



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)
FY2026 TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange
Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0018277
Application Deadline: July 6, 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	FY2026 TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange
Funding Opportunity Number	DFOP0018277
Announcement Type	New Cooperative Agreement
Deadline for Applications	July 6, 2026 11:59pm Eastern (Washington DC time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.415

Length of Performance Period	24-30 months
Number of Awards Anticipated	1 award
Award Amount	approximately \$1,500,000
Total Available Funding	\$1,500,000 pending availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY26 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
Funding Instrument Type	Cooperative Agreement
Anticipated Award Date	July 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.

Pending satisfactory implementation of this program and the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, it is ECA's intent to renew this award for two additional, consecutive fiscal years, before openly competing it again.

2. Executive Summary.

The Office of Citizen Exchanges, Global Leaders Division, of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) invites proposal submissions for the FY 2026 TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Program. TechLeaders will strengthen America's technological edge and industry dominance by promoting U.S. leadership in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain/Cold Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech). This initiative engages approximately 60 foreign participants, ages 25-40, from Europe and Eurasia, East Asia and the Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Western Hemisphere through a five-week intensive placement in the United States. Participants will collaborate with U.S.-based mentors and companies to develop actionable solutions in critical technology sectors, showcasing American expertise and innovation. The program will also feature overseas components including reciprocal exchanges and an accelerator following the second U.S.-based cohort to expand U.S. influence, inspire future STEM professionals, and foster collaboration with American businesses. TechLeaders supports U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives by

exporting American expertise and technological innovations abroad, promoting U.S.-preferred technology standards globally, bolstering economic ties, and countering the proliferation of malign competitors' technology in the global market.

Organizations applying for this federal award must demonstrate the capacity to recruit, select, and place participants, manage all program logistics, and implement overseas programming, which includes annual reciprocal exchanges and a Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator program after the second cohort of participants. The recipient will be awarded \$ 1,500,000 for the overall FY 2026 TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Program, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used efficiently to advance U.S. national interests and global leadership in critical technology sectors.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants.

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- U.S. Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations
- 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. Grants or Cooperative Agreements awarded to organizations which do not demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$130,000. 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, Project Objectives, Goals, 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 award 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

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.

Technological advancements are redefining every aspect of human life, presenting both opportunities and challenges that demand U.S. leadership to ensure these transformations align with American priorities and interests. From AI reshaping industries and societies to biotechnology revolutionizing medicine, agricultural technology addressing food security, and space exploration driving innovation and national prominence, critical emerging technologies are at the forefront of global competition and poised to reshape the geopolitical landscape in the upcoming decades. The United States must lead in these fields to secure its economic prosperity, national security, and global influence.

TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange advances the America First foreign policy by leveraging U.S. technology expertise to strengthen global partnerships that advance American interests and reinforce the U.S. as the global leader in technological innovation. This program will engage approximately 60 participants (“TechLeaders”), ages 25-40, with at least two years of professional experience in STEM industries, pairing them with U.S.-based placement mentors for a five-week intensive program. Participants will focus on critical industries—Artificial Intelligence (AI), Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain/Cold Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech)—that are vital to U.S. economic and strategic priorities.

Through project-based mentorships, TechLeaders will collaborate with their American counterparts to develop actionable solutions in their designated industries, showcasing U.S. technological leadership and innovation. Participants will also create reciprocal project plans under the guidance of mentors, ensuring their experiences translate into tangible outcomes that align with U.S. interests. Industry-specific programming will further enhance their professional development, exposing participants to cutting-edge trends and reinforcing the United States as the global leader in critical technologies.

Approximately four to six months after the U.S.-based placements conclude, up to 10 selected American mentors will travel to participating countries to implement projects designed with foreign participants during the U.S. placement. Additionally, as part of activities in subsequent renewals, selected American mentors will participate in a “Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator” program following the second cohort of TechLeaders where they and foreign alumni of the program will lead professional development and industry networking activities for TechLeader

alumni, in-country tech industry experts, in-country tech business leaders, U.S. embassy representatives and the broader community. These engagements will expand U.S. influence in critical emerging technologies globally by showcasing U.S. technological expertise, innovation, and thought leadership.

The TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange reflects ECA's commitment to deliver measurable benefits to the American people. By promoting U.S. technological expertise, fostering beneficial partnerships, and advancing American economic and strategic interests, the program strengthens U.S. competitiveness in critical and emerging technologies while countering adversarial influence in key regions.

3. Program Specific Guidelines.

3.1. Eligible Countries and Participants: The below regions are expected to participate in the FY 2026 TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange. ECA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposed project configurations, budgets, and participant numbers in accordance with the program's needs and availability of funds. In addition, ECA reserves the right to adjust countries and/or regions should conditions change in a partner country and/or regions.

Eligible Regions:

Sub-Saharan Africa (AF), East Asia and the Pacific (EAP), Europe and Eurasia (EUR), Middle East and North Africa (NEA), South and Central Asia (SCA), and Western Hemisphere (WHA)

Participants selected to be TechLeaders must be residents in the above regions who are engaged in professional careers that require significant expertise/knowledge in critical emerging technology industries and/or innovative application of industry-related skills, and who already are, or show promise of being, role models for others in their countries. "Critical Emerging Technologies" should be interpreted broadly to include *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain/Cold Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech)*, and business with emerging technology components. Participants must have at least two years of work experience in a field that explicitly and directly involves and applies any of the critical emerging technologies in meeting professional goals. All participants must be proficient in written and spoken English.

3.2 Exchange components

3.2.1 U.S.-based Industry-track Exchange: Upon acceptance into the program, participants will be placed in one of five critical technology tracks—AI, Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain/Cold Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech). These tracks will serve as specialized networks, enabling participants to engage deeply with industry-specific trends and challenges while showcasing U.S. innovation and leadership in these fields. Each industry track will consist of approximately 12 participants, ensuring targeted collaboration and professional development. Participants will be placed with host businesses and organizations in the United States that align with their designated industry track, professional goals, and backgrounds. Host businesses and organizations will be selected to highlight American excellence in critical technologies, reinforcing the United States as the global leader in innovation. Participants will be matched with U.S. placement mentors—mid-level professionals within the host businesses and organizations—who will oversee their projects and programs, ensuring alignment with the participants’ professional goals and the priorities of their industry.

3.2.2 Professional Development Trainings: The exchange will provide professional development trainings for all participants to enhance commercial outcomes and strengthen the promotion of U.S. standards in technological innovation. These trainings will provide participants with skills to facilitate trade deals, partnerships, and concrete business outcomes, and will increase their understanding of U.S. technology standards and encourage their adoption in the participants’ professional work. This component of the exchange ensures that TechLeaders gain knowledge of standards and norms that facilitate their ability to serve as viable business partners in technological innovation.

3.2.3 Reciprocal Exchange: During the exchange, all participants will work with their U.S. hosts to develop a reciprocal exchange project proposal—an actionable project plan to address a contemporary issue in their respective critical emerging technology industry in their home country. TechLeaders will receive dedicated support from American advisors throughout the process, from ideation to execution of the project in their home countries as reciprocal exchanges. This structure ensures that participants not only gain technical expertise but also develop actionable solutions that reflect U.S. priorities and incorporate U.S. standards. ***See Sections 3.3 “Reciprocal Exchanges Framework” and 3.4 “Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator” below for more detailed information.***

3.2.4 Program Orientation and Closing: The exchange program will feature a program opening designed to promote cohort integration and will include orientation and industry-track activities. Additionally, there will be a closing program in Washington, D.C. designed to serve as a capstone for the U.S.-based exchange, as well as an opportunity for USG engagement. All activities will reinforce the program’s emphasis on advancing U.S. leadership in critical technologies while fostering long-term partnerships that benefit both the United States and participating countries. ***See Section 4 “Award Recipient Responsibilities” below for more detailed information on exchanges and other U.S. based activities.***

