Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

University-led Networks for Innovation, Technology, and Expertise (UNITE)

NEA/Riyadh, Department of State

Opportunity number: DOS-SAU-2603-PD

Application deadline: September 14, 2026 23:59 AST (Arabia Standard Time)

Contents

U.S Department of State
NEA/ Riyadh
Notice of Funding Opportunity

A. Basic Information

1. Overview

Funding Opportunity Title	University-led Networks for Innovation, Technology, and Expertise (UNITE)
Funding Opportunity Number	DOS-SAU-2603-PD
Announcement Type	Initial Announcement
Deadline for Applications	09/14/2026, 23:59 AST (Arabia Standard Time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.040 Public Diplomacy Programs
Length of performance period	18 months
Number of awards anticipated	1 award
Award amounts	Award expected to reach a maximum of $150,000
Total available funding	$150,000.00 pending availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY26 Smith Mundt Public Diplomacy Funds
Anticipated project start date	October 1, 2026

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

Project Performance Period: Proposed projects should be completed on March 31, 2028 or less.

The Department of State will entertain applications for continuation grants funded under these awards beyond the initial budget period on a non-competitive basis subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

This notice is subject to availability of funding.

2. Executive Summary

The U.S. Embassy Riyadh Public Diplomacy Section is accepting applications for a cooperative agreement to run the University-led Networks for Innovation, Technology, and Expertise (UNITE) program. UNITE will support approximately four to five applied project teams — university-industry partnerships between U.S. universities, U.S. companies or technical partners, and Saudi institutions — through project seed awards of up to $25,000 each to solve specific Saudi workforce and development gaps in high-demand strategic sectors, including Artificial Intelligence, critical minerals, cybersecurity, emerging technologies, and workforce development. Each project team will produce a U.S.-linked deliverable — such as a curriculum, module, technical roadmap, or standards briefs — that creates durable pathways for Saudi investment in American academic, workforce, and industry collaboration. Mission KSA will award a cooperative agreement to a single U.S. academic implementing partner to manage the portfolio. Each participating project team must provide a 1:1 cost-share match to ensure genuine institutional commitment and long-term viability.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations
- Public and private educational institutions (with preference for U.S. higher education institutions or entities with robust academic networks);
- Public International Organizations and Governmental institutions

*Note: For-profit organizations and for-profit educational institutions are ineligible to apply as prime recipients or subrecipients. They may only participate as commercial vendors providing goods/services under 2 CFR 200 Subpart D.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Prime Recipient Cost-Share: Cost sharing is not required for the prime applicant.

Applicants are permitted to propose voluntary cost sharing, such as cash or third-party in-kind contributions (like donated staff time or facilities). Because cost sharing is not required, it will not be evaluated as a competitive factor during the primary merit review, and no point values will be assigned for offering it.

In the event that two or more applications receive identical scores after being evaluated against all primary criteria, the U.S. Embassy will first use the applicant's indirect cost rate to break the tie. If a tie remains, the Embassy will consider the availability and strength of any proposed voluntary cost sharing to select the final winner.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements

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

C. Program Description

1. Background

Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 economic transformation is generating significant demand for international partnerships, particularly in high-growth sectors such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), critical minerals, digital technology, and localized workforce development. While U.S. universities and U.S. private sector firms possess world-class expertise well suited to address these operational, workforce, and development needs, they frequently lack a structured, low-risk, and cost-effective entry point to identify Saudi partners and navigate the Saudi institutional and high-priority sector landscapes.

Consultations with leadership from leading U.S. universities indicate that the most sustainable, resilient, and impactful international academic relationships are often faculty-driven. However, institutional information gaps, legal and administrative friction, limited seed funding, and uncertainty about Saudi institutional needs can prevent promising faculty-led collaborations from taking root.

At the same time, other international actors are expanding their presence in Saudi higher education, technology, workforce development, and applied research. Without a proactive U.S. framework, Saudi institutions may increasingly adopt technical approaches, educational models, and workforce-development pathways that do not fully reflect U.S. strengths, standards and best practices. UNITE will help address this gap by creating a practical mechanism for U.S. universities, Saudi institutions, and U.S. companies or technical partners to collaborate on specific operational, workforce, standards, and development challenges.

2. Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of the UNITE program is to seed practical, faculty-driven partnerships that solve critical Saudi workforce and development gaps while establishing U.S. academic standards, technical expertise, and commercially relevant collaboration as preferred pathways for long-term U.S.-Saudi engagement.

Objective 1: Establish Applied University Partnership Networks
Establish four to five active, faculty-driven partnership networks ("project teams")—each comprising a U.S. university, a Saudi university, and a U.S. commercial or technical partner—that will identify a specific operational, workforce, standards, or technical gap in a Saudi priority sector and successfully design a practical collaboration to address it.

Objective 2: Produce Concrete Partnership Deliverables
Ensure that each selected project team produces at least one concrete, U.S.-linked deliverable during the award period. Deliverables may include a training curriculum, technical roadmap, standards brief, workforce-readiness assessment, or pilot plan. Deliverables should be designed for practical use by Saudi academic, workforce, government, or industry stakeholders and should reflect U.S. expertise, standards, or best practices.

Objective 3: Catalyze Sustainable Follow-On Collaboration
Position funded networks to pursue documented follow-on pathways beyond the seed-funded phase. These pathways may include Saudi-funded training programs, executive education, curriculum adoption, applied research agreements, formal commitment of follow-on non-USG funding, the establishment of student/professional talent pipelines, or the integration of U.S. partners into commercial procurement tracks.

Objective 4: Leverage Partner Matching and Institutional Commitment
Use Embassy funding to unlock matching contributions from educational, institutional, and industrial project team partners. To ensure genuine institutional commitment and long-term viability, each selected project team member institution receiving Embassy-funded technical package support ($25,000 max contract per partnership) must demonstrate a minimum 1:1 matching commitment ($25,000 per partnership, totaling $100,000 to $125,000 in cumulative project funding). This matching commitment can be fulfilled through direct corporate/academic financial contributions or comparable, audited in-kind support. Eligible in-kind support includes, but is not limited to: dedicated faculty time, facility and lab access, specialized training resources, corporate industry expertise, software licensing access, student/professional cohort management, or direct travel support.

3. Program Components and Phases

The prime recipient will implement the UNITE program over an 18-month period through four integrated, mandatory phases:

Phase 1: Mobilization & Applied Partnership Project Selection (Months 1 – 3)

During the mobilization phase, the prime recipient will establish program operations, coordinate closely with Mission Saudi Arabia, and launch a targeted, competitive application process to solicit and select the four to five applied partnership projects.

Key activities include: conducting a program orientation with Mission KSA; finalizing project selection criteria; developing outreach materials and marketing the program to qualified U.S. and Saudi universities and corporate networks; and administering a transparent, merit-based selection process. Selected projects should involve a U.S. university, a Saudi university or institution, and a U.S. commercial or technical partner. Each project must address a specific operational, workforce, standards, or technical gap in a Saudi priority sector and include a clear deliverable, cost-share plan, and follow-on partnership concept.

Milestone: Four to five Applied Partnership Projects selected and approved in coordination with Mission Saudi Arabia.

Phase 2: Onboarding, Matchmaking, and Project Design (Months 4 – 5)

During this phase, the prime recipient will support selected project teams in finalizing partner roles, technical work plans, deliverables, cost-share commitments, and compliance requirements. This phase is intended to reduce administrative and operational barriers so that project teams are positioned for successful implementation.

Key activities include: Confirming each project team's scope of work, finalizing the project team budgets and agreements; formalizing and verifying the 1:1 matching commitment from each participating project team institution; and aligning the technical work plans.

Milestone: All project team agreements are signed, have approved work plans, include verified commitment requirements, and contain implementation-ready deliverables.

Phase 3: Co-Design & Deliverable Production (Months 6 – 10)

During the co-design and production phase, selected teams will execute their joint work plans to build high-value U.S.-linked assets.

