Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Advancing Investigative Journalism in Ukraine through U.S. AI Innovation

EUR/U.S. Embassy Kyiv, Department of State

Opportunity number: PDS-Ukraine-FY26-04

Application deadline: September 1, 2026

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U.S Department of State
EUR/U.S. Embassy Kyiv, Public Diplomacy Section
Notice of Funding Opportunity

A. BASIC INFORMATION

1. Overview

Funding Opportunity Title	Advancing Investigative Journalism in Ukraine through U.S. AI Innovation
Funding Opportunity Number	PDS-Ukraine-FY26-04
Announcement Type	Initial announcement
Deadline for Applications	September 1, 2026 (23:59 Kyiv time (GMT+2)
Assistance Listing Number	19.040
Length of performance period	6 to 12 months
Number of awards anticipated	1-3 awards (pending available funding)
Award amounts	$30,000.00 - $100,000.00
Total available funding	$100,000.00
Type of Funding	FY26 Smith Mundt Public Diplomacy Funds
Anticipated project start date	October 2026

Funding Instrument Type: Cooperative Agreement

Project Performance Period: Proposed projects should be completed in 12 months or less.

This notice is subject to availability of funding. The Public Diplomacy Section reserves the right to award less or more than the funds described under circumstances deemed to be in the best interest of the U.S. government, pending the availability of funds and approval of the designated grants officer.

2. Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of State's Embassy Kyiv announces an open competition for Ukrainian non-governmental media organizations and independent media outlets to implement a program that strengthens data-driven and AI-enabled journalism in Ukraine. It will build the capacity of journalists and newsrooms to produce high-quality reporting on economic development, reconstruction and investment through training in investigative reporting, data journalism, artificial intelligence, open-source research, cybersecurity, and responsible use of emerging technologies. The program will also aim to support regional and frontline media, where AI and modern digital tools can help offset wartime staffing shortages, strengthen investigative reporting, and improve coverage of local economic development and future recovery efforts. As a result, the program will expand audiences access to independent sources of information. Eligible recipients are Ukrainian registered non-profit media organizations and media outlets working in partnership other relevant stakeholders. By strengthening independent media, expanding the responsible use of U.S.-developed AI technologies and fostering a skilled journalism workforce, the program advances U.S. foreign policy priorities by improving resilience against foreign malign influence, promoting technological innovation, and supporting transparent, accountable journalism that reinforces democratic resilience and contributes to Ukraine's reconstruction, economic transformation, and a transparent, competitive investment environment.

A. ELIGIBILITY

1. Eligible Applicants

The following organizations are eligible to apply*:*

- Ukrainian not-for-profit media organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations
- Ukrainian independent media outlets

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing is not required for this funding opportunity.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements

All organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via SAM.gov as well as a valid registration in SAM.gov. Please see Section E.3 for more information. Individuals are not required to have a UEI or be registered in SAM.gov.

4. This opportunity will not support:

- Projects relating to partisan political activity;
- Charitable or development activities; including direct social services such as medical, psychological, and/or humanitarian support
- Construction projects;
- Projects that support specific religious activities;
- Fund-raising campaigns;
- Lobbying for specific legislation or programs

- Scientific research or surveys;
- Commercial projects;
- Projects intended primarily for the growth or institutional development of the organization;
- Projects that duplicate existing projects;
- Illegal activities

B. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1. Project Background, Goals, and Objectives

Ukraine's independent media sector continues to operate under the extraordinary pressures of Russia's full-scale war while adapting to rapid technological and economic change. Facing security risks, displacement, damaged infrastructure, and financial constraints, independent media remain essential to informing the public, countering malign influence, promoting transparency, and strengthening democratic resilience. Despite the war, Ukraine maintains a vibrant and pluralistic media environment. At the same time, its information space remains a target of Russian influence operations aimed at manipulating public opinion. Strengthening independent media's AI capacity to identify and expose external malign influence is therefore essential to protecting public trust and democratic resilience, as well as U.S. interests. As Ukraine advances its reconstruction and economic transformation, it also requires high-quality journalism that helps citizens, businesses, and policymakers understand investment, innovation, public spending, and governance. At the same time, Ukraine's reconstruction, economic transformation, and integration into global markets require high-quality journalism that helps citizens, businesses, and policymakers understand investment, innovation, public spending, and governance. Journalism grounded in responsible AI adoption and U.S.-recognized best practices advances U.S. priorities by strengthening resilience against adversarial information, promoting transparency and accountability, and supporting an open, competitive investment climate attractive to U.S. businesses. Despite the challenges of Russia's full-scale war, Ukrainian newsrooms are partly integrating artificial intelligence into their editorial workflows, primarily to improve routine tasks such as transcription, translation, document organization, and content production. While these tools have helped newsrooms operate more efficiently under difficult wartime conditions, many media organizations—particularly regional and frontline outlets—have yet to fully leverage AI to strengthen investigative reporting, data analysis, digital verification, and evidence-based journalism.