3.3 Reciprocal Exchanges Framework: The TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange will incorporate a reciprocal exchanges component to ensure continued engagement with U.S. mentors, businesses, and institutions. This enhanced framework will fund up to 10 reciprocal exchange projects, in which American mentors travel to their TechLeaders’ home country to implement a reciprocal exchange project in one of the designated industry tracks (AI, Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain/Cold Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology), designed during the participants’ U.S.-based placement. Up to **two** projects from each of the **five** designated industries will be selected from all eligible project proposals submitted, for a total of 10 funded reciprocal projects. Applicants will develop a merit-based assessment rubric for the reciprocal exchange projects with guidance from ECA that ensures selected projects incorporate U.S. standards, foster long-term and economically viable collaboration between the U.S. and the host countries, advance U.S. strategic interests in critical emerging technologies, and amplify the program’s impact globally. During the Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator, taking place during subsequent award renewals, select completed reciprocal exchange project teams will be eligible to compete for Seed Grant funding to scale their work. The reciprocal exchanges will serve as a cornerstone for measurable outcomes, ensuring that participants remain connected to U.S. mentors and businesses while implementing projects that provide positive impacts to their own communities and align with U.S. priorities.

3.4 Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator: A central component of the TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Technologies Exchange is the execution of the

Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator program following the second TechLeaders cohort. American hosts and TechLeaders alumni from each industry and each participating country will have the opportunity to travel to one participating country for one-week after the conclusion of the U.S.-based program and the reciprocal exchanges, beginning in 2029. This convening will highlight TechLeaders' broad impacts in critical emerging technology industries, facilitate American and foreign alumni-led professional development and industry networking activities, encourage U.S.-facilitated cross-regional cooperation in critical technologies, foster opportunity for new economic or innovation collaborations in tech, and promote the TechLeaders program to future participants. The Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator program will support the development of an international professional network for individuals working in critical emerging technology fields by engaging alumni, in-country tech industry experts, in-country tech business leaders, U.S. embassy representatives and the broader community. Additionally, the Accelerator will provide an opportunity to showcase implemented reciprocal exchange projects, offering those projects the opportunity to compete for further seed grant funding to continue their work, ensuring continued U.S. engagement and presence. By showcasing U.S. technological expertise and innovation to broad audiences, the Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator will reinforce the United States' position as the global leader in critical technologies and U.S.-funded exchange programs as a premiere vehicle for professional development opportunities in emergent technologies.

Funding for the Accelerator will be issued in subsequent renewals and shouldn't be included in this proposals budget, but the applicant should demonstrate the capacity to design and implement the accelerator as a part of this proposal as is it a major component of the program.

3.5 Alumni Engagement: Proposals should include robust plans to establish and maintain an engaged alumni network that amplifies U.S. influence and strengthens ties between alumni and the United States. This network should serve as a platform for advancing alumni's professional development in critical technology industries—Artificial Intelligence (AI), Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech)—while fostering collaboration that benefits U.S. economic and strategic priorities. Alumni

programming should also highlight the United States as a global leader in innovation and diplomacy, ensuring that participants maintain connection with the U.S. government through the U.S. embassies.

Applicants must incorporate existing ECA alumni initiatives into their plans, including leveraging the online community on the International Exchange Alumni website (exchangealumni.state.gov) and promoting other opportunities offered by the U.S. Department of State, such as small grants and professional development seminars.

All alumni communications and programming must adhere to ECA guidance for crediting the U.S. Department of State, ensuring that the program's connection to the U.S. government is prominently recognized.

3.6 Partner Organizations & U.S. Business Engagement: Award applicants must identify U.S. and foreign organizations and individuals with whom they propose to collaborate to showcase U.S. leadership in critical emerging technologies.

Proposals should include letters of commitment or support from partner organizations that will assist in robust recruitment of participants, securing placement hosts, implementing reciprocal exchange projects and the Critical Emerging Technologies Accelerator programming. These letters should demonstrate a clear alignment with U.S. priorities in critical emerging technology industries—Artificial Intelligence (AI), Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain/Cold Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech). Applicants should also provide a description of any previous cooperative activities with these partner organizations, highlighting their mission, activities, and accomplishments as they relate to their ability to meet the goals of the program.

