



# Educational and Cultural Affairs

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

**U.S. Department of State  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)  
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)  
FY 2026 Community Solutions Program  
Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0018816  
Application Deadline: July 23, 2026**

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## **A. Basic Information**

### **1. Overview.**

<b>Funding Opportunity Title</b>	FY26 Community Solutions Program
<b>Funding Opportunity Number</b>	DFOP0018816
<b>Announcement Type</b>	New Cooperative Agreement
<b>Deadline for Applications</b>	July 23, 2026 11:59pm Eastern (Washington DC time)
<b>Assistance Listing Number</b>	19.415
<b>Length of Performance Period</b>	28 months

<b>Number of Awards Anticipated</b>	One award
<b>Award Amount</b>	Approximately \$3,000,000
<b>Total Available Funding</b>	\$3,000,000, pending availability of funds
<b>Type of Funding</b>	FY26 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
<b>Funding Instrument Type</b>	Cooperative Agreement
<b>Anticipated Award Date</b>	September 4, 2026

**This notice is subject to availability of funding.** Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government.

**ECA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds.**

Pending satisfactory implementation of this program and the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, it is ECA's intent to renew this award for two additional, consecutive fiscal years, before openly competing it again.

**2. Executive Summary.**

The Global Leaders Division in the Office of Citizen Exchanges at the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) seeks proposals for a cooperative agreement to design and implement the FY 2026 Community Solutions Program (CSP). The United States has a strong tradition of hard work, entrepreneurship, and local leadership that has powered economic growth. American communities succeed by building on what they do best — innovating, strengthening key industries, and coordinating business, workforce, and community leadership to deliver results. CSP invests in American and international community leaders interested in learning from proven U.S. approaches to regional economic growth. It will engage leaders, ages 27–39, who will work alongside American partners to understand how regional industry clusters and locally driven strategies expand opportunities that benefit the American people. During a three- to four-month exchange in the United States, approximately 50–60 participants will work directly with American counterparts on real-world economic growth initiatives across key sectors such as: culinary industries/farm-to-table; business and entrepreneurship; hospitality and tourism; technology and innovation, and others as proposed. Placements will demonstrate how U.S. communities organize around regional industry clusters to attract talent, secure investment, grow businesses, and strengthen local economies.

Participants will return home with practical, results-oriented approaches they can apply to support community growth and stability, while opening new markets for Americans. Approximately 20–25 Americans will take part in reciprocal exchanges to advance joint projects, strengthen partnerships, and deliver clear economic benefits to U.S. communities. CSP develops results-oriented leaders who drive results, strengthen alliances and business networks, bolster global stability, and deepen relationships that advance U.S. economic interests and security.

## **B. Eligibility**

### **1. Eligible Applicants.**

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- U.S. not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations
- U.S. not-for-profit public and private educational institutions

Please see the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for additional information.

### **2. Cost Sharing.**

There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this program.

### **3. Other Eligibility Requirements.**

- a. All organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via SAM.gov as well as a valid registration in SAM.gov. Please see *Section E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines* for more information.
- b. ECA's Grant Guidelines require that organizations demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchanges to be eligible for awards exceeding \$130,000 in ECA funding. As noted in *Section A. Basic Information*, ECA anticipates issuing one award, for approximately \$3,000,000. Therefore, organizations must demonstrate four years of experience in conducting international exchanges in your proposal to be eligible to apply under this competition.
- c. All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO and the PSI; not doing so may result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.

- d. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
- e. Only *one* proposal will be considered by ECA from each applicant organization. In cases where more than one submission from an applicant appears in grants.gov, ECA will *only* consider the submission made closest in time to the NOFO deadline; that submission would constitute the one and only proposal ECA would review from that applicant.

**Please note:** Applicant organizations are defined by their legal name, and EIN number as stated on their completed SF-424 and additional supporting documentation outlined in the PSI document.

- f. Proposals must include the geographic regions listed in the NOFO; not doing so may result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.
- g. Applicants who are current recipients of awards directly from ECA should make sure the application discusses one or more award that will be open with ECA at the start of the anticipated period of performance for this NOFO. Applicants who do not have current awards directly with ECA, please review the information in the PSI, section D, with additional information that must be provided in your application for it to be eligible.

## **C. Program Description**

### **1. Authority.**

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries...; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations...and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program above is provided through legislation.

### **2. Purpose.**

The FY 2026 CSP brings together experienced community leaders, from select countries and the United States, to support practical, results-driven approaches to regional economic growth and community prosperity. The program strengthens American communities while building reliable international partnerships that expand opportunities for U.S. workers, businesses, and local leaders.

## **2. Program Specific Guidelines.**

CSP builds on America's leadership in industry clusters and proven regional growth strategies. CSP equips participants with the skills, relationships, and hands-on experience needed to lead cross-sector efforts that strengthen local economies. Through placements with U.S. host organizations, participants engage directly with American communities applying practical, regional- and/or local economic models that drive regional growth. Participants are organized in regional cohorts and work with local leaders, businesses, and workforce partners to advance real-world economic development initiatives. Participants return to their home communities with practical, action-oriented projects designed to apply U.S. regional-based approaches that help local communities prosper. A reciprocal exchange component enables American participants to collaborate on joint projects that expand resources and opportunities for U.S. communities.

Participants from selected countries travel to the United States for an approximately three to four-month exchange that includes a tailored professional placement in an American business, cultural institution, government office, nonprofit organization, public institution, or social incubator. Working alongside U.S. counterparts, participants will contribute to practical, place-based economic development efforts. Participants should be organized in regional cohorts that accelerate resource sharing, impact, and cross-sector coordination related to clustered economic initiatives. Activities should expose participants to strategies that can be adapted in their home communities.

The U.S.-based exchange program, including tailored placements, will focus on hands-on leadership and practical skills needed to support regional growth. Participants will engage in real-world, cross-sector work with local partners, gaining direct experience in efforts that strengthen regional economies and local communities.

Regional Coordinators - drawn from local business, community, or tech leaders - will support program implementation by ensuring participants are actively sharing insights, resources, and lessons learned across host organizations within each regional cluster. Coordinators will convene regional meetings, virtual or in-person,

bringing together participants and host organizations to share practical solutions, expertise, and ideas. The meetings should be designed to encourage participants to learn from and contribute to American innovations in regional development.

Following the U.S.-based exchange, selected American counterparts will participate in reciprocal overseas visits to share U.S. approaches to cluster-based regional economic development, advance joint projects, and identify new opportunities for regional growth. These reciprocal exchanges are designed to expand opportunities and markets for Americans while strengthening the relationships between CSP alumni and U.S. host communities. CSP develops a cadre of future-focused leaders committed to local development to attract talent, strengthen local industries, and drive sustainable growth.

The proposal should integrate CSP goals into all aspects of program design and implementation, with special attention to maximizing concrete, measurable impact in the United States and participating countries.

### **3a. Program Tracks.**

The CSP should provide applied leadership and skill training through a training component. Proposed activities should equip participants to work with U.S. community and business leaders across sectors to develop practical, results-driven solutions that strengthen regional economies and support long-term community growth. Every effort should be made to provide participants with practical models of regional economic development that can be adapted in their home countries. The program should develop a cadre of trusted partners who strengthen international collaboration and expand markets and opportunities for American businesses and communities working in key sectors such as: culinary industries/farm-to-table; business and entrepreneurship; hospitality and tourism; technology and innovation, and others as suggested.

