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)
FY2026 Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI)
Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0017987
Application Deadline: June 5, 2026

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A. **Basic Information**

1. **Overview.**

Funding Opportunity Title	FY26 Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI)
Funding Opportunity Number	DFOP0017987
Announcement Type	New Cooperative Agreement
Deadline for Applications	June 5, 24, 2026 11:59pm Eastern (Washington DC time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.415
Length of Performance Period	18 to 24 months

Number of Awards Anticipated	1 award
Award Amount	Approximately $7,875,000
Total Available Funding	$23,625,000, pending availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY26 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
Funding Instrument Type	Cooperative Agreement
Anticipated Award Date	September 1, 2026

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

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

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

2. Executive Summary.

The Global Leaders Division in the Office of Citizen Exchanges at the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) seeks proposals for a cooperative agreement to design, implement, and oversee the FY 2026 Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI) Fellowship Program. YLAI advances U.S. economic interests and leadership by fostering business partnerships between emerging entrepreneurs from the Western Hemisphere and U.S. companies. The program combines in-person and technology-driven engagement, an active alumni network, and ongoing collaboration with U.S. embassies to promote U.S. commercial priorities, create new opportunities for American companies in key markets, and increase public awareness of American business leadership. YLAI directly supports U.S. national security and the Administration's foreign policy objectives by strengthening commercial ties, expanding U.S. exports, and promoting American values of entrepreneurship, free enterprise, and innovation throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The FY 2026 program will bring approximately 250 participants from the Caribbean and Latin America for a five to six-week fellowship, including orientation, tailored

U.S. business placements, entrepreneurial training, a closing event, and post-program alumni activities. Approximately 100 U.S. participants will travel overseas to support Fellows' action plans and develop networks that support American economic growth.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants.
The following organizations are eligible to apply*:*
- U.S. Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations
- U.S. Not-for-profit public and private educational institutions

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

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

3. Other Eligibility Requirements.
a. All organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via SAM.gov as well as a valid registration in SAM.gov. Please see *Section E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines* for more information.
b. ECA's Grant Guidelines require that organizations demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchanges to be eligible for awards exceeding $130,000 in ECA funding. As noted in *Section A. Basic Information*, ECA anticipates issuing one award, for approximately $7,875,000. Therefore, organizations must demonstrate four years of experience in conducting international exchanges in your proposal to be eligible to apply under this competition.
c. All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO and the PSI; not doing so may result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.
d. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF 424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
e. Only *one* proposal will be considered by ECA from each applicant organization. In cases where more than one submission from an applicant appears in grants.gov, ECA will *only* consider the submission made closest in

time to the NOFO deadline; that submission would constitute the one and only proposal ECA would review from that applicant.

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

f. Applicants who are current recipients of awards directly from ECA should make sure the application discusses one or more award that will be open with ECA at the start of the anticipated period of performance for this NOFO. Applicants who do not have current awards directly with ECA, please review the information in the PSI, section D, with additional information that must be provided in your application for it to be eligible.

C. Program Description

1. Authority.

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

2. Purpose.

The YLAI Fellowship Program advances U.S. economic interests and global leadership by fostering strategic business partnerships between entrepreneurs from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. Through in-person exchanges, technology-driven engagement, and an active alumni network, the program prepares business leaders to scale ventures, adopt American business practices, and contribute to economic growth in their home countries and the United States.

3. Program Specific Guidelines.

Definitions

"Program participants" are defined as those individuals who travel under award funding from their country of origin to a designated exchange country. For this NOFO, program participants are also referred to as "YLAI Fellows" or "Fellows." Americans participating in follow-on outbound exchanges are referred to as "U.S. Participants." **Employees and family members of employees of the award recipient or of any sub-award recipients are not eligible to participate in the YLAI Fellowship Program and cannot be included as program participants.**

A. Eligible Countries

Fellows will be emerging entrepreneurs, age 25-35, recruited and selected from eligible countries in the Western Hemisphere. ECA reserves the right to modify the final list of participating countries.

B. Recruitment and Selection

Proposals must demonstrate the capacity to recruit and select Fellows and American participants through an open, merit-based process, in consultation with ECA and U.S. embassies. Recruitment should target entrepreneurs with strong potential for commercial engagement with U.S. companies and alignment with U.S. economic priorities.

Fellows:
- Selected through a competitive process in consultation with ECA, WHA, and PAS at U.S. embassies/consulates.
- Must be for-profit business entrepreneurs, 25-35 years old, with at least two years of experience, and demonstrate potential for commercial engagement with U.S. companies.
- Must submit an action plan for business growth or market expansion.
- Must have working-level English proficiency.

U.S. Participants:
- Approximately 100, selected through an open, merit-based process, primarily from those who served as hosts for Fellows.
- Must have relevant expertise to support Fellows' business action plans and facilitate the development of strategic partnerships and advance commercial initiatives that align with U.S. economic interests and priorities in the region.

C. Outreach and Promotion

Proposals must outline a comprehensive outreach plan to publicize the program to qualified applicants and U.S. businesses, leveraging media campaigns, public events, and digital storytelling. All materials must adhere to ECA communication guidelines and be submitted for approval. Technology should be used to facilitate communication, strengthen group identity, and support alumni activities.

Additionally, the proposal should address the recipient's ability to support maintenance of the YLAI Fellowship Program website and all its components and social media sites. ECA may request that website content be added or removed in a timely manner. ECA may request that the recipient assist in promoting and coordinating opportunities for Fellowship Alumni with the YLAI Network.

D. Program Components

The proposal should include these key components of the YLAI Fellowship Program:
- Pre-departure orientation (PDO) for Fellows and U.S. participants
- An online community for networking and resource sharing
- Arrival orientation in the U.S.
- Four to five-week tailored U.S. business placements and mentorship
- Action plan development and implementation support
- Supplemental entrepreneurship and leadership training
- YLAI Closing Forum in Washington, D.C.
- Reciprocal exchange for U.S. participants
- Ongoing alumni engagement and follow-on activities, including at least one in-person alumni networking conference per year, to be held in the United States or in a YLAI country

Proposals must also demonstrate subject matter expertise on the Western Hemisphere and the thematic business areas listed below. ECA and participating Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies and consulates reserve the right to approve in-country partners.

D.1 Pre-Departure Orientation
PDOs and arrival orientations must cover program goals, expectations, logistics, health and safety including the overview of Accident and Sickness Program for exchanges (ASPE), J-1 Visa regulations, U.S. State Department role, professional standards of conduct, opportunities for alumni engagement and other topics as

determined by ECA and the recipient. Content should be tailored to both Fellows and U.S. participants and may be delivered virtually or in person.

In coordination with ECA, the award recipient is responsible for developing and administering all PDOs. PDOs should be interactive and, when possible, involve U.S. embassy staff, ECA, in-country partners, and program alumni.

D.2 Online Community

Proposals must demonstrate the ability to develop a robust, mobile-responsive online platform to support application, training, networking, and alumni engagement, including virtual training, resource sharing, and real-time tracking of outcomes.

D.3 Arrival Orientation

All Fellows must participate in an arrival orientation in the United States. The award recipient will develop standardized orientation materials, in coordination with ECA, to ensure consistent delivery of key program information. The orientation will provide Fellows with detailed information about the U.S.-based program, expectations, logistics, and opportunities for business engagement.

D.4 U.S. Fellowship Placements

Proposals much demonstrate the ability to secure placements at least two months in advance, tailored to each Fellow's professional goals, and provide direct experience in a U.S. business or organization. Each host must designate a primary contact. Fellows should be grouped by industry and placed in cities with relevant sector strengths. Proposals should include a clear plan for recruiting and selecting host organizations, with letters of commitment from potential hosts. The award recipient must receive final approval for the Fellowship Placement Organization (FPO) from ECA before final selection of placement organizations.

D.5 Action Plans

U.S. placement hosts should assist Fellows in developing concrete action plans focused on scaling their businesses and expanding commercial engagement with U.S. partners. Proposals should describe how the award recipient will support Fellows and hosts in action plan development and implementation, including sharing action plans at the program's closing event. The award recipient is responsible for providing a standardized action plan template and ensuring a consistent timeline for plan development and refinement.