Applicants must clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all placement organizations in terms of project logistics, management, and oversight, ensuring that all activities are designed to maximize the program's impact in advancing U.S. interests. These companies should demonstrate a willingness to host Emerging Tech participants from Europe and Eurasia, the Western Hemisphere, Indo-Pacific,

Sub-Saharan Africa, and/or the Middle East and North Africa, showcasing American expertise and fostering mutually beneficial partnerships between the U.S. and target countries.

3.7 Projected Timeline: ECA envisions the approximate dates of the FY 2026 TechLeaders: Critical Emerging Tech Exchange program to be as follows:

- May 2026: proposals for NOFO due
- May 2026-June 2026: ECA/DOS review of received proposals
- July 2026: Notice of Award and kick-off meeting with ECA
- August 2026-February 2027: Recruitment, selection, and notification of foreign participants for general program. Recruitment campaign for U.S. hosting companies/institutions
- March 2027 – June 2027: Securing U.S.-based mentors and host sites
- July 2027 – September 2027: Visa issuance for selected participants and pre-departure preparations
- September 2027 – November 2027: Travel to the United States by foreign participants for orientation activities, placement at host sites, and a debriefing in Washington, D.C. (that includes a closing reception)
- February 2028 – May 2028: Reciprocal Exchanges
- May 2028 – July 2028: Program completion and lessons-learned.

3.8 Non-Mode Indicators

In addition to required MODE Framework objectives and indicators (See section 6), the award recipient should develop and track key outcomes that highlight the achievement of program goals and objectives (See section 5) as part of their Performance Monitoring Plan. These indicators should track longer term outcomes (such as partnerships that have been fostered as a result of the program) as timing of the award allows. A review of the MODE Framework indicators and custom indicators will occur during the negotiation phase; discussions on what data should be collected during the program and when should be expected to be finalized at that time.

The award recipient will also submit success stories on a regular basis that highlight both the accomplishments of the participants and hosts resulting from program participation. These highlights should demonstrate how the TechLeaders Program promotes U.S. technological expertise in critical and emerging technologies, strengthens U.S. competitiveness and mutually beneficial

partnerships in tech innovation, and advances American economic and strategic interests.

4. Recipient Responsibilities.

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:

1. **Merit-Based Recruitment and Selection:** Develop and conduct a comprehensive, merit-based recruitment and selection process to identify highly qualified individuals from eligible countries. Participants will be sorted into critical emerging technology tracks—AI, Space Technology, Biotechnology/Health Technology, Supply Chain Technology, and Agricultural Technology (AgriTech).
2. **Engagement with U.S. Companies:** Identify U.S.-based companies and individuals to collaborate on tech-centric exchanges and networking opportunities. Demonstrate robust engagement with the private sector to expand networking opportunities and secure mentorship hosts in small-, medium-, and large-sized companies, showcasing American leadership in critical technologies.
3. **Program Timelines and Guidelines:** Create program timelines, guidelines and relevant materials for TechLeaders participants, and U.S. host organizations.
4. **Project-Based Placements:** Arrange meaningful five-week project-based placements for participants at U.S.-based STEM companies or institutions connected to critical emerging technologies. Placements will include peer mentors, cultural/social support, and reciprocal exchange planning, with additional educational and cultural programming to highlight U.S.
 - a. Participants will be placed in tech hubs across the United States to maximize their exposure to American expertise and innovation.
 - b. Placements will be tailored to participants' professional goals, address contemporary challenges in critical emerging technology industries, and facilitate opportunity for continued innovation and economic partnerships between the U.S. and participating countries.
5. **Visa and Health Coverage:** Issue DS-2019 forms for J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor program participants and enroll them in the Bureau's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE).
6. **Pre-Departure Orientation:** Conduct group pre-departure orientations to set expectations and provide program materials to U.S. embassies/consulates for supplemental orientations.
7. **Travel and Logistics:** Arrange all program-related travel, lodging, and meals for participants, ensuring efficient use of resources.

