

STATUS Update June 1, 2025: The Embassy Sofia Small Grants Program is accepting proposals for Financial Year 2025. Proposals will be reviewed when funding is available. As such, you may not hear back from us immediately. Projects that start before September are unlikely to be reviewed in time. Please submit proposals no later than July 25th. All projects will be reviewed by August 22 with responses going out no later than August 29, 2025.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
U.S. EMBASSY SOFIA, PUBLIC DIPLOMACY SECTION
Notice of Funding Opportunity**

Funding Opportunity Title:	U.S. Embassy Sofia PDS Annual Program Statement
Funding Opportunity Number:	PDS-APS-FY25-01.rev-SOFIA
Deadline for Applications:	Rolling deadlines based on funding availability; final deadline 5:00 p.m. Sofia time, July 25, 2025
Assistance Listing Number (CFDA):	19.040 – Public Diplomacy Programs
Type of Funding:	FY25 Smith Mundt and Fulbright-Hays Act Public Diplomacy Funds
Total Amount Available:	TBD; pending availability of funds
Maximum for Each Award:	\$25,000.00

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Embassy Sofia Public Diplomacy Section (PDS) of the U.S. Department of State is pleased to announce that funding is available through its Public Diplomacy Small Grants Program. This is an Annual Program Statement, outlining our funding priorities, the strategic themes we focus on, and the procedures for submitting requests for funding. Please carefully follow all instructions below.

Small Grants Program Goals and Objectives: PDS Sofia invites proposals for programs that align with U.S. administration objectives to make the U.S. safer, stronger, and more prosperous and comply with all Executive Orders. All programs must include a U.S. element, or clear connection with American expert/s, organization/s, or institution/s in a specific field that will promote these priorities.

Priority Program Areas: Competitive proposals should focus on one or more of the following areas:

- Programs showcasing American leadership and innovation—teaching U.S. best practices/achievements in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, science, technology, energy, and cybersecurity to secondary and university students, especially from regions outside major cities.

- Programs that celebrate American culture, scientific advances, and innovation ahead of America's 250th anniversary.
- Programs that increase English language proficiency, unlocking economic opportunities, increasing understanding of U.S. policy priorities, and establishing an environment for even stronger future cooperation.
- Programs that build active, sustainable networks of alumni from U.S. exchange programs or U.S. educational institutions who understand U.S. and Bulgarian shared priorities and advocate for them within their local communities.
- Programs that forge partnerships between U.S. and Bulgarian educational, cultural, or civic society organizations/institutions, including the development of joint- degree programs, internships, trainings or exchanges, in strategic areas like energy security/cooperation, cybersecurity, biotechnology, AI, etc.
- Programs that foster closer people-to-people ties between Bulgarians and other U.S. allies/neighbors in the region—increasing trust and promoting regional economic and security self-sufficiency.
- Programs that increase interest in and opportunities for Bulgarians to study in the United States and Americans to study in Bulgaria.
- Programs that promote the protection of intellectual property (IP) rights, enabling an environment for creative innovation and incentivizing new investments.
- Programs that ensure accurate local media coverage of U.S. priorities/policies to audiences most susceptible to foreign propaganda; or programs that increase awareness of foreign actors' efforts to undermine U.S. interests.

Participants and Audiences: Project activities must primarily take place or be initiated in Bulgaria and should be directed towards Bulgarian and/or regional (non-U.S. citizen) audiences/participants. Audiences, which will vary by program and focus, include but are not limited to students (particularly at secondary and university levels), academics and think-tanks, government officials (at all levels), journalists, professionals in strategic areas, entrepreneurs, etc.

While not required, **special consideration will be given to projects including components that reach audiences outside of Sofia, in regions with less exposure to the United States**, including Northwest and Southeast Bulgaria and the Black Sea region.

Grantees are also encouraged to host programming and take advantage of existing resources at American Corners in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, and Burgas, especially when programming involves youth (secondary/university) audiences.

The following types of programs are not eligible for funding:

- Programs relating to partisan political activity;
- Charitable activities;
- Construction programs;
- Programs that support specific religious activities;
- Fundraising campaigns;
- Lobbying for specific legislation or programs;
- Scientific research;
- Programs intended primarily for the growth or institutional development of the organization;
- Programs that duplicate existing programs; or
- For-profit programs.

Authorizing legislation, type and year of funding: Funding authority rests in the Smith-Mundt Act and the Fulbright-Hays Act. The source of funding is Fiscal Year 2025 Public Diplomacy Funding.

