

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES, GOALS, AND IMPLEMENTATION (POGI)

## FY 2026 Future Leaders Exchange Global (FLEX Global)

### Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0018219

### Office of Citizen Exchanges, Youth Programs Division

The POGI guidelines apply specifically to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) solicitation issued by the Office of Citizen Exchanges' Youth Programs Division for the FY 2026 FLEX Global program. Proposals must conform to the solicitation, the guidelines in this document, and the standard Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI). Any application not adhering to these conditions may be deemed technically ineligible.

These guidelines are **in addition to** the requirements outlined in the solicitation and PSI. In the event of a discrepancy between documents, the solicitation takes precedence.

#### I. STATEMENT OF WORK

FLEX Global builds on the 34-year legacy of the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program and the 24-year legacy of the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program by expanding participation beyond specific world regions to a flexible, global model. The program advances U.S. interests by developing a network of young leaders who understand and support U.S. leadership and excellence, and that focuses on entrepreneurship, innovation, civic engagement, and leadership. Each year, up to 150 American high school participants will study abroad and up to 1,200 foreign high school participants will study in the United States. All participants live with host families, attend high school, and engage in leadership and American Excellence enhancement activities.

Applicants may apply for one or both of the following program components:

- **Administrative Component:** Oversee overseas operations, recruit and select inbound and outbound participants, manage travel logistics, maintain databases and websites, coordinate alumni activities and program-wide events, arrange host family and school placements for outbound participants and ensure overall program coordination.
- **Placement Component:** Arrange host family and school placements for inbound foreign participants in the U.S., organize regional “American Excellence” enhancement activities, and provide ongoing monitoring and support.

ECA anticipates awarding one cooperative agreement for the Administrative Component and six to ten for the Placement Component. Eligible organizations may apply for one or both components but must submit separate proposals for each.

Applicants for the Placement Component may not request participants from specific countries. The Administrative Component recipient will assign participants from a range of countries and regions to each Placement Component recipient.

## **II. PROGRAM SPECIFIC GUIDELINES**

All recipients - Administrative and Placement Component awardees - must meet the following requirements throughout the period of performance.

### 1. Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

Develop and enforce protocols to protect personally identifiable information (PII) of applicants, participants, alumni, host families, staff, and volunteers. Ensure staff handling PII take necessary trainings and comply with legal, regulatory, and Department of State privacy requirements. Take prompt action if you discover or suspect a breach of PII protocols, including conducting fact-finding to gather all relevant information. Cooperate with ECA’s Grants Office to escalate and address any data exposure.

### 2. Branding and Communications

Brand all materials as U.S. Department of State programs and follow ECA Communications Guidance in all official documents and promotional materials. Coordinate material development with ECA and obtain clearances before publication and distribution. Unless ECA grants a waiver, display the American flag and U.S.

Department of State seal on all materials. The Bureau retains copyright and may distribute program-related materials. If permitted, coordinate information for program websites with FLEX Global recipients and ECA.

### 3. Online Presence: Social Media (if permitted), Mobile Technologies, and Department of State

#### Online Communities

Dedicate staff to coordinate and maintain program websites, market the program online, disseminate information to U.S. and foreign audiences, and provide an application (if secure) and resource tool for participants. Develop and implement strategies to use mobile technologies and social media to promote the programs.

#### *U.S. Department of State Web Resources*

Support ECA promotional campaigns by providing updated information and materials. In consultation with ECA's Program Office and in coordination with Alumni Affairs and Web and Social Media teams, develop and implement strategies to leverage mobile and online technologies, as well as the Department's digital properties, such as the International Exchange Alumni website and social media platforms, to promote the program, enhance in-person exchanges, and engage alumni.

Ensure all staff, program personnel, and volunteers associated with the FLEX Global program understand Department of State resources, including [alumni.state.gov](http://alumni.state.gov), and facilitate member registration on the website.

### 4. Financial Management

Manage fiscal data and accounting for award funding as required by federal law, including cost-sharing and any funds provided to approved sub-award recipients, as applicable.

### 5. U.S. Department of State Consultation

Work closely with the ECA Program Office to carry out all aspects of the program. During periods of heightened activity, anticipate daily communication to coordinate efforts and share information. Clearly delineate points of contact for various functions and establish appropriate chains of communication for any situation.

## 6. Information Management

Maintain a participant placement database which is accessible to ECA and all FLEX Global recipient organizations for quick information uploads. Track applicants from recruitment through selection, placement, and transition to alumni status. Regularly update the database to ensure accurate reporting and share data in formats compatible with ECA databases. Allow staff to access records only on a need-to-know basis and restrict disclosure of sensitive PII to authorized individuals in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974 and Department of State policies. Update official records only when necessary and as part of staff's official duties.

## 7. ECA Youth Programs Annual Meeting

Send one or two program representatives to participate in the ECA Youth Programs Annual Meeting, which will take place over two days in Washington, D.C. in early 2027.

