

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES, GOALS, AND IMPLEMENTATION (POGI)

## FY 2026 Global Undergraduate Exchange Program

**Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0017975**

### **Office of Academic Exchange Programs, Multi-Regional Programs Branch (ECA/A/E/MR)**

The POGI guidelines apply specifically to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) issued by the Office of Academic Exchange Programs, Multi-Regional Programs Branch (ECA/A/E/MR) for the FY 2026 Global Undergraduate Exchange 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 NOFO takes precedence.

#### **I. STATEMENT OF WORK**

##### **Recipient Responsibilities:**

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State will enter into a cooperative agreement with the recipient to administer the FY 2026 Global Undergraduate Exchange (Global UGRAD) Program. The FY 2026 Global UGRAD Program will support the administration of approximately 160 awards to visiting undergraduate students for non-degree study in the United States. ECA anticipates the Cooperative Agreement beginning on/about August 14, 2026, and closing on August 14, 2029.

The recipient will work closely with Public Affairs Sections (PAS) of U.S. embassies, bi-national Fulbright commissions (in the limited number of countries in which commissions coordinate the program), and ECA/A/E/MR to ensure that program content meets the needs of participants as well as U.S. State Department and ECA goals and objectives. ECA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase funding amounts and participating countries and regions, pending the availability of FY 2026 funds, the needs of the program, and U.S. Department of State priorities.

Under the terms of the FY 2026 cooperative agreement, the recipient will be responsible for administering scholarships for one semester of non-degree undergraduate study for international

students at a broad range of accredited colleges and universities in the United States during academic year 2027-2028.

The Global UGRAD Program requires that participants carry out their core exchange program in-person at host institutions which offer full in-person instruction in the United States. The applicant should arrange for virtual pre-departure training and arrival orientation workshops as well as pre-academic English language training for participants who require it prior to their arrival in the United States.

Additional responsibilities for the FY 2026 award include, but are not limited to:

- development of promotional recruitment and application materials, and the provision of these materials to PASs of U.S. embassies and Fulbright commissions in participating countries;
- development, maintenance, and technical management of an online application system;
- recruitment and selection of appropriate host institutions throughout the United States;
- coordination of TOEFL testing, provision of TOEFL vouchers, and receipt of TOEFL scores for students nominated to start their non-degree programs in the 2027-2028 academic year;
- review of all nominations for program eligibility;
- placement of participants at U.S. host institutions;
- development and oversight of in-person and virtual pre-departure and arrival orientation workshops, which includes the development and delivery of messaging to applicants and participants related to financial planning and the pre-departure reimbursement process;
- management of travel arrangements;
- management of participant Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) health benefits, including the explanation of benefits, processes, and procedures for management of physical and mental health challenges;
- administration of virtual pre-academic English language programming;
- monitoring and support of program participants, focusing on issues such as academic progress, adjustment to receiving institution and local community, physical and mental health, personal safety and overall success for the duration of their sponsorship;
- development and execution of emergency planning protocols to ensure the health, safety, and security of all participants;
- oversight and planning of community service and professional development activities;
- development and implementation of in-person end of program workshop with the capacity to host them virtually, if required;
- development and administration of a communications strategy, which includes identification of impact stories, in coordination with the program office;
- management of program finances, including the inclusion of a reimbursement for predeparture expenses in a participant's first stipend payment;
- monitoring of all program components; and

- development of enhanced alumni tracking and engagement and follow-on activities, in collaboration with ECA/A/E/MR.

Further information on these administrative responsibilities is provided below. Note: All ECA Grant Recipients must adhere to the requirements in ECA’s Communications Guidance on the creation of program branding and attribution, websites, social media, and press. PASs of U.S. embassies and bi-national Fulbright commissions will be responsible for the recruitment and nomination of student participants.

ECA anticipates including the following regions and approximate numbers of final participants for the FY 2026 award (see also “Selection” section in the POGI). ECA reserves the right to add or remove participating countries and regions during the proposal phase depending on ECA priorities and the availability of funds. Recruitment strategies and activities in all regions must ensure a robust pool of qualified candidates, with special focus given to regions which traditionally require additional support in recruitment, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific Islands. In addition to recruitment support, support for finalists in countries facing security-related issues or geopolitical uncertainty will require special attention during the recruitment and selection process.