Participants should have the opportunity to focus on specific skill building and leadership tracks during this training component. The track-based trainings should extend the duration of the program and should include, but are not limited to:

- Coalition building and Public-Private Partnerships
- E-Commerce and Digital Tools
- Project Development and Management
- Resource Mobilization and Development
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Workforce Development and Transformation
- Youth Engagement and Retention

The applicant may propose alternative tracks provided the suggestions advance a regional economic development framework, align with program and Administration goals, and include a strong justification for inclusion in the FY 2026 CSP.

### **3b. Partner Countries.**

To the extent possible, program participants should be recruited and selected from strategic countries in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, and the Western Hemisphere. It is anticipated that approximately 30-40 countries will be selected, in partnership with the Department of State regional bureaus, for inclusion in the FY26 CSP award. A final list of countries will be provided to the award recipient following the issuance of the FY26 CSP award. No guarantee is made or implied that every country will have participants. ECA reserves the right to adjust and/or add eligible countries should conditions change in a country and/or if other countries are identified as viable alternatives and/or based on Department of State priorities.

### **3c. Participant Recruitment.**

Proposals should include a strategy to implement an open merit-based recruitment campaign designed to reach the targeted demographics in participating countries. Outreach efforts should be appropriately tailored to the country or region, account for applicant safety and well-being, and have the broadest possible reach. It is anticipated that the participants' backgrounds will be varied and could include the sciences, social sciences, humanities, education, business, technology, and other professional fields, but with a unifying commitment to the community-based initiatives and growth. Successful candidates should demonstrate a strong track record of leading or supporting initiatives with measurable benefits to local communities. Proposals should include sample recruitment and selection materials that demonstrate organizational capacity and expertise in global outreach efforts.

### **3d. Participant eligibility:**

Competition for CSP is merit-based and open to community leaders who submit a completed application and meet the following criteria, at the time of application:

- Age 27-39;
- Living and working in their country;
- Has a minimum of five years of experience working on community issues;
- Able to begin the CSP program in the United States in 2027;
- Able to receive a U.S. J-1 visa;

- Committed to returning to their home country for a minimum of two-years after completion of the program and implementing a community-based project; and,
- Proficient in spoken and written English.

Individuals in the following circumstances are NOT eligible to apply:

- U.S. citizens and/or permanent residents of the United States;
- Individuals who have applied for U.S. permanent residency in the past three years;
- Individuals residing or working outside their home countries at the time of application. This includes individuals participating in academic, training, or research programs in the United States or other countries at the time of application. In consultation with ECA, special consideration may be given to individuals completing school courses or non-USG programming outside of their home countries at the time of application but have returned home six months prior to the start of program; and,
- Individuals who have participated in an exchange visitor program sponsored or funded by the U.S. government (e.g., U.S. Department of State, Public Affairs Sections of U.S. embassies, or other U.S. government agencies) who have not fulfilled their two-year home residency requirement by the time of application.

Other criteria may be determined in consultation with ECA, including public-health related status based on guidance from federal agencies and/or updated national security policies.

### **3e. Participant Selection.**

Proposals should address how participant applications will be screened for completeness and eligibility. Applicant organizations should convene a selection committee with expertise in relevant fields to read and evaluate each application using an evaluative form and scoring matrix reviewed and approved by ECA. A percentage of individuals receiving top scores on their applications (approximately three candidates for every placement available), should be invited for an English language interview, either in person or virtual. Each member of the interview team will complete an evaluation form designed by applicant, and approved by ECA, to evaluate and rank-order candidates based on the anticipated number of finalists and alternate candidates.

The award recipient should administer an Institutional TOEFL or comparable English-language proficiency exam to each semi-finalist who does not

already possess a valid TOEFL score of 520 (or 213 on the computer-Based Test) or higher.

The recruitment and selection of candidates for CSP program is the responsibility of the award recipient in consultation with ECA and participating U.S. embassies. Proposals should include plans for maintaining a close working relationship with ECA and embassy counterparts. The award recipient should maintain ongoing communication with the Public Diplomacy Sections (PDS) of relevant embassies and coordinate PDS' involvement, as possible, during the recruitment, interview, selection, and pre-departure orientation phases of the program. PDSs should be invited to read applications, participate in interviews, and provide comments on semi-finalists. Based on the written applications, English-language interviews, language proficiency scores, and PDS' comments, the award recipient will select a final slate of recommended CSP finalists and alternates to ECA, and then PDS, for approval. The applicant must inform, *in writing*, all finalists, alternate candidates, and unsuccessful applicants of their status in the competition

### **3f. Selection of U.S.-based Placements.**

Placement sites should provide hands-on experience where participants apply leadership skills, build professional expertise, and work alongside American counterparts to support local growth that benefits U.S. communities. Placements should expose participants to best practices in cross-sector, regional development that can be adapted to strengthen the participant's home communities. U.S.-based exchanges serve as learning labs where participants can:

- Apply leadership and management theory;
- Experience American innovation and expertise in regional cluster strategies;
- Engage in substantive organizational initiatives and projects;
- Strengthen skills in local community-driven economic development;
- Learn how public, private, and nonprofit sectors collaborate to drive cross-sector growth and prosperity in regions; and,
- Positively contribute to American organizations and communities.

The proposal must address how applicants will recruit, select, and secure host organizations that advance program goals. Host institutions should be proposed for ECA review based on their demonstrated track record of success in community-based initiatives, organizational culture, ability to provide participant support, and capacity to engage in cross-sector collaboration.

The proposal should address how the program will ensure participants meet with a wide-cross section of Americans during their time in the United States and access to immersive experiences with U.S. host communities. Placements should group participants into regional cohorts, embedded across multiple organizations within a defined region to demonstrate how coordinated, cross-sector collaboration drives economic growth and local innovation.

The proposal must clearly specify the level of support required from U.S. organizations and institutions hosting CSP participants. Each participant should be paired with both an organizational mentor and a regional coordinator. Organizational mentors—professionals within the host organization—will guide participants through onboarding, help them acclimate, connect them to professional resources, and assign substantive projects that advance the program goals.

Regional Coordinators, selected from host organizations and local communities, will manage regional cohorts of participants placed across multiple host sites within the same cluster. Coordinators will ensure participants regularly share insights, resources, and lessons learned across organizations and projects, strengthening coordination and reinforcing a cluster-based approach to regional economic and community development. Placements should be in-person to maximize engagement and exposure to American organizations and communities.

### **3g. Pre-Departure Orientation.**

A pre-departure orientation (PDO), virtual, in-person or blended, should be conducted for CSP finalists before they depart their home countries. The pre-departure orientation should be the entry point for participants' exchange experience. Pre-departure orientations should:

- prepare participants for travel to the United States;
- prepare them for a successful exchange in the United States;
- clarify program's goals and regulations, including each participant's mandatory compliance with the J-1 visa two-year physical home residency requirement; and,
- review the program's CSP Terms and Conditions document.

The Terms and Conditions document will be developed by the award recipient and approved by ECA. Each participant must receive and sign a copy of the CSP Terms and Conditions prior to his or her departure to the United States.

### **3h. U.S.-based Orientation.**

The U.S.-based orientation acts as an introduction to the program. The proposal should exercise creativity in designing a U.S.-based orientation and related activities that is impactful, interactive, and advances program goals. The proposal should include an agenda for a U.S.-based orientation.