### **III. ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **The Administrative Component recipient will:**

- Recruit, select, orient, and arrange travel for FLEX Global outbound (FLEX Global Abroad) participants. Liaise with natural parents, support alumni, organize American Excellence activities (which may include visits to American businesses, sporting events, or leadership enhancement activities), and place, monitor, and support participants overseas. Recruitment and selection processes should be transparent, thorough, and merit based.
- Recruit, select, orient, and arrange travel for FLEX Global inbound participants, and liaise with natural parents. Use a merit-based recruitment and selection process that includes English language testing.
- In coordination with ECA and recipients of the Placement Component, prepare and implement guidelines for program operations, including handling participant issues, managing early returns, overseeing public communications, and facilitating information sharing.
- Market the program, manage social media, and maintain a database to track all applicants.
- Ensure participants' health, safety and welfare.

- Organize American Innovation and Leadership workshops in Washington, D.C. for selected inbound participants and all FLEX Global Abroad participants (described below in more detail).
- Coordinate the overall program with ECA and recipients of the Placement Component.
- Organize and implement a “Capstone Challenge” for all participants.
- Coordinate alumni activities in the United States for FLEX Global Abroad participants and overseas for FLEX Global participants.
- Monitor and evaluate the program.
- If your proposal includes sub-awardees, organize an annual in person or virtual FLEX Global implementers conference, if necessary, for both inbound and outbound programming
- The Administrative Component recipient may designate sub-awardees to recruit inbound participants, liaise with U.S. embassies, manage recruitment and selection, coordinate travel logistics, communicate with natural families, and implement alumni programming. Sub-awardees may also manage FLEX Global Abroad responsibilities, including liaising with U.S. embassies, securing host family and school placements, monitoring participants, providing orientations for host families and participants, and organizing American Excellence enhancement activities throughout the academic year.

### 1. Coordination with Embassies

Establish and maintain positive, effective working relationships between all overseas program representatives and the Office of Public Affairs/Public Affairs Section (OPA/PAS) at each U.S. embassy or consulate. Meet with OPA/PAS within 30 days of award to discuss recruitment priorities and, if applicable, placement processes for FLEX Global Abroad participants. Promptly notify ECA of any embassy requests that impact budget or capacity, and submit meeting summaries to the ECA Program Office as requested.

Facilitate Public Diplomacy (PD) involvement in recruitment, selection, orientations, American Excellence enhancement and alumni activities, briefings, and joint activities for FLEX Global participants, as determined through ongoing discussions. During program planning, discuss and obtain PD concurrence on FLEX Global Abroad participant placements, including host family locations and other long-term accommodations.

Maintain an open, consultative relationship with PD contacts and the ECA Program Office, with at least monthly PD contact regarding recruitment, selection, security, travel, participant issues, invitations to events, and other relevant matters. Inform PD contacts and ECA of participant successes. If political conditions limit program activities in a country, make special provisions to continue program functions efficiently and cost-effectively.

## 2. Overseas Infrastructure and Communications

The ongoing communications with natural parents, follow-on activities with alumni, and relations with foreign government officials all require that your organization and any sub-awardees maintain a consistent presence in participant countries.

## 3. Issue DS-2019 Forms and Adhere to J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program Regulations

Designate an Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) and a backup to ensure compliance with all relevant Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requirements. Issue DS-2019 forms for international participants and alternates, as all international participants will travel on a U.S. government designation for the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor program. Create and update inbound participants' SEVIS status and maintain all SEVIS records. Submit placement reports and change of placement reports to ECA's Youth Programs Division's Responsible Officer. Provide assistance to ECA with SEVIS-related matters as requested.

## 4. Program and Promotional Materials

Design and develop materials to support all program components and inform program participants overseas and in the United States. Create application forms, participant, host family, and school administrator handbooks, operational guidelines, and predeparture orientation materials. Develop additional materials as requested by ECA and update existing materials to address changing needs.

## 5. Medical Screening

Arrange for in-country medical review, consulting with medical professionals, if necessary, before finalists leave their home countries, to ensure participants are healthy and have the necessary immunizations for program participation. Review medical documents in the United States to confirm all requirements have been met. Identify and inform the ECA Program Office of any participant pre-existing physical or mental health conditions that may affect insurability and participant support in the United States. For any participants with disabilities, conduct a special review that

includes ECA staff and a medical doctor, to confirm that applicants with disabilities are medically fit to travel and participate in the program.

## 6. Travel

Arrange roundtrip international airline tickets from participants' home communities in all designated countries to their host communities, and assist with obtaining passports and visas. Ensure travel is efficient, cost-effective, and compliant with the Fly America Act and all USG travel regulations. Select and train adult flight leaders to manage groups of teenage travelers, prioritizing staff or alumni who can also serve as trainers and facilitators at orientations or represent the FLEX Global program at events.