D.6 Supplemental Entrepreneurship Training

City teams will participate in workshops, panel discussions, and site visits focused on advanced business and leadership skills, practical business training, compliance with U.S. regulations, and strategies for increasing U.S. exports. Sessions should provide mentorship and networking with American business leaders.

D.7 YLAI Closing Forum

The award recipient will organize a Closing Forum in Washington, D.C., including workshops, networking, and opportunities for Fellows to present their action plans and business achievements. The event will include engagement with U.S. government, business leaders and the diplomatic community. The award recipient should coordinate with ECA program staff on the program closing.

D.8 Reciprocal Exchange for Americans

The award recipient will coordinate one- to two-week reciprocal exchanges for U.S. participants to support Fellows' business initiatives. Exchanges should be substantive, support action plan implementation, and promote U.S. economic priorities. U.S. participants will be selected from among those who served as hosts during the U.S. fellowship and have relevant expertise to advance Fellows' action plans.

Proposals should include a sample application, a detailed timeline, and a description of the selection process for the U.S. outbound exchange components. The award recipient will submit to ECA and the relevant U.S. embassies/consulates a proposed slate of American participants, including summary biographical information, proposed destination cities, a draft agenda, and a clear project timeline. The selection process should be structured to provide sufficient time for ECA and U.S. embassies/consulates to review and approve U.S. participants, ensuring alignment with program goals and U.S. strategic interests.

D.9 YLAI Alumni Programming/Host Placement Continued Engagement

The award recipient must maintain a mobile-friendly online platform for ongoing communication, collaboration, and tracking of alumni and host engagement. Alumni programming should support professional development, business partnerships, and U.S. economic and foreign policy interests.

The award recipient should also incorporate ECA alumni initiatives into their plans and communications for alumni programming, including, but not limited to, the online community on the International Exchange Alumni website (alumni.state.gov)

and other exchange alumni opportunities offered by the U.S. Department of State such as small grants and professional development seminars. All alumni programs must strengthen participants' identification with the U.S. government.

D.10 Indicators

The award recipient should develop and track key outcomes that highlight the achievement of program goals and objectives as part of their Performance Monitoring Plan in addition to required MODE Framework objectives and indicators (See section 6). Key metrics that support program goals could include:

1. Number of business partnerships or joint ventures established between YLAI Fellows and U.S. companies.
2. Percentage of Host Organizations implementing new business practices learned from YLAI Fellows.
3. Number of jobs created or supported in the U.S. because of program-facilitated business activities.

The award recipient will submit success stories on a regular basis that highlight both the accomplishments of the fellows and hosts resulting from program participation, demonstrating tangible contributions to U.S. commercial engagement, business partnership development, and American economic competitiveness in the region.

Projected Program Timeline (2026):
- August – September 2026: Application period
- October 2026: Applications review
- November 2026: Interviews
- December 2026: Selection Announcement
- January – May 2027: DS-2019s issued, visa process
- March to May 2027: Virtual programming
- June 2027: Fellows arrive in the United States
- July 2027: Closing Forum in Washington, D.C.
- September 2027: U.S. outbound exchanges begin

4. Recipient Responsibilities.

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:
- Collaborate with ECA to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate the program;

- Ensure compliance with all administrative, financial, and reporting requirements; and,
- Develop and maintain all program components, including recruitment, orientations, placements, training, alumni engagement, and performance monitoring.
- Issue DS-2019 forms and send to relevant embassies/consulates for all international participants.

5. Goals and Objectives.

The YLAI Fellowship Program supports the following broad goals:
1. Advance U.S. economic interests and global leadership by fostering business partnerships between entrepreneurs from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States.
2. Strengthen Fellows' business and leadership skills for commercial engagement with U.S. companies.
3. Increase public awareness of U.S. business leadership and program impact.
4. Build a network of entrepreneurs and U.S. business partners committed to supporting American economic growth, job creation, and commercial leadership in the region.
5. Leverage technology for seamless collaboration and measurable outcomes.

The YLAI Fellowship Program achieves program goals by:

- Objective 1: Advance U.S. Economic Interests and Global Leadership
By July 2028, facilitate the creation of new business partnerships or joint ventures between YLAI Fellows and American companies, resulting in measurable increases in U.S. exports, investment, or market access in the Western Hemisphere.

- Objective 2: Strengthen Fellows' Business and Leadership Skills
Ensure that at least 80% of YLAI Fellows demonstrate measurable improvement in business, leadership, and technical skills relevant to U.S. business practices, as evidenced by pre- and post-program assessments and successful implementation of action plans focused on commercial engagement with American companies.

- Objective 3: Increase Public Awareness of U.S. Business Leadership
By the end of the program cycle, achieve at least 100 media features through targeted media campaigns, public events, and digital storytelling that highlight U.S. business leadership and the YLAI program's impact.

- Objective 4: Build a Sustainable Network for U.S. Economic Growth
Expand YLAI alumni engagement by 10% annually, and facilitate cross-border collaborations, mentorships, or business projects among network members each year, with a focus on supporting American economic growth and job creation.

- Objective 5: Leverage Technology for Program Delivery and Impact
Deliver at least 75% of program activities—including application, training, networking, and alumni engagement—through a secure, mobile-responsive online platform, achieving a user satisfaction rate of 90% or higher and enabling real-time tracking of business outcomes and network engagement.

- Objective 6: Support U.S. National Security and Foreign Policy Priorities
Ensure that all program activities, participant selection, and alumni engagement are aligned with U.S. national security and the foreign policy objectives of the current Administration, as evidenced by regular consultation with ECA, U.S. embassies in the region, and the integration of program outcomes into U.S. government reporting and strategic planning.

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
    - 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
      - E1.1.17: 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 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)
    - E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)
  - Objective 4: Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
    - E4.0.01: Percent of participants reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation

- ▪ E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation
- ▪ E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
  - o Sub-Objective 4.1: Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
    - ▪ E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
    - ▪ E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)
    - ▪ E4.1.04: Number of professional placements
    - ▪ E4.1.11: Number of American reciprocal exchange participants
- Objective 8: Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau's resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
  - ▪ E8.0.03: Response rate for participant surveys (core indicator)

Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs)

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

- Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.
- Indicators. Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning, breakdowns of the data by subgroups; the PMP lists

the demographic questions required to obtain the information necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.

- o 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.
- o 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).
- o 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 NOFO and/or POGI. In this instance, the recipient will be responsible for coordinating with ECA on any alumni surveys to de-duplicate questions and minimize potential survey fatigue.

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

Program Performance M&E Narrative

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

- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.

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

Nonmandatory Use of the Qualtrics MODE Survey Builder Data Collection System

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

MyGrants RPM Reporting Requirements

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

7. Allowable Costs.

a. Travel: International and domestic airfare; airline baggage and seat fees; visas for U.S. travelers; transit costs; ground transportation costs. Please note that all air travel must be in compliance with the Fly America Act. There is no charge for J-1 visas for foreign participants in Bureau-sponsored projects.

b. Per Diem: For U.S.-based programming, organizations should use the published Federal per diem rates for individual U.S. cities. Domestic per diem rates may be accessed at: http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/21287. ECA requests applicants to budget realistic costs that reflect the local economy and do not exceed Federal per diem rates. Foreign per diem rates can be accessed at: https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp

c. Book and Cultural Allowances: Participants are entitled to a one-time cultural allowance of $150 per person, plus a book allowance of $50. Interpreters should be reimbursed up to $150 for expenses when they escort participants to cultural events. U.S. project staff, trainers or participants are not eligible to receive these benefits.

d. Consultants: Consultants may be used to provide specialized expertise or to make presentations. Honoraria rates should not exceed $250 per day per session. Organizations are encouraged to cost-share rates that would exceed that figure. Sub-award recipient organizations may also be employed, in which case the written agreement between the prospective award recipient and sub-award recipient should be included in the proposal. Such sub-awards should detail the division of responsibilities and proposed costs, and subcontracts should be itemized in the budget. Contractors/contracting organizations may also be employed in which case the written agreement between the award recipient and the contractors/contracting organizations should be included in the proposal.

