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STEVENS INITIATIVE TO FUND VIRTUAL EXCHANGES CONNECTING YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES, MIDDLE EAST, AND NORTH AFRICA

Equipping Young People with 21st Century Skills by to Build a Better World

Washington, DC, October 1, 2015 —The Aspen Institute Stevens Initiative today opened the first in a series of competitions to fund virtual exchanges that equip young people in the United States, the Middle East, and North Africa with the skills they need to gain a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and to succeed in the 21st century.

The deadline for the Stevens Initiative award competition is Nov. 12, 2015. The competition is open to a wide range of U.S. organizations that work with young people, including those enrolled in secondary through post-secondary education, and that either have operated or are interested in operating cross-cultural exchanges. The announcement and application are available at www.stevensinitiative.org.

“This initiative seeks to honor Ambassador Stevens’ legacy by helping to establish relationships based on mutual understanding and respect between our societies. And we are grasping the promise of the digital age to do this,” said Evan Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The Initiative is a multilateral partnership of the family of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens; the U.S. Department of State; the Bezos Family Foundation; the MacArthur Foundation; the governments of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Morocco, and Algeria; and Microsoft; Mozilla; and GoPro.

“Chris believed in the value of each person’s story,” said Dr. Anne Stevens, Ambassador Stevens’ sister. “The Stevens Initiative honors his legacy by tapping into the power of technology to foster meaningful connections and shared respect and understanding between young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa. This is the work that Chris believed in, and would have wanted to continue,” she added.

Virtual exchanges are sustained, technology-supported, people-to-people education programs. As part of the technological movement that is transforming how young people engage with the world, they are distinctive in their use of digital platforms to enable deep, interactive, social learning. In-person exchanges that enhance the virtual components are also part of the Stevens Initiative.

“Virtual exchange is a vehicle for students to catalyze action outside of their comfort zone, assume leadership roles, and work with their peers locally and globally to solve complex problems. Not everyone has the opportunity to get a passport and travel the world. But with

increases in technology, young people do have the opportunity to have a meaningful cross-cultural exchange,” said Mike Bezos, Vice President and Co-Founder of the Bezos Family Foundation and Trustee of the Aspen Institute. “This is why we have invested in virtual exchange and are thrilled that the Aspen Institute is now a leader in this work,” he added.

“Our goal is to utilize the power of global connectivity for a safer and more prosperous world,” said Elliot Gerson, executive vice president of policy and public programs for the Aspen Institute, which manages the Stevens Initiative, which is directed by Melissa Ingber. “To get there, young people must develop 21st century skills, including digital literacy, and cross-cultural communication, leadership, and collaborative problem-solving,” Gerson added.

The Stevens Initiative program award competition will support both new and existing programs. Although this call for proposals is open only to U.S.-based organizations, future competitions will include organizations in other countries. For more information, visit www.stevensinitiative.org. To apply, go to aspen.fluidreview.com.

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, CO; and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.

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