U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
Office of Assistance Coordination

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 19.500

Economic Diversification and Access to Finance in Bahrain

Opportunity Number: SFOP0007728

Key Information:

Announcement Type:	**New**
Date Opened:	**March 8, 2021**
Deadline for Questions:	**March 23, 2021**
Application Deadline:	**May 6, 2021**
Expected Date of Notification:	**September 30, 2021**
Federal Agency Contact:	**NEA-Grants@state.gov**

Funding Opportunity Synopsis

The lack of economic diversification in the region continues to limit economic, political, and social stability. The Labor Market Regulatory Authority states that SMEs in Bahrain account for 90 percent of registered companies, but less than 25 percent of GDP, pointing to an issue in scaling startup enterprises to sustainable medium and large-size companies. Projects will aim to significantly increase the number of enterprises scaling up and providing nurturing opportunities for new regional leaders in the information and communications technology (ICT), financial technology, and cybersecurity industries, including the Smart City Technology used by municipalities to increase operational efficiency and information sharing with public and private sector. NEA/AC will fund tailored projects to promote increased employment, economic growth, and U.S. commercial engagement by supporting a stronger private sector and business-friendly environment. Projects will be encouraged to seek partnerships with U.S. and global businesses to leverage private sector expertise in entrepreneurship and innovation and utilize resources from the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement.

Project success will be measured by assessing the number of SMEs that scale up beyond the initial startup phase; trainings and support on overcoming barriers to finance; technical assistance; and partnership development. Proposals should pay special attention to gender integration, ensuring that both men and women benefit from support.

All applications must be submitted in English. Complete information on how applicants can submit proposals for this opportunity can be found in Section VI below.

Applicants should read this NOFO in its entirety before writing their proposal, and should refer to the full Evaluation Criteria provided in Section VII while drafting all materials.

Eligible Countries and Territories

In this announcement, we seek to support projects in Bahrain. Please note: Applications that focus on activities in countries and territories other than those listed will NOT be considered.

Background Information about NEA/AC

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) offers Federal assistance to groups and individuals striving to bring about positive change in the Middle East-North Africa region. The Assistance Coordination Office works in 20 countries and territories, partnering with governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), community leaders, youth and women activists and private sector groups to advance their efforts. Competitively selected projects aim to foster participatory governance, economic reform, and educational advancement in response to local interest and needs.

Table of Contents

APPENDICES *(Posted with NOFO)*

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs' Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) invites applications that foster entrepreneurial and startup activities and accelerate economic diversification in Bahrain. The funding supports proposals that assist businesses in shifting from the startup stage to the intermediate and expansion stages in order to increase new employment opportunities. Proposals are encouraged to include the development of partnerships with government offices, including the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism; the Economic Development Board; the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry; local Business Associations; and U.S. companies and investors to leverage private sector expertise in entrepreneurship and innovation.

This programming responds to the U.S. Government priority of governments maintaining a business-friendly environment and promotes robust bilateral trade and targeted investment. It falls under Embassy Manama's Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) Mission Objectives 3.1, *Bahrain continues to diversify its economic base, and enact structural reform in order to promote economic stability and opportunity,* and 3.2, *Bahrain maintains a level playing field for U.S. businesses and provides opportunities for U.S.-based companies in key growth sectors of the Bahrain economy.*

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The lack of economic diversification in the Middle East and North Africa region continues to limit economic, political, and social stability. Research in the MENA region suggests that Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are estimated to be between 19-23 million (formal and informal) comprising 80-90% of total businesses in most countries (The Middle East Investment Initiative, n.d.).

In Bahrain, the twin impacts of Covid-19 and depressed oil prices have strained its fiscal standing, with the Bahraini government increasingly turning to international financial markets to raise capital to address enduring budget deficits. Traditionally reliant on support from its Gulf allies, Bahrain risks turning to other external, potentially malign sources of financing in the context of tightening global conditions. Furthermore, according to the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (2018), SMEs in Bahrain account for 90 percent of registered companies, but less than 25 percent of GDP, pointing to an issue in scaling startup enterprises to sustainable medium and large-size companies.

To accelerate growth, economic diversification, and job creation in the MENA region, fostering entrepreneurial activity is necessary. It is expected that once startups mature into small and medium sized enterprises, not only will they contribute to the GDP of the region, but also provide innovative solutions for economic challenges.

