

NOFO - AI Partnership & Exchange for Tech Leaders (APEX)



Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

AI Partnership & Exchange for Tech Leaders (APEX)

NEA/Riyadh, Department of State

Opportunity number: DOS-SAU-2602-PD

Application deadline:

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**U.S Department of State
NEA/ Embassy Riyadh
Notice of Funding Opportunity**

A. Basic Information

1. Overview

Funding Opportunity Title	AI Partnership & Exchange for Tech Leaders (APEX)
Funding Opportunity Number	DOS-SAU-2602-PD
Announcement Type	Initial Announcement
Deadline for Applications	September 8, 2026, at 11:59 PM AST (Arabia Standard Time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.040
Length of performance period	12 to 24 months
Number of awards anticipated	1 award
Award amounts	Award expected to reach a maximum of \$250,000 (approximately)
Total available funding	\$250,000.00 pending availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY26 Smith Mundt Public Diplomacy Funds
Anticipated project start date	October 1, 2026

Funding Instrument Type: Cooperative Agreement. Cooperative agreements include substantial involvement of the bureau or embassy in program implementation of the project.

Project Performance Period: Proposed projects should be completed by September 1, 2028 or less.

The Department of State will entertain applications for continuation grants funded under these awards beyond the initial budget period on a non-competitive basis subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

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This notice is subject to availability of funding.

2. Executive Summary

Priority Region: Saudi Arabia (if applicable)

Executive Summary

Program Purpose

The U.S. Embassy Riyadh Public Diplomacy Section is accepting applications for a cooperative agreement to run the AI Partnership & Exchange for Tech Leaders. The goal of this program is to connect rising Saudi Artificial Intelligence (AI) leaders with American experts in business, tech, and academia. This initiative helps participants build professional networks, study U.S. technology standards, and create lasting partnerships between American and Saudi institutions.

Target Audience and Participants

The program should be designed for Saudi nationals aged 20 to 30. Participants must be undergraduate, graduate, or post-doctoral students, or recent graduates who are studying or working in AI-related fields (such as data science, robotics, or machine learning). They must also speak fluent English and show strong leadership potential. Provide three complete budget scenarios for 12 participants, 16 participants (primary), and 20 participants.

Applicants must provide budget scenarios for three participant cohort sizes:

- 12 participants
- 16 participants (primary scenario)
- 20 participants

Each budget scenario should maintain program quality while demonstrating cost-effectiveness at different scales.

Program Components

In addition to the planning and preparation with the Embassy and partner organizations, the selected partner will plan and run three mandatory participant-focused phases:

- Phase 1: Preparation (Virtual and In-Person) around April 1, 2027: The partner will create an online application portal and launch a recruiting campaign. They will host a virtual hackathon to help short-listed candidates design an AI project idea. Top project ideas will

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determine who wins a spot on the exchange trip. The partner will also train the group in leadership, project management, and cross-cultural communication before they travel.

- Phase 2: U.S. Exchange (Two Weeks) in July 2027: The partner will lead a two-week summer trip to two or three U.S. cities. The trip will include visits to American tech hubs and universities, networking events, workshops at a major AI summit, and cultural activities. The partner will also match each participant with a professional mentor for three months of bi-weekly virtual career coaching after the exchange program component.
- Phase 3: Follow-On Summit (Saudi Arabia) on/around January 2028: Within three to six months after the trip, the partner will organize a showcase event in Saudi Arabia. Participants will present their follow-on capstone AI projects to local tech communities, government leaders, and investors. This could be adjacent to major Saudi AI summits or a USG-related event.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- *Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations*
- *Public and private educational institutions*
- *Public International Organizations and Governmental institutions*

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing is not required for this application.

Applicants are permitted to propose voluntary cost sharing, such as cash or third-party in-kind contributions (like donated staff time or facilities). Because cost sharing is not required, it will not be evaluated as a competitive factor during the primary merit review, and no point values will be assigned for offering it.

In the event that two or more applications receive identical scores after being evaluated against all primary criteria, the U.S. Embassy will first use the applicant's indirect cost rate to break the tie. If a tie still remains, the Embassy will consider the availability and strength of any proposed voluntary cost sharing to select the final winner.

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(Note: Once approved by the Grants Officer, any proposed cost sharing becomes a legally binding requirement that the recipient must document and verify during audits).

3. Other Eligibility Requirements

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 D.3 for more information. Individuals are not required to have a UEI or be registered in SAM.gov.

