

**Department of Commerce (DOC)
International Trade Administration
(ITA)**

**Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO):
U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program
Funding Opportunity Number: ITA-GMX-GTM-2025-00001**

Assistance Listing Number:	11.041
Solicitation Type:	Open Competition
Award Type:	Cooperative Agreement
Funding Ceiling:	\$545,000
Cost Sharing:	Not Required
Number of Awards:	One (1) award
Est. Project Start Date:	June 2025
Est. Project End Date:	December 2026
Period of Performance:	18 months
Application Deadline:	11:59 PM EST on March 6, 2025
Question Submission Deadline:	11:59 PM EST on March 1, 2025
Notification of Recommendation for Funding:	June 2025
Application Submission:	Electronic. Application must be submitted through www.grants.gov
Eligibility Applicants:	U.S.-based private, public, or state institutions of higher education.

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SECTION A: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Department of Commerce (DOC) International Trade Administration (ITA) announces a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to support programmatic, financial and administrative activities for the 2026 U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS) Pilot Fellowship Program. A cooperative agreement for up to \$545,000 U.S. Dollars (USD) will be awarded to an institution of higher education, subject to the availability of funds, for work that will support activities for the 2026 U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS) Pilot Fellowship Program.

A.1. Background

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program (“the Program”) was established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law No. 117-328) and is designed work with an institution of higher education to heighten students’ awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service through a summer enrichment program and a virtual Professional Development and Networking component.

The Department of Commerce may award a competitive grant to an institution of higher education as defined in 20 U.S.C. § 1001 to administer a program to award grants to students for the purpose of increasing the level of knowledge and awareness of and interest in employment with the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service, consistent with 22 U.S.C. § 3905. The Recipient will conduct broad national outreach advertising the Program, recruit applicants, request and review applications, and select Fellows.

Eligible entities applying to manage the program must meet the following requirements:

- Must be a U.S. accredited graduate institution which administers Master’s degrees in the fields of International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy.
- Staff employees with Human Resources backgrounds.
- Possess working familiarity with the Foreign Commercial Service.
- Possess at least three years’ experience of administering federal government educational federal financial assistance programs, particularly federal grants or cooperative agreements of a similar complex nature.

The Recipient will manage the Program, which encourages highly qualified students, including students from minority groups, to apply to be Fellows. Additionally, the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program provides an opportunity for Master’s degree students in the fields of International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy, to increase their level of knowledge and awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) and its vital role in promoting American exports and facilitating trade and commerce around the world. The Program also provides a pathway to

potential employment with the Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Global Markets.

The ITA will seek to ensure that Fellows represent a range of academic disciplines, geographies, and degrees sought, with additional consideration of academic achievement and the potential for satisfying the Foreign Commercial Service Assessment requirements.

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service recognizes the importance of having varied perspectives helps generate better ideas to solve the complex problems of a changing world. It also enables us to be effective stewards and reflect the communities in which we live, work, and play. As such, creating a culture that is welcoming and inclusive of all helps to ensure the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service is able to effectively execute on its mission of creating prosperity by strengthening the international competitiveness of U.S. industry, promoting trade and investment, and ensuring fair trade and compliance with trade laws and agreements.

The Program is being established under the International Trade Administration (ITA) and administered by the Recipient institution through a cooperative agreement with substantial involvement from ITA.

A.2. Program Description

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program provides outstanding candidates entering graduate school an up to eight-week overseas internship at a U.S. embassy, consulate, or mission. Recipients of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship will be required to participate in a mandatory one-week Office of Global Talent Management Orientation and Training in June of 2026.

This award will provide up to \$245,000 for the selection of up to seven Fellows including approved program expenses for up to \$35,000 per Fellow for the program period. The award recipient will be advised of the final number of Fellows prior to the selection cycle. The award will also provide up to \$300,000 for institutional support, which is the maximum allocation for such support. The specific amount and scope will be determined at the time of the award.

The current model allocates up to \$35,000 per student that includes a stipend, meals, housing during the orientation and overseas internship, domestic and overseas internship travel, baggage fees, visa fees, mandatory inoculation fees, and emergency medical evacuation insurance. The Recipient will disburse the funds to each Fellow. Fellows are required to provide their own health insurance coverage during the program collaboration. However, students may use a portion of their allocated funds, in addition to the included expenses mentioned above, to pay for health insurance coverage and any supplemental insurance. More details on allowable costs can be found in 2 CFR part 200,

Subpart E – Cost Principles. Funds cannot be used toward research costs.

If Fellows engage in fraudulent conduct or fail to comply with any term or condition of the Fellowship, funding may be withdrawn, or Fellows may be required to repay monies already received and any expenses borne by the government for their participation in the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program.

Applicant Criteria

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program Recipient must be a U.S.-based accredited private, public, or state institution of higher education. Per 20 U.S.C. § 1001, the term "institution of higher education" means an educational institution in any State that-

- (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate, or persons who meet the requirements of 20 U.S.C. section 1091(d);
- (2) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education;
- (3) provides an educational program for which the institution awards a Master's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree, or awards a degree that is acceptable for admission to a graduate or professional degree program, subject to review and approval by the Secretary of Education;
- (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and
- (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted preaccreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of preaccreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

Students applying for the Fellowship must have: 1) proof of U.S. citizenship at the time of application; 2) acceptance or enrollment as a first-year student in an U.S. accredited graduate institution to pursue a Master's Degree on a full time basis, beginning in the following academic year (fall entrance) in selected fields of study, including International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy; 3) a minimum cumulative 3.30 grade point average (GPA) or higher in their graduate program or absent graduate studies, have earned a minimum cumulative 3.30 grade point average or higher from undergraduate studies on a 4.0 scale; and 4) demonstration of outstanding leadership and academic achievement. Applicants must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.30 or higher

per either semester or quarter for the duration of their Master's degree program.

Fellowship selections must be based on academic excellence, letters of recommendations, a personal statement, relevant experience, and skills demonstrated during interviews.

A.3. Program Goals

- Increase the level of knowledge, awareness, and employment of the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) program and its vital role in promoting American exports and facilitating trade and commerce around the world.
- Develop new talent for ITA's Foreign Commercial Service.
- Remain consistent with the direction of Congress (i.e., Public Law 117-328) and thus: 1) make competitive grants to appropriate institutions of higher education or students; and (2) "increase the level of knowledge and awareness of, and interest in employment with, the Foreign Commercial Service among minority students.";

A.4. Program Objectives

- Attract and recruit highly talented and qualified candidates for a Foreign Commercial Service career in the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service through a program of educational support and professional development.
- Provide candidates and Fellows with information on the service elements, benefits, challenges, and requirements of a Foreign Commercial Service career.
- Provide candidates and Fellows with information on the benefits and obligations of the Fellowship and need to complete Foreign Commercial Service entry requirements including obtaining and maintaining required clearances (security and suitability).
- Provide funding to assist Fellows towards completing the program.
- Enhance Fellows' understanding of U.S. foreign trade policy and the work and lifestyle of the Foreign Commercial Service through an overseas summer development experience at a U.S. embassy, consulate, or mission.
- Provide Fellows with mentoring and professional development training to expose them to information that will help to prepare them to be successful Foreign Commercial Service Officers.
- Administer the program in a strategic and efficient way that produces the intended results.

A.5. Expected Outcomes

Based on the goals and objectives of the program, expected results include, but are not limited to the following:

- Recruitment activities will be broad and include institutions across the United States, will increase awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service, including among minority students, and will highlight the ITA's commitment to building a workforce that represents our nation's diversity.
- Candidates' knowledge of the benefits, challenges, and requirements of a Foreign Commercial Service career will increase.
- Up to seven Fellows will be selected through a highly competitive nationwide selection process.
- Fellows will be prepared for careers with the Foreign Commercial Service through a program that includes financial assistance, mentoring, summer internship experience, and professional development.
- The institution will conduct participant surveys, which will indicate successful to fully successful performance ratings on delivery and impact of program elements: orientation, financial assistance, professional development training, internship/summer development experience support, and mentoring.
- The program will be administered in a cost-effective manner, resources will be matched to program objectives, and all program elements will be completed within budget.