Participant numbers are estimates and may be modified to reflect ECA priorities.

East Asia and the Pacific: 35  
 Europe and Eurasia: 35  
 Near East: 25  
 South and Central Asia: 25  
 Sub-Saharan Africa: 15  
 Western Hemisphere: 25  
 Total: 160

It is estimated that approximately 15 percent of all participants will participate in virtual pre-academic English language training. Participants enrolled in virtual pre-academic English language training during the fall semester will continue with the in-person academic program in the spring semester, following successful completion of their English language training program.

## **II. PROGRAM SPECIFIC GUIDELINES**

### CANDIDATE ELIGIBILITY

The Global UGRAD Program is a merit-based exchange program that engages students from critical world regions. Selection will be based on the students’ backgrounds, academic achievement, English language skills, and leadership potential. Participants will be highly motivated undergraduate students from colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher

education in participating countries overseas who demonstrate merit through academic work, community involvement, and extracurricular activities.

Student participants will be recruited and nominated by PASs of U.S. embassies and bi-national Fulbright commissions. Students must submit complete applications with all required documents by the application deadline. Participants in the FY 2026 program must be able to begin the exchange program in academic year 2027-2028. Students requiring English language training would complete the virtual English studies in the fall 2027 semester and enroll in the academic program for the spring 2028 semester. In addition, each student participant must be able to receive a U.S. J-1 visa and be committed to returning to his or her home country at the conclusion of their program.

Please note that individuals in the following circumstances are NOT eligible for the Global UGRAD Program:

- U.S. citizens and permanent residents of the United States.
- Individuals currently participating in academic, training, or research programs in the United States.
- Individuals currently residing or working outside of participating countries.
- Individuals who have participated in an Exchange Visitor program sponsored or funded by the U.S. government (e.g., ECA, PASs of a U.S. embassy, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or other U.S. government agency) for a period of more than six weeks and who have not fulfilled their two-year home residency requirement by the application deadline.
- Individuals who have applied for U.S. permanent residency in the past three years.
- Employees, and their families, of non-profit organizations who administer the Global UGRAD Program on behalf of the U.S. Department of State. This provision does not disqualify self-supporting members of families who live apart from their parents.
- Local employees of U.S. missions abroad who work for the U.S. Department of State, or the USAID are ineligible for grants during the period of their employment and for one year following the termination of employment.
- Immediate family members (i.e., spouses and dependent children) of U.S. Department of State employees and/or USAID for a period of one year following the termination of such employment. This provision does not disqualify self-supporting members of families who live apart from their parents.

#### SUPPORT FOR OVERSEAS ACTIVITY

The recipient will support the administration of the activities of the Global UGRAD Program abroad. Such support will include, but is not limited to, the provision of promotional and recruitment materials to ECA, PASs of U.S. embassies, and Fulbright commissions; the development and technical management of an online application system; the development of pre-departure materials with close collaboration from PASs of U.S. embassies and Fulbright commissions for the implementation of in-person and supplemental virtual pre-departure orientation workshops; the management of international travel arrangements; and the implementation of follow-on and alumni programming. Promotional materials may include

printed brochures, posters, electronic communication, and the use of social media platforms. ECA/A/E/MR will review these documents before publication or distribution to PASs of U.S. embassies and Fulbright commissions. The recipient should also maintain the program website with up-to-date program information, applications, program and alumni highlights, and pictures for access by international audiences.

### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

ECA's goal is to achieve a distribution of the 160 participants who represent the populations of countries from all world regions, with exact numbers of scholarships per country provided after the issuing of the cooperative agreement by ECA. Recruitment will include areas beyond capital cities as much as possible. Applicants should describe their plans to support recruitment by PASs of U.S. embassies and Fulbright commissions.

### SELECTION

The recipient will be responsible for revising application forms as needed and building out and maintaining an online application system for use by PASs of U.S. embassies, Fulbright commissions, and ECA. In addition, the applicant should demonstrate an ability to provide ongoing technical support for the online system and offer webinars to PASs of U.S. embassies and Fulbright commission staff to provide assistance in navigating and using the system.

