1. On page 6, the NOFO states that five (5) finalists and two (2) alternates will be selected from the pitch competition, and it later specifies that the implementing partner must select five (5) alternates to be “ready to step in.” Could you kindly confirm the total number of alternates to be identified? The implementing partner is required to select five (5) alternates in addition to the five (5) finalists. Therefore, the total number of alternates to be identified is five (5), to ensure that there are backup candidates ready in case of any visa issues or other unforeseen circumstances.
2. Could you please clarify the extent to which the implementing partner will be expected to co-design or co-organize the InvesTech pitch competition, which is being organized by the Foreign Commercial Service? Specifically, will the implementing partner be responsible only for preparing the participants for this event, or are there also expected logistical, technical, or evaluative roles (e.g., venue, judging criteria, panel facilitation) that fall under the implementer's scope? The implementing partner will be responsible for preparing the participants for the InvesTech pitch competition, which includes providing coaching on pitch preparation, refining business models, and ensuring participants are well-prepared to present their businesses. The implementing partner will also provide support for any logistical aspects related to participant needs, such as coordinating meals, managing event materials, and addressing any other ad-hoc requirements that might arise during the event or as requested by the U.S. Embassy. However, **the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS)** will be responsible for the overall organization of the event, including judging criteria, and panel facilitation. The implementing partner will not be expected to handle the evaluative aspects of the pitch competition but should coordinate closely with FCS to ensure the participants are adequately prepared.
3. Could you kindly confirm that visa application fees for the U.S. visit are expected to be covered under the cooperative agreement budget? Additionally, could you clarify what type of visa participants are expected to apply for (e.g., B-1 Business Visitor), so that we may plan for timelines, documentation, and overall program logistics accordingly? Lastly, will the U.S. Embassy be able to provide any assistance in facilitating or expediting the visa interview process for selected participants, given the fixed travel timeline? The visa application fees for the U.S. visit should be covered under the cooperative agreement budget. This includes standard visa fees, which are typically for a B-1 Business Visitor visa. As for the visa interview process, the U.S. Embassy will work with the selected participants to ensure timely processing and may assist in expediting the visa interviews, depending on the circumstances and the fixed travel timeline.
4. Are there expectations that U.S.-based mentors will be formally contracted and paid, or can they be engaged pro bono through industry networks? U.S.-based mentors can be engaged **pro bono** through industry networks, and there is no requirement for them to be formally contracted or paid. However, the implementing partner should ensure that mentors are well-qualified and able to provide valuable guidance to participants. If needed, compensation for mentors can be considered within the program’s scope, but it is not a requirement nor a restriction.
5. Are there preferred media outreach metrics (e.g., number of posts, impressions, engagement) that applicants should target during the communications campaign? While the Embassy does not have specific media outreach metrics in place, applicants are encouraged to focus on measurable engagement. The goal is to maximize visibility of the program’s impact, so it is important to track outreach and ensure that key milestones (e.g., participant success stories, event attendance) are covered across multiple media platforms. This is up to the applicant.
6. The NOFO requests that applicants establish a baseline at the start of the program to measure outcomes. Will the Embassy provide a standard baseline/MEL tool or should applicants develop a custom one for this activity? Applicants are required to establish a baseline at the start of the program to measure outcomes. The Embassy will not provide a standard baseline or M&E tool, so applicants should develop a custom monitoring and evaluation (MEL) tool that is appropriate for their program and outcomes. The baseline should include specific indicators that will allow for tracking progress and measuring the success of the program.
7. The program guidelines mention that participants will be responsible for their own SelectUSA Investment Summit registration fees.
* Could you please confirm whether these fees should be reflected in our project budget as cost share, or if they are to be managed separately through direct coordination with the selected participants? The SelectUSA Summit registration fees should be managed separately from the program budget and are the responsibility of the participants. These fees are not required to be included in the project’s budget as cost-share, but participants should be informed upfront about this cost-sharing element.
* Should we also factor in the cost of managing participant consent and documentation regarding this cost-sharing requirement? Yes, you should factor in the cost of managing participant consent and ensuring that documentation is collected and properly managed regarding this cost-sharing requirement – but could you explain what type of costs are incurred with managing the consents and documentation?
1. Our organization does not currently have (NICRA). In this case:
* Are we permitted to apply the **10% de minimis indirect cost rate** in our budget, as outlined in 2 CFR 200.414(f)? Recipients that do not have a current Federal negotiated indirect cost rate (including provisional rate) may elect to charge a de minimis rate of up to 15 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC).
1. Will the organizer's travel expenses—including international and domestic travel, accommodation, meals, and local transportation during the 21-day U.S. visit—also be covered under the program?  Organizers must be intrinsic to the program and be reasonable to be considered as allowable and allocable costs.
2. Please explain what is meant by “Official permission letters, if required for program activities” in the section on attachments. These are just additional attachments if required/needed. It could be non-applicable.