

THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION
ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT

STRATEGY ON ARMENIAN SCHOOLS
& WESTERN ARMENIAN IN LEBANON

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The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Strategy on Armenian Schools and Western Armenian in Lebanon

The Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (henceforth CGF) has long supported Armenian Schools and students around the world; Armenian Schools in the Middle East have particularly been a focal point. This document specifically addresses the Foundation's strategy regarding Armenian schools and educational programs in Lebanon. CGF would like to continue its support in Lebanon, with a special focus on the effective teaching and transmission of the Western Armenian language.

CGF recognizes the many challenges that Lebanese Armenian schools, administrators, and teachers face today, and hopes to take part in helping meet some of those challenges by investing in the schools, the teachers, the students, and ultimately the Western Armenian language. Many efforts have been made and are still being made to keep the language and ensure its vitality, and CGF's strategy is emplaced to complement these efforts. CGF believes that despite the countless and multifaceted difficulties that the Armenian educational system faces in Lebanon today, it is possible to bring about essential changes through collaboration and a long-term vision that is put in action.

CGF has come to realize that in many instances we can no longer take for granted that Armenian schools can "automatically" produce fluent Armenian speakers and intellectuals. While it is true that Armenian schools in Lebanon still produce Armenian-speaking generations, this does not necessarily mean that they master the language or that they can be the Western Armenian

thinkers, writers, and readers of tomorrow. It has become clear that during the last decades, Western Armenian has almost always been offered to its learners solely within the Armenian national context and less as a language of creativity and a language of the world. We therefore need to be the catalysts of a much-needed profound pedagogic reform that would enhance the emergence of a new Western Armenian speaking generation that can make it a language of innovation and reflection - a generation that *internalizes* the language and *creates* in it.

This entails a fundamental realignment in CGF's approach in its grant making, which necessitates linking its funds to specific activities and programs. Two factors have led us to this more "hands-on" approach: the realities or needs on the ground, and CGF's determination to see impact in the strengthening of Western Armenian. Thus, we will focus on schools, on the preparation of teachers, on language-related projects, and on youth creativity by:

- 1. Working with and supporting Armenian Schools in Lebanon for specific initiatives**
- 2. Giving Scholarships to Armenian university students to major in the field of Education**
- 3. Supporting creativity in Western Armenian through the youth**
- 4. Supporting other language-related initiatives that are currently in place and that merit support**

In addition, another need that should be addressed further is the field of:

- 5. Special Education**, which is an integral component of Education and has the same fundamental purposes as that of regular education, its main objective being the optimal development of each child as a skillful and purposeful person who is able to reach his/her highest potential as an individual and as a member of society.

Hence our programming in Lebanon will be based on 5 pillars: working with schools on specific initiatives and programs, giving scholarships for studying Education, supporting creativity in Western Armenian, supporting a number of other language-related initiatives, and supporting Special Education.

1 | FIRST AREA OF FOCUS: THE ARMENIAN SCHOOLS IN LEBANON

We would like to work closely with Lebanese-Armenian Schools, in order to:

- A. Help teachers with (re)training, so they can adapt to new ways of language instruction, and
- B. Help boost the (Armenian) education system through the CGF Armenian School Grant Program

Our involvement will be on two levels:

1.A First, we will focus on teachers. By the general term teacher, we mean any teacher who teaches using Western Armenian as a language of instruction; this includes teachers of all sections (from kindergarten to high school), who teach the language, history, religion, art, math, science, social studies, physical education or any other subject in Western Armenian. There are two interrelated components in our focus on teachers:

- a. Teachers are responsible for each new generation of learners and should be regarded as some of the most influential and responsible individuals within the community. CGF would like to provide **continuous training for teachers**, so they can stay competitive with the country's educational system and the world. Teachers using Western Armenian as a language of instruction also need to be continuously growing and learning new skills and ways to effectively teach children and youth, thus, we will give grants to teachers so they can attend appropriate teacher-training programs in Lebanon or elsewhere in the Diaspora.
- b. We are aware, however, that it would be difficult to find appropriate teacher-training programs in Lebanon that would meet the specific and contemporary needs of today's teachers who teach in the Armenian language, we will therefore fund the creation of a **specific teacher-training program**, in collaboration with local university/ies.

By providing funding for a) attending teacher-training programs and b) designing a custom-made teacher-training program, we hope to foster a culture of innovative language teaching that will be continuously updated and improved, which will help make education and specifically the acquisition of the Armenian language and culture interesting again for youth. Thus, our focus will be on training, supporting, and recruiting teachers.