Key activities include: active collaboration between U.S. faculty, Saudi faculty, and U.S. industry experts to draft, test, and finalize the curriculum, technical roadmap, or standards brief; and continuous monitoring and troubleshooting by the prime recipient.

Milestone: Technical outputs finalized and approved in coordination with Mission Saudi Arabia.

Phase 4: Transition, Showcase and Sustainability Activation (Months 11 – 12)

During the transition phase, the prime recipient will help selected project teams package their outputs for practical use and identify pathways for follow-on collaboration beyond the seed-funded phase.

Key activities include: the prime recipient helping project teams pitch their outputs for follow-on Saudi funding, corporate sponsorship, or commercial procurement; and packaging lessons learned into market-entry toolkits to help future U.S. entities navigate the Saudi landscape.

Milestone: Submission of final market-entry toolkits to the Mission; completion of commercial/academic transition plans.

Final Reporting and Closeout (Months 13-18)

The remaining period will be dedicated to follow-on engagement, monitoring and evaluation, cost-share documentation, final reporting, financial closeout, and lessons learned. The prime recipient will track post-project outcomes, including continued university engagement, follow-on proposals, curriculum adoption, training opportunities, research agreements, pilot concepts, or other documented partnership developments.

4. Technical Deliverables & Guardrails

UNITE moves past abstract networking by conditioning success on the production of a concrete, replicable technical output within 12 months. Every funded project team must produce a specific asset designed to bridge a real-world Saudi operational gap. Approved outputs include but are not necessarily limited to:

- Targeted Training Curricula: Specialized workforce training programs or academic certificates;
- Technical Roadmaps: Step-by-step frameworks for technology implementation or localized industrial upgrades;
- Standards Briefs: Regulatory, technical, or operational blueprints that establish baseline industry benchmarks.

Intellectual Property, Data, and Publication Guardrail: Each selected project must establish appropriate intellectual property, data-management, and publication terms before implementation. Background intellectual property, proprietary tools, software,

curricula, data, and technical materials will remain with the originating institution or owner unless otherwise agreed in writing. Any jointly developed deliverables, including curricula, technical roadmaps, standards briefs, pilot plans, or implementation frameworks, must be governed by written terms agreed by the participating institutions and consistent with applicable U.S. law, institutional policies, federal award requirements, export-control rules, and data-protection obligations. Project teams must ensure that U.S. institutional and private-sector contributions are appropriately protected while reserving for the U.S. Government a royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable right (per 2 CFR § 200.315) to use, reproduce, or publish all grant-funded deliverables for public diplomacy, education, workforce-development, and partnership purposes under the UNITE program.

5. Expected Performance Monitoring, Indicators, and Outcomes

The applicant must incorporate a comprehensive Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP). Performance indicators must track both short-term outputs and long-term outcomes, utilizing established baselines and targets. The Federal agency expects the following results:

- Sustained Networks: A minimum of four to five active, faculty-driven partnership networks established and actively collaborating across the 12-month program lifecycle;
- Completed Deliverables: 100% of selected partnerships successfully finalize at least one high-quality technical output (curriculum, roadmap, or brief) registered under agreed intellectual property, data-management, and publication terms;
- High Transition Rate: 100% of funded project teams secure documented transition plans for multi-year operational pathways (such as follow-on non-USG funding or talent pipelines);
- Verified Partner Matching: Documented and audited 1:1 matching commitments ($25,000 equivalent per project team institution, totaling $100,000 to $125,000 across the project);
- Institutional Lowering of Barriers: Production of comprehensive market-entry toolkits submitted to Mission KSA to facilitate rapid deployment of U.S. technical benchmarks.

