3 years and contact details. In addition to this, IAC will use MailChimp to create e-newsletters which will serve as a robust internal communication channel for all stakeholders.

IAC in collaboration with the partnering organization and Vinson will create reference material for this program which will be available on google docs to all. Participants will get a few physical handouts during the seminar for immediate reference too. IAC will also make arrangements for all travel, lodging and boarding expenses for Vinson and IAC staff. This will be initiated within the first 3-4 months of the program. IAC will finalize the venue for the seminar in Kerala during this phase. It will reach out to reputed local hotels and banquet halls for this program. During this phase, the venue, food arrangements and event management details (A/V projector, internet, marketing collateral designing, etc.) will be confirmed. IAC's partners, CAP, will come on-board for the program after the third month and will assist with all such program and event activities.

IAC will reach out to local experts and understand their availability to participate as speakers and panelists. They will be encouraged to share their experiences and stories and discuss religious freedom concepts and ideas for improving the current situation. IAC will firm up the program schedule with all such key personnel and confirm their availability. In the event, IAC and its partners may need to bring in experts from outside the city, then, all their travel arrangements will be completed in this phase too. Publicity efforts will also commence in this phase.

During this 6-months period, IAC will initiate the online registration platform, enroll participants and ensure smooth access to the digital material for all stakeholders. This will be fully-functional and in use prior to the beginning of seminar. At the stage of being enrolled into the program, all participants will also sign an agreement online and give their consent to use certain information and allow for regular updates on IAC and its partners' social media platforms solely for the purposes of publicity of this program. No personal details will be publicly disclosed without the approval of participants. During the 6<sup>th</sup> month, an online survey will be administered to the participants to understand the level of religious freedom interest, knowledge and efforts that they have been involved in and their activism levels to help in empowering people to live with liberated values and practice religious freedom in society. This will be a great starting point to understand where each participant stands in their beliefs and actions.

IAC's local coordinator, Ansum, will be in charge of ensuring development of this online portal. He will safeguard participants' Personally Identifiable Information (PII), secure program data and will be responsible for all publicity efforts online and on-ground. The local coordinator will ensure that this program serves as a crucial on-going learning platform for all participants and that the program staff, State Department representatives, the speakers, key personnel, IAC's partners, and other stakeholders also benefit. IAC's online platform (google docs) will be a closed-user-group with restricted access given to members only. Ansum will also ensure access to a message board which will allow for free interaction amongst participants even after the seminar is complete. In this way, IAC and its partners and the

participants can be in regular touch, leverage contacts and update details about their new efforts towards religious freedom.

Also, during this phase, the speakers will be asked to take an online survey too. Their viewpoint will be understood pertaining to what they hope to achieve through this program. All online surveys will be through Survey Monkey which is a free tool for conducting surveys and generating various databases.

**PHASE 2: Conducting the seminar at Kerala:**

Duration: 1-month time frame

The seminar will be hosted by IAC and its partners at a hotel or banquet hall in Kochi, Kerala. During month 7, the seminar will be conducted on a Saturday. This will be a convenient day of the week to get all participants and speakers to attend a day-long seminar. The seminar will be intensive and detailed to cover all major topics pertaining to religious freedom, law and religion, a scientific and logical approach to religion, India as a secular nation, what each person can do at an individual level and practical solutions to ensure religious freedom. IAC has enlisted distinguished people from different walks of life to deliver their perspectives on religious freedom. These are the key personnel and speakers and panelists for the seminar.

The agenda of the seminar is as follows:

- a) Importance of religion in society;
- b) Belief in religion: through a scientific and logical approach;
- c) Promoting civil dialogue and engaging public; and
- d) Religious freedom and community peace.

The seminar topics will cover the following main themes like interfaith dialogue and race relations, religious diversity, legal protection and the law on religious freedom, inculcating a scientific bent of mind while practicing religion and similar such points. These topics will be eye-openers for participants to understand the importance of living in secular India, the rights of people and their freedom of expression, economic, socio-cultural and political impact that this can bring to the city and country at large.

During this time-frame, Vinson will travel from USA to India to conduct the seminar in-person. Similarly, Ansum will travel from New Delhi to Kochi for the seminar. As IAC's staff they will be in the city for approximately 5-days. Vinson is passionate about the program's mission and takes keen interest in being involved. From the very start of this program, he will dedicate his personal attention to it and will give his time and be committed to achieving success of the program.

Overall, 20-30 participants will be attending the seminar. These will be influential people from different walks of life. IAC's local coordinator, Ansum Mishra, will coordinate efforts with local partners and will oversee various aspects of the program on-ground too. By attending these sessions, just like the participants, the local coordinator will gain more knowledge and be more proficient in his leadership skills. This will be beneficial to the sustainability of the RFI Program as the local coordinator will become adept in this field as well.

From CAP, Beena and her team will be invested in the RFI Program. Beena will also be a speaker at the seminar and share the decades of experience that she has with all participants. Beena and Vinson will together be key personnel for the program and spearhead various aspects of it to ensure smooth operation and success.

In conjuncture with IAC and the local coordinator, AB events/American Bazaar will help develop on-ground/below-the-line (BTL) marketing initiatives and collateral for seminar publicity. This includes all standees, banners, wall panels, tent cards, flyers and pamphlets. They will also record the seminar from start to finish. This will serve as a valuable repository of information and will be under the secure custody of the local coordinator. AB Events will support with food and beverage arrangements if IAC gets a banquet hall to host the program. They will help with A/V equipment (microphones, speakers, projectors, power connections, etc.), podium set-up and seating-arrangement (all event management duties). Contractual expenses towards AB Events will be managed by IAC.

Vinson and all key personnel will work with the local coordinator to customize training and reference material that will be required for the RFI Program. IAC's curriculum developers will work with them to create compelling and relevant content. This material will be digitally available to participants through Google docs. Necessary training handouts will be circulated to participants during the seminar which will be attended by participants, key personnel, Vinson, the local coordinator, and event management personnel. IAC has designed and developed an intensive schedule for this seminar. A suggested seminar curriculum is proposed below and will be suitable to complete in a 1-day time-frame. Each session of the seminar will close with a question-and-answer forum for participants to clarify doubts and gain a better understanding of the topics discussed.

Through the seminars, participants will gain a new understanding of how religious freedom can positively impact their lives. As the participants further disseminate this information in their networks and use it in their daily work, it will have a cascading effect on the lives and perspectives of more people in turn. It will create a multiplier-effect in the long-run. The key personnel will discuss how to build a logical way of reasoning when it comes to following religious customs. A practical approach to religion will ensure that no extremities are undertaken, or no one is forced or fooled in the process. The participants will appreciate the urgency of this efforts due to the ground-realities. Discussions on viable solutions will be elucidated as it is imperative to change the religious freedom narrative and incorporate logic in everyday life and actions that even pertain to religion.

This seminar will be a small step toward the right direction of attaining religious freedom. The format of the seminar supports group discussions to allow participants to think clearer and further on promoting religious freedom. During this session, key personnel and speakers will circulate amongst groups to understand their thinking and encourage them to focus on workable methods. Key personnel will also make a note of those participants who show grit, courage and passion for this cause. The 'Tell your story' session allows the key personnel to learn new things from participants and it makes for an interesting pedagogical method. Key personnel will also have a panel discussion to emphasize their views, share their experiences and bring to light the practical pathways for religious freedom.

Seminar schedule & curriculum (suggested): Duration: 1 day:

**Day 1: Saturday:**

9:00am – 9:45am:

- 1) Participants report & register at venue
- 2) Introduction of the Key Personnel
- 3) Introduction of speakers and panelists
- 4) Introduction of participants
- 5) Networking within the cohort

9:45am – 10:00am: Break for tea/coffee and snacks

10:00am – 11:00am:

- 1) Session #1: Religion and religious freedom: (Beena Sebastian and Vinson Palathingal)
  - a. India as a secular nation and its religious demographics
  - b. What is religion? Who defines it?
  - c. Who are the religious or faith leaders?
  - d. What is the concept of religious freedom?
  - e. Defending religious freedom – why should it matter to each of us?
  - f. Ensuing community outreach efforts in the region
  - g. Q&A session

11:00am – 12:00noon:

- 1) Session #2: The politics of religious freedom: (Vinson Palathingal)
  - a. Government constraints: restrictive laws, policies, regulations, or actions that discriminate based on religious identity/beliefs or unduly restrict religious freedom
  - b. Societal constraints: discrimination, harassment or violence directed at individuals based on their religious identity/beliefs
  - c. Contested norms and local practices in the region
  - d. Religious literacy: scientific and logical thinking/ explanation for religion and religious customs
  - e. Religious appreciation of human rights
  - f. Encourage women to engage in civil and religious matters – involve them in leadership roles too
  - g. Q&A session

12:00noon – 1:00pm:

- 1) Session #3: Law and religion: (Justice Mohammed Mushtaq)
  - a. Ground-realities, situations and occurrences in today's society
  - b. Current developments in religious freedom law
  - c. The Indian constitution and law pertaining to religious rights, expression and practice
  - d. What the law allows and disallows.
  - e. Q&A session

1:00pm – 1:30pm: Break for Lunch

1:30pm – 2:30pm:

- 1) Session #4: Religion, tolerance and diversity: (J. Devika)
  - a. Religious diversity and acceptance
  - b. Interreligious dialogue and interfaith and race relations
  - c. Q&A session

2:30pm – 3:30pm:

- 1) Session #5: Your role in secular India: (Hameed Chennamangaloor)
  - a. Be an active citizen
  - b. Be a peacemaker and encourage societal harmony
  - c. Support freedom of speech and gender equality

- d. Uplift society through logical pathways forward
- e. Q&A session

3:30pm – 3:45pm: Break for tea/coffee and snacks

3:45pm – 6:00pm:

- 1) Session #6: Religion and you:
  - a. Tell your story (1 hour): (Vinson Palathingal)
    - i. Group discussion:
      - Break into 2 or 3 groups of 10 people each (5 mins)
      - Choose your own topic related to this seminar (5 mins)
      - Discuss within the group – a problem & 3 practical solutions (20 mins)
      - Present to key personnel and panelists (15 mins)
      - Feedback (10 mins)
      - Q&A session (5 mins)
  - b. Panel discussion (1 hour):
    - i. Topic: Developing a culture of religious freedom & communal peace
    - ii. Q&A session

A second and final survey will be administered at the end of the seminar through Survey Monkey (online survey). This will be undertaken to understand how the participants liked the event, whether they have gained an enhanced perspective, learnt new concepts and understood the urgency associated with religious freedom and people that is required in today's society. Even key personnel will undertake the survey to give their thoughts on how receptive and engaged the participants were and their interest in the topic.

**PHASE 3: Program completion:**

Duration: 4-months

The program is said to be successfully completed after the participants attend the seminar in month 7 of the program. In the following month (month 8), the all key personnel and speakers will decide and shortlist 4 exemplary participants who performed consistently well and expressed keen determination to pursue religious freedom initiatives in their capacities. These 4 participants will be future guides for new batches of candidates who will enroll for next RFI Programs. IAC wants to continue the program and keep it on-going. Thus, the 4 new guides will be well equipped with thorough knowledge and will pursue this new opportunity with dedication as they are interested in ensuring religious freedom. They will be chosen also because of their potential to pass this knowledge on further to new batches. This will ensure sustainability of the RFI Program.

All participants will be informed about this through MailChimp (e-newsletters). The 4 new guides will be announced on social media and traditional media outlets as well. This will be adequately publicized. IAC's local coordinator, Ansum, will also connect with the media for articles, op-eds and ads and this will be the last leg of publicity efforts for the RFI Program.

During the 9<sup>th</sup> month, Ansum will have started data collection from surveys, feedback received, and observations made and will start preparing a report on the program. The report will entail details of the seminar, the number of participants reached, activities undertaken, level of impact made, and future



initiatives participants wish to pursue for religious freedom. This report will also capture the degree to which the program was successful. The key personnel and speakers will provide feedback and suggest edits to the report. During the 11<sup>th</sup> month, IAC will submit the final report to the State Department for review. This will also be shared with relevant stakeholders as the need may arise.

### **Marketing efforts:**

IAC will continue to undertake promotion and publicity efforts to pique the interest of new participants and get them intrigued about knowing further and learning about what the RFI Program has to offer. The media plan syncs with the project activities and program flow and is designed to boost visibility of this program all throughout the one-year duration.

IAC will host a dedicated section on its website for the RFI Program. The content creation and regular updates of this section will be managed by the local coordinator. He will also oversee other online activities pertaining to YouTube videos that are linked on IAC's website and IAC's social media platforms. He will be responsible to interact with local media for op-eds and articles in newspapers. Just like IAC, CAP and AB Events will also publicize the RFI Program through their online assets and on-ground networks.

3 months before the seminar commences (during month 4), this program will be promoted online through social media initiatives like regular posts, promoted posts and ads. The content will focus on the concept, purpose and social impact that the program will have. Audiences and geographic location will be defined for marketing and online advertising on Facebook and Twitter (with a heavy focus on Kerala). The selection will be based on profession and industry of work like business, entrepreneurship, media, TV, film and interest in the media industry, leadership and management, innovation, advertising, videography, photography, literature and writing, current affairs, production, journalism, anchoring, and similar categories. It will also be based upon socio-political and religious freedom interests. The age group targeted will be 25 to 60 years.

Advertising through Google AdWords will also be undertaken. IAC will also engage the target audiences through outreach efforts via traditional media vehicles like newspaper ads. Newspaper ads will include display ads (of size: 116 sq. cms.) in a leading newspaper – Times of India, Kochi - Kochi Times Newspaper. A total of 2 newspaper ads will be published during this 1-year period (1 in the beginning of the program to attract the participants and 1 ad at the end of the program to highlight the advantages, experiences of participants and success of the program). E-newsletters will be circulated fortnightly all through the one-year duration to provide stakeholders with important developments, program details and participant expectations. IAC will use MailChimp to create the e-newsletters.

As the seminar commences, additional marketing initiatives will be undertaken during day of the seminar. IAC's local coordinator will work in collaboration with AB Events/American Bazaar to create venue-specific marketing collateral. These will include banners, wall displays, standees, tent cards, flyers and pamphlets. CAP and AB Events will distribute such marketing material at their local centers to spread knowledge about the RFI Program amongst its on-ground network as well. Also, AB Events will help with video recording and professional photography of the seminar. These will be used for creating emphatic social media posts by IAC's local coordinator and will be a useful repository of information for IAC and partners.

During the days of conducting the event, social media posts will include a heavy flow of periodic updates throughout the seminar on IAC and CAP's Facebook and Twitter pages. It will be about the sessions underway, interaction of participants amongst themselves, group discussions, participant and trainers' interactions. The local coordinator will also create short video snippets of activities throughout the

seminar to capture the trainer's and participants' perspective/feedback on the seminar, new knowledge gained, how practical thinking can benefit society, and religious freedom concept learnt.

Each post, be it a video, image or text, will be appropriately tagged to include all stakeholders involving the trainers as well. This will facilitate adequate promotion for the seminar and this program will be visible on all stakeholder's online assets for their respective networks to view and follow. This amplification will prove beneficial and have a far-reaching ripple effect on the online public information space.

Through the RFI Program's online presence, participants will get to broadcast their ideas and capitalize on high visibility that IAC will provide through social media posts. The local coordinator will also publicize the 4 chosen participants who will be future guides to new batches of participants as this program continues. This will be pivotal to the success and sustainability of the program and attract new participants too. Ansum will announce the participants through social media and traditional media and popularize the program adequately.

After the completion of the program, the local coordinator will engage online audiences through interesting posts about the stories of what the participants have accomplished through the program and what they want to achieve with their newly acquired knowledge. This will display the confidence of the participants and will make for inspirational digital content for audiences.

### **Project accomplishments and Target Milestones (TM):**

Throughout the one-year of the RFI Program, IAC and its partners will fervently work towards achieving all target milestones set out. Reaching each milestone will help all partners to understand that this program is on the correct path to progress. A timeline is associated with each milestone and this indicates the duration by when it should be accomplished.

**Target Milestone (TM) 1:** Confirm program partner, speakers and panelists, and seminar venue. Make all travel and boarding/lodging arrangements:

TM 1 will be completed by the end of month 3. IAC will ensure that by this time all key personnel have been confirmed. Their travel arrangements will be completed, as the need may arise. Even IAC team's travel arrangements and boarding/lodging will be undertaken. At this time, IAC will finalize its partner, CAP, and secure a reputed hotel or banquet hall in Kochi, Kerala to host the seminar.