B. ACHIEVABLE OBJECTIVES

A successful project will result in:

a) Participating startup businesses shift from the startup stage to the intermediate and expansion stages;
b) Established businesses continue growing and expanding employment opportunities;
c) Rapid business growth is achieved using innovative approaches; and
d) Lenders or investors develop new financial products and services

C. PROJECT DESIGN

This solicitation invites applications in support of promoting regional, social, and economic stability, as well as private sector growth and job creation by expanding small, and medium-sized enterprises.

NEA/AC seeks to support projects that will help strengthen and diversify Bahrain's entrepreneurial ecosystem by engaging entrepreneurs, assisting existing SMEs to scale up beyond the initial startup phase to the critical middle stages of the business lifecycle, and providing nurturing opportunities for new regional entrepreneurs in the information and communications technology (ICT), financial technology (Fin Tech), cybersecurity industries, and smart city technologies. Assistance during these middle stages will help grow and expand businesses and spur increased employment in Bahrain and across the region.

Projects will be encouraged to develop partnerships with public and private sector partners, including U.S. and other businesses, multinational corporations, local incubators, government agencies, universities, mentors, trainers, and/or other financial sponsors. Partnerships should amplify ongoing support to incubators and the local startup community. Projects will also be expected to collaborate with U.S. companies and investors – as well as international businesses – to leverage private sector expertise in entrepreneurship and innovation.

Projects should provide support to established entrepreneurs, and work with SMEs that are best positioned for growth and expansion. Businesses in Bahrain will benefit from best practices to attract investment to grow and export their products to new regions and overseas markets in order to scale up commercial activity. Support and technical assistance should focus on overcoming barriers to finance and supporting existing SMEs for scaling businesses, with a critical focus on using resources from the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement.

Project activities shall include:

a. Training, mentoring, and/or coaching SMEs to shift to the intermediate/expansion stage using an innovative approach;
b. Building and promoting collaborations between the public and private sectors, including U.S. and other businesses, multinational corporations, local incubators, government agencies, universities, mentors, trainers, and/or other financial sponsors

Project beneficiaries shall include:

a. Women and youth-owned SMEs;
b. Public and private sector lenders, including banks, non-traditional lenders, or investors; and
c. Private-sector Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

The following activities and costs are **NOT ALLOWED** under this announcement:

- Funding new businesses at the seed or startup stage;
- Capital investment or loans to businesses;
- Exchange activities with other countries or territories;
- Social welfare projects;
- Paying to complete activities begun with other funds;
- Activities that appear partisan or that support individual or party electoral campaigns;
- Academic or analytical research (if not necessary as part of a larger project);
- One-time events, such as stand-alone conferences and one-off round tables;
- Cultural presentations, cultural research, cultural clubs, or festivals, etc.; and
- Entertainment costs (e.g., receptions, social activities, ceremonies, alcoholic beverages, guided tours).

NOTE: Applications that include any of these activities or costs above may be eliminated at the Technical Eligibility Review stage and will not advance to the Merit Review Panel.

D. GENDER INTEGRATION

NEA/AC requires that all activities fully address gender considerations, ensuring that both men and women benefit from support where applicable, and that gender awareness is an integral component of project activities. This should be documented through gender analysis in the project narrative that identifies any relevant gender gaps and ways the proposed activities will address those gaps. Proposals should demonstrate how addressing relevant gender gaps will enhance the project's goals and objectives. Applicants who are unfamiliar with integrating gender in foreign assistance programing should view the training video located here: https://encompassworld.com/elearningfiles/DOS/DOS_Gender_Integration_E-Course/story_html5.html

E. DEFINITIONS

The following are **definitions** of activities accepted under this announcement:

The OECD defines Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) as non-subsidiary, independent firms which employ less than a given number of employees.

Financial technology refers to tech-enabled products and services that improve traditional financial services. Formerly, the term applied solely to technology applied to the back-end of established consumer and trade financial institutions. The term has expanded to include any technological innovation in the financial sector, including innovations in financial literacy and education, retail banking, investment, and crypto-currencies.

Smart city technologies refer to information and communication technologies (ICT) used by municipalities to increase operational efficiency, share information with the public and improve both the quality of government services and citizen welfare.

II. MEASUREMENT OF RESULTS

Applicants shall provide a logic model or a theory of change to demonstrate how the proposed project (including activities, the project design, and the surrounding context) will achieve the stated objectives. The logic model or theory of change statements can be generated using the template in Appendix II. Please see Section VI below for more information.

Successful applicants will work with the NEA/AC program and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) teams to create a plan based on the proposed logic model/theory of change to measure qualitative and quantitative indicators as part of the award negotiations process. The successful applicants will be responsible for collecting data against these indicators, which will be monitored throughout the period of performance of the award to gauge necessary modifications to the project's design, and assess the results of the project's success in meeting expected outcomes.