Deadlines and Funding Decisions: Proposals will be evaluated on a rolling basis based on the availability of funds. However, the final deadline for FY 25 proposals will be **5:00 p.m. Sofia time on July 25, 2025**. We recommend submitting proposals when ready and not waiting until the July 25 deadline as funding may be depleted by then. No exceptions will be given for late or incomplete proposals. *Note: see Submission Dates and Times in Part D below for more specific information.*

Whenever possible, applicants should submit proposals for projects at least 2-3 months prior to anticipated program start dates. *PDS Sofia is generally unable to approve/fund proposals that are submitted last minute and are slated to begin 1-1.5 months after they are submitted.*

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Length of performance period: up to 12 months

Number of awards anticipated: TBD; depends on funding availability

Award amounts: award amount may range from a minimum of \$500 to a maximum of \$25,000

Total available funding: TBD based on funding availability

Type of Funding: Fiscal Year 2025 Public Diplomacy Funding

Funding Instrument Type: Grants, Fixed Amount Awards (FAA), or Cooperative Agreements.

Please note, this notice is subject to availability of funding.

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Eligible Applicants

The Public Diplomacy Section encourages applications from Bulgarian, European or, U.S.-based organizations and individuals with proven experience of executing programs. Proposals that demonstrate the long-term sustainability of the proposed project will receive priority. Organizations may include:

- Registered not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations with programming experience
- Individuals
- Non-profit or governmental educational institutions
- Foreign Public Entities (FPE) and Governmental institutions

For-profit or commercial entities are not eligible to apply.

Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing is not required.

Other Eligibility Requirements

All Applicants:

- In order to be eligible to receive an award, all organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number issued via www.SAM.gov.
- Certification Regarding Compliance with applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws:
 - If the place of performance or delivery of the award is within the United States none of the funds awarded under this agreement may be used for any initiatives or programs, or any activities that do not comply with Executive Order 14173 titled Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity. The Recipient shall submit, prior to award or upon request from Grants Officer, a certification that confirms: 1. Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government's payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and; 2. It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws.
 - If the place of performance or delivery is outside the United States, the above provision does not apply.

Foreign Organizations or Foreign Public Entities (FPEs):

- Full SAM.gov registration is no longer required for foreign organizations or FPEs receiving an award less than \$500,000 that will be performed outside the United States. Exemptions will be provided on a case-by-case basis by the Grants Officer. However, per the guidance above, you still need to acquire a UEI number via www.SAM.gov.

U.S. Organizations

- U.S. organizations applying for awards will still need to obtain a UEI and complete the full SAM.gov registration process via www.SAM.gov.

U.S. Institutions of Higher Education (IHE)

- This policy applies to IHEs located in the United States.

Applicants are advised that IHEs must certify the following at the time of award, and that this certification requirement must be included in any subaward agreements to IHEs:

Its compliance in all respects with section 1011f of title 20, United States Code, and any other applicable foreign funding disclosure requirements is material for purposes of section 3729 of title 31, United States Code, and for receipt of appropriate Federal grant funds.

As defined in 2 CFR 200.1 and 20 U.S.C. 1001, an IHE is an educational institution in any U.S. state that:

- (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate, or persons who meet the requirements of section 1091(d) of this title;
- (2) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education;
- (3) provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit
- (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and
- (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

Foreign or U.S. Individuals

- If the award will be issued to an individual you are not required to have a UEI or be registered in SAM.gov.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Content and Form of Application Submission

Please follow all instructions below carefully. Proposals that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated requirements will be ineligible.

Content of Application

Please ensure:

- The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity
- All documents are in English
- All budgets are in U.S. dollars
- All pages are numbered
- All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, 12-point Calibri font, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.

The following documents are **REQUIRED**:

1. Mandatory application forms

Note: links to exact forms below may change as they are updated so please check the higher-level websites for organizations/individuals if the links do not work.

For Organizations: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/sf-424-family>

- [SF-424](#) (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations)
- [SF424A](#) (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs)
- [SF424B](#) (Assurances for Non-Construction programs)
 - Note: the SF-424B is required for individuals and for organizations not required to fully register in SAM.gov. Please assume this is mandatory unless you are told specifically not to fill it out.

For Individuals: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/sf-424-individual-family>

- [SF-424-I](#) (Application for Federal Assistance – Individual)
- [SF424A](#) (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs)
- [SF424B](#) (Assurances for Non-Construction programs)
 - Note: the SF-424B is required for individuals and for organizations not required to fully register in SAM.gov. Please assume this is mandatory unless you are told specifically not to fill it out.

Note: if you open the higher-level pages instead of downloading the forms directly, please ignore the warning at the top of the grants.gov page that says the PDF forms are for sample purposes and should not be submitted.

