



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)**

**Amendment to the FY2026 Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative
(YSEALI) Professional Fellowship**

Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0017815

Application Deadline: May 29, 2026

- A. Basic Information**
- B. Eligibility**
- C. Program Description**
- D. Application Contents and Format**
- E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines**
- F. Application Review Information**
- G. Award Notices**
- H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration**
- I. Other Information**

A. Basic Information

1. Overview.

Funding Opportunity Title	FY 2026 Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Professional Fellowship
Funding Opportunity Number	DFOP0017815
Announcement Type	Amendment to the New Cooperative Agreement
Deadline for Applications	May 29, 2026, 11:59pm Eastern (Washington DC time)

Assistance Listing Number	19.415
Length of Performance Period	30 months
Number of Awards Anticipated	One award.
Award Amount	Approximately \$8,000,000
Total Available Funding	Approximately \$8,000,000
Type of Funding	FY 2026 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
Funding Instrument Type	Cooperative Agreement
Anticipated Award Date	September 15, 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.

2. Executive Summary.

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, through its Office of Citizen Exchanges, invites proposals to design and implement the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Professional Fellowship. The program advances U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific by developing a network of emerging leaders from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states who share America’s founding principles of liberty, opportunity, and self-reliance. By promoting free enterprise, open markets, and innovation, the program fosters shared prosperity and supports a secure, free, and open Indo-Pacific.

Through professional fellowships and reciprocal exchanges, YSEALI Professional Fellowship advances U.S. leadership by strengthening commercial ties, promoting regional stability, and supporting peace and security across the Indo-Pacific. Each year two cohorts of approximately 220 participants from Southeast Asia will travel to the United States for five to six weeks of professional and leadership development. Participants, ages 25 to 35, will be placed with U.S. public, private, and nonprofit institutions for customized placements aligned with four strategic themes central to U.S. foreign policy: Economic Prosperity, Strategic Energy and Minerals, Liberty and Freedom, and Peace and Security.

The exchange will culminate in a YSEALI Professional Fellowship Forum in Washington, D.C., where participants will share lessons learned and explore future collaboration. Following each U.S. fellowship, approximately 100 American professionals will travel to Southeast Asia on Reciprocal Exchanges to extend engagement, transfer expertise, and strengthen bilateral partnerships.

To strengthen engagement with YSEALI Professional Fellowship alumni, the program will support up to five in-person regional alumni accelerator workshops across the ASEAN region. These workshops will focus on U.S. priority policy areas, including countering transnational crime, expanding trade and commerce, advancing AI and emerging technologies, strengthening strategic energy and critical mineral supply chains, supporting regional and maritime security, and more. Alumni seed grants will then support participants in applying these ideas to local solutions across the region.

This Amendment to the NOFO makes the following changes to the original NOFO:

- Increases the total estimated funding from \$4,467,000 to \$8,000,000
- Changes all references in the NOFO from “YSEALI Professional Fellow” to “Participant.”
- Changes all references in the NOFO from “U.S. Fellow” to “U.S. Participant.”
Changes references from “Professional Fellow Institute Themes” to “the Professional Fellowship program theme”
- Revised the Liberty and Freedom theme description for the YSEALI Professional Fellowship program to reflect updated proposed activities.
- Increases the total number of participants from approximately 216 (144 ASEAN and 72 U.S.) to approximately 320 (220 ASEAN and 100 U.S.).
- Expands the YSEALI closing forum to include educational engagement opportunities with the U.S. Congress and the participation of at least 10 U.S. Fellowship hosts to deepen collaboration between U.S. hosts and ASEAN participants.
- Revised Recipient Responsibilities, point #13, to reflect expanded action plan and alumni activities in line with enhanced alumni programming.
- Strengthens the YSEALI Professional Fellowship alumni component through up to five in-person regional alumni accelerator “solutions” workshops across the ASEAN region.
- Changes references from “YSEALI Fellows Forum (YFF)” to “YSEALI Professional Fellowship Forum.”

- Removed inapplicable J visa language following the correct J visa language, which remains included.
- Extends the program implementation period from 24 months to 30 months.
- Extends the due date so proposals are now due May 29, 2026, due to the nature of these changes.

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.

Applicants may administer the program directly or propose to implement specific components through sub-award partnerships, as appropriate to achieve program objectives.