All Result Monitoring Plans (RMPs) should include the following objective, based on the proposed project:

- ***Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) create jobs and contribute to a diversified, thriving private sector***
    - *Sub-objective:* Increased opportunities for entrepreneurship and self-employment

All projects funded as a result of this NOFO will be required to complete a final evaluation of the project at the end of the period of performance with support from the NEA/AC M&E team.

III. AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Mechanism Type:	**Grant**
Estimated Number of Awards:	**1**
Estimated Total Program Funding:	**$500,000**
Estimated Award Ceiling:	**$500,000**
Estimated Award Floor:	**$400,000**
Cost-Sharing or Matching:	**Encouraged; NOT Required**
Estimated Length of Project Period:	**12-24 Months**

Contingent on the availability of funds, approximately $500,000 in Economic Support Funds for approximately one (1) award will be award through this announcement. If selected to receive an award, an applicant will be awarded funds for up to two years, depending on the project activities. The estimated start date for this project is August 1, 2021.

NEA/AC reserves the right to award more or less than the estimated program funding and reserves the right to award funding under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

This request for full applications **does not** constitute an award or commitment on the part of the U.S. government to make any awards, **nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.**

Non-Competing Continuation
Continuation grants funded under these awards, beyond the initial budget period, will be contingent upon the availability of funds; grantee's progress in meeting grant requirements, including timely submission of required reports and compliance with all terms and conditions of the award; timely submission of a request for additional funding; and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the Department of State.

Pending successful implementation of this project for the initial estimated length of time as indicated above and pending the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, NEA/AC may extend this grant for additional time, not to exceed a four (4) year total project period. Please note that this NOFO requires that applicants submit additional budget materials to plan for potential out-years of non-competing continuations. See Section VI Application and Submission Information for more details.

IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

All applicants will be screened by NEA/AC to determine whether they meet all of the program eligibility requirements detailed below.

NOTE: **Applications that do not demonstrate that they meet all of the eligibility requirements in Section A and Section B will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage and may be deemed ineligible for funding under this announcement. Nothing can be added to an application once the competition deadline has passed.**

A. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants include:
- U.S. or foreign
  - Non-profit organizations;
  - For-profit organizations; and
  - Small and Medium-sized businesses with function and regional experience in the areas of entrepreneurship and communication and financial technology in the MENA region.

NEA/AC is committed to an anti-discrimination policy in all of its programs and activities. NEA/AC welcomes applications irrespective of an applicants' race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. We encourage applications from organizations working with underserved communities, including women, people with disabilities, and youth.

NEA/AC strongly encourages applications from civil society organizations headquartered in the Middle East and North Africa region. International non-governmental organizations with principal bases of operations outside the Middle East and North Africa are also encouraged to apply, **but the percentage of total budget actually spent in the region through local partners will be among the elements of evaluation for this competition.**

A.1. Prime Applicant

To be considered for funding under this opportunity, applicants MUST:

- Have demonstrable previous experience working in the MENA region. This should be addressed within the project narrative section of the application.
- Meet ALL of the registration requirements listed in *Section B* below.
- Meet any requirements listed as MANDATORY in Section *C Additional Eligibility Considerations*, below.
- Demonstrate experience working in the MENA region.
- Demonstrate ability to form relationships/partnerships with MENA-based technology organizations and premier U.S. private sector entities to ensure that all project activities can be implemented effectively and efficiently.

A.2. Local Partners

Applicants are REQUIRED to include partnerships with local organizations as part of their project design for this NOFO. **Applicants who do not incorporate local partners in their proposal will be deemed ineligible and will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage.** Applicants should propose partners that would work together on specific programmatic objectives or priorities and that utilize local expertise. Partnerships may, but are not required to, take the form of sub-grants.

B. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

To apply for NEA/AC (Federal) funding, organizations, whether based in or outside the U.S., must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, currently referred to as a DUNS number, and an active account with the System for Award Management (SAM). This applies to BOTH prime applicants and any local partners receiving federally funded sub-awards. Applicants who do not meet all registration requirements are NOT eligible for funding under the opportunity.

UEI Number

The UEI number is a nine-digit number established and assigned by Dun and Bradstreet, Inc. (D&B) to uniquely identify business entities.

