**U.S. Department of State**

**U.S. Embassy Tbilisi**

**Notice of Funding Opportunity**

### **Basic Information**

##### ***Overview***

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| **Funding Opportunity Title** | Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF 2025) |
| **Funding Opportunity Number** | PDS-DOS-GEO-FY25-003 |
| Announcement Type | Initial Announcement |
| Deadline for Applications | January 31, 2025, 18:00 |
| Assistance Listing Number | 19.022 |
| Length of performance period | Up to 12 months |
| Number of awards anticipated | Up to 2 awards (dependent on amounts) |
| Award amounts | Awards may range from a minimum of $5,000 to a maximum of $35,000 (approximately)  |
| Total available funding | Pending availability of funds  |
| Type of Funding | FY24 ECA, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs   |
| **Anticipated project start date** | September, 2025 |

**Funding Instrument Type:** Grant or fixed amount award (FAA).

**Project Performance Period**: Proposed projects should be completed in 12 months or less.

**This notice is subject to availability of funding.**

##### ***Executive Summary***

The Embassy of the United States in Tbilisi announces an open competition for past participants (“alumni”) of U.S. government-funded and U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs to submit applications to the **2025 Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF 2025).** We seek proposals from teams of at least two alumni that meet all program eligibility requirements below. Exchange alumni interested in participating in AEIF 2025 should submit proposals to TbilisiGrants@state.gov with the **subject line AEIF 2025** by **January 31, 2025, 18:00.**

### **Eligibility**

##### ***Eligible Applicants***

The following individuals are eligible to apply:

* Applicants must be alumni of a U.S. government-funded exchange program (<https://alumni.state.gov/list-exchange-programs>) or a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program <https://j1visa.state.gov/>
* Projects teams must include teams of at least two (2) alumni or an alumni association. If the proposal is submitted by an alumni association, the alumni association needs to identify a team lead for the proposed project.
* Alumni who are U.S. citizens may not submit proposals, but U.S. citizen alumni may participate as team members in a project.
* Alumni teams may be composed of alumni from different exchange programs and different countries.
* Applications must be submitted by exchange alumni. Not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions are not eligible to apply in the name of the organization but can serve as partners/grant recipients for implementing project activities. Alumni need to consider local NGO restrictions and laws.
* Applicants are only allowed to submit **one** proposal.

##### ***Cost Sharing or Matching***

Inclusion of cost share is not a requirement of this opportunity but is strongly encouraged.

Examples include in-kind support (services, labor, supplies/equipment, or volunteers), a business contributing food, an organization offering a venue at a discount or free of charge, an NGO sponsoring an activity, an expert donating time to facilitate a seminar, etc. We encourage all proposals to include some form of cost sharing

### **Program Description**

##### ***Goals and Objectives***

AEIF provides alumni of U.S. sponsored and facilitated exchange programs with funding to expand on skills gained during their exchange experience to design and implement innovative solutions to global challenges facing their community. Since its inception in 2011, AEIF has funded nearly 500 alumni-led projects around the world through a competitive global competition. This year, AEIF 2025 will support the United States’ commitment to Georgia’s further integration with the West as a more democratic and stable country.

This annual funding opportunity is designed to amplify the return on the investment of the U.S. government in exchange programs. Pending availability of funds, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) will review and recommend proposals for funding on a yearly basis.

US Embassy Tbilisi will accept public service projects proposed and managed by teams of at least two (2) alumni that support themes such as:

* Exposure to American culture and shared values, particularly for those in the regions;
* Strengthen economic prosperity, promote innovation, foster entrepreneurship, and improve the digital economy;
* Reinforce democratic values;
* Community integration, inclusion, and tolerance-building;
* Skills building for women, youth, and people with disabilities;
* Supporting de-occupation and reconciliation;
* Projects that support cultural preservation in rural areas or in marginalized communities;
* Strengthen independent, pluralistic, and professional media while promoting media literacy, and respect for press freedom;
* Empower diversity through educational, cultural, and informational outreach tailored to the unique needs of ethnic minority communities and vulnerable populations.

Also, AEIF projects must address at least one of the following:

* Bring alumni together from different exchange programs to build or expand an alumni network capable of working together on common interests and increase regional and global collaboration of alumni.
* Strengthen the relationship between alumni and the U.S. government to work together on activities that address mutual goals and challenges.
* Support alumni as they develop their leadership capacity and implement projects in their communities. Strengthen the relationship between alumni and the U.S. government to work together on activities that address mutual goals and challenges.

Proposals must address the United States’ commitment to Georgia’s further integration with the West as a more democratic and stable country. Proposals that do not address the theme as outlined in the program objectives will be deemed ineligible. All project activities must take place outside of the United States and its territories.

### **Application Contents and Format**

1. **Content and Form of Application Submission**

Applications and budgets must be submitted using the official AEIF 2025 application and budget forms.

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

Please ensure:

* The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity;
* The proposal addresses all questions in the official AEIF 2025 application form;
* All documents are in English
* The budget is in U.S. dollars and is submitