



Boldline Religious Freedom Accelerator

Responsive Monitoring of Religious Freedom Violations in the Middle East Proposal Overview

1. ***Name of organization submitting partnership:*** Religious Freedom Institute (RFI)
2. ***Full address and postal code:*** 1050 30th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20007
3. ***For-profit or not-for-profit status:*** Not-for-profit, 501c3 organization
4. ***Industry affiliation (e.g., health care, aviation, energy):*** Religious freedom research and advocacy organization
5. ***Links to biographies of the participants or LinkedIn profiles (preferable) that will be shared with the other participants:*** Kent Hill: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kent-r-hill-95604520/>; Jeremy Barker: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jaybark7/>; Tom Farr: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tom-farr-8b7171149/>
6. ***Has your organization ever partnered with the U.S. government? Describe.*** The Religious Freedom Institute and its senior staff has regularly worked with the State Department and USAID as a source of information and briefing on issues of international religious freedom. RFI has not been a funding recipient of a U.S. government program.
7. ***What stage is your partnership business plan (new idea, existing program going to scale)?*** The plan builds on the work of the Religious Freedom Institute's Middle East Action Team, but refines it and takes it to scale through increased collaboration with software platforms and increased partnerships.
8. ***Signed commitment statement to participate in the full three-day accelerator program in or around Washington, D.C.:*** If invited, the Religious Freedom Institute will commit to attend the full three-day accelerator program planned for October 2018.

Jeremy P. Barker
Senior Program Officer
Associate Director, Middle East Action Team

Problem Statement (250 words max): Describe the problem you are trying to solve and any relevant background information. Address the impact and innovation potential of your idea given the status quo.

There is a major gap in our knowledge of the day-to-day situation of religious minorities and other vulnerable communities in the Middle East. This is on account of a number of knowledge deficits:

- (a) the majority of international human rights organizations only cover a small number of the most violent assaults rather than the whole gamut of forms of daily encroachments.
- (b) local organizations and actors do not have the capacity to document and monitor situation in a robust, consistent and systematic manner
- (c) ethnographic coverage tends not to be fit for the purpose of cross-setting comparison for an immediate “pulse check” of the situation of these communities.

In addition, the reports that are produced generally are backward-looking documentation efforts which lack the kinds of data that provide a clear, reliable, and real-time picture of religious freedom dynamics. This lack of actionable data prevents policy makers or other actors from responding with immediate, targeted, and effective religious policies.

Through leveraging the deep experience of researchers who have analyzed religious freedom violations, networks of local actors from religious communities and human rights organizations, and software and data-visualization companies we will aim to address the knowledge gaps and produced more timely, accurate, and verifiable reports of religious freedom violations.

Idea (250 words max): What is the core concept for the partnership; what would it look like? How will working in a partnership obtain the outcome that is required? How does this advance religious freedom in a way that aligns with U.S. interests?

The core concept of the partnership would be to create a network of trained and equipped individuals and organizations who are able to securely gather, document, and verify in near real-time fashion incidents of religious freedom violations. This would then feed into a searchable database to enable robust analysis and documentation to support local, national, and international advocacy and policy efforts to advance religious freedom protections and to reduce the vulnerability of at-risk communities. We would envision starting this project in two key countries: Iraq and Egypt and in at least four targeted geographic areas with a cross-section of religious communities involved.

Working in partnership between experienced researchers, local actors, and software providers would engender a number of synergies to overcome existing knowledge gaps in efforts to advance religious freedom in challenging environments. Engaging religious freedom researchers in the design will help to ensure that the right types of information are being gathered and measured and done so in ways that allow for robust analysis and cross-national comparisons. Networks of local actors engaged in the effort will help to overcome trust deficits of reporting and documentation to international observers and builds the capacity of target communities. By

working in a collaborative fashion, the partnership enables cross-checking and verification of reporting across communal lines. The contribution of software providers will allow for implementation of data-gathering and sharing platforms that will expand the reach of these types of monitoring efforts, enhance security, gather data in ways that is comparable across communities, and produce better analysis for programming and policy recommendations.

This effort aligns with U.S. interest to advance religious freedom in vulnerable places by equipping communities to document instances of religious freedom violations. It will supplement and enhance on-going monitoring and evaluation efforts taken by the U.S. State Department and other agencies such as in the Annual International Religious Freedom Report.

Resource Requirements (250 words max): Describe what is needed to implement your idea (resources, stakeholder buy-in, legal requirements, etc.). Address the feasibility of your idea.

The project will build-on and expand existing work that the Religious Freedom Institute is undertaking. Funding limitations have slowed the implementation of the idea, but there has been initial stakeholder buy-in from local communities to support this in key target communities (particularly in Iraq among religious minorities who have or are seeking to return from situations of internal displacement). RFI has the existing scholarly background among its staff or networks of associated scholars to develop the rubrics and analyze for this project.

There is a need for identifying potential partners who have the software and technological capacity to bring a project like this to scale, identify ideal solutions, and build out the training and outputs for both internal and external facing data.

Best Potential Partners (250 words max): Describe ideal partners (from 2-10) or types of partners that would make for a successful partnership.

This project will ultimately need a merging of at least through groups that will enhance the understanding of religious freedom violations and enable a fourth group, to develop more effective policy and programming responses to advance religious freedom in key areas.

The three groups will be:

Religious freedom researchers with deep experience in understanding, documenting, and analyzing religious freedom violations – the Religious Freedom Institute is well-positioned to provide this.

Local networks of religious actors or human rights professionals who have the standing within vulnerable communities to document and verify religious freedom violations – a number of these actors are known and have shown interesting in this effort

Technology and software companies with experience in data-collection, analysis, verification, particularly in frontier or developing markets – this is the biggest gap area within the concept so far.

Ideal End State (150 words max): *Describe what success will look like with the implementation of your idea. Address the impact of your idea and its innovation potential*

The ideal end state of this project is that when and where religious freedom violations take place communities are equipped to accurately and verifiably document these in a secure fashion that allows for robust analysis, cross-communal and cross-national comparison, that enables refined and effective policy and programmatic interventions to enhance robust religious freedom for all communities.

The impact of this effort will be not only a better understanding of the challenges facing communities and enhanced efforts to advance religious freedom for these communities, but ultimately safer and more stable societies where the rights and freedoms of all individuals and communities are protected, enabling economic development and reducing religion-related violence and terrorism.

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