

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR
PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT SUBMISSION
NEA/PI Online Performance Reporting System (PRS),
1405- 0183, Form DS-4127**

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. The President of the United States has the authority, under 22 U.S.C. 2395(b) (the Foreign Assistance Act), to give grants to individuals, governments, businesses, and other organizations in the course of furthering the United States' foreign policy goals. Executive Order 12163 delegates this authority to the Secretary of State and the State Department.

The United States has adopted a policy to promote freedom and democracy in the Middle East. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is one of the administration's primary diplomatic policy and programmatic tools to support this policy. MEPI was founded to support economic, political, and educational reform efforts in the Middle East and to increase opportunity for all people of the region, especially women and youth. The Department of State provides funding to U.S. and foreign organizations in the form of grants and cooperative agreements to support U.S. foreign affairs policy goals. Recipient organizations are primarily non-governmental organizations (NGOs), institutions of higher education, international organizations, and other Federal agencies. In a few instances, commercial firms are also grant recipients.

As a normal course of business and in compliance with OMB Guidelines contained in Circular A-110, recipient organizations are required to provide, and the U.S. State Department required to collect, periodic program and financial performance reports. (See A-110: www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/a110/a110.html) The responsibility of the State Department to track and monitor the programmatic and financial performance necessitates a database that can facilitate this in a consistent and standardized manner.

2. Since 2002, MEPI has obligated \$600 million to over 550 organizations, who carry out more than 850 projects in support of political, economic, education and women's rights reform in 20 countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The MEPI Performance Reporting System (PRS) enables enhanced monitoring and evaluation of grants through standardized collection and storage of relevant award elements, such as quarterly progress reports, workplans, results monitoring plans, grant agreements, financial reports, and other business information related to MEPI implementers. The PRS streamlines communication with implementers and allows for rapid identification of information gaps for specific projects.

Representatives of each grantee organization enter their required performance report information on a quarterly basis through a password protected website

(<http://mepinet.msi-inc.com>). Using a standard quarterly reporting template, grantees report against the established objectives and performance indicators of the projects. The major workplan activities are automatically listed in the report and enable grantee organizations to easily notify the State Department of progress, delays and requested changes to the workplan.

Each grantee organization can also submit relevant supporting documentation as attachments, including the OMB-required SF-425 financial status report.

3. This collection of information is completely electronic, but a paper version of the information collection is available for organizations that are unable to submit their reports online. Nonetheless, quarterly reports that are submitted outside of the system are uploaded to the system in order to ensure quarterly reports are accessible to all relevant State Department officials in Washington and overseas. At this time, 95% of US-based grantees are using the electronic submission method.

4. The information in the PRS is not duplicative of information maintained elsewhere or otherwise available. While hardcopy versions of all quarterly reports are saved in the official grant files, there is not an existing system of electronic record keeping for these reports. In addition, the standardized format and cumulative results reporting features make the PRS unique.

5. This collection does not have a significant impact on small businesses.

6. OMB regulations require that grantees provide regular progress reports during the period of performance (See Item 1). The use of the PRS serves to streamline the process for grantees and to improve monitoring and evaluation capabilities of the U.S. Department of State. With over \$600 million in grants obligated since Fiscal Year 2002, MEPI's ability to effectively assess the performance of individual projects and a broader portfolio of programs necessitates standardized reporting in an electronic format.

7. Not applicable. No such circumstances exist.

8. A 60-day notice soliciting public comments was published in the Federal Register (Volume 76, Number 58). Two (2) comments were received that were not relevant to this information collection.

9. Not Applicable. No payment or gift is provided to respondents.

10. The MEPI PRS is a password protected, web-based portal. However, there are no assurances of confidentiality given other than in the Terms and Conditions attached to each grant document, which state that the information will be used by Department of State Auditors and Inspectors.

11. Not applicable. No questions of a sensitive nature are asked.

12. There are no additional hours added to customary and usual business practices. It is estimated that writing a quarterly report, whether through the PRS system or not, takes each implementer an average of 20 hours per report. (This ranges anywhere from 4 to 40 hours, depending on the size of the project; larger projects require more extensive information gathering and analysis. Also, some organizations have multiple rounds of editing and review, while others do not.) MEPI estimates that it will average 75 grantees per year in the future; of these, approximately 70 will report quarterly through the PRS system. The average annual burden for reporting via the PRS system is 5,600 hours (20 hours per report x 4 reports per year x 70 grantees).

13. The collection imposes no additional capital costs or operation and maintenance costs on respondents.

14. The estimated cost burden to the Federal government is \$236,811.08 per year. The Federal Government estimate is based on the cost to MEPI contractor Management Systems International to maintain and update the database, as well as the number of hours MEPI staff devote to maintaining and updating the MEPI Project Management Database. The average number of hours devoted to this purpose is 2640 per year. The average hourly salary of \$32.21 (GS-12/2 Program Analyst) was used in making this calculation.

15. The program change in form 83-I is because this is a renewal.

16. Information collected from these progress reports is not intended for publication, though MEPI may highlight results from specific projects in published reports in the future. If results of a specific project are published, the grantee organization will be consulted to confirm the results.

Quarterly report information is used by the State Department to monitor and evaluate the performance of its programs. The information is used to evaluate current projects, assess future programming needs and maximize the effective use of resources. While primarily for internal use, information from these quarterly reports may be shared in part or whole with external stakeholders such as the U.S. Congress.

17. The OMB approval information and expiration date for this collection will be displayed.

18. Not applicable. No exceptions are being requested.

B. STATISTICAL METHODS

This collection does not employ statistical methods.