



# 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)  
FY 2026 Community Engagement Exchange  
Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0018606  
Application Deadline: July 9, 2026**

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## **A. Basic Information**

### **1. Overview.**

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Funding Opportunity Title</b>  | FY26 Community Engagement Exchange (CEE)          |
| <b>Funding Opportunity Number</b> | DFOP0018606                                       |
| <b>Announcement Type</b>          | New Cooperative Agreement                         |
| <b>Deadline for Applications</b>  | July 9, 2026 11:59pm Eastern (Washington DC time) |
| <b>Assistance Listing Number</b>  | 19.415  |

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Length of Performance Period</b> | 30 months   |
| <b>Number of Awards Anticipated</b> | One award   |
| <b>Award Amount</b>                 | Approximately \$1,000,000                                   |
| <b>Total Available Funding</b>      | \$1,000,000, pending availability of funds                  |
| <b>Type of Funding</b>              | FY26 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds |
| <b>Funding Instrument Type</b>      | Cooperative Agreement                                       |
| <b>Anticipated Award Date</b>       | September 4, 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 and implement the FY 2026 Community Engagement Exchange (CEE). CEE is a two-way exchange initiative for approximately 30-40 emerging civic leaders (ages 22-27), from Europe and Eurasia, that provides skill-based training, hands-on activities, and practical application of one of the First Amendment's most fundamental rights: the freedom of speech. Grounded in the enduring principles of the U.S. Constitution, CEE equips participants with the skills to promote free speech, reduce conflict and strengthen community engagement. CEE participants will work alongside American counterparts in a substantive six- to eight-week exchange program, including a four- to five-week individually tailored professional placement in a U.S. organization, designed to cultivate practical First Amendment (1A) skills. Approximately 15-20 Americans will travel on reciprocal visits, co-designed with CEE participants, that showcase America's leadership, promote free speech, and create opportunities for sustained collaboration. CEE advances U.S. foreign policy by strengthening the free speech and community engagement, promoting constructive public discourse, and

fostering international partners equipped to address complex challenges in alignment with U.S. interests. CEE is supported by Pawel Adamowicz supplemental funding.

## **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 \$1,000,000. 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.**

Since the founding of the United States Constitution, the First Amendment has distinguished America as a global leader in protecting individual liberty—ensuring the rights to freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly, and petition. First Amendment rights, especially freedom of speech, created conditions for ideas to be tested, challenged, and refined. The enduring commitment to free speech has fueled innovation and progress in America. The FY 2026 CEE builds on America's longstanding commitment to protected speech by preparing a new generation of

leaders with the 1A skills and free-speech fluency to responsibly and effectively apply them in home organizations, communities, and institutions. CEE cultivates leaders with a deep understanding of and commitment to the responsible exercise and protection of free speech. Through a mix of applied leadership training, professional practicums, and collaborative projects, CEE participants in the United States and Europe and Eurasia, strengthen local capacity for constructive public discourse and civic engagement. CEE ensures that emerging leaders have the practical skills and knowledge to reduce community-level conflict, foster productive dialogue, promote knowledge sharing, and spark innovative thinking at home and abroad.

### **3. Program Specific Guidelines.**

CEE participants from select countries in Europe and Eurasia will travel to the United States for a six- to eight-week exchange that includes applied leadership training, free speech literacy, hands-on practical application, and a four- to five-week individualized professional placement with a U.S. organization. Working alongside American counterparts, CEE participants will observe how American experts apply free speech principles in real-world settings, promote community dialogue efforts, and other initiatives that strengthen community engagement and participation. Placements should be designed to immerse participants in U.S. organizations with strong models of 1A application in public discourse and participation. The U.S.-based exchange program, including professional placements, should prioritize applied leadership development, skills training, and community-based initiatives that deliver tangible benefits to American communities while equipping participants to advance free speech, community engagement, and constructive dialogue in their home countries.

Following the U.S.-based exchange, American counterparts from placement organizations will travel overseas to participate in reciprocal exchanges co-developed with CEE participants. Reciprocal exchanges should support locally driven 1A projects, while also showcasing American leadership and creating opportunities for sustained collaboration between U.S. host communities and program alumni.

The proposal should integrate CEE goals into all aspects of program design and implementation, with special attention to maximizing concrete, measure impact in participants' home communities, both in the United States and in participants' home countries.

### **3.a. Partner Countries.**

To the fullest extent possible, program participants should be recruited and selected from selected countries in Europe and Eurasia. It is anticipated that approximately 8-10 countries will be selected, in partnership with the Department of State regional bureaus, for inclusion in the FY26 CEE award. A final list of countries will be provided to the award recipient following the issuance of the FY26 CEE award. No guarantee is made or implied that every country will have participants. ECA reserves the right to adjust and/or add eligible countries should conditions change in a country and/or if other countries are identified as viable alternatives and/or based on Department of State priorities.