The proposed program will help journalists move beyond basic automation by building the skills and institutional capacity needed to use AI for higher-value journalistic work. Through training in investigative reporting, data journalism, artificial intelligence, open-source research (OSINT), cybersecurity, and digital verification, participating newsrooms will be better equipped to analyze complex datasets, authenticate digital evidence, provide accountability for use of public and investment funds, and produce more credible, in-depth reporting. These capabilities will strengthen oversight of reconstruction, public procurement, investment, and governance while helping regional media remain sustainable despite wartime staffing shortages and financial constraints. These tools must be used responsibly to verify true information and uncover falsehoods and inauthentic or "deepfake" content, not to persuade or dissuade audiences of a particular policy viewpoint.

By promoting the responsible adoption of U.S.-developed AI technologies and internationally recognized best practices, the program advances U.S. priorities by strengthening democratic accountability, helping audiences better discern truthful content and counter adversarial information, showcasing U.S. leadership in AI and media innovation, and supporting the transparent, competitive investment climate essential for Ukraine's reforms, long-term recovery and economic modernization.

The U.S. Embassy Kyiv's Public Diplomacy Section has a long history of supporting independent regional media through projects that strengthen government transparency, public accountability, investigative journalism, and civic participation. Previous grants have supported investigative reporting on a range of social and economic issues, while also expanding digital journalism through online media development, internet broadcasting, journalism training, internships, and partnerships with journalism schools. These investments have helped strengthen regional media capacity, promote informed public dialogue, and advance democratic governance across Ukraine.

The program complements the U.S. Embassy Kyiv's Business Impact Series and other U.S. government initiatives that promote economic growth, innovation, entrepreneurship, and private-sector development in Ukraine. By strengthening journalists' capacity to report on investment, business, emerging technologies, public procurement, and economic governance, the program contributes to a more transparent and predictable business environment, increases public understanding of Ukraine's economic transformation, and supports investor confidence. Through the promotion of AI-enabled journalism, U.S.-developed technologies, and partnerships among media organizations, investigative networks, and other relevant stakeholders, the program also reinforces U.S. leadership in technological innovation and workforce development while advancing long-term U.S.-Ukraine economic cooperation.

Project Audience(s):

Primary Audience 1: Journalists and Editors at Independent Media Organizations

- **Geographic location:** Nationwide, with particular emphasis on regional and frontline communities.
- **Age group:** Approximately 22–60.
- **Profession:** Journalists, editors, investigative reporters, newsroom managers, producers, data journalists, and digital content specialists.

Primary Audience 2: Regional and Frontline Newsrooms

- **Geographic location:** Frontline, de-occupied, and other regions experiencing staffing shortages and limited resources.
- **Age group:** Not age-specific (organizational audience).
- **Profession:** Local media organizations, editorial teams, investigative units, publishers, and newsroom leadership.

Primary Audience 3: Investigative Journalism Networks and Media Support Organizations

- **Geographic location:** Nationwide, with opportunities for international collaboration.
- **Age group:** Not age-specific.
- **Profession:** Investigative journalists, media trainers, editors, researchers, data analysts, and media development organizations.

Project Goal: Strengthen Ukraine's independent media sector to promote transparency, democratic accountability, and economic competitiveness through AI-enabled, data-driven investigative journalism and newsroom innovation.