A.6. Performance Indicators

Performance indicators shall include but are not limited to the following:

- Number of recruitment events held during which information was shared with applicants about the benefits and obligations of the Fellowship, Foreign Commercial Service entry requirements, and the benefits and challenges associated with a Foreign Commercial Service career.
- Number of recruitment events held at public universities and colleges, major research universities, liberal arts colleges, and Minority-Serving Institutions.
- Number of applicants.
- Assessment through participant surveys on program elements: orientation, professional development training, internship / summer development experience, and mentoring.
- Percent of Fellows indicating an increase in their understanding of the Foreign Commercial Service.

- Percent of Fellows indicating successful to fully successful performance ratings on delivery program elements: orientation, financial assistance, professional development training, internship/summer development experience support, and mentoring.
- Number of Fellows completing the program requirements.
- Number of Fellows matched with Foreign Commercial Service mentors.
- Attrition and retention rates of the cohort.
- Program elements completed on time and within budget.

A.7. Main Activities

Effective management of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program is fundamental to its overall success. The attached appendix outlines the scope of work and main activities of the program and the Recipient's responsibilities (See Appendix 1, Scope of Work).

In addition to meeting the eligibility requirements (See A.1, Background), the Recipient must demonstrate:

- Experience with management of federal funds, informed by related policies
- Management of a federal program similar in size, rigor, nature, and complexity to the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program
- Policies for program oversight
- Mechanisms for oversight of student compliance.

There is a preference for staff to have knowledge of the Department's Foreign Commercial Service career system and/or diversity recruitment experience (see Section E: Application Review Information, *E.1. Proposal Review Criteria*, 1. Organizational Capacity and Record of Performance). The Recipient is advised to designate sufficient staff to liaise with ITA and NIST's Grants Officer on all aspects of the program.

Once the Recipient is selected, the Recipient must submit to ITA in draft, for review and final approval, a milestone schedule for the 2026 cohort. Key activities to be identified in the milestone schedule shall include, but are not limited to:

- Opening and closing dates for Fellowship application
- Dates associated with the selection process (when applications are sent to panelists for review, date by which applications must be read and scores submitted, dates panelists meet, when selection interviews occur, when finalists are notified, etc.)
- Dates associated with orientation
- Completion, delivery, and posting dates for promotional material
- Stipend payment dates
- Frequency of social media postings with description of content
- A separate travel plan must be submitted as an addendum to the milestone to include dates, location, and purpose of staff recruitment trips

Additionally, the Recipient should be aware of the following:

- The Recipient will work in conjunction with ITA to select Fellows.
- The Recipient will be responsible for submitting required quarterly performance progress reports and financial reports.
- Recipient must develop an evaluation strategy to measure the impact and outcomes of the USFCS Pilot Fellowship Program. Recipient must submit proposed evaluation strategy to ITA for prior approval.
- Recipient must conduct surveys of the cohort to elicit opinions on effectiveness of program components and program administration and submit to ITA via performance progress quarterly reports and final report.
- Recipient will consent to meetings, as requested, with ITA leadership participation to review status of the programs.
- Recipient agrees that ITA has proprietary rights to all databases, surveys, statistics, and related information regarding cohorts under the Recipient's management.

A.8. Substantial Involvement

ITA anticipates awarding a cooperative agreement. The distinction between grants and cooperative agreements revolves around the existence of “substantial involvement.” Cooperative agreements require greater Federal government participation in the project. ITA will undertake reasonable and programmatically necessary substantial involvement. Substantial involvement areas include, but are not limited to:

- Active participation and collaboration with the Recipient on Program implementation.
- Review and approval of all Program policies, Program guidelines, and materials.
- Substantial involvement in the selection of Fellows (e.g. selection of panels, etc.).

Specific areas of substantial involvement are included in the attached SOW and will be outlined in the final Agreement.

SECTION B: FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

B.1. Available Funding

This notice is subject to availability of funding.

Subject to appropriations, approximately \$545,000 may be available for awards under this program during fiscal year (FY) 2026. The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship provides one year of support up to \$35,000 per student for up to seven students to cover a stipend, meals, housing during the orientation and overseas internship, domestic and overseas internship travel, baggage fees, visa fees, mandatory inoculation fees, and health insurance coverage, any supplemental insurance, and emergency medical evacuation insurance. The Recipient will disburse the funds to each Fellow. Fellows are required to provide their own health insurance coverage during the program collaboration. However, students may use a portion of their allocated funds, in addition to the included expenses mentioned above, to pay for health insurance coverage and any supplemental insurance.

The funding instrument will be a cooperative agreement with the selected applicant. The substantial involvement anticipated under this award includes a summer enrichment program component where the Fellow is required to spend up to eight weeks at a U.S. embassy, consulate, or mission as well as continuous mentorship. The Office of Global Talent Management intends to work with each Fellow to facilitate placement at a U.S. embassy, consulate, or mission and to help the Fellow refine the scope of their summer enrichment program, if necessary.

A mandatory orientation will be held for incoming Fellows. Fellows must participate in this orientation to ensure a basic knowledge of the program. If Fellows cannot participate for whatever reason (e.g., travel visa issues, medical emergency, etc.), the program manager has the discretion to revoke the Fellowship. Travel support (logistics and funding) not to exceed \$35,000 per Fellow will be provided to Fellows, who will also meet with the ITA leadership and staff. The USFCS funds cannot be used toward research costs or tuition.

B.2. Award Management

The award periods are up to 18 months for an institution of higher education. The anticipated start date is June 2025. If an applicant is selected for initial funding, the USFCS reserves the right to revoke funding at any point. See D.5. below for funding restrictions.

SECTION C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

C.1. Eligible Applicants:

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program has the potential to reach a diverse range of students and foster renewed interest in the Foreign Commercial Service. Eligible applicants must:

- Be a U.S. accredited graduate institution which administers Master's degrees in the fields of International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy
- Staff employees with Human Resources backgrounds
- Possess working familiarity with the Foreign Commercial Service
- Possess at least three years' experience of administering federal government educational federal financial assistance programs, particularly federal grants or cooperative agreements of a similar complex nature.

Applications that do not meet these requirements will be deemed ineligible for funding under this NOFO.

C.2. Cost-Sharing or Matching

There are no matching requirements for this award.

C.3. Other Eligibility Criteria

Any applicant listed on the Excluded Parties List System (EPLS) in the [System for Award Management \(sam.gov\)](#) is not eligible to apply for an assistance award in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR, 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension." Additionally, no entity listed on the EPLS can participate in any activities under an award. All applicants are strongly encouraged to review the EPLS in sam.gov to ensure that no ineligible entity is included.

SECTION D: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

D.1. Address to Request Application Package

Applicants can find application forms, kits, or other materials needed to apply on grants.gov under the announcement title “U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program,” funding opportunity number “ITA-GMX-GTM-2025-00001.” Please contact the ITA point of contact listed in Section G if requesting reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities or for security reasons. Please note that reasonable accommodations do not include deadline extensions.

D.2. Content and Form of Application Submission

Each application package must include the items listed below unless otherwise indicated, within the limit of 20 pages. Proposal submissions that do not meet all the requirements outlined in this NOFO and as described in this section will result in disqualification.

To ensure that all applications receive a balanced evaluation, the review panel will review from the first page of each section up to the page limit, (i.e., no more than 20 pages) and no further. Provide the information in font size 12 in Times New Roman, with a 1” margin.

On a single page, please list the items and page numbers of the following required information. Page numbers are not required for pre-existing PDF documents but still contribute to the page count.