### **3.b. Participant Recruitment.**

Proposals should include a strategy to implement an open merit-based recruitment campaign designed to reach the targeted demographics in participating countries. Outreach efforts should be appropriately tailored to the country, account for applicant safety and well-being, and have the broadest possible reach. While participants' backgrounds may vary, all successful candidates should have a demonstrated commitment to fostering free speech and constructive dialogue in home organizations, communities, or institutions. Proposals should include sample recruitment and selection materials that demonstrate capacity and organizational expertise in targeted outreach efforts.

### **Participant eligibility:**

Competition for CEE is merit-based and open to emerging leaders who submit a completed application and meet the following criteria, at the time of application:

- Age 22-27;
- Living and working in their country;
- Has a minimum of two years of experience working on relevant 1A issues;
- Has a clear commitment to developing local 1A initiatives in his/her home country;
- Able to work in cross-cultural settings and contribute to U.S. communities;
- Able to begin the CEE in the United States in 2027;
- Able to receive a U.S. J-1 visa;
- Committed to returning to their home country for a minimum of two-years after completion of the program and implementing a community-based project; and,
- Proficient in spoken and written English.

Individuals in the following circumstances are NOT eligible to apply:

- U.S. citizens and/or permanent residents of the United States;
- Individuals who have applied for U.S. permanent residency in the past three years;
- Individuals residing or working outside their home countries at the time of application. This includes individuals participating in academic, training, or research programs in the United States or other countries at the time of application. In consultation with ECA, special consideration may be given to individuals completing school courses or non-USG programming outside of their home countries at the time of application but have returned home six months prior to the start of program; and,
- Individuals who have participated in an exchange visitor program sponsored or funded by the U.S. government (e.g., U.S. Department of State, Public Affairs Sections of U.S. embassies, or other U.S. government agencies) who have not fulfilled their two-year home residency requirement by the time of application.
- Employees of the award recipient or any sub-award recipients.

Other criteria may be determined in consultation with ECA, including public-health related status based on guidance from federal agencies and/or updated national security policies.

### **3.c. Participant Selection.**

Proposals should address how participant applications will be screened for completeness and eligibility. Applicant organizations should convene a selection committee with expertise in relevant fields to read and evaluate each application using an evaluative form and scoring matrix reviewed and approved by ECA. A percentage of individuals receiving top scores on their applications (approximately three candidates for every placement available), should be invited for an English language interview, either in person or virtual. Each member of the interview team will complete an evaluation form designed by applicant, and approved by ECA, to evaluate and rank-order candidates based on the anticipated number of finalists and alternate candidates. The award recipient should administer English-language proficiency assessment to each semi-finalist who does not already possess a valid TOEFL score of 520 (or 213 on the computer-Based Test) or higher.

The recruitment and selection of candidates is the sole responsibility of the award recipient in consultation with ECA and participating U.S. embassies. Proposals should include plans for maintaining a close working relationship with ECA and embassy counterparts. The award recipient should maintain ongoing

communication with the Public Diplomacy Sections (PDS) of relevant embassies and coordinate PDS' involvement, as possible, during the recruitment, interview, selection, and pre-departure orientation phases of the program. PDSs should be invited to read applications, participate in interviews, and provide comments on semi-finalists. Based on the written applications, English-language interviews, language proficiency scores, and PDS' comments, the award recipient will select a final slate of recommended finalists and alternates to ECA, and then PDS, for approval. The applicant must inform, *in writing*, all finalists, alternate candidates, and unsuccessful applicants of their status in the competition

### **3.d. Pre-Departure Orientation.**

A pre-departure orientation (PDO), virtual, in-person or blended, should be conducted for finalists before they depart their home countries. The pre-departure orientation should be the entry point for participants' exchange experience. Pre-departure orientations should:

- facilitate the safe passage of participants to the United States;
- introduce 1A issues and free-speech literacy;
- prepare them for the U.S. cultural and work environment;
- clarify program's goals and regulations, including each participant's mandatory compliance with the J-1 visa two-year physical home residency requirement;
- Review the program's the Terms and Conditions document will be developed by the award recipient and approved by ECA.

Finalists must sign a copy of the Terms and Conditions document prior to their departure from their home country.

### **3.e. U.S.-based Orientation and Learning Lab.**

The U.S.-based orientation acts as an introduction to the program design, goals, and activities. The proposal should exercise maximum creativity in designing a U.S.-based orientation that is skill-based, introduces 1A content, free-speech literacy, and advances program goals. At a minimum, the orientation should address U.S. constitutional foundations, free speech protections—including controversial and dissenting viewpoints—and practical skills such as facilitating respectful dialogue and navigating public participation in community life. Orientation activities should provide participants an understanding of how First Amendment freedoms function as a foundation for local solving and progress. The proposal should include an agenda for a U.S.-based orientation.