e. Overhead Costs: Costs necessary for the effective administration of the project may include salaries for employees, benefits, and other direct and indirect costs per detailed instructions in the PSI. Proposals should show strong cost sharing contributions from the applicant, the in-country partner and other sources. Travel of primary award recipient staff or sub-award recipient staff should NOT be included in the exchange participant numbers.

f. Reasonable Accommodations: Organizations should budget for the reasonable accommodations of participating individuals with disabilities. Proposals may allocate up to 5 - 7% of the total requested ECA award funds for this purpose.

g. Pre-departure Orientation: Travel to the Pre-departure location(s); ground transportation to and from the airport to the orientation(s) site; food and lodging for all Fellows, adequate meeting space; travel from orientation to fellowship sites.

h. Arrival Orientation: International travel to the U.S.-based orientation location; ground transportation to and from the airport to the orientation site; food and lodging for Fellows, adequate conference meeting space for participants (Fellows, grantee staff, speakers, facilitators, DOS staff, other invited guests); travel from orientation to fellowship sites.

i. Fellowships: Lodging, per diem, transportation, and other necessary program-related expenses the Fellows may incur while at their fellowship sites.

j. Entrepreneurial training sessions: Training materials, trainers, meeting space/equipment rental, etc.

k. YLAI Closing Forum: Travel to Washington, D.C; ground transportation to and from the airport to the conference hotel; food and lodging for Fellows for a three to four-day conference, adequate conference space for approximately 350 participants (Fellows, grantee staff, speakers, facilitators, DOS staff, other invited guests); international travel from forum to home country.

l. U.S. Participant follow-on travel: Travel, ground transportation, lodging, per diem, for approximately 70 U.S. participants for 10 to 15 days in relevant Western Hemisphere countries.

m. Room Rental: The rental of meeting space should not exceed $250 per day per activity. Any rates that exceed this amount should be cost shared.

n. Materials: Proposals may contain costs to purchase, develop, and translate materials. Costs for high quality translation of materials should be anticipated and included in the budget.

o. Supplies: Applicants may propose to use award funds to purchase supplies, such as computers and printers; supply costs should be justified in the budget narrative. Costs for furniture are not allowed.

p. Working Meal: One working meal may be provided during each U.S.-based and foreign-based component. Per capita costs for working meals may not exceed $45/person, excluding room rental and other overhead charges. The number of invited guests may not exceed Fellows by more than a factor of two-to-one.

q. Return Travel Allowance: A return travel allowance of $70 for each Fellow may be included in the budget. This allowance would cover incidental expenses incurred during international travel.

r. Health and Travel Insurance: The award recipient will be responsible for working with ECA to ensure that both foreign Fellows and American

participants traveling overseas for outbound projects are enrolled in the ECA-sponsored Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE). The premium is paid by ECA and should not be included in the proposal budget. Applicants may include costs for travel insurance for both Fellows and U.S. Participants in the budget.

s. Wire Transfer Fees: When necessary, award recipients may include costs to transfer funds to foreign-based partner organizations. The primary award recipient is urged to research applicable taxes that may be imposed on these transfers by host governments.

t. In-Country Travel Costs for Visa Processing Purposes: U.S. visas for Fellows are provided by DOS and should not be included in the budget. Given the requirements associated with obtaining J-1 visas for ECA-supported participants, applicants should include costs for any travel associated with procuring visas, including travel for interviews, delivering or picking up passports, etc.

u. Alumni Activities: Reasonable costs related to alumni activities may be included. The proposal must include an outline of any proposed follow-on activities. Proposals should also demonstrate how the recipient organization will creatively use technology and online networking sites to enhance and amplify alumni programming. Organizations can propose small grants or a small grant competition for the Fellows to compete for to encourage their continued work on and implementation of their individual Action Plans.

v. 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.