**TM 2:** Confirm participants and get them to register online. Provide access to content on google docs and undertake survey 1:

By the end of month 5 and beginning of month 6, IAC and its partners will shortlist and confirm candidates/participants for the seminar. Ansum will ensure that they all duly register online thus initiating database cultivation for the program. All participants and other stakeholders will receive exclusive access to the reference material and content online on google docs. At this time, the participants and key personnel + speakers will undertake the first survey. This will capture their initial impressions on religious freedom.

**TM 3:** All participants successfully complete the seminar. A second online survey will be administered to trainers and participants:

On completing the seminar in Kochi, the program will be said to be successfully undertaken by participants. At this stage, the participants, key personnel and speakers will undertake survey 2. This survey will successfully capture any change in perceptions and new thinking towards religious freedom

that may occur due to the seminar. Through the survey, IAC will find out if participants liked the overall program, any suggestions that they have for improvement or any topic that they would have liked to know more about. Participants will also be asked about how they plan to use the knowledge gained through the seminar to undertake new ideas in their individual capacities. The trainers will undertake an online survey too – IAC will find out if certain topics need more focus as trainers are now aware about participants' interests and can suggest if more knowledge is needed to be dispersed to participants. If need be, IAC will then be able to help with new material on google docs and continuously interact with participants through a message board. The local coordinator will ensure that all participants and trainers complete and submit these surveys. These surveys will serve as a great comparison of knowledge amassed through the program as IAC has been capturing pre and post data.

**TM 4:** Selection of new guides for a new batch of participants:

In the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the RFI Program, key personnel/speakers will shortlist 4 participants from this seminar, based upon their interest expressed for safeguarding religious freedom and passion for such efforts. In addition to this, their interaction with everyone, ideas and group discussion talking points will also be evaluated. Thus the 4 selected participants will be chosen to take the program forward. They will take charge of being new guides to new batches of future participants for new seminars.

**TM 5:** Data collection, analysis and evaluation:

During month 9, Ansum will take responsibility to collect all data to date. He will work on streamlining it and analyzing it. The data will be evaluated to gather a detailed understanding of how the seminar inspired participants. Here the pre and post program data will be most useful for such comparison. This data will be duly evaluated by teams.

**TM 6:** Submit completed report to DoS and share it with relevant stakeholders:

During the final few months of the program, IAC's local coordinator will collect all data through surveys and observations. He will analyze, evaluate and prepare a detailed report on the WSN Program, its benefits and overall success. Having analyzed all datasets and measured all collected metrics, IAC will complete an evaluation report on its findings. This report will contain valuable data and precise information on this program and its accomplishments. During the 11<sup>th</sup> month of this program, IAC will make the submission to DoS and share it with all relevant stakeholders. The success of such programs accelerates more networking opportunities between participants, the trainers and others and helps in creating new connections between both nations – USA and India. In the long run, it proves beneficial as such educational, informational and social initiatives driven by USA will further strengthen the cordial bond that both countries enjoy. In order to develop the growing Indo-American strategic alliance to new heights, it is imperative that diverse populaces in India are supportive of such a partnership with the U.S. IAC believes that such efforts will tremendously help improve the people-to-people bond between citizens of both countries.

Thus, programs like these seek to help people to take charge of their destinies and serve the nation to improve communities through informational platforms, free courses, seminars, exchanges and events. Education and training are the most effective tools to empower people and build successful communities. IAC supports these efforts and stands tall in accomplishing its mission of improving society and strengthening international bonds. A detailed chronological order of program accomplishments and their target milestones are illustrated in Attachment A.

### Monitoring and evaluation plan:

Data collection, monitoring, evaluation, analysis and reporting will be undertaken by IAC's local coordinator. Data will be collected directly from both, the participants and the trainers using data collection tools like survey forms/questionnaires. This data will be collected across different phases of the RFI Program and will be quantitative and qualitative in nature. The data collected and evaluated will be disaggregated by name, demographic details like: age, region, ethnic group/sect; profession, professional/business details, field of work (sector), education, associations to organizations, involvement and interest in social causes, gender equality, community upliftment, religious freedom efforts, years of experience in the industry, professional goals for the next 1-3 years and contact details. IAC will track the progress, output and outcome of all phases of this program. This will help to achieve the aforementioned target milestones.

