

An original and 10 copies of all pleadings, referring to STB Finance Docket No. 33299, must be filed with the Surface Transportation Board, Office of the Secretary, Case Control Branch, 1201 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20423 and served on: T. Scott Bannister, 1300 Des Moines Building, 405 6th Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50309.

Decided: December 4, 1996.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik,  
Director, Office of Proceedings.

Vernon A. Williams,  
*Secretary.*

[FR Doc. 96-31539 Filed 12-11-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

[STB Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 533X)]

**CSX Transportation, Inc.;  
Abandonment Exemption; in Hamilton  
County, OH**

**AGENCY:** Surface Transportation Board,  
Transportation.

**ACTION:** Notice of exemption.

**SUMMARY:** The Board, under 49 U.S.C. 10502, exempts from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 the abandonment by CSX Transportation, Inc. of a 1.25-mile portion of its Louisville Division, Cincinnati Terminal Subdivision, between milepost 7.11, near Mitchell Street, and milepost 5.86, at the end of track at Dane Avenue, in Cincinnati, Hamilton County, OH, subject to labor protective conditions and a historic preservation condition.

**DATES:** Provided no formal expression of intent to file an offer of financial assistance (OFA) has been received, this exemption will be effective on January 13, 1997. Formal expressions of intent to file an OFA<sup>1</sup> under 49 CFR 1152.27(c)(2) and requests for interim trail use/rail banking under 49 CFR 1152.29 must be filed by December 23, 1996; petitions to stay must be filed by December 27, 1996; requests for a public use condition under 49 CFR 1152.28 must be filed by January 2, 1997; and petitions to reopen must be filed by January 6, 1997.

**ADDRESSES:** Send pleadings referring to STB Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 533X) to: (1) Office of the Secretary, Case Control Branch, Surface Transportation Board, 1201 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20423, and (2) Petitioner's representative: Charles M. Rosenberger, CSX Transportation, Inc., 500 Water Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202.

<sup>1</sup> See *Exempt. of Rail Abandonment—Offers of Finan. Assist.*, 4 I.C.C.2d 164 (1987).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**  
Joseph H. Dettmar, (202) 927-5660.  
[TDD for the hearing impaired: (202) 927-5721.]

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**  
Additional information is contained in the Board's decision. To purchase a copy of the full decision, write to, call, or pick up in person from: DC News & Data, Inc., Room 2229, 1201 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20423. Telephone: (202) 289-4357/4359. [Assistance for the hearing impaired is available through TDD services (202) 927-5721.]

Decided: November 25, 1996.

By the Board, Chairman Morgan, Vice  
Chairman Simmons, and Commissioner  
Owen.

Vernon A. Williams,  
*Secretary.*

[FR Doc. 96-31538 Filed 12-11-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

**UNITED STATES INFORMATION  
AGENCY**

**Administration of the 1997 U.S. Based  
Training Program for Overseas  
Educational Advisers; Request for  
Proposals**

**SUMMARY:** The Advising and Student Services Branch of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for an assistance award. Public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c)(3)-1 may apply to develop two sets of training programs for USIA-affiliated overseas educational advisers to take place in late spring and fall of 1997, respectively. The basic function of an overseas educational adviser is to provide accurate, objective information to foreign audiences on U.S. study opportunities at accredited academic institutions, and to guide students and professionals in selecting a program appropriate to their needs. Participants will be drawn from educational advisers working at USIA-affiliated overseas educational advising centers. The training program is intended for two separate groups of ten participants. Each program must be at least two weeks in duration and must include workshops on advising issues of concern, an internship or other form of substantive professional stayover at a U.S. academic institution(s), and attendance at either the national NAFSA: Association of International Educators Conference or one of its regional fall conferences. USIA

anticipates awarding up to \$150,000 to one organization to administer this program.

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries \* \* \* ; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations \* \* \* and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program cited above is provided through the Fulbright-Hays Act.

Programs and projects must conform with Agency requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package. USIA projects and programs are subject to the availability of funds.

**ANNOUNCEMENT TITLE AND NUMBER:** All communications with USIA concerning this announcement should refer to the above title and reference number *E/ASA-97-08*.

**DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS:** All copies must be received at the U.S. Information Agency by 5 p.m. Washington, D.C. time on Monday, January 13, 1997. Faxed documents will not be accepted, nor will documents postmarked January 13, 1997 but received at a later date. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that proposals are received by the above deadline. The grant should begin on or about March 3, 1997.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:** Advising and Student Services, E/ASA, Room 349, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547, Tel: (202) 619-5434, Fax: (202) 401-1433. Email: pbecskeh@usia.gov, to request a Solicitation Package which includes supplementary information; required application forms; and standard guidelines for preparing proposals, including specific criteria for preparation of the proposal budget.