### **3.f. Host Organization Orientation.**

U.S. Host Organizations should also receive a thorough orientation and be provided with resources to successfully guide and collaborate with CEE participants. The host orientation should reinforce program goals and respective roles and responsibilities. Hosts should be informed of resources available to support CEE participants and hosting institutions. Proposals should include a draft agenda and related orientation materials that demonstrate organizational capacity and expertise.

### **3.g. U.S.-based Professional Placements.**

Placement sites should be highly experiential and give participants hands-on experience with U.S. experts in free speech literacy and application. U.S.-based exchanges serve as learning labs where participants can:

- Apply leadership theory;
- Engage in substantive organizational initiatives and projects that address local needs;
- Explore American models for strengthening community engagement that can be adapted in their home countries;
- Develop skills in dialogue, facilitation, mediation, and group decision making; and,
- Serve as community contributors, assisting with dialogue and public participation in local issues.

Participants should work on organizational projects that demonstrate how American organizations address local community needs and, where possible, contribute to public-facing projects that allow for practical application of 1A issues.

Proposal should address how applicants will recruit, select, and secure host organizations that advance program goals. It is envisioned that hosting organizations could include local business councils, education and culture organizations, local governments, and non-for-profit organizations. Host institutions should be selected based on their demonstrated track record of success in strengthening free speech, constructive public discourse, and community engagement. Selection should prioritize an organization's ability to actively support CEE participants and capacity to engage the local community in support of the program.

### **3.h. U.S. Fellow Reciprocal Exchange.**

The proposal should include opportunities for Americans to participate in reciprocal exchanges—one- to two-week international exchanges—to support CEE participants' follow-on projects and designed in collaboration with U.S. host representatives. Reciprocal exchanges must be substantive, advance program program goals, and deliver clear benefits to both American and overseas communities. It is anticipated that U.S. participants will be selected from those who served as Host Supervisors, or other American colleagues who worked directly with the Fellow, during the U.S.-based exchange. Proposals should describe the participant selection process for the American reciprocal exchanges. Reciprocal visits should foster ongoing idea-sharing, resource exchange, and create opportunities for sustained collaboration that benefits local communities. The proposal should also outline how technology and social media will be used to support and amplify these collaborative projects.

### **3i. 1A Academy and Leadership Development.**

Supplementary programming activities, in person or online, may be built into the four- to five-week fellowship placement period, such as group workshops or other enrichment activities. Every effort should be made for CEE participants to engage with a wide range of Americans working on 1A and related issues. Proposals should exercise creativity in developing enhancement activities that advance program goals and foster constructive discourse in local communities, organizations, and institutions. Applied leadership development—both virtual and in-person—should be central to the program, maximizing impact and strengthening community engagement in the United States and abroad. Proposals should include tentative dates and topics for enhancement activities, that enable participants to learn and apply real world free speech fluency in a variety of settings.

### **3.j. Program Capstone.**

The proposal must include a capstone workshop in Washington, D.C. at the conclusion of the U.S.-based program. This final event should highlight the achievements of participants and host organizations, clearly demonstrate the program's positive impact on American communities, and offer practical activities that help turn ideas into real-world results. Proposals should articulate the overarching goals and present a creative and compelling design for the capstone.

While the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) will arrange meetings with key Department stakeholders, the award recipient is responsible for planning and implementing all other aspects of the

workshop. Award recipients are expected to work closely with ECA to ensure the capstone event is well-coordinated, impactful, and aligned with program goals.

### **3k. Program Monitoring.**

In addition to reporting for Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE), see Section 6, Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), it is critical that the award recipient monitor CEE participants' progress in achieving program goals and objectives while they are at their professional placement (e.g., through surveys, interviews, work plans, email, etc.) and after they return home. The proposal should also include a plan to monitor the safety and welfare of CEE and U.S. participants. The award recipient should be prepared to troubleshoot and resolve issues in real-time as they emerge. At a minimum, the proposal should:

- cite the intended frequency of communication with the participants and representatives of the U.S. host institutions;
- outline performance goals or benchmarks for the participants' time in the United States, as well as U.S. participants time traveling on reciprocal visits.
- include a plan for monitoring U.S. participants while they are working on collaborative projects with the CEE participants.

The proposal should address how the quality of the participants' experience, both in the United States and overseas, will be evaluated and impact to the American people measured.

### **3.l. Collaboration with the Public Diplomacy Section of the Respective Embassies:**

Award recipients must work closely with the Public Diplomacy Section of the respective embassy (-ies) to develop plans for program implementation, including the recruitment and selection, pre-departure orientations (PDOs), and other in-country program activities. It is important that all proposed American outbound program schedules are reviewed and approved by ECA and PDS a minimum of two months prior to the start of any reciprocal exchange. Since many U.S. participants will be experts on issues pertinent to various U.S. foreign policy objectives in the respective country, award recipients should work with U.S. participant and CEE alumni to identify additional activities that complement in-country public diplomacy programs, thereby enhancing the impact of the exchange and 1A project to the U.S. embassy.