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. Grants or Cooperative Agreements awarded to organizations which do not demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$130,000.
- 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.

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 Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) is the Department of State's flagship initiative to advance America's interests in a region that will drive two-thirds of global growth in the coming decades. YSEALI cultivates young leaders across ASEAN, mobilizing them around U.S. priorities such as:

- strengthening trade and economic ties to advance shared prosperity
- maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific
- enhancing cooperation around resilient supply chains for energy and natural resources

The YSEALI Professional Fellowship develops emerging professionals from ASEAN member states to strengthen U.S. engagement and advance American interests in

the Indo-Pacific. Through tailored four-week fellowships with U.S. public, private, and nonprofit institutions, participants gain firsthand experience across key pillars of U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific—advancing economic prosperity, promoting strategic energy and mineral cooperation, strengthening liberty and democratic governance, and supporting peace and security. **Participants** are exposed to American models of innovation, free enterprise, responsible resource management, and rule of law that reinforce U.S. leadership and expand mutually beneficial partnerships throughout Southeast Asia.

The YSEALI Professional Fellowship advances U.S. foreign policy and economic goals by:

1. **Advancing Economic Prosperity:** Building stronger U.S.–ASEAN business and trade relationships through innovation, aligned business practices, entrepreneurship, and emerging technologies.
2. **Securing Strategic Energy and Minerals:** Advancing U.S. energy security and supply chain resilience by engaging leaders in energy innovation, resilient infrastructure, and critical minerals management.
3. **Promoting Liberty and Freedom:** Highlighting America’s founding principles of self-government, freedom of speech, and rule of law.
4. **Strengthening Peace and Security:** Expanding cooperation with U.S. partners to address transnational crime, cyber threats, and adversarial influence.
5. **Cultivating Future U.S. Allies:** Transforming emerging leaders into enduring partners who strengthen U.S. leadership and advance peace, prosperity, and security in the Indo-Pacific.

3. Program Specific Guidelines.

The proposal should fully integrate program goals throughout its design and implementation. It should also demonstrate relevant regional and thematic expertise and clearly describe the applicant’s and any subrecipients’ capacity to recruit U.S. public- and private-sector placement hosts aligned with the program’s themes. The recipient will manage and support all international program activities and serve as the primary point of contact for participating U.S. embassies. Award recipients must coordinate closely with U.S. embassies to ensure program design and implementation advance American foreign policy objectives, including the recruitment and selection of non-U.S. **participants**, pre-departure orientations (PDOs), and in-country engagements. All proposed reciprocal program schedules involving American participants must be reviewed by the Global Leaders Division

and the respective Public Diplomacy Section at least one month before any international activities begin. U.S. participants, recognized as experts in areas vital to advancing U.S. foreign policy and economic objectives, are encouraged to engage in public diplomacy efforts that highlight American excellence, innovation, and values. Their participation will strengthen the impact of reciprocal exchanges and reinforce U.S. influence and partnerships abroad.

3a. Participating Countries

Participating countries will be ASEAN Member States, which may include all or a selected subset, depending on J-1 visa eligibility and other operational considerations. ECA reserves the right to modify the list of participating countries prior to award.

3b. Participants

Program participants are those individuals who travel under cooperative agreement funding from their country of origin to a designated exchange country. In this NOFO, non-U.S. participants are referred to as YSEALI participants and Americans traveling on reciprocal exchanges are referred to as U.S. participants. Employees of the U.S. Department of State, the recipient, subaward recipients, and/or contractors are not eligible to participate in the YSEALI Professional Fellowship and cannot be included as program participants.

Proposals must support approximately 320 participants, including about 220 YSEALI ASEAN participants and 100 U.S. participants.

YSEALI Professional Fellowship participants are emerging leaders, ages 25 to 35, with strong English proficiency and the potential to advance U.S.-ASEAN relations through their professional achievements. They demonstrate leadership promise in their countries' political, economic, private and public sectors and are committed to implementing projects that foster collaboration with the United States and promote freedom, innovation, and good governance.

U.S. participants must be American citizens who are established working professionals and have either hosted or engaged substantively with YSEALI participants during the U.S.-based exchange program.

3c. The Professional Fellows Program Themes

Eight Professional Fellowship themes will take place in 2027 and 2028. There will be

two themes in each category listed below. Approximately four themes will run in Fall 2027, and approximately four will run in Spring 2028.