**TO DOWNLOAD A SOLICITATION PACKAGE VIA INTERNET:** The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from USIA's website at <http://www.usia.gov/> or from the Internet Gopher at [gopher:/gopher.usia.gov](http://gopher.usia.gov/). Under the heading "International Exchanges/Training," select "Request for Proposals (RFPs)."

Please read "About the Following RFPs" before downloading.

Please specify USIA Program Officer Peter Becskehazy on all inquiries and correspondences. Interested applicants should read the complete Federal Register announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the RFP deadline has passed, Agency staff may not discuss this competition in any way with applicants until the Bureau proposal review process has been completed.

**SUBMISSIONS:** Applicants must follow all instructions given in the Solicitation Package. The original and eight copies of the application should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency, Ref.: E/ASA-97-08, Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 326, 301 4th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547.

**DIVERSITY GUIDELINES:** Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, programs must maintain a non-political character and should be balanced and representative of the diversity of American political, social, and cultural life. "Diversity" should be interpreted in the broadest sense and encompass differences including, but not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, and physical challenges. Applicants are strongly encouraged to adhere to the advancement of this principle both in program administration and in program content. Please refer to the review criteria under the 'Support for Diversity' section for specific suggestions on incorporating diversity into the total proposal.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

##### **Overview**

The training program's objectives are twofold: To strengthen and develop the skills of overseas educational advisers; and to build a corps of knowledgeable advisers who are skilled as trainers and can advance the field of educational advising in their home countries with new and current expertise, techniques and knowledge of applicable technology. Each component of the training program should be designed to provide detailed, hands-on learning in areas such as facilitating access to U.S. higher education, communicating cross-culturally, and managing an advising center. Special attention should be given to the use of technology, both as a necessary advising skill, and as a potential tool to develop new and creative advising approaches. Similarly, a significant emphasis should be placed on outreach, partnership and cost-sharing strategies and skills development.

#### **Guidelines**

##### **1. Participants**

For the purposes of this RFP, eligible advisers are defined as those who have demonstrated the skills associated with the four major components of overseas educational advising: (1) Basic knowledge of the U.S. and home country educational systems; (2) basic knowledge of the U.S. higher education application process; (3) demonstrated educational advising and cross-cultural communication skills; and (4) demonstrated office management skills as they relate to an overseas advising center. In addition, each must demonstrate leadership and a commitment to the profession.

Ten participants are expected for each separate training program. Participants will be selected by USIA based on nominations from overseas posts. The grant recipient will be consulted during the selection process and have input into, but not responsibility for, final selections. To be eligible, an adviser must have two to five years of experience and a demonstrated commitment to the field of overseas advising. Based on the nominations received, USIA will assign advisers to either the spring or fall session in such a way that each group is similar in terms of years of experience and skill level.

##### **2. Program Design**

USIA invites organizations to submit creative and flexible program plans which can be tailored, in close consultation with E/ASA, to the selected advisers' individual needs. However, the proposal should still include an overall project framework which identifies objectives, an implementation plan and measurable, expected outcomes. Possible topics to incorporate in the program include: Degree equivalency and accreditation; international student admissions; financial aid; standardized testing; ESL programs; immigration and visa issues; fields of study, cultural adjustment/U.S. societal diversity; specialized Internet usage; distance learning; proposal writing; fundraising; public relations and marketing; determining appropriate fees for students and others, given each host country's environment; trends in advising center self-sufficiency; and training and management of volunteer staff.

##### **3. Training/Program Phases**

The program should include attendance at, and active participation in, either the spring national NAFSA conference or a fall regional conference where workshops and seminars address

various issues of current interest to international educators and overseas advisers and where the opportunity to brainstorm and to share information plays an important part. The USG supports the conference participation of the 10 advisers, providing their travel and accommodations, and arranges presentations and/or participation in panels and workshops. In 1997, the national conference is scheduled for May 20-23 in Vancouver, BC. The regional conferences typically occur in October or November. In addition, each program should include an internship experience at a U.S. college or university. Ideally, advisers should be on campus while classes are in session to optimize their experience through interaction with students.

##### **4. Logistics**

The recipient organization will be responsible for arrangements associated with this program. These include organizing a coherent progression of activities, providing international and domestic travel arrangements for all advisers, making lodging and local transportation arrangements, orienting and debriefing advisers, preparing any necessary support material, locating host campuses and working with host institutions and experts in the field of higher education and overseas advising to achieve maximum program effectiveness through hands-on applications and training and direct involvement in the administration of practices and policies in institutions of higher education.

