



Statement of Interest (SOI)
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
*U.S. Embassy Mexico/ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement
Affairs*

Announcement Type:	Request for Statements of Interest (SOI)
Funding Opportunity Title:	<i>Cartel Recruitment Understanding & Suppression Hub (CRUSH)</i>
Funding Opportunity Number:	OFOP0002504
Assistance Listing Number (CFDA):	19.705 - Transnational Crime
Funding Source:	Post-Funds
Estimated Funding Amount:	\$1,500,000 U.S. Dollars
SOI Ceiling:	\$1,500,000 U.S. Dollars
SOI Floor:	At least \$1,000,000 U.S. Dollars
Type of Funding:	Post-Funds
Number of Awards Anticipated:	1 award
Approximate Length of Project:	30 to 36 months
Estimated Project start date:	May 2026
SOI Issuance Date:	February 6, 2026
Deadline for Submission of Questions:	February 20, 2026 by 11:59 PM EST via email
Deadline for Submission of Applications:	<u>March 6, 2026</u> by 11:59 PM EST via Grants.gov
Assistance Type:	Cooperative Agreement (CA)
Applicant Type and Eligibility Categories:	Organizations only. <u>Please see section B. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION</u> for more information.

INL Points of Contact:

Submit questions to both INL contacts:
Najar Starr (StarrND@state.gov) - GO
Constanza Nuche (NucheAC@state.gov) - PO
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BUREAU MISSION

The mission of the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is to keep Americans safe by countering crime, illegal drugs, and instability abroad. INL is at the forefront of responding to these challenges, uniting these overarching themes through our foreign assistance programs, diplomatic engagement, and policy coordination.

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A. Basic Information

1. Funding Opportunity

The U.S. Embassy Mexico / Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the U.S. Department of State announces an open competition for organizations or individuals to submit a statement of interest (SOI) to carry out a project to design and implement a cartel anti-recruitment initiative that will detect, monitor, analyze, and forecast cartel recruitment trends and their impact on cartel operations in Mexico. Please carefully follow all instructions below.

The submission of the SOI is the first step in a two-step process. Applicants must first submit a concise 3-page statement of interest designed to clearly communicate projects' idea and objectives. This is not a full proposal and will not result in a federal assistance award at this step.

The purpose of the SOI process is to allow applicants to submit project ideas for evaluation prior to requiring the development of a full proposal application. Upon a merit review of eligible SOIs, selected applicants will be invited to expand on their project idea(s) by submitting a full proposal application. Full proposals will go through a second merit review before final funding decision(s) are made.

Funding Instrument Type: Cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements include substantial involvement of the bureau or embassy in program implementation of the project.

Project Performance Period: Proposed projects should be completed in 36 months or less.

This notice is subject to availability of funding.

Project Description

The cartel anti-recruitment initiative will focus on creating an interactive platform to analyze cartel recruitment trends, forecast their impact, and develop evidence-based strategies to counter recruitment activities.

Priority Region: Mexico

2. Executive Summary

According to the Global Initiative Against Organized Crime and the Complexity Science Hub between 2024 and 2025 the Cartels have become among the largest “employers” in the country, recruiting an estimated 350 individuals per week to sustain their operations in Mexico. Therefore, this project proposes the creation of a data-driven initiative designed as an interactive platform to detect, monitor, analyze, and forecast cartel recruitment and its impact on these organizations' activities and operations.

By systematically gathering and analyzing data on cartel recruitment methods, vulnerable populations, and trends in violence, the project should generate actionable intelligence to

inform policymakers and support strategies against organized crime already supported by INL. This project should help reduce cartel recruitment capacity and weaken fentanyl trafficking supply chains that affects the United States by disrupting personnel pipelines and improving interventions, enhancing safety and reducing violence on both side of the border.

The project should also be able to measure macro-criminal activities, that is criminal networks made up three main structures (criminal, political and business). In simple terms, this rears to the ability of certain groups to exercise criminal governance and thus control a specific territory. This system is sustained by human resources (vulnerable population profiles) who form social labor bases and are organized under a parallel system of rules, order and instrumentalization, where various crimes are committed in connection with illegal and criminal interest that are legitimized through both lethal, and non-lethal violence.

These networks are particularly complex, as they entail a form of criminal governance that enables the open commission of illegal acts with impunity, giving rise to broader social processes of violence and armed conflict.

These macro activities, which are of interest to INL and intrinsically related to the outcomes of cartel operations and their scale based on recruited assets. This will strengthen INL's monitoring and evaluation datasets and help establish better baselines for program measurement.

The project should incorporate a sustainability component, ensuring that it remains useful and adaptable beyond the life of the award. The initiative should also be designed to outlast initial funding and continue informing policies and interventions against cartel recruitment over the long term.