All applicants must have a UEI number. To obtain a UEI number, please follow the steps below:

Go to http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/pages/CCRSearch.jsp.Select the country or territory where your organization is physically located. Complete and submit the form. Organizations will need to provide basic information, including physical and mailing addresses, name and title of the chief executive, primary Standard Industrial Code (SIC) (https://www.osha.gov/pls/imis/sic_manual.html), and annual revenue.

For technical difficulties in obtaining this number, please contact D&B at: govt@dnb.com.

System for Award Management (SAM)
SAM is a U.S. government wide registry of vendors doing business with the Federal government and requires annual renewal. The system centralizes information about grant applicants/recipients, and provides a central location for grant applicants/recipients to change organizational information.

Further, each applicant must maintain an active account, with current information, while its application is under consideration for funding. To keep an active SAM.gov account, an applicant must renew it at least once each year. **If an organization's account expires, the organization cannot submit a grant application until it is renewed.**

To create a new account, please follow the steps below:

Go to http://www.sam.gov.
Log In to complete authentication and create an account. On the My SAM page, select *Entity Registrations* from the sub-navigation menu and select *Register New Entity.*

Organizations must have a UEI number and a CAGE number (US Domestic Organizations) or a NCAGE number (Foreign Organizations), to create an account.

Complete and submit the online form. If the applying organization already has the necessary information on hand (see the SAM Quick Start Guide for Grant Registration: https://sam.gov/SAM/transcript/Quick_Guide_for_Grants_Registrations.pdf), the online form takes approximately one hour to complete, depending upon the size and complexity of the applying entity. Because of the different steps in the process, it might take anywhere from **12 - 15 business days** to complete the process of creating an account with the system.

For help with SAM.gov, please visit their support page at https://www.fsd.gov or contact them at: 866-606-8220 (U.S.) or +1-334-206-7828 (international).

C. ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Cost-Sharing or Matching

There is no minimum or maximum percentage required for this competition. However, NEA/AC encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs.

Cost-sharing or matching is not an evaluation criteria of this NOFO.

V. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

All applications must include the application components detailed below. **All application documents must be submitted in English. Applicants may submit only one (1) application.** Please refer to *Section B* below for additional submissions guidance and requirements.

NOTE: Applications that do not include all the required documentation described in Section 1 below will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage. Further, applications that exceed the allowable page limits will not be reviewed by the review panel. **Applicants may not add any materials to an application once it has been submitted and the competition deadline has passed.**

A.1. Required Documents

Federal Assistance Application Forms (SF-424, SF424a, and SF-424b)

Applicants must complete each of these forms online to be considered for funding. The SF-424B is only required for those applicants who a) have not registered in SAM.gov or b) have not recertified their registration in SAM.gov since February 2, 2019.

If an organization has an active registration in SAM.gov that was either created or updated **on or after** 2/2/2019, then the applicant does ***NOT*** need to submit the SF-424B because their registration or recertification will have included the necessary information.

Guidance on how to complete the SF-424 and SF424a is provided in Appendix 3. NOTE: In addition to following all guidance outlined below regarding application materials, applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Application Evaluation Criteria section of this NOFO closely as they prepare their proposal. The Evaluation Criteria section is the rubric by which each application will be scored.

Project Narrative
The Project Narrative describes the efforts the applicant will undertake to address the priorities and goals of this announcement. It may **be no longer than 10 pages**. More details on preparing the Project Narrative are provided in Appendix 3. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to review Appendix 3 before preparing their Narrative.**

Budget & Budget Narrative Submission
Applicants must provide the following three elements as part of their budget submission:

- Summary Budget
- Detailed Line Item Budget
- Budget Narrative

There is no page limit for this section of an application. A sample fillable template can be found in Appendix 1. This template includes three tabs: The first tab includes written guidance on preparing the **Budget Narrative.** Applicants are strongly encouraged to create their Budget Narrative in Word and submit as either a Word Doc or PDF file. Please note that the Budget Narrative should include designations of who is considered Key Personnel for this project. As defined in the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (for assistance awards, Key Personnel means, "…key professional and supervisory personnel; i.e., the members of the professional staff in a program supervisory position engaged for or assigned to duties under the award." The second tab has the template for the **Summary Budget**. This tab will auto-fill as you complete the Detailed Line Item Budget, which can be found on the third tab. The third tab is where you can fill in the template for the **Detailed Line Item Budget** as stated above. **NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as provided in the template, and to submit summary and detailed line item budgets in Excel form, and the Budget Narrative as either a PDF or Word file.** If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. The template, which includes more detailed instructions, can be found in Appendix 1. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to review Appendix 1 before preparing their Budget and Budget Narrative.**

A detailed budget for 12-24 months is required as well as a notional budget for one additional out (option) year, with the option period being one year. The option period should be its own detailed tab within the budget.