**3i. Host Organization and Regional Coordinators Orientation.**

U.S. Host Organizations, and Regional Coordinators, should also receive a thorough orientation that provides resources to successfully collaborate with CSP participants. The host orientation should reinforce program goals and review respective roles and responsibilities. Host organizations and regional coordinators should be informed of resources available to support CSP participants and exchange activities. Proposals should include a draft agenda and associated materials that demonstrate organizational capacity and expertise.

**3j. Innovation and Applied Skills Labs.**

Innovation and applied skill labs provide structured, hands-on skill building that enable participants to develop and apply leadership and management tools to support cross-sector regional growth. Labs should equip participants with practical tools to turn ideas into action and deliver results that strengthen and accelerates regional growth. Leadership and skills training - delivered in-person and/or virtually - should emphasize real-world application and strengthening skills that support local initiatives. Proposals should include activities that support committed community leaders in driving growth and prosperity at the local and regional level.

Program activities should highlight how emerging technologies, including AI, can strengthen key industries, support business growth, and create new opportunities for workers and communities. Technology should be integrated throughout the program to support practical learning, improve collaboration, and encourage innovation.

The proposal may include leadership experts, instructors, and facilitators from outside the applicant’s organization. Participants should be exposed to a variety of leaders, innovators, advocates, and policy experts representing a range of backgrounds, viewpoints, and occupations on the topics and issues explored as part of CSP. Proposals should also describe how materials and activities will be adapted for different learning styles, with a focus on hands-on, applied learning.

**3k. Regional Coordination.**

Regional Coordinators, selected from U.S. host institutions and local partners, will convene regular in-person and virtual meetings that bring together a cohort of CSP

participants placed across different host organizations in a regional cluster. These sessions will ensure participants actively share insights, resources, and lessons learned from their respective placements, strengthening collaboration across the cohort. Coordinators will apply a cluster-based approach that reflects U.S. regional economic development models by reviewing structured cross-sector collaboration in a particular regional cluster. This structure will help align efforts across host sites, reinforce shared learning, and support practical solutions that advance regional growth.

### **3l. End-of-Program Workshop.**

The proposal should include a capstone workshop in Washington, D.C. at the conclusion of the U.S.-based program. This final event should highlight the achievements of participants and host organizations, clearly demonstrate the program's positive impact on American communities, and offer practical activities that help turn innovative ideas into real-world results. Proposals should present a creative and compelling design for the capstone event. Proposals should articulate the overarching goals for the final event and include a draft agenda that celebrates the program's impact and contributions to local and regional prosperity, in the U.S. and overseas.

While the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) will arrange meetings with key Department stakeholders, the award recipient is responsible for planning and implementing all other aspects of the workshop. Award recipients are expected to work closely with ECA to ensure the capstone event is well-coordinated, impactful, and aligned with program goals.

### **3m. Program Safety and Welfare Monitoring.**

The proposal should include a plan to monitor the safety and welfare of CSP and U.S. participants. The award recipient should be prepared to troubleshoot and resolve issues in real-time as they emerge. At a minimum, the proposal should:

- cite the intended frequency of communication with the participants, representatives of the U.S. host institutions, and regional coordinators;
- outline performance goals or benchmarks for the participants' exchange in the United States, regional prosperity councils, as well as U.S. participants' reciprocal visits; and,
- include a plan for monitoring U.S. participants while they are working on collaborative projects with the CSP participants.

The proposal should address how the quality of the participants' experience, both in the United States and overseas, will be evaluated and impact to the American people measured.

### **3n. Performance Monitoring.**

In addition to reporting for Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE), see Section 6, Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), it is critical that the applicant monitor CSP participants' progress in achieving program goals and objectives while they are at their U.S. host institutions (e.g., through surveys, interviews, work plans, email, etc.) and while implementing follow-on projects. The proposal must present a comprehensive plan to measure program success. Proposals should define clear objectives and outcomes aligned with CSP goals and include a strategy to collect data from participants and U.S. community members alike. Performance monitoring tools must complement, rather than duplicate, ECA's MODE activities. The award recipient is expected to track participants and partners, and provide data responsive to key indicators, including:

- Effectiveness of the program model and core components in advancing stated goals and objectives;
- Delivery and impact of leadership and professional development training;
- Scope and impact of the program on the American people, institutions, and communities;
- Program's success in supporting the community leaders; and,
- Effects of the program on participants' home communities or institutions.

The performance monitoring plan should include indicators that assess the impact of the program here in the United States.

### **3o. Follow-on Country Projects.**

Proposals should present a creative and clearly defined plan for participants to utilize their U.S.-based experience to strengthen their home communities. It is anticipated that U.S. participants, and potentially regional coordinators, will play an active role in the development and implementation of follow-on projects, including participation in international travel and in-country programming. Proposals should address how reciprocal visits, from select U.S. host representatives, will support the implementation of participant projects and strengthen collaboration between CSP and U.S. participants. Applicants are invited to propose an innovative name and design for the follow-on component that reflects U.S. leadership in cluster-based economic development and local community growth. Applicants may also include follow-on activities that engage alumni from U.S. government programs and other

local organizations, leveraging expertise to advance American interests and community needs.

### **3p. U.S. Fellow Reciprocal Exchange.**

The proposal should include opportunities for Americans to participate in reciprocal visits, one- to two-week international exchanges, to support CSP participants' follow-on projects and expand opportunities for Americans. These exchanges should be substantive, advance practical collaboration, and deliver clear benefits to both U.S. and overseas communities. U.S. participants are expected to be selected primarily from those who served as Host Supervisors, or other American colleagues who worked directly with the Fellow, during the U.S.-based exchange. Reciprocal visits should sustain collaboration, strengthen ongoing relationships, and support shared cross-sector problem-solving that reflects American leadership and innovation. The proposal should also describe how technology and social media will be used to support coordination, strengthen communication, and amplify the impact of joint projects.

Proposals should include a sample application, a detailed timeline, a description of the selection process for the U.S. reciprocal exchange components, and outline program support before, during, and after the reciprocal visit. The selection process should be structured to provide sufficient time for ECA and U.S. embassies to review and approve U.S. participants, ensuring alignment with program goals and U.S. strategic interests.

### **3q. Alumni Programming.**

Proposals must include a clear, results-oriented strategy for alumni engagement that advances CSP's goals and builds on the America's leadership in enterprise, innovation, and economic growth. Alumni programming should support ongoing skill development, strengthen leadership capacity, and contribute to measurable impact in the United States and partner countries. Applicants are strongly encouraged to leverage existing U.S. government alumni networks to maximize resources, expand connections, and extend program reach.

Proposals should demonstrate creativity in designing alumni programming and must include an outline of proposed follow-on alumni activities. Proposals should also address how proposed alumni activities will be coordinated with, and integrated into, existing ECA initiatives in the United States and abroad. Applicants should creatively leverage technology to engage individuals before, during, and after their exchange, amplifying the program's impact and supporting continued leadership and community engagement.

### **3r. Participant Tracking and Database Management**

The tracking of program participants, host organizations, community partners, and alumni is crucial to evaluating program goals, highlighting successes, and adjusting program components in real-time. The proposal must provide a clear plan for participant tracking and database management and sharing data with ECA, as well as PDs in participating countries. Award recipients should be prepared to transfer all information gathered and compiled by applicant to ECA. Additionally, award recipients may be asked to provide regular data submissions, via electronic upload or data transfer, to an ECA database, or to enter data directly into an ECA provided spreadsheet and/or platform. Data fields should include but are not limited to the following: first name; middle name; last name; sex; date of birth; country of citizenship; country of residence; field of study/research topic; home/host institution or affiliation; program category; fiscal and calendar year of participation; and U.S. city and state where the practicum takes place. The award recipient will be expected to assist with the submission of all data for the Bureau's annual statistical report.