IAC's local coordinator will also undertake data analysis and assessment to improve and evolve the program. All online surveys undertaken by participants will throw light on their thoughts and perspectives about the religious freedom, tolerance, acceptance and race relations initiatives. Questions on the survey will be both open and close-ended. The local coordinator will gather, study, evaluate and understand the steady changes that may reflect in each survey. He will work on analyzing the data received from surveys to draw inferences, make deductions and decipher how these religious freedom topics have helped the participants. He will capture behavioral and attitudinal changes in participants that have occurred because of the knowledge imparted – understanding participants' attitude towards religion and religious freedom and freedom of expression efforts in their regions. Survey results undertaken by the speakers and key personnel will also be studied in-depth by the local coordinator to gauge how well the program has been received (this includes the seminar curriculum and program reference material shared with participants) and the efforts participants make to learn different skills. It will be easy to understand the effect of the program on participants with a pre-and post-test undertaken – i.e. survey comparisons will offer an enhanced perspective on how participants responded to the seminar and how their religious freedom outlook has been influenced.

All these surveys in turn will give a clearer picture of the program's steady success. Thus, regular tracking and analysis will help to assess the relevance of the program in the current context and the interest levels of participants. IAC will have target milestones as progress markers to help determine the program's steady accomplishments and achieve targets set at a regular pace. Evaluation results will be based on the data collected/disaggregated and comparison made before, during and after the RFI Program. This will help in understanding what has been done correctly and where the focus needs to be channelized to keep the project on track. Thus, the local coordinator can effectively modify parts of the program to ensure relevance to participants as well as attain program objectives within the timelines.

IAC will work on preparing and submitting a detailed report about the seminar. This document will be reviewed by key personnel and speakers who will provide inputs and help in making this a thorough report. This will take a few weeks. Once it is ready, the final report will be submitted to DoS for review and will be shared with concerned stakeholders. Also, critical success details and developments will be shared across social media to publicize the achievement of this program.

### A win-win program – the big picture:

The RFI Program will be beneficial to all stakeholders: it will help participants gain an enhanced understanding of religious freedom, their rights in secular India and propel them to act in a way to support religious freedom. This will only help the community and nation progress further. The key personnel and

speakers will appreciate different stories and discussions that come up through the seminar. This will be a great platform for them to leverage to express their views and inspire participants from diverse professional fields. The DoS and U.S. Government will benefit as this program aligns with U.S. foreign policy priorities on religious freedom and national security. Also provided to them will be databases, metrics and the impact that the seminar will achieve.

Considering the ground realities of the situation relating to faith, religion and age-old customs, there is no better time than now to encourage dialogue and discussions and have a conversation on religious freedom in Kerala. The situation may only worsen with time, if such necessary and timely conversations do not occur. There is a need to change the narrative for religious freedom. Through this seminar, IAC addresses such a critical problem and shakes barriers in a simple way by incorporating innovative and pragmatic thinking. IAC and its partners will attempt to inspire people in India to understand why critical evaluation, practical thinking, logic and scientific reasoning are important when it comes to practicing religion. Blind faith, belief in superstitions and god men or women, and unrealistic exercises in the name of religion will not help society to progress further. Ultimately, this will be a barrier to success for the nation and its people.

Here, IAC attempts to use novel ways to address this problem: it will reach people from different fields and include them in religious freedom conversations. These influential individuals will further disperse the information creating a ripple-effect. IAC wants to change the myopic way in which people look at religion. Especially in a country like India, where many religions co-exist, such a seminar amongst educated and influential participants has the potential to create a steady impact in the long run. Therefore, changing perspectives and in turn the behavior towards religion is a long and challenging task. However, this process needs to start now in a simple and basic way and then be scaled up to achieve a change in the environment. This is what IAC and its partners will achieve in India. With such seminars being conducted on a repeated and regular basis across regions, the program will certainly have the ability to scale further and impact more lives.