Logic Model
Applicants shall provide a logic model or theory of change to demonstrate how the proposed project (including activities, the project design, and the surrounding context) will achieve the stated objectives. The logic model or theory of change statements can be generated using the template in **Appendix 2**. **NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as found in the sample.** If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. This section **may be no longer than 3 pages.**

Project Timeline
Applicants must provide an overall breakdown of the order and timeframe in which all project activities will take place. This item should provide a macro snapshot of what will take place from beginning to end of the project. Applicants must ensure that the timeline of activities/events corresponds with details provided in the Project Narrative and Logic Model/Theory of Change. This section may be **no longer than 2 pages.**

Job Descriptions/Biographical Info for Key Personnel Positions
For each position designated as key personnel for this project, applicants must provide the following:

1. <u>If the position is already filled:</u> Provide brief biographical information summarizing the person's qualifications, as well as a brief description of the roles or responsibilities pertaining to this project.

OR

2. <u>If the person to fill a key position has not yet been hired</u>: Provide a brief summary of the job description, which should include a description of the roles and responsibilities pertaining to this project, as well as a description of qualifications of eligible candidates.

<u>NOTE:</u> If an applicant is proposing sub grant partner(s) as part of their project design, **Key Personnel/Positions of the sub grantee must also be included.** This section may be **no longer than 5 pages.**

Security, Risk Mitigation, & Contingency Planning Summary
This item should provide detail regarding the applicant's intended due diligence to assess and mitigate risks, and put in place adequate security measures to ensure the safety and well-being of project staff, participants, and partners, if applicable. This should include specific actions by the applicant to ensure risks are adequately and routinely assessed, and that security measures are commensurate with operational concerns specific to the locale. The applicant should also include a contingency plan that highlights potential challenges and limitations to project implementation in the operating environment and propose contingency plans should program activities be impacted. Please note that this section should not be limited to physical security and risk but should cover any applicable factors relevant to the given operating environment. This section may be **no longer than 5 pages.**

Sustainability Plan
The sustainability plan outlines how the proposed project will be sustained beyond the initial award period. More information on preparing the Sustainability Plan is provided in **Appendix 3**. This section may be **no longer than 2 pages.**

Letters of Agreement or Letters of Intent
Applicants proposing partner organizations and/or government bodies should include Letters of Intent or Letters of Agreement from their proposed partners. **There is no page limit for this section of the application.**

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
NOTE: This item is required only IF applicable. Applicants proposing indirect costs in the Budget greater than a 10% de minimis rate must provide a copy of their Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA). **There is no page limit for this section of the application.**

A.2. Optional Documents
Applicants may submit additional documents for consideration with their application. These documents are not required. Some examples of additional documents an applicant may wish to submit include but are not limited to organizational chart, etc. This section of the application may be **no longer than 10 pages.**

NOTE: Applicants must adhere to all maximum allowed page counts. Applications that exceed any of the allowable page limits will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage.

B. APPLICATION FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

The required font is 12-point, Times New Roman. All application documents must be single spaced, with all margins (left, right, top, and bottom) of at least one inch each. Also, applicants should ensure all pages in the application package are numbered consecutively and meet the page limit requirements outlined in Section VI above. **The Standard Forms 424 (SF-424, SF-424a, and SF-424b) are excluded from the page numbering.**

It is strongly recommended that applicants submit grant applications using Microsoft Office. If applicants do not have access to Microsoft Office products, Adobe PDF files may be submitted.

C. SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

Applicants must submit their application electronically using SAMS Domestic. Applications will **NOT** be accepted from grants.gov. SAMS Domestic requires that the applying organization have an account with the system and both require a UEI number and SAM.gov account as detailed in Section V. **It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they have an active account and will be able to submit its application.** NEA/AC is not in a position to grant exceptions to these requirements.

The application process is not complete until the applicant receives notification that its application has been validated and forwarded to the granting agency (NEA/AC). Please allow sufficient time for entering the application into these systems. It is the responsibility of the applicant to monitor its application to ensure that it is successfully received and validated.

SAMS Domestic
SAMS Domestic is a comprehensive grants management system that allows applicants to apply for, manage, and report on the use of U.S. government funds for multiple programs, accessed online at mygrants.service-now.com.

To create an account, go to https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/, and click the "create an account" hyperlink, located above the user name prompt. Users will be directed to a page entitled "User Registration Request;" complete the online form and click the "Submit" button. Users will receive an activation email entitled "Verify Your Grants Account Registration;" click the activation link within the email to receive a username and password.