8. **Arrival Orientation:** Conduct a group arrival orientation in the United States, featuring general activities and industry-specific programming to integrate participants into the program.
9. **Monitoring and Support:** Monitor participants' safety and well-being and oversee host companies/institutions to ensure program success.
10. **Closing Program:** Create a comprehensive closing program in Washington, D.C., including networking opportunities with U.S. government officials and critical emerging technology professionals. Handle all logistical arrangements and costs for the closing reception and participant travel.
11. **Debriefing:** Conduct a debriefing session at the conclusion of the U.S.-based program to assess outcomes.
12. **Sustainable Mentoring Relationships:** Create sustainable professional mentoring relationships between U.S. and foreign participants to strengthen long-term collaboration.
13. **Reciprocal Exchanges:** Promote and support the implementation of the TechLeaders' reciprocal exchange projects following participants' U.S. mentorships to advance U.S. strategic interests globally.
14. **Critical Emerging Technology Accelerator:** In subsequent award renewals, develop follow-on overseas Accelerator program to reinforce U.S. influence and leadership in technology. This program will include industry specific professional development activities, industry networking events, seminars, and other activities to advance U.S. economic and strategic interests globally.
15. **Alumni Engagement and Professional Networks:** Develop an alumni engagement plan that connects TechLeaders alumni with the wider network of critical emerging technology professionals and innovators in eligible countries, ensuring sustained U.S. influence, alignment with U.S. strategic priorities, and long-term collaboration between the U.S. and participating countries.
16. **Outreach and Communications Strategy:** Design an outreach and communications strategy that highlights program outcomes and success stories featuring both U.S. and overseas participants and functions as a recruitment tool for the program. This strategy should include the use of print media, various social media platforms, short impact videos and other forms of related digital content to showcase achievements, demonstrate results, and communicate the program's contribution to U.S. foreign policy objectives for technology while aligning with ECA branding and communication standards. The recipient will design and maintain an internal

online TechLeaders website to share these highlights, stories, and updates with the public, prospective applicants, program alumni, ECA, and Posts.

17. **Program Materials:** Handle the publication of all program materials in collaboration with ECA and U.S. embassies/consulates, ensuring alignment with U.S. messaging and policy.
18. **Program Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Conduct routine M&E of the program's impact utilizing a system that incorporates the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework, non-MODE indicators developed in consultation with ECA, links program industry-track outcomes to stated program goals and objectives, and ensures consistent and high-quality implementation across all program industry-tracks and program components to strengthen program implementation and inform program improvements.
19. **Financial Management:** Manage financial aspects of the program, including timely disbursement of stipends and housing allowances, and report any irregularities promptly to ECA.
20. **Program Reviews:** Participate in regular program reviews with ECA (via in-person, video conferencing, or telephone) to assess implementation progress of program activities, address concerns, and review effectiveness of the executed program activities.
21. **Staffing Plan:** Provide a detailed staffing plan to ensure effective program execution, with any changes to key personnel submitted to ECA for approval.
22. **Compliance:** Ensure compliance with the terms of the Cooperative Agreement with ECA, including timely submission of financial and program reports.

5. Goals and Objectives.

1. To provide 60 emerging STEM leaders from AF, EAP, EUR, NEA, SCA and WHA with five-week mentorship experiences with American mentors in science and technology companies.
2. Provide emerging STEM leaders from all six regions with tools to advance their careers, spur and encourage innovation, use their networks to create opportunities for U.S. tech businesses, industry experts and academics, and commercial entities.
3. Increase economic and technological innovation partnerships between the U.S. and strategic countries from all six regions to counter competitor influence, globally.
4. Create and maintain a sustainable professional network of support for TechLeaders in critical emerging STEM fields in the United States and

participating countries to support U.S. foreign policy to advance U.S. economic and security priorities.

