# ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT INNOVATION FUND (AEIF) 2026 – MEXICO U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE WHA/ U.S. EMBASSY AND CONSULATES IN MEXICO Notice of Funding Opportunity

**Funding Opportunity Title:** Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund 2026 - Mexico

**Funding Opportunity Number:** PD AEIF-FY26-01

**Deadline for Applications:** April 30, 2026

**Assistance Listing Number:** 19.022

**Total Amount Available:** $5,000 to $35,000 per project (pending availability of funds)

## A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico announce an open competition for past participants ("alumni") of U.S. government-funded and U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs to submit applications to the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) 2026 – Mexico. We seek proposals from teams of at least two alumni who meet all program eligibility requirements outlined below. Alumni interested in participating in AEIF 2026 should submit proposals to [MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov](mailto:MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov) by **April 30, 2026, at 11:59 PM (Mexico City time)**. See Section E below for the full application process and timing.

**Program Objectives:**

1. AEIF provides alumni of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs with funding to expand on the skills gained during their exchange

experiences and design and implement innovative solutions to address global challenges within their communities.  Since its inception in 2011, AEIF has funded over 1,100 alumni-led projects worldwide.

2. **All AEIF projects must celebrate and promote the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America (Freedom250) by highlighting American excellence, ingenuity, and shared values.** Proposals must clearly demonstrate how the project supports Freedom250 and alignment with current U.S. administration policy goals such as making the United States safer, stronger, and more prosperous, defending freedom of expression, and/or highlighting U.S. innovation, excellence, and positive impact to global culture.

3.  AEIF proposals must address at least one of the themes listed below. Proposals that do not address the themes as outlined in the program objectives will not be eligible.

- Convene alumni from different exchange programs to build or expand an alumni network capable of working together on common interests and increasing regional and global collaboration of alumni.  Every project proposal should include at least two exchange alumni or the involvement of an alumni association.
- Strengthen the relationship between alumni and the U.S. government to work together on activities that address shared goals and challenges.
- Support alumni as they develop their leadership capacity and implement projects in their communities for maximum impact.

## B. PRIORITY THEMES FOR 2026

Projects must address at least one of the following themes:

1. **Celebrate American Excellence** (culture, arts, sports, English language learning, STEAM education, or civic engagement)

2. **Promote Regional Safety and Security** (youth violence prevention, human trafficking awareness, community resilience, cybersecurity, or rule of law)

3. **Shared Prosperity and Economic Growth** (capacity building, entrepreneurship, digital skills, regional economic development, or supply chains)

4. **American Ingenuity and Innovation** (emerging technologies, AI, space science, innovation communities, or university-industry partnerships)

5. **Global Partnerships and Collaboration** (binational exchanges, international networks, cross-border initiatives, public-private partnerships, or youth leadership)

Proposals that do not meet these outlined program objectives or are submitted by individuals other than alumni of a U.S. government-funded or U.S. government-sponsored exchange program, will be deemed ineligible. All project activities must occur outside of the United States and its territories.

For questions about the grant application process, please contact:

[MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov](mailto:MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov)

## C. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

**Announcement Posted:** April 01, 2026

**Closing Date for Applications:** April 30, 2026, by 11:59 PM (Mexico City time). See Section E below for additional information on the full timeline.

**Award Amounts:** Awards may range from a minimum of $5,000 to a maximum of $35,000 (pending availability of funds).

**Type of Funding:** The 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. This notice is subject to funding availability.

**Funding Instrument Type:** Grant, fixed amount award (FAA), or cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements and some FAAs are distinct from grants in that embassy staff are more actively involved in the grant implementation ("Substantial Involvement").

**Program Performance Period:** Proposed programs should be completed within 12 months or less.

## D. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

### 1. Eligible Applicants:

The following individuals are eligible to apply:

- Applicants **must** be alumni of a U.S. government-funded or U.S. government-sponsored exchange program.
- Each proposal must involve **at least two non-U.S. citizen exchange program alumni** and needs to specify a team leader. Any non-alumni team members must be included as well.
- Alumni who are U.S. citizens may not submit proposals but may participate as team members in a project. U.S. citizen alumni cannot be team leads on projects.
- Alumni teams may comprise alumni from different exchange programs and countries; however, at least one team member must be from Mexico.

- Applications must be submitted by exchange alumni or alumni associations of USG exchange alumni.  If the proposal is submitted by an alumni association, the alumni association needs to identify a team lead for the proposed project.  No other organizations are eligible to apply. Exchange alumni may partner with not-for-profit or non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions to implement project activities.  Grants may be issued to the individual alumni or the partner organization.