C. Program Description

1. Goals and Objectives

a. Background, Goals, and Objectives:

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents a critical opportunity to shape the global tech landscape using secure, ethical, and market-driven innovation models. This initiative is designed to build and strengthen sustainable professional networks between Saudi Arabia's emerging AI leaders and their American counterparts in academia, industry, and the venture capital ecosystem. By orienting the next generation of Saudi tech talent toward U.S.-developed frameworks, standards, and ethics, this program positions the United States as the preferred technology partner.

The primary goal of the program is to develop professional capabilities and institutional links that foster long-term technology collaboration between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The program achieves this through three specific objectives: enhancing the leadership and project design capacity of participants through a series of online workshops before traveling to the exchange program; exposing participants to U.S. technology sectors, best practices, and commercialization strategies during a two-week exchange; and generating a localized impact via follow-on capstone AI projects and an ecosystem showcase summit within Saudi Arabia.

b. Program Components and Possible Activities:

The recipient will implement these objectives through three mandatory, integrated phases:

- **Component 1: Preparatory Phase (Virtual/In-Country):** The recipient will design and run an online application portal, execute promotional outreach, recruiting plan, evaluation tool for selection, and manage an information campaign to solicit applications. To determine final participant selections, the recipient must organize an online hackathon for short-listed candidates. Candidates will develop a baseline capstone project proposal

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identifying a problem statement to solve using AI. Top proposals will receive priority for the exchange. The recipient will deliver info sessions while application still open covering tech sector leadership, agile project management, pitch presentation skills, and fluency in the U.S. venture capital and research ecosystem.

- Component 2: U.S. Exchange (Two Weeks): The recipient will manage a two-week summer travel itinerary across two to three U.S. cities or states with high tech-sector prominence. Activities must include site visits to research centers, tech companies, startups, and accelerators. The schedule should embed workshops on AI policy, ethics, and governance, ideally linked to a concurrent U.S. AI summit. The recipient will pair each participant with an American mentor to begin three months of bi-weekly virtual career coaching. Cultural activities must also be integrated to deepen the participants' understanding of U.S. society. The recipient responsible for all the travel logistics including issuance of the Ds-2019s, travel insurance, and detailed program schedule.
- Component 3: Follow-On Summit (Saudi Arabia): Within three to six months following the U.S. exchange, the recipient will organize a high-visibility capstone summit in Saudi Arabia. This event will showcase the participants' learning and finalized AI capstone projects to the local tech community, potential investors, and key Saudi institutional partners.

c. Expected Performance Monitoring, Indicators, and Outcomes:

To ensure accountability, the applicant must incorporate a Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) aligned with standard Department requirements. Performance indicators must track both short-term outputs and long-term outcomes, utilizing established baselines and targets.

The Federal agency expects the following specific results:

First, to increase leadership and technical capacity, the program expects ninety percent of participants to demonstrate increased technical or project management capacity via pre- and post-training technical assessments and capstone proposal reviews.

Second, to establish professional bilateral networks, participants must maintain a minimum of two active professional connections with U.S. mentors and counterparts, which will be verified through post-exchange surveys and milestone tracking at three and six months.

Third, to expose talent to the U.S. ecosystem, eighty-five percent of participants must show an enhanced understanding of U.S. AI governance, frameworks, and ethics via post-exchange evaluation surveys and workshop tracking.

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Finally, to catalyze long-term local impact, the program targets sixteen completed AI capstone projects successfully presented at the Saudi Arabian showcase summit, evaluated through program reviews and stakeholder feedback.

d. Eligibility Criteria for Participants/Beneficiaries:

Beyond the primary federal award recipient, specific eligibility criteria apply directly to the program participants (beneficiaries) who will be selected for the exchange. The recipient must ensure all selected individuals meet the following requirements:

- Must be a Saudi national or resident of more than 5 years from another Arab country.
- Must be an undergraduate, graduate, or post-doc student or a recent graduate aged 20 to 30.
- Must be actively studying or working in AI or an AI-adjacent field (such as machine learning, data science, robotics, or computer vision).
- Must demonstrate English language proficiency sufficient for technical and academic participation.
- Must demonstrate leadership potential and a clear commitment to advancing tech innovation in Saudi Arabia.
- The cohort must achieve diversity, covering at least 50% female representation and a geographical spread across the 13 provinces of Saudi Arabia.

2. *Substantial Involvement*

This program will be implemented via a Cooperative Agreement. Unlike standard grants where the federal role is primarily administrative and monitoring-focused, a cooperative agreement requires consistent, substantial programmatic involvement from the U.S. Embassy Riyadh Public Diplomacy Section throughout the lifecycle of the project.