### **4. Recipient Responsibilities.**

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows for the overseas administration of the program:

1. Coordinate with ECA on all aspects of recruitment and selection including development of review criteria, outreach strategies, and the final selection of applicants;
2. Develop a merit-based recruitment campaign for individuals meeting the eligibility criteria for the program;
3. Design, launch, and support a digital application platform that supports the real-time tracking and monitoring of application data;
4. Develop a transparent review process to evaluate applicants for CSP that provides opportunities to involve PDS at participating U.S. embassies.
5. Arrange English language interviews (virtual or in-person) for semi-finalists as part of the selection process;
6. Administer an Institutional TOEFL or an equivalent language-based assessment to evaluate semi-finalists' English language abilities;
7. Develop a digital platform to assist finalists in preparing for their U.S.-based exchange program, answer questions on programmatic issues, including but not limited to leadership development, professional skill development, service-learning opportunities, U.S. cultural norms, program responsibilities and expectations, travel, health and safety issues, accident and sickness benefits, housing, etc.; this platform should also provide resources and

- answer questions for U.S participants, or other leadership professionals traveling under this program;
8. Conduct pre-departure orientations (virtual or in-person) for CSP finalists and U.S. participants before they depart their home countries;
  9. Facilitate communication between finalists and host organizations and communities prior to participants departing to the United States, including but not limited to communication about program and community resources, any pre-program leadership assignments, and leadership development activities;
  10. Monitor and support U.S. participants activity overseas, including the implementation of follow-on and community-based projects;
  11. Design and support alumni programming. Recipient organizations should collaborate with ECA's Alumni Affairs Office to support alumni activities; and,
  12. Report on program impact on participants, institutions, and the areas they serve.

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows for the U.S. administration of CSP:

1. Recruit and maintain a cadre of U.S. public, private, and non-profit institutions and organizations able to support a professionally tailored placement for CSP participants;
2. Develop and communicate program guidelines, and other relevant materials, to U.S. host organization. Recipients should host a virtual orientation for U.S. host organization representatives to review program goals, policies, available resources, and responsibilities;
3. Develop and maintain a digital platform to post resources and facilitate communication among host organizations and CSP participants;
4. Develop and support concrete strategies to facilitate host engagement in, and support for, the CSP and related activities;
5. Create opportunities for CSP participants, and American colleagues, to develop professional relationships in U.S. communities;
6. Conduct a comprehensive orientation in the United States for CSP participants prior to the start of their U.S.-based exchange program;
7. Develop and integrate a strong leadership and professional skill-building component into CSP program activities;
8. Recruit and support regional coordinator;
9. Facilitate community-based activities and professional enrichment activities that support the program goals;

9. Monitor and support CSP participants and host organizations throughout the U.S.-based exchange;
10. Conduct an End-of-Program workshop in Washington, D.C. for CSP participants, and select hosts, following the completion of the U.S.-based practicum;
11. Promote and support projects in the U.S. communities and CSP participants' home communities;
12. Arrange and cover the cost of all appropriate program-related travel for CSP and U.S. Participants, and alumni participating in collaborative projects, including but not limited to transportation, lodging, and meals and incidental expenses;
13. Develop a merit-based recruitment campaign for Americans meeting the eligibility criteria for the program's reciprocal component;
14. Conduct pre-departure orientations (virtual or in-person) and end-of-program debriefs for American participants before and after participating in reciprocal exchanges;
15. Develop program materials that amplifies CSP goals, supports host engagement, and highlights participant and alumni achievements, demonstrates impact, and showcases effective innovative community-led initiatives;
16. Develop resources to assist participants with the development and implementation of community-based in their home communities;
17. Collect monitoring data for the program and its impact on program participants, host organizations, host communities, and participants' home communities;
18. Work in collaboration with ECA's Alumni Affairs Office to support American alumni and domestic alumni activities;
20. Manage financial aspects of the program including timely disbursement of participant stipends, housing allowances, etc. and promptly report any irregularities in the budget or spending to ECA;
21. Enroll participants in the Bureau's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) for the duration of the program, issue health benefits identifications cards, and provide instructions on submitting claim forms. More information on ASPE is available at [www.usdos.sevencorners.com](http://www.usdos.sevencorners.com);
22. Issue and ship DS-2019 forms for international participants and alternates. All international participants will travel on a U.S. government designation for the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor program;
23. Participate in regular program reviews with ECA (in person or by telephone) that provide general updates on program implementation and matters of concern, including but not limited to a review of the effectiveness of past

activities, progress on anticipated programmatic activities, and issues that may impede the implementation of planned programming;

24. Respond fully and promptly to requests for program or data from ECA; and,

25. Ensure compliance with the terms of the Cooperative Agreement with ECA, including but not limited to submitting timely financial and program reports and providing proper budget oversight.

## 5. Goals and Objectives.

The Community Solutions Program:

- Provide participants with targeted training and practical resources to improve leadership and technical skills that allow for cross-sector collaboration and cluster-based strategic economic growth.
- Strengthen participants' collaborative leadership skills and ability to take on expanded responsibility in delivering real-world economic and community development outcomes.
- Facilitate the creation of lasting professional connections between participants, U.S. citizens, and American institutions.
- Develop and sustain a multisector network of professionals and community leaders able and ready to support innovative problem-solving and community initiatives.

## 6. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).

Distinct from grants or cooperative agreement monitoring and participant monitoring, performance monitoring is designed to assess progress against a program's goals and objectives. A performance monitoring framework is vital to tracking the direction, pace, and magnitude of change that result from ECA programs.

ECA created the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework to measure the performance of ECA programs. **The MODE Framework provides standard indicators and corresponding survey questions to ensure consistent measures across all ECA programs.** More resources and guidance documents on the MODE Framework are available online at: <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>.

The proposal must include the MODE Framework objectives and indicators listed below (note that, because not all MODE objectives and indicators are relevant for a program, the numbering below will not be sequential). In addition to the ECA-required objectives and indicators, applicants may also select additional MODE Framework indicators (see the *Indicator Book* on the MODE Framework website),

or design custom objectives and indicators that are specific to the proposed program and this proposal.

