



Educational and Cultural Affairs

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

**U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
FY 2026 Stewards of Cultural Heritage
Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0018339
Application Deadline: July 10, 2026**

- A. Basic Information**
- B. Eligibility**
- C. Program Description**
- D. Application Contents and Format**
- E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines**
- F. Application Review Information**
- G. Award Notices**
- H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration**
- I. Other Information**

A. Basic Information

1. Overview.

Funding Opportunity Title	Stewards of Cultural Heritage
Funding Opportunity Number	DFOP0018339
Announcement Type	New Cooperative Agreement
Deadline for Applications	July 10, 2026, 11:59 p.m. Eastern (Washington DC time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.451
Length of Performance Period	12 months
Number of Awards Anticipated	One award
Award Amount	Up to \$1,000,000
Total Available Funding	\$1,000,000, pending availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY26 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
Funding Instrument Type	Cooperative Agreement
Anticipated Award Date	August 1, 2026

This notice is subject to availability of funding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government.

ECA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds.

2. Executive Summary.

ECA announces an open competition for a cooperative agreement to develop and implement a program that will convene cultural ministers from key countries at an iconic location in the United States for high level discussions on cultural heritage and cultural property protection as part of the State Department's programming to mark America's 250th birthday. The implementing partner will work closely with ECA to develop the program's one-to-two-day exchange agenda, including showcasing innovation and new technologies of the U.S. private sector and other American institutions in the cultural heritage field; strengthening cooperation in combatting art and antiquities trafficking; and using cultural heritage to amplify global narratives on America's foundational values. The convening will feature U.S. models, standards, and best practices; strengthen relationships with key countries in the cultural heritage field; and produce concrete follow-on steps to advance the program's agenda. Two to three virtual sessions with working level representatives of the selected cultural ministers will precede the U.S. program, helping gain input into and solidify the agenda.

Participants will include 25-40 cultural ministers or equivalents/designees from select countries; representatives from the U.S. government, U.S. companies and other institutions involved in cultural heritage preservation and protection; and U.S. law enforcement focused on combatting art and antiquities trafficking. The program will introduce the foreign participants to U.S. advancements in cultural property protection and preservation, strengthen commercial diplomacy, and accelerate coordination between ECA and U.S. law enforcement, thereby enhancing border security and reducing financing from trafficked art and antiquities.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants.

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- a. U.S. Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations

- b. U.S. Not-for-profit public and private educational institutions

Please see the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for additional information.

2. Cost Sharing.

There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this program.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements.

- a. All organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via SAM.gov as well as a valid registration in SAM.gov. Please see *Section E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines* for more information.
- b. ECA's Grant Guidelines require that organizations demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchanges to be eligible for awards exceeding \$130,000 in ECA funding. As noted in Section A. Basic Information, ECA anticipates issuing one award, for approximately \$1,000,000. Therefore, organizations must demonstrate four years of experience in conducting international exchanges in your proposal to be eligible to apply under this competition.
- c. All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO and the PSI; not doing so may result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.
- d. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
- e. Only one proposal will be considered by ECA from each applicant organization. In cases where more than one submission from an applicant appears in grants.gov, ECA will only consider the submission made closest in time to the NOFO deadline; that submission would constitute the one and only proposal ECA would review from that applicant. Please note: Applicant organizations are defined by their legal name, and EIN number as stated on their completed SF-424 and additional supporting documentation outlined in the PSI document.
- f. Applicants who are current recipients of awards directly from ECA should make sure the application discusses one or more awards that will be open with ECA at the start of the anticipated period of performance for this NOFO. Applicants who do not have current awards directly with ECA, please review

the information in the PSI, section D, with additional information that must be provided in your application for it to be eligible.

C. Program Description

As the National Security Strategy of the United States puts it, this anniversary year is a time for America to look back to “cherish its past glories and its heroes” while also “looking forward to a new golden age.” With its emphasis on history and heritage, the 250th anniversary of U.S. independence is a seminal moment to engage cultural ministers from key countries to promote American technologies and models that protect and preserve cultural heritage and property. It presents an opportunity to look forward while honoring the past.

A one- to two-day convening of cultural ministers or their equivalents from select countries will allow the Department, with ECA in the lead, to advance the following goals that will be further developed and refined in collaboration with our implementing partner:

- a. Showcase cutting-edge technologies for heritage preservation and protection driven by U.S. industries, laboratories, and other institutions, thus championing American businesses and cultural institutions and their leadership in the technologies of tomorrow.
- b. Strengthen cooperation in combatting the illicit trafficking of art and antiquities, which finances organized crime, cartels, and terrorist groups; weakens border security; and undermines the integrity of the U.S. art market.
- c. Promote U.S. standards and best practices regarding cultural heritage and the creative economy to elicit the support of key countries and regional groupings.
- d. Deepen the Department’s ties with cultural authorities in key countries, with a view to future cooperation, including a concrete road map for future engagement. While ECA will develop with the implementing partner the list of country representatives to invite, invitees could include representatives of: countries with which the United States has active cultural property agreements; countries with a significant stake in cultural heritage programs and the art and antiquities market; and countries seeking to adapt U.S. models of art crime law enforcement, tourism development, or public/private partnerships in the cultural realm.

- e. Encourage key countries to leverage cultural heritage projects to amplify global narratives around the founding of the United States and the legacy of the America's commitment to freedom.

The implementing partner for this project will be responsible for both programmatic development and logistics for the convening. It will work closely with ECA's Cultural Heritage Center to identify key cultural ministers and U.S. government and non-government experts to serve as speakers and interlocutors. It will also organize at least two pre-convening virtual meetings with working level representatives of the invited cultural ministers, to finalize the agenda and projected outcomes, as well as a possible statement of cooperation.

The implementing partner will not fund the travel or accommodations for cultural ministers or their equivalents, who will be expected to cover the costs of their travel; however, the implementing partner will fund the travel and accommodations for U.S. speakers or other interlocutors from outside the selected location of the convening.

The implementing partner will identify venues, including for possible visits to sites that tell the story of the United States—its history, its culture, and its enduring spirit of innovation and ingenuity. Over the course of the one- to two-day convening, it will also be responsible for all arrangements involved in hosting one formal luncheon and a reception for approximately 50 guests, including the cultural ministers, U.S. representatives, and others as determined by the Cultural Heritage Center.

After the convening, the implementing partner will work with ECA to identify avenues for future cooperation among the participating countries that may include plans for joint training, collaborative exhibits, and deeper cooperation in combatting antiquities trafficking, as well as a working-level mechanism for follow-up.

1. Authority.

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries...; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural

interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations...and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program above is provided through legislation.

2. Purpose.

This ministerial-level exchange program will engage cultural ministers or their equivalents from key foreign countries at a high-impact convening focused on showcasing U.S. leadership in cultural heritage protection and preservation; strengthening law enforcement cooperation to curb illicit financing from trafficked art and antiquities; and promoting commercial diplomacy by highlighting innovation and technological advances by U.S. companies and cultural institutions in the heritage field. The one-to-two day convening at an iconic U.S. heritage site will include U.S. speakers from the government, private sector, other institutions and will lead to a road map for concrete future cooperation.

3. Program Specific Guidelines.

This program, developed as part of the Freedom 250 celebration of America's semiquincentennial, builds on current and past ECA projects that (a) support cultural heritage preservation projects, such as the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, or (b) curb the illicit trafficking of antiquities, such as ECA's leadership of the Cultural Antiquities Task Force and negotiation and management of 31 binding bilateral cultural property agreements.

Successful proposals will demonstrate both capacities to develop and implement a complex, high impact exchange for senior foreign government leaders and familiarity with public diplomacy programs focused on cultural heritage protection and preservation.

4. Recipient Responsibilities.

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:

- a. In consultation with ECA's Cultural Heritage Center, develop the programmatic concept, agenda, and list of countries to be invited to the convening.
- b. In consultation with ECA's Cultural Heritage Center, develop a list of potential U.S. representatives from the cultural heritage, technology,

museum, law enforcement, and other relevant communities to participate in the convening.

- c. Manage all logistics for U.S. speakers/invitees.
- d. Develop key milestones and a timeline for planning and implementation.
- e. Organize visits to museums and/or heritage sites that tell the story of the United States—its history, its culture, its people, and its enduring spirit of innovation and ingenuity.
- f. Secure venues and catering for the convening of cultural ministers and make all associated logistical arrangements, including an official luncheon.
- g. Secure hotel accommodations for U.S. participants and block rooms for international participants, who will self-fund their actual hotel costs.
- h. Coordinate with international and U.S. participants, including on invitations, timing, flights, and hotel options.
- i. Create branded signage, hand-outs, and other information resources that would be helpful to the participants.
- j. As needed, provide adequate staff at the convening to help with check-in, escorting, etc.

