**General Proposal for Marshall Direct Fund:**

Marshall Direct Fund is dedicated to alleviating poverty in Pakistani communities by providing free, quality education for girls and their brothers and economic empowerment opportunities for women.

**The Project**

Poverty, educational deprivation and child-marriage are systemic problems that afflict individuals as well as communities in Pakistan, with girls and women bearing a disproportionate share of social, cultural and even physical burdens. Together, these burdens mutually reinforce one another, reifying the unjust status quo and ultimately resulting in pathological as opposed to sustainable development.

Reasons for the continued injustice of impoverished Pakistani girls and women face are multifarious and systemic. Poverty, lack of opportunity, cultural stigma and physical impairment are mutually reinforcing burdens that reproduce gendered inequality along with its varied harms. Notably, in Pakistan there is a deep-rooted mentality that boys are worth more than girls and along with this, the idea that it is more beneficial to focus on boys education as opposed to girls. This cultural stigma that attaches to girls has it’s rationale in the self-fulfilling prophecy of female unemployment, deprivation and dependency. The cycle of poverty persists for girls largely because people assume poor girls will fulfill domestic roles and therefore don’t need an education and don’t need to acquire marketable skills. To avoid the economic burden of caring for their dependents, parents marry their daughters off early. This has the outcome of effectively sealing their daughters’ fates as life-long dependents. Impoverished Pakistani girls become women who have never had, nor will ever have, a chance to gain the skills and qualifications needed earn a viable income. They are rendered incapable of contributing to the financial well being of their family members and the stability of their communities.

Since its inception in 2007, Marshall Direct Fund has established two schools in Pakistan, and developed deep connection with the communities we have launched our program. Marshall Direct Fund only operates where we are invited and work with a trusted team of local Pakistanis that execute project goals. By combining education with vocational training we provide both children—particularly girls, who are the most vulnerable—and their mothers the opportunity to attain a future of economic stability, improved livelihoods, delay early forced marriages and keep children out of full time forced employment.

Marshall Direct Fund focuses on building and sustaining the welfare of Pakistan’s girls and women. Research shows that giving girls a formal education through at least the fifth grade level lowers infant mortality rate, reduces population expansion, and improves basic health. A woman who had had just a few years of schooling is much more likely to send her own children to school.

By maximizing the space already being used by our schools for youth education, mothers and older sisters of students can utilize the classrooms and the accompanying space of the buildings to come together in a safe and secure space. In the conservative Muslim culture women are not permitted the same freedoms to work where she would please. By designating space where women can congregate in a socially accepted manner these women can then improve upon existing skills and participate in activities that contribute to her family income.

Marshall Direct Fund conducts training where women receive business skills education and technical vocational training over a four-month period. By transferring high-value market knowledge and facilitating market linkages, we can develop a stream of income to provide long-term sustainability for the schools and families we support.

**Project budget and projected needs**

Marshall Direct Fund seeks $36,000 per year to support 2,000 women and girls a year to receive business training and vocational skills development.

**History of Marshall Direct Fund**

The name of the organization is inspired by George Marshall, whom initiated the Marshall Plan, rebuilding war-torn Europe after World War II. Like Marshall, we believe that investment in people is the only way to revive a society. Founder and President, Silbi Kelly Stainton, possesses a Master’s Degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, with a focus on International Security Studies and International Negotiation and Conflict Management. Silbi had a geographic focus on the Middle East and Central Asia and was studying the Taliban prior to 9/11. MDF was born from an observation of the shortfalls of US policy and the desire to work toward stability by improving relations between the West and the Muslim world through poverty relief.

Since its initiation Marshall Direct Fund has undergone one major milestones. In 2013 Moqah Foundation was formally registered as the implementing organization in Pakistan, which allowed for local fundraising efforts, increased monitoring capacity, and fostered community building efforts in the areas where we work. Though differing in name, Moqah Foundation was borne from Marshall Direct Fund. In Urdu, “Moqah” means opportunity. We selected this name for our sister organization to ground it firmly within the social consciousness of the community, which a more Americanized name like “Marshall Direct Fund” would not allow for. Moqah Foundation’s  team is comprised of highly qualified individuals who are familiar with the developmental needs and realities of the communities in Pakistan where we operate. The second major milestone occurred more recently in 2017, when our joint Executive Director recognized the significant impacts our programs have had on delaying early child marriage and early pregnancy as well as preventing child labor.

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Marshall Direct Fund and our on the ground implementing partner organization, Moqah, were both founded in 2007 by Silbi Stainton. Having studied international security with emphasis on terrorism and asymmetric threat in the Middle East and South Asia, Stainton originally started the organization in response to what she saw as a failure in governmental, diplomatic and economic efforts to eliminate the sources of social unrest in Pakistan that provide fertile ground for radicalization of youth and violent extremism.

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**Why give to Marshall Direct Fund**

Our goal is to move women and girls from poverty to opportunity, enabling them to have lifelong economic independence and overall improved quality of life. We foster the building of gender equity through allowing boys to attend our schools only if their sisters are enrolled. We focus on the building our project participants long term financial independence by equipping them with the skills, knowledge of their rights and support to be successful in their own right.