



ONLINE CAPACITY BUILDING RESOURCE CENTER FOR IRANIAN NGOS

PROVIDING PERSIAN LANGUAGE CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT TO IRANIAN NGOS

www.niacouncil.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) form an indispensable component of civil society in developed and developing countries alike. The proliferation of the NGO community in Iran, in particular, has been impressive over the past decade, and continues to account for an increasing number of civic initiatives. Iranian NGOs have focused on raising awareness and providing services to meet social needs that transcend the contentious world of politics. Issues such as environment protection, sustainable development, and family planning and other health related issues are at the forefront of Iranian NGO activities. Establishing cross-national linkages and synergies between American-based and Iranian-based NGOs broaden the support base of both, and enhances their capacity to produce crucial social capital in their respective communities.

In January 20-21, 2004 the National Iranian American Council participated in an NGO capacity building workshop sponsored by NGO umbrella organization Hamyaran in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in conjunction with its relief efforts in the aftermath of the Bam earthquake. The workshop highlighted the importance of building and utilizing professional connections with international NGOs.

The success of this particular workshop demonstrated the great potential for cooperation between American and Iranian NGOs – despite US sanctions and the current political climate. However, one handicap that characterizes Iranian NGOs presents a stumbling block to the establishment of enduring linkages between Iranian and Western NGOs: a lack of access to Persian language capacity building literature and expertise that has left most Iranian NGOs without a strong foundation for growth and expansion. As a result, their ability to sustain linkages with non-Iranian NGOs has been limited. Similarly, Iranian-American NGOs, who have shown great interest in collaboration with Iranian-based NGOs, share this characteristic due to the same lack of access to “Iranized” capacity building literature and expertise.

Without access to this expertise and support of other endowed organizations concerned with social improvement, many NGO's decline or fail. In this regard, Iranian NGOs have been operating well below capacity.

Capacity building measures are intricate and, in many ways, culturally contextual. US and European foundations are accustomed to working procedures and protocols that have developed in democratic societies. The NGO sector in Iran has only been in existence for 45 years, and due to the country's isolation, it has not benefited from the knowledge and experience of NGOs in other countries. Iranian (and Iranian-American) NGOs are often ignorant or unfamiliar with these working procedures and constantly forced to “reinvent the wheel.”

The purpose of this project is to facilitate the burgeoning activity of the Iranian NGO community by demystifying the successful working methods of international NGOs. NIAC aims to create and support a Persian-language Online Resource Center that translates, explains and “Iranizes” key capacity building literature in order to improve Iranian NGOs' performances in relation to their purpose, context, resources and viability. Most importantly, these practices will not just be translated to Persian, but will also be adapted to the cultural and political circumstances facing Iranian NGOs. The Resource Center will also provide direct access to a Persian-speaking NGO management expert who will assist the

NGOs and provide them with in-depth knowledge and expertise on this subject matter. Furthermore, in order to facilitate international support for Iranian NGOs, the resource center will also include a detailed description of the grant process and list foundations interested in funding NGO activities in Iran.

Underlying this more functionally specific goal – that of providing capacity building support to Iranian NGOs – there exists a more intangible, yet much more fundamental priority inherent in the program. This program will inevitably expand and deepen people-to-people contacts between nations, which NIAC believes is essential to the efflorescence of democratic norms in Iran, and more sophisticated cross-cultural understanding between the two peoples; an abundantly necessary dynamic considering today's global realities.

NIAC estimates the total budget for the Nongovernmental Organization Online Resource Center to be \$87,980.

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Despite their tremendous achievements in a very short time frame, Iranian Nongovernmental Organizations are performing under capacity and lack a strong foundation to sustain their current activity levels. One of the more confounding considerations when collaborating with Iranian NGOs is navigating U.S. sanctions. Iranian NGOs, marginalized both by the structures of officially-imposed sanctions and by unfamiliarity with Western political and cultural norms, cannot reasonably assess the boundaries of U.S. sanctions.