Develop detailed written travel procedures for inbound participants, incorporating input from domestic Placement Component recipients (referred to as Placement Organizations or POs). Specify group flight scheduling, participant assignments, date-change processing, and itinerary distribution. Ensure travel includes domestic segments outside main capital cities and provide full roundtrip itineraries. Clearly explain domestic travel obligations and deadlines for submitting arrival airport codes. Describe participant support while en route, including airport staffing and emergency communication procedures.

Coordinate travel for participants unable to travel with escorted groups, including those repatriated early. Budget for escorted travel for approximately twelve early-returning participants when necessary for health, behavior, or security reasons. Coordinate all travel dates with ECA before finalizing arrangements with travel agencies or venues.

### *Participant Travel Documents*

Obtain, and retain for three years, copies of the following documents for each program participant:

- Name/photo page of international passport.
- Visa page in passport.
- DS-2019 with stamp issued at U.S. port of entry (for FLEX Global inbound participants).

## 7. Participant and Alumni Highlights

Provide timely reports of significant participant and alumni accomplishments demonstrating program impact.

#### 8. On-Program Participant Support Liaison

Designate a staff member or members as a “Participant Support Liaison” to serve as the primary point of contact for ECA on all FLEX Global participant support issues. Use the liaison as a communication channel between the POs and the Administrative Component implementer for FLEX Global inbound students. Consult with ECA Program staff regarding this role.

Designate a staff member to take primary responsibility for working with participants with disabilities. This staff member will develop a strategy and build staff expertise in supporting participants and alumni with disabilities. Provide resources and oversee the identification and procurement of reasonable accommodations, including equipment, materials, and services. Develop training opportunities for program implementers, coordinate placement needs assessments for POs, and coordinate participant orientation upon arrival.

#### 9. Communication of Participant Concerns

Provide on-program support for FLEX Global Abroad participants and maintain communication with natural families and overseas placement partners. For international participants, coordinate with POs to communicate information about participants’ well-being to their natural families. Ensure all efforts comply with Federal Regulations as outlined in 22 CFR 62 and closely coordinate with ECA’s Program Office.

Immediately report to the ECA Program Office or monitoring unit any situation that affects a participant’s safety, health, or well-being, or any disciplinary action at the second warning or probation level that could result in repatriation. Only the ECA Youth Programs Division may decide to terminate a program and repatriate a participant. Do not inform participants of program termination or repatriation without specific instructions from the ECA Program Office.

#### 10. Communication with Natural Families

Communicate and liaise with participants’ natural families throughout the program year. Inform families promptly of any problems that arise with the participant, including academic deficiencies, behavioral concerns, health and safety issues,

transfers to a new host family or school, and any situations that may require early termination from the program. Provide on-program support for participants, staff, and volunteers when addressing issues with natural parents.

#### 11. Participant Photo and Video Usage

Request and maintain documentation of permission from each participant and their natural family (if a minor) to take and reproduce photographic or video images in ECA-approved printed and electronic promotional materials.

#### 12. Alumni Programming Coordination

Organize and facilitate alumni activities that promote FLEX Global program goals, and coordinate alumni participation and travel as needed. Provide opportunities and training for alumni to reinforce skills learned during the program and apply them at home. Maintain a database to track alumni that is compatible with ECA's database systems and share it with the State Alumni Office and the respective U.S. embassies. Collaborate with organizations conducting other ECA-funded workshops or programs for FLEX Global participants or alumni. Inform participants and alumni about ECA's International Exchange Alumni website and provide instructions for registration. Support alumni in maintaining or, where feasible, assist returned participants in forming FLEX Global Alumni associations to help organize their efforts.

#### *Alumni Engagement Requirements*

Develop and deliver additional activities, as resources allow, to keep alumni engaged and encourage them to share their U.S. experiences.

### **Additional Administrative Component Recipient Responsibilities:**

#### A. Recruitment and Selection

Develop an outreach plan that aligns with the U.S. mission's country-specific interests and supports recruitment of a participant pool that broadly reflects the country. Conduct outreach at any time during the award period. As mentioned, recruit, screen, and select FLEX Global inbound finalists and alternates through an open, transparent, merit-based competition. Establish a standard recruitment and selection process for all countries and maintain applicant and participant statistics at

each stage. Use uniform application forms across all countries, separating any country-specific requirements. Do not charge application fees.

Verify that all finalists meet age, academic, and English proficiency requirements for U.S. high school enrollment. Select finalists who are citizens or permanent residents of their respective countries; obtain ECA approval or guidance for non-citizens and permanent residents. If budget or security concerns limit recruitment, consult with the U.S. embassy to focus efforts on major population centers or specific regions. Develop contingency plans for recruitment in countries with challenging governments.

*Criteria for FLEX Global Inbound Participants:*

- a. Applicants must be citizens or permanent residents of the country where they apply.
- b. Applicants must be ages 15 to 18.5 at the program start date; each country may set specific age requirements based on local educational system restrictions.
- c. Applicants must demonstrate sufficient ability to speak and study in English. The recipient must use English language testing resources, understand general levels required for U.S. high school admission, and establish minimum test scores for all selected participants.
- d. Give preference to applicants who have spent more than 50% of the last five years in the country of application.
- e. Give preference to applicants who have not previously studied in the United States.
- f. Require applicants to commit to cultural immersion in the United States through a home-stay experience.
- g. Select applicants who are mature, responsible, independent, confident, thoughtful, and inquisitive.
- h. Require applicants to plan for sharing their U.S. experience with their home school and community upon return.