**2. Other Eligibility Requirements:**

- All project activities must take place outside of the United States and its territories.
- Only proposals submitted using the official AEIF 2026 forms will be considered for funding.
- Only proposals that support U.S. policies and Freedom250 initiatives will be considered for funding.
- Each group may submit only one proposal.
- Proposals should be in the range of USD $5,000 to $35,000.
- To be eligible to receive an award, all organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via www.SAM.gov, as well as a valid 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.  Note that in the case of an award to an individual – rather than to an organization – that individuals are not required to register with SAM.gov.

*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.*

*While a UEI is not required to apply for this opportunity, it must be in place before an award can be finalized.*

## E. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please follow all instructions below carefully.  Proposals that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated guidelines will be deemed ineligible.  **All submissions throughout the application process must be in English.**

**Stage 1: Concept Note Submission and Pre-Screening**

In this initial phase, interested applicants must first submit a brief concept paragraph (maximum 250 words) to MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov to request authorization to proceed to full proposal development.

The concept paragraph should succinctly describe the project idea, target audience, proposed activities, and how the initiative aligns with **current Administration priorities and U.S. foreign policy objectives**.  This step is intended to ensure early alignment and to allow applicants to receive guidance before investing time in a full proposal.

Once invited to proceed, applicants will fine-tune their proposals in coordination with embassy and consulates' Public Diplomacy Sections and proceed with the application form.

The concept note should include:

- Project Information: Project title, total requested budget, and primary project location.
- Project Team Information: A minimum of two alumni team members is required.  Applications must include names and contact information, a detailed description of each member's role, relevant experience and

qualifications, and the estimated percentage of time each member will dedicate to the project.

- Problem Statement: A concise narrative outlining the issue or challenge addressed, project rationale, objectives, and anticipated impact.
- Project Goals and Objectives: Clear goals supported by specific, measurable, and achievable objectives within a defined timeframe.

The U.S. embassy and consulates in Mexico will review concept notes to assess feasibility, policy alignment, and programmatic relevance.

Submission:

Concept paragraphs must be sent to MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov. Applicants will be notified if they are invited to proceed with proposal development.

**Stage 2: Full Proposal**

If the Concept note is approved, applicants will be invited to develop a proposal. Selected applicants will be notified by the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico **on or about April 1, 2026,** and will then need to provide greater project detail, in the mandatory submission forms, including:

1. **Project Design and Method**: Explain how the project is expected to work to solve the stated problem and achieve your established goal/s. Include who will benefit from your planned activities and how you plan to build on the outcome of this project. You may want to include workshops or training agendas, or any curricula developed to be used in your project.
   *Applicants may also include proposed workshop or training agendas and materials.*
2. **Project Timeline**: A comprehensive timeline of the project activities.

3. **Beneficiaries**: A description of the target audience and an estimate of the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project.

4. **Local Project Partners**: A list of local partners who will support the project, if applicable.

5. **Communication and Outreach Plan**: A strategy for communication and outreach to promote the project, including social media, websites, print news, or other forms of media to reach beneficiaries and the public. Ensure branding includes Freedom250 and U.S. embassy identifiers. All Freedom250-focused activities and any use of Mission Mexico-provided Freedom250 brand elements require advance Mission Mexico approval and must adhere to Department of State and Mission Mexico branding guidelines.

6. **Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan**: This should outline how the project's activities will advance program goals, including measurable outcomes and outputs, such as changes in knowledge, attitudes, service quality, or organizational capacity. It should also specify how impact will be measured.

7. **Detailed Budget Form with Budget Narrative**: A detailed budget and narrative justification using the provided template. All listed expenditures must be presented in the greatest detail possible, in U.S. dollars.

8. **Cost Share:** <u>We encourage all proposals to include some form of cost sharing</u>. Examples include in-kind support (services, coffee breaks, venues, labor, supplies/equipment, or volunteers), a business contributing food, an organization offering a venue at a discount or free of charge, an NGO sponsoring an activity, an expert donating time to facilitate a seminar, etc.

**\*A note on reasonable costs:** Please make sure cost categories are reasonable. **Administrative costs should be under 30% of the total requested budget amount.** These costs include fees for speakers, trainers, and consultants.

Lodging costs should be for program activities during the project and not long-term rent for project team members. Travel costs need to consider the most economic means of travel.

9. **Mandatory application forms for submission:**

   Only proposals submitted using the official forms will be considered for funding.