The Professional Fellow Program themes for this award are:

- (a) **The YSEALI Professional Fellowship program theme: Economic Prosperity -** This program theme will strengthen U.S.–ASEAN business and trade relationships by providing participants with direct experience in American business practices, innovation, entrepreneurship, and emerging technologies. Fellowships should highlight how U.S. small businesses, sports industries, and technology sectors expand commercial partnerships, attract investment, and create jobs. Activities should build entrepreneurial capacity, increase market access, and advance collaboration between U.S. and ASEAN small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Priority areas include technology for prosperity, digital commerce, sustainable business models, and sports-based economic initiatives that promote growth, youth engagement, and community development—especially as the nation prepares for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic and Paralympic Games.

- (b) **The YSEALI Professional Fellowship program theme: Strategic Energy and Minerals -** This program theme will focus on advancing U.S. energy security and critical mineral supply chain resilience vital to economic growth and strategic stability. The participants will study U.S. practices in energy innovation, resilient infrastructure, resource governance, and supply chain transparency that secure reliable access to essential materials. Programs should promote responsible resource management, strategic investment, and partnerships that protect U.S. economic and security interests across the Indo-Pacific.

- (c) **The YSEALI Professional Fellowship program theme: Liberty and Freedom -** This program theme will advance America’s founding principles of self-government, freedom of speech, rule of law to demonstrate the strength and accountability of the U.S. system of governance. Programs should highlight how constitutional checks and balances, transparent institutions, and protection of individual rights foster public trust and civic participation. The YSEALI Professional Exchange participants should examine accountability and transparency in government, anti-corruption practices, and freedom of speech and expression as essential foundations for responsive leadership, stable societies, and long-term regional prosperity.

- (d) **The YSEALI Professional Fellowship program theme: Peace and Security - This program theme** will promote U.S. leadership in strengthening peace and regional stability across the Indo-Pacific. **The** participants will engage with American experts and institutions to address transnational crime, cyber threats, and adversarial influence through cooperation in security, law enforcement, and technology. Programs should emphasize peace through strength, regional coordination, and practical approaches to preventing online fraud, trafficking, and criminal exploitation. Efforts should strengthen partnerships with U.S. government agencies, the private sector, and civil society to protect communities and reinforce shared security interests.

3d. Overview of key program components

All proposals should contain detailed information related to the following key program components.

Program Promotion and Outreach – The recipient will develop and manage a program website, create informational documents, and develop and manage official program social media accounts.

Recruitment and Selection – The recipient will create and disseminate recruitment materials, develop and manage an online application system, organize and participate in candidate interviews, and create an application scoring system to ensure a fair and open competition. The primary award recipient should identify and collaborate with at least one in-country partner in each ASEAN nation, if available, to support program recruitment efforts. If an in-country partner is not available, the applicant must demonstrate that it has the internal capacity and expertise to carry out recruitment and related activities directly, without reliance on an in-country partner.

Leadership and Professional Development Curriculum – The recipient will design and implement a leadership and professional development curriculum that strengthens **participants'** skills in leadership, management, community engagement, and strategic communication. The curriculum should foster practical competencies that prepare **participants** to lead effectively, promote U.S.–ASEAN collaboration, and advance shared democratic and economic values.

Virtual Program Launch/ Pre-Departure Orientations (PDOs) – The recipient will develop and host a series of virtual pre-departure orientations for YSEALI and U.S. participants. The PDOs should prepare the participants for their program experience and include elements related to program goals and expectations, and health and safety information. The PDOs should be conducted in collaboration with Public Diplomacy Sections at involved U.S. embassies and/or consulates (“Posts”), and subaward recipients (if applicable).

Professional Fellowships Themes - The U.S.-based exchange program will comprise of eight professional fellowship program themes (approximately four in fall 2027 and approximately four in spring 2028) organized by each of the four themes referenced in section “3c. Professional Themes.” Each theme should support a minimum of 25 YSEALI Professional participants and should be comprised of YSEALI participants from all eligible Southeast Asian countries.