Project Objectives:

Objective 1. Strengthen Journalists' Capacity for AI-Enabled, Data-Driven, and Investigative Reporting

- Provide training in data journalism, AI-assisted investigative reporting, open-source research (OSINT), cybersecurity, fact-checking methodologies for verifying factual claims and identifying false, misleading, or manipulated content. As well as responsible use of emerging technologies to strengthen reporting on economic development, investment, reconstruction, governance, and other issues of public accountability.
- Increase journalists' capacity to use AI-powered and advanced digital tools for research, document analysis, transcription, translation, geolocation, satellite imagery, digital verification, detection of manipulated and AI-generated ("deepfake") content , data visualization, and evidence authentication.
- Introduce journalists and newsrooms to U.S.-developed and globally recognized technologies and platforms for AI-assisted reporting, cloud collaboration, cybersecurity, data analytics, and open-source intelligence (OSINT), and technical verification of digital content, promoting responsible and effective adoption of emerging technologies.
- Strengthen digital resilience and investigative security through training in cybersecurity, source protection, encrypted communications, secure data management, and responsible handling of sensitive information.

Objective 2. Foster Newsroom Innovation, Collaboration and Responsible Use of AI

- Establish an AI and Investigative Journalism Innovation Lab to pilot emerging technologies, develop newsroom AI workflows, share best practices, and promote ethical AI governance, transparency, and editorial oversight and technical approaches to verifying digital content and identifying manipulated or AI-generated media.
- Support collaborative investigative journalism through cross-regional reporting partnerships, shared investigative datasets and research platforms, and cooperation with Ukrainian media organizations.
- Enhance reporting on Ukraine's economic transformation and recovery by supporting collaborative coverage of investment, entrepreneurship, innovation, commercial opportunities, and reconstruction projects that improve transparency and investor confidence.
- Strengthen newsroom institutional capacity by training editors and media managers to integrate AI into editorial workflows, fact-checking and digital verification, quality assurance, workflow improvement, audience analytics, and digital transformation strategies.

2. Substantial Involvement

The U.S. Embassy will maintain active engagement throughout the project lifecycle to ensure alignment with U.S. strategic goals and media development best practices. This includes:

- **Selection and Vetting:**
  Participating in the review and approval of beneficiary media outlets and trainers to ensure program credibility, transparency, and effectiveness.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Support:**
  Collaborating with the grantee on the development of performance indicators, success metrics, and evaluation tools to ensure measurable results and alignment with broader foreign assistance objectives.
- **Visibility and Public Diplomacy:**
  Supporting appropriate visibility of U.S. government involvement through co-branded events, public communication, and media engagement, as relevant and safe for participants.
- **Adaptive Management:**
  Providing strategic feedback and technical input during implementation to adjust approaches in response to shifting political, security, or media conditions on the ground

C. APPLICATION CONTENTS AND FORMAT

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

Content of Application
Please ensure:

- The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity
- All documents are in English

- All budgets are in U.S. dollars
- All applicant authorized signatures are provided where indicated on the various, required forms.

The following documents are **required**:

1. Mandatory application forms

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

2. Proposal (6 pages maximum)

- Applicants must submit a complete narrative proposal in a format of their choice. The proposal should contain sufficient information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the applicant wants to do. The proposal must include all the items below:

- **Proposal Summary:** Short narrative that outlines the proposed project, including project objectives and anticipated impact.
- **Introduction to the Organization applying**: A description of past and present operations, showing ability to carry out the program, including information on all previous grants from the State Department and/or U.S. government agencies as well as experience with and expertise in areas related to those described in the NOFO.
- **Problem Statement:** Clear, concise and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed and why the proposed program is needed
- **Program Methods, Design, Activities, and Deliverables:** The "goals" describe what the program is intended to achieve. The "objectives" refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be achievable and measurable. Describe the program activities and how they will help achieve the objectives.
- **Proposed Project Schedule and Timeline:** The proposed timeline for the program activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.
- **Key Personnel:** Names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program. What proportion of their time will be used in support of this program?
- **Project Partners:** List the names and type of involvement of key partner organizations and sub-awardees (if applicable).
- **Monitoring & Evaluation Plan:** Proposals must include a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) that explains how the applicant plans to track project performance and measure progress toward the project's goals and objectives. The PMP should include "If-Then" statements to illustrate how the project

activities will lead to the intended results, along with a short datasheet outlining proposed project activities and the indicators that will be used to measure success.

3. *Budget Justification Narrative*

- **Detailed Budget** - Applicants must submit a detailed line-item budget. Line-item expenditures should be listed in the greatest possible detail. The budget must identify the total amount of funding requested, with a breakdown of amounts to be spent in the following budget categories: personnel; fringe benefits; travel; equipment; supplies; consultants/contracts; other direct costs; and indirect costs. See Annex Section I for a description of the types of costs that should be included in each category. Personnel salaries should include the level of effort and the rate of pay, which should cover the percentage of time each staff member will dedicate to grant-based activities. If an organization is charging an indirect cost rate without a NICRA, it must apply it to the modified total budget costs (MTDC), refer to 2CFR§200.1. **Budgets shall be submitted in U.S. dollars** and final grant agreements will be conducted in U.S. dollars.