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, the recipient must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as their 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 the applicant does 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 component(s) could come before, during and/or after the physical exchange. The objective for the virtual exchange component(s) 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 <u>ECA's Communications Guidance</u> on the creation of program branding and attribution, websites, social media, and press.

12. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial.

Required if expected period of performance includes any time during calendar year 2026 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 19 direction, and changes may be requested by ECA. Use of any ECA-provided Freedom 250 brand elements will be subject to advance ECA approval and require adherence to Department of State and ECA guidelines for such branding.

13. Substantial Involvement.

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

a. Participate and provide strategic guidance in the design, direction, and execution of all program components and activities to ensure alignment with U.S. economic interests, commercial priorities, and foreign policy objectives.
b. Approve key personnel and any changes to dedicated YLAI staff, ensuring the team possesses the expertise to advance program goals and U.S. leadership.
c. Review and approve recruitment materials, applications, program timelines, and agendas to maximize visibility, attract high-potential participants, and promote U.S. business leadership.
d. Approve sub-award recipients, partner organizations, and fellowship placements to ensure strategic partnerships and placements in regions with robust business ecosystems and opportunities for commercial engagement.
e. Approve the final selection of all Fellows and U.S. Participants to ensure participants are positioned to contribute to U.S. economic growth and global leadership.

f. Approve decisions related to special circumstances or problems throughout the program, including assisting with participant emergencies and ensuring program continuity.

g. Liaise with WHA, Public Affairs Section staff at U.S. embassies and consulates, country desk officers, and other State Department offices to coordinate recruitment, selection, digital outreach, and the execution of opening and closing events, ensuring program activities support U.S. strategic interests.

h. Collaborate with the award recipient to publicize the program through targeted media campaigns, digital storytelling, and public events, including approving all program publicity, outreach efforts, and materials in accordance with ECA Communications Guidance.

i. Assist in the coordination of the YLAI Closing Forum in Washington, D.C., including arranging meetings with key stakeholders, U.S. business leaders, and government officials to showcase program impact and foster lasting partnerships.

j. Monitor and evaluate the program through regular communication, meetings, site visits, and debriefing sessions; and liaise with ECA's MELI Unit and the award recipient to ensure measurable outcomes and continuous improvement in advancing U.S. economic and foreign policy objectives.

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 Proposal Submission Instruction (PSI) document, which contains guidelines for proposal preparation.

1. Budget Format.

Applicants must submit a budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and a budget narrative. Budget requests may not exceed $6,600,000, pending the availability of funds. 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 Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for information about the application and formatting guidelines.

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

1. Address to Request Application Package.

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

2. Department of State Contacts

For questions about this announcement, contact: Susannah Wood, U.S. Department of State, Global Leaders Division, ECA/PE/C/GL**,** (771) 205-9501, Woodst@state.gov.

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

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

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

Required Registrations

All organizations, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and an active registration in SAM.gov.

A UEI is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards. An applicant must maintain an active registration while it has a proposal under review by the Department and must continue to keep the registration active for the entire duration of the period of performance of any Federal award that results from this NOFO.

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

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

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 is 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](2 CFR 25.110) for a full list of exemptions.

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

4. Required Registration with MyGrants.
All ECA award recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories must be registered with the U.S. Department of State's MyGrants system by accessing https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com and clicking the "create an account" link. MyGrants is the U.S. Department of State's grants management system and is supported by the Department's Integrated Logistics Management System (ILMS). Recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories that have previously

used MyGrants as a U.S. Department of State award recipient do not need to register again. If the organization is not able to access the system, please contact the ILMS Help Desk for help in gaining access.

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

5. Submission Instructions.

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

Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures
Eligible organizations should follow the instructions available in the 'Get Started' portion of the site (https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants.

How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov
Applicants should read instructions carefully and prepare the information requested before beginning the registration process. Reviewing and assembling the required information before beginning the registration process will alleviate last-minute searches for required information.