B. Support of Participants with Disabilities

Provide necessary support and accommodation for selected participants with disabilities. Participants with disabilities may receive reasonable accommodations for testing. Ensure that orientations and other pre- and post-program activities include reasonable accommodations.

Coordinate participant assignments with each domestic PO to ensure that they have the resources and capacity to place and support them. Provide each domestic PO with written, detailed, and accurate support and accommodations needs assessment results for each participant prior to their travel. Serve as a resource through the year in providing funds for reasonable accommodations, guidance, and assistance to domestic POs in meeting these participants' needs.

#### C. Pre-Travel Documentation

Assist all FLEX Global inbound participants with pre-travel paperwork in coordination with the respective U.S. embassies. Work with the U.S. embassy in each country to ensure timely processing of U.S. visas for all participants.

#### D. Coordinate Participant Information and Assign to POs

Develop and implement a plan to distribute finalist documentation to domestic PO organizations equitably, transparently, and promptly, considering factors such as sex, age, country of origin, and disabilities. Ensure overseas partners have access to placement information about host families and schools. Throughout the exchange, coordinate with POs to oversee and update changes in school or family addresses and local coordinator assignments in the program database. Report these changes to ECA within ten days or as required by J-1 regulations.

#### E. Pre-Departure Orientations

Provide uniform pre-departure orientation (PDO) programming to prepare participants for life in the United States. Ensure uniformity to reinforce participants' identity as U.S. government exchange program recipients and to deliver essential information, policies, and procedures for their success. Cover topics such as living with a host family, American high school education, American Excellence activities, American culture and respecting cultural differences, participant safety and available resources, sexual harassment and resources, obeying rules, personal responsibility, realistic expectations, mental health, on-program participant support, budgeting, and engagement in community activities.

Invite U.S. embassy personnel to PDOs with sufficient notice. If security concerns prevent your organization from conducting PDO sessions in a country, arrange for U.S. embassy staff, a neighboring country, or—with ECA approval—in the United

States after participants arrive, to conduct the orientations. Provide orientations for natural parents before participants depart for the United States.

Distribute domestic PO-specific materials before or during the PDO.

#### F. American Innovation and Leadership Workshops

Develop and conduct four to five-day workshops in Washington, D.C. for competitively selected inbound and all outbound Abroad participants on American innovation and leadership themes. The four-five days should include arrival and departure. Cover topics such as federalism, entrepreneurship, innovation, and visits to American businesses. Include monument tours and visits to Congress and ECA. Coordinate dates with ECA. Involve several alumni as mentors to enhance the experience. Implement a mechanism to assess the workshop's impact and contribution to FLEX Global objectives. Provide a separate cost explanation for this component in the budget narrative.

#### G. Capstone Challenge

Develop and implement a Capstone Challenge for inbound and outbound participants that aligns with administration priorities. Coordinate with ECA for approval.

#### H. End-of Year Combined Re-Entry Workshops

If funding allows, develop and implement multi-country re-entry workshops in the Washington, D.C. area at the end of the exchange year. Include meetings with U.S. Department of State and other government officials, and cover topics such as reverse culture shock, State Department alumni programs, potential embassy programs, and skills and leadership development for effective FLEX Global alumni. Coordinate dates with ECA's Program Office before reserving facilities or planning agendas to ensure official guests can meet with participants.

#### I. Organize FLEX Global implementers conference

During the award period, organize an in-person or virtual conference for overseas implementers to discuss program procedures and best practices. Those participating may be staff of the recipient organization and/or sub-awardees.

#### *Specific Responsibilities for outbound FLEX Global Abroad Program*

### A. U.S. Marketing

Develop and implement a comprehensive outreach and marketing plan for recruitment, including a program and application website and printed informational materials and handbooks. Conduct outreach at any time during the award period. Provide informational materials to domestic POs upon request. While domestic POs do not handle recruitment, ECA encourages them to distribute information and materials about the FLEX Global Abroad program.

### B. FLEX Global-specific Staff/Volunteer Training and Orientation

Ensure all overseas implementing partner staff and volunteers who have regular contact with FLEX Global Abroad participants complete suitability screening and training. Design the training to equip them with methods and tools for monitoring, supporting, and counseling participants, host families, and school personnel, with sensitivity to cross-cultural issues. Ensure the training covers the goals, expectations, and requirements of the FLEX Global Abroad program. Develop proper reporting procedures and ensure staff and volunteers understand their roles in communicating participant and placement concerns.

### C. Recruitment

Develop an extensive, nationwide, merit-based recruitment and selection process to attract strong U.S. applicants. Maintain statistics at all stages, including initial applications received, full applications with essays, and interviews conducted.

### D. Selection

Select finalists and alternates from a broad pool of candidates. Use a fair and objective multi-stage process to evaluate applications and select participants.

### *Criteria for FLEX Global Abroad Students*

- a. Applicant must be a U.S. citizen.
- b. Applicants must be at least 15 years old and no older than 18.5 years at the program start date. Specific countries may set a narrower age range based on local high school and Ministry of Education requirements.
- c. Applicant may not be a family member of U.S. Department of State employees or of award recipient employees whose official duties involve ECA Youth Programs Division-funded programs.
- d. Applicant demonstrates maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude.

- e. Applicant commits to cultural immersion in a host culture through a home-stay experience.
- f. Applicant expresses interest in learning the predominant language of the host culture.
- g. Applicant demonstrates the ability to meet cross-cultural challenges with maturity, humor, and an open mind.
- h. Applicant can develop and articulate ideas and plans for sharing their overseas experience in their U.S. home school and community.

#### E. Pre-Exchange Participant Resources

Develop and distribute language and cultural resource packets to finalists upon their acceptance into the program. Ensure the materials clearly outline the goals and requirements of the FLEX Global Abroad program.

#### F. Passports and Visas

Coordinate with finalists and alternates to obtain all required documents, such as passports and visas, and facilitate the process as much as possible.

#### G. Pre-Program Orientations

Provide pre-program orientations before participants depart. Brief host institutions, staff, families, and participants on the FLEX Global Abroad program's purpose, foreign policy context, goals, expectations, rules, and practical information. Introduce personal and cultural adjustment issues and prepare participants to adapt to their host cultures. Train host country support staff to explain cultural differences Americans may face. Include a general overview of the host countries' political, historical, educational, and cultural backgrounds, program objectives and themes, and practical details. Prepare participants to encounter varied interpretations of U.S. policy and history while abroad.

#### H. Participant Tax Liabilities

Assume full responsibility for complying with all applicable tax treaties and for withholding and reporting Federal, State, and local taxes for American FLEX Global Abroad participants.

#### I. School Enrollment

Identify and enroll participants in private or public high schools that primarily serve host country nationals and hold accreditation from the host country's Ministry of

Education. Include tuition, room, and board costs in dormitories in your budget if needed, with prior ECA approval. If the only suitable school requires dormitory living during the week, place participants in this setting and ensure the in-country partner identifies a suitable family to host them on weekends and holidays, providing a meaningful cultural family experience.

#### J. Host Family Placement and Orientation

Develop a plan to monitor participants' safety and welfare that aligns, as closely as possible, with J-1 visa standards for international academic year participants in 22 CFR 62. This includes identifying and using appropriate methods to verify the integrity and suitability of each host family.

Include reasonable stipend payments to host families in your budget to cover actual food and hosting expenses. Obtain approval from the Public Affairs Section of the relevant U.S. embassy and from ECA for the city and neighborhood of all host family and dormitory housing arrangements. Provide a pre-arrival orientation for host families that covers program goals, policies, and cultural information to support adjustment and cross-cultural communication.

#### K. Placement Reports

Provide ECA with confirmation that embassies concur with the general school and housing placement strategy and location well in advance of the program and before engaging significantly with prospective host families and schools. Submit a detailed electronic placement report to ECA before FLEX Global Abroad participants depart. Include country placement maps, the names of all FLEX Global Abroad participants, their host country, host family names and addresses, host school names, and language of instruction.

#### L. Arrival Orientation, Including Safety and Security Briefing

Organize an in-country arrival orientation within one month of participants' arrival. Address program policies, procedures, and rules, as well as your organization's procedures for communicating with participants and for monitoring and supporting their exchange, with sensitivity to cultural issues unique to this exchange population and host country. Ensure participants understand the goals, expectations, and requirements of the FLEX Global Abroad Program as outlined in this document.

Contact the U.S. embassy or consulate well in advance of participants' arrival to arrange for PD participation in the orientation and, if possible, a security briefing by the embassy's Regional Security Officer or another U.S. embassy official. Inform participants of relevant local and country-specific information, including personal and general safety considerations and emergency services the embassy offers to American citizens. Ensure participants and their parents or legal guardians complete relevant consular forms and register in the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at <https://step.state.gov/step/>.

#### M. In-Country Language Program

Evaluate participants' language needs in each country and provide language instruction to support their success in school, with host families, and in the community. Offer FLEX Global Abroad participants a minimum two-week intensive language program upon arrival. Continue language and cultural education courses as needed throughout the program. Offer individual language tutoring beyond the first semester if needed or requested. Request funding as necessary for tutors or instructors, meeting space, participant travel and lodging for language courses, language learning materials, online courses, and other resources.

#### N. American Excellence Enhancement Activities

Design, plan, and implement an intensive and substantive extracurricular American Excellence enhancement program for FLEX Global Abroad participants focused on leadership development, community activities, and business and entrepreneurship. Engage participants in leadership activities throughout the program. Arrange visits to U.S. businesses and, if possible, American Chambers of Commerce in the host country. Prepare, encourage, and track participants as they share their experiences after returning to the United States.

#### O. Participant -Support and Monitoring

Maintain at least monthly personal contact with FLEX Global Abroad participants and host families during the program. Ensure schools have contact information for the local organization representative and the program sponsor's main office. Immediately report to ECA any situation affecting participant safety, health, or well-being, as well as any incident or allegation of sexual exploitation, harassment, or abuse. Promptly inform ECA of any serious problem or controversy that could bring notoriety to the Department or the program.

Provide ECA with a monthly summary of each participant's adjustment, activities, and well-being. Develop a reporting system that includes: 1) a brief monthly summary of program activities, challenges, and accomplishments; 2) an objective assessment of each participant's adjustment and progress; and 3) a monthly participant survey, which they must complete and submit themselves. Obtain ECA approval for the system and survey questions.

Ensure in-country representatives regularly monitor participants and provide adequate support and guidance. Representatives must maintain at least monthly contact with participants and host families, address concerns promptly, and keep ECA informed of significant issues. Maintain all records and data, including survey responses and contact information, for at least three years and provide them to ECA upon request.

#### P. Mid-Year and End-of-Year Orientation

Plan and implement Mid-Year and End-of-Year orientations in each country to monitor participant progress, address needs, and provide leadership, teambuilding, and other American Excellence enhancement activities.

For Mid-Year Orientation, meet with all FLEX Global Abroad participants halfway through their exchange to assess progress, reinforce cultural understanding, review communication protocols, and update program policies, rules, and health and safety resources.

For End-of-Year Orientation, prepare participants to conclude their exchange and re-enter their home communities. Provide information on FLEX Global Abroad Program alumni resources and opportunities and discuss individual plans for possible alumni projects.

#### Q. Insurance

Enroll FLEX Global Abroad participants in ECA's ASPE health benefits plan or another comparable plan that meets required standards, including emergency medical evacuation and repatriation coverage, for the duration of the exchange.

#### R. Cell Phones

Provide FLEX Global Abroad participants with a cell phone and minutes for use in emergencies, if needed.

### S. Stipends

Provide each FLEX Global Abroad participant with a monthly stipend of up to \$200, based on the local cost of living, to cover pocket money, incidentals, and other expenses.

## **IV. PLACEMENT COMPONENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Placement Component Recipients will:

- Recruit American host families, place participants in host families and schools, and ensure the health, safety, and well-being of inbound participants. Include a plan in your proposal to place and monitor at least 30 participants in the United States.
- Coordinate with the recipient of the Administrative Component and ECA.
- Organize regional American Excellence enhancement activities on topics such as commercial diplomacy, entrepreneurship, innovation, leadership, and engaging with Americans.

### **Responsibilities include:**

#### 1. Participant Materials

Prepare organization-specific participant materials for distribution by the Administrative Component recipient during Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO). Submit all required materials, as listed in 22 CFR 62, to the Administrative Component award recipient by May 1, 2027. Clearly identify participants as U.S. Department of State FLEX Global participants.

#### 2. Marketing

Develop promotional and marketing materials that clearly identify FLEX Global as a U.S. Department of State program. Obtain additional FLEX Global marketing materials from the Administrative Component recipient.

#### 3. Host Families

Recruit, screen, select, and secure host families before participants depart their home countries. Ensure all practices comply with Exchange Visitor Program regulations for secondary school students (22 CFR 62.25) at a minimum. Proposals

detailing compliance and oversight of local coordinators will be more competitive. Contact the FLEX Global Program Office with questions about regulations.

#### 4. Host Schools

Secure enrollment in accredited secondary educational institutions for the participants prior to departures from their home countries. POs' practices and procedures for placing FLEX Global participants in secondary schools must meet the Exchange Visitor Program regulations for the secondary school student category (22 CFR 62.25). Encourage school administrators to utilize participants as resources in the classroom and community. Discuss options for extracurricular activities that correlate with FLEX Global goals (e.g., Student Council, Junior Achievement, Future Business Leaders of America, volunteer opportunities).

Due to cultural sensitivities, POs must obtain ECA concurrence and approval from participants and natural parents before placing in religious schools. POs must request ECA concurrence to utilize award funds for private school tuition. Home schooling and long-term virtual schooling are not allowed; a school may, however, temporarily move to a virtual format to safeguard public health during the period the participant is enrolled. POs must inform ECA if participants are placed in other non-traditional schools, such as charter or non-religious private schools.

#### 5. Clustering

ECA encourages placements in all 50 states and the District of Columbia in a wide range of rural, urban, and suburban settings. POs that choose to cluster all or most of their participants will be deemed more competitive under the Program Planning and Ability to Achieve Program Aims and Purpose review criterion. A cluster is defined as a minimum of three ECA-funded exchange participants who live within reasonable proximity and can be brought together for activities that address common ECA-funded program themes (e.g., orientations and American Excellence activities).