Each program must include the following two components:

Integrated Arrival Orientation and Professional Study Tour – The award recipient, in coordination with all subaward recipients (if applicable), will organize a single, integrated Arrival Orientation for all YSEALI participants. This orientation will outline the goals and expectations of the U.S.-based exchange program and provide guidance on developing action plans that advance mutual interests and reinforce U.S. leadership in the Indo-Pacific. The Arrival Orientation will be integrated into a Professional Study Tour designed to deepen participants understanding of American principles, institutions, and policy approaches related to the program’s themes. The tour should showcase U.S. innovation, governance, and enterprise, connecting participants with leading American experts and organizations that exemplify U.S. values and strategic priorities.

Fellowship Placement – The award recipient, in coordination with all subaward recipients (if applicable), will identify and support individually tailored fellowship placements that advance U.S. foreign policy and economic priorities while aligning with each YSEALI participants' professional background and interests. These placements should provide participants with direct, hands-on experience in the daily operations of leading U.S. public, private, and nonprofit institutions; foster professional relationships and networks with American counterparts that strengthen long-term U.S.-ASEAN partnerships; and guide participants in developing action plans that extend U.S. influence, promote open markets, and reinforce American leadership in their home countries. The recipient and, if applicable, its partners, must have and demonstrate the capacity to provide and support

professional placements nationwide. Placement clustering within a single community or metropolitan area is encouraged to promote shared learning and collaboration across program themes. However, each community or metropolitan area should host no fewer than two and no more than ten YSEALI participants during any given Spring or Fall cohort.

YSEALI Professional Fellowship forum – The U.S.-based exchange program will conclude with the YSEALI Fellowship forum, a two- to three-day program-wide conference held in Washington, D.C., at the end of each Spring and Fall cohorts. The primary award recipient, and any subrecipients if applicable, will plan, implement, and manage the forum in close coordination with ECA. The forum will bring together all participants to share insights from their experiences, participate in advanced leadership and professional development sessions, and engage directly with U.S. officials, experts, and organizations. The forum will include educational engagement with the U.S. Congress through a visit that introduces participants to the founding principles and structure of the U.S. government. It will also include the participation of at least 10 U.S. Hosts to strengthen exchange and collaboration between U.S. hosts and ASEAN exchange participants. The forum should reinforce American leadership, highlight U.S. values, and strengthen the participants' understanding of the United States as a trusted and preferred partner in the Indo-Pacific region.

Reciprocal Exchange for Americans – The award recipient, in collaboration with subaward recipients (if applicable), will manage and support reciprocal exchanges of at least one week, enabling U.S. participants to travel to Southeast Asia to assist participants in implementing their follow-on projects. These exchanges should advance U.S. strategic interests by strengthening professional and institutional ties, promoting American innovation, and showcasing U.S. leadership in the region. The recipient will develop and maintain an online application system for participants and their U.S. counterparts to propose reciprocal projects, coordinate schedules in consultation with participants, and work closely with U.S. embassies to identify post-driven programming opportunities that further U.S. diplomatic and economic priorities.

Alumni Engagement and Alumni Accelerator "Solutions" Workshops – The recipient will develop and implement plans to sustain alumni engagement that advance U.S. foreign policy objectives and strengthen long-term connections with emerging regional leaders. Alumni engagement activities should foster continued collaboration with the United States, promote U.S. foreign and economic priorities,

and encourage participants to apply American models of leadership, innovation, and civic participation in their home countries. Plans must include up to five alumni accelerator “solutions” workshops with a mini-grants program to support YSEALI participants follow-on projects, an alumni impact award recognizing outstanding achievements, a professional development award program, and regional alumni capacity building events.

Mentoring – The recipient will establish participants mentoring program designed to strengthen leadership and professional development while promoting continued engagement with U.S. contacts. The program should connect alumni with American and regional mentors to foster collaboration on shared challenges and advance U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. The recipient will also administer mentor-mentee collaboration awards to support in-person engagement that enhances professional growth and reinforces the program’s long-term impact.

Logistical and Administrative Support – The recipient will arrange and participate in participants selection interviews, issue program notifications to participants and/or hosts, prepare, issue and send DS-2019 forms to posts, enroll all program participants traveling outside their home countries in the U.S. Department of State’s Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE), and coordinate and support exchange participant housing, meal and transportation arrangements.

4. Recipient Responsibilities.

These responsibilities include program planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and full financial and administrative oversight in accordance with all applicable federal regulations and ECA guidelines. The recipient is responsible for carrying out all program activities referenced above and below.