- Demographic Questions as outlined in the *Indicator Book* on page v and *Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)* (See the MODE Resource Guide - <https://app.box.com/s/qjo8icwj46tc8h1i1qtg80zl7ibwgtua> – found on our website <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>)
- **Objective 1:** Advance participant and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
  - o **Sub-Objective 1.1:** Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between participants and their host communities
    - E1.1.01: Percent of participants reporting that their program experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
    - E1.1.04: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
    - E1.1.09: Percent of participants who traveled abroad for the first time because of their program (core indicator)
    - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
    - E1.1.11: Percent of American participants indicating a change in their understanding of their host country's culture and values
    - E1.1.12: Percent of foreign participants indicating a change in understanding of third-party countries' cultures and values
    - E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American people (core indicator)
    - E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values (core indicator)
    - E1.1.19: Percent of foreign participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values (core indicator)
- **Objective 2:** Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities / countries
  - o **Sub-Objective 2.2:** Foster participants' belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
    - E2.2.01: Percent of participants who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country (core indicator)
- **Objective 3:** Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions

- E3.0.02: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of Americans (core indicator)
  - E3.0.04: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of third country nationals
  - E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)
- **Objective 4:** Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
  - E4.0.01: Percent of participants reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.09: Percent of participants reporting an increase in language skills as a result of their program participation
- o **Sub-Objective 4.1:** Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
  - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
  - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)
  - E4.1.04: Number of professional placements
  - E4.1.11: Number of American reciprocal exchange participants
- **Objective 8:** Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau’s resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
  - E8.0.03: Response rate for participant surveys (core indicator)

### **Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs)**

ECA recommends the use of a PMP to serve as the primary reference document for performance monitoring for this award. If used, the PMP is an important part of any proposal, as it outlines how the applicant plans to track progress towards the proposed program’s goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. A PMP document that includes all MODE Framework indicators is a part of this solicitation’s attachments. Specific instructions on how to modify the PMP to be responsive to this solicitation are included in that document; there is also a support video available for more information on how to fill out the PMP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBHC1oLNZvI>. While ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. Successful PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the

following:

- Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.
- Indicators. Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning, breakdowns of the data by subgroups; the PMP lists the demographic questions required to obtain the information necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.
  - If you do not use the PMP format provided, note that any performance monitoring reference document the applicant submits should include the information in the column headers (Indicator Name, Definition, Target, Survey Question, etc.) in the PMP attachment at a minimum.
  - In addition to those indicators outlined in above, the applicant may propose additional custom, program-specific indicators in the PMP (ECA recommends the proposed PMPs include a minimum of one indicator for each custom programmatic objective).
  - During the period of performance of the award, the ECA program office may further revise, add, or remove indicators. Therefore, the applicant's PMP and data collection instruments should be flexible enough to incorporate those once established.

Award recipients are responsible for collecting indicator data only on participant outcomes during the period of performance of the award itself (see the PMP for guidelines as to when these data collection efforts should occur). ECA will measure outcomes of ECA participants at one, three, five, and 10 years after the exchange has ended to capture the long-term outcomes of ECA programming unless otherwise specified in the solicitation. In this instance, the recipient will be responsible for coordinating with ECA on any alumni surveys to de-duplicate questions and minimize potential survey fatigue.

Regardless of the survey platform used, **all** MODE Framework survey questions outlined above are **required** (i.e., should be forced response); please see the Consent Language in the MODE Framework *Indicator Book* for more information on how to convey this to participants/survey respondents.

### **Program Performance M&E Narrative**

Proposals should include information within the program narrative section(s) that outlines how the applicant intends to measure the indicators listed above. This will be separate from the PMP and should include but not be limited to:

- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.
- The mechanism(s) through which surveys and other data collection tools (if applicable) will be administered, including which platform will be used, and when and how surveys will be advertised to participants – detailing strategies to ensure adequate survey response rates (<https://app.box.com/s/pn6tavyg7sh064i502fzap49ox63y38a>), and to reduce selection and non-response bias.
- A brief explanation of data analysis and reporting procedures.
- An overview of a proposed learning plan and feedback loops to ensure that the Grant Officer (GO)/Grant Officer Representative (GOR) are informed on performance monitoring issues at regular intervals.

### **Nonmandatory Use of the Qualtrics MODE Survey Builder Data Collection System**

ECA has created a guided tool (the MODE Survey Builder) within the Qualtrics survey platform for ECA implementing partners to generate surveys to facilitate the seamless collection and reporting of MODE Framework data. The MODE Survey Builder offers implementing partners a guided workflow that will generate a ready-to-send MODE survey, allows the addition of custom survey questions, and offers a standard report template for a quick overview of survey results that can be submitted in MyGrants (see section below) to fulfill RPM Reporting Requirements. Use of the Qualtrics survey platform can be utilized at no cost to implementing partners. Additional information about the MODE Survey Builder can be found here: <https://app.box.com/s/jjr98hmx6deorxj3lwgaxjrwdfec2r91> and here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jus4fRqOTcM>. You can propose use of an alternate survey tool or use the MODE Survey Builder, but if you are utilizing the MODE Survey Builder, you must indicate such in your proposal.

### **MyGrants RPM Reporting Requirements**

MyGrants is a database solution that serves as the official system of record for all U.S. Department of State and ECA awards. The Results Performance Monitoring (RPM) module within MyGrants is an extension module that enables users to report performance monitoring data in the same system where they currently manage federal assistance actions. As part of ECA's efforts to streamline data collection and management, the recipient(s) of this award will be required to input performance reporting data outlined in this solicitation into the MyGrants RPM. The data stored in the MyGrants RPM will provide ECA with a bureau-wide, uniform M&E reporting tool that is already linked with other elements of the awards familiar to existing awardees.

## **7. Allowable Costs.**

Program costs should support the proposed program design. A list of suggested program costs eligible for funding consideration are listed below:

- 1) Travel.** Please note that all international air travel must be in compliance with the Fly America Act. J-1 visas for non-U.S. participants are provided by the U.S. Department of State and should not be included in the budget. Proposals should include costs for any travel associated with procuring visas, including travel for interviews, delivering, or picking up passports, etc. A return travel allowance of \$75 for each foreign participant may be included in the budget. The allowance may be used for incidental expenses incurred during international travel.
- 2) Per Diem.** For U.S.-based programming, the applicant should use the published Federal per diem rates for individual U.S. cities. Domestic per diem rates may be accessed at: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem>. ECA requests applicants to budget realistic costs that reflect the local economy and do not exceed Federal per diem rates. Foreign per diem rates can be accessed at: [https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per\\_diem.asp](https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp)
- 3) Book and Cultural Allowance.** Foreign participants are entitled to a one-time cultural allowance of \$250 per person, plus a book allowance of \$100. U.S. program staff members are not eligible to receive these benefits.
- 4) Consultants.** Consultants may be used to provide specialized expertise or to make presentations. Honoraria rates should not exceed \$250 per session. Subaward and subcontracting organizations may also be employed, in which case a letter of support between the prospective subawardee and subcontractor should be included in the proposal. Subawards should detail the division of responsibilities and proposed costs, and subcontracts should

be itemized in the budget. Contractors/contracting organizations may also be employed, in which case a letter outlining the agreement between applicant and the contractors/contracting organizations should be included in the proposal.

- 5) **Room Rental.** Room rental may not exceed the going market rate for event space. Proposals citing market value must provide justification as to the amount requested. Without solid justification, room rentals may not exceed \$250 per day per conference room or per activity.
- 6) **Materials Development.** The proposal may contain costs to purchase, develop, and translate materials for participants.
- 7) **Supplies.** The proposal may contain costs to purchase equipment for programming such as computers and fax machines. Costs for furniture are not allowed. Supply costs for the purchase of equipment must be kept to a minimum.
- 8) **Working Meals.** No more than two working meals may be provided for each program component. At least one working meal should be budgeted for the D.C. End of Program Workshop. The cost per person should not exceed \$45 for the working meal. No charges may be made against U.S. government funds for alcoholic beverages. The number of invited guests should not exceed the number of funded program participants by more than a factor of two (i.e., no more than twenty invited guests for a working meal involving ten funded program participants).
- 9) **Reasonable Accommodations.** Proposals should budget for the reasonable accommodations of individuals with disabilities. The proposal may allocate up to 5 - 7% of the total requested ECA award funds for this purpose and reflect plans to make the necessary program modifications, or modifications to participant numbers, in the event that participants need reasonable accommodation.
- 10) **Alumni Activities.** Reasonable costs related to alumni programming for both U.S. and foreign participants may be included. The proposal must include an outline of any proposed follow-on activities. Proposals can include small grants or a small grant competition that advance program goals and support community development activities.