ECA-funded exchange participants are identified as those participating in FLEX Global or the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) programs. Applicants are expected to cluster a minimum of 60% of their placements. Multiple local coordinators may work together to form a cluster. Applicants must describe how local staff and volunteers will provide non-clustered exchange participants with the benefits of orientations and American Excellence enhancement activities.

## 6. Participants with Disabilities

Include in your proposal a plan to place, monitor, and support participants with disabilities, help them adjust, and secure necessary resources and accommodation as required by law. Separate funding is available through the Administrative Component award, and POs must coordinate reasonable accommodation expenses with the Administrative Components recipient.

## 7. Trainings/Orientations

Plan and conduct the following trainings and orientations, and include sample outlines in your proposal appendix:

*FLEX Global-specific Staff/Volunteer Training and Orientation:* Train all employees, local coordinators, volunteers, and third parties involved in Placement Component awards on FLEX Global program goals, expectations, J-1 visa requirements, and cross-cultural issues. Describe your training and knowledge-review plan in your proposal and report on its implementation in semi-annual performance reports. ECA will include your local coordinator training data in annual compliance reporting.

*Host Family Orientation:* Prior to the participants' arrival, conduct an in-person FLEX Global-specific orientation for all screened and selected host families and provide them with the information and reference materials necessary to host and support a FLEX Global participant.

(Note: Previous interviews during the screening and selection process do not constitute this FLEX Global-specific orientation.) The Program Office recommends that orientations for FLEX Global host families either be held separately from those for other host families or include a dedicated session, ensuring adequate attention to program-related and cross-cultural issues.

*Arrival Orientation for Participants:* Your practices and procedures for the FLEX Global participant arrival orientation must meet the general J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program regulations and the Secondary School Student category-specific orientation requirements. Orientations should take place within one month of the participants' arrival and address the PO's policies, procedures, and rules, as well as the PO's procedures for communicating with participants and for monitoring and supporting their exchange, with sensitivity to cultural issues specific to this exchange

population. The orientations must ensure understanding of the goals, expectations, and requirements of the FLEX Global program as explained in this NOFO. ECA strongly recommends that participant orientations be conducted in person.

*Mid-Year Orientation:* Arrange a mid-year orientation to meet with all FLEX Global participants approximately halfway through their exchange programs, preferably in January. The purpose of this meeting is to assess their progress in achieving program and personal goals and to provide the necessary assistance to enable them to meet these goals.

*Re-entry Training:* Prepare participants to bring closure to their American exchange experiences and prepare them for re-entry to their home countries. Ensure participants receive relevant information about FLEX Global alumni opportunities in their respective countries and discuss individual plans for possible alumni projects. Note: Alumni activities are coordinated in the participants' countries by the Administrative Component award recipient.

#### 8. Participant Monitoring and Support

ECA employs Participant Monitoring Specialists who oversee the health and safety of all FLEX Global participants during their time in the United States. POs must work closely with ECA's monitors on escalated cases and document these cases promptly. Ensure your participant monitoring practices and procedures comply with Exchange Visitor Program regulations for secondary school students (22 CFR 62.25). Follow additional guidance provided by ECA's Youth Programs Division in the Office of Citizen Exchanges.

#### *Participant Monitoring Guidance*

*Local Coordinators:* Local coordinators play a vital role in supporting each FLEX Global participant. As representatives of the PO living in the host community, they identify and vet host families, process host school enrollment, conduct orientations, and provide guidance and support to participants and host families throughout the program year, as required by J-1 visa regulations. Ensure each FLEX Global participant has access to a local coordinator within 120 miles of their host family home, in accordance with J-1 visa regulations. Local coordinators must report all placement changes and participant support concerns to the PO promptly, following Communication Guidance.

*Participant Progress:* Local coordinators monitor participants' academic progress, social adjustment, and involvement in community activities. Track exemplary achievements and other program-related endeavors in monthly contact reports.

*Reporting Systems:* Use reporting systems to distribute and collect monthly updates and reports that participants complete and submit themselves. Detail this system in your proposal. Proposals that outline strategies to achieve 100% participation will be more competitive under the Participant Monitoring review criterion. Use these monthly updates to identify and track issues. Promptly notify ECA and the Administrative Component award recipient of any problems, inconsistencies, or concerns identified from these updates.

*Participant Support:* Local coordinators identify when participants need additional support from their natural parents, peers, or other PO staff. They arrange counseling if needed, document the circumstances, and notify the PO, which will inform the Administrative Components award recipient to gain natural parent perspective or concurrence when necessary. POs also notify ECA as needed.

*Participant Disciplinary Process:* A three-step disciplinary and support process should be outlined in the event a participant requires counseling for behavioral or adjustment concerns. Examples of this include written warnings or letters of encouragement as a first step, a probation-level letter as the second, and an early return request as the third and final disciplinary consequence of continued support concerns. Proposals that include sample support letters and outline the disciplinary process will be more competitive.