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

How to Submit an Application to ECA via Grants.gov

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

Grants.gov Support and Submission Issues

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

Grants.gov Customer Support
Contact Center Phone: 800 -518-4726
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; closed on federal holidays.
Email: support@grants.gov

6. Submission Dates and Times.

Application Deadline Date
Friday, June 5, 2026

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. <u>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.</u>

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

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

When ECA successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgement of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Please also be mindful of any Grants.gov generated error messages that may appear during the

application process as they may result in some documents not transmitting correctly.

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

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

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

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

7. Funding Restrictions for this Announcement.

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

None of the funds awarded resulting from this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be made available for subawards, direct financial support, or otherwise used to provide any payment or transfer to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

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

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

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

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

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

1) Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government's payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and;

2) It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. A program promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means a program whose purpose is to promote preferences based on race, color religion, sex, or national origins, such as in training or hiring.

   d. Certification Regarding Compliance with 20 U.S.C. 1011f and any other applicable foreign funding disclosure requirements.
   Applicants are advised that institutions of higher education (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.

e. **Certification of Trafficking in Persons Compliance and Compliance Plan**
Applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award <u>for awards where the estimated value of services to be performed outside the United States exceeds $500,000</u>:

- To the best of the recipient's knowledge, neither the recipient, nor any subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor of the recipient or any agent of the recipient or of such a subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor, is engaged in any of the activities described in <u>2 CFR 175(a)</u>;

  The recipient has implemented a Trafficking in Persons compliance plan to prevent activities described in <u>2 CFR 175(a)</u> and is compliant with it; and compliance plan must be consistent with the requirements of <u>2 CFR 175(b)(4) and (5)</u>.

- That the recipient has procedures to prevent activities described in <u>2 CFR 175(a)</u> and to monitor, detect, and terminate any subrecipient, contractor, subcontractor, or employee of the recipient engaging in them.

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

f. **Prohibition on Unmanned Aircraft Systems Manufactured or Assembled by American Security Drone Act-Covered Foreign Entities**

(a) *Definitions.*

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

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

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

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

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

(1) delivering any FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system, which includes unmanned aircraft (i.e., drones) and associated elements;

(2) Operating a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system in the performance of the award; and
(3) Using Federal funds for the purchase or operation of a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system .

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

8. Other Submission Requirements.

a. Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.

b. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF 424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.

c. Key Personnel
ECA recommends that the applicant identify intended key personnel positions via an asterisk (*) or other marking in the proposal budget, budget narrative, or a separate appendix. If not provided in the application, recipients must submit the names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Applicants should also identify what proportion of their time will be used in support of the program. Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department's Standard Terms and Conditions.

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

F. Application Review Information

1. Review Process.

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

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

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

2. Review Criteria.

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

a. **Quality of the program idea and planning:** Proposals should be original, well-defined, and relevant to ECA's mission. Proposals should have a detailed agenda and work plan that demonstrates the institution's ability to carry out the program. The plan should follow the program guidelines described in this solicitation and should be likely to provide maximum impact in achieving the proposed results.

b. **Institutional Capacity to achieve program aims and purpose:** Proposals should clearly state the program's aims and purpose and demonstrate how the institution will meet them. Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results. The organization's expertise in exchange programs and the demonstrated internal controls in place to manage federal funds.

c. **Institution's Record/Ability:** Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs and responsible fiscal management. ECA will consider the past performance of prior ECA recipients, including the timely submission of reports, and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.

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

e. **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 the applicant 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.

f. **Cost-effectiveness and Cost Share:** Proposals should keep the overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, as low as possible. All costs should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost share through other private sector support and institutional direct funding contributions.

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 in SAM.gov.

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

G. Award Notices

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal ECA procedures. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from an authorized Grants Officer in ECA's Grants Division. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by a Grants Officer 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

a. 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.

The Department of State will review and consider proposals for funding pursuant to this NOFO in accordance with OMB guidance located at 2 CFR part 200, all applicable Federal laws, and relevant Executive guidance, including 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),

- o 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
- o 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).

- 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/

b. Reporting.

Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The FAA will specify 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.

g. 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.

h. 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 ECA/P/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.

i. 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.

j. **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:

1. 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.

2. 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.

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

For Informational Purposes Only - 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. 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