**Biographical Information**

*Name of Organization:* LYNC (Love Your Neighbor Community)

*Contact Details:*

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*Status of Organization:* Registered Non-Profit

*Industry Affiliation:* NGO

*Stage of Partnership Business Plan:* We are actively operating in the region and look forward to the tools, resources and partnerships we will establish, should we have the opportunity to participate, to grow our roundtable discussions and distribute aid as part of our strategy for peace & reconciliation and religious liberalization in Central Asia.

*Brief Description of Organization:*

LYNC’s vision is to see a Central Asia where all people of all faiths or no faith can live out their beliefs and bring those beliefs to public policy discussions of good governance and care for the most socially and economically marginalized through humanitarian aid. Serving as a facilitator of faith-based reconciliation in the region of Central Asia, LYNC is focused on how to promote/build the capacities and opportunities for those of all faiths and no faith to contribute to the well-being of society, as well as to the stability of good governance by the state. We have a developed network of leaders from different religious communities in Central Asia who have either participated in our meetings or are eager to expand the impact of serving to promote religious freedom in their cities and countries.

*About the Founder & President:*

LYNC is lead by religious freedom expert Wade Kusack. He was born and raised in Belarus, bilingual in English & Russian and has extensive cross-sectorial networks throughout the former Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia. His direct experience in negotiating prisoner releases and leading interfaith dialogues with this model has inspired many stakeholders to found LYNC. For more about Wade’s background, please visit: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/wade-kusack-353702143/>

*U.S. Government Partnership:*

LYNC is eager to work alongside the United States Government through the training in this accelerator program. We have relationships with several members of Congress, including Congressmen Gus Bilirakis who recently agreed to advocate for imprison Tajik pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov through Tom Lantos Humar Rights Commission’s Defending Freedom Project . We have effectively engaged in international partnerships with the following results:

* *IGE Partnership, Washington, D.C.*
  + “Religion, Security and Citizenship” project focused on Central Asia (2011-2013);
  + “Russian-Ukrainian Conflict Peacemaking and Reconciliation Project” including first ever meeting between religious leaders from both sides since the beginning of the conflict (Istanbul, June 2014);
  + “Practical Reconciliation Project” (Kiev, November 2014); and
  + “Peacemaking Seminar” including an unprecedented seminar/mission in Slovyansk, just a few miles from the front line in Eastern Ukraine. (Slovyansk, October 2015).
* *AROK Partnership, Astana, Kazakhstan*
  + Permanent participant in the Secretariat for Relations with Religious Denominations in the Office of the Prime Minister, Kazakhstan (later transformed into Committee for Religious Affairs) (1999-2001);
  + Participation in Parliament of Kazakhstan working group on religious legislation and CVE. (2002-Current);
  + Organized or participated in more than 150 discussions and roundtables in connection with religious studies of the government, academic and civil society platforms (Astana, Almaty, Kazakhstan and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2001-Current);
  + Developed educational network for religious leaders on international and domestic religious laws and policies. (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, 2007-Current); and
  + Provided expertise on subject of religious freedom and CVE to OSCE, UN and other international institutions. (2007-2017).
* *During last eight years, we also successfully advocated the releases of numerous prisoners of conscience in Central Asia and Russia, including but not limited to:*
  + Dmitriy Shestakov (Uzbekistan February, 2011);
  + Ilmurad Nurliev (Turkmenistan, March 2012);
  + Thomas Khan (Russia, February 2013); and
  + Bakhdzan Kashkumbayev (Kazhakstan, February 2013)

**Problem Statement**

In the past decade, the passage and implementation of the religious laws to the criminal and administrative codes across the FSR countries has placed religious freedom at severe risk. As the freedom to worship and engage in daily and private religious activities is limited, every strata of society comes under oppression. Two very real obstacles to sustainable religious freedom exist:

* Governmental Influence. Central Asian governments are using

major/traditional religion as a means of building new national ideologies. Typically, the governments promote one religion and tolerate one or two additional religious (usually Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism). Religions outside of this ‘structure’ are suppressed and persecuted on varying scales. The old Soviet stereotypes regarding ‘foreign’ and ‘new’ religions contribute to government’s paranoia against the religious minorities.

* Religious Nationalism/Tribal Antagonism. Central Asian nations continue to develop a new national identities post-Soviet Union collapse. Current stakeholders across sectors are attempting to force the age-old norms and traditions shaped in a tribal context mixed with Islam.