### **3.m. Post-Fellowship Engagement:**

Proposals should describe how post-Fellowship engagement will be approached after the CEE participants return to their home country. Proposals should articulate how the award recipient will provide ECA with regular updates on the alumni individual projects as well as professional successes following their participation in CEE. Proposals should describe how new program alumni will be introduced to and connected with past program alumni, such as through web-based technology, social media, and alumni programming efforts.

#### **4. Recipient Responsibilities.**

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows for the overseas administration of the program:

1. Coordinate with ECA on all aspects of recruitment and selection including development of review criteria, outreach strategies, and the final selection of applicants;
2. Develop a merit-based recruitment campaign for individuals meeting the eligibility criteria for the program;
3. Design, launch, and support a digital application platform that supports the real-time tracking and monitoring of application data;
4. Develop a transparent review process to evaluate applicants for CEE that provides opportunities to involve PDS at participating U.S. embassies.
5. Arrange English language interviews (virtual or in-person) for semi-finalists as part of the selection process;
6. Administer a language-based assessment to evaluate semi-finalists' English language abilities;
7. Develop a digital platform to assist finalists in preparing for their U.S.-based exchange program, answer questions on programmatic issues, including but not limited to applied leadership and skill development, U.S. cultural norms, program responsibilities and expectations, travel, health and safety issues, accident and sickness benefits, housing, etc.; this platform should also provide resources and answer questions for U.S participants, or other leadership professionals traveling under this program;
8. Conduct pre-departure orientations (virtual or in-person) for CEE finalists and U.S. participants before they depart their home countries;
9. Facilitate communication between finalists and host organizations and communities prior to participants departing to the United States, including but not limited to communication about program and community resources, any pre-program leadership assignments, and leadership development activities;

10. Monitor and support U.S. participants' activity overseas, including the implementation of follow-on and community-based projects;
11. Design and support alumni programming. Recipient organizations should collaborate with ECA's Alumni Affairs Office to support alumni activities; and,
12. Track program impact on participants, institutions, and the areas they serve.

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows for the U.S. administration of CEE, the applicant should:

1. Recruit and maintain a cadre of U.S. public, private, and non-profit institutions and organizations able to support a professionally tailored placement for CEE participants;
2. Develop and communicate program guidelines, and other relevant materials, to U.S. host organization. Recipients should host a virtual orientation for U.S. host organization representatives to review program goals, policies, available resources, and responsibilities;
3. Develop and maintain a digital platform to post resources and facilitate communication among host organizations and CEE participants;
4. Develop and support concrete strategies to facilitate host engagement in, and support for, the CEE and related activities;
5. Create opportunities for CEE participants, and American colleagues, to develop professional relationships in U.S. communities;
6. Conduct a comprehensive orientation in the United States for CEE participants prior to the start of their U.S.-based exchange program;
7. Develop and integrate a strong 1A focused leadership and skill-building component into CEE program activities;
8. Facilitate community-based activities and professional enrichment activities to support the program goals;
9. Monitor and support CEE participants and host organizations throughout the U.S.-based exchange;
10. Conduct a capstone program in Washington, D.C. for participants, and select hosts, following the completion of the U.S.-based practicum;
11. Promote and support projects in the U.S. communities and participants' home communities;
12. Arrange and cover the cost of all appropriate program-related travel for CEE and U.S. Participants, and alumni participating in collaborative projects, including but not limited to transportation, lodging, and meals and incidental expenses;

13. Develop a merit-based recruitment campaign for Americans meeting the eligibility criteria for the program's reciprocal component;
14. Conduct pre-departure orientations (virtual or in-person) and end-of-program debriefs for American participants before and after participating in reciprocal exchanges;
15. Develop program materials that amplifies CEE goals, supports host engagement, and highlights participant and alumni achievements, demonstrates impact, and showcases effective innovative community-led initiatives;
16. Develop resources to assist participants with the development and implementation of community-based in their home communities;
17. Evaluate the program and its impact on program participants, host organizations, host communities, and participants' home communities;
18. Work in collaboration with ECA's Alumni Affairs Office to support American alumni and domestic alumni activities;
20. Manage financial aspects of the program including timely disbursement of participant stipends, housing allowances, etc. and promptly report any irregularities in the budget or spending to ECA;
21. Enroll participants in the Bureau's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) for the duration of the program, issue health benefits identifications cards, and provide instructions on submitting claim forms. More information on ASPE is available at [www.usdos.sevencorners.com](http://www.usdos.sevencorners.com);
22. Issue and ship DS-2019 forms for international participants and alternates. All international participants will travel on a U.S. government designation for the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor program;
23. Participate in regular program reviews with ECA (in person or by telephone) that provide general updates on program implementation and matters of concern, including but not limited to a review of the effectiveness of past activities, progress on anticipated programmatic activities, and issues that may impede the implementation of planned programming;
24. Respond fully and promptly to requests for program or statistical information from ECA; and,
25. Ensure compliance with the terms of the Cooperative Agreement with ECA, including but not limited to submitting timely financial and program reports and providing proper budget oversight.