PRACTICAL STEPS:

- CGF will provide funding in the form of grants to teachers working with and in Western Armenian who wish to improve their competences as educators. Through this grant program, any teacher working with Western Armenian as a language of instruction, from any of the Armenian schools in Lebanon, will be considered for a grant to attend a mutually agreed upon teacher-training program.
- CGF will collaborate with and provide funding to local Lebanese university/ies in order to help design a special teacher-training course or program that would correspond to the needs of the teachers who already work as educators in Armenian schools today. This could be a two-pronged course or program made up of pedagogic approaches to language teaching on the one hand, and Armenian content adapted to new methods of teaching on the other. The aim of the latter is to strengthen the practice of teaching Armenian and teaching in Armenian in a creative manner.
- CGF plans to give up to 15 scholarships to Armenian content teachers who wish to attend a mutually agreed upon teacher-training program.

1.B Second, we will work directly with Armenian schools in Lebanon in order to give them the opportunity to develop **innovative educational project** proposals within the framework of the **CGF Armenian School Grant Program**. The aim of this program is to contribute to the improvement of schools in general, and to enhance Western Armenian in particular.

CGF believes that the initiative to meet the need for reform and to bring essential changes to improve schools should come from within the school and should be based on the school's needs and its development perspectives. School administrations and staff – including teachers – are best placed to identify their needs and work together towards developing a plan or project wherein these needs can be met and reforms can be envisioned and implemented.

CGF realizes that renewal and reform efforts often falter because schools lack effective action plans and the financial resources to implement them. Thus, CGF would like to offer schools that strive to meet the challenges of renewal and the challenges of updating their pedagogy or learning-related services, the financial means to implement specific activities meant to improve the school.

The *CGF Armenian School Grant Program* intends to give schools the possibility to develop a substantive project that addresses any aspect of professional practice within the school or any pressing issues in education. The grant will allow selected schools to implement innovative teaching practices or to pilot new approaches that reflect the latest educational thinking. Initiatives could include, among others, the development of new curricula, the purchase of new pedagogic tools, the use of information technologies (e.g. language apps), classroom libraries, after school or student-led activities, and, importantly, the development of new teaching methodologies such as project-based learning.

For example, a school might want to incorporate project-based learning activities into existing syllabi to enhance the teaching of Western Armenian through innovative ways that facilitate student learning and language acquisition (a must for the vitality and advancement of the language).

Funds from the *CGF Armenian School Grant Program* can be used to update the school curriculum so that students experience Western Armenian as their language of thinking and living today, and not just as a heritage language of the past. Through this new teaching method, students will develop deep content knowledge as well as critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills in the context of doing authentic, meaningful projects. As such, the CGF grant will produce some impact on ensuring the vitality of Western Armenian. This is one example of how the Foundation envisions the use of its funds.

CGF will appoint a coordinator in Lebanon to help administer the *CGF Armenian School Grant Program*. The coordinator will adopt a hands-on approach in working closely with school administrations and staff, including teachers, and where appropriate students, in order to help with the development and implementation of the school projects that have been awarded a *CGF Armenian School Grant*, and to follow their progress closely. The Lebanon-based coordinator will provide guidance and assistance throughout the project development and implementation phases, ensuring close collaboration between the schools and CGF.

PRACTICAL STEPS:

- CGF will appoint a local coordinator in Lebanon to implement the *CGF Armenian School Grant Program*, working with school administrations and staff, and accompanying the selected projects.
- CGF will provide support and funding for the development and implementation of the school projects. The coordinator's task would also include giving suggestions to schools for the type of projects that would interest CGF.
- Through the *CGF Armenian School Grant Program*, CGF plans to give up to 3 major grants to Armenian schools in Lebanon who submit proposals and whose submissions are successful.

2 | SECOND AREA OF FOCUS: PREPARING THE EDUCATORS OF TOMORROW

In parallel to focusing on retraining current teachers and the CGF Armenian School Grant Program, it is essential to focus on preparing the teachers of tomorrow. The demand for great teachers is a pressing need and there is currently a serious shortage of Western Armenian language and content teachers in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Diaspora.

Nowadays, when we think of innovation, we usually think of technology, but technological innovations in education cannot be a replacement for good teachers and the human interaction that goes with it. Thus, in a field such as education, it is just as important to focus on innovations in areas such as child psychology, learning theories, and teaching methods. We have a critical need for educators whose vision stretches beyond existing structures that depend on increasingly ineffective methods of teaching. To address this particular need, CGF will establish a **Scholarship Program** that will give students the possibility to major in the field of Education.

Within the scope of this grant program, we also hope to foster a culture of research and the development of policy-making regarding Armenian schools in general, and the teaching of Western Armenian in particular, with the intention to identify the best educational practices. We hope to achieve this to some extent by

encouraging and sensitizing students who are studying Education at university to bring their knowledge and acquired competences as future educators into the Armenian educational context by doing their major course assignments, projects, and theses within the context of Armenian schools.

In order to prepare the teachers of tomorrow and to help develop a culture of policy-making with regards to Western Armenian, CGF will give scholarships to those who wish to major in the field of Education. Showing that being the Armenian content teachers of the future can be rewarding is an integral part of this mission, thus we will also work with the schools in order to sensitize the youth and open them towards the prospect of becoming Armenian content teachers.