**11) Database Management.** Reasonable costs for the purchase or development of a secure database management system to track applicant, participant, host organization, and alumni data may be included.

## **8. Cost Share.**

There is no cost sharing required for your budget submission. However, ECA encourages applicants to demonstrate a strong commitment of private sector resources to the program. Voluntary cost sharing may be provided as cash or in-kind contributions and may include direct or indirect costs. The valuation of cash and in-kind contributions must comply with 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600, which provide that all cost sharing must be verifiable, allowable, reasonable, and allocable.

When cost sharing is proposed, applicants must provide the amount in their proposal, which will be incorporated into any agreement. The budget and budget narrative must clearly detail the source and form of the cost sharing and whether it is secured at the time of the application.

In accordance with federal regulations, recipients must maintain written records supporting all cost-shared claimed as cost sharing and federally funded expensed, consistent with federal audit requirements. The recipient must also report the amount of cost sharing they have contributed to a project on the SF-425 financial status report. Failure to provide the agreed-upon cost share may result in the Grant Officer's applying a proportional reduction of ECA's Federal award contribution or holding the recipient accountable for the amount specified in the approved budget.

Private sector contributions that do not meet the standards in 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 should be identified and detailed exclusively in the budget narratives. These contributions must not appear as cost sharing in the budget summary or detailed budget.

## **9. Freedom and Democracy Guidelines.**

Public Law 104-319 provides that "in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy," the Bureau "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries." Public Law 106 - 113 requires that the governments of the countries described above do not have inappropriate influence in the selection process. Proposals should reflect advancement of these goals in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

## **10. Virtual Exchange Component.**

When changing political, health, environmental, or other similar circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges. Proposals should demonstrate the organization's capacity to provide innovative options for virtual activities to substitute for in-person engagement for program participants. Organizations should consider how they will implement virtual exchange activities, given the potential limits to internet access from participants in some locations and while continuing to advance foreign policy objectives and achieve lasting benefits for U.S. citizens and international participants.

In addition to planning for virtual exchange activities if in-person programming is prohibited, ECA welcomes innovative ideas on how organizations can leverage virtual programming technologies during or in addition to in-person programming. ECA encourages organizations to submit proposals in response to this solicitation to suggest one or more virtual exchange components to complement the in-person exchange. The virtual exchange components could come before, during and/or after the physical exchange. The objective for the virtual exchange components is to augment the impact of the in-person exchange described in this solicitation. ECA encourages organizations to propose virtual exchange ideas that take advantage of ECA's existing web and social networking platforms. Virtual exchange components would be coordinated with and approved by the ECA program office and U.S. missions abroad on a project-by-project basis.

## **11. Communications Guidance for ECA Recipients.**

All ECA Recipients must adhere to the requirements in ECA's Communications Guidance on the creation of program branding and attribution, websites, social media, and press.

## **12. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial.**

ECA is excited to play a key role in making the Semiquincentennial – commonly known as “Freedom 250” – a truly global celebration. As the period of performance for this award is scheduled to cover part or all of calendar year (CY) 2026, the applicant may wish to consider ways the program can celebrate Freedom 250. Any Freedom 250 focused activities or plans will be subject to ECA approval and direction, and changes may be requested by ECA. Use of any ECA-provided Freedom 250 brand elements will be subject to advance ECA approval and require adherence to Department of State and ECA guidelines for such branding.

### **13. Substantial Involvement.**

In a cooperative agreement, the Department is substantially involved in program activities above and beyond routine monitoring, including:

- a) participation in the design and direction of program implementation
- b) review of publicity and program materials
- c) approval of participants and host organizations
- d) development of alumni activities

### **D. Application Contents and Format**

Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals.

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package, including the PSI, which contains guidelines for proposal preparation.

#### **1. Budget Format.**

Applicants must submit a budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and a budget narrative. See the PSI section III for more information on the budget requirements.

Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

#### **2. Content of Application.**

Please see the PSI for information about the application and formatting guidelines. Additionally, the proposal should include:

##### **2a. Executive Summary.** (One page) that includes:

1. Name of organization/participating institutions
2. Beginning and ending dates of the program
3. Proposed theme or focus area
4. Nature of activity
5. Funding level requested from the Bureau, total program cost, total cost-sharing from applicant and other sources
6. Scope and Goals
  - a. Number and description of participants
  - b. Wider audience benefiting from program (overall impact)
  - c. Program location, both U.S. and overseas

d. Anticipated results (short and long-term)

**2b. Narrative.** In 20 double-spaced, single-sided pages, using 12 pt. font, provide a detailed description of CSP addressing the areas listed below:

1. Vision (statement of need, objectives, goals, benefits)
2. Participating Organizations
3. Program Activities that address the core components outlined in the above guidelines
4. Program Evaluation
5. Follow-on Activities
6. Project Management
7. Work Plan/Time Frame

Applicants may include supplemental materials that demonstrate institutional track record, showcase expertise, and illustrate capacity to implement the program as outlined in the NOFO.

## **E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines**

### **1. Address to Request Application Package.**

The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from the Grants.gov website at <https://www.grants.gov> or from the ECA website at <https://www.state.gov/eca-grant-opportunities/>.

### **2. Department of State Contacts**

For questions about this announcement, contact: Linnéa Allison, U.S. Department of State, Office of Citizen Exchanges, Global Leaders Division, ECA/PE/C/GL, telephone (202) 62-6060, [allisonle@state.gov](mailto:allisonle@state.gov).

All correspondence with ECA concerning this solicitation should reference the title and funding opportunity number listed at the top of this solicitation. Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the deadline has passed, ECA staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

The terms and conditions published in this solicitation are binding and may not be modified by any ECA representative. Explanatory information provided by ECA that contradicts published language will not be binding.

### **3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM.gov).**

#### **Required Registrations**

All organizations, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and an active registration in SAM.gov. A UEI is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards. An applicant must maintain an active registration while it has a proposal under review by the Department and must continue to keep the registration active for the entire duration of the period of performance of any Federal award that results from this NOFO.

The 2 CFR 200 requires subrecipients to obtain a UEI. Please note the UEI for subrecipients is not required at the time of application but will be required before an award is processed and/or directed to a subrecipient.

***Note: The process of obtaining or renewing a SAM.gov registration may take anywhere from 4-8 weeks. Please begin your registration as early as possible.***

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 prior to registering in SAM.gov.

All federal award recipients must maintain a current registration in the SAM database. Recipients must maintain accurate and up-to-date information in [www.SAM.gov](http://www.SAM.gov) until all program and financial activity and reporting are completed on any issued award. Recipients must review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration and more frequently if required information changes or another award is granted. There is no cost associated with registering or updating SAM.gov accounts.

For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to: <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>

#### **Exemptions**

An exemption from the UEI and sam.gov registration requirements may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. See [2 CFR 25.110](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/chapter-V/part-25/subpart-110) for a full list of exemptions.

Organizations requesting exemption from UEI or SAM.gov requirements must email the point of contact listed in the NOFO at least two weeks prior to the deadline in the NOFO providing justification of their request. Approval for a SAM.gov exemption must come from the warranted Grants Officer before the application can be deemed eligible for review.