The U.S. Embassy Riyadh will maintain substantial involvement in the following operational areas:

- **Direct Selection Participation:** Embassy personnel should approve application and promotion materials designed by the grantee, and will play an active role in the initial screening of online applications. Embassy representatives will maintain voting seats on the merit review panel to conduct final interviews and select the exchange participants.
- **Curriculum and Itinerary Approval:** The recipient must submit the pre-departure leadership curriculum, virtual hackathon frameworks, and the exact U.S. multi-city travel itinerary to the Embassy for review, modification, and final programmatic approval.

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- **Saudi Institutional Facilitation:** The U.S. Embassy will directly facilitate initial introductions and coordinate ongoing collaboration between the recipient and essential local stakeholders, such as the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and the Human Capability Development Program (HUMAIN), if needed to supplement recipient's own efforts or relationships with Saudi partners.
- **Milestone Monitoring and Attendance:** Embassy staff will actively participate in virtual orientations, attend the virtual hackathon, and maintain prominent roles at the final capstone Follow-On Summit in Saudi Arabia.
- **Media Coordination:** The Embassy Public Diplomacy Section will exercise direct oversight and approval authority over all public media relations, press distribution strategies, and social media campaigns.

D. Application Contents and Format

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

Content of Application

Please ensure:

- The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity
- All documents are in English
- All budgets are in U.S. dollars
- All pages are numbered
- All documents are formatted to fit 8 ½ x 11 paper, and
- All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, 12-point Calibri font, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.

The following documents are **required**:

1. Mandatory application forms

- SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations) at [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
- SF-424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs) at [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
- SF-424B (Assurances for Non-Construction programs) at [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) (note: the SF-424B is only required for individuals, organizations exempt from registration, and for organizations not required to fully register in SAM.gov)

2. Summary Page

Cover sheet stating the applicant's name and organization, proposal date, program title, program period proposed start and end date, and brief purpose of the program.

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3. Proposal (20 pages maximum)

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

- **Proposal Summary:** Short narrative that outlines the proposed project, including project objectives and anticipated impact.
- **Introduction to the Organization or Individual applying:** A description of past and present operations, showing ability to carry out the program, including information on all previous grants from the State Department and/or U.S. government agencies.
- **Problem Statement:** Clear, concise and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed and why the proposed program is needed
- **Project Goals and Objectives:** The “goals” describe what the program is intended to achieve. The “objectives” refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be achievable and measurable.
- **Project Activities:** Describe the program activities and how they will help achieve the objectives.
- **Project Methods and Design:** A description of how the program is expected to work to solve the stated problem and achieve the goal. Include a logic model as appropriate.
- **Proposed Project Schedule and Timeline:** The proposed timeline for the program activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.
- **Key Personnel:** Names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program. What proportion of their time will be used in support of this program?
- **Project Partners:** List the names and type of involvement of key partner organizations and sub-awardees.
- **Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan:** This is an important part of successful grants. Throughout the timeframe of the grant, how will the activities be monitored to ensure they are happening in a timely manner, and how will the program be evaluated to make sure it is meeting the goals of the grant?
- **Future Funding or Sustainability** Applicant’s plan for continuing the program beyond the grant period, or the availability of other resources, if applicable.

4. Budget Justification Narrative

After filling out the SF-424A Budget (above), use a separate file to describe each of the budget expenses in detail. See section *I. Other Information: Guidelines for Budget Submissions* below for further information.

5. Attachments

- 1-page Curriculum Vitae (CV) or resume of key personnel who are proposed for the program

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- Letters of support from program partners describing the roles and responsibilities of each partner
- If your organization has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) and includes NICRA charges in the budget, include your latest NICRA as a PDF file.
- Official permission letters, if required for program activities.
- History of previous similar work if available.

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application forms required above are available at: embassy website and grants.gov.

2. Department of State Contacts

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact:

riyadhgrants@state.gov.

3. Unique entity identifier 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.
- Organizations **based outside of the United States** and that do not pay employees within the United States do not need an EIN from the IRS but do need a UEI prior to registering in SAM.gov.

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- **Organizations based outside of the United States that do not intend to apply for U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) awards are no longer required to have a NATO Commercial and Government Entity (NCAGE) code to apply for non-DoD foreign assistance funding opportunities.** If an applicant organization is mid-registration and wishes to remove an NCAGE code from their SAM.gov registration, the applicant should submit a help desk ticket (“incident”) with the Federal Service Desk (FSD) online at www.fsd.gov using the following language: “I do not intend to seek financial assistance from the Department of Defense. I do not wish to obtain an NCAGE code. I understand that I will need to submit my registration after this incident is resolved in order to have my registration activated.”