6. Substantial Involvement

This program will be implemented via a Cooperative Agreement. Unlike standard grants, this requires consistent, substantial programmatic involvement from the U.S. Embassy Riyadh Public Diplomacy Section throughout the project's lifecycle, specifically in:

a) Direct Selection Participation: PDS Riyadh will review and approve project team solicitation criteria and application materials, with the selection of the 4–5 winning project teams subject to final Mission approval and confirmation.
b) Output and Milestone Review: PDS Riyadh must review and approve the project team work plans, quarterly technical progress, and draft technical deliverables (curricula, roadmaps, briefs) to ensure alignment with UNITE program objectives;

c) Saudi Institutional Facilitation: The Embassy will directly facilitate introductions and coordinate collaboration between the recipient and essential local Saudi stakeholders, including government ministries and academic networks, to supplement the recipient's relationships;
d) Milestone Monitoring: Embassy staff will participate in virtual orientations, program kickoffs, and attend the final sustainability pitches and transition showcases;
e) Media Coordination: PDS Riyadh will exercise direct oversight and approval authority over all public media relations, press releases, social media campaigns, and public branding of program deliverables.

D. Application Contents and Format

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

Content of Application
Please ensure:

- The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity
- All documents are in English
- All budgets are in U.S. dollars
- All pages are numbered consecutively
- All documents are formatted to fit 8 ½ x 11 paper, and
- All Microsoft Word documents are single-spaced, 12 point Calibri font, with a minimum of 1-inch margins.

The following documents are **required**:

1. Mandatory application forms

- SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations)
- SF-424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs) at XXXX
- SF-424B (Assurances for Non-Construction programs) at XXX (note: the SF-424B is only required for individuals, organizations exempt from registration, and for organizations not required to fully register in SAM.gov)

2. Summary Page (optional)

Cover sheet stating the applicant's name and organization, proposal date, program title, program period proposed start and end date, and brief purpose of the program.

3. Proposal (20 pages maximum)

The proposal should contain sufficient information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the applicant wants to do. You may use your own proposal format, but it must include all the items below.

- **Proposal Summary:** Short narrative that outlines the proposed project, including project objectives and anticipated impact.

- **Introduction to the Organization or Individual applying**: A description of past and present operations, showing ability to carry out the program, including information on all previous grants from the State Department and/or U.S. government agencies.
- **Problem Statement:** Clear, concise and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed and why the proposed program is needed
- **Project Goals and Objectives:** The "goals" describe what the program is intended to achieve. The "objectives" refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be achievable and measurable.
- **Project Activities**: Describe the program activities and how they will help achieve the objectives.
- **Project Methods and Design**: A description of how the program is expected to work to solve the stated problem and achieve the goal. Include a logic model as appropriate.
- **Proposed Project Schedule and Timeline:** The proposed timeline for the program activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.
- **Key Personnel:** Names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program. What proportion of their time will be used in support of this program?
- **Project Partners:** List the names and type of involvement of key partner organizations and sub-awardees.
- **Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan:** This is an important part of successful grants. Throughout the timeframe of the grant, how will the activities be monitored to ensure they are happening in a timely manner, and how will the program be evaluated to make sure it is meeting the goals of the grant?
- **Future Funding or Sustainability** Applicant's plan for continuing the program beyond the grant period, or the availability of other resources, if applicable.

4. Budget Justification Narrative

After filling out the SF-424A Budget (above), use a separate file to describe each of the budget expenses in detail. Budgets must provide complete scenarios for both 4 and 5 active partnerships. See section *I. Other Information: Guidelines for Budget Submissions* below for further information.

5. *Attachments*

- 1-page Curriculum Vitae (CV) or resume of key personnel who are proposed for the program
- Letters of support from program partners describing the roles and responsibilities of each partner
- If your organization has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) and includes NICRA charges in the budget, include your latest NICRA as a PDF file.
- Official permission letters, if required for program activities.

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application forms required above are available at grants.gov.

2. Department of State Contacts

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact: Riyadhgrants@state.gov

3. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM.gov)

Required Registrations

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

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

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

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

- Organizations **based outside of the United States** and that do not pay employees within the United States do not need an EIN from the IRS but do need a UEI prior to registering in SAM.gov.