Nonetheless, despite these difficulties, the fatal deficiency limiting the success and growth of Iranian NGO's is their inability to take advantage of and learn from the perfected working methods of NGOs in other countries. Iranian-American NGO's – who can play a key role as an intermediary between U.S. foundations and Iranian NGOs as a natural bridge between cultures and political attitudes – also face this handicap.

Despite a growing appreciation of their mission and understanding of the more technical aspects of fulfilling their objectives, Iranian NGOs remain deprived of the accumulated knowledge and expertise of international organizations when it comes to the development of effective, efficient and sustainable working methods for NGOs. This includes expertise on communications strategies such as the preparation of information materials to promote the organization's work, to procedures for periodic financial reporting and cash flow forecasting, routines for strategic planning and work plan management, to the development of fundraising strategies and a donor database.

Amongst other things, this inaccessibility to information regarding best-practices has affected Iranian NGOs' understanding of the grant proposal process, and left them comparatively disadvantaged when it comes to obtaining adequate grant funding from international foundations. As a result, Iranian NGOs are apprehensive about taking the first steps into what they perceive to be an alien environment. Lobbying for limited capital on a competitive basis is not a customary practice within the highly patrimonial political systems they are accustomed to.

In essence, these NGOs do not know that they are eligible for US and EU grants, who to ask for grants, how they can contact donors, how to present their financial situation and previous activities, or even what a first-rate grant proposal looks like. Furthermore, they lack knowledge on how to maintain a core operating budget, how to develop efficient personnel management and human resource policies, and how to measure, trend and evaluate their working activities.

In sum, these standard non-profit practices are perfectly foreign to them. This has, even more than political obstacles such as US sanctions and the stigma in Iran of receiving US or EU funds, led to the limited state of Iranian NGOs, as well as the underdeveloped ties between Iranian and American NGO's.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

The National Iranian American Council is committed to augmenting the capacity of Iranian NGOs to fulfill their goals in increasing the social capital in Iranian society by providing reliable and easily accessible information on capacity building measures and activities.

NIAC aims to develop a Persian language Online Resource Center that provides detailed information on the best-practices of successful NGOs, such as preparation of information materials to promote the organization's work, procedures for periodic financial reporting and cash flow forecasting, activity reporting, routines for strategic planning and work plan management, the development of fundraising strategies and a donor database, and a Persian-speaking NGO management expert available for advice and support.

NIAC's Nongovernmental Online Resource Center will provide Iranian and Iranian-American NGOs with the blueprint of a variety of capacity building activities, in Persian and adapted to the political and cultural circumstances facing Iranian NGOs.

Although undemocratic governments have the capacity to monitor and control the activities and funds of NGOs and civil society groups, they do not have the power to control knowledge. Located on the worldwide web, NIAC's Nongovernmental Online Resource Center will impart knowledge from a platform transcendent of state oversight and regulation. Both Iran and Iranian-American NGOs can access this essentially transnational public good at their volition.

At the same time, U.S. and international foundations interested in expansion of civic development in Iran currently lack inroads and contact points requisite in creating and maintaining enduring relationships with Iranian NGOs, and for all intents and purposes, with the Iranian people. NIAC's Nongovernmental Organization Online Resource Center will facilitate people to people contacts in an effort to enhance freedom and cultural understanding.