Complete applications must include the following:

1. Completed and signed SF-424, SF-424A, and SF-424B forms (OPTIONAL but strongly encouraged for Federal Project Executives [FPEs] / Public Information Officers [PIOs])
2. Organizations that engage in lobbying the U.S. government, including Congress, or pay for another entity to lobby on their behalf, are also required to complete the SF-LLL “Disclosure of Lobbying Activities” form (only if applicable).
3. Cover Page/Executive Summary (one page)
4. Proposal Narrative (two pages)
5. Budget Narrative (three-four pages in an annotated worksheet format)
6. Program Monitoring and Evaluation Narrative and Plan (one page)
7. Key Personnel (no more than one page)
8. Timeline (one page)
9. Attachments, (if applicable; do not count toward the page limit):

- CVs of Key Personnel (one page each)

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

The Unique Entity Identifier (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. www.sam.gov is the Federal government's primary database for complying with FFATA reporting requirements. OMB designated www.sam.gov as the central repository to facilitate applicant and Recipient use of a single public website that consolidates data on all federal financial assistance. Under the law, it is mandatory to obtain a UEI number and register in sam.gov **before submitting an application**. ITA may **not** review applications from or make awards to applicants that have not completed all applicable UEI and SAM.gov requirements.

The 2 CFR 200 requires that sub-grantees obtain a UEI number. Please note the UEI for sub-grantees is not required at the time of application but will be required before the award is processed and/or the recipient makes a subaward to a subrecipient.

UEI is assigned by sam.gov to organizations that must register/or renew their sam.gov registration.

Note: The process of obtaining a sam.gov registration may take anywhere from 4- 8 weeks.

Please begin your registration as early as possible. Numerous errors require correction, such as an address mismatch, and can delay final registration. If the application is not corrected within 90 calendar days of original registration/or renewal submission, it will be automatically deleted, and the organization will need to re-start the process.

- 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). Organizations **based outside of the United States** and do not pay employees within the United States do not need an EIN from the IRS, but they do need a UEI number prior to registering in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov). **Please note that as of November 2022, newly** registering organizations based outside of the U.S. that do not intend to apply for U.S. Department of Defense awards are no longer required to have CAGE and NCAGE codes.

All prime organizations must also continue to maintain active [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) registration with current information at all times during which they have an active Federal award or application under consideration by a Federal award agency. [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) requires all entities to renew their registration once a year in order to maintain an active registration status in SAM. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure it has an active registration in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) and to maintain that active registration. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements at the time of application, the applicant may be deemed technically ineligible to receive an award and use that determination as a

basis for making an award to another applicant.

Note: [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) is NOT the same as SAMS / MyGrants. It is free to register in both systems, but the registration processes are different.

Please note, guidance on [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) and the guidance on GSA's website about requirement for registering in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) is subject to change. Applicants should review the website frequently for the most up-to-date guidance.

D.3.1 Exemptions

An exemption from these requirements may be permitted under the following circumstances:

- The award relates to a classified or national security matter.
- The Recipient's identity must be protected due to possible endangerment of their mission, their organization's status, their employees, or the beneficiary being served by the Recipient.
- There are exigent circumstances that prohibit the applicant from receiving a UEI and completing SAM registration prior to receiving the award. These circumstances are identified in the justification below and the Recipient will be required to register within 30 days of the award date in accordance with 2 CFR 25.

Organizations requesting exemption from UEI or [SAM.gov](https://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](https://sam.gov) exemption must come from the warranted Grants Manager before the application can be deemed eligible for review.

D.4. Submission Dates and Times

Applications are due no later than 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST), on March 6, 2025, on [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) under the announcement title "The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program," "Funding Opportunity Number ITA-GMX-GTM-2025-00001."

Faxed, couriered, or emailed documents will not be accepted. Reasonable accommodations may, in appropriate circumstances, be provided to applicants with disabilities or for security reasons.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that it has an active registration in [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) and that an application has been received by the system in its entirety. [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) automatically logs the date and time an application submission is made, and the ITA will use this information to determine whether an application has been submitted on time. Late applications are neither

reviewed nor considered. Applicants should not expect a notification upon ITA receiving their application.

ITA bears no responsibility for disqualification that results from applicants not being registered before the due date, for registrations errors in either system, or other errors in the application process.

D.5. Funding Limitations, Restrictions, and Other Considerations

ITA will not consider applications that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative of a designated terrorist organization. Please refer the link for Department of State's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>. In accordance with 14 FAM 247, and consistent with the 2 FAM 050, Counterterrorism (CT) name-check vetting may be performed in countries and programs designated by the Department.

Unallowable Costs

The following activities and costs are not covered under this announcement (this list is NOT exhaustive):

- Construction or renovations are not allowable activities under this award;
- Projects intended primarily for the growth or institutional development of the applicant organization;
- Projects seeking funds for personal use;
- Administration of a project that will make a profit;
- Expenses incurred before or after the specified dates of award period of performance (unless prior written approval is received);
- Projects designed to advocate policy views or positions of foreign governments or views of a particular political faction;
- Alcoholic beverages;
- Costs of entertainment, including amusement, diversion, and social activities, and any associated costs, are unallowable, except where specific costs that might otherwise be considered entertainment have a programmatic purpose and are authorized either in the approved budget for the federal award or with prior written approval of NIST's Grants Manager.

Representation by Organization Regarding a Delinquent Tax Liability or a Felony Criminal Conviction: In accordance with section 7073 of Division K of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Public Law 113-76) none of the funds made available by that Act may be used to enter into an assistance award with any organization that –

1. Was “convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency has direct knowledge of the conviction, unless the agency has considered, in accordance with its procedures, that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government;” or
2. Has any “unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, unless the Federal agency has considered, in accordance with its procedures, that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.”

Organizations should be cognizant of these restrictions when developing project proposals. Funding restrictions will require appropriate due diligence of program beneficiaries and collaboration with ITA to ensure compliance with these restrictions. Program beneficiaries subject to due diligence vetting will include any individuals or entities that are beneficiaries of foreign assistance funding or support. Due diligence vetting will include a review of open-source materials.

SECTION E: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

E1. Proposal Review Criteria

The Recipient recruits Fellowship applicants. Both the Recipient and ITA review the Fellowship applications. ITA selects the successful Fellows.

ITA's review panels will evaluate each Fellowship application individually against the following criteria, listed below in order of importance, and not against competing applications. ITA designates the panels and provides the criteria for selection of panel members.

ITA's review panels are structured as follows:

- Administrative Panel: Review applications for completeness and NOFO requirements.
- Merit Review Panels: Comprised of up to four panel members who review the applications.
- Selection Panel: Comprised of up to five members who conduct the interviews.

Please use the below criteria as a reference, but do not structure your application according to the sub-sections.

Applications should contain the applicant's best terms from both cost and technical standpoints. The implementing partners (sub-recipients) of the primary Recipient will be subject to ITA approval.

1. Quality and Feasibility of the Program Idea (20 points):

The program idea is well developed, with detail about how program activities will be carried out. The proposal includes a reasonable implementation timeline.

2. Program Planning and Ability to Achieve Objectives (20 points):

Proposals should be original, well-defined and relevant to the goals of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the applicant will meet the program's objectives. Applicants should propose activities that are feasible and practical and may be experiential in nature to encourage innovation. The applicant should address how the program will engage or obtain support from relevant stakeholders. Program logic is sound showing plausible pathways to achieve program outcomes.

3. Organizational Capacity and Record of Performance (20 points):

Applicant must provide evidence of its past performance and management of programs of comparable complexity and size. Proposals should include the necessary personnel and

institution resources to achieve the program results.

The organization should have adequate staffing to manage the proposed project (staffing must include at least one full time senior level program manager with decision making authority; dedicated program coordinator/ assistant with preferably diversity recruitment experience and / or knowledge of the ITA's Foreign Commercial Service); and a full or part time recruitment staff. The applicant may earn up five of the allotted 20 points for the level of experience and / or knowledge of the Foreign Commercial Service.

4. Financial Capacity and Cost Effectiveness (15 points):

The organization has internal controls in place to manage federal funds. The budget justification is detailed, accounting for all necessary expenses to achieve proposed activities. Costs are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results. The budget is realistic, accounting for all necessary expenses to achieve proposed activities. In addition, it is recommended that the budget narrative demonstrate the applicant's ability to economize and plan effectively. Cost-share is voluntary and will not be used as a factor to evaluate the submission.