   - AEIF 2026 Proposal form (Word document)
   - AEIF 2026 Budget form (Excel)

10. **Additional Attachments**:

- Official permission letters (if required for program activities)
- Support letters, if applicable
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM.gov) registration details (if applicable)

**Deadline for submission of complete applications for Stage 2 is April 30, 2026, at 11:59 PM (Mexico City Time).**

**Stage 3: Commitment**

If the proposal is selected for funding by the U.S. Department of State's Office of Alumni Affairs, the applicant must provide the following forms:

**Mandatory Application Forms**:

- **SF-424** (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations) or **SF-424-I** (Application for Federal Assistance – individuals)
- **SF-424A** (Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs)

- **SF-424B** (Assurances for Non-Construction Programs) – *only required for individuals and for organizations not registered in SAM.gov*

*All forms are only required if the proposal is selected for funding. These forms can be found at https://www.grants.gov/forms.*

## Funding Restrictions

AEIF 2026 does not support the following activities or costs, and applications proposing any of these will be deemed ineligible:

- Activities that take place in the United States and its territories
- Staff salaries, office space, and overhead/operational expenses
- Large items of durable equipment or construction programs
- Alcohol, excessive meals, refreshments not integral to the project, or entertainment
- Academic or scientific research
- Charitable or development activities
- Provision of direct social services to a population
- Gifts or prizes
- Duplication of existing projects
- Institutional development of an organization
- Venture capital, for-profit endeavors, or charging fees for participation in the project
- Support for specific religious activities
- Fundraising campaigns
- Support or opposition of parties and political activity or lobbying for specific legislation.

# F. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

**Evaluation Criteria**:

Each application will be evaluated and rated based on the following criteria:

**1. Policy Alignment and Innovation**

This evaluation field assesses the extent to which the proposed project aligns with current U.S. foreign policy priorities, mission goals, and thematic focus areas outlined in the call. Reviewers will consider how clearly the proposal advances strategic objectives such as promoting American excellence, security, economic prosperity, democratic values, and people-to-people engagement. Innovation will be evaluated based on the originality of the approach, the use of new or adapted methods, and the project's potential to generate meaningful impact beyond routine programming. Proposals scoring higher will demonstrate strong strategic relevance and introduce creative, scalable, or replicable models that enhance alumni engagement and policy outcomes.

**2. Feasibility and Capability**

This evaluation field assesses the practicality of the proposed project and the capacity of the project team to successfully implement it and sustain its impact beyond the funding and implementation period. Reviewers will assess whether the scope, timeline, activities, and risk considerations are realistic and well-defined. The experience, roles, and complementary skills of the alumni team and partners will be examined, as well as evidence of local knowledge, stakeholder engagement, and operational readiness. Proposals will also be assessed on their plans for long-term sustainability, including institutional partnerships, resource diversification, scalability, or continued alumni leadership after the project concludes. Higher-scoring proposals will present a coherent implementation plan supported by a qualified team and credible partnerships, demonstrating both a strong likelihood of successful execution and durable impact.

## 3. Budget and Cost Effectiveness

This evaluation field assesses whether the proposed budget is reasonable, well-justified, and aligned with project objectives and activities. Reviewers will consider the appropriateness of costs, the balance between administrative and programmatic expenses, and adherence to funding guidelines. Cost effectiveness will be evaluated based on the project's ability to maximize impact with available resources, including the use of cost sharing or in-kind contributions. Proposals scoring higher will demonstrate efficient use of funds, clear budget justification, and strong value for money in relation to expected outputs and outcomes.

## 4. Monitoring and Evaluation

This evaluation field assesses the quality and rigor of the project's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. Reviewers will examine whether the proposal includes clear, measurable indicators linked to stated objectives, as well as realistic plans for data collection, analysis, and reporting. Attention will be given to how the project plans to track progress, measure outcomes and outputs, and incorporate learning or adaptation during implementation. Higher-scoring proposals will present a thoughtful M&E approach that demonstrates accountability, supports evidence-based decision-making, and contributes to understanding the project's impact.

**Review and Selection Process**:

Review committees from the U.S. embassy and consulates in Mexico will evaluate all eligible applications. Finalists will be reviewed by a committee from the U.S. Department of State Alumni Affairs Office in Washington, D.C. Selected finalists will be contacted with follow-up information.

*Additional Note on Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov*:

Federal agencies will review applicants' integrity and performance history available on SAM.gov as part of the application review process, in alignment with Federal awarding guidelines.

## G. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

### 1. Federal Award Notices

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

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional funding in the future.  Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the performance period is at the Department of State's discretion.  Issuance of this NOFO does not constitute a commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it obligate the U.S. government to cover any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals.  The U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

**2. Payment Method**: Payments will be based on a risk assessment of the project and specific milestones.  The payment structure will be designed to ensure that funds are released in alignment with project progress and risk management.  Payments may be divided into multiple installments, with options such as 80%-20%, 50%-50%, or other mutually agreed-upon percentages.  This flexible approach supports the project's financial needs throughout its implementation while managing risks effectively.  Grantees must adhere to the

grant agreement's terms to ensure smooth and timely disbursement of funds throughout the project's lifecycle.