- **Budget Justification Narrative** – Applicants must submit a budget justification narrative to accompany the detailed line-item budget. The purpose of the budget justification narrative is to supplement the information provided in the detailed budget spreadsheet by justifying how the budget cost elements are necessary to implement project objectives and accomplish the project goals. The budget justification narrative is a tool to help Embassy staff fully understand the budgetary needs of the applicant and is an opportunity to provide descriptive information about the requested costs beyond the constraints of the budget template. Together, the detailed budget spreadsheet, the budget justification narrative, and the SF-424A should provide a complete financial and qualitative description that supports the proposed project plan and should be directly relatable to the specific project components described in the applicant's proposal.

  Additional Budget Notes:

- Audit Requirements: Please note the audit requirements for Department of State awards in the Standard Terms and Conditions https://www.state.gov/m/a/ope/index.htm and 2CFR200, Subpart F – Audit Requirements. The cost of the required audits may be charged either as an allowable direct cost to the award OR included in the organization's established indirect costs in the award's detailed budget.

- Visa Fees: Include all visa application and related fees in your budget as applicable. Please note DS-2019s for post-funded programs must be submitted directly by the award recipient. If you anticipate your program will include the DS-2019 visa processing, your organization must be a registered Designated Sponsoring Organization. For more information go to: https://j1visa.state.gov/sponsors/become-a-sponsor/

4. *Attachments*

- **Key Personnel Resumes**: A résumé, not to exceed one page in length, must be included for the proposed key staff persons, such as the Project Director and Finance Officer, as well as any speakers or trainers (if applicable). If an individual for this type of position has not been identified, the applicant may submit a 1-page position description, identifying the qualifications and skills required for that position, in lieu of a résumé.

- **Letters of support from program partners:** Letters of support should be included for sub-recipients or other partners. The letters must identify the type of relationship to be entered into (formal or informal), the roles and responsibilities of each partner in relation to the proposed project activities, and the expected result of the partnership. The individual letters cannot exceed 1 page in length.

- **Indirect Costs**: If your organization has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) and includes NICRA charges in the budget, your latest NICRA should be included in the application submission.

- **Proof of Non-profit Status:** Documentation to demonstrate the applicant's non-profit status (e.g., U.S.-based organizations should submit a copy of their 501(c)(3) Internal Revenue Service determination letter, and non-U.S. organizations should provide evidence of non-profit status issued by a government entity).

- **Proof of Registration:** A copy of the organization's registration should be provided with the proposal application. Organizations should submit a copy of their certificate of registration from the appropriate government organization.

Other items <u>NOT</u> required/requested with the application submission, but which *may* be requested if your application is approved to move forward in the review process include:

a. Copies of an organization or program audit within the last two (2) years
b. Copies of relevant human resources, financial, or procurement policies
c. Copies of other relevant organizational policies or documentation that would help the Department determine your organization's capacity to manage a federal grant award overseas
d. Documentation that demonstrates the recipients' plan and/or policy to safeguard PII of participants and beneficiaries. It is the responsibility of the recipient to ensure protection of personally identifiable information (PII) and safeguard PII when collecting, maintaining, using and disseminating such information
e. Information to determine what financial controls and standard operating procedures an organization uses to procure goods and services, hire staff and track time and attendance, pay for grant-related travel, and identify other financial transactions that may be necessary to undertake the project activities
f. The Embassy reserves the right to request any additional programmatic and/or financial information regarding the proposal.

D. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application forms required above are available at www.grants.gov

2. Department of State Contacts

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact:
KyivMDF@state.gov

3. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM.gov)

Required Registration: 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 also 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.

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

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

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

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

Exemptions
An exemption from the UEI and sam.gov registration requirements may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. See 2 CFR 25.110 for a full list of exemptions.

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

Please note: Any applicant with an exclusion in the System for Award Management (SAM) is not eligible to apply for an assistance award in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR, 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension."