5. Increase participants' understanding of how Americans drive development in science and technology, reinforcing the United States as the global leader in innovation.

5.1 Results and Outcomes:

5.1.1: A clearly articulated recruitment plan that ensures the selection of highly qualified STEM leaders from participating regions, prioritizing individuals who demonstrate the potential to advance U.S. interests in critical emerging science and technology.

5.1.2: Successful completion of a five-week mentorship program in science and technology companies by 60 emerging STEM leaders, showcasing U.S. expertise and innovation.

5.1.3: Demonstrated increased capacity of foreign participants to advance in critical emerging technology fields, with measurable improvements in their ability to innovate and collaborate with U.S. counterparts.

5.1.4: Enhanced skills in innovation and entrepreneurship among foreign participants as a direct result of the mentorship experience, fostering partnerships that align with U.S. economic priorities.

5.1.5: Development and execution of reciprocal exchange projects that foster long-term collaboration between U.S. experts and institutions and the foreign participants.

5.1.6: Increased participation of American mentors in the program, showcasing U.S. leadership and expertise in critical emerging STEM fields.

5.1.7: Increased engagement of U.S. science and technology companies in the program, reinforcing the United States as the global hub for innovation and technological advancement.

5.1.8: Engagement of program alumni in participating countries to support the career development of emerging STEM leaders and cultivate further opportunities for collaboration with the United States.

5.1.9: Integration of the skillsets and expertise of American mentors throughout the program, ensuring alignment with U.S. foreign policy objectives and maximizing the program's impact on advancing U.S. interests.

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
 - E1.1.04: Percent of participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
 - E1.1.09: Percent of participants who traveled abroad for the first time because of their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.11: Percent of American participants indicating a change in their understanding of their host country's culture and values
 - E1.1.12: Percent of foreign participants indicating a change in understanding of third-party countries' cultures and values

- 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 2: Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities / countries

- Sub-Objective 2.2: Foster participants' belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
 - E2.2.01: Percent of participants who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country (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 report increasing their network of third country nationals
- E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)

Objective 4: Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries

- E4.0.01: Percent of participants reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation
- E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation
- E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
- Sub-Objective 4.1: Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
 - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
 - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)
 - E4.1.04: Number of professional placements
 - E4.1.11: Number of American reciprocal exchange participants

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=WBHC1oLNZvl>. 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:

- **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.
- **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 period of 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:

- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.
- 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/pn6tavvg7sh064i502fzap49ox63y38a>), and to reduce selection and non-response bias.
- A brief explanation of data analysis and reporting procedures.
- 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, allows the addition of custom survey questions, and offers 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.

1. International and domestic air fares; visas; transit costs; ground transportation costs; airline baggage and seat fees; and in-country travel costs for visa processing purposes. Given the requirements associated with obtaining J-1 visas for ECA-supported participants, applicants should include costs for any travel associated with visa interviews or DS-2019 pick-up. Please note that all air travel must be in compliance with the Fly America Act. There is no charge for J-1 visas for participants in Bureau-sponsored programs.

2. Per Diem. For U.S.-based programming, organizations should refer to the published federal per diem rates for individual U.S. cities. Domestic per diem rates may be accessed at: <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/21287>. ECA requests applicants to budget realistic costs that reflect the local economy and do not exceed federal per diem rates. Foreign per diem rates for overseas activities can be accessed at: https://aoprals.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=184&menu_id=78

3. Return Travel Allowance. A return travel allowance of approximately \$70 for each foreign participant may be included in the budget. The allowance may be used for incidental expenses incurred during international travel.

4. Cost of housing in the United States. The award recipient will be responsible for providing clean, safe and reasonably located housing for the Critical Emerging Technology Exchange participants during their stay in the United States.

5. Orientation Costs. The award recipient will conduct a comprehensive pre-departure and arrival orientation for all the Critical Emerging Technology Exchange participants. Additionally, the award recipient will provide to posts overseas appropriate informational materials about the exchange and the logistics involved in traveling to the United States. This information will be used by posts to conduct pre-departure orientations and/or supplement the orientations conducted by the award recipient, for the exchange participants in each country.