##### **5. Evaluation/Follow-Up**

The proposal must include a detailed evaluation and follow-up plan. Special emphasis should be given to designing a program which incorporates outcome measurement strategies that assess its ultimate effectiveness.

##### **6. Visa/Insurance/Tax Requirements**

The program must comply with J-1 visa regulations. Participant health and accident insurance will be provided the overseas advisers by USIA; the recipient organization will be responsible for enrolling participants in USIA's insurance program and providing any necessary assistance should medical care be needed. Administration of the program must be in compliance with reporting and withholding regulations for federal, state, and local taxes as applicable. Recipient organizations should demonstrate tax regulation adherence in the proposal narrative and budget.

## 7. Printed Materials

Drafts of all printed material developed for this program should be submitted to E/ASA for review and approval. All official documents should highlight the U.S. government's role as program sponsor and funding source. USIA requests that it receive the copyright use and be allowed to distribute any of this material if it sees fit to do so.

## Proposed Budget

Applicants must submit a comprehensive line item budget based on the budget guidelines in the PSI for the entire program. USIA's grant assistance, up to \$150,000 in total, is expected to constitute only a portion of the total project funding. Cost sharing is required and the proposal should list other anticipated sources of support. Grants awarded to eligible organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$60,000.

Applicants must submit a comprehensive budget for the entire program. There must be a summary budget as well as a break-down reflecting both the administrative budget and the program budget. Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete formatting instructions. For clarification, applicants should provide separate sub-budgets for each training component.

Allowable costs for the program include the following:

- (1) Salaries and fringe benefits; travel and per diem;
- (2) Other direct costs, inclusive of rent, utilities, etc.;
- (3) Indirect expenses, auditing costs;
- (4) Participant program costs; i.e. international/domestic travel, per diem, conference attendance, resource materials.

Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines.

## Review Process

USIA will acknowledge receipt of all proposals and will review them for technical eligibility. Proposals will be deemed ineligible if they do not fully adhere to the guidelines stated herein and in the Solicitation Package. Eligible proposals will be forwarded to panels of USIA officers for advisory review. All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office, as well as the USIA Area Offices. Proposals may also be reviewed by the Office of the General Counsel or by other Agency elements. Funding decisions are at the discretion of the USIA Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Final

technical authority for assistance awards (grants or cooperative agreements) resides with the USIA grants officer.

## Review Criteria

Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered and all carry equal weight in the proposal evaluation:

1. *Quality of the program idea:* Proposals should exhibit a thorough knowledge and understanding of current issues facing international educators and display originality, substance, precision, and relevance to Agency mission.
2. *Program planning:* Detailed agenda and relevant work plan should demonstrate substantive undertakings and logistical capacity. Agenda and plan should adhere to the program overview and guidelines described above.
3. *Ability to achieve program objectives:* Objectives should be reasonable, feasible, and flexible. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan for the professional development of overseas educational advisers.
4. *Multiplier effect/impact:* Proposed programs should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of educational information issues and establishment of long-term institutional and individual linkages.
5. *Support of Diversity:* Proposals should demonstrate substantive support of the Bureau's policy on diversity. Achievable and relevant features should be cited in both program administration (program venue and program evaluation) and program content (orientation and wrap-up sessions, program meetings, resource materials and follow-up activities).
6. *Institutional Capacity:* Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program or project's goals.
7. *Institution's Record/Ability:* Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. The Agency will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.
8. *Project Evaluation:* Proposals should include a plan to evaluate the activity's success, both as the activities unfold and at the end of the program. A

draft survey questionnaire or other technique plus description of a methodology to use to link outcomes to original project objectives is recommended. Successful applicants will be expected to submit intermediate reports after each project component is concluded or quarterly, whichever is less frequent.

9. *Cost-effectiveness:* The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate.

10. *Cost-sharing:* Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions.

## Notice

The terms and conditions published in the RFP are binding and may not be modified by any USIA representative. Explanatory information provided by the Agency that contradicts published language will not be binding. Issuance of the RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. The Agency reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements.

## Notification

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal USIA procedures.

Dated: December 9, 1996.

Dell Pendergrast,

*Deputy Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.*

[FR Doc. 96-31552 Filed 12-11-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8230-01-M

## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

### Proposed Information Collection Activity; Public Comment Request

**AGENCY:** Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** As part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) invites the general public and other Federal agencies to comment on this information collection. This request for