5. Monitoring & Evaluating and Sustainability (15 points):

Applicant demonstrates it is able to measure program success against key performance indicators and provides milestones to indicate progress toward goals outlined in the proposal. The program includes output and outcome indicators and shows how and when those will be measured. The applicant clearly details how activities will result in benefits that will continue beyond the funding period.

6. Support for Students (10 points): Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the program will support and advance student learning and engagement through program administration, design, and implementation, including how the program will support students from various backgrounds pursuing a common interest. Proposals should have a clearly articulated plan and not simply express general support.

E.2. Review and Selection Process

ITA is committed to ensuring a competitive and standardized process for awarding funding.

At the beginning of the selection process, panel members are selected, and panels are constituted (See Section E.1. Application Review Information. E1. Proposal Review Criteria).

- **Phase 1:** Applications will be screened initially in an Administrative Review stage to determine whether applicants meet the eligibility requirements outlined in section C and have submitted all required documents outlined in section D. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not advance beyond this stage and will be deemed ineligible for funding under this NOFO.
- **Phase 2:** All applications that are deemed eligible will move forward to the Merit Review Panel and will be rated on a 100-point scale. ITA reserves the right to request the assistance of non-U.S. government Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), if appropriate to the solicitation. Panel Reviewers will determine scores based on the strengths and weaknesses of the aforementioned categories and for consistency with the program goals and objectives outlined in this NOFO. Panel Reviewers' ratings, and any resulting recommendations, are advisory. To ensure effective use of U.S. Government funds, conditions or recommendations may include requests to increase, decrease, clarify, and/or justify costs and project activities.

The Administrative and Merit Review panels are comprised of up to seven panel members who may occupy Senior Foreign Service Officer, senior U.S. Field personnel, and senior and junior General Schedule (GS) personnel roles.

ITA reserves the right to make an award based on the initial application received with or without discussion or negotiations. Therefore, applications should contain the Applicants' best proposal from both cost and technical standpoints.

In this phase, panel members score the applicants and compile a list of applicants and their related scores in descending order.

- **Phase 3:** Final selection authority resides with an ITA senior level official. Final award decisions will be influenced by whether the application meets the ITA's programmatic goals and objectives and how it supports the Department's overarching policy priorities.

E.3. Responsibility / Qualification Information in SAM.gov (formerly FAPIIS)

ITA, prior to making a federal award with a total amount of federal share greater than the simplified

acquisition threshold, is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (formerly FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313).

The applicant, at its option, may review information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through www.sam.gov. Currently, federal agencies create integrity records in the integrity module of the Contractor Performance Assessment and Reporting System (CPARS) and these records are visible as responsibility / qualification records in SAM.gov.

ITA will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR §200.205 Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

Applicants are reminded that U.S. Executive Orders and U.S. law prohibits transactions with or support to individuals or organizations associated with terrorism.

- Proposals that reflect any type of support for any member, affiliate, or representative or a designate to terrorist organization or narcotics trafficker, including elected members of government, will NOT be considered. This provision must be included in any sub-awards / sub-contracts issued under this award. U.S. Applicant organizations must demonstrate adherence to equal opportunity employment practices and commitment to non-discrimination with respect to beneficiaries. Non-discrimination includes equal treatment without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and political affiliation.
- Applicants under DOC-funded projects are responsible for complying with all applicable tax treaties and federal, state, and local laws on tax withholding and reporting for project participants.

SECTION F: FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

F.1. Federal Award Notices

ITA will provide a separate notification to applicants on the result of their applications. The successful applicant will receive a letter electronically via email requesting that the applicant respond to review panel conditions and recommendations. This notification is not an authorization to begin activities and does not constitute formal approval or a funding commitment. Activities may only commence once the Recipient receives the official award package from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). At that time, grant funds will be obligated.

Additional information that the successful applicant may be required to submit after notification of intent to make a Federal award, but prior to issuance of a Federal award, may include:

- Written responses and any revised application documents addressing any conditions or recommendations from the Review Panel and awarding entity;
- Other requested information or documents included in this funding opportunity or subsequent communications with the recommended applicant prior to issuance of a Federal award.

ITA has granted NIST the delegated authority to award and administer grants and cooperative agreements. The notice of Federal award signed by NIST's Grants Officer is the sole authorizing document. The Recipient may only start incurring program expenses beginning on the start date shown on the award document signed by NIST's Grants Officer. If awarded, the notice of Federal award will be provided to the organization's designated Authorizing Official via email to be electronically counter signed and returned to NIST.

Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.400(g), it is ITA policy **not** to award profit under assistance instruments.

Payments under this award will be made by completing form SF-270—Request for Advance or Reimbursement and submitting the form. Final determination will be made in conjunction with NIST's Grants Officer. Unless otherwise stipulated, the Recipient may request payments on a reimbursement or advance basis. Instructions for requesting payments via SF-270 are available at: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>.

2 CFR §200.501 requires domestic / U.S. non-federal entities that expend \$1,000,000 or more in federal assistance during the organization's fiscal year to have a single or program-specific audit conducted for that year. In addition, the entity must report the collected audit data elements on the form SF-SAC and submit it to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse (FAC). Any findings such as material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, or material noncompliance are reported on the SF-SAC.

F.2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

- [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 200 – UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL AWARDS](#)

F.3. Reporting

Reporting is critical to effective program management and oversight. Reports are required as a means of evaluating the Recipient's progress and utilization of resources. They are divided between a performance progress report and a financial status report. Applicants should be aware that ITA awards will require that all reports (financial and progress) are submitted to NIST on a quarterly basis.

Financial Reports

The Recipient will be required to submit quarterly financial reports (unless stipulated otherwise in the final Agreement) throughout the project period, using form SF-425, the Federal Financial Report form. The Recipient will also be required to submit to ITA / NIST a pdf version of all financial reports (Federal Financial Report). The Federal Financial Report form (F-425 can be found here: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>.

Program Reporting

The Recipient will be required to submit quarterly narrative progress reports (unless stipulated otherwise in the final Agreement) throughout the project period to the award file to GMIS via e-mail at Greports@nist.gov.

Narrative progress reports should reflect continued focus on measuring the project's progress in achieving the overarching. Explain and evaluate how activities reflect progress toward expected outcome and outcomes towards achieving objectives. Where relevant, progress reports should also

include the following:

- Relevant contextual information (limited).
- Any tangible impact or success stories from the project, when possible.
- Relevant supporting documentation or products related to the project activities (such as articles, meeting lists and agendas, participant surveys, photos, manuals, etc.) as separate attachments.
- Description of how the Recipient is pursuing sustainability, including looking for sources of follow-on funding.
- Any problems/challenges in implementing the project and corrective action plan with an updated timeline of activities.
- Reasons why activities have not been conducted or deliverables were not met in accordance with the timeline.
- Proposed activities for the next quarter.
- Additional pertinent information, including analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs, if applicable.

Final Reporting

A final summary Federal Financial Report (FFR) and a final summary performance progress report (PPR) will be due no later than 120 calendar days after the end date of the award. The Final PPR shall include the following elements: executive summary, successes, outcomes, best practices, composition of Fellow cohort and outreach efforts (e.g., schools, areas of focus, demographic data, etc.), how the project addresses gender issues and marginalized communities, how the project will be sustained. Additional guidance may be provided prior to the award end date.

NOTE: Delays in reporting may result in delays of payment approvals and failure to provide required reports may jeopardize the Recipient's ability to receive future U.S. government funds. ITA reserves the right to request any additional programmatic and/or financial project information during the award period of performance.

It is the ITA policy that English is the official language of all award documents. If reports or any other supporting documents are provided in both English and a foreign language, it must be stated in each version that the English language version is the controlling version. U.S. dollar is the controlling currency. Financial reports must be submitted in U.S. dollars.

Applicants should be aware of the post award reporting requirements reflected in [2 CFR 200 Appendix XII–Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters](#).

SECTION G: FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT

G.1. Contacts

For technical submission questions related to this NOFO, please contact:

U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program
GM Office of Global Talent Management
Attn: Wendy Thompson
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Ave. NW,
Room 1843
Washington, DC 20230
CSFellowship@trade.gov

FAQs may be posted online at <https://www.trade.gov/cs-fellowship>.