CGF would like to invest in these future teachers and would like to provide continuous support to ensure that their work and dedication is valorized.

PRACTICAL STEPS:

- CGF will give a number of scholarships at BA and MA levels to Armenian students from different schools in Lebanon who wish to specialize in the field of Education at major universities in Lebanon.
- Upon graduation, CGF will consider providing the new teachers financial incentives to teach in Armenian schools.
- CGF will collaborate with certain universities in Lebanon who offer the best programs in the field of Education that also match with CGF's views and criteria in terms of course content and approach.
- CGF will collaborate with local and international professionals in the field to develop an Armenian language/culture content course (e.g. in the form of a yearly seminar, an online course, or another appropriate mechanism) that would be incorporated into the university's Education program with the aim of developing the students' linguistic, cultural, analytic, and critical thinking skills in the Western Armenian language.
- CGF will also consider granting scholarship awardees the chance to participate in short-term educational programs around the world (e.g. internships).
- CGF plans to give up to 3 full scholarships to Armenian students who wish to major in Education.

3 | THIRD AREA OF FOCUS: YOUTH AND CREATIVITY

We would like to encourage young Armenians – 18 to 35 years old – to produce any form of culture in the Western Armenian language; the term culture is taken in its broad sense of encompassing the arts, heritage, and the humanities.

Through the **CGF Creative Culture Program** in Lebanon, which will be established in order to give youth the opportunity to create in Western Armenian, CGF will consider supporting various projects that encompass the **creative** expression of ideas, experiences, and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts,

literature, visual arts, and the interdisciplinary and hybrid forms that have emerged thanks to new media. It is essential to create in the language in order to ensure its contemporariness, its development, and ultimately its survival.

PRACTICAL STEPS:

- Within the scope of the *CGF Creative Culture Program*, a number of grants will be given to cultural projects conceived and implemented in Western Armenian. The projects will be chosen based on specific criteria and guidelines provided beforehand.
- There will be an open call for project proposals as well as competitions, which will also be announced in Armenian schools in Lebanon.
- The CGF coordinator in Lebanon will provide guidance to the awardees for the implementation of these creative projects with a special focus on quality.
- CGF would like to fund up to **5 projects** per year, however this number can vary based on the number of applications received and the number of projects that merit funding.

4 | FOURTH AREA OF FOCUS: SUPPORTING LANGUAGE-RELATED INITIATIVES

There are other institutions or initiatives in Lebanon that work on the preservation and vitality of Western Armenian. These include, for example, some of the activities undertaken by the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia and the Haigazian University. CGF will strive to collaborate with such institutions in support of some of their Western Armenian-related projects.

PRACTICAL STEPS:

- CGF will consider funding some of the language-related initiatives undertaken by other institutions in Lebanon.
- CGF will fast track the approval process of projects submitted from Lebanon that pertain to Western Armenian.

5 | FIFTH AREA OF FOCUS: SUPPORTING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Recognizing the importance of inclusive education and bearing in mind that Special Education is a necessary component of Education in general, we will continue supporting Special Education in Lebanon within the Lebanese-Armenian community context and the Lebanese-Armenian schools setting.

Ensuring that children with special educational needs have a support system outside the school as well as within mainstream education, and the lack of such resources in Lebanon, necessitates funding to help strengthen existing institutions that work on Special Education.

Working with special needs students requires a level of training that specifically accommodates individuals

with exceptionalities. Teachers and administrators who work with special needs students constantly learn how to identify disabilities and design tailored curricula.

Besides supporting current teachers and institutions that cater the Special Education needs of students and children, we would also like to help ensure that there are enough professionals who will be the Special Needs Instructors of tomorrow.

PRACTICAL STEPS:

- CGF will continue supporting the specific programs of organizations focusing on Special Education and will provide further funding and assistance to the development of Special Education within specialized centers as well as within mainstream Armenian Schools.
- CGF will continue to give scholarships to those who wish to major in Special Education.

CONCLUSION

For the Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lebanon is an important beacon of the Western Armenian language and identity. But CGF also recognizes the many challenges facing the schools and Armenian education in general. Much like the 1920s, when an Armenian-speaking community was created, we need to devise a strategy and an approach that is not defeatist; we need to be visionary and yet realistic, forward looking and yet grounded in unavoidable current realities and structures. It is not just a question of sending funds but of obtaining a common objective: to keep the language alive and flourishing. For this to happen, young people have to be excited about the language and have to use it on a daily basis in order to understand and discover the world through it; teachers and schools have to encourage this excitement and be conduits of it; community leaders and intellectuals have to recognize that ensuring the vitality of Western Armenian is not merely a question of mastering the language grammatically but of giving spaces and opportunities to the next generation to express itself creatively – in Western Armenian. This is where the Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation can bring its value added. It will spend its funds on tangible initiatives that have impact.