ECA, in conjunction with PASs of U.S. embassies and Fulbright commissions, will be responsible for final selection of all applicants. The competition for the Global UGRAD Program will be open to anyone who meets the basic eligibility requirements noted above, and fair to all applicants. Each participant will be selected for academic excellence, leadership potential, proficiency in written and spoken English, and flexibility and suitability as an exchange student. The program will place students in a range of fields of study, such as business, entrepreneurship, semiconductors, AI, engineering, critical minerals, manufacturing, and supply chain resilience. Students are expected to achieve a minimum TOEFL score of 500 (or the likelihood of achieving that score after pre-academic English language training) and meet other requirements of the U.S. colleges and universities where placement is being sought.

### U.S. RECEIVING INSTITUTION SELECTION AND PARTICIPANT PLACEMENT

In collaboration with ECA, the recipient will recruit U.S. receiving institutions and will serve as the main point of contact for the receiving institution competition. Global UGRAD participants will be placed at colleges and universities, such as community colleges, land-grant institutions, rural campuses, and Senior Military Institutions in areas of the country which traditionally do not receive high numbers of exchange participants, giving participants a "real American" experience in a number of small towns and rural communities. Participants should be placed in small cohorts comprised of a minimum of three participants at each institution. The implementing partner should consult with ECA for approval of placements of six or more participants at a single institution. Receiving institutions must provide on-campus housing and sufficient participant support structures.

The proposal should describe how the U.S. receiving institution competition will be conducted, including the measures that will be taken to select appropriate high caliber institutions and secure tuition scholarships and/or other cost sharing.

The Global UGRAD Program is a cooperative effort of ECA, U.S. embassies, Fulbright commissions, the recipient organization, and the receiving institutions. The recipient is expected to strive to obtain the greatest possible cost share of tuition and other resources from the receiving institutions as possible.

#### PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION

Applicants should describe plans for substantive pre-departure orientation (PDO) programs that will be implemented in each country or region, as feasible, by the PAS of U.S. embassies or Fulbright commissions. In addition, the proposal should also describe plans for supplemental virtual PDO workshops to be led by the recipient organization's staff. PDO programs should cover topics such as the terms and conditions of the scholarship, including a clear articulation of J visa requirements and the two-year home residency requirement; information on current topics of interest in U.S. society; detailed information about physical and mental health coverage and resources; topics related to safety and security issues; travel preparation (what items to bring, including clothing and personal items); and, to the extent possible, information regarding the U.S. receiving institutions.

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

Virtual English language study programs are offered to participants who need to improve their English language skills and knowledge to a level necessary to successfully complete the Global UGRAD Program. English language study enables the Global UGRAD Program to recruit a broad group of participants, especially from areas where advanced English study may not be widely available. Participants requiring additional language study may continue with English language support during their academic program. The applicant should explain plans for providing one semester of virtual pre-academic English language study for approximately 15 percent of the participants.

#### U.S. ORIENTATIONS

The recipient should include in the narrative provisions plans for virtual orientation activities in the United States for all participants. Virtual orientation activities should take place shortly after the participants' arrival to best prepare them for their program in the United States. The narrative should include tentative dates and topics for virtual orientation activities. The proposal should also describe plans for participants to attend on-campus orientation activities provided by their receiving institutions.

As part of the arrival orientation activities, the recipient should implement a mandatory sexual harassment and assault education program. This program may be implemented virtually, through an online program. All Global UGRAD participants are required to participate. The program should supplement PDO materials in which the organization covers U.S. cultural norms, laws

and regulations, related to sexual-based harassment and violence. The arrival orientation should also include a review of physical and mental health coverage and resources made available by the exchange program as well as how to access services on campuses or generally.

Orientations, and all program activities, must ensure that participants are exposed to a variety of themes, speakers and perspectives.

### MONITORING

The proposal should describe how the recipient will monitor and measure participants' academic and personal progress during their exchange program in the United States. The applicant should delineate a set of academic and behavioral standards for the program and define policies for participants who do not meet these standards.