5. Goals and Objectives.

- a. Increased foreign participant awareness of and interest in deploying cutting-edge technologies for heritage preservation and protection driven by U.S. companies, laboratories, and other institutions
- b. Strengthened law enforcement cooperation in combatting the illicit trafficking of art and antiquities.
- c. Development of cultural heritage projects that amplify global narratives around the founding of the United States and the legacy of the America's commitment to freedom.

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

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

ECA created the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework to measure the performance of ECA programs. The MODE Framework provides standard

indicators and corresponding survey questions to ensure consistent measures across all ECA programs. More resources and guidance documents on the MODE Framework are available online at: <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>.

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

- Demographic Questions as outlined in the *Indicator Book* on page v and *Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)* (See the MODE Resource Guide - <https://app.box.com/s/qjo8icwj46tc8h1i1qtg80zl7ibwgtua> – found on our website <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>)
- **Objective 1:** Advance participant and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
 - **Sub-Objective 1.1:** Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between participants and their host communities
 - E1.1.01: Percent of participants reporting that their program experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
 - E1.1.04: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
 - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American people (core indicator)
 - E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values (core indicator)
 - E1.1.19: Percent of foreign participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values (core indicator)
- **Objective 3:** Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions
 - E3.0.02: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of Americans (core indicator)

- E3.0.04: Percent of foreign participants who reported increasing their network of third country nationals
- **Objective 4:** Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
 - **Sub-Objective 4.1:** Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
 - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
- **Objective 8:** Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau’s resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
 - E8.0.03: Response rate for participant surveys (core indicator)

Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs)

ECA recommends the use of a PMP to serve as the primary reference document for performance monitoring for this award. If used, the PMP is an important part of any proposal, as it outlines how the applicant plans to track progress towards the proposed program’s goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. A PMP document that includes all MODE Framework indicators is a part of this solicitation’s attachments. Specific instructions on how to modify the PMP to be responsive to this solicitation are included in that document; there is also a support video available for more information on how to fill out the PMP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBHC1oLNZvI>. While ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. Successful PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the following:

- a. Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.
- b. Indicators. Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning breakdowns of the data by subgroups; the PMP lists the demographic questions required to obtain the information

necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.

- If you do not use the PMP format provided, note that any performance monitoring reference document the applicant submits should include the information in the column headers (Indicator Name, Definition, Target, Survey Question, etc.) in the PMP attachment at a minimum.
- In addition to those indicators outlined in above, the applicant may propose additional custom, program-specific indicators in the PMP (ECA recommends the proposed PMPs include a minimum of one indicator for each custom programmatic objective).
- During the performance of the award, the ECA program office may further revise, add, or remove indicators. Therefore, the applicant's PMP and data collection instruments should be flexible enough to incorporate those once established.

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

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

Program Performance M&E Narrative

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

- a. An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.

- b. The mechanism(s) through which surveys and other data collection tools (if applicable) will be administered, including which platform will be used, and when and how surveys will be advertised to participants – detailing strategies to ensure adequate survey response rates (<https://app.box.com/s/pn6tavyg7sh064i502fzap49ox63y38a>), and to reduce selection and non-response bias.
- c. A brief explanation of data analysis and reporting procedures.
- d. An overview of a proposed learning plan and feedback loops to ensure that the Grant Officer (GO)/Grant Officer Representative (GOR) are informed on performance monitoring issues at regular intervals.

Nonmandatory Use of the Qualtrics MODE Survey Builder Data Collection System

ECA has created a guided tool (the MODE Survey Builder) within the Qualtrics survey platform for ECA implementing partners to generate surveys to facilitate the seamless collection and reporting of MODE Framework data. The MODE Survey Builder offers implementing partners a guided workflow that will generate a ready-to-send MODE survey, allow the addition of custom survey questions, and offer a standard report template for a quick overview of survey results that can be submitted in MyGrants (see section below) to fulfill RPM Reporting Requirements. Use of the Qualtrics survey platform can be utilized at no cost to implementing partners. Additional information about the MODE Survey Builder can be found here: <https://app.box.com/s/jjr98hmx6deorxj3lwgaxjrwdfec2r91> and here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jus4fRqOTcM>. You can propose use of an alternate survey tool or use the MODE Survey Builder, but if you are utilizing the MODE Survey Builder, you must indicate such in your proposal.

MyGrants RPM Reporting Requirements

MyGrants is a database solution that serves as the official system of record for all U.S. Department of State and ECA awards. The Results Performance Monitoring (RPM) module within MyGrants is an extension module that enables users to report performance monitoring data in the same system where they currently manage federal assistance actions. As part of ECA's efforts to streamline data collection and management, the recipient(s) of this award will be required to input performance reporting data outlined in this solicitation into the MyGrants RPM. The data stored in the MyGrants RPM will provide ECA with a bureau-wide, uniform M&E reporting tool that is already linked with other elements of the awards familiar to existing awardees.

7. Allowable Costs.

The implementing partner will be responsible for costs associated with the Stewards of Cultural Heritage program that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Personnel: salaries and wages for all implementing partner staff working on the convening of cultural ministers
- b. Fringe Benefits: allowances and services provided to implementing partner staff working on the convening of cultural ministers as compensation in addition to regular salaries and wages
- c. Travel for implementing partner staff working on the convening of cultural ministers, and for U.S. representatives from the cultural heritage, technology, museum, law enforcement, and other relevant communities, including:
 - Per diem
 - U.S. domestic travel (air, train, etc.)
 - Group and ground transportation
 - Accommodation
 - Meals and incidental expenses
 - Baggage allowance
 - Other expenses, as appropriate
- d. Supplies and other materials necessary for the convening of the cultural ministers, including signage
- e. Monitoring and evaluation costs
- f. Cultural allowances
- g. Venue rental
- h. Audio/Visual provisions
- i. Catering and other meals for both U.S. and international participants in the convening of cultural ministers
- j. Interpretation

8. Cost Share.

ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit.

The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

9. Freedom and Democracy Guidelines.

Public Law 104-319 provides that "in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy," the Bureau "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries." Public Law 106-113 requires that the governments of the countries described above do not have inappropriate influence in the selection process. Proposals should reflect advancement of these goals in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

10. Communications Guidance for ECA Recipients.

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

11. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial.

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

12. Substantial Involvement.

In a cooperative agreement, the Department is substantially involved in program activities above and beyond routine monitoring, as follows:

- a. Provide guidance on, and final approval of, all vendors, facilities, caterers, etc., associated with the convening of cultural ministers.

- b. Provide feedback on, and final approval of, the cultural ministers' convening agenda, including any optional activities
- c. Provide guidance on, and final approval of, a list of cultural ministers to be invited to the convening.
- d. Provide guidance on, and final approval of, a list of U.S. representatives from the cultural heritage, technology, museum, law enforcement, and other relevant communities to participate in the cultural ministers convening. Approve all final lists of speakers and invitation lists for any site visit or optional activities.
- e. Liaise between the implementer and U.S. embassies and consulates, State Department bureaus and offices, and U.S. law enforcement, specifically concerning input into agenda and to solicit potential speakers for the program, and approve the final agenda and list of speakers.
- f. Approve the scheduling of key milestones.
- g. Approve all invitations, signage, and media or social media products developed for the program.
- h. Seek participation from senior State Department officials in program events and take the lead on communications with them.

D. Application Contents and Format

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

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

1. Budget Format.

Applicants must submit a budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and a budget narrative. See the PSI section III for more information on the budget requirements.

2. Content of Application.

Please see the PSI for information about the application and formatting guidelines.

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

1. Address to Request Application Package.

The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from the Grants.gov website at <https://www.grants.gov> or from the ECA website at <https://www.state.gov/eca-grant-opportunities/>.

2. Department of State Contacts

For questions about this announcement, contact: Martin Perschler, U.S. Department of State, Cultural Heritage Center, ECA/P/CHC, 202-531-6590, PerschlerMJ@state.gov.

All correspondence with ECA concerning this solicitation should reference the title and funding opportunity number listed at the top of this solicitation. Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the deadline has passed, ECA staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

The terms and conditions published in this solicitation are binding and may not be modified by any ECA representative. Explanatory information provided by ECA that contradicts published language will not be binding.

3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Required Registrations

All organizations, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and an active registration in SAM.gov. A UEI is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards. An applicant must maintain an active registration while it has a proposal under review by the Department and must continue to keep the registration active for the entire duration of the period of performance of any Federal award that results from this NOFO.

The 2 CFR 200 requires subrecipients to obtain a UEI. Please note the UEI for subrecipients is not required at the time of application but will be required before an award is processed and/or directed to a subrecipient.