## **5. Goals and Objectives.**

The Community Engagement Exchange:

- Enable participants to demonstrate measurable growth in collaborative leadership and the practical application of First Amendment principles, including assuming increased leadership roles in facilitating constructive public discourse within their organizations and communities.
- Provide participants with targeted training and practical resources to strengthen leadership and technical skills that support free speech literacy, community engagement, and the development of initiatives that advance constructive dialogue and community-based problem-solving.
- Facilitate the creation of lasting professional connections between participants, U.S. citizens, and American institutions to support ongoing collaboration in promoting free expression and community participation.
- Develop and sustain a multisector network of professionals and community leaders equipped to advance free speech literacy, foster respectful discourse, and support innovative, community-driven initiatives across local and international contexts.

## **6. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).**

Distinct from grants or cooperative agreement monitoring and participant monitoring, performance monitoring is designed to assess progress against a program's goals and objectives. A performance monitoring framework is vital to tracking the direction, pace, and magnitude of change that result from ECA programs.

ECA created the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework to measure the performance of ECA programs. **The MODE Framework provides standard indicators and corresponding survey questions to ensure consistent measures across all ECA programs.** More resources and guidance documents on the MODE Framework are available online at: <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>.

The proposal must include the MODE Framework objectives and indicators listed below (note that, because not all MODE objectives and indicators are relevant for a program, the numbering below will not be sequential). In addition to the ECA-required objectives and indicators, applicants may also select additional MODE Framework indicators (see the **Indicator Book** on the MODE Framework website), or design custom objectives and indicators that are specific to the proposed program and this proposal.

- Demographic Questions as outlined in the **Indicator Book** on page v and **Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)** (See the MODE Resource Guide - <https://app.box.com/s/qjo8icwj46tc8h1i1qtg80zl7ibwgtua> – found on our website <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>)
- **Objective 1:** Advance participant and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
  - o **Sub-Objective 1.1:** Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between participants and their host communities
    - E1.1.01: Percent of participants reporting that their program experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
    - E1.1.04: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
    - E1.1.09: Percent of participants who traveled abroad for the first time because of their program (core indicator)
    - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
    - E1.1.11: Percent of American participants indicating a change in their understanding of their host country's culture and values
    - E1.1.12: Percent of foreign participants indicating a change in understanding of third-party countries' cultures and values
    - E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American people (core indicator)
    - E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values (core indicator)
    - E1.1.19: Percent of foreign participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values (core indicator)
- **Objective 2:** Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities / countries
  - E2.0.01: Percent of foreign participants that volunteer in their host communities
  - E2.0.04: Number of hours that foreign participants spend volunteering in their host communities
  - o **Sub-Objective 2.2:** Foster participants' belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
    - E2.2.01: Percent of participants who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country (core indicator)
- **Objective 3:** Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions

- E3.0.02: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of Americans (core indicator)
- E3.0.04: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of third country nationals
- E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)
- **Objective 4:** Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
  - E4.0.01: Percent of participants reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.09: Percent of participants reporting an increase in language skills as a result of their program participation
  - **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=WBHC1oLNZvl>. While ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. Successful

PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the following:

- Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.
- Indicators. Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning, breakdowns of the data by subgroups; the PMP lists the demographic questions required to obtain the information necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.
  - If you do not use the PMP format provided, note that any performance monitoring reference document the applicant submits should include the information in the column headers (Indicator Name, Definition, Target, Survey Question, etc.) in the PMP attachment at a minimum.
  - In addition to those indicators outlined in above, the applicant may propose additional custom, program-specific indicators in the PMP (ECA recommends the proposed PMPs include a minimum of one indicator for each custom programmatic objective).
  - During the period of performance of the award, the ECA program office may further revise, add, or remove indicators. Therefore, the applicant's PMP and data collection instruments should be flexible enough to incorporate those once established.

Award recipients are responsible for collecting indicator data only on participant outcomes during the period of performance of the award itself (see the PMP for guidelines as to when these data collection efforts should occur). ECA will measure outcomes of ECA participants at one, three, five, and 10 years after the exchange has ended to capture the long-term outcomes of ECA programming unless otherwise specified in the solicitation. In this instance, the recipient will be responsible for coordinating with ECA on any alumni surveys to de-duplicate questions and minimize potential survey fatigue.