The recipient should be prepared to assist ECA in handling crises affecting foreign participants in the United States, such as medical emergencies and medical evacuations, including mental and physical health issues; natural disasters; and repatriation of remains. This includes emergency support services in the event of program suspensions and/or circumstances necessitating the repatriation of foreign participants from the United States. The recipient should present a robust plan for how they will assist participants with mental health issues. Recipients should be prepared to utilize both ASPE Assist resources and those provided by the receiving institutions in the United States. The recipient will inform and consult with ECA on the response to any press/public queries related to crisis situations.

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

To immerse participants in local communities while they are in the United States, participants will be required to take part in unpaid community service activities. Global UGRAD participants must provide 20 hours of community service to local organizations. Participants may not receive salaries, stipends, or wages for their volunteer service. The community service component must be mentioned in program recruitment and application materials. Participants' documentation of their community service activities through varied means (e.g., photos, and videos) benefit the program and should be encouraged and shared with the implementing partner, as well as with ECA/A/E/MR for outreach purposes.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

In order to foster participants' professional development, Global UGRAD participants will be required to participate in professional development training during the academic program. These activities will be designed by the recipient organization to provide participants with professional skills to support participants as they work toward their career goals. Topics may include professional training in areas such as resume-writing, interview and presentation skills, and networking techniques. Professional development opportunities must be mentioned in Global UGRAD program advertisements and application materials.

### PROGRAM WORKSHOPS

The recipient will implement one in-person program workshop per semester for participants participating in the academic program. The proposal should include tentative dates and locations for the fall and spring semester workshops, as possible given the award implementation calendar. Under certain conditions, at the direction of the program office, virtual workshops may be required. Each workshop should enhance participants' professional skills and understanding of U.S. institutions as well as American society and culture, ensuring they can continue to engage effectively with U.S. partners upon their return to their home communities. Workshops should help the participants reflect on their experience in the United States and prepare for their return to their home countries. The workshops should also focus on preparing participants to be engaged alumni. The agenda for each workshop must be approved by ECA before implementation.

#### COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIC PLAN

The applicant should provide a plan to collect and highlight participant stories that include descriptions of the experiences and accomplishments of individual program participants and home institutions overseas as well as the impact of the program on the individual, U.S. receiving institution, U.S. community, and the follow-on impact of program alumni in their home country. The individual stories selected should be shared at regular intervals with the ECA program office and align with the U.S. Department of State's public diplomacy goals and should show the impact (including a "multiplier effect" to broader sectors) of the program. These stories should be shared through traditional web-based media, and other formats to the benefit of program stakeholders and recruitment efforts.

#### ALUMNI TRACKING AND FOLLOW-ON

Alumni tracking is critical for the evaluation of the program and for the implementation of worthwhile follow-on activities for alumni. ECA maintains a database of program alumni, and the cooperating organization will be required to provide regular data submissions via electronic data transfer to the ECA database that are compatible with, and meet, ECA database standards.

The application should propose follow-on activities for alumni and successful recipients and must develop these activities in close consultation with ECA, PASs of the U.S. embassies, and Fulbright commission. Follow-on activities must reflect the goals and objectives of the Global UGRAD Program and contribute to the overall ECA goal to foster mutual understanding between the United States and the peoples of the world.

The proposal should include an outline of, and timeline for, follow-on alumni programming, information on how it will be coordinated with existing alumni efforts, how long-term linkages with alumni will be fostered and maintained, how these efforts will be coordinated with ECA and PASs of the U.S. embassies, and how they will be integrated with initiatives for alumni of other ECA programs, rather than as isolated events. The proposal should demonstrate a willingness to work closely and collaboratively with ECA's Alumni Affairs Division, including the sharing of UGRAD Program newsletters and information on the alumni.state.gov website.

Alumni activities should be conducted with minimum financial support from ECA and demonstrate cost sharing by the applicant organization. ECA encourages applicants to propose virtual alumni activities, including ideas that make use of ECA's existing web and social networking platforms, as well as resources found on our International Exchange Alumni website.

### PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The proposal should also specify and explain the applicant's proposed personnel levels as well as anticipated changes in the coming year. Resumes for key personnel should be included in the Additional Documents to be submitted tab on the SAMS Domestic Funding Opportunity application. ECA requests that applicants present costs that accurately reflect the level of staff effort. The proposed staffing pattern included in the proposal should include the level of effort for each staff allocated to the Global UGRAD Program. The recipient should also provide a staffing patterns in Performance Progress Reports (PPRs); this should detail roles and responsibilities as well as make clear the volume of work per employee in support of Global UGRAD. The staffing pattern should not include interns and assistants. The staffing patterns need only include level of effort should there be a change from the initial staffing pattern included in the proposal.