For assistance with Grants.gov accounts and technical issues related to using the system, please call the Contact Center at +1 (800) 518-4726 or email support@grants.gov. The Contact Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except federal holidays.

For a list of federal holidays visit:

<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/federal-holidays/>

Except for technical submission questions, during the NOFO period ITA staff in Washington shall not discuss this competition with applicants until the entire proposal review process has been completed and rejection and approval letters have been transmitted.

G.2. Question Submission Deadline

To maintain fairness and transparency in competition, ITA will not answer questions related to proposal concept or design. All questions must be submitted via email to contact listed in G.1. by 11:59 PM EST by **March 1, 2025**. ITA will create a document of submitted questions with answers and post it in [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). ITA will strive to post questions and answers within 3 business days of receipt. Prospective applicants are advised to regularly review the announcement page in grants.gov for any updates.

SECTION H: OTHER INFORMATION

The information in this NOFO is binding. Explanatory information provided by ITA that contradicts this language will not be binding. 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.

H.1. Conflict of Interest

In accordance with applicable Federal awarding agency policy, applicants must disclose in writing any potential conflict of interest to the Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity.

H.2. Freedom of Information Act

Applicants should be aware that ITA understands that some information contained in applications may be considered sensitive or proprietary and will make appropriate efforts to protect such information. However, applicants are advised that ITA cannot guarantee that such information will not be disclosed, including pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or other similar statutes.

H.3. Marking Policy

Applicants are advised that Recipients and sub-recipients of Federal assistance awards are subject to DOC's Marking Policy. More information on this policy can be found in under [Controlled Unclassified Information \(CUI\)](#).

H.4. Evaluation Policy

Applicants are advised that Recipients and sub-recipients of Federal assistance awards are subject to DOC's Evaluation Policy. More information on this policy can be found here: [Program Evaluation](#).

H.5. Monitoring Site Visits

A monitoring site visit, at least once during the lifetime of an award, may be conducted by ITA personnel. The site visit is conducted to gather additional information on the Recipient's ability to properly implement the project, manage ITA funds and share substantiating document for programmatic and financial reporting. Specifically, the site visit may involve the review of the programmatic progress (progress on activities, sub-recipient/consultant work, etc.) as well as administrative and financial management controls. This may include observing classroom modules virtually or in person and visit applicant's headquarters and regional offices to observe operations.

H.6. Privacy Disclosure

ITA understands that some information contained in applications may be considered sensitive or proprietary and will make appropriate efforts to protect such information. However, applicants are advised that ITA cannot guarantee that such information will not be disclosed, including pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or other similar statutes.

H.7. Mandatory disclosures (2 CFR 200.113)

Non-federal entity, applicant or applicant for a federal award must disclose, in a timely manner, in writing to the federal awarding agency or pass-through entity all violations of federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the federal award. Non-federal entities that have received a Federal award including the term and condition outlined in Appendix XII of the 2 CFR 200—Award Terms and Conditions for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters -- are required to report certain civil, criminal, or administrative proceedings to www.sam.gov. Failure to make required disclosures can result in any of the remedies described in §200.338 Remedies for Noncompliance, including suspension or debarment.

H.8. Background Information on the International Trade Administration (ITA)

International Trade Administration Mission:

Create prosperity by strengthening the international competitiveness of U.S. industry, promoting trade and investment, and ensuring fair trade and compliance with trade laws and agreements.

Our Focus

- Promote U.S. exports.
- Attract inbound investment.
- Provide actionable data and information.
- Defend against unfair trade.

Our People

Our trade experts and professional staff—approximately 2,200 employees—are positioned in more than 100 U.S. cities and 80 international markets.

Connecting Businesses to Global Markets

Our global network of experienced trade professionals is located throughout the United States and in U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide. Whether a U.S. company is looking to make its first export sale or expand to additional markets, we offer the expertise they need to connect with opportunities and increase their sales.

Worldwide Recognition: As the U.S. government, we can open doors that no one else can in

markets around the world.

Global Network: Our unmatched global network with trade experts in more than 70 countries can provide U.S. businesses with on-the-ground knowledge and connections.

Results Driven: Our expert, customized counseling is unparalleled and designed to help U.S. businesses succeed in global markets.

U.S. Department of Commerce Strategic Plan for 2022-2026:

<https://www.commerce.gov/about/strategic-plan>

Global Markets Mission:

Global Markets assists and advocates for U.S. businesses in international markets to foster U.S. economic prosperity.

Utilizing our network of trade promotion and policy professionals located in over 70 countries and 100 U.S. locations, Global Markets promotes U.S. exports, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises; advances and protects U.S. commercial interests overseas; and attracts inward investment into the United States.

Commercial Officers carry out a wide variety of critical functions and work with a broad spectrum of government and private sector organizations to articulate, develop and refine United States foreign commercial policy, promote U.S. exports, and protect U.S. commercial interests abroad. Key to the successful execution of a Commercial Officer's duties is the ability to cultivate personal and professional contacts to be used in influencing foreign trade policies to benefit and protect United States commercial interests. Serving a substantial portion of their careers at overseas diplomatic missions (usually in embassies, consulates, or missions), Foreign Commercial Service Officers enjoy access to people and places beyond the experience of most United States Government employees.

Additional background information on ITA and its efforts can be found at:

<https://www.commerce.gov/bureaus-and-offices/ita>.

APPENDIX 1: Scope of Work (SOW)

I. Program Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

Effective management of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program is fundamental to its overall success. The International Trade Administration is fully invested in this program and seeks to maintain a program of integrity and high quality. The goals and objectives of the program include, but are not limited to:

i. Program Goals

The overarching goals of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship are to:

- Increase the level of knowledge and awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) program and its vital role in promoting American exports and facilitating trade and commerce around the world.
- Develop new talent for ITA's Foreign Commercial Service.
- Remain consistent with the direction of Congress (i.e., Public Law 117-328) and thus: 1) make competitive grants to appropriate institutions of higher education or students; and (2) "increase the level of knowledge and awareness of, and interest in employment with, [the Foreign Commercial Service] among minority students."

ii. Program Objectives

The objectives of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship are to:

- Attract and recruit highly talented and qualified candidates to a Foreign Commercial Service career in the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service through a program of educational support and professional development.
- Provide candidates and Fellows with information on the service elements, benefits, challenges, and requirements of a Foreign Commercial Service career.
- Provide candidates and Fellows with information on the benefits and obligations of the Fellowship and need to complete Foreign Commercial Service entry requirements including obtaining and maintaining required clearances (security and suitability).
- Provide funding to assist Fellows towards completing the program.
- Enhance Fellows' understanding of U.S. foreign trade policy and the work and lifestyle of the Foreign Commercial Service through an overseas summer development experience at a U.S. embassy, consulate, or mission.
- Provide Fellows with mentoring and professional development training to expose them to information that will help to prepare them to be successful Foreign Commercial

Service Officers.

- Administer the program in a strategic and efficient way that produces the intended results.

iii. Expected Outcomes

Based on the goals and objectives of the program, expected outcomes include, but are not limited to the following:

- Recruitment activities will be broad and include institutions across the United States, will increase awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service, including among minority students, and will highlight the ITA's commitment to building a workforce that represents our nation's diversity.
- Candidates' knowledge of the benefits, challenges, and requirements of a Foreign Commercial Service career will increase.
- Up to seven Fellows will be selected through a highly competitive nationwide selection process.
- Fellows will be prepared for careers with the Foreign Commercial Service through a program that includes financial assistance, mentoring, summer internship experience, and professional development.
- Participant surveys will indicate successful to fully successful performance ratings on delivery and impact of program elements: orientation, financial assistance, professional development training, internship/summer development experience support, and mentoring.
- The program will be administered in a cost-effective manner, resources will be matched to program objectives, and all program elements will be completed within budget.

iv. General Recipient Responsibilities

- Adhere to all ITA guidance and procedures.
- The Recipient will need to be attentive and responsive to USFCS Fellows' needs and those of the Department.
- The Recipient will need to demonstrate dedication and commitment in pursuing the goals of the programs as well as the ability to engage and work closely with ITA in meeting all requirements.
- The Recipient must have sufficient staff with relevant qualifications to administer the program and liaise with ITA on all aspects of the programs. Knowledge of the Department's Foreign Commercial Service career system and/or diversity recruitment experience is preferred.
 - A senior level program manager with decision-making authority must be

readily available and responsive to ITA requests during the period of performance.

- The Recipient must submit to ITA in draft, for review and final approval, a milestone schedule for the 2026 cohort. Key activities to be identified in the milestone schedule shall include, but are not limited to:
 - Opening and closing dates for Fellowship application
 - Dates associated with the selection process (when applications are sent to panelists for review, date by which applications must be read and scores submitted, dates panelists meet, when selection interviews occur, when finalists are notified, etc.)
 - Dates associated with orientation
 - Completion, delivery and posting dates for promotional materials
 - Stipend payment dates
 - Frequency of social media postings with description of content
 - A separate travel plan must be submitted as an addendum to the milestone to include dates, location, and purpose of staff recruitment trips
- The Recipient will be responsible for submitting required quarterly performance progress reports and financial reports.
- Recipient must develop an evaluation strategy to measure the impact and outcomes of the USFCS Pilot Fellowship Program. Recipient must submit proposed evaluation strategy to ITA for prior approval.
- Recipient must conduct surveys of the cohort to elicit opinions on effectiveness of program components and program administration and submit to ITA via performance progress quarterly reports and final report.
- Recipient will consent to meetings, as requested, with ITA leadership participation to review status of the programs.
- Recipient agrees that ITA has proprietary rights to all databases, surveys, statistics, and related information regarding cohorts under the Recipient's management. If, during an open competition, a subsequent grant was made to another entity, the Recipient will be required to relinquish said information to ITA.

v. Substantial Involvement

The USFCS Fellowship is administered via a cooperative agreement. ITA, as the grantor, is substantially involved in the program activities above and beyond routine monitoring. ITA activities and responsibilities for this program include, but are not limited to the following:

- Provide overall program and policy design and direction to Recipient regarding the administration of the Fellowship.
- Ensure that the Recipient advances the stated program goals and objectives.

- Review and analyze the Recipient's promotion of ITA's Fellowship program goal of outreach, including outreach to minority students.
- Monitor and evaluate Recipient's delivery of the desired product.
- Review Recipient's budget submissions to ensure they meet ITA's requirements for the program.
- Review Recipient reports of program activities, evaluating the effectiveness of the Recipient.
- Review and approve annual milestone schedule and any programmatic date changes.
- Recruitment / Outreach
 - Collaborate with Recipient on the design and development of the recruitment strategy.
 - Review and approve recruitment strategy and materials, application forms¹, publicity, selection, orientation, mentoring, and professional development materials.
 - Review and approve all content to be posted on the website and social media outlets.
- Selection
 - Provide selection criteria and review selection procedures prior to implementation.
 - Provide criteria for selection of panel members
 - Final approval and designation of panel members.
 - Draft interview and essay questions in collaboration with Recipient.
 - Final approval selection interview and essay questions.
 - Final approval of Fellows.
- Orientation
 - Collaborate with Recipient on the design and development of the orientation schedule.
 - Organize orientation networking events with Recipient.
 - Arrange orientation briefing sessions with Recipient for new Fellows on issues related to the Fellowship and a Foreign Commercial Service career including a mandatory information session on the FSOA.
- Overseas Summer Development Experience
 - Identify overseas summer development experience placements for Fellows.
 - Review any requests for summer experience funds.

¹ ITA will provide the OMB Control Number to the successful applicant in adherence to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) within two weeks after receiving the grant. Institutions must display the OMB Control Number as part of their application process.

- Review and counsel Fellows regarding their internship evaluations when necessary.
- Professional Development
 - Review and approve professional development series schedule and topics.
 - Review and approve professional development facilitator and presenters.
- Security Clearance, Suitability Clearance, Medical Review
 - Provide information to Fellows on the security/suitability clearance and medical review process.
 - Track security/suitability clearance and medical review status of Fellows and inform Fellows and Recipient of determination.
- Deferrals and Termination/Repayment
 - Make final decision termination and repayment obligation of Fellows.
 - Review and make final decision on deferral requests.

vi. Program Description

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program provides outstanding candidates entering graduate school and up to eight-week overseas internship at a U.S. diplomatic mission. Recipients of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship will be required to participate in a mandatory one-week Office of Global Talent Management Orientation and Training in the spring / summer of 2026.

This award will provide for the selection of up to seven Fellows and will cover approved program expenses for the program period. Recipient will be advised of the final number of Fellows prior to the selection cycle. The current model allocates up to \$35,000 per student that includes a stipend, meals, housing during the overseas internship, domestic and overseas internship travel, baggage fees, visa fees, mandatory inoculation fees, and emergency medical evacuation insurance. Fellows are required to provide their own health insurance coverage during the program collaboration. However, students may use a portion of their allocated funds, in addition to the included expenses mentioned above, to pay for health insurance coverage and any supplemental insurance. More details on allowable costs can be found in 2 CFR part 200, Subpart E – Cost Principles. Funds cannot be used toward research costs.

If Fellows engage in fraudulent conduct or fail to comply with any term or condition of the Fellowship, funding may be withdrawn, or Fellows may be required to repay monies already received and any expenses borne by the government for their participation in the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program.

Fellowship Applicant Criteria

Eligible entities applying to manage the USFCS Pilot Fellowship Program: 1) must be a U.S. accredited graduate institution which administers Master's degrees in the fields of International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy; 2) staff employees with Human Resources backgrounds; 3) possess working familiarity with the Foreign Commercial Service; and possess at least three years' experience of administering federal government educational federal financial assistance programs, particularly federal grants or cooperative agreements of a similar complex nature.

The USFCS Pilot Fellowship Program requirements include: 1) proof of U.S. citizenship at the time of application; 2) acceptance or enrollment as a first-year student in an U.S. accredited graduate institution to pursue a Master's Degree on a full time basis, beginning to the following academic year (fall entrance) in selected fields of study, including International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy; 3) a minimum cumulative 3.30 grade point average (GPA) or higher in their graduate program or absent graduate studies, have earned a minimum cumulative 3.30 grade point average or higher from undergraduate studies on a 4.0 scale; and 4) demonstration of outstanding leadership and academic achievement. Applicants must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.30 or higher per either semester or quarter for the duration of their Master's degree program.

Fellowship selections must be based on academic excellence, letters of recommendations, a personal statement, relevant experience, and skills demonstrated during interviews.

vii. Program Specific Guidelines

The specific responsibilities of the Recipient are detailed below:

In consultation with ITA, the Recipient will be responsible for the programmatic, financial, and administrative activities for the USFCS Fellowship. ITA will work collaboratively with the Recipient in administering the program. The Recipient will be responsible for conducting the day-to-day activities associated with the management of the program and must consult with ITA, which will have final approval in consultation with NIST's Grants Officer, on all policy matters affecting the program.

I. Outreach and Recruitment

Outreach activities include both recruitment and publicity efforts. The Recipient

will coordinate all necessary outreach efforts to encourage students to apply for the Fellowship program and will produce all needed promotional materials that stresses the importance of the Fellowship. The materials will describe the program in detail giving all necessary eligibility requirements and application deadlines.

Recruitment efforts must stress the importance of a career in the Foreign Commercial Service and of ITA's mission of facilitating global trade.

Specific activities include:

- **Recruiting:** The Recipient will identify and attract highly qualified students with an interest in pursuing a career as a Foreign Commercial Service Officer. As part of a program to conduct broad outreach, the Recipient is expected to include outreach to:
 - Public universities and colleges, major research universities and liberal arts colleges.
 - Minority-Serving Institutions include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).
 - Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).
 - Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), and
 - Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) schools.

The Recipient may also conduct outreach to community colleges which, despite not having eligible students, may prompt an early interest among students in international affairs and the Foreign Commercial Service.

There should be a combined effort between in-person and virtual recruitment with an emphasis placed on virtual recruitment efforts and use of digital resources such as but not limited to "sourcing" through online resume databases and professional networking sites.