6. Accident and Sickness Insurance. The Critical Emerging Technology Exchange participants will be covered under the terms of a U.S. Department of State-sponsored Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE). The State Department pays the ASPE premium directly to the administrator. The proposal may include costs for supplemental health insurance for hosting organizations requiring specialized coverage and travel insurance for participants.

8. Consultants. Consultants may be used to provide specialized expertise or to make presentations. Daily honoraria may not exceed \$250 per day. Subcontracting organizations may also be used, in which case the written agreement between the prospective award recipient and the subcontractor should be included in the proposal. Subcontracts should be itemized in the budget.

9. Room Rental. Room rental may not exceed \$250 per day per event or activity.

10. Materials Development. Your proposal may contain costs to purchase, develop and translate materials for participants and mentors.

11. Wire Transfer Fees. When necessary, applicants may include costs to transfer funds to partner organizations overseas. Award recipients are urged to research applicable taxes that may be imposed on these transfers by host governments.

12. Debriefing and Reception in Washington, D.C. After the conclusion of the U.S.-based mentorships, the Critical Emerging Technology Program participants will take part in a one- to three-day debriefing and closing reception. The award recipient will be responsible for all costs involved in the debriefing, including the transportation for the participants to Washington, as well as their housing and meals while there. The award recipient will also be responsible for all expenditures incurred for the reception.

13. Funding for up to 10 Critical Emerging Technology Program participants' reciprocal exchange project plans.

14. Website Expenses. Program branded website development, design, and maintenance costs.

15. Database Management Software. Applicants should budget for procurement of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software or similar alternative to ensure accurate, consistent, and real-time management of data that is required to be submitted to ECA as part of data reporting requirements.

16. Reasonable Accommodations. Organizations should budget for the reasonable accommodation of individuals with disabilities. Proposals should reflect plans to make necessary program modifications or participant numbers should these funds be used for reasonable accommodations.

17. Shipping costs for DS-2019 and other items.

18. Overhead and Staffing Costs. Costs necessary for the effective administration of the program may include salaries for recipient organization employees, benefits, and other direct and indirect costs per detailed instructions in the Application Package. Applicants are strongly encouraged to keep overhead and staffing costs as low as possible. ECA encourages applicants to include cost sharing contributions from the applicant, the in-country partner, and other sources. Please also include in your budget plans for one or more staff of the recipient organization to travel to Washington, D.C. (if not already located in D.C.) to meet with your program officer within the first 45 days after the cooperative agreement has been awarded.

Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

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. Virtual Exchange Component.

When extenuating circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges.

In addition to planning for virtual exchange activities if in-person programming is prohibited, ECA welcomes innovative ideas on how organizations can leverage virtual programming technologies during or in addition to in-person programming. ECA encourages organizations submitting proposals in response to this solicitation to suggest one or more virtual exchange components to complement the in-person exchange. The virtual exchange component(s) could come before, during and/or after the physical exchange, or in conjunction with the in-person programming for

certain participants unable to participate in in-person programming. The objective for the virtual exchange component(s) is to augment the impact of the in-person exchange described in this solicitation. ECA encourages organizations to propose virtual exchange ideas that take advantage of ECA's existing web and social networking platforms. Virtual exchange components would be coordinated with and approved by the ECA program office and U.S. missions abroad on a project-by-project basis.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. Substantial Involvement.

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

1. Provide assistance to the recipient including guidance on all program activities and final approvals of key project plans and activities, and approval of locations of all main program components;
2. Collaborate with the award recipient on the outreach and selection of exchange mentors and host sites;
3. Approve host companies and institutions/organizations;
4. Approve final selection of participants;

5. Review and approval of all program publicity and other materials;
6. Approve program timelines and agendas;
7. Assist with Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)-related issues;
8. Assist with participant emergencies;
9. Liaise with relevant U.S. embassies and country desk officers at the U.S. Department of State, particularly in terms of recruitment and selection efforts, and follow-on program activities; Assist in arrangements for the debriefing session in Washington, D.C., and the closing reception;
10. Work with the award recipient to publicize the program through various media outlets and social media platforms of ECA and Public Diplomacy Sections (PDSs) at U.S. embassies/consulates overseas;
11. Monitor the program, as necessary, through site visits or debriefing sessions; and
12. Conduct an annual performance review.