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

### **Program Performance M&E Narrative**

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

- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.
- The mechanism(s) through which surveys and other data collection tools (if applicable) will be administered, including which platform will be used, and when and how surveys will be advertised to participants – detailing strategies to ensure adequate survey response rates (<https://app.box.com/s/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.**

The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase the proposal budget in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. A list of suggested program costs, eligible for funding consideration, are:

- a. **Travel.** Please note that all international air travel must be in compliance with the Fly America Act. J-1 visas for non-U.S. participants are provided by the U.S. Department of State and should not be included in the budget. Proposals should include costs for any travel associated with procuring visas, including travel for interviews, delivering, or picking up passports, etc. A return travel allowance of \$75 for each foreign participant may be included in the budget. The allowance may be used for incidental expenses incurred during international travel.
- b. **Per Diem.** For U.S.-based programming, the applicant should use the published Federal per diem rates for individual U.S. cities. Domestic per diem rates may be accessed at: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem>. 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](https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp)
- c. **Book and Cultural Allowance.** Foreign participants are entitled to a one-time cultural allowance of \$250 per person, plus a book allowance of \$100. U.S. program staff members 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 session. Subaward and subcontracting organizations may also be employed,

in which case a letter of support between the prospective subawardee and subcontractor should be included in the proposal. Subawards 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 a letter outlining the agreement between applicant and the contractors/contracting organizations should be included in the proposal.

- e. **Room Rental.** Room rental may not exceed the going market rate for event space in the area of activity. Proposals citing market value must provide justification as to the amount requested. Without solid justification, room rentals may not exceed \$250 per day per conference room or per activity.
- f. **Materials Development.** The proposal may contain costs to purchase, develop, and translate materials for participants.
- g. **Supplies.** The proposal may contain costs to purchase equipment for programming such as computers and fax machines. Costs for furniture are not allowed. Supply costs for the purchase of equipment must be kept to a minimum.
- h. **Working Meals.** No more than two working meals may be provided for each program component. At least one working meal should be budgeted for the D.C. End of Program Workshop. The cost per person should not exceed \$45 for the working meal. No charges may be made against U.S. government funds for alcoholic beverages. The number of invited guests should not exceed the number of funded program participants by more than a factor of two (i.e., no more than twenty invited guests for a working meal involving ten funded program participants).
- i. **Health Benefits.** Foreign participants will be covered under the terms of a U.S. Department of State-sponsored ASPE. The premium is paid by the U.S. Department of State directly to the insurance company. An additional line item for supplemental health insurance may be included for hosting organizations requiring specialized insurance coverage. Proposals may include costs for travel insurance for participants in the budget.
- j. **Reasonable Accommodations.** Proposals should budget for the reasonable accommodations of individuals with disabilities. The proposal

may allocate up to 5 - 7% of the total requested ECA award funds for this purpose and reflect plans to make the necessary program modifications, or modifications to participant numbers, in the event that participants need reasonable accommodation.

- k. **Wire Transfer Fees.** When necessary, the applicant may include costs to transfer funds to partner organizations overseas. The applicant is urged to research applicable taxes that may be imposed on these transfers by host governments.
- l. **Alumni Activities.** Reasonable costs related to alumni programming for both U.S. and foreign participants may be included. The proposal must include an outline of any proposed follow-on activities. Proposals can include small grants or a small grant competition that advance CEE goals and support 1A related activities.
- m. **Database Management.** Reasonable costs for the purchase or development of a secure database management system to track applicant, participant, host organization, and alumni data may be included.

## **8. Cost Share.**

ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

## **9. Freedom and Democracy Guidelines.**

Public Law 104-319 provides that "in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy," the Bureau "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for

participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries." Public Law 106 - 113 requires that the governments of the countries described above do not have inappropriate influence in the selection process. Proposals should reflect advancement of these goals in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

### **10. Virtual Exchange Component.**

When changing political, health, environmental, or other similar circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges. Proposals should demonstrate the organization's capacity to provide innovative options for virtual activities to substitute for in-person engagement for program participants. Organizations should consider how they will implement virtual exchange activities, given the potential limits to internet access from participants in some locations and while continuing to advance foreign policy objectives and achieve lasting benefits for U.S. citizens and international participants.

In addition to planning for virtual exchange activities if in-person programming is prohibited, ECA welcomes innovative ideas on how organizations can leverage virtual programming technologies during or in addition to in-person programming. ECA encourages organizations submitting proposals in response to this solicitation to suggest one or more virtual exchange components to complement the in-person exchange. The virtual exchange components could come before, during and/or after the physical exchange. The objective for the virtual exchange components is to augment the impact of the in-person exchange described in this solicitation. ECA encourages organizations to propose virtual exchange ideas that take advantage of ECA's existing web and social networking platforms. Virtual exchange components would be coordinated with and approved by the ECA program office and U.S. missions abroad on a project-by-project basis.

### **12. Communications Guidance for ECA Recipients.**

All ECA Recipients must adhere to the requirements in [ECA's Communications Guidance](#) on the creation of program branding and attribution, websites, social media, and press.

### **13. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial.**

ECA is excited to play a key role in making the Semiquincentennial – commonly known as “Freedom 250” – a truly global celebration. As the period of performance for this award is scheduled to cover part or all of calendar year (CY) 2026, the applicant may wish to consider ways the program can celebrate Freedom 250. Any Freedom 250 focused activities or plans will be subject to ECA approval and direction, and changes may be requested by ECA. Use of any ECA-provided Freedom 250 brand elements will be subject to advance ECA approval and require adherence to Department of State and ECA guidelines for such branding.