Central Asian governments wield anti-extremism laws to target religious minorities. The current legal definition of *extremism* across the national governments in the regiondo not require the threat or use of violence and are therefore, leveraged widely, to persecute non-state sympathetic religious groups and leaders.  Recent extremism charges included peaceful promotion of “the superiority of one’s own religion,” and resulted in religious texts being banned and members of non-violent religious groups imprisoned.  The result of such legalized rhetoric *increases* social tensions and stereotypical dehumanization and *decreases* dialogue and CVE, to the detriment and most basic religious freedoms of the entire population.

**Idea**

The past decade has proven that the traditional approach of shame and blame at the international level is not improving the climate of religious freedom. Additionally, high-level dialogue has had limited impact beyond the boardroom, leaving the vulnerable religious minorities exposed to further oppression and abuse. Conceptualization and depersonalization of the issues limits impact. A different approach is critical: faith-based reconciliation.

Faith-based reconciliation approaches the promotion of religious freedom through the reconciliation of three distinct groups: government, civil society and the religious community. These three groups are the bedrock of culture and when they are at odds with one another, religious freedom is severely constrained.

LYNC understands the current state of religious freedom in Central Asia hinges upon reconciling the three under the knowledge that Central Asian governments are not enemies of religion, such as was the state in the Soviet Union. The roots of the conflict are *not* in the Soviet ideology to destroy any religion.

Rather, LYNC sees the opportunity to engage US & Central Asian governments together with civil society and the religious community to begin a dialogue on common ground: helping the poor. Every religion has a mandate to serve the poor and this mandate can be used as a means of unification, moving religion from concept to practical application.

LYNC’s idea is to host three roundtable discussions in Kazakhstan to train, equip and initiate dialogue with local level leaders across government, religions and civic society. Based on IGE’s 4S Theory of Change (Safe Space, Scholarship, Standard of Train/Education & Structure of Change), LYNC adds a fifth ‘S’ to the roundtable agendas: Service. By uniting leaders in the shared purpose of helping the poor, lasting change is can begin.

**Resource Requirements**

LYNC has already tested the difference this fifth step of *Service* makes in the volatile and militarized area of Donetsk, Ukraine, following the Russian invasion in 2014. LYNC brought together Russian and Ukrainian religious leaders in a neutral environment with peace & reconciliation training, open and honest dialogue about tensions and as the final step: humanitarian aid distribution. The results of this workshop carry on today with relaxed tensions (and friendship, in fact) between the religious leaders who attended, greater compassion and cooperation for locals under their leadership and greater understanding that has had a multiplier effect in their respective communities. As a result of this case study, LYNC understands the resources required to see this series of roundtables come to fruition.

We propose hosting three three-day roundtables in Astana, Almaty and Shymkent. We will have two representatives from the United States as well as will look for and invite speakers on topics pertinent to faith-diplomacy, cultural leadership and peace & reconciliation. The roundtables will offer ample opportunity for both high-level discussion, teaching and training as well as informal time over coffee to initiate relationships between leaders one-on-one.

