

Questions and Answers for Undercover Backstopping Project - OFOP0002752

June 5, 2026

1. We are a small business consulting firm incorporated in Mexico (SAS) and would like to confirm whether we are eligible to submit a SOI under this opportunity. The Grants.gov listing indicates "Miscellaneous/Other" as the applicant type, but this is not reflected in the SOI document itself, leaving the eligibility criteria unclear. Could you please confirm whether a Mexico-based SAS consulting firm qualifies as an eligible applicant?

Answer: Based on the eligibility criteria outlined in the NOFO under Section B. *Eligibility Information*, eligibility is limited to qualifying NGOs and educational institutions. A consulting firm would not be eligible unless it is formally recognized as a non-profit or educational institution. While Grants.gov references "Miscellaneous/Other," the NOFO eligibility criteria rule this opportunity.

2. The document states SAM.gov registration may take 4–8 weeks. Given that the SOI deadline is June 15, 2026, will INL consider applications from organizations whose SAM.gov registration is pending but was initiated before the submission deadline?

Answer: Applicant's SAM.gov registration must be fully active at the time of proposal submission.

3. Can a consortium of two or more organizations submit a joint SOI? If so, who must hold the SAM.gov registration and UEI, and how will performance accountability be distributed between the prime applicant and consortium members?

Answer: Yes. A consortium of two or more organizations may submit a joint SOI; however, one organization must serve as the prime applicant and be legally responsible for the award. The prime recipient assumes overall responsibility for programmatic, financial, and reporting compliance, including oversight of all subrecipients and consortium partners, consistent with the subrecipient monitoring requirements under 2 CFR §200.332.

4. What specific obligations does the Cooperative Agreement modality impose on the implementing partner with respect to INL's "substantial involvement"? Does INL retain approval authority over personnel selection, subcontractors, and individual deliverables, or only over major milestones?

Answer: Please refer to the ‘Substantial Involvement’ section regarding INL’s role and level of involvement throughout project implementation, as stated INL’s role will be collaborative rather than operational.

5. Regarding 2 CFR 602, 603, and 604 (PHFFA policies): do these apply to activities conducted exclusively outside the United States? Please clarify the geographic scope of compliance obligations for foreign-based implementers operating solely in Mexico.

Answer: Recipients are responsible for complying with all applicable U.S. federal award requirements and the specific terms and conditions of the award, including any provisions that incorporate or reference 2 CFR Parts 602, 603, and 604, as applicable. The geographic location of project implementation does not, in itself, exempt a recipient from compliance

6. The SOI prohibits activities that "encourage mass-migration caravans." Will any activity related to the protection of undercover agents who investigate migration-related criminal networks be considered in conflict with this restriction? Please clarify the operational boundary.

Answer: The restriction against activities that "encourage mass-migration caravans" does not prohibit work related to protecting undercover agents who investigate migration-related criminal networks. This program focuses exclusively on strengthening law enforcement capabilities to combat transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), including those that exploit migrants through human smuggling and trafficking operations.

The operational boundary is clear: activities must support law enforcement operations against criminal organizations, not facilitate or encourage irregular migration. Undercover operations targeting cartels and TCOs that profit from human smuggling are fully aligned with program objectives and U.S. security interests. Implementing partners should ensure all activities focus on disrupting criminal networks rather than addressing migration policy or humanitarian assistance to migrants.

7. Which specific Mexican federal and/or state law enforcement agencies are anticipated as counterparts for this project? Will INL facilitate formal liaison, or is the implementing partner expected to establish those relationships independently prior to or during implementation?

Answer: The specific Mexican federal and state law enforcement agencies will be identified during the assessment phase based on operational capacity, institutional readiness, and alignment with program objectives. Anticipated counterparts may include federal agencies responsible for organized crime investigations, identity document issuance, and law enforcement training, as well as selected state-level agencies with demonstrated capacity for undercover operations.

INL will provide substantial involvement throughout implementation, including collaboration on stakeholder engagement and facilitating connections with relevant U.S. and Mexican government entities (as outlined in Section 2 of the SOI). However, implementing partners should demonstrate existing relationships or proven capacity to establish effective working relationships with Mexican law enforcement and government agencies. Partners should outline their approach to stakeholder engagement and interagency coordination in their proposals.

8. What is the expected geographic scope of the legal gap analysis under Objective 1? Should the assessment cover all 32 Mexican states, or should it prioritize specific federal jurisdictions and selected states based on operational relevance?

Answer: The legal gap analysis should be comprehensive at the federal level and strategically targeted at the state level. While a complete understanding of federal legal frameworks is essential, state-level assessments should prioritize jurisdictions based on operational relevance, including:

- States with high levels of TCO activity
- States with existing or planned undercover operations capacity
- States with institutional readiness for pilot program implementation
- Strategic border states relevant to U.S.-Mexico cross-border investigations

Implementing partners should propose a methodology that balances comprehensiveness with operational feasibility, ensuring the assessment identifies critical gaps while remaining within budget and timeline constraints. The assessment should provide sufficient analysis to inform both immediate pilot implementation and future national-scale expansion.

9. What mechanisms will INL put in place to ensure the continuity and confidentiality of deliverables (legal assessments, system architecture documents, SOPs) given the sensitive nature of the program? Will deliverables be classified? How will intellectual property rights and data ownership be governed?