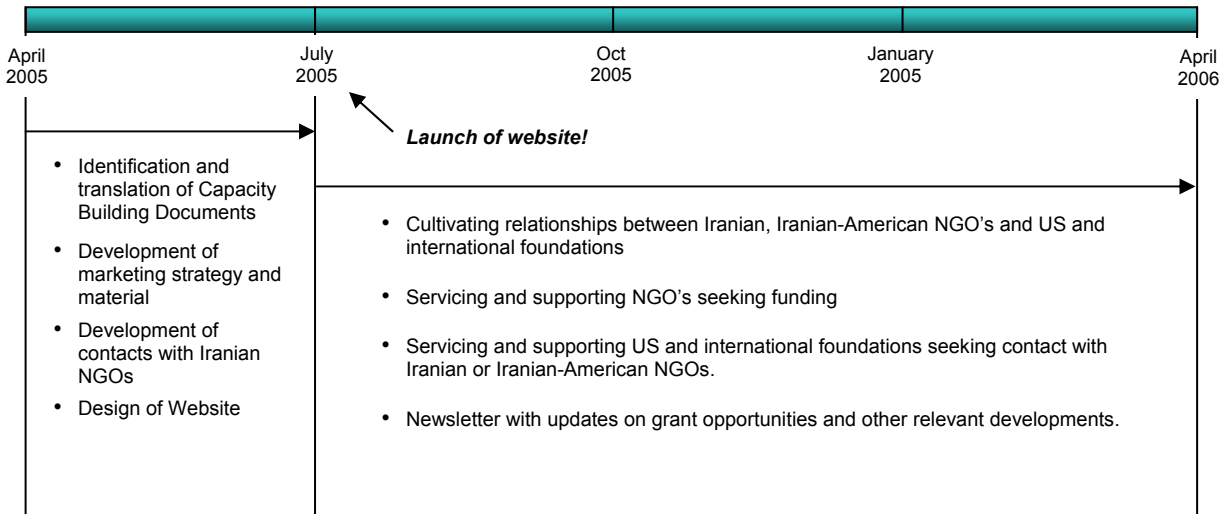
The Online Resource center will be built and lead by a Persian-speaking NGO management expert whose role, as a point person between organizations, is vital to the proposed program. The NGO management expert is responsible for translating and "Iranizing" capacity building documents in a fashion that is culturally comprehensible to Iranians, as well as acting as a support center for Iranian NGOs by guiding them through and explaining the capacity building exercises and procedures.

In addition, NIAC's Nongovernmental Organization Online Resource Center will bolster the capacity of Iranian-American NGOs, and facilitate their interconnectedness with complimentary Iranian organizations, in harmony with the goals of NIAC's IraNexus project. As a result, the pool of Iranian-American NGOs that can function as a bridge between Iran and America and affect the society in Iran, will grow stronger and larger.

Project Plan

Selecting, translating and "Iranizing" the capacity building practices deemed most useful to Iranian NGOs is a necessary first step towards educating and empowering Iranian NGOs and fulfilling the fourth leg of NIAC's mission: to foster greater understanding between Iran and the United States by helping to enable Iranian-Americans to serve as a natural bridge between both peoples.

Project Plan



During the “NGO Online Resource Center’s” embryonic stages – first three-month period – the Persian-speaking NGO management expert will be tasked to identify relevant capacity building documents to be translated and adapted to the cultural and political context that Iranian NGOs operate in.

Simultaneously, the website of the Nongovernmental Online Resource will be designed and prepared. It will include the grant management detailed, yet easily comprehended explanation of various capacity building practices in Persian, which will serve to familiarize the Iranian NGOs with the necessary practices. The expert will also cultivate relations with the NGOs and foundations during this period and prepare a database of U.S. and international foundations supportive of NGO activities in Iran, as well as a translation into Persian of the specifics of their grant processes. If need be, a professional translation service will be used for some of the translations. During this preparatory phase, the management expert will be working full-time.

NIAC will promote the website to Iranian based NGOs through the NGO umbrella organization Hamyaran – who will disseminate the project’s goals and features to the NGO community in Iran. NIAC will also use its own IraNexus database to promote the Online Resource Center amongst Iranian-American NGOs.

Once the Online Resource Center has been launched – in early July 2005 – the NGO management expert will start advising and supporting NGO’s seeking assistance in capacity building, as well as helping connect international foundations with Iranian NGOs. Furthermore, a monthly Persian-language newsletter will be sent to Iranian NGOs with updates on new capacity building tool-kits in Persian, grant opportunities and other relevant developments. After the launch, the management expert will be working on a part-time basis, and be fully accessible via phone and email. However, if demand from Iranian NGO’s is high, and if resources are available, NIAC will aim to maintain the management expert on a full-time basis after the launch of the Resource Center as well.

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen capacity of Iranian NGOs through online Persian-language resource center.
- Provide easily accessible Persian-language information on capacity building activities, tailor-made for Iranian NGOs.
- Promote collaboration between NGOs in Iran and the West.

