

DFOP0019227: Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC)

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated July 27, 2026

Question 1: Which areas of research are eligible?

MERC remains open to concepts from across scientific disciplines. Any applied science topic may be considered so long as the concept addresses the review criteria. One of the review criteria is "Relevance to priorities of the United States." Pre-identified areas of relevance to the United States are featured within Section C.2. of the NOFO (page 8).

Question 2: What is meant by advancing "U.S. economic competitiveness and technological leadership"?

As noted within Section B.1. of the NOFO (page 7), MERC prioritizes projects that advance U.S. economic competitiveness and technological leadership; promote the adoption and integration of U.S. technologies; strengthen strategic regional partnerships; address regionally relevant challenges in ways that also advance U.S. interests; and enable scalable, market-driven solutions.

More specific examples, could include projects that:

- Create opportunities for U.S. companies to sell, export, license, or deploy U.S. technologies in MENA markets;
- Demonstrate or validate U.S. technologies in real-world conditions;
- Strengthen U.S. research and commercial partnerships with Israeli and other MENA institutions;
- Open pathways to follow-on investment, commercialization, or market adoption for U.S. innovations; or
- Reduce reliance on competing foreign technologies by promoting the adoption of U.S. technologies, standards, expertise, and supply chains.

These examples are illustrative, not prescriptive, nor is this an exhaustive list.

Question 3: I have a concept focused on a research area not listed among the priority areas on pg. 8 of the NOFO. Will this concept be competitive?

Any applied scientific or technical research topic may be competitive if it is responsive to the objectives and review criteria outlined in the NOFO. The Department cannot determine the competitiveness of a specific concept in advance of submission of a statement of interest (SOI) and submissions will be evaluated competitively against the review criteria in the NOFO.

Question 4: Which topics in health security will be considered?

Review the publicly available America First Global Health Strategy which is linked in the NOFO (page 8) for a sense of the U.S. administration's priorities in this sector.

Question 5: Can I resubmit a proposal that was previously considered by the MERC Program?

Yes, see Section B.4. (page 6) of the NOFO entitled "Previously Submitted Concepts."

Per the NOFO, you may resubmit a previously declined concept, but the SOI must be substantially revised in response to the requirements and review criteria of **this** NOFO. Resubmitted SOIs that have not been substantially revised may be declined without review. Applicants with questions about resubmitting previously submitted concepts are encouraged to contact the MERC Program at nea-grants@state.gov (include "MERC" in the subject line). This answer also applies to projects that were previously terminated.

Question 6: How can I identify potential collaborators?

We recommend you employ the normal tools of professional networking to identify potential collaborators, including looking for publications and the websites of researchers in your area of interest.

If this approach is unsuccessful, or you need additional support, you are welcome to send a short summary of your interests to nea-grants@state.gov (include "MERC" in the subject line) and we can connect you with a support team who may be able to recommend relevant organizations that are also seeking collaborators.

Question 7: Which institution should submit the SOI or lead the consortium?

Any member of the consortium, from any country or organization type, may apply as the lead, or prime, institution. Bear in mind that the responsibilities of prime recipients of federal awards, as defined by 2 CFR 200, include maintaining proper financial management and internal controls, executing mandatory risk assessments and monitoring of subrecipients, and ensuring compliance with all federal cost principles and reporting requirements. Additionally, the prime recipient will need to have a valid registration in SAM.gov prior to the submission of a full application as described within Section B.3. of the NOFO (pages 5 and 6).

Question 8: Are satellite or portal campuses of U.S. universities eligible recipients?

As noted within Section B.1. of the NOFO (page 4), satellite or portal campus of non-regional institutions, including U.S. universities, do not meet the requirement of being a Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region organization. Such organizations may be eligible recipients as a

member of a broader consortium, but they alone will not address the NOFO's minimum requirement of engaging a MENA country organization.

Question 9: It is a requirement to include a U.S. private sector company among the consortium of applicants?

As described within Section B.1. of the NOFO, the inclusion of a U.S. co-applicant (recipient) is optional. However, MERC encourages the inclusion of U.S. private sector companies, either as co-applicants (sub-recipients with their own budget) or key stakeholders (an entity that is engaged in the project but not receiving their own budget), to advance commercial outcomes. Applicants may include a U.S. company to address the review criteria of "relevance to priorities of the United States" and "likely impact and commercial potential" (see Section F.2., page 21) of the NOFO.

Question 10: Is a U.S. company registered in a MENA country considered a MENA organization for the purposes of meeting the NOFO's minimum eligibility requirements?

Possibly. As guiding principles, applicants should consider if their consortium of proposed implementers advances the MERC program's objective of "enabling direct cooperation, strengthening peaceful partnerships, and establishing durable working relationships between individuals, organizations, and communities in Israel and the broader Middle East and North Africa region" and addresses the review criterion of "strength and durability of regional cooperation" (see Section F.2., page 21).