## 3. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Before applying, applicants should review all applicable terms, conditions, and required certifications for this award to ensure compliance.  These include:

- **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** – Government-wide 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**

In line with the Office of Management and Budget's guidance in 2 CFR Part 200, as well as applicable Federal laws and Executive guidance, the Department of State will review and consider applications per the following:

- **Objective Evaluation of Federal Award Applications**: Select recipients most likely to succeed based on program objectives (2 CFR part 200.205).
- **Prohibition on Certain Telecommunications and Surveillance**
- **Equipment**: Ensure compliance with section 889 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2019 (2 CFR part 200.216).

- **Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty**: Align with E.O. 13798 and E.O. 13864 on free speech and inquiry in academic settings (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, 200.341).
- **Preference for U.S.-Made Goods**: Maximize the use of goods produced in the United States to the extent permitted by law (2 CFR part 200.322).
- **Agreement Termination**: Agreements may be terminated if they no longer meet program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340).

## 4. Reporting

**Reporting Requirements**: Recipients must submit both financial and program reports according to the frequency specified in the award document.

• **Financial Reports**: Recipients are required to submit detailed financial reports that cover all financial transactions associated with the grant.  These reports should include a breakdown of expenditure, income, and any other financial activities related to the project.  Financial reports must be submitted according to the schedule outlined in the grant agreement.

• **Program Reports**: Recipients must provide program reports detailing the project's progress, achievements, and challenges during implementation.  These reports should include narratives, data, and other relevant information demonstrating the project's impact and alignment with its objectives.

**Reporting Schedule**: The specific schedule for financial and program reports, including due dates and frequency, will be defined in the award document. Recipients will be notified of reporting deadlines upon project approval.

**Personnel Time Allocation**: To ensure adequate preparation for report submission, recipients should allocate sufficient time and resources to compile the necessary financial and program data.  Reporting schedules are aligned with

key project milestones, supporting effective integration with overall project management.

**5. Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR)**: As required by Congress, the Department of State is responsible for tracking and reporting foreign assistance data through the FADR.  This entails tracking data from budgeting, planning, and allocation through obligation and disbursement.  Successful applicants must report and draw down federal funding according to relevant FADR Data Elements specified in their award documentation.  If multiple FADR Data Elements apply, the recipient may need to maintain separate accounting records for each program, sector, region, or country.

## H. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions about the grant application process, please contact: [MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov](mailto:MissionMexicoAlumni@state.gov).

## I. OTHER INFORMATION

**Guidelines for Budget Justification – Required for Stage 2 Only**

- **Venue Costs**: Calculate costs for space rental for project-related activities, such as workshops or training.  Consider in-kind donated space first, if possible. Costs should be reasonable for the local environment. Itemize all expenses.
- **Promotional Items and Advertising**: These items are intended to amplify your project's impact.  All requests should be reasonable, relevant, and itemized.

- **Meals and Beverages**: Include reasonable costs for snacks, non-alcoholic beverages, and meals when essential to the project. Break down meal costs per person, per meal.

• **Speaker/Consultant/Training Fees**:

- **Speaker**: Maximum $250 per day for full programming.
- **Trainer**: Maximum $250 per day or $30 per hour not to exceed the daily maximum of $250.  Consider cost-sharing with alumni where possible.
- **Consultant**: A reasonable consultant fee can be included by the alumni for project management and oversight; however, consider cost-sharing as the AEIF cannot provide a salary for your involvement.  All expenses must be itemized.
- **Lodging and Per Diem**: Provide per diem rates and hotel costs supporting project implementation, specifying single or double occupancy.  Calculate per diem rates according to U.S. government standards or adjust to local rates if appropriate.  Itemize all expenses.
- **Travel**: If the project involves travel, include a brief justification.  Costs can include in-country and regional airfare or local travel necessary for project implementation.  Note that travel between the U.S. and the project country is not supported, and travel must be economy class.  Itemize all expenses.  Travel expenses (including lodging and per diem) should not exceed 15% of the requested budget.
- **Supplies, Materials, and Equipment**: Include items like office supplies, software, fuel, small equipment (laptops, projectors), and expendable materials.   Rent equipment rather than purchase when cost-effective. Itemize all expenses.
- **Other Costs**: Describe other costs directly associated with the program that do not fit in the categories above, such as administrative costs, shipping, and monitoring/evaluation.  Itemize all expenses.

- **Cost Sharing**: Refers to contributions from entities other than the U.S. embassy, including in-kind contributions like volunteer time or donated venues.
- **Alcoholic Beverages**: Award funds cannot be used to purchase alcoholic beverages.