This project addresses transnational organized crime at its source, particularly cartel recruitment. The development of the Cartel Recruitment Understanding & Suppression Hub (CRUSH) looks to advance a safer, stronger, and more prosperous America by disrupting fentanyl supply chains through reduced cartel recruitment; strengthen border security by weakening criminal control of smuggling and migration routes along the U.S.–Mexico border; enhancing U.S. community safety by addressing the root causes of organized crime and drug trafficking; and promoting regional stability by strengthening Mexico's institutional capacity and reducing violence that drives irregular migration and undermines governance.

B. Eligibility Information

1. Eligible Applicants

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- U.S.-based non-profit/non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- U.S.-based educational institutions subject to section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. tax code or section 26 US 115 of the US 115 of the U.S. tax code;
- Foreign-based non-profits/non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- Foreign-based educational institutions

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost share is recommended but not required for this project.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements

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

C. Program Description

1. Goals and Objectives

This project should establish an independent analytical hub focused on detecting, monitoring, and forecasting cartel recruitment dynamics. Mexican cartels continue to recruit kids and youth at scale, but there is no centralized mechanism to map recruitment trends, identify the most affected Mexican states and communities, or assess the effectiveness of policy and operational responses. Without such a mechanism, deterrence and enforcement remain fragmented and reactive.

The goal is to create operational intelligence on cartel recruitment in Mexico using advanced analytics to diminish recruitment. Project objectives include the following:

- Establish an independent cartel anti-recruitment data hub to serve as a trusted source of data and analysis on cartel recruitment trends.
- Equip the Mexican and U.S. governments, as well as civil society with data and forecasts to better design and implement more effective strategies against cartel recruitment.
- Possible program components and activities (examples, to be adapted by implementers):
 - Data integration
 - Regular analytic outputs
 - Field mapping to establish baselines and local context.

2. Substantial Involvement

INL will maintain substantial involvement throughout the project's implementation and continually evaluate the project to ensure alignment with U.S. foreign assistance priorities and objectives.

Specifically, the INL will:

- Provide strategic guidance and technical oversight to ensure outputs are operationally relevant and methodologically sound.
- Approve key project milestones and deliverables to ensure quality control and policy coherence.
- Collaborate on stakeholder engagement, facilitating connections with relevant U.S. and Mexican government entities, including law enforcement, prosecutors, and data agencies, to promote coordination and data-sharing mechanisms if needed.

- Support interagency linkages, helping align the hub’s outputs with U.S. government programs addressing organized crime operations and cross-border security threats.
- Participate in project activities, when relevant, to promote the hub’s findings and methodologies.

INL’s role will be collaborative rather than operational, providing ongoing technical and strategic input without assuming direct responsibility for day-to-day management.

D. Applicant Contents and Format

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

1. Mandatory application forms

Required Documents

(Application forms required below are available at Grants.gov)

Complete applications must include both documents:

- SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations) Completed and Signed
- Statement of Interest (SOI): 3 pages

SF-424 Guidance

The SF-424 is required for all applications for federal assistance. A template is included within the Grants.gov posting, under the “Related Documents” tab. The SF-424 must be signed and dated by an authorized representative of your organization.

2. SOI (3 pages maximum)

Content of SOI must include:

- A brief project description summarizing goals, objectives outcomes, performance indicators, beneficiaries, and proposed timeline.
- A clear statement of the applicant’s organizational capacity to carry out the proposed activity and manage U.S. Government funds.
- Documents fully in English
- All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, **12-point Times New Roman font**, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.
- The anticipated total budget amount (in U.S. dollars) – Budget Summary

	CATEGORY	ESTIMATED FEDERAL AMOUNT	APPLICANT COST SHARE PROPOSED
A	Personnel	\$X	\$X
B	Fringe Benefits	\$X	\$X
C	Travel	\$X	\$X
D	Equipment	\$X	\$X
E	Supplies	\$X	\$X
F	Contractual	\$0	\$0

G	Construction	\$X	\$X
H	Other Direct Costs	\$X	\$X
I	Indirect Costs	\$X	\$X
J	Total Cost	\$X	\$X

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application forms required above are available via Grants.gov.

2. Department of State Contacts

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact:

Najar Starr (Starrnd@state.gov);

Constanza Nuche (NucheAC@state.gov); and

MexicoCityINLGU@state.gov.

All questions should be submitted to both INL points of contact listed above by the deadline listed on Page 1 of this document. INL's responses will be made available to all applicants. A question-and-answer document will be uploaded to the Documents tab of this announcement in grants.gov.