#### **14. Substantial Involvement.**

In a cooperative agreement, the Department is substantially involved in program activities above and beyond routine monitoring, including participation in the design and direction of program implementation, review of publicity and program materials, approval of participants and hosts, and development of alumni activities.

#### **D. Application Contents and Format**

Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals.

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package, including the PSI, which contains guidelines for proposal preparation.

##### **1. Budget Format.**

Applicants must submit a budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and a budget narrative. See the PSI section III for more information on the budget requirements. Budget requests may not exceed \$1,000,000. Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

##### **2. Content of Application.**

Please see the PSI for information about the application and formatting guidelines. Additionally, the proposal should include:

###### **2a. Executive Summary.** (One page) that includes:

1. Name of organization/participating institutions
2. Beginning and ending dates of the program
3. Proposed theme or focus area

4. Nature of activity
5. Funding level requested from the Bureau, total program cost, total cost-sharing from applicant and other sources
6. Scope and Goals
  - a. Number and description of participants
  - b. Wider audience benefiting from program (overall impact)
  - c. Program location, both U.S. and overseas
  - d. Anticipated results (short and long-term)

**2b. Narrative.** In 20 double-spaced, single-sided pages, using 12 pt. font, provide a detailed description of CEE addressing the areas listed below:

1. Vision (statement of need, objectives, goals, benefits)
2. Participating Organizations
3. Program Activities that address the core components outlined in the above guidelines
4. Program Evaluation
5. Follow-on Activities
6. Project Management
7. Work Plan/Time Frame

Applicants may include supplemental materials that demonstrate institutional track record, showcase expertise, and illustrate capacity to implement the program as outlined in the NOFO.

## **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: Linnéa Allison, U.S. Department of State, Office of Citizen Exchanges, Global Leaders Division, ECA/PE/C/GL, t(202) 62-6060, [allisonle@state.gov](mailto:allisonle@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. Please begin your registration as early as possible.***

Organizations based in the United States or that pay employees within the United States will need an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and a UEI prior to registering in SAM.gov.

All federal award recipients must maintain a current registration in the SAM database. Recipients must maintain accurate and up-to-date information in [www.SAM.gov](http://www.SAM.gov) until all program and financial activity and reporting are completed on any issued award. Recipients must review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration and more frequently if required information changes or another award is granted. There is no cost associated with registering or updating SAM.gov accounts.

For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to:  
<https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>

## **Exemptions**

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

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

## **4. Required Registration with MyGrants.**

All ECA award recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories must be registered with the U.S. Department of State's MyGrants system by accessing <https://mygrants.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](mailto:support@grants.gov)

## **6. Submission Dates and Times.**

### **Application Deadline Date.**

**July 09, 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. There are no

exceptions to the above deadline. Applications uploaded to the site after the application deadline date and time will be automatically rejected by the Grants.gov system and will be found technically ineligible.

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

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

When ECA successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgement of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Please also be mindful of any Grants.gov generated error messages that may appear during the application process as they may result in some documents not transmitting correctly.

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

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

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

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

## **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:

- i. Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government's payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and;
- ii. It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. A program promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means a program whose purpose is to promote preferences based on race, color religion, sex, or national origins, such as in training or hiring.

**d. Certification Regarding Compliance with 20 U.S.C. 1011f and Any Other Applicable Foreign Funding Disclosure Requirements for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE).**

Applicants are advised that IHEs must certify the following at the time of award, and that this certification requirement must be included in any subaward agreements to IHEs:

- Its compliance in all respects with section 1011f of title 20, United States Code, and any other applicable foreign funding disclosure requirements is material for purposes of section 3729 of title 31, United States Code, and for receipt of appropriate Federal grant funds.

**e. 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 Program Idea and Ability to Program Aims and Purpose:** The proposal should exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to the ECA's mission. Program objectives should be stated clearly and should reflect subject matter expertise relevant to the requirements of the solicitation. Proposals should clearly state the program's aims, include a detailed workplan, and demonstrate how your institution will meet

them. Proposed activities should follow the program guidelines described in this solicitation and should be likely to provide maximum impact in achieving the proposed results.

- b. **Multiplier effect/impact and Follow-on Activities:** Proposals should strengthen long-term mutual understanding between countries, including sharing of information and creating long-term institutional and individual linkages. Proposals should provide a plan for continued follow-on activity after the ECA supported program ends, ensuring that programs are not isolated events.
- c. **Institutional Capacity and Track Record:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results. 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. **Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should have a fully developed M&E plan that includes goals, objectives, and indicators. The plan should be feasible and aligned with the M&E section of this solicitation. Proposals should include a realistic learning plan that outlines how your organization plans to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices. All submitted M&E plans will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided at least the required information outlined in the M&E section of this solicitation and demonstrated the applicant's capacity to carry out the M&E plan.
- e. **Cost-effectiveness 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. Cost-sharing and in-kind contributions, including contributions from the applicant organization, proposed in-country partner(s), and other sources should be included in the budget or budget notes. Please address how the program will utilize innovative tools and fiscally responsible approaches to program implementation, including web-based and other technologies, in order to be a faithful steward of federal resources.