IAC will make use of emerging technologies and cost-effective digital tools to manage the program, spread publicity and encourage participation. It will use the excellent technical resources that it has access to through the IT background and capability of its team to develop a highly functional IAC online registration website for this program. Through this platform, all the players in this project will be able to successfully register. IAC will upload all training material via google docs and participants will have access to it anytime and from anywhere. Thus, these participants are becoming part of a resourceful network focused on improving the narrative of religious freedom. IAC's local coordinator will work closely with the participants, key personnel and stakeholders to successfully register online. The participant database, program content, seminar curriculum, reference material and the extensive network that IAC will build in this process are the resources that will be available for such programs in the future. As a think-and-do-tank, IAC believes in collaboration and sharing of resources to solve real-world problems.

This platform also creates a mutually inclusive advantage for USA and India: A closer U.S.-India relationship is advantageous for the world, as both political systems are based on democratic representation and believe in liberty, equality, and freedom of expression. The U.S.-India relations have improved significantly over the past decade and this only accelerates greater investment opportunity within the two nations. Being 'natural allies', the two nations have mutual economic and military interests that are longstanding and growing. The economic relationship, in a broader geopolitical context, emphasizes on cooperation and investment as a strategic way forward. India is a trusted partner and ally

of the U.S. and is capable of playing a pivotal role in the region alongside USA with shared ideals of liberty and democratic principles.

The people-to-people contact is on the rise, as well as academic and cultural exchanges. The Indian American diaspora of 3 million has also proved to be an asset in supporting better relationships between the two countries. Being a public figure, IAC's Chief, Vinson, is an influential Indian American with access to a wide and broad network in both countries. In his individual capacity, he has helped forge closer and stronger ties between India and USA. His involvement and contribution will be instrumental in ensuring the success of the RFI Program. Such Indo-American programs further strengthen people-to-people ties and create flourishing associations for citizens of both countries. These encompass economic goodwill, networking, experience and subject matter expertise. This shows that as two powerful nations, they will engage to improve global prosperity. Cooperation around religious freedom in India will certainly benefit both countries. Ultimately, USA's longer-term strategic goals in Asia will advance as she invests in cultivating a prosperous, confident, and democratic India as her trusted partner.

This proposed RFI Program is in alignment with U.S. foreign policy goals on religious freedom. The partnership between IAC and CAP is a collaborative effort to promote religious freedom ideals in a practical context. This in turn propels societal upliftment through conversations and action and IAC and its partners are passionate about this mission. They will start on a small scale in India and amplify it further. In a nation like India, religious freedom is a crucial pivot for community peace and socio-political progress. This program will create synergies amongst stakeholders and bring them together to create a larger impact. This will foster growth for nations and enhance economic progress for the U.S. and India with better people-to-people relationships and partnerships between the two nations as they strive for a common purpose.

## Conclusion:

"Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We must always examine the ways in which we protect it." "People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind, heart, and soul." President Barack Obama, [June 4, 2009](#).

IAC and its partners strongly believe that religious freedom is a fundamental human right that must be preserved and protected. Religious freedom being a liberty allows for freedom of speech, expression, and assembly. Thus, social pluralism can develop because of the law protecting all religions. Hence, people who practice their religion within an acceptable framework proves beneficial to society. Therefore, by inducing a refreshed way of looking at religion, IAC and its partners will help participants to understand that a scientific and practical outlook towards practicing religion will support community development and increase religious tolerance and freedom. This will help to allow many religions to harmoniously co-exist (like they do in several parts of India).

People must be aware about the law and their right to practice the religion of their choice. Religion is essential in society to ensure a good life on earth. Practicing religion in a moderate and practical way is a step forward towards progress of the people, community, region, and nation.

## Letter of Support:

**THE AMERICAN  
BAZAAR**



To  
Vinson Palathingal  
Executive Director  
Indo-American Center (IAC)  
Washington DC

June 1, 2018

Subject: Partner with IAC for educational and training initiatives in India

Dear Mr. Palathingal,

This is in reference to our discussion on partnership between our organizations for your leadership training and youth/women empowerment initiatives in India. We would like to confirm AB Events' participation as IAC's local partner for its workshops, training and follow-on activities in these domains.