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

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

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

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

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

NCAGE Homepage:
https://eportal.nspa.nato.int/AC135Public/sc/CageList.aspx
NCAGE Code Request Tool (NCRT):
NCAGE Code Request Tool (nato.int)

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 a 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. ***Submission Dates and Times***

Applications are due no later than *September 14, 2026, 23:59, AST*

5. ***Funding Restrictions***

i. **Prohibition on For-Profit Sub-Awards:**
Because this program is funded under Public Diplomacy Smith-Mundt resources (CFDA 19.040), specific statutory restrictions apply to the delivery modality of the funds. No funds awarded under this agreement may be made available to issue sub-grants, sub-awards, or direct financial assistance to commercial, for-profit entities, or for-profit educational institutions. This restriction applies across all tiers of the project lifecycle, including the selection of tripartite partners. For-profit organizations and commercial firms may only participate in this program as vendors providing commercial goods or professional services via standard procurement subcontracts, or by contributing their own voluntary cost-share.

ii. **Venture Capital and Commercial Seed Funding Prohibition:**
In accordance with Public Diplomacy program guidelines, federal funds cannot be used to provide direct capital, loans, or seed funding for commercial ventures, startups, or for-profit businesses launched by program participants. The award funding is to be used

strictly for academic, technical, or curriculum development, and creating technical roadmaps or standards briefs.

iii. Hardware and Software Purchase Restrictions:

Federal award funds must be used strictly for direct programmatic execution and cannot be used for capital expenditures or the procurement of permanent information technology (IT) infrastructure. Grant funds cannot be used to purchase high-end computing servers, specialized AI processing hardware, or standalone commercial software licenses for the permanent ownership or general operational use of the recipient or technical partners. Budget items for hardware and software are strictly limited to temporary configurations, cloud-based computing credits, or standard participant supplies (such as standard computing devices with a per-unit cost under $10,000) that are directly and exclusively utilized by selected beneficiaries during the active project phases.

iv. 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).

v. 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:

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

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

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

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

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

vii. 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:

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1) To the best of the Recipient's knowledge, neither the Recipient, nor any subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor of the Recipient or any agent of the recipient or of such a subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor, is engaged in any of the activities described in 2 CFR 175.105(a);

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

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

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

viii. 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.].

6. *Other Submission Requirements*

All application materials must be submitted by email to *Riyadhgrants*@state.gov

F. Application Review Information

1. *Review Criteria*

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

Quality and Feasibility of the Program Idea – 25 points: The program idea must be well-developed, demonstrating a logical, integrated flow across the four phases of the project cycle.

The proposal must show a realistic timeline, a clear plan to coordinate partnership networks, and a deep understanding of the U.S. and Saudi academic and commercial landscapes.

Saudi Partnership Strategy and Engagement Plan 20 points: Reviewers will evaluate the credibility, feasibility, and depth of the applicant's strategy to engage key Saudi institutions. High-scoring proposals will demonstrate pre-existing relationships or clear alignment with regional Saudi universities whose academic or research portfolios directly support Vision 2030 and shared U.S.–Saudi strategic priorities (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, critical minerals, cybersecurity, emerging technologies, and workforce development). Points will be awarded based on the specific operational clarity of partner roles, the extent of faculty-to-faculty collaboration, and the concrete utility of the proposed partnership mechanism.

Organizational Capacity and Record on Previous Grants – 15 points: The applicant must demonstrate expert capabilities in managing international academic and corporate networks, administering competitive award funding programs, and maintaining robust internal controls to safely manage federal funds and monitor project teams.

Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Objectives – 15 points: Goals and objectives must be clearly aligned with UNITE's objectives. Points are awarded for innovative methods in lowering institutional barriers to entry for U.S. universities and firms, and the use of effective transition tools.

Budget – 15 points: The budget narrative must be detailed, reasonable, and competitive. Evaluators will closely examine cost-effectiveness and scalability across the two mandatory budget scenarios: Scenario A (managing 4 active partnerships) and Scenario B (managing 5 active partnerships).

Monitoring, evaluation, and sustainability plan – 10 points: The application must include a comprehensive Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) featuring clear output and outcome indicators. Proposals must demonstrate a realistic approach to verifying project team 1:1 cost-share matches and ensuring a 100% transition rate of the networks into self-sustaining pathways.

