

Original grant application submitted to Peace Corps Kyrgyz Republic
Edited to omit Peace Corps technical documentation
28 April 2023

NARRATIVE

Community Background

Provide background information of the community in which this grant will be implemented.

Ak Chiy is a small farming village located in the Jyrgalan valley, forty kilometers east of Karakol. The economy is dominated by agricultural activities, taking advantage of rich soils and a favorable temperate climate. Rakymov Secondary School, the post office, a clinic, and a few small shops are located in the village, as well as the government offices serving Ak Chiy and two neighboring villages, Kachybek and Sovetskoe.

The school, an established institution serving students from grades one through eleven, is the heart of the community in many ways, with a strong commitment toward improvement.

Many residents of the area have limited ability to access the kind of resources and training that are available in Karakol, due to little time within busy farming activities, and reduced financial means.

Why can Rakymov Secondary School not become an educational facility serving many others, in addition to providing education for children? This project is an attempt to create such a capability.

Probable components:

1. An area of the school devoted to this function.
2. Flexibly usable space with publicly accessible meeting area, resources, media, computer equipment, and internet services.
3. Sustainable funding for development and continued services.
4. Management capacity to adjust services as demand warrants.

The main community partners in this effort are Joomart Rakymov, Director, Rakymov Secondary School, and Ryskeldi Asakeev, Head of Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu. We have also reached out to key individuals in all three villages, and to the Head of Education at the Rayon Center.

My current school staff has no recent experience implementing grants, other than the physical education teacher, who successfully completed an outdoor recreation enclosure funded through a local youth group. His comment in regard to that experience was to make sure you have sufficient cushion in the budget to absorb inevitable cost changes. The Ail Okmotu current staff has no experience either, although several years ago a Peace Corps grant supported resource center was completed in the school at Kachybek.

A Peace Corps Volunteer started service at Rakymov Secondary School in 2019, but that posting was interrupted by the pandemic evacuation in 2020. My posting with the Peace Corps is until August of 2024.

There are two major relevant needs that triggered this project's exploration. The first is the lack of effective resources and teaching materials at Rakymov Secondary School:

- a. The school has no dedicated English classroom or library.
- b. There is no active internet access except in administration and the computer lab.
- c. There is only one classroom equipped with digital projection and a smart board, the computer lab.

The second relevant need is the isolation of Ak Chiy, Kachybek, and Sovetskoe from easily accessible public community facilities:

- a. There are no public libraries or adult education entities.
- b. There is no public internet access.
- c. There are no spaces available for informal small gatherings or non-governmental events.

This grant application addresses these needs by including the following components:

1. Renovation of a classroom. The school building is much larger than currently needed. Generally, south side rooms are occupied, and north side are not. The entire school is minimally heated - south side rooms are the most habitable in the winter. There is a large north side abandoned classroom available on the second floor, near administrative offices.
2. Installation of effective educational equipment.
3. New English textbooks for the entire school, and training in their effective use.
4. Books and other media to be expected for a school resource center, and for community use.

A document showing more detail was to be attached to this application, but VRG would not upload it:

- Detailed Budget

It will be electronically transferred to Peace Corps Kyrgyzstan Republic.

Objectives

Briefly describe the intended results of funding the activities associated with this grant.

This grant will improve the education of students at Rakymov Secondary School. It will also establish a facility available to all citizens of the Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu, enabling them to constructively address their future in spite of their physical isolation.

All our grant development activities have informed citizens of the area about this resource center and its possible uses in the future, as well as benefiting from their own suggestions in its creation. A sense of ownership toward the center will result, and encourage its active use and adaptation over time as the community develops.

The community will see better English language accomplishment in its students. Success in English will enable them to take advantage of positive opportunities for young people in the Karakol area, where tourism is a major economic component. It will also facilitate the future for those wanting to pursue further education and professions appropriate to their natural talents.

There will also be improved access to educational resources for all citizens of the Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu. Farmers will have the capability to organize and hold meetings or classes for new agricultural products and processes, or to address emergent disease threats, or to organize collective marketing of their production. All citizens will have the possibility to engage each other in an organized manner, in an appropriate setting, and with effective administrative support.

The school has an active maintenance crew, whose head is a former electrician. They routinely complete the kind of construction work involved in renovating the abandoned classroom. We will take advantage of that, and other local transport capabilities, as in-kind contributions.

This effort is going to involve many citizens of this community, within its established governmental and educational structures, on a day to day basis. Its successful completion outside of public scrutiny will not be possible.