The proposal and staffing pattern should clearly outline key personnel. Under the Global UGRAD program, key personnel could include responsible signatories on the award as well as senior staff such as the program director, manager, senior outreach and recruitment officer, and other senior program officers responsible for program oversight and implementation. Additional key personnel may be identified during award negotiations and/or the period of performance. Please include the job description and resume for all key personnel in the proposal submission. ECA reserves the right to review and approve the roles and responsibilities of key personnel positions prior to future advertisement and subsequent hiring. The recipient must demonstrate responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements concerning the FY 2026 Global UGRAD Program. The recipient will be expected to maintain procedures and manuals for all components of the program to ensure that all staff operate the Global UGRAD Program according to established protocol.

### HEALTH BENEFITS ENROLLMENT

All participants must be enrolled in the ECA-funded health benefits program, ASPE and/or other health benefits plan as directed by ECA. The ASPE health benefits program is ECA-funded, therefore the applicant should not include the cost of ASPE in the budget proposal. The applicant may include an additional line item to purchase supplemental insurance for those participants attending a U.S. college or university that has mandated use of its own insurance coverage for participants or that does not accept ECA's coverage. This health insurance should act as their primary policy with ASPE or other health benefits plan acting as secondary coverage.

ASPE provides limited accident and sickness coverage, medical evacuation and repatriation of remains for all participants for the duration of the exchange program; it also provides the ASPE Assist benefit that provides support for grantee mental health challenges. The recipient will also advise participants who are enrolled in ASPE of the program policies, benefits, limitations, and

procedures for filing claims. The recipient must utilize a system that assigns a unique ID number to each participant for the purposes of health benefits program enrollment. This unique ID number must further include a specific number (assigned to each cooperating organization) that identifies the student participants particular to that organization.

#### PROGRAM PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

ECA created the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework to measure the performance of ECA programs. The MODE Framework provides standard indicators and corresponding survey questions to ensure consistent measures across all ECA programs. Please see section L.6. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in the NOFO. More resources and guidance documents on the MODE Framework are available online at: <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>.

#### VISA AND TAX REQUIREMENTS

All UGRAD Program participants must be sponsored under Exchange Visitor Program No. G-1-12539 on a J-1 visa and comply with J-visa regulations. The proposal should describe plans for complying with all J-visa regulations. Please note that some UGRAD Program policy requirements may be in addition to the requirements for compliance with J-visa regulations.

The recipient's staff members will serve as Alternate Responsible Officers (AROs) for the issuance of DS-2019 forms via the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), monitoring and maintaining appropriate non-immigrant visa status for student participants at all times. The recipient should provide guidance to participants regarding J-visa regulations. If necessary, and with prior approval from an ECA Grants Officer and ECA/A/E/MR, the recipient will provide timely documentation for continuation of stay in the United States, employment authorization, as well as arrange transfer of visa sponsorship to universities when requests are approved.

The applicant must also present a plan for assisting participants to comply with federal income tax regulations in accordance with *The Tax Reform Act of 1986*, *The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017*, and other legal requirements. A tax service provider should assist foreign participants in complying with federal and state income tax regulations and calculating the appropriate income tax amounts to be withheld from foreign student grants as necessary. Any tax refunds should be issued directly to grantees.

#### EXTENSIONS AND TRANSFERS

Program extensions or transfer of J-visa sponsorship from Exchange Visitor Program No. G-1-12539 are not allowed as the intent of this program is to provide participants with one semester of non-degree undergraduate study. It should be made clear to participants at various times throughout their grant cycle that they must return immediately to their home countries upon completion of their academic program to complete their undergraduate degrees and fulfill their two-year home residency requirement. In unforeseen circumstances (war, disaster, etc.), ECA/A/E/MR may direct the recipient to facilitate extensions and/or transfer of visa

sponsorship.

### **III. 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)

### **IV. 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>.

### **V. APPLICATION SUBMISSION**

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

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