Sustainability – 10 points: Program activities will continue to have positive impact after the end of the program.

2. *Indirect Costs and Tie-Breaking Mechanisms*

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). If a tie remains, the U.S. Embassy will utilize the availability, relevance, and strength of any proposed voluntary cost-sharing by the prime applicant as a secondary tie-breaking mechanism. This preference will only be applied as a tie-breaking mechanism and does not supersede the primary evaluation criteria.

3. ***Review and Selection Process***
   A review committee will evaluate all eligible applications. Final selection decisions rest with the Grants Officer, subject to funding availability and alignment with U.S. Mission strategic priorities.

4. ***Risk Review and Program-Specific Risk Factors***
   Under the merit review as required by 2 CFR 200.206, prior to making a Federal Award the Department will review and consider the following risk factors:

   a. Financial stability
   b. Management systems and standards
   c. History of performance
   d. Audit reports and findings
   e. Ability to effectively implement requirements
   f. Data Security and Privacy Management: The applicant's ability to ensure secure data handling within the project team selection and reporting portals;
   g. Hardware and Supply Chain Compliance: Compliance with IT procurement rules and the absolute prohibition on utilizing parts/services from covered foreign entities;
   h. Duty of Care and Award Funding Oversight: Risk management of project team expenditures, ensuring compliance with federal tracking and reporting guidelines.

G. Award Notices

The award or cooperative agreement will be written, signed, awarded, and administered by the Grants Officer. The award agreement is the authorizing document, and it will be provided to the recipient for review and counter-signature. The recipient may only start incurring project expenses beginning on the start date shown on the award document signed by the Grants Officer.

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the discretion of the Department of State.

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.

Unsuccessful applicants: Unsuccessful applicants will be notified via email.

Payment Method:

Recipients will be required to request payments by completing form SF-270—Request for Advance or Reimbursement and submitting the form to the Grants Officer.

Recipients may not draw down funds without the affirmative authorization of the Department of State. In addition, recipients must submit, with each SF-270 payment request, a detailed explanation justifying the request.

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. These include:

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

- 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***

Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted. In addition, as a formal award milestone, the prime recipient must submit copies of each project team's final curriculum, technical roadmap, or standards brief directly to the Embassy.

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

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

Guidelines for Budget Justification
Personnel and Fringe Benefits: Describe the wages, salaries, and benefits of temporary or permanent staff who will be working directly for the applicant on the program, and the percentage of their time that will be spent on the program.

Travel: Estimate the costs of travel and per diem for this program, for program staff, consultants or speakers, and participants/beneficiaries. If the program involves international travel, include a brief statement of justification for that travel.

Equipment: Describe any machinery, furniture, or other personal property that is required for the program, which has a useful life of more than one year (or a life longer than the duration of the program), and costs at least $10,000 per unit.

Supplies: List and describe all the items and materials, including any computer devices, that are needed for the program. If an item costs more than $10,000 per unit, then put it in the budget under Equipment.

Contractual: Describe goods and services that the applicant plans to acquire through a contract with a vendor. Also describe any sub-awards to non-profit partners that will help carry out the program activities.

Other Direct Costs: Describe other costs directly associated with the program, which do not fit in the other categories. For example, shipping costs for materials and equipment or applicable taxes. All “Other” or “Miscellaneous” expenses must be itemized and explained.

Indirect Costs: These are costs that cannot be linked directly to the program activities, such as overhead costs needed to help keep the organization operating. If your organization has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA) and includes NICRA charges in the budget, attach a copy of your latest NICRA. Organizations that have never had a NICRA may request indirect costs of 15% of Modified Total Direct Costs as defined in 2 CFR 200.1.

“Cost Sharing” refers to contributions from the organization or other entities other than the U.S. Embassy. It also includes in-kind contributions such as volunteers’ time and donated venues.

Alcoholic Beverages: Please note that award funds cannot be used for alcoholic beverages.