3. Unique entity identifier 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.

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

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

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

Organizations based outside of the United States and that DO plan to do business with the DoD in addition to Department of State should follow the below instructions:

Step 1: Apply for an NCAGE code by following the instructions on the NSPA NATO website linked below:

NCAGE Homepage:

<https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/sc/CageList.aspx>

NCAGE Code Request Tool (NCRT):

[NCAGE Code Request Tool \(nato.int\)](https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/sc/CageList.aspx)

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. Funding Restrictions

- i. 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).

ii. 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.

iii. Certification Regarding Compliance with applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws

If the place of performance or delivery of any award made under this Statement of Interest will be **within the United States**, applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award:

- 1) 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;
- 2) 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.

iv. Certification Regarding Compliance with 20 U.S.C. 1011f and any other applicable foreign funding disclosure requirements.

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:

- 1) 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.

v. Certification of Trafficking in Persons Compliance and Compliance Plan

Applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award for awards where the estimated value of services to be performed outside the United States exceeds \$500,000:

- To the best of the Recipient’s knowledge, neither the Recipient, nor any subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor of the Recipient or any agent of the recipient or of such a subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor, is engaged in any of the activities described in [2 CFR 175.105\(a\)](#);

The recipient has implemented a Trafficking in Persons compliance plan to prevent activities described in [2 CFR 175\(a\)](#) and is compliant with this plan; and the compliance plan must follow the minimum requirements described in 2 CFR 175(b)(5).

- That the Recipient has and will implement procedures to prevent activities described in [2 CFR 175.105\(a\)](#) and to monitor, detect, and terminate any subrecipient, contractor, subcontractor, or employee of the recipient engaging in these activities.

Recipients do not need to submit a copy of the plan. However, they must provide it to the Grants Officer upon request, and as appropriate, must post the useful and relevant contents of the plan or related materials on their website and at the workplace. Recipients must re-certify on an annual basis for the entire award period of performance.

iv. 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 Statement of Interest (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) On or after December 22, 2025, operating a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system in the performance of the award; and

(3) On or after December 22, 2025, 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.].

Application Review Information

1. Review Criteria

Each submission will be evaluated and rated based on the evaluation criteria outlined below.

Quality of Program Idea – 50 points: The SOI is responsive to program framework. The idea is communicated well and is feasible. SOI's that promote creative approaches to address program objectives are highly encouraged. The proposed timeline is reasonable. The proposal does not include any activities contrary to any standing Executive Orders. For a full list, see <https://www.federalregister.gov/>.

Organizational Capacity and Record on Previous Grants – 20 points: The SOI should demonstrate the organization's expertise and previous experience in administering programs. If a local partner is identified SOI should briefly describe the partner's role and experience. If subawards are proposed, applicant demonstrates experience managing subawards.

Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives – 30 points: The SOI should clearly articulate proposed program activities and expected results towards achieving program objectives and goal(s).

2. Indirect Costs

If two or more applications receive equivalent scores based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this NOFO, preference will be given to the applicant with the lower indirect cost rate, as consistent with Executive Order 14332, Section 4(b)(iii). This preference will only be applied as a tie-breaking mechanism and does not supersede the primary evaluation criteria.

3. Review and Selection Process

A review committee will evaluate all eligible SOI applications.

All eligible SOIs will be reviewed against the criteria listed above. Each SOI will be evaluated individually based on these criteria and not in comparison with other SOIs. To ensure a fair review, all panelists will review only the first page of each SOI, up to the established 3 page limit, and no additional content will be considered. The panel may provide conditions and/or recommendations to strengthen the proposed program, which must be addressed in a full proposal application.

Following the review, any successful SOI applicants will be contacted and instructed to submit full applications. A full application will include:

- SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations)
- SF424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs)
- SF424B (Assurances for Non-Construction programs) – the SF424B are only required for individuals, organizations exempt from registration, and for organizations not required to fully register in SAM.gov.

Grants.gov Registration

If the second step is managed through www.grants.gov, then all eligible applicants would be required to submit a full proposal package through that website, and no applications would be accepted via email.

4. Risk Review

- i. Risk factors – must include

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
- f. If there are any program specific risk factors that will be considered, describe them here.

- ii. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov (*formerly FAPIIS*)

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 (see 41 U.S.C. 2313);

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

F. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

These include:

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

- [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 Executive Orders as applicable. A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

2. Reporting

Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted.

Bi-weekly online meetings and bi-monthly progress reports, submitted in accordance with project progress.

Foreign Assistance Data Review: As required by Congress, the Department of State must make progress in its efforts to improve tracking and reporting of foreign assistance data through the Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR). The FADR requires tracking of foreign assistance activity data from budgeting, planning, and allocation through obligation and disbursement. Successful applicants will be required to report and draw down federal funding based on the appropriate FADR Data Elements, indicated within their award documentation. In cases of more than one FADR Data Element, typically program or sector and/or regions or country, the successful applicant will be required to maintain separate accounting records.

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](#).

3. Branding and Marking

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

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

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