Note: The process of obtaining or renewing a SAM.gov registration may take anywhere from 4-8 weeks. Please begin your registration as early as possible.

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

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

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

Exemptions

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

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

4. Required Registration with MyGrants.

All ECA award recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories must be registered with the U.S. Department of State's MyGrants system by accessing <https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com> and clicking the "create an account" link. MyGrants is the U.S. Department of State's grants management system and is supported by the Department's Integrated Logistics Management System (ILMS). Recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories that have previously used MyGrants as a U.S. Department of State award recipient do not need to register again. If the organization is not able to access the system, please contact the ILMS Help Desk for help in gaining access.

Support for Recipient Organizations and recipient contacts and signatories is available 24 hours, 7 days a week (except federal holidays), and can be reached at

1-888-313-ILMS (4567) or through the ILMS Self Service Portal at <https://afsism.servicenowservices.com/ilms/>.

5. Submission Instructions.

Method of Submission

Applications may only be submitted electronically through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Complete solicitation packages are available at Grants.gov in the “Search Grants” portion of the system.

Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures

Eligible organizations should follow the instructions available in the ‘Get Started’ portion of the site (<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants>).

How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov

Applicants should read instructions carefully and prepare the information requested before beginning the registration process. Doing so will alleviate last-minute searches for required information.

The registration process can take up to four weeks to complete. Therefore, registration should be done in sufficient time to ensure it does not affect your ability to meet required application submission deadlines. Applicants should check with appropriate staff within their organizations immediately after reviewing this NOFO to confirm or determine their registration status with Grants.gov. Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration>

How to Submit an Application to ECA via Grants.gov

For access to complete instruction on how to apply for Notice of Funding Opportunities on Grants.gov, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants>

Grants.gov Support and Submission Issues

Direct all questions regarding Grants.gov registration and submission issues to:

Grants.gov Customer Support

Contact Center Phone: 800 -518-4726

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; closed on federal holidays.

Email: support@grants.gov

6. Submission Dates and Times.

Application Deadline Date

July 10, 2026, 11:59 p.m. EDT

Applicants have until 11:59 p.m., Washington, DC time of the closing date to ensure that their entire application has been uploaded to the Grants.gov site. There are no exceptions to the above deadline. Applications uploaded to the site after the application deadline date and time will be automatically rejected by the Grants.gov system and will be found technically ineligible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Funding Restrictions for this Announcement.

a. Funding Restrictions for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

None of the funds awarded resulting from this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be made available for subawards, direct financial support, or otherwise used to provide any payment or transfer to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

b. Certification Regarding Compliance with Applicable Federal Anti-Discrimination Laws

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

- i. Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government’s payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and

- ii. It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. A program promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means a program whose purpose is to promote preferences based on race, color religion, sex, or national origins, such as in training or hiring.

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

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

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

i. Prohibition on Unmanned Aircraft Systems Manufactured or Assembled by American Security Drone Act-Covered Foreign Entities

(a) Definitions.

American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity means an entity included on a list developed and maintained by the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC) and published in the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>

FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system means an unmanned aircraft system manufactured or assembled by an American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity.

Unmanned aircraft means an aircraft that is operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft .

Unmanned aircraft system means an unmanned aircraft and associated elements (including communication links and the components that control

the unmanned aircraft) that are required for the operator to operate safely and efficiently in the national airspace system.

(b) Prohibition.

Recipients of funding under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (including subawards and subcontracts issued by the recipient) will be prohibited from:

- (1) delivering any FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system, which includes unmanned aircraft (i.e., drones) and associated elements;
- (2) Operating a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system in the performance of the award; and
- (3) Using Federal funds for the purchase or operation of a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system .

c) Exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.

The prohibitions described above will not apply if the agency determines that an exemption, exception, or waiver applies and the award indicates that such a determination has been made. [See sections 1823 through 1825 and 1832 of Public Law 118-31 (41 U.S.C. 3901 note prec.) for statutory requirements pertaining to exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.].

8. Other Submission Requirements.

- a. Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.
- b. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
- c. Key Personnel: ECA recommends that the applicant identify intended key personnel positions via an asterisk (*) or other marking in the proposal budget, budget narrative, or a separate appendix. If not provided in the application, recipients must submit the names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Applicants should also identify what proportion of their time will be used in support of the program. Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department's Standard Terms and Conditions.
- d. Intergovernmental Review of Applications: Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

F. Application Review Information

1. Review Process.

ECA will check that all proposals meet the technical requirements in this solicitation. Proposals that do not meet the guidelines, including those under the eligibility section above or in the PSI, will be ineligible for further review.