1. Develop and implement a mobile-friendly online application system and a targeted recruitment campaign that reaches eligible candidates, supports a merit-based open competition, and includes semi-finalist interviews (virtual and/or in-person) in coordination with Posts as part of the participant selection process.
2. Develop and implement a mobile-friendly program website (independent of the recipient’s organizational website) to convey program information and highlights;
3. Develop and implement a comprehensive outreach and social media strategy that promotes U.S. investment in the YSEALI Professional Fellowship

- strengthens America's leadership in fostering global partnerships, and highlights U.S. host institutions, participants, and alumni whose work advances American values, innovation, and mutual prosperity;
4. Create and distribute comprehensive program materials (electronic and print), conduct virtual pre-departure orientations in close coordination with U.S. Embassies, and use mobile-friendly online and social media tools to prepare finalists for their programs, address questions, and facilitate early communication with host organizations and communities, including sharing key resources, assignments, and leadership and professional development activities prior to departure.
 5. Manage and monitor sub-award recipients (if applicable);
 6. Create program guidelines and other relevant materials for U.S. placement host organizations. The recipient organization should host a virtual orientation for U.S. placement host organizations that clearly outlines hosting roles and responsibilities;
 7. Develop and implement communication platforms and systems to share resources and facilitate communication among U.S. placement organizations, participants, and the greater YSEALI Professional Fellowship participants network of alumni;
 8. Conduct a comprehensive arrival orientation at the start of each Fellowship program theme and design and implement professional study tours that showcase U.S. excellence by connecting YSEALI participants with leading American professionals and organizations aligned with each thematic focus.
 9. Identify and secure four-week fellowship placements with leading U.S. non-profit, public, and private sector organizations that exemplify American excellence and innovation. Ensure each placement aligns with the YSEALI participants areas of interest and supports their follow-on projects and action plan development.
 10. Develop and implement a U.S.-led and U.S.-inspired YSEALI participants mentoring program for the FY 2026 that promotes American leadership in mentorship and professional excellence, fosters collaboration, addresses shared challenges, and strengthens the leadership and professional development skills of participants and alumni.
 11. Develop and implement a plan to monitor the health, safety, and welfare of participants, and promptly inform and consult with ECA and relevant U.S. embassies and consulates regarding any program or participant issues, emergencies, or actions taken to address them.
 12. Develop and implement an integrated leadership and professional development curriculum for YSEALI participants, and administer a closing

community engagement award program that enables U.S. hosts and interlocutors to participate in closing events.

13. In coordination with ECA and the U.S. Mission to ASEAN, develop and implement up to five in-person regional YSEALI Professional Fellowship Alumni Accelerator "Solutions" Workshops across the ASEAN region that highlight U.S. expertise in areas aligned with Administration priorities—including (1) countering transnational crime, including online scams; (2) business and commerce that expand trade and commercial ties; (3) artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies; (4) strategic energy and minerals, including supply chains that support AI, advanced technologies, and critical minerals; (5) regional security, including maritime security; and (6) technologies that drive economic growth and opportunity—during which alumni will develop and present concrete solutions to these priority issues, and administer follow-on alumni grants for selected alumni to implement their proposed solutions after the workshops, in consultation with ECA and the U.S. Mission to ASEAN as appropriate.
14. Provide reasonable accommodations for participants, including disability-related needs when required, to ensure participation in all program activities;
15. Conduct performance monitoring that incorporates the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework, links outcomes to stated program goals and objectives, ensures consistent and high-quality implementation across all fellowship themes, and, in consultation with ECA, collects additional non-MODE data as needed to strengthen evaluation and inform program improvements.
16. Cover the cost of all appropriate program-related expenses for YSEALI Professional Fellowship participants, U.S. participants, and alumni participating in collaborative projects, including but not limited to transportation, lodging, and meals and incidental expenses, etc.
17. 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.
18. Facilitate and coordinate the planning of the Reciprocal Exchange for Americans. Posts must receive the draft project schedule no later than four weeks before the program start date.
19. Enroll participants in the Bureau's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) for the duration of the program, issue health benefits identification cards, provide guidance on claims procedures, and incorporate an ASPE presentation into pre-departure and/or arrival orientations, including participation from ECA's ASPE Coordinator when possible.