#### **4. Required Registration with MyGrants.**

All ECA award recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories must be registered with the U.S. Department of State's MyGrants system by accessing <https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com> and clicking the "create an account" link. MyGrants is the U.S. Department of State's grants management system and is supported by the Department's Integrated Logistics Management System (ILMS). Recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories that have previously used MyGrants as a U.S. Department of State award recipient do not need to register again. If the organization is not able to access the system, please contact the ILMS Help Desk for help in gaining access.

Support for Recipient Organizations and recipient contacts and signatories is available 24 hours, 7 days a week (except federal holidays), and can be reached at 1-888-313-ILMS (4567) or through the ILMS Self Service Portal at <https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/>.

#### **5. Submission Instructions.**

##### **Method of Submission**

Applications may only be submitted electronically through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Complete solicitation packages are available at Grants.gov in the "Search Grants" portion of the system.

##### **Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures**

Eligible organizations should follow the instructions available in the 'Get Started' portion of the site (<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants>).

##### **How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov**

Applicants should read instructions carefully and prepare the information requested before beginning the registration process. Reviewing and assembling the required information before beginning the registration process will alleviate last-minute searches for required information.

The registration process can take up to four weeks to complete. Therefore, registration should be done in sufficient time to ensure it does not impact your ability to meet required application submission deadlines. Applicants should check with appropriate staff within their organizations immediately after reviewing this NOFO to confirm or determine their registration status with Grants.gov.

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration>

### **How to Submit an Application to ECA via Grants.gov**

For access to complete instruction on how to apply for Notice of Funding Opportunities on Grants.gov, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants>

### **Grants.gov Support and Submission Issues**

Direct all questions regarding Grants.gov registration and submission issues to:

Grants.gov Customer Support

Contact Center Phone: 800 -518-4726

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; closed on federal holidays.

Email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov)

## **6. Submission Dates and Times.**

### **Application Deadline Date.**

**Thursday, July 23, 2026. Eastern Standard Time (EST)**

Applicants have until 11:59 p.m., Washington, DC time of the closing date to ensure that their entire application has been uploaded to the Grants.gov site. There are no exceptions to the above deadline. Applications uploaded to the site after the application deadline date and time will be automatically rejected by the Grants.gov system and will be found technically ineligible.

**Therefore, we strongly recommend that you begin the submission process through Grants.gov well in advance of the application deadline.**

Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov. An electronic date/time stamp is generated within the system when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant Grants.gov Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov with the successful transmission

of their application. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov Tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When ECA successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgement of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Please also be mindful of any Grants.gov generated error messages that may appear during the application process as they may result in some documents not transmitting correctly.

Applicants using slow internet should be aware that transmission can take some time before Grants.gov receives your application. Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role. The Grants.gov Support Center reports that some applicants end the transmission because they think that nothing is occurring during the transmission process. Please be patient and give the system time to process the application.

The Grants.gov website includes extensive information on all phases/aspects of the Grants.gov process, including an extensive section on frequently asked questions, located under the “Applicant FAQs” section of the website. ECA strongly recommends that all potential applicants review thoroughly the Grants.gov website, well in advance of submitting a proposal through the Grants.gov system. ECA will not notify you upon receipt of electronic applications.

**PLEASE NOTE:** ECA bears no responsibility for applicant timeliness of submission or data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes for proposals submitted via Grants.gov. Prior to submitting applications through Grants.gov, please ensure you meet all Grants.gov system and software requirements, including Adobe software compatibility. You can verify if your version of the Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://grants.gov/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility>

It is the responsibility of all applicants submitting proposals via the Grants.gov web portal (<https://www.grants.gov>) to ensure that proposals have been received by Grants.gov in their entirety, and ECA bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes.

## **7. Funding Restrictions for this Announcement.**

### **a. Funding Restrictions for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)**

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).

### **b. Prohibition on Funding Activities that Encourage Mass-Migration Caravans towards the United States Southwest Border**

None of the funds awarded under this grant may be made available to encourage, mobilize, publicize, or manage mass-migration caravans towards the United States southwest border. Funds may not be made available for legal counseling on the United States asylum process; and/or for referrals to legal or representation in the United States.

Funds may only be used for cash cards for use in the country in which they are provided or to facilitate assisted voluntary returns and other purposes that do not encourage, mobilize, publicize, or manage mass migration caravans towards the United States southwest border. The provision of humanitarian assistance is permitted.

### **c. Palestinian Authority, West Bank, and Gaza Programming.**

All awards made under this competition must be executed according to all relevant U.S. laws and policies regarding assistance to the Palestinian Authority, and to the West Bank and Gaza. Organizations must consult with relevant Public Affairs Offices before entering into any formal arrangements or agreements with Palestinian organizations or institutions.

Note: To assure that planning for the inclusion of the Palestinian Authority complies with requirements, please contact Linnéa Allison, (202) 632-6060, [allisonle@state.gov](mailto:allisonle@state.gov) for additional information.

### **d. Certification Regarding Compliance with Applicable Federal Anti-Discrimination Laws**

If the place of performance or delivery of any award made under this NOFO will be within the United States, applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award:

- i. 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;
  - ii. It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. A program promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means a program whose purpose is to promote preferences based on race, color religion, sex, or national origins, such as in training or hiring.
- e. Certification Regarding Compliance with 20 U.S.C. 1011f and Any Other Applicable Foreign Funding Disclosure Requirements for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE).**
- 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.
- f. Prohibition on Unmanned Aircraft Systems Manufactured or Assembled by American Security Drone Act-Covered Foreign Entities**

(a) *Definitions.*

*American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity* means an entity included on a list developed and maintained by the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC) and published in the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>

*FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system* means an unmanned aircraft system manufactured or assembled by an American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity.

*Unmanned aircraft* means an aircraft that is operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft.

*Unmanned aircraft system* means an unmanned aircraft and associated elements (including communication links and the components that control the unmanned aircraft) that are required for the operator to operate safely and efficiently in the national airspace system.

(b) *Prohibition.*

Recipients of funding under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (including subawards and subcontracts issued by the recipient) will be prohibited from:

- (1) delivering any FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system, which includes unmanned aircraft (i.e., drones) and associated elements;
- (2) Operating a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system in the performance of the award; and
- (3) Using Federal funds for the purchase or operation of a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system.

(c) *Exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.*

The prohibitions described above will not apply if the agency determines that an exemption, exception, or waiver applies and the award indicates that such a determination has been made. [See sections 1823 through 1825 and 1832 of Public Law 118-31 ( 41 U.S.C. 3901 note prec.) for statutory requirements pertaining to exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.].

## **8. Other Submission Requirements.**

- a. Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.
- b. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
- c. **Key Personnel**  
ECA recommends that the applicant identify intended key personnel positions via an asterisk (\*) or other marking in the proposal budget, budget narrative, or a separate appendix. If not provided in the application, recipients must submit the names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Applicants should also identify what proportion of their time will be used in support of the program.

Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department's Standard Terms and Conditions.

- d. Intergovernmental Review of Applications  
Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

## **F. Application Review Information**

### **1. Review Process.**

ECA will check that all proposals meet the technical requirements in this solicitation. Proposals that do not meet the guidelines, including those under the eligibility section above or in the PSI, will be ineligible for further review.

All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office before being reviewed by an ECA grant panel. Applications may also be reviewed by Public Diplomacy sections overseas, State Department regional bureaus, or other State Department offices, as appropriate. All reviewers, including the ECA grant panels, will review any eligible proposals based on the criteria below.