### 3. Indirect Costs

If two or more applications receive equivalent scores based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this NOFO, preference will be given to the applicant with the lower indirect cost rate, as consistent with Executive Order 14332, Section 4(b)(iii).

This preference will only be applied as a tie-breaking mechanism and does not supersede the primary evaluation criteria.

#### **4. Risk Review**

Under the merit review as required by 2 CFR 200.206, prior to making a Federal Award, the Department will review and consider the following risk factors:

- a. Financial stability
- b. Management systems and standards
- c. History of performance
- d. Audit reports and findings
- e. Ability to effectively implement requirements

#### **5. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov.**

The Federal awarding agency, prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the U.S. government designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov (see 41 U.S.C. 2313) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313)

An applicant can review and comment on any information in the responsibility/qualification records available at SAM.gov.

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

#### **G. Award Notices.**

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal ECA procedures. The award or cooperative agreement will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer in ECA's Grants Division and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer (as identified in the application) for review and countersignature. The recipient may only start incurring project expenses beginning on the start date shown on the fully signed award document.

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

reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received. If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding.

**Unsuccessful applicants:**

Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification of the results of the application review from the ECA program office coordinating this competition following the completion of the review process.

**Payment Method:**

Payments under this award will be made through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Payment Management System (PMS).

**H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration**

**1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.**

Before submitting an application, applicants should review all the terms and conditions and required certifications which will apply to this award, to ensure that they will be able to comply.

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

- [Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations](#) (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register’s 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, particularly on:
  - Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an impartial process of evaluating Federal award applications (2 CFR part 200.205),
  - Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
  - Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and

- Terminating agreements pursuant to the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, including, to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340). For the avoidance of doubt, the Department has sole discretion over the determination that an award no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities, and this provision permits awards to be terminated at the Department's convenience, including when it determines that the award no longer advances the national interest.
- [2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT](#)
- [2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION](#)
- [2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS](#)
- [2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE \(FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE\)](#)
- [2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY](#)
- [2 CFR 600 - DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS](#)
- [U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#)
- Recipients must comply with all applicable Executive Orders A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

## 2. Reporting.

Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted. All reports must be submitted in a timely manner.

For planning purposes, applicants can expect to provide ECA with an electronic copy of the following required reports:

- a. Performance Progress Reports (PPRs)** shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual, quarterly, or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. All reports and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.

- b. The Federal Financial Reports** (FFR SF-425/SF-425a) must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the recipient must upload the approved report to MyGrants, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the recipient's eligibility for future awards.
- c. Required MODE data** (see Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation section) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. MODE data reporting shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. The frequency of these reports will be determined by DOME and the Program Officer. Either a standard report template (if using the MODE Survey Builder) or aggregate data and the raw data file (if Recipient uses their own survey platform) must be uploaded by the Recipient as an RPM Performance Report under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
- d. A final program and financial report** no more than 120 days after the period of performance of the award ends or termination of the award.
- e. Program Data Requirements:** Award recipients will be required to maintain specific data on program participants and activities in an electronically accessible database format that can be shared with ECA as required. At a minimum, the data must include the following:
- Name, address, contact information and biographic sketch of all persons who travel internationally on funds provided by the agreement or who benefit from the award funding but do not travel.
  - Itineraries of international and domestic travel, providing dates of travel and cities in which any exchange experiences take place. Final schedules for in-country and U.S. activities must be received by the ECA Program Officer at least three workdays prior to the official opening of the activity.

Applicants should be aware of the post award reporting requirements reflected in 2 CFR 200 Appendix XII—Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

#### **4. Branding and Marking**

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

Recipients of federal assistance awards must follow the branding guidance published at [Guidance for Contracts and Grants - U.S. Department of State Brand System](#). Branding policy exceptions are outlined in the U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual [10 FAM 416, Policy Exceptions](#).

For more information, visit: <https://brand.america.gov/>

## **I. Other Information**

### **Adherence To All Regulations Governing the J Visa**

ECA places critically important emphasis on the security and proper administration of the Exchange Visitor (J visa) Programs and adherence by award recipients and sponsors to all regulations governing the J visa. Therefore, proposals should demonstrate the applicant's capacity to meet all requirements governing the administration of the Exchange Visitor Programs as set forth in 22 CFR 62, including the oversight of Responsible Officers and Alternate Responsible Officers, screening and selection of program participants, provision of pre-arrival information and orientation to participants, monitoring of participants, proper maintenance and security of forms, record-keeping, reporting and other requirements.

The award recipient program office: specify which 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