Answer: Given the sensitive nature of undercover operations and identity management systems, all deliverables will be handled with appropriate security protocols. While deliverables are not anticipated to be classified, they will be designated as Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) or Law Enforcement Sensitive (LES) and subject to strict access controls. INL will work with the implementing partner to establish:

- Secure communication channels and document management systems
- Clear protocols for handling, storing, and transmitting sensitive materials
- Access restrictions limiting distribution to authorized U.S. and Mexican government personnel
- Data protection measures aligned with both U.S. and Mexican legal requirements

Regarding intellectual property and data ownership, standard cooperative agreement terms will apply. Deliverables produced under this program will generally be owned by the U.S. Government, with appropriate sharing arrangements with Mexican government counterparts for operational use. Implementing partners should address their approach to information security, confidentiality protocols, and data management in their proposals.

10. The SOI notes that the basic undercover training course must be "designed for replication by Mexican officials." Is the expectation that the implementing partner trains a Mexican cadre of trainers (train-the-trainer model), or that the implementing partner delivers the training directly? Please clarify the intended pedagogical model.

Answer: The program envisions a train-the-trainer model to ensure sustainability and Mexican ownership of undercover training capabilities. The implementing partner should design a comprehensive basic undercover training curriculum tailored to the Mexican legal system and then train a cadre of qualified Mexican instructors who can deliver and adapt the training independently. The pedagogical approach should include:

- Development of complete training materials, curricula, and instructor guides
- Training of Mexican trainers on both content and instructional methodology
- Supervised delivery of initial training courses with Mexican trainers
- Mechanisms for quality assurance and continuous improvement
- Documentation that enables Mexican agencies to replicate and scale training independently

While the implementing partner may deliver some initial training directly during the pilot phase, the ultimate objective is to build sustainable Mexican capacity to conduct undercover training without ongoing external support. Proposals should clearly articulate the train-the-trainer methodology and timeline for transitioning full training responsibility to Mexican counterparts.

11. Are subcontracts and/or consultancy agreements with Mexican-registered entities allowable under this award? If so, what procurement standards apply — FAR, 2 CFR 200 Subpart D, or the implementing organization's own procurement policies subject to INL approval?

Answer: Yes. Subawards, subcontracts, and consultancy agreements with Mexican-registered entities are generally allowable when they are necessary for project implementation and comply with the terms and conditions of the award. Procurement and subrecipient management must comply with the applicable provisions of 2 CFR 317–327, Recipients are expected to follow their own documented procurement policies and procedures, provided they are consistent with federal standards for competition, reasonableness, and oversight.

12. What is the anticipated payment mechanism — advance funding, reimbursement, or a combination? For foreign-based organizations operating in Mexico, are there wire transfer or banking restrictions that applicants should anticipate?

Answer: The anticipated payment mechanism will be determined at the time of award and specified in the final Terms and Conditions. For foreign based organizations operating in Mexico, standard international wire transfer processes are generally used. Applicants should ensure they have access to a reliable banking mechanism capable of receiving U.S. dollar denominated transfers.

13. Are costs for legal counsel or regulatory advisory services to support the development of draft legislation and policy recommendations (Objective 1) considered allowable direct costs under this award?

Answer: Yes, these may be allowable as direct costs under the award when they are necessary, reasonable, and allocable to achieving project objectives, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.403–405.

14. What is the anticipated timeline between SOI submission (June 15, 2026) and notification to selected applicants to submit full proposals? What is the expected window for full proposal submission?

Answer: INL is unable to provide a definitive timeline between SOI submission and notification to selected applicants at this stage. The review period will depend on the volume of submissions, internal evaluation processes, and programmatic priorities. If an applicant is invited to submit a full proposal, INL will provide formal notification with detailed instructions, including the required submission timeline.

15. The SOI states that "1–2 awards" are possible depending on amounts. If INL makes two awards, will they cover distinct objectives or geographic areas, or could two organizations be funded for overlapping scopes? How would coordination between two awardees be managed?

Answer: At this stage, INL can't determine whether multiple awards would support distinct or overlapping scopes of work. Applicants should therefore propose a complete, independently viable approach aligned with the program objectives. **If** multiple awards are made, any coordination required would be established by INL during award negotiation and implementation.

16. What sustainability and exit strategy is INL expecting at the end of the 24-month period of performance? Is the expectation that the backstopping system will be fully transferred to and operated by Mexican government institutions, or will a follow-on award be anticipated?

Answer: This should be determined by the proposal as part of how the applicant envisions achieving the project goals.

17. Will the program reports (quarterly and final) be published or made publicly available, or will they remain restricted given the sensitive operational content?

Answer: Quarterly and final reports submitted under U.S. government assistance awards are primarily intended for award management, monitoring, and oversight purposes and are not made public.

18. Page Limit: Does the 3-page SOI limit include the budget summary table, or may the table be submitted as an additional page?

Answer: No, the budget summary must be part of the 3-page SOI.

19. Pilot Scope: The SOI describes the pilot as intentionally limited in scope. Could INL provide guidance on the realistic number of undercover agents or identities the pilot program should cover?

Answer: The pilot program should be intentionally limited to demonstrate the complete end-to-end backstopping process while remaining feasible within budget and timeline constraints. The exact number should be determined during the assessment phase based on:

- Agency readiness and operational capacity
- Technical system requirements and costs
- Available budget after completing legal framework development and system design
- Timeline for pilot implementation

Implementing partners should propose a pilot scope that balances demonstrating comprehensive capability with maintaining program feasibility. The focus should be on depth and quality of implementation rather than quantity of identities created. Proposals should clearly justify the proposed pilot scale and explain how it will generate actionable lessons for national-scale expansion.

20. Target Agencies: Does INL have preferred Mexican agencies already identified for the pilot, or are applicants expected to propose and justify their own agency targets?

Answer: No. Applicants should identify and propose target agencies based on the objectives and design of their proposed project.

21. Subrecipient Eligibility: Are Mexican organizations eligible to serve as subrecipients under this award?

Answer: Yes.