SAMS Domestic has Quick Tours available to educate users about the system. These documents can be found on the Support tab upon logging into the system.

D. SUBMISSION DATES AND TIMES

Applications must be time stamped before 17:00:00 eastern time (ET) on May 6, 2021. There will be no grace period, and any application not received by the application deadline will be deemed ineligible and will not advance to be reviewed. **Each applicant is encouraged to submit an application far enough in advance of the deadline so that the applicant can alert**

NEA/AC (nea-grants@state.gov) of any technical difficulties and allow sufficient time to resolve difficulties before the deadline. Although NEA/AC will work with applicants to resolve technical issues, it is not in a position to grant exceptions to the submission requirements outlined in this announcement.

VI. FUNDING LIMITATIONS, RESTRICTIONS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

A. AWARDS TO COMMERCIAL FIRMS OR FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Department of State prohibits profit under its assistance awards to commercial organizations. No funds will be paid as profit to any recipient that is a commercial organization. Profit is defined as any amount in excess of allowable direct and indirect costs. The allow ability of costs incurred by commercial organizations is determined in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) at 48 CFR Part 31. Program income earned by the recipient may be:

- added to the total of the amount of this award, including the required cost sharing or matching, and use it to further eligible project objectives;
- used to meet the Recipient's cost sharing or matching requirement;
- OR deducted from the total project or program allowable cost in determining the net allowable costs on which the federal share of costs is based.

B. AUDIT REQUIREMENTS

Domestic and foreign organizations that expend $750,000 or more in a fiscal year in federal assistance must perform an independent, recipient-contracted Single Audit or Program Specific Audit. (***Program-specific Audit*** means an audit of one Federal award program. ***Single Audit*** means an audit which includes both the entity's financial statements and the Federal Awards to be conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). The audits must be independently and professionally executed in accordance with GAGAS either prescribed by a government's Supreme Audit Institution with auditing standards approved by the Comptroller General of the United States, or the host country's laws or adopted by the host country's public accountants or associations of public accountants, together with generally accepted international auditing standards. However, foreign entity audits consistent with International Standards for Auditing or other auditing standards are acceptable with the Grants Officer's approval. More information can be found at https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/693136.pdf

For sub-non-Federal entities expending $750,000 or more in Department of State award funding during their fiscal year, Department of State standard audit provisions require that Prime non-Federal entities certify that audits of sub-non-Federal entities are performed annually and according to the standards described above. The cost of audits required under this policy may be charged either as an allowable direct cost to the award OR included in the organizations established indirect costs in the award's detailed budget.

C. COMPLIANCE WITH APPLICABLE FEDERAL FUNDING REGULATIONS AND DOS TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Payment of funds awarded under this Notice of Funding Opportunity will not be disbursed until the DOS has been assured that the Recipient's financial management system will provide effective control over and accountability for all Federal funds in accordance with 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable. Awards issued under this NOFO are subject to the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/U.S.-Department-of-State-Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-10-01-2019508.pdf) and 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable.

VII. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

Achievable Objectives (30 points)
Each of the project objectives listed above (in Section I) are clearly addressed.

- Impact and Effectiveness: The applicant describes the project's potential contribution to solving the problem addressed in the problem statement and achieving results.
- Timeframe: The applicant describes realistic results to be accomplished within the timeframe of the proposed award.
- Beneficiaries: The applicant clearly identifies the anticipated beneficiaries and explains how the project's objectives will positively affect them.
- Milestones: The applicant provides realistic milestones to indicate progress toward goals and objectives as described in the program announcement.
- M&E: The applicant explains how monitoring and evaluation activities will be carried out throughout the award's period of performance and who will be responsible for them.
- M&E: The applicant includes a final evaluation of the project at the completion of the award.

Project Design (40 points)
The applicant clearly describes how each proposed project activity will address each of the objectives outlined in the requested priority area above (Section I).

- Responsiveness to NOFO: The applicant describes how the proposed activities respond to the objectives listed in the NOFO.
- Rationale: The applicant justifies how the proposed activities will achieve the above objectives in this context.
- Project Management: The applicant provides a clear description of how the project will be managed in terms of initiation, planning, implementation and closing.
- Partnerships and Buy-ins: The applicant addresses how the project will engage or obtain support from relevant stakeholders and identifies any local partners.
- Feasibility: The applicant proposes activities that are feasible, and are also practical, and/or experiential in nature to encourage innovation.
- Beneficiaries Selection Criteria and Process: The applicant explains how participants will be selected (e.g., criteria for selection, selection process).