- **Producing Promotional/Recruitment Materials:**

Recipient must prepare promotional/recruitment materials and application² for the USFCS Fellowship Program. These materials should also conform to GSA section 508 guidelines to ensure equal access to users with disabilities and be compatible with appropriate assistive technology. ITA must review and approve all publicly distributed promotional/recruitment materials and application (print and online) prior to final print/posting. Once produced, Recipient should distribute materials to and/or direct intended audiences to online postings. Intended audiences include academic institutions, students, and professional associations and organizations focused on international trade and commercial diplomacy.

- **Website:**

Recipient will establish and maintain a website to include up-to-date program description, including eligibility requirements, application information and information about Foreign Commercial Service careers with ITA. The program website should also conform to GSA section 508 guidelines to ensure equal access to users with disabilities. In addition, the Recipient will establish an email address for the program.

Recipient will obtain ITA approval for all content posted on the website.

- **Using Social Media and Online Recruitment Tools:**

Recipient will work closely with ITA to develop an online recruitment and social media outreach plan including online information sessions, webinars, workshops, and Q&A sessions. The elements of this outreach plan should conform to GSA section 508 guidelines with equal access to audiences with Visual, Auditory, Motor, & Cognitive disabilities. Recipient will obtain ITA approval for all content posted on online regarding the program and provide sufficient time to review and comment on proposed postings.

- **Explaining Fellowship and Foreign Service Entry Requirements:**

Recipient must counsel interested applicants on the seriousness of the Foreign Service entry requirements and obligations of the USFCS

² ITA will provide the OMB Control Number to the successful applicant in adherence to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) within two weeks after receiving the grant. Institutions must display the OMB Control Number as part of their application process.

Fellowship program to ensure they understand these requirements and the consequences if they are unable to obtain and maintain required Fellowship clearances. Recipient should clearly explain Fellowship's repayment obligation conditions.

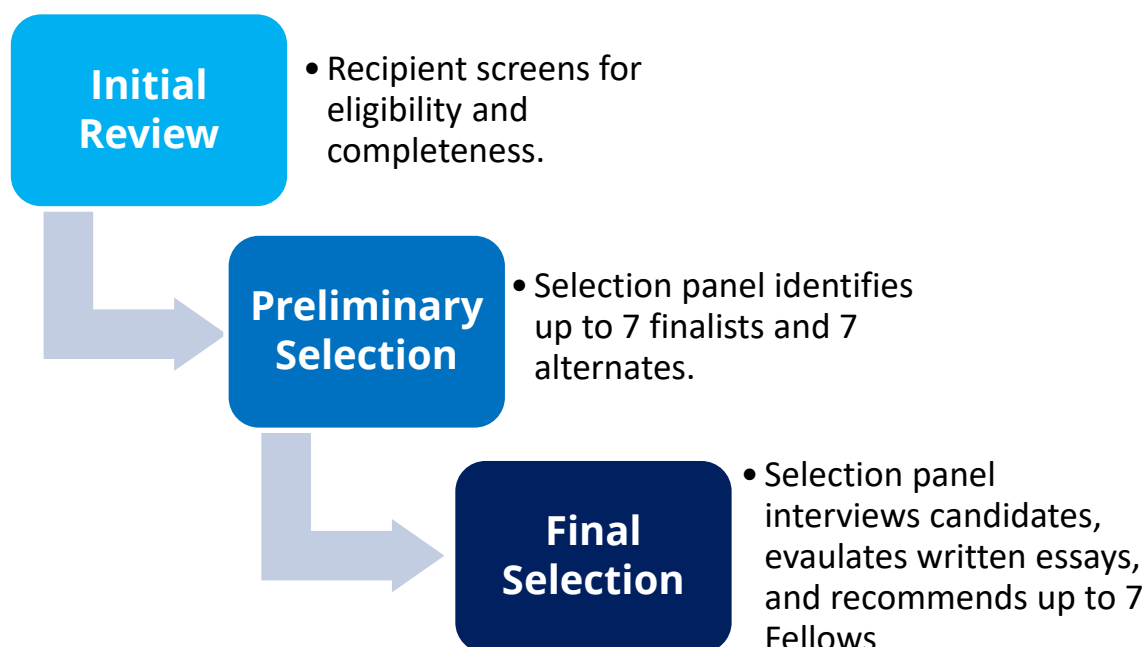
- **Institutional Database:**
Recipient must develop and maintain a list of institutional databases used for recruitment. A copy of this list will be provided to ITA periodically upon request.
- **Other Outreach Activities:**
Perform other related outreach activities as needed by ITA.

II. Screening and Selection

In collaboration with ITA, Recipient will organize the screening and selection process. The USFCS Program final selection takes place in early December and it will be conducted virtually.

- **Structure of Selection Panels:** Panels will be established, consisting of up to seven panel members who will review the applications and up to five who will conduct interviews. For example, ITA would select seven of the twelve panelists (three for interviews and four for application review) and the Recipient will select five panelists (two for interview and three for application review). ITA designated panelist will chair the panels. ITA will provide the criteria for selection of panel members. Designations must be approved by ITA.
- **Candidate Selection Process:** The first phase is the initial review conducted by the Recipient. The initial review screens candidates' applications for adherence to eligibility criteria and completeness. Following the initial review, in the second phase, the Recipient forwards eligible applications to the selection committee members. The selection committee conducts a preliminary review narrowing the candidate applicant pool to up to seven finalists and seven alternates. In the third and final phase, semi- finalists undergo interviews. The interview selection committee meets virtually or for a 3.5-day meeting in Washington D.C. which includes a half-day mandatory training, interviewing and final selection period. Selection committee members make their final selections, based on the scoring of the application and interview (*Note: ITA personnel comprise a part of the selection committee).

The selection process is as follows:



Recipient is responsible for the following tasks:

- Conducting initial screening of candidates' applications for adherence to eligibility criteria and completeness.
- Submitting to ITA, in a timely fashion, the names and biographies of proposed panel members. ITA will provide the criteria for selection of panel members.
- Keeping ITA informed of all instructions and information provided to panelists with regards to the selection process.
- Providing panelists with electronic access to applications and scoring sheets for selection of finalists. Copying and distributing hard copies of application packets if asked.
- Contacting all finalists prior to selection and brief them on selection process and Fellowship benefits and obligations.
- Coordinating all administrative functions associated with the selection process, to include but not limited to:
 - Processing honoraria for designated panelists. Honoraria may be provided only to those panelists who do not receive a full time U.S. Government salary. The daily estimated honorarium amount will be based on standard practice.

- Preparing a selection program and scheduling time for presentations regarding Fellowship obligations and clearances.
- With ITA, preparing selection questions, for interviews.
- Preparing a user guide for each panelist.
- Distributing and with ITA, explaining the agreement Fellows will sign upon accepting the Fellowship.
- Notifying in writing those finalists selected for the Fellowship, securing written acceptances from finalists and forwarding final list of Fellows to ITA.
- Preparing lists of selected Fellows, alternates, non-selected candidates with panelist scores for ITA for review prior to notifying candidates.
- Notifying in writing those applicants not selected and alternates of their status within two working days of decision by selection committee.
- Notifying in writing ITA Office of Global Talent Management of selected finalists and Fellows.
- Preparing a list of non-selected candidates for the ITA.

III. Fellowship Agreements

- In consultation with the ITA, distribute the agreements to those selected as finalists.
- Recipient must submit all signed agreements together to ITA prior to orientation.
- Ensure that all Fellows agreements have been received and counter-signed by the Department prior to Fellows attending the USFCS Orientation.

IV. Orientation

In collaboration with ITA, Recipient will organize the week-long orientation program for new Fellows conducted in early June 2026. The orientation program is conducted in Washington, DC. In organizing the orientation program, the Recipient will be expected to:

- Provide all administrative functions for the orientation and professional development seminars to include arranging travel and lodging for the Fellows, name tags, folders, etc.
- Counsel Fellows on the benefits and obligations of the Fellowship.
- Ensure Fellows receive all instructions related to the medical examinations and are present for their appointments if they are conducted during orientation.
- In consultation with ITA, identify speakers and organize briefing sessions and networking events to discuss issues related to the USFCS Fellowship and a

Foreign Commercial Service career.