4. Submission Dates and Times

Submission Deadline: All applications must be received by September 1, 2026 (23:59 Kyiv time (GMT+2). For the purposes of determining if an award is submitted on time, PDS will utilize the timestamp provided by Grants.gov. This deadline is firm and is not a rolling deadline. If organizations fail to meet the deadline noted above their application will be considered ineligible and will not be considered for funding.

Submission Method: Submitting all application materials directly to the following email address: KyivMDF@state.gov. Applicants opting to submit applications via email to **must** include the Funding Opportunity Title and Funding Opportunity Number in the subject line of the email.

5. ***Funding Restrictions:*** 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).

   i. 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:
      a. 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;
      b. 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.

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

a. 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 2 CFR 175.105(a);
b. The recipient has implemented a Trafficking in Persons compliance plan to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175(a) and is compliant with this plan; and the compliance plan must follow the minimum requirements described in 2 CFR 175(b)(5).
c. That the Recipient has and will implement procedures to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175.105(a) and to monitor, detect, and terminate any subrecipient, contractor, subcontractor, or employee of the recipient engaging in these activities.

i. 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 its website and at the workplace. Recipients must re-certify on an annual basis for the entire award period of performance.

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

a. (a) *Definitions.*

i. *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
ii. *FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system* means an unmanned aircraft system manufactured or assembled by an American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity.
iii. *Unmanned aircraft* means an aircraft that is operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft.
iv. *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. (b) *Prohibition.* Recipients of funding under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (including subawards and subcontracts issued by the recipient) will be prohibited from:
    i. delivering any FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system, which includes unmanned aircraft (i.e., drones) and associated elements
    ii. Operating a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system in the performance of the award; and
    iii. Using Federal funds for the purchase or operation of a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system.

c. 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.].

iv. Pre-Award Costs: Pre-award costs are not an allowable expense for this funding opportunity.

v. Construction: Any award made as a result of this NOFO will not allow for construction activities or costs.

vi. Direct Social Services: Costs that cover and provide direct social services, such as welfare, charity, health or economic relief, are unallowable. Medical assistance, such as costs to include medical professionals, including but not limited to doctors, nurses, and psychiatrists to participate in the project activities are not allowed.

6. *Other Submission Requirements: Copyrights and Proprietary Information*

If any of the information contained in your application is proprietary, please note in the footer of the appropriate pages that the information is Confidential – Proprietary. Applicants should also note what parts of the application, program, concept, etc. are covered by copyright(s), trademark(s), or any other intellectual property rights and provide copies of the relevant documentation to support these copyrights.

Applicants must acquire all required registrations and rights in the United States and Ukraine. All intellectual property considerations and rights must be fully met in the United States and Ukraine.

Any sub-recipient organization must also meet all the U.S. and Ukraine requirements described above.

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. *Review Criteria*

- **Quality and Feasibility of the Program Idea** – 30 points: The program idea should be innovative and well developed, with sufficient detail about how project activities will be carried out. The proposals should demonstrate originality and outline clear, achievable objectives that align directly with the priorities and requirements of the NOFO. The proposal includes a reasonable implementation timeline, and the project scope is appropriate and clearly defined. Finally, the proposal aligns with the following:
  - The project clearly demonstrates a direct contribution to current U.S. foreign policy priorities.
  - The project will positively impact America's reputation among foreign government partners.
  - The project will positively impact American's reputation among foreign publics.
  - The proposal does not include any activities contrary to the following Executive Orders:
    - Executive Order 14173: "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity
    - Executive Order 14287: "Protecting American Communities from Criminal Aliens"
    - Executive Order 14168: Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government

- **Organizational Capacity and Record on Previous Grants** – 25 points:
  - The project proposal demonstrates that the organization has sufficient expertise, skills, and human resources to implement the project, including internal controls in place to manage federal funds. If sub-awards are proposed, applicant demonstrates experience managing subawards.
  - The organization demonstrates that it has a clear understanding of the underlying issue that the project will address.
  - The organization demonstrates capacity for successful planning and responsible fiscal management. This includes a financial management system, a bank account, and if applicable, satisfactory audit findings.
  - Applicants who have received grant funds previously have been compliant with applicable rules and regulations, including the Award Provisions and Standard Terms and Conditions.
  - Where partners are described, the applicant details each partner's respective role and provides curriculum vitae (CVs) for persons responsible for the project and financial administration. Proposed personnel, institutional resources, and partners are adequate and appropriate.