20. Issue 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.
21. Participate in regular program reviews with ECA (in person, video conference, 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.
22. Develop and support innovative plans for virtual activities to augment, or substitute for, in-person engagement with all program stakeholders when changing political and/or environmental situations result in restrictions on international travel. The plans must address how the organization will conduct virtual activities for participants who have limited access to internet and/or limited access to a computer or mobile device.
23. Respond fully and promptly to requests for program or statistical information from ECA, including but not limited to providing information through ECA-supplied spreadsheets and databases.
24. Respond fully and promptly to ad hoc requests for program information from ECA.
25. Design and implement a fellowship placement vetting and selection process, in consultation with ECA, to ensure all proposed placements align with Administration priorities, with ECA reviewing and approving each placement prior to finalization.
26. Design and produce media and communication materials that highlight program outcomes and success stories featuring both U.S. and overseas participants—including short impact videos and related digital content—to showcase achievements, demonstrate results, and communicate the program’s contribution to U.S. foreign policy objectives, while aligning with ECA branding and communication standards, and design and maintain an internal online YSEALI Professional Fellowship website to share these highlights, stories, and updates with the recipient, ECA, and Posts.
27. Be able to pivot and implement alternative or online programming if in-person activities become infeasible for all or a subset of eligible countries.

5. Goals and Objectives.

The goals and objectives of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Professional Fellowship are to provide ASEAN emerging leaders with a U.S.-based understanding of economic prosperity, liberty and freedom, peace and security, and

strategic resource management. The program achieves this by facilitating professional fellowships, leadership development, and engagement with U.S. public, private, and nonprofit institutions. Through these experiences, participants gain practical exposure to American models of innovation, entrepreneurship, rule of law, and responsible resource management. These fellowships equip emerging leaders to apply learned practices in their home countries, strengthen regional collaboration, and build lasting partnerships that advance shared U.S.–ASEAN goals of freedom, prosperity, and stability.

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
 - E1.1.16: Percent of virtual exchange (VE) participants who report VE as their only likely way to interact with citizens from other countries in the future
 - 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
 - E2.0.01: Percent of foreign participants that volunteer in their host communities
 - E2.0.04: Number of hours that foreign participants spend volunteering in their host communities
- 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)
 - o Sub-Objective 3.1: Alumni subscribe to platforms for resources and information-sharing
 - E3.1.02: Percent of participants who learned about new resources
 - o 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
 - E4.0.14: Percent of participants reporting new digital skills/competencies gained from virtual exchange (VE) programming
 - 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
 - E4.1.14: Number of virtual exchange (VE) programs
 - E4.1.15: Number of participants in virtual exchange (VE) programs
 - o 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=WBHC1oLNZvl>. 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/pn6tavvg7sh064i502fzap49ox63y38a>), 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.

- a. **Travel:** All international air travel must comply with the Fly America Act. The U.S. Department of State provides J-1 visas for non-U.S. participants, and visa processing fees should not be included in the budget. The proposal should include costs for travel related to obtaining visas, such as interviews, delivering or picking up passports, etc. A travel allowance of \$100 per foreign participant may be included in the budget for incidental expenses during international travel.
- b. **Per Diem:** For U.S.-based programming, use the federal per diem rates for individual U.S. cities, which can be found at [GSA Per Diem Rates](#). **Budget realistic costs that reflect the local economy and do not exceed federal per diem rates. For foreign programming, use the rates available at [State Department Per Diem Rates](#).**

- c. **Book and Cultural Allowance:** Foreign participants may receive a one-time cultural allowance of \$200 per person and a book allowance of \$50. U.S. program staff are not eligible for these allowances.
- d. **Consultants:** Consultants may be hired to provide specialized expertise or presentations. Honoraria rates should not exceed \$250 per session. Subaward and subcontracting organizations may also be used. Include a letter of support detailing responsibilities and costs for subawards and itemize subcontract costs in the budget. Contractors or contracting organizations may also be employed, with a letter outlining the agreement included in the proposal.
- e. **Room Rental:** Room rental costs must not exceed the market rate for event space in the area of activity. If citing market value, provide justification for the requested amount. Without justification, room rentals may not exceed \$250 per day per conference room or activity.
- f. **Materials Development:** The proposal may include costs for purchasing, developing, and translating materials for participants.
- g. **Supplies:** The proposal may include costs for equipment needed for programming, such as computers or fax machines. Furniture costs are not allowed. Equipment costs should be kept to a minimum.
- h. **Working Meals:** No more than two working meals may be provided per project. At least one working meal should be budgeted for U.S.-based exchange briefings in Washington, DC. The cost per person for a working meal must not exceed \$45. Alcoholic beverages cannot be charged to U.S. government funds. The number of invited guests should not exceed twice the number of funded program participants (e.g., no more than 20 guests for a meal with 10 participants).
- i. **Health Benefits:** Foreign participants will be covered under the U.S. Department of State-sponsored Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE). The State Department pays the ASPE premium directly to the administrator. The proposal may include costs for supplemental health

insurance for hosting organizations requiring specialized coverage and travel insurance for participants.