Please see a breakdown of our budget below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Three Days Roundtable and Humanitarian Aid - Astana (50 people)** | | | |
| № | Cost item | Price | Amount | Total |
| 1 | Accommodation (10 persons for 3 days) | $450 | 10 | $4,500 |
| 2 | Meals (3 times for 50 persons) | $25 | 150 | $3,750 |
| 4 | Conference hall with equipment | $1,500 | 1 | $1,500 |
| 5 | Coffee-break (2 per person for 1 day) | $5 | 100 | $500 |
| 6 | Interpreters Kazakh/Russan/English | $600 | 1 | $600 |
| 7 | Local Transportation (taxi/mini bus rental) |  |  | $300 |
| 8 | Unforeseen |  |  | $2,000 |
| 9 | **Total:** |  |  | $13,150 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Three Days Roundtable and Humanitarian Aid - Almaty (50 people)** | | | |
| № | Cost item | Price | Amount | Total |
| 1 | Accommodation (14 persons for 3 days) | $300 | 14 | $4,200 |
| 2 | Meals (3 times for 50 persons) | $25 | 150 | $3,750 |
| 3 | Conference hall with equipment | $1,500 | 1 | $1,500 |
| 4 | Coffee-break (2 per person for 1 day) | $5 | 100 | $500 |
| 5 | Local Transportation (taxi/mini bus rentals) |  |  | $400 |
| 6 | Interpreter/equipment | $1,000 | 1 | $1,000 |
| 7 | Transportation/Airfare for leadership Astana-Almaty | $250 | 3 | $750 |
| 8 | Transportation/Airfare for Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen and Kyrgyz officials | $350 | 8 | $2,800 |
| 9 | Unforeseen |  |  | $1,000 |
| 10 | **Total:** |  |  | $15,900 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Three Days Roundtable and Humanitarian Aid - Shymkent (40 people)** | | | |
| № | Cost item | Price | Amount | Total |
| 1 | Accommodation (14 persons for 3 days) | $200 | 14 | $2,800 |
| 2 | Meals (3 times for 40 persons) | $20 | 120 | $2,400 |
| 3 | Conference hall with equipment | $1,000 | 1 | $1,000 |
| 4 | Coffee-break (2 per person for 1 days) | $3 | 80 | $240 |
| 5 | Local Transportation (taxi/mini bus rentals) |  |  | $300 |
| 6 | Interpreter | $1,000 | 1 | $1,000 |
| 7 | Transportation/Airfare for leadership Astana-Shymkent | $250 | 7 | $1,750 |
| 8 | Unforeseen |  |  | $1,000 |
| 9 | **Total:** |  |  | $10,490 |
|  | **Overall Project Expenses** | | | |
| № | Cost item | Price | Amount | Total |
| 1 | Humanitarian aid |  |  | $27,000 |
| 2 | Humanitarian aid - delivery |  |  | $9,000 |
| 3 | Airfare from US (two persons 3 times) | $1,500 | 6 | $9,000 |
| 4 | Salaries for 3 LYNC employees (US and Kazakhstan) + 2 contractors |  |  | $37,480 |
| 5 | Honorarium for speakers | 2000 | 3 | $6,000 |
| 6 | **Total:** |  |  | $88,480 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | ***Grand Total*** |  |  | **$128,020** |

**Best Potential Partners**

Wade Kusack, LYNC’s Founder & President, is active in speaking on religious freedom topics both in Washington, D.C. and in the Central Asia region. He is the co-chairman of Central Asia Working Group at Religious Freedom Roundtable, Washington DC and is often warmly-received in the region due to his personal background growing up in the Soviet Union and now an American citizen. Leveraging his unique background and as previous mentioned, our project is built on partnership between three factions: government, religions and civic society. In order for our project to truly bring together local- and national-level leaders, we desire to grow our partnerships in each of these sectors named.

* Government: In addition to our existing connections with the various branches of the Central Asia governments, LYNC would identify more leaders at the local level in each of these cities who would be willing to speak on a panel as well as attend. Specifically, we are interested in law enforcement officials, officials within foreign affairs, local mayors offices, as well as national/internal security departments and ministries within the government.
* Religions: We have an extensive network among local religious leaders in each of the three cities who are recognized or unrecognized by the government. We aim to lend support by publically inviting minority religions to participate. In essence, we see the roundtables as an equalizer, a safe space where all religious leaders can have a voice and learn how to connect and unite in the call to serve the poor.
* Civic Society: LYNC recognizes that prominent NGO leaders and academia can be a strong voice and ally in uniting factions at every level. Specifically, academia trains up the next generation and we believe by providing safe space for dialogue that there will be greater openness to differences in thought as well as practice of religious or no religious beliefs. Additionally, we respect the longevity and “roll up your sleeves” approach of NGOs on the ground. It is our desire for these organizations to be heard and integrated more deeply into the fabric and future of Central Asia.

**Ideal End of State**

LYNC seeks a Central Asia where all people of all faiths or no faith can live out their beliefs and bring those beliefs to public policy discussions of good governance and care for the most socially and economically marginalized. We see our roundtables as a critical step in:

* Seeing a religion as a part of the solution for a CVE and security issues, as well as other important problems;
* Equipping a diverse group of religious and government leaders with the tools to share the message of faith-based reconciliation in their own context;
* Providing basic understanding of how this model can work in different regions of Eurasia;
* Relationship-building among participants from different sectors of society;
* Leading to a destruction of stereotypes and lowering of tension between government and religions as well as between different religious communities; and
* Laying the groundwork for the liberalization of religious legislation in Central Asia.

Thank you for your consideration of how we foresee the expansion of religious freedom in Central Asia in partnership with the U.S. Government through this Borderline Challenge.