Please note that in order to be able to view and fill in the required forms, you need to download these PDF files onto your computer, right-click the document and select Open with

Adobe. If you get a message “*The document you are trying to load requires Adobe Reader 8 or higher*”, update your Adobe to the required version. Then select “*Enable all features*” in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.

2. Summary Page: Cover sheet stating the applicant’s name and organization, proposal date, program title, program period proposed start and end date, and brief purpose of the program.

3. Proposal (10 pages maximum): The proposal should contain sufficient information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the applicant wants to do. You may use your own proposal format, but it must include all the items below.

- **Proposal Summary:** Short narrative that outlines the proposed program, including program objectives and anticipated impact.
- **Introduction to the Organization or Individual applying:** A description of past and present operations, showing ability to carry out the program, including information on all previous grants from the U.S. Embassy and/or U.S. government agencies.
- **Problem Statement:** Clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed and why the proposed program is needed.
- **Program Goals and Objectives:** The “goals” describe what the program is intended to achieve. What aspect of the relationship between the United States and Bulgaria will be improved? The “objectives” refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be specific, achievable, and measurable. Describe the target audiences.
- **Program Activities:** Describe the program activities and how they will help achieve the objectives.
- **Program Methods and Design:** A description of how the program is expected to work to solve the stated problem and achieve the goal.
- **Proposed Program Schedule:** The proposed timeline for the program activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.
- **Key Personnel:** Names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program. What proportion of their time will be used in support of this program?
- **Program Partners:** List the names and type of involvement of key partner organizations and sub-awardees.
- **Program Monitoring and Evaluation Plan:** This is an important part of successful grants. Throughout the timeframe of the grant, how will the activities be monitored to ensure they are happening in a timely manner, and how will the program be evaluated to make sure it is meeting the goals of the grant?
- **Metrics:** Proposal should include *measurable* indicators and metrics that demonstrate program activities’ impact and success.
- **Communication and Outreach Plan:** Clearly indicate how you will communicate to specific external audiences about your program in all phases – from recruitment to implementation. What methods will you use? Can the Embassy’s social media channels help amplify your efforts? Do you anticipate Embassy participation in specific events?

Provide as many details as possible on your overall communication and outreach strategy and any Embassy role you envision in these plans.

- **Future Funding or Sustainability:** Applicant's plan for continuing the program beyond the grant period, or the availability of other resources, if applicable.
- **Previous U.S. Government Grants:** Include information on all previous grants from U.S. Embassy Sofia and/or U.S. government agencies.

4. Budget Justification Narrative: After filling out the [SF-424A](#) Budget, use a separate Word document or Excel spreadsheet to describe each of the budget expenses in detail. See section *H. Other Information: Guidelines for Budget Submissions* below for further information.

5. Suggested Attachments

- 1-page CV or resume of key personnel who are proposed for the program
- Letters of support from program partners describing the roles and responsibilities of each partner
- Official permission letters, if required for program activities
- Verification of the non-profit registration
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number

Required Registrations:

- **All organizations**, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) through www.sam.gov. Please note the UEI for sub-grantees is not required at the time of application but will be required before an award is processed and/or directed to a sub-grantee.
- **Organizations based in the United States** must obtain a UEI number and also fully register in SAM.gov. Organizations based in the United States or that pay employees within the United States will need an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and a UEI number prior to registering in SAM.gov.
- **Foreign and U.S. individuals** are not required to register in SAM.gov or obtain a UEI.

Exemptions

Exemptions from obtaining full SAM.gov registrations will be provided by the Grants Officer on a case-by-case basis if applicants meet all applicable requirements. All organizations must obtain a UEI and while exemptions to this requirement are possible, they will only be issued in extreme circumstances. Organizations requesting an exemption from this requirement must email SofiaGrants@state.gov at least two weeks prior to the deadline in the NOFO providing a justification of their request. Exemptions for UEI registration are rarely provided by Grants Officers.

Submission Dates and Times

PDS Sofia will accept proposals throughout the year based on fund availability with a final deadline of 5:00 p.m. on July 25, 2025. All projects will be reviewed by August 22 with responses going out no later than August 29, 2025.

Programs should plan to commence no earlier than one month after review panels meet Applicants are encouraged to indicate if project start dates are flexible.

Funding Restrictions

None of the funds awarded resulting from this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be made available for subawards, direct financial support, or otherwise used to provide any payment or transfer to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Other Submission Requirements

All application materials must be submitted by email to SofiaGrants@state.gov
Please do not/not submit forms electronically through www.Grants.gov or MyGrants.