- j. **Reasonable Accommodations:** The proposal should budget for reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Up to five to seven percent of the total requested ECA award funds may be allocated for this purpose. Plans should include necessary program modifications or adjustments to participant numbers if accommodations are required.
- k. **Wire Transfer Fees:** The proposal may include costs for transferring funds to partner organizations overseas. Research applicable taxes imposed by host governments on these transfers.
- l. **Follow-on/Alumni Activities:** The proposal may include small grants or a grant competition to support YSEALI PFP goals and accelerate the development of products or services that advance program objectives. Other follow-on opportunities may also be proposed.
- m. **Database Management:** Reasonable costs for purchasing, developing, or expanding a database management system to track applicants, participants, host organizations, and alumni may be included. The system must protect personally identifiable information (PII) both at rest and during routine data transmission.
- n. **Other cost categories as necessary.**

Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

8. Cost Share.

ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit.

The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

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 submitting 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 of State will play a substantial role in program planning, coordination, and oversight beyond routine grant monitoring. The Department, through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), will provide strategic direction to ensure the program aligns with U.S. foreign policy priorities and advances America's interests in the Indo-Pacific region. ECA staff will participate in key stages of program design and implementation, including the review and approval of program materials, participant selection, placement coordination, reciprocal exchanges, and alumni engagement activities. The Department will also facilitate coordination with U.S. embassies and consulates to ensure integration with ongoing public diplomacy initiatives and to maximize policy impact.

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

- 1.) Closely monitor the recipient's performance through site visits, desk audits, mandatory performance and financial reports, consultations, and other forms

of communication. (Additional details regarding monitoring and oversight of the program by ECA representatives will be provided at the time the award is made.)

- 2.) Review and evaluate all quarterly or semi-annual program and financial reports.
 - a. All program and financial reporting requirements must be current and up to date.
 - b. Any/all concerns, issues, or modifications requested by the Grants Officer or Program Officer to the original program design or method of implementation must be responded to in writing.
 - c. Approve each YSEALI Professional Fellowship placement, including city cohort assignments and the location of the Integrated Arrival Orientation.
 - d. Hold regular meetings with the award recipient and relevant State Department stakeholders. Include external partners or representatives, as appropriate.

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.

Applicants must submit SF-424A – “Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs” along with a comprehensive budget for the entire program. In addition to the SF-424A, there must be a summary budget, a detailed budget, and a budget narrative. 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.

Applicants may choose to submit additional materials to support their application. Optional documents may include calendars of activities or itineraries (if applicable), resumes or CVs, and letters of endorsement or commitment.

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/>.

3. Department of State Contacts

For questions about this announcement, please contact Program Officer Davron Mirsagatov at the U.S. Department of State, Office of Citizen Exchanges, Global Leaders Division (ECA/PE/C/GL), at 202-632-2718 or mirsagatovd@state.gov, with a copy to Dawnjalice Brown, Branch Chief, at brownd4@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.

2. 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 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-I/subchapter-A/part-25/subpart-1/section-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 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.servicenow.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.servicenow.com/ilms/>.

3. 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

4. Submission Dates and Times.

Application Deadline Date.

Friday, May 29th, 2026, 11:59 p.m. EDT

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.

5. 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. 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.

c. 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.

d. 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 the program idea:** Proposals should be original, well-defined, and relevant to ECA's mission.
- b. **Ability to achieve program aims and purpose:** Proposals should clearly state the program's aims and purpose and demonstrate how your institution will meet them.
- c. **Institutional Capacity:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results. The organization has expertise in exchange programs, and the proposal demonstrates it has internal controls in place to manage federal funds.
- 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. **Cost-effectiveness:** Proposals should keep the overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, as low as possible. All costs should be necessary and appropriate.

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.

6. 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 MELI 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