Organizations based outside of the United States and that DO NOT plan to do business with the DoD should follow the below instructions:

Step 1: Proceed to SAM.gov to obtain a UEI and complete the SAM.gov registration process. SAM.gov registration must be renewed annually.

Organizations based outside of the United States and that DO plan to do business with the DoD in addition to Department of State should follow the below instructions:

Step 1: Apply for an NCAGE code by following the instructions on the NSPA NATO website linked below:

NCAGE Homepage:

<https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/sc/CageList.aspx>

NCAGE Code Request Tool (NCRT):

[NCAGE Code Request Tool \(nato.int\)](#)

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](#) 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 a 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. Submission Dates and Times

Applications are due no later than September 8, 2026, at 11:59 PM AST

5. Funding Restrictions

- i. Funding Restrictions for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

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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).

ii. 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:

- 1) Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government's payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and;
- 2) It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. 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.

iii. Certification Regarding Compliance with 20 U.S.C. 1011f and any other applicable foreign funding disclosure requirements:

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:

- 1) 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.

iv. Certification of Trafficking in Persons Compliance and Compliance Plan

Applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award for awards where the estimated value of services to be performed outside the United States exceeds \$500,000:

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- 1) To the best of the Recipient's knowledge, neither the Recipient, nor any subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor of the Recipient or any agent of

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the recipient or of such a subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor, is engaged in any of the activities described in 2 CFR 175.105(a);

The recipient has implemented a Trafficking in Persons compliance plan to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175(a) and is compliant with this plan; and the compliance plan must follow the minimum requirements described in 2 CFR 175(b)(5).

- 2) That the Recipient has and will implement procedures to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175.105(a) and to monitor, detect, and terminate any subrecipient, contractor, subcontractor, or employee of the recipient engaging in these activities.

Recipients do not need to submit a copy of the plan. However, they must provide it to the Grants Officer upon request, and as appropriate, must post the useful and relevant contents of the plan or related materials on their website and at the workplace. Recipients must re-certify on an annual basis for the entire award period of performance.

(Note: While the current opportunity ceiling is \$250,000, this standard provision applies to ensure compliance if cumulative or scaled services exceed the threshold.)

- v. 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 .

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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.].

vi. Hardware/Software Purchase Restrictions:

Federal award funds provided under this cooperative agreement must be used strictly for direct programmatic execution and cannot be used for capital expenditures or the procurement of permanent information technology (IT) infrastructure.

- Grant funds cannot be used to purchase high-end computing servers, specialized AI processing hardware, or standalone commercial AI software licenses for the permanent ownership or general operational use of the recipient organization.
- Budget items for hardware and software are strictly limited to temporary configurations, cloud-based computing credits, or standard participant supplies (such as standard computing devices with a per-unit cost under \$10,000) that are directly and exclusively utilized by the selected beneficiaries during the virtual hackathon or U.S. exchange workshops.
- Any equipment or supplies acquired under this award must adhere to the property standards and end-of-grant disposition requirements outlined in the Federal Assistance Directive.

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vii. Prohibition on For-Profit Sub-Awards:

Because this program is funded and authorized under Public Diplomacy Smith-Mundt resources (CFDA 19.040 - Public Diplomacy Programs), specific statutory restrictions apply to the delivery modality of the funds.

- No funds awarded resulting from this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be made available to issue sub-grants, sub-awards, or direct financial assistance to commercial, for-profit entities, or for-profit educational institutions.
- This restriction applies across all tiers of the project lifecycle, including the selection of hackathon evaluators, workshop facilitators, or technical mentors
- For-profit organizations and commercial firms may only participate in this program as vendors providing commercial goods or professional services via standard procurement subcontracts, which must be executed in accordance with the recipient's own procurement regulations and 2 CFR 200 subpart D.

viii. General Public Diplomacy Funding Restriction:

In addition to specific statutory requirements, funds awarded under this cooperative agreement cannot be used for the following activities:

- **Inherently Religious Activities:** Federal funds may not be used to support inherently religious activities, such as worship, religious instruction, or proselytization.
- **Venture Capital or Commercial Seed Funding:** In accordance with Public Diplomacy program guidelines, funds cannot be used to provide direct capital, loans, or seed funding for commercial ventures, startups, or for-profit businesses launched by program participants.
- **Construction and Infrastructure:** Project funds cannot be used for construction, structural modernization, permanent alterations, or real-property rehabilitation projects.
- **Lobbying and Political Activity:** Funds cannot be used directly or indirectly for political campaigns, electioneering, or to influence legislation or public referendums.
- **Retroactive Costs:** Federal assistance funds cannot be used to cover expenses or project activities that occurred prior to the official award start date.