Proposals recommended by an ECA grant panel will be reviewed for compliance with Federal and Bureau regulations and guidelines and assessed for risk. Final funding decisions are made by the ECA's Assistant Secretary. Only an ECA Grant Officer has the final authority to issue assistance awards.

### **2. Review Criteria.**

An ECA grants panel will competitively evaluate all technically eligible applications according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered, and all carry equal weight in the proposal review.

- a. **Quality of Program Idea and Ability to Program Aims and Purpose:** The proposal should exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to the ECA's mission. Program objectives should be stated clearly and should reflect subject matter expertise relevant to the requirements of the solicitation. Proposals should clearly state the program's aims, include a detailed workplan, and demonstrate how your institution will meet them. Proposed activities should follow the program guidelines described in this solicitation and should be likely to provide maximum impact in achieving the proposed results.
- b. **Multiplier effect/impact and Follow-on Activities:** Proposals should strengthen long-term mutual understanding between countries, including sharing of information and creating long-term institutional and individual

linkages. Proposals should provide a plan for continued follow-on activity after the ECA supported program ends, ensuring that programs are not isolated events.

- c. **Institutional Capacity and Track Record:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs and responsible fiscal management. ECA will consider the past performance of prior ECA recipients, including the timely submission of reports, and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.
- d. **Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should have a fully developed M&E plan that includes goals, objectives, and indicators. The plan should be feasible and aligned with the M&E section of this solicitation. Proposals should include a realistic learning plan that outlines how your organization plans to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices. All submitted M&E plans will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided at least the required information outlined in the M&E section of this solicitation and demonstrated the applicant's capacity to carry out the M&E plan.
- e. **Budget and Cost Effectiveness:** The budget must be supported by a detailed budget narrative and demonstrate that all proposed costs are verifiable, allowable, reasonable, and allocable, including cost sharing (if proposed). The budget should reflect an appropriate allocation of time, personnel, and other resources necessary to effectively achieve the program's scope and scale. It must align with the program narrative, support the proposed activities, and be sufficient to successfully carry out the program. Each budget line item must include justification for how the cost was calculated, including subawards. If indirect costs are claimed, a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) must be provided, unless the applicant is using the 15% de minimis rate. Please address how the program will utilize innovative tools and fiscally responsible approaches to program implementation, including web-based and other technologies, in order to be a faithful steward of federal resources.

### **3. Indirect Costs**

If two or more applications receive equivalent scores based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this NOFO, preference will be given to the applicant with the lower indirect cost rate, as consistent with Executive Order 14332, Section 4(b)(iii). This preference will only be applied as a tie-breaking mechanism and does not supersede the primary evaluation criteria.

#### **4. Risk Review**

Under the merit review as required by 2 CFR 200.206, prior to making a Federal Award, the Department will review and consider the following risk factors:

- a. Financial stability
- b. Management systems and standards
- c. History of performance
- d. Audit reports and findings
- e. Ability to effectively implement requirements

#### **5. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov.**

The Federal awarding agency, prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the U.S. government designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov (see 41 U.S.C. 2313) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313)

An applicant can review and comment on any information in the responsibility/qualification records available at SAM.gov.

Before making decisions in the risk review required by 2 CFR 200.206, the Department will consider any comments by the applicant, along with information available in the responsibility/qualification records in SAM.gov.

#### **G. Award Notices.**

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal ECA procedures. The award or cooperative agreement will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer in ECA's Grants Division and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer (as identified in the application) for review and countersignature. The recipient may only start incurring project expenses beginning on the start date shown on the fully signed award document.

Issuance of this NOFO 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. If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding.

**Unsuccessful applicants:**

Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification of the results of the application review from the ECA program office coordinating this competition following the completion of the review process.

**Payment Method:**

Payments under this award will be made through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Payment Management System (PMS).

**H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration****1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.**

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.

In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's guidance located at 2 CFR part 200, all applicable Federal laws, and relevant Executive guidance, the Department of State will review and consider proposals for funding, as applicable to specific programs, pursuant to this NOFO in accordance with the following:

- Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register's 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, particularly on:
  - Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an impartial process of evaluating Federal award applications (2 CFR part 200.205),
  - Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
  - Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and
  - Terminating agreements pursuant to the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, including, to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340). For the avoidance of doubt, the Department has sole discretion over the determination that an award no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities, and this provision permits awards to be terminated at the Department's convenience,

including when it determines that the award no longer advances the national interest.

- 2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT
- 2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION
- 2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
- 2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)
- 2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY
- 2 CFR 600 – DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS
- Recipients must comply with all applicable Executive Orders A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

## **2. Reporting.**

Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted. All reports must be submitted in a timely manner.

For planning purposes, applicants can expect to provide ECA with an electronic copy of the following required reports:

- a. Performance Progress Reports (PPRs)** shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual, quarterly, or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. All reports and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
- b. The Federal Financial Reports (FFR SF-425/SF-425a)** must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>. Once a financial report has been approved by the

Department, the recipient must upload the approved report to MyGrants, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the recipient's eligibility for future awards.

- c. Required **MODE data** (see Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation section) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. MODE data reporting shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. The frequency of these reports will be determined by DOME and the Program Officer. Either a standard report template (if using the MODE Survey Builder) or aggregate data and the raw data file (if Recipient uses their own survey platform) must be uploaded by the Recipient as an RPM Performance Report under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
- d. A **final program and financial report** no more than 120 days after the period of performance of the award ends or termination of the award.
- e. **Program Data Requirements:** Award recipients will be required to maintain specific data on program participants and activities in an electronically accessible database format that can be shared with ECA as required. At a minimum, the data must include the following:
  - Name, address, contact information and biographic sketch of all persons who travel internationally on funds provided by the agreement or who benefit from the award funding but do not travel.
  - Itineraries of international and domestic travel, providing dates of travel and cities in which any exchange experiences take place. Final schedules for in-country and U.S. activities must be received by the ECA Program Officer at least three workdays prior to the official opening of the activity.

Applicants should be aware of the post award reporting requirements reflected in 2 CFR 200 Appendix XII—Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

#### **4. Branding and Marking**

The Department of State, its programs, and U.S. Government funding and assistance should be easily identifiable to the Department's global audiences.

Recipients of federal assistance awards must follow the branding guidance published at Guidance for Contracts and Grants - U.S. Department of State Brand System. Branding policy exceptions are outlined in the U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual 10 FAM 416, Policy Exceptions.

For more information, visit: <https://brand.america.gov/>

## **I. Other Information**

### **Adherence To All Regulations Governing the J Visa**

ECA places critically important emphasis on the security and proper administration of the Exchange Visitor (J visa) Programs and adherence by award recipients and sponsors to all regulations governing the J visa. Therefore, proposals should demonstrate the applicant's capacity to meet all requirements governing the administration of the Exchange Visitor Programs as set forth in 22 CFR 62, including the oversight of Responsible Officers and Alternate Responsible Officers, screening and selection of program participants, provision of pre-arrival information and orientation to participants, monitoring of participants, proper maintenance and security of forms, record-keeping, reporting and other requirements.

The award recipient will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to participants in this program.

A copy of the complete regulations governing the administration of Exchange Visitor (J) programs is available at <http://j1visa.state.gov> or from:

Office of Private Sector Exchange Designation  
U.S. Department of State  
SA-5, Floor C2, Room C2L13  
2200 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20522