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Criteria

Each application will be evaluated and rated based on the evaluation criteria outlined below:

- **Completeness:** The proposal must include all required elements.
- **Organizational capacity and record on previous grants (if applicable):** The organization has expertise in its stated field and PDS is confident of its ability to undertake the program. This includes a financial management system and a bank account.
- **Quality and Feasibility of the Program** – The program idea is well developed, with detail about how program activities will be carried out. The proposal includes a reasonable implementation timeline. The program goals and objectives are clearly stated, realistic, and measurable. The staff, budget, and program approach are likely to achieve the proposed results.
- **U.S. Component and Alignment with Priority Themes:** Applicant has clearly described how stated goals are related to and support U.S. Embassy Sofia's priority areas or target audiences and the U.S. element, or clear connection with American expert/s, organization/s, or institution/s in a specific field that will promote increased understanding of U.S. policy and perspectives.
- **Budget:** The budget justification is detailed. Costs are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results. The budget is realistic, accounting for all necessary expenses to achieve proposed activities.

- **Monitoring and evaluation plan:** Applicant demonstrates the ability to measure program success against key indicators and provide milestones to indicate progress toward goals outlined in the proposal. The program includes output and outcome indicators and shows how and when those will be measured.
- **Impact and Sustainability:** Program activities will continue to have positive impact after the end of the program.

Review and Selection Process: A Grants Review Committee will evaluate all eligible applications.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

Federal Award Notices

The award or cooperative agreement will be written, signed, awarded, and administered by the Grants Officer. The award agreement is the authorizing document, and it will be provided to the recipient for review and signature by email. The recipient may only start incurring program expenses beginning on the start date shown on the grant award document signed by the Grants Officer.

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the discretion of the Department of State.

Issuance of this Notice of Funding Opportunity does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

Unsuccessful applicants: Unsuccessful applicants will be notified via email within a month from the application deadline.

Payment Method: Recipients will be required to request payments by completing form [SF-270—Request for Advance or Reimbursement](#) and submitting the form to the Grants Officer. Payments will be made in at least two installments, as needed to carry out the program activities.

Terms and Conditions: Before submitting an application, applicants should review all the terms and conditions and required certifications which will apply to this award, to ensure that they will be able to comply. These include: [2 CFR 200](#), [2 CFR 600](#), Certifications and Assurances, and the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, all of which are available at: <https://www.state.gov/federal-assistance-policies-appeals/>

<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5>

Branding Requirements: Unless the Grants Officer provides an exemption, awardees are required to follow branding and marking requirements in the Standard Terms and Conditions. Flag logos for inclusion in program materials, can be downloaded here:

<https://bg.usembassy.gov/embassy/sofia/embassy-sofia-flag-logo/>

Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit program and financial reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted.

G. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACTS

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact PDS at: SofiaGrants@state.gov.

H. OTHER INFORMATION

Guidelines for Budget Justification

Personnel and Fringe Benefits: Describe the wages, salaries, and benefits of temporary or permanent staff who will be working directly for the applicant on the program, and the percentage of their time that will be spent on the program.

Travel: Estimate the costs of travel and per diem for this program, for program staff, consultants or speakers, and participants/beneficiaries. If the program involves international travel, include a brief statement of justification for that travel.

Equipment: Describe any machinery, furniture, or other personal property that is required for the program, which has a useful life of more than one year (or a life longer than the duration of the program), and costs at least \$10,000 per unit.

Supplies: List and describe all the items and materials, including any computer devices, that are needed for the program. If an item costs more than \$10,000 per unit, then put it in the budget under Equipment.

Contractual: Describe goods and services that the applicant plans to acquire through a contract with a vendor. Also describe any sub-awards to non-profit partners that will help carry out the program activities.

Other Direct Costs: Describe other costs directly associated with the program, which do not fit in the other categories. For example, shipping costs for materials and equipment or applicable taxes. All “Other” or “Miscellaneous” expenses must be itemized and explained.

Indirect Costs: These are costs that cannot be linked directly to the program activities, such as overhead costs needed to help keep the organization operating. If your organization has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA) and includes NICRA charges in the budget, attach a copy of your latest NICRA. Organizations that have never had a NICRA may request indirect costs of 15% of Modified Total Direct Costs as defined in 2 CFR 200.1.

“Cost Sharing” refers to contributions from the organization or other entities other than the U.S. Embassy. It also includes in-kind contributions such as volunteers’ time and donated venues.

Entertainment Costs: Costs of entertainment, including amusement, diversion, and social activities and any associated costs are unallowable, except where specific costs that might otherwise be considered entertainment have a programmatic purpose and are authorized either in the approved budget for the Federal award or with prior written approval of the Federal awarding agency.

Alcoholic Beverages: Please note that award funds cannot be used for alcoholic beverages.