- Duplication: The applicant acknowledges if activities similar to those proposed are already taking, or have taken place previously, and provides an explanation as to how proposed new activities will not duplicate or merely add to existing/recent activities.
- Contingency Plan: The applicant articulates programming assumptions and potential challenges to project implementation and proposes contingency plans.
- Division of Labor: The application describes the division of labor among the applicant and any partners.
- Gender Considerations: The applicant includes gender analysis in the project narrative that identifies relevant gender gaps and ways the proposed activities will address those gaps. Proposals should demonstrate how addressing relevant gender gaps will enhance the program's goals and objectives and how the project will benefit both men and women.
- Program Logic: Is it theoretically sound? Do all elements of the logic model fit together showing plausible pathways to achieving project outcomes? Have all the key assumptions been identified and their potential influences described? Are the risks to implementation (external factors) fully accounted for and described?

Organizational Capacity (20 points)

- The applicant demonstrates experience in MENA and working/programming with the Fintech industry (e.g. institutional record of successful programs in the developing Fintech products or solutions, operating context knowledge such as understanding of local laws and regulations, track record developing tailored content, demonstrated ability to obtain private sector financing for USG-backed initiatives, etc.).
- The applicant demonstrates an institutional record of successful programs in Small, and Medium-Enterprise programming.
- The applicant demonstrates capacity for responsible fiscal management of donor funding (e.g., successful management of a previous sub-award or grant).
- The applicant demonstrates the ability to meet monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- The applicant has adequate staffing and demonstrates the capacity to manage the proposed project.

Staff and Position Specifications (10 points)

- The applicant details pre-identified key staff members – including volunteers – with demonstrable experience working in the country/territory/region proposed, in the proposed content area, and with participants from that area (e.g., language skills, cultural understanding).
- The applicant provides a description of the roles of each person or position as well as language abilities on the project – whether staff, partner, consultant, or volunteer – demonstrating that the project will be sufficiently staffed but will avoid redundancy or duplication of effort.
- The applicant provides a job description, including hiring criteria, for each open key position.
- The applicant and/or partner staff have relevant language competencies.

Budget & Budget Narrative (Acceptable or Not Acceptable)

- The costs proposed are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results, which are clearly explained in the budget narrative.

- The budget provides details of calculations, including estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail sufficient for the calculation to be duplicated.
- The preponderance of the budget is spent on supporting the project participants/activities in country.
- The budget includes costs dedicated to management, monitoring, and evaluation, and any costs needed for further gender analysis and for addressing gender gaps.
- Adequate travel costs are proposed.
- The budget demonstrates a reasonable cost per participant.
- The budget accounts for monitoring and evaluation costs.

B. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

NEA/AC is committed to ensuring a competitive and standardized process for awarding funding. Applications will be screened initially in a Technical Eligibility Review stage to determine whether applicants meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Section V and have submitted all required documents outlined in Section VI. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not advance beyond the Technical Eligibility Review stage and will be deemed ineligible for funding under this NOFO.

NEA/AC reserves the right to have all applications deemed to be technically eligible undergo a Subject Matter Expert (SME) review prior to the Merit Review Panel. Applications that do not pass SME review will not proceed to the Merit Review Panel.

All applications that proceed to the Merit Review Panel will be evaluated by U.S. government and non-governmental subject matter and/or country-specific experts and will be rated on a 100-point scale. Point values for individual elements of the application are presented in Section VIII. Panel Reviewers' ratings, and any resulting recommendations, are advisory.

Final award decisions will be influenced by whether the application meets NEA/AC's programmatic goals and objectives, how it supports the Department's overarching foreign policy priorities, and the geographic distribution of the top-ranking applications.

VIII. ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. AWARD NOTICES

Applicants who do not advance beyond the Technical Eligibility Review stage will be notified 30 business days after the closing of the announcement. The authorized representative and program point of contact listed on the SF-424 will receive the notification via email. If an applicant does not receive such a notification, their submission was put forward for review.

NEA/AC expects to notify applicants who proceeded past the Technical Eligibility Review stage about the status of their application by August 1, 2021. Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal bureau procedures. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from the bureau's Grants Office. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer identified in the application. NEA/AC reserves the right to award funding to applicants under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

B. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting is critical to effective program management and oversight. Reports are required as a means of evaluating the recipient's progress and utilization of resources. They are divided between a performance progress report and a financial status report.