*Early Returns:* If a situation requires an early return, provide ECA with thorough documentation to ensure participants, host families, and natural families are informed and consulted. Promptly prepare a clear and concise Incident Report detailing the circumstances, actions taken, and communication between parties. Share the report with the Administrative Component award recipient and ECA. Only ECA's Youth Programs Division may decide to terminate and repatriate a participant. Do not inform or imply to participants that their program will end or that they will be repatriated without explicit direction from the Youth Programs Division.

*Site Visits:* Full-time permanent employees or official designees from the PO's headquarters must conduct site visits to 20% of FLEX Global participants in their host

family and community environments, covering both clustered and non-clustered students. Submit site visit plans to ECA via the on-program support email: by September 30, 2027, for October–December visits, and by December 15, 2027, for January–June visits. ECA Participant Monitoring Unit members will also conduct site visits, and POs must assist with scheduling these monitoring visits throughout the program year.

*Communication Guidance:* Report to ECA any matters required by J-1 visa regulations, regardless of whether you are designated as a sponsor by the U.S. Department of State. Provide ECA's Participant Monitoring Unit with reports on all situations affecting the health, safety, or well-being of FLEX Global participants. Enter complete, accurate, and up-to-date placement information into the FLEX Global web-based database, including any host family or local coordinator changes, within 48 hours of the change.

#### 9. American Excellence Enhancement Activities

Conduct American Excellence enhancement activities and leadership development programs throughout the exchange, disbursing American Excellence funds in small increments during the year, with a budget of \$400 per participant. Do not use American Excellence funds for large, packaged sightseeing trips. Include debrief sessions in all activities to help participants discuss and analyze their experiences.

Design American Excellence activities to deepen participants' understanding of American culture, principles, and history. Expose participants to American excellence through briefings on government and the judicial system, freedom of speech, community programs, business and tech incubators, and sports activities.

Promptly share information from ECA about Department of State-initiated FLEX Global activities and any ad-hoc program-related events, such as online meetings or briefings, with all participants.

#### 10. Community Activities

Require FLEX Global participants to complete at least 30 hours of community activities during their program year. Assist participants in finding community activity opportunities in their areas of interest and provide them and their host families with clear guidelines on standards, requirements, and expectations, including:

- The minimum number of hours and types of acceptable community activities.

- The method you will use to monitor community activities.

### 11. Health Benefits Coverage

ECA offers the Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) benefits plan at no cost to POs. If you choose a different plan, you must show it provides coverage equal to or better than ASPE and meets 22 CFR 62.14 requirements. Coverage must start when participants leave their home countries and end upon their return. If you do not use ASPE, include your health policy and its cost in your proposal. Inform participants and their families in writing of any coverage limitations. For ASPE details, visit: <https://www.sevencorners.com/about/gov/usdos>.

### 12. Participant Financial and Gift Incentives

Require participants to engage in program activities such as orientations, cluster meetings, leadership activities, and cultural presentations. Do not request funds for monetary or material incentives for participation.

### 13. Program Impact Highlights

Regularly report participants' significant accomplishments and host community impact. Inform ECA of any publicity featuring the FLEX Global program or participants, especially engagements with government officials or media coverage. When media interact with participants, identify FLEX Global as a U.S. Department of State program.

### 14. Performance Reporting

Report your organization's successes and challenges in meeting program goals through two semi-annual reports and interim updates as requested. Submit semi-annual performance reports within 30 days of each reporting period, following guidelines from the FLEX Global Program Office and the award agreement. Describe your training and knowledge-review plan for J-1 visa requirements in your proposal and confirm its implementation in your reports. Submit a final program report within 120 days of the award's expiration or termination.

Placement Component recipients may designate sub-awardees to secure host family and school placements, monitor participants, provide orientations for host families and participants, support participants with disabilities, and deliver American Excellence enhancement activities throughout the academic year. If you use sub-awardees, your proposal must explain how you will mentor, train, oversee, and

provide additional monitoring for participants placed by sub-award recipients.

## **V. PROPOSAL CONTENTS**

Applicants must submit a complete and thorough proposal that addresses the program's objectives and requirements. Proposals should be clear, concise, and responsive to the criteria outlined in the solicitation and PSI.

Since there is no opportunity for applicants to meet with reviewing officials, the proposal should respond to the criteria set forth in the solicitation and other guidelines as clearly as possible.

**NOTE:** Proposals submitted through Grants.gov may only be submitted in the following formats:

- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Excel
- Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) - 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 Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>.
- ASCII Text
- Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG images)

## **VI. OTHER AWARD INFORMATION**

### **Adherence To All Regulations Governing the J Visa**

Proposals must demonstrate the applicant's capacity to meet all requirements governing the administration of Exchange Visitor (J) Programs as outlined in **22 CFR 62**. For more information, visit <http://j1visa.state.gov>.

## **VII. APPLICATION SUBMISSION**

The solicitation document specifies the deadline and method for proposal submission. **There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this deadline.**