AB Events and American Bazaar have prior experience in organizing such events and with a local presence in India, we are suitably placed to assist you in coordinating, publicizing and managing this event. As we have previously worked together on programs of this nature in USA and India, and we are happy to extend our help and services always.

We are pleased to have been selected as your local partner for logistics, event management and publicity (online and on-ground) for IAC's initiatives. We are confident of achieving the goals of this mission and bringing about a desired impact by joining our efforts with IAC. We hereby confirm our participation as partners through this letter of support.

We look forward to working with you again.  
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asif Ismail'.

Asif Ismail  
Publisher  
The American Bazaar  
[www.americanbazaaronline.com](http://www.americanbazaaronline.com)  
<http://abevents.americanbazaaronline.com/>

1st Floor, No. 125, Hosur Main Road, Madivala, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560068  
[americanbazaaronline.com](http://americanbazaaronline.com)\*[www.facebook.com/americanbazaaronline](https://www.facebook.com/americanbazaaronline);  
[twitter.com/ambazaarmag](https://twitter.com/ambazaarmag)

Letter for non-profit status:

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE  
P. O. BOX 2508  
CINCINNATI, OH 45201

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Date:

**JUN 23 2016**

INDO-AMERICAN CENTER INC  
8230 BOONE BLVD STE 445  
VIENNA, VA 22182

Employer Identification Number:

47-5635640

DLN:

17053116350026

Contact Person:

JO A CHRISTMAS

ID# 31546

Contact Telephone Number:

(877) 829-5500

Accounting Period Ending:

December 31

Public Charity Status:

170(b)(1)(A)(vi)

Form 990/990-EZ/990-N Required:

Yes

Effective Date of Exemption:

December 18, 2015

Contribution Deductibility:

Yes

Addendum Applies:

No

Dear Applicant:

We're pleased to tell you we determined you're exempt from federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 501(c)(3). Donors can deduct contributions they make to you under IRC Section 170. You're also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under Section 2055, 2106, or 2522. This letter could help resolve questions on your exempt status. Please keep it for your records.

Organizations exempt under IRC Section 501(c)(3) are further classified as either public charities or private foundations. We determined you're a public charity under the IRC Section listed at the top of this letter.

If we indicated at the top of this letter that you're required to file Form 990/990-EZ/990-N, our records show you're required to file an annual information return (Form 990 or Form 990-EZ) or electronic notice (Form 990-N, the e-Postcard). If you don't file a required return or notice for three consecutive years, your exempt status will be automatically revoked.

If we indicated at the top of this letter that an addendum applies, the enclosed addendum is an integral part of this letter.

For important information about your responsibilities as a tax-exempt organization, go to [www.irs.gov/charities](http://www.irs.gov/charities). Enter "4221-PC" in the search bar to view Publication 4221-PC, Compliance Guide for 501(c)(3) Public Charities, which describes your recordkeeping, reporting, and disclosure requirements.

Letter 947



-2-

INDO-AMERICAN CENTER INC

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Cooper', written in a cursive style.

Jeffrey I. Cooper  
Director, Exempt Organizations  
Rulings and Agreements

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Letter 947

Letter signed for attending the accelerator in October 2018 at DC:



**INDO AMERICAN CENTER**  
Washington DC  
*SOCIETY . SECURITY . STRATEGY .*

To whomsoever it may concern:

August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

Subject: Participate in the religious accelerator program in or around Washington, D.C.

Greetings Team,

The Indo American Center (IAC), Washington DC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation funded by Amaram Technology Corp. IAC is a non-profit, non-partisan, free-market, think-and-do tank, dedicated to strengthening values of liberty and freedom in India and the US. We constantly strive to develop strong Indo-American alliances in the fields of education, entrepreneurship, leadership and religious freedom.

I, Vinson X. Palathingal, Executive Director of the Indo American Center, commit that I will be pleased to participate and attend the full three-day Boldline Accelerator Program in or around Washington DC. At the accelerator, I will be happy to represent IAC and its partners on our collaborative mission to protect religious freedom.

I look forward to knowing the next steps.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Vinson Palathingal  
Executive Director, IAC  
[vinson@indoamericancenter.com](mailto:vinson@indoamericancenter.com)  
703.568.8070