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6. *Other Submission Requirements*

All application materials must be submitted by email to riyadhgrants@state.gov or electronically through grants.gov.

F. Application Review Information

1. *Review Criteria*

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

Quality and Feasibility of the Program Idea (25 points): The program idea must be well-developed, demonstrating a logical, integrated flow across the virtual hackathon, the U.S. exchange, and the follow-on summit. The proposal must include a realistic implementation timeline and show a clear understanding of the U.S. and Saudi Arabian technology landscapes. The proposal must not include any activities contrary to any standing Executive Orders.

Saudi Partnership Strategy and Engagement Plan (20 points): Evaluation will focus on the credibility and strength of the applicant's plan to engage key local stakeholders, such as the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and the Human Capability Development Program (HUMAIN), throughout the planning, implementation, and review phases. Points are awarded based on the clarity of partner roles and the depth of the collaboration concept for the final follow-on summit.

Organizational Capacity and Experience (15 points): The applicant must demonstrate expert capabilities in its stated field, a proven track record of managing international exchange programs, and robust internal controls to safely manage federal funds. If subawards or technology partnerships are proposed, the applicant must demonstrate strong prior experience screening and managing subrecipients.

Program Planning and Innovation (15 points): Goals and objectives must be clearly stated, with measurable intermediate targets. Points are awarded for innovative methods in cultivating U.S.-Saudi bilateral connections, developing technology sector leadership, and managing the three-month virtual coaching phase.

Budget and Cost Effectiveness (15 points): The budget justification narrative must be highly detailed and realistic, accurately justifying all costs within the proposed activities. Evaluators will look closely at value for money and cost-effectiveness across all three mandatory budget scenarios (12, 16, and 20 participants).

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Monitoring, Evaluation, and Sustainability Plan (10 points): The application must include a comprehensive Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) featuring clear output and outcome indicators. The proposal must show a realistic approach to tracking participant success and a plan to maintain the professional network after the grant period ends.

2. *Indirect Costs and Tie-Breaking Mechanisms:*

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.

In the rare event that a tie still remains after checking indirect cost rates, the U.S. Embassy will utilize the availability, relevance, and strength of any proposed voluntary cost sharing as a secondary tie-breaking mechanism to select the final recipient.

3. *Review and Selection Process*

A technical review committee comprised of U.S. government personnel will evaluate and score all eligible applications against the primary merit criteria listed above. The committee will provide funding recommendations to the Public Diplomacy Section. Final selection decisions rest with the Grants Officer and depend on available funding, risk assessments, and alignment with U.S. Mission strategic priorities.

4. *Risk Review*

i. Risk factors

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

ii. Program-Specific Risk Factors

In addition to the general factors above, the Department will evaluate the following program-specific risks unique to the artificial intelligence and international exchange elements of this program:

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- **Data Security and Privacy Management:** The applicant's ability to ensure secure data handling within the virtual hackathon and online screening portals, safeguarding participant personal data from unauthorized leakage.
- **Hardware and Supply Chain Compliance:** Evidence of strict adherence to information technology procurement rules, including the absolute prohibition on utilizing any parts or services manufactured by covered foreign entities.
- **Duty of Care and Contingency Planning:** The adequacy of the applicant's risk management protocols, emergency communication channels, and health insurance provisions to guarantee participant safety across multiple U.S. transit cities during the summer break exchange.

G. Award Notices

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

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

Issuance of this 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.

Unsuccessful applicants: Unsuccessful applicants will be notified via email.

Payment Method:

Recipients will be required to request payments by completing form SF-270—Request for Advance or Reimbursement and submitting the form to the Grants Officer.

Recipients may not draw down funds without the affirmative authorization of the Department of State. In addition, recipients must submit, with each SF-270 payment request, a detailed explanation justifying the request.

H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

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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. These include:

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 applications for funding, as applicable to specific programs, pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity 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](#)

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- [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*

Reporting Requirements: 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.

Foreign Assistance Data Review: As required by Congress, the Department of State must make progress in its efforts to improve tracking and reporting of foreign assistance data through the Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR). The FADR requires tracking of foreign assistance activity data from budgeting, planning, and allocation through obligation and disbursement. Successful applicants will be required to report and draw down federal funding based on the appropriate FADR Data Elements, indicated within their award documentation. In cases of more than one FADR Data Element, typically program or sector and/or regions or country, the successful applicant will be required to maintain separate accounting records.

3. **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**

Guidelines for Budget Justification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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