PROJECT DELIVERABLES

- Persian-English NGO management expert advising Persian-speaking NGOs on capacity-building practices.
- Interactive website in Persian on capacity building activities and best-practice working procedures and protocols.
- Database of Iranian NGOs and international foundations supportive of NGO activities in Iran.
- Translation of grant submission processes of foundations supportive of NGO activities in Iran.
- Monthly newsletter in Persian with updates on grant opportunities, new capacity building documents and upcoming seminars and workshops.
- Yearly evaluations measuring the volume of NGOs serviced by the Resource Center.

FUTURE GOALS

NIAC hopes to see strong mutually reinforcing relationships develop between NGOs in Iran and America, through the assistance of Iranian-American NGO's.

In the future, NIAC can, in cooperation with U.S. and European foundations, hold capacity building workshops for Iranian NGOs in the United States, in the Middle East or, if the political climate permits, in Iran. Furthermore, Persian-language educational CD's on capacity-building can be produced and distributed widely in Iran.

The workshops will achieve two important objectives. Firstly, they will provide the NGO community in Iran with concrete professional skills in capacity building, thereby enhancing their ability to spread democratic practices in Iran. Secondly, the workshops will facilitate the establishment of valuable links between U.S. and Iranian NGOs.

Lastly, NIAC hopes that collaborative relationships between European institutions and foundations and Iranian NGOs develop in hopes of expanding the scope of grant target sources and intercultural exchange.

NIAC envisions the Online Resource Center to be an ongoing activity that will grow in scope, and expand well-beyond the web, as collaboration between Iranian and American NGOs grow.

PERSONNEL

MARJAN H. EHSASSI

Marjan Ehsassi has over her career served in various capacities at the Canadian International Development Agency, the International Center for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch. She was awarded the Richard M. Gollick Leadership Award for outstanding contribution to the political life at McGill University.

A member of the New York Bar and the Law Society of Upper Canada, Marjan worked at Blake, Cassels & Graydon in Toronto before moving to Shearman & Sterling in New York as litigation associate. Most recently, she served as Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel for Jaffe Associates, a leading legal consulting firm.

Marjan is a fluent speaker of Farsi, French and English and is a graduate of the University of Toronto and McGill University Law School.

DOKHI FASSIHIAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ms. Fassihian has held positions in journalism, research, and international development. She possesses both academic and professional experience on Iran-related issues, and has traveled and worked in Iran, intermittently, since 1997. In 1999, Ms. Fassihian worked as a senior editor for two English language newspapers in Iran. She also worked as a program officer for the Governance Unit of the United Nations Development Program in Tehran. As a part of her portfolio, she oversaw the development of Iran's First Human Development Report in 1999. Ms. Fassihian has worked with the Christian Science Monitor, the New York Times, Asia Society, and Sisterhood Is Global Institute. More recently, she has worked as a policy analyst for the CNA Corporation. Ms. Fassihian holds a Master's degree from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. She is fluent in Persian and has received advanced training in French and Arabic.

THE HONORABLE JIM MOODY, ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

Former Congressman Jim Moody represented the 5th district of Wisconsin from 1983 to 1993. During his time as a representative he served on the Way and Means committee, as well as the Transportation and Public Works committees. Congressman Moody also served as a Field Representative for CARE International in both Yugoslavia and Iran, and as a Country Director for the Peace Corp in Pakistan where he established the first Peace Program. He also serves as a board member for Relief International, an NGO providing humanitarian disaster relief in Iran, India and Azerbaijan and a member of the Executive Committee for the American-Turkish council. Congressman Moody received his Ph.D. in Economics from U.C. Berkeley and his M.P.A. from Harvard University.

TRITA PARSİ, PRESIDENT

Trita Parsi has worked for the Swedish Permanent Mission to the UN in New York where he served in the Security Council handling affairs for Afghanistan, Iraq, Tajikistan and Western Sahara, and the General Assembly's Third Committee addressing human rights in Iran, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Iraq.