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.

Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification. Budget requests may not exceed \$1,500,000.

2. Content of Application.

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

All proposals must contain an executive summary, proposal narrative, budget, and budget narrative.

In addition to information included in the PSI, proposals should include:

Program Narrative

Executive Summary (One page)

In one double-spaced page, provide the following information about the project:

1. Name of organization/participating institutions
2. Beginning and ending dates of the program
3. Nature of activity
4. Funding level requested from the Bureau, total program cost, total cost-sharing from applicant and other sources
5. Scope and Goals
 - a. Number and description of participants
 - b. Wider audience benefiting from program (overall impact)
 - c. Geographic diversity of program, both U.S. and overseas
 - d. Anticipated results (short and long-term)

Narrative

In twenty (20) double-spaced, single-sided pages, provide a detailed description of the project addressing the areas listed below.

1. Vision (statement of need, objectives, goals, benefits)
2. Participating Organizations
3. Program Activities
4. Program Monitoring and Evaluation
5. Alumni Engagement/Follow-on
6. Project Management
7. Work Plan/Time Frame

Additional Information to be Submitted

- Detailed Budget (see **Section 7. "Allowable Costs"**)
- 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.
- Calendar of activities/itinerary, if applicable

- Sample materials
- Letters of endorsement
- Resumes and CVs (resumes of all staff should be included in the submission; no resume should exceed two pages.)
- First Time Applicant Attachments, if applicable.

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: Program Officer Michelle Harris, U.S. Department of State, Office of Citizen Exchanges, ECA/PE/C/GL, (202) 445-4072 or harrismr@state.gov, with a copy to Dawnjalice Brown, Branch Chief, at brownd4@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://afsitsm.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. Reviewing and assembling the required information before beginning the registration process 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 impact 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.

Monday, July 6, 2026

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. 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.

c. 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.

d. 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.

e. 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(a);

The recipient has implemented a Trafficking in Persons compliance plan to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175(a) and is compliant with it; and compliance plan must be consistent with the requirements of 2 CFR 175(b)(4) and (5).

- That the recipient has procedures to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175(a) and to monitor, detect, and terminate any subrecipient, contractor, subcontractor, or employee of the recipient engaging in them.

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.

f. 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. **Quality of the program, planning, and ability to achieve program aims and purpose:** Proposals should be original, well-defined, and relevant to ECA's mission. 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 clearly state the program's aims and purpose and demonstrate how your institution will meet them.
- b. **Institutional Capacity/Record/Ability:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results. Proposals should also demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, responsible fiscal management and demonstrates it has internal controls in place to manage federal funds. ECA will consider the past performance of prior ECA recipients, including the timely submission of reports, and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.
- c. **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.
- d. **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.
- e. **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.
- f. **Long-term impact and alignment with foreign policy goals:** Proposals should demonstrate the program's ability to facilitate long-term

impact. Proposals should demonstrate an alignment with the current Administration's expressed foreign policy goals, particularly as they pertain to America First and science and technology initiatives.

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, 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 MELI 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.
- e. Program Data Requirements:** Award recipients will be required to maintain specific data on program participants and activities in an electronically accessible database format that can be shared with ECA as required. At a minimum, the data must include the following:
 - i. Name, address, contact information and biographic sketch of all persons who travel internationally on funds provided by the agreement or who benefit from the award funding but do not travel.
 - ii. Itineraries of international and domestic travel, providing dates of travel and cities in which any exchange experiences take place. Final schedules for in-country and U.S. activities must be received by the ECA Program Officer at least three workdays prior to the official opening of the activity.

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.

The award recipient 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