All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office before being reviewed by an ECA grant panel. Applications may also be reviewed by Public Diplomacy sections overseas, State Department regional bureaus, or other State Department offices, as appropriate. All reviewers, including the ECA grant panels, will review any eligible proposals based on the criteria below.

Proposals recommended by an ECA grant panel will be reviewed for compliance with Federal and Bureau regulations and guidelines and assessed for risk. Final funding decisions are made by the ECA's Assistant Secretary. Only an ECA Grant Officer has the final authority to issue assistance awards.

2. Review Criteria.

An ECA grants panel will competitively evaluate all technically eligible applications according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered, and all carry equal weight in the proposal review.

- a. **Program planning and quality of program idea:** Proposals should have a detailed agenda and work plan that demonstrates your institution's ability to carry out the program. The plan should follow the program guidelines described in this solicitation and should be likely to provide maximum impact in achieving the proposed results. Proposals should be well-defined and relevant to ECA's mission.
- b. **Ability to achieve program aims and purpose:** Proposals should clearly state the program's aims and purpose and demonstrate how your institution will meet them, including the ability to design and execute a high-impact exchange program for senior foreign government officials.
- c. **Multiplier effect/impact:** Proposals should strengthen mutual understanding and advancement of the program's goals, including sharing of information and creating institutional linkages.

- d. **Institutional capacity and record/ability:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results. The organization has expertise in exchange programs and the proposal demonstrates it has internal controls in place to manage federal funds. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs and responsible fiscal management. ECA will consider the past performance of prior ECA recipients, including the timely submission of reports, and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.
- e. **Follow-on activities:** Proposals should provide a plan for continued follow-on activity after the ECA supported program ends, ensuring that programs are not isolated events.
- f. **Performance monitoring and evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should have a fully developed M&E plan that includes goals, objectives, and indicators. The plan should be feasible and aligned with the M&E section of this solicitation. Proposals should include a realistic learning plan that outlines how your organization plans to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices. All submitted M&E plans will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided at least the required information outlined in the M&E section of this solicitation and demonstrated the applicant's capacity to carry out the M&E plan.
- g. **Cost-effectiveness and Cost Share:** Proposals should keep the overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, as low as possible. All costs should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost share through other private sector support and institutional direct funding contributions.

3. Indirect Costs.

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

4. Risk Review.

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

- a. Financial stability

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

5. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov.

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

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

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

G. Award Notices.

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

Issuance of this NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received. If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding.

Unsuccessful applicants

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

Payment Method

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

H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

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

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

- Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register's 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, particularly on:
 - Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an impartial process of evaluating Federal award applications (2 CFR part 200.205),
 - Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
 - Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and
 - Terminating agreements pursuant to the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, including, to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340). For the avoidance of doubt, the Department has sole discretion over the determination that an award no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities, and this provision

permits awards to be terminated at the Department's convenience, including when it determines that the award no longer advances the national interest.

- 2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT
- 2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION
- 2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
- 2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)
- 2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY
- 2 CFR 600 – DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS
- Recipients must comply with all applicable Executive Orders A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

2. Reporting.

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

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

- a. **Performance Progress Reports (PPRs)** shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual reports shall be due 90 days after the reporting period; quarterly or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. All reports and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the recipient as a Post Award Activity under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.

- b. The **Federal Financial Reports** (FFR SF-425/SF-425a) must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the recipient must upload the approved report to MyGrants, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the recipient's eligibility for future awards.
- c. Required **MODE data** (see Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation section) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. MODE data reporting shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. The frequency of these reports will be determined by R/PPR/DOME and the Program Officer. Either a standard report template (if using the MODE Survey Builder) or aggregate data and the raw data file (if Recipient uses their own survey platform) must be uploaded by the Recipient as an RPM Performance Report under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
- d. A **final program and financial report** no more than 120 days after the period of performance of the award ends or termination of the award.

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/>

I. Other Information

Adherence To All Regulations Governing the J Visa

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

ECA will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to participants in this program.

A copy of the complete regulations governing the administration of Exchange Visitor (J) programs is available at <http://j1visa.state.gov> or from:

Office of Private Sector Exchange Designation
U.S. Department of State
SA-5, Floor C2, Room C2L13
2200 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20522