We will use these governing bodies and their public presentations to inform citizens. We will also adapt and use a web page to keep citizens informed of progress, as well as maintaining active links to submit comments, ideas, or questions, in both English and Russian.

SMART objectives for the Ak Chiy Resource Center:

- S The resource center facility will be completed. It will be used for English education activities and other school functions. The community at large will similarly use the facility, and have a sense of ownership, recognizing the resource center as something important to their lives.
- M Students will show measurable improvement in English language assessments. Community use of the resource center will show increasing activity both in individually logged visits and in scheduled events.
- A Needs have been assessed throughout the community before the grant application, and incorporated into project parameters.
- R Opinion about realistic achievement of the project will be sought from both local authorities and influential citizens.
- T Creation of the center will be accomplished within the Peace Corps Volunteer's service time frame.

Community Involvement

Provide examples that demonstrate the community's involvement in the design and implementation of this grant. Upload supporting documents to the Document section of the grant.

My counterpart and myself first met with the Director of Rakymov Secondary School, Joomart Rakymov, to assess his interest in pursuing such a project. He was enthused. All three of us then met with the Head of the Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu, Ryskeldi Asakeev, and received an equally positive response. He stated the project would be part of next year's budgeting process. We also met with the Head of Education at the Ak-Suu Rayon Center, Altynbek Japarov, and received his support.

Public governing bodies, both at Ak Chiy Ail Okmoty and Rakymov Secondary School, will be responsible for completion of the grant. Their announcements and public presentations will inform citizens. We will also adapt and use a web page to keep citizens informed of progress, as well as maintaining active links to submit comments, ideas, or questions, in both English and Russian. Grant activities do not predate my arrival in Ak Chiy.

Following positive initial responses to the proposed project, we conducted three needs assessment meetings. At each of these we involved all attending in small group discussions, where they expressed ideas, assessed possibilities for success, prioritized their responses, and participated in full group presentations and discussions:

1. With teachers at the school. We were able to involve 17 teachers (most of the faculty).
2. With farmers. We were able to involve 26 active crop and livestock producers.
3. With wives. We were able to involve 11 people, covering many different ages.

In hopes of also gathering input from those in the area not attending our needs assessment meetings, we have done two things:

- a. Created a web page with the project summary and active links to email comments, ideas, or questions, in both English and Russian. <https://www.raffety.net/resourceKGarc.html>
- b. Given everyone we have met a business card with the website address and a request for comment, in Russian.

Documents showing the results of all these needs assessment efforts were to be attached to this application, but VRG would not upload them:

- School Support
- Ail Okmotu Support
- Rayon Support
- Imam Support
- Teachers Needs Assessment
- Farmers Needs Assessment
- Wives Needs Assessment
- Web Page Print
- Business Card Print

They will be electronically transferred to Peace Corps Kyrgyzstan Republic.

Capacity Building

Provide a description of how the activities associated with this grant will contribute to building skills and capacity within the community.

There is already a notably accomplished capacity for agricultural production in Ak Chiy and the surrounding Jyrgalan Valley. However, the opportunities to effectively pursue new avenues are limited. The same is similarly true of Rakymov Secondary School, where English language education has little to support its improvement beyond teacher dedication.

English education will benefit significantly from the results of this grant, as there will be student and teacher access to better textbooks and resources for language instruction. Every movement forward in the language will be magnified as students progress.

Full community accessibility to the resource center will also benefit from the same language resources. An actively administered resource center that encourages everyone's use, and imports outside assistance when appropriate, will build upon itself in the same manner. Working together on common issues inevitably produces transferable skills.

Our community partners will gain skills required to take advantage of such grant funding sources. An understanding of how to soundly base any pursuit on community need, identify existing strengths, and leverage other factors in pursuit of opportunities are skills applicable to many situations, and can have significant long term impact.

Participants and community members will gain the ability to identify possibilities that could be beneficial to them individually, or as groups, and pursue those possibilities in an organized, effective manner.

Sustainability

Discuss your community's plan for sustaining these activities beyond the implementation of this grant.

Beyond this grant, a specifically hired manager for both the school and the public aspects of the resource center will continue. The school's need will be maintaining the center's English language instructional capabilities, and offering effective assistance to all teachers. The community's need will be more wide ranging, including analyzing use patterns, identifying new opportunities, answering expressed desires, and promoting center capabilities and possibilities.

All activities envisioned will continue beyond this grant, capitalizing on the initial facility's completion as well as its active management component.