Recipients will, at a minimum, be required to submit Quarterly Performance Reports (QPR) and a Quarterly Financial Report (QFR). The QPRs will compare actual to planned performance and indicates the progress made in accomplishing each assistance award tasks/goals noted in the grant agreement and will contain analysis and summary of findings, both quantitative and qualitative, for key indicators. The QFRs provide a means of monitoring expenditures and comparing costs incurred with progress.

Recipients must report ***immediately*** when a program faces unplanned delays in implementation, fails to meet program targets or milestones, or costs increase. Any changes or revisions to the approved budget require prior approval from the NEA/AC Grants Officer.

Recipients are required to report program and beneficiary achievements on a quarterly basis (or provide written confirmation that there is no related news for the given quarter) beginning with second quarter's program report.

Maktabat: Recipients will be required to submit to MEPI all materials developed under awards for the training of participants. These documents (including but not limited to manuals, curriculums, videos, websites, and presentations used in workshops or distributed to participants) will be considered for inclusion in the Maktabat MEPI website: http://maktabatmepi.org. The Recipient should make every effort to submit training materials as they are developed and used rather than waiting until the end of the award. The materials can be submitted in English, French, and/or Arabic. The Recipient can submit materials to the Maktabat MEPI website: www.maktabatmepi.org. The Recipient is asked to add a link to the Maktabat website on the Recipient's website if feasible.

C. TRAVEL NOTIFICATIONS

Successful applicants will be required to provide prior notification of all international travel as a requirement of their agreement. This includes travel which is already included in the approved budget and Scope of Work. The purpose of this notification is to enable NEA/AC to inform the relevant U.S. Embassy or post of the recipient's intent to travel. The recipient must notify the

Grants Officer at least three (3) business days prior to any travel. The Grants Officer reserves the right to advise against specific travel arrangements for security-related reasons.

D. BRANDING AND MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTEES

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to make all materials produced under the award with the standard U.S. flag in a size and prominence equal to (or greater than) any other logo or identity. Materials are defined as but not limited to: training materials, materials for recipients, or materials to communicate or promote with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity under this award, including but not limited to invitations to events, press materials, event backdrops, podium signs, etc. In addition, sub-recipients or sub-awardees are subject to the marking requirements and the grantee shall include a provision in the sub-recipient or sub-awardee's agreement indicating that the standard, rectangular U.S. flag is a requirement. Exceptions to this requirement can be discussed with NEA/AC when negotiating an award.

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to follow MEPI social media guidelines for any and all online presences related to the project. Grantees will be expected to tag @USMEPI in all social media posts and utilize the official hashtag #MEPI for any social media posts in Arabic or English. Grantees will be expected to highlight MEPI online and share as many MEPI stories as possible, including demonstrating how each MEPI programs strive to achieve its assistance objectives of participatory governance and economic reform.

E. UEI NUMBER REQUIREMENT FOR SUB AWARDEES

All sub-awardees are required to have a UEI number. For information on obtaining a UEI number, please see Section V. B. **Proposed sub-awardees are not required to have a UEI number prior to the submission of an application but must have one prior to a sub-award being issued.**

F. SUB AWARDEE REPORTING REQUIREMENT

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to report all sub-awardees receiving funds of $25,000 or more to http://www.fsrs.gov. More information about this requirement can be found at this site.

IX. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions regarding this funding opportunity including: completing an application, financial and grants management issues, or technical matters, contact: nea-grants@state.gov

All questions must be submitted in writing to nea-grants@state.gov by March 23, 2021 at 17:00:00 eastern time (ET). All questions should include the opportunity number (SFOP0007728) in the subject of the email. NEA/AC will create a document of the submitted questions along with the answers and post it on SAMS Domestic and Grants.gov. Questions submitted after the deadline will not be addressed.

For questions regarding creating an account with or using grants.gov to submit an application, contact the grants.gov Contact Center. The Contact Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, excluding Federal holidays.

Grants.gov Contact Center
(800) 518-4726
support@Grants.gov

For questions regarding creating an account or using SAMS Domestic to submit an application, contact the ILMS Help Desk. The Help Desk is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, excluding Federal holidays. The ILMS Help Desk utilizes a user-facing ticketing interface that allows users to submit and monitor their SAMS Domestic tickets. The ILMS Self Service Portal can be accessed by going to https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/.

ILMS Help Desk
(888) 313-ILMS (4567)
https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/

X. DISCLAIMER

The terms and conditions published in this NOFO are binding and may not be modified by any Bureau representative. Explanatory information provided by the bureau that contradicts public language will not be binding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government. The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements listed in this NOFO.