- **Project Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives** – 25 points: The project plan is well developed, with sufficient detail about how activities will be carried out. The proposal specifies target audiences, participant recruitment, and geographic areas of implementation. The proposal outlines clear, achievable objectives. The proposal includes a reasonable implementation timeline. The project scope is appropriate and clearly defined.

- **Budget** – 10 points: The budget and narrative justification are sufficiently detailed. The budget demonstrates that the organization has devoted time to accurately determine expenses associated with the project instead of providing rough estimates. Costs are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results. The results and proposed outcomes justify the total cost of the project. Budget items are reasonable, allowable, and allocable.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation** - 10 points: The project proposal includes an M&E plan. The applicant demonstrates it is able to measure program success against key indicators and provides milestones to indicate progress toward goals and objectives outlined in the proposal. The proposal includes output and outcome indicators and shows how and when those will be measured. Funded projects will have their plans finalized during the negotiation phase, and monitoring plans may be subject to periodic updates throughout the life of the project.

2. 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.

3. Review and Selection Process

a. Acknowledgement of receipt. Applicants will receive acknowledgment of receipt of their proposal.

b. Review. All submissions are screened for technical eligibility. **If a submission is missing any required forms/documents listed above in Section D. Application Contents and Format, it will be considered ineligible and will not be reviewed by the grants review committee.** A technical review panel will review eligible proposals based upon the criteria noted in this NOFO.

c. Follow up notification. Applicants will generally be notified within 120 days after the NOFO deadline regarding the results of the review panel.

2. Risk Review

i. 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 project requirements

ii. High Risk Designation

Awardees that are deemed to be high risk based on the above risk factors will be held to special award conditions. At a minimum, the recipient and/or project designated as High Risk will be required to submit monthly narrative reports and/or quarterly detailed financial reports. Recipients may also be required, upon request of the Grants Officer or Grants Officer Representative, to provide electronic copies of receipts or other supporting documentation (e.g., timesheets, travel documents) for costs incurred. The Grants Officer may withhold 10% of the award amount until final reports have been reviewed and approved by the GO. The recipient may be required to pay all salaries supported by the grant via electronic funds transfer. Other special award conditions may also be included if deemed appropriate by the Grants Officer.

F. AWARD NOTICES

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

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

Issuance of this NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

Payment Method:

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

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

G. 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. These include:

In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's guidance located at 2 CFR part 200, all applicable Federal laws, and relevant Executive guidance, the Department of State will review and consider applications for funding, as applicable to specific programs, pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity in accordance with the following:

- Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register's 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, particularly on:
    - Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an impartial process of evaluating Federal award applications (2 CFR part 200.205),
    - Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
    - Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and
    - Terminating agreements pursuant to the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, including, to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340). For the avoidance of doubt, the Department has sole discretion over the determination that an award no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities, and this provision permits awards to be terminated at the Department's convenience, including when it determines that the award no longer advances the national interest.

- 2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT

- 2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION

- 2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

- 2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)

- 2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY

- 2 CFR 600 – DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS

- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Recipients must comply with all applicable Executive Orders. A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: https://www.federalregister.gov/ .

2. ***Reporting***

   Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted. ***Note***: most recipients will be required to submit quarterly program progress and financial reports throughout the project period. The quarterly progress report must include updated M&E data for that quarter. Progress and financial reports are due 30 days after the reporting period. Final certified programmatic and financial reports are due 120 days after the close of the project period.

   All reports are to be submitted electronically.

   The Awardee must also provide the Embassy on an annual basis an inventory of all the U.S. government provided equipment using the SF428 form.

3. ***Branding and Marking***

   The Department of State, its programs, and U.S. Government funding and assistance should be easily identifiable to the Department's global audiences.

   Recipients of federal assistance awards must follow the branding guidance published at Guidance for Contracts and Grants - U.S. Department of State Brand System. Branding policy exceptions are outlined in the U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual 10 FAM 416, Policy Exceptions. For more information, visit: https://brand.america.gov/

H. OTHER INFORMATION

Guidelines for Budget Justification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alcoholic Beverages: Please note that award funds cannot be used for alcoholic beverages and other entertainment related expenses.

STEP Enrollment

U.S. citizens who travel to Ukraine encouraged to enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) available at: https://step.state.gov/step/. Enrollment enables citizens to receive security-related messages from the Embassy and makes it easier for us to locate you in an emergency. The Embassy also recommends that all travelers review the State Department's travel website at travel.state.gov for the Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and Ukraine Specific Information.