In 2003, Mr. Parsi represented the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) at the United Nations' Fifty-sixth Annual Conference For Non-Governmental Organizations, "Human Security and Dignity: Fulfilling the Promise of the United Nations."

Mr. Parsi is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, while working part-time as a policy advisor to Chairman Robert Ney (R-OH) on the Middle East and Iran.

Mr. Parsi was born in Iran and grew up in Sweden. He earned a Master's degree in international relations at Uppsala University and a second Master's degree in economics at Stockholm School of Economics.

ALEX PATICO, SECRETARY

Alex Patico, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Iran, has worked for large non-profit institutions throughout his career and provides in-depth knowledge of the intricacies of non-profit management. Alex Patico is a Director in the Exchange Program for Sustainable Growth at the Institute of International Education (IIE), the oldest and largest educational exchange organization in the world, founded in 1919. He represented IIE at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as an accredited NGO representative, participated at the Mayors' Asia-Pacific Environmental Summit 2001, and will participate in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. In previous positions, Alex helped to inaugurate the USAID Pakistan Participant Training Project for World Learning, worked on AID Orientation Programs for Meridian International Center, and served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in the town of Firuzkuh, Iran in 1968-69. Alex holds a master's degree in cross-cultural training, and has been a contributor to Teaching across Cultures (NAFSA, 1982) and Know-How for Cross-Cultural Trainers (Kohls & Brussow, 1996).

ABOUT NIAC

Founded in 2002, the National Iranian American Council is a non-partisan, non-political, non-sectarian, and non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Iranian-American participation in American civic life.

This goal will be achieved through the exchange of ideas and resources, and the development of programs and initiatives aimed at mustering broad expertise for responding to problems facing the Iranian-American community.

NIAC's activities center around four separate objectives:

- Encouraging opportunities for the Iranian-American community to represent itself in its own words and on its own terms by promoting media outlets directed at enhancing public awareness and education about the community.
- Building a database of Iranian-American organizations through services and activities that support collaboration and cooperation among grassroots groups.
- Supporting capacity-building activities for Iranian-American organizations through information sharing, professional development, voter registration, and the promotion of philanthropy among Iranian Americans.
- Fostering greater understanding between Iran and the United States by creating opportunities for Iranian Americans to serve as a natural bridge between both peoples.

OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

NIAC has in the past received funding from individual donors and private foundations (The Open Society Institute, Tides Foundation, Kenbe Foundation, and the National Endowment for Democracy). Funding for the current proposal will be sought from the National Endowment for Democracy, the Kenbe Foundation and the Rockefeller Brother's Fund.

NIAC ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Please see our 2003-2004 Annual Report, "Moving Forward" at <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press231.asp>. Also, NIAC's 2002-2003 Annual Report, "Transforming a Community: Promoting Iranian- American Civic Participation" is available at <http://www.niacouncil.org/pressreleases/press128.asp>.

PROPOSED ANNUAL BUDGET

The National Iranian American Council
NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION ONLINE RESOURCE CENTER
Project Duration 12 Months
April 2005 through April 2006

I.	SALARIES		\$51,800
	A.	NGO Management Expert Full-time 3 months (Apr-Jun)	\$14,000
	B.	NGO Management Expert Part-time 9 months (Jul-Mar)	\$21,000
	C.	Project Managing 40h/month at \$35	\$16,800
II.	EQUIPMENT AND RENT		\$11,700
	A.	Rent \$850/month	\$10,200
	B.	Computer	\$1,500
III.	POSTAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS		\$2,400
	A.	Telephone and fax \$100/month	\$1,200
	B.	Internet DSL \$50/month	\$600
	C.	Postage/DHL \$50/month	\$600
VI.	SUPPLIES AND PROMOTION		\$4,080
	A.	Office supplies \$40/month	\$480
	B.	Printing \$150/month	\$1,800
	C.	Internet Advertisement \$150/month	\$1,800
V.	CONTRACTUAL SERVICES		\$18,000
	A.	Website design and maintenance	\$9,000
	B.	Translator 30h/month at \$25	\$9,000
	TOTAL COSTS		\$87,980