Language skills will automatically transfer as students gain more capability to express and use their personal talents in a predominantly English speaking world.

Both individuals and the community as a whole will benefit the same as students in regard to language. However, of perhaps more value, the community will gain experience in citizen activity toward common goals, identified problems, and changing situations.

Responsibilities within Rakymov Secondary School will rest with its existing director and administrative structure through the Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu. An English teacher, or someone equally qualified, will be engaged to administer both the school and public aspects of the resource center.

This resource center will be rooted within the community, and within Rakymov Secondary School. In many respects it should become a key anchor of Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu. Its active area-wide functioning will evolve as needs arise, and as experience demonstrates how best to meet those needs.

Documents showing the Ail Okmotu financial and manager commitments were to be attached to this application, but VRG would not upload them:

- Okmotu Financial Match Commitment
- Okmotu Manager Position Commitment

They will be electronically transferred to Peace Corps Kyrgyzstan Republic.

Do No Harm

Every grant has the potential for unexpected negative consequences. Therefore, all grant applicants are required to discuss the potential harm resulting from the grant-funded activities with their community partner. "Harm" is defined as potential negative social, cultural, political, economic, environmental, health, or safety consequences. Please provide the results of this conversation including the identified potential consequences and mitigation plan.

Implementing this grant may cause funding priority competition or disagreement at Ak Chiy Ail Okmotu, as it publicly debates during the budgeting process. There may also arise competitive political interests of which we are currently unaware. Within the school itself, there may be jealousies regarding this kind of expenditure focused on the English language program.

Within the community, this project may arouse an individual who does not share our belief in the benefits of this effort, or who does not believe in the benefits of adult education.

If cases such as the above, or others not envisioned should arise, promoters of this grant will take the following actions:

1. Identify and meet immediately with problem individuals or organizations.
2. Listen to them and reflect what concerns you can in administering the grant implementation.
3. Remember there is potential diminishing of the objection just by accepting opposing input, even if nothing can be significantly changed.

Summary

Provide a brief summary of your grant proposal (250 words or less). Do not include the name of your community, community members, or other identifying information in this section.

The objectives of this grant are two fold. First, the grant will enable creation of a resource center in a rural school where there is currently nothing of this nature. Included will be complete replacement of inappropriate English textbooks, reliable access to the internet, electronic equipment to effectively take advantage of that access, and various media. Second, the resource center will serve as an actively administrated community facility open to the public throughout the year. It will address needs for a public library, a meeting space, and the instigation of citizen activities.

The community is one of farmers, working rich mountain valley soil for crop and livestock production. There are three villages within the administrative unit, but no significant services other than a secondary school, government offices, and a post office. Many residents of the area have limited ability to access the kind of resources and training that are available in more populated areas, due to little time within busy farming activities, and reduced financial means. Such services are also many kilometers distant.

Needs assessment has been completed with teachers, farmers, and the general public. Concurrent with the grant application itself, a funding arrangement is being completed through existing government structures that will ensure active administration and operation of the resource center as a community accessible facility into the future.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Please work with your community to schedule all of the necessary steps to plan, implement, and monitor the activities funded by this grant as well as close out the grant. Projected time lines may change, so you can adjust the dates or add and remove implementation steps as needed at any time in the process. Please be mindful that any unspent funds must be returned and your grant closed out at least one month prior to your Close of Service Date

The most likely logistics challenges to implementing this grant are:

- a. Delays in construction work.
- b. Missed deadlines for receipt of items.
- c. Problems obtaining appropriate purchase receipts.
- d. Problems receiving appropriate documentation of in-kind work.

We will review our potential time frame with all responsible parties, and adjust to suit. For unforeseen problems with implementing the grant, we will respond in a timely manner, and reflect changes in time frame as much as we are able to do so.

Our most likely missed date will be completion of the resource center before the start of school in the fall of 2023. As the center's use as an English classroom is a new addition to current practice, we should be able to revert to current homeroom language instruction.

Implementation of this grant is scheduled almost a year prior to my posting's end, so we also have ample time to readjust as needed.

DOCUMENTS AND FORMS

1. Detailed Budget
2. School Support
3. Ail Okmotu Support
4. Rayon Support
5. Imam Support
6. Teachers Needs Assessment Meeting
7. Farmers Needs Assessment Meeting
8. Wives Assessment Meeting
9. Web page Print
10. Business Card Print
11. Okmotu Financial Match Commitment
12. Okmoty Manager Position Commitment
13. Implementation Plan
14. Graphic Time Frame