- Perform other related activities as needed by ITA.

V. Overseas Summer Development Experience

There is one overseas summer development experience at a U.S embassy, consulate, or mission. In collaboration with ITA, Recipient will be expected to:

- Ensure Fellows have successfully completed their academic requirements, received required clearances, and met the minimum medical qualification standard before disbursing funds associated with the overseas summer development experience and arranging travel. Fellows must receive a commensurate security clearance to participate in the USFCS Fellowship Program. Fellows must also meet the minimum medical qualification standard to participate.
- Counsel Fellows on overseas summer development experience choices.
- Ensure that Fellows understand what the program covers with regards to travel, housing, stipend, evacuation insurance, baggage, inoculations, and visas.
- In consultation with ITA, ensure coverage of all required visas and mandatory inoculations for Fellows traveling abroad.
- Maintain a productive relationship with a reliable travel agency that can produce results as needed.
- Facilitate and ensure Fellows have reasonable emergency medical evacuation insurance coverage prior to beginning the overseas summer development experience and have met the required country-specific medical qualification standard prior to beginning overseas summer development experience.
- Identify and arrange appropriate housing for Fellows during their internships; handle payments for housing and provide ITA with accounting information. Domestic lodging rates during the orientation in Washington, D.C. are subject to standard U.S. government per diem rates. Recipient may reimburse Fellows choosing alternate housing up to the amount of the cost of lodging provided by Recipient.
- Remain current on Fellows' start and end dates of the overseas summer development experience.
- Follow up with Fellows, in writing, to ensure that they have arrived and reported, as scheduled, at their overseas summer development experience location. Notify ITA of any late arrivals with accompanying explanation.
- Review and counsel Fellows regarding their overseas summer development experience evaluations and recommend ways to improve and strengthen their future performance if the Fellow receives a rating that does not meet expectations.

- Require Fellows submit their first deliverable: the Individual Post Analysis Report (IPAR). The IPAR documents the up to eight-week summer enrichment program at an assigned overseas U.S. embassy, consulate, or mission, summarizing industry sector-focused market research that helps clients understand the opportunities available in selling their specific products and services in a select market as well as any specific tariff or non-tariff regulatory barriers that may impede market access. The IPAR must be submitted by within thirty days of returning from the overseas summer enrichment experience. Recipient must submit a copy of each assessment to ITA upon receiving the Fellow's assessment.
- Perform other related overseas summer development experience activities as needed by ITA.

VI. Professional Development

- Recipient is to develop and conduct the succeeding Professional Development and Networking phase of the Fellowship, which runs from August 2026 through September 2026. Here, the Recipient assigns the Fellows their second deliverable, a Capstone Project. Fellows will be provided with the Capstone Project requirements including specific prompts that highlight how they will transfer the knowledge and skills learned through the Fellowship into her or his professional career. Mentors will be assigned to enhance the Fellows' growth and help them understand their own personal career development opportunities. At the culmination of the Fellowship, the Recipient coordinates the Fellows' required virtual presentation of their projects before a diverse panel of ITA / Global Markets' senior managers in September 2026.
- Professional development series facilitators and presenters must be reviewed and approved by ITA.
- At the end of the series, the Recipient is to conduct a participant survey and present the findings with recommendations to ITA.
- Recipient is responsible for monitoring Fellows' attendance and address Fellows' unapproved absences.

VII. Mentoring

- ITA will assign Foreign Service mentors and sponsors to all newly selected Fellows before the start of the Fellowship orientation and submit the list of all proposed mentors to the Recipient. Mentors must be current Foreign Commercial Service Officers in good standing. In consultation with ITA, Recipient will match the mentors with the selected Fellows.

- Recipient should also serve as mentor to the Fellows. Recipient will be expected to conduct quarterly one-on-one sessions with the Fellow during which issues that could impact participation in the Fellowship and/or completion of the Foreign Commercial Service entry requirements should be discussed.

VIII. The Commercial Service Assessment

- Ensure each Fellow is aware the Fellowship comes with no offer of employment—implied or explicit—in the Foreign Commercial Service. However, Fellows are encouraged to take the Commercial Service (CS) Assessment when it is held.
- Fellows who successfully complete the requirements of the Fellowship, opt to take and pass the Commercial Service (CS) Assessment, and are offered employment in the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service are required to accept the position.

IX. Tracking

- Maintain institutional databases for recruitment.
- Maintaining databases of Fellows for purposes of tracking: a) current contact information b) GPA and academic program status, c) successful completion of program requirements, d) successful completion of contractual obligations, e) withdrawals/dismissals from the program prior to completion, f) deferrals, g) areas of study, h) languages spoken and other relevant statistical information.
- Perform other related tracking activities as needed by ITA.

X. Monitoring

The Recipient should monitor and report on performance indicators that are specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, and time bound. Performance targets for each expected result should be established and details should be included on what sources of data will be used to document performance. Indicators should be relevant to the goals or objectives of the program. Indicators may include but are not limited to:

- Composition of Fellow cohort, including but not limited to demographics of the applicants including information on race, ethnicity, gender, geographic origin, and disability.
- Number of recruitment events held during which information was shared

with applicants about the benefits and obligations of the Fellowship, Foreign Commercial Service entry requirements, Foreign Commercial Service career tracks, and the benefits and challenges associated with a Foreign Commercial Service career.

- Number of recruitment events held at public universities and colleges, major research universities, liberal arts colleges, and Minority-Serving Institutions.
- Number of applicants.
- Effectiveness of program elements in preparing Fellows for Foreign Commercial Service careers and increasing their knowledge of U.S. foreign trade policy and the work and lifestyle of the Foreign Commercial Service.
- Assessed through participant surveys on program elements: orientation, professional development training, internship, summer development experience, and mentoring.
- Percent of Fellows indicating an increase in their understanding of the Foreign Commercial Service.
- Percent of Fellows indicating performance ratings on delivery program elements: orientation, financial assistance, professional development training, internship / summer development experience support, and mentoring.
- Number of Fellows completing the program requirements – including: graduate degree in a discipline representing the skill needs of the Foreign Commercial Service, medical review and security and suitability clearances in a timely manner.
- Number of Fellows matched with Foreign Commercial Service mentors.
- Number of quarterly one-on-one mentoring sessions held with Fellows.
- Attrition and retention rates of the cohort.
- Program elements completed on time and within budget.

XI. Administrative

- Maintain document file for each Fellow with all written correspondence, contractual agreement, payments, and other pertinent data and provide to ITA as requested.
- Provide ITA, in a timely manner, with additional information on Fellows as needed.

a. **Disbursement of Funds**

- Prior to disbursement of any Fellowship funds, Recipient coordinates with ITA to ensure the Fellow has met all necessary requirements. For each semester, provide ITA with a list of 1) Fellows enrolled in academic programs, 2) their graduate institution and 3) the amount of Fellowship funds disbursed. Prior to disbursement of Fellowship funds, Recipient will coordinate with ITA to determine a course of action.
 - Should a Fellow not receive and maintain a worldwide available medical clearance, the commensurate security clearance, or not pass the required suitability review, the Fellowship offer will be rescinded.
- Ensure that the Fellow understands the reasons for any payment delays and must help manage the Fellow's expectations with regard to the disbursement of Fellowship funds.
- Ensure Fellows have received the required security clearance and met the minimum medical qualification standard before disbursing funds associated with the overseas summer development experience, including travel and stipend funds.
- Make overseas summer development experience stipend disbursements to Fellows. Provide ITA with accounting.

b. **Deferral Requests**

- Ensure Fellows understand deferral requests will not be accepted.

c. **Record Keeping**

- Maintain transcripts of all Fellows.
 - a. Should Recipient fail to receive a transcript from a Fellow, Recipient will send a letter to the Fellow requesting compliance with their contract and notify ITA immediately.
- Maintaining file for each Fellow with correspondence, contractual agreement, payments, and other pertinent data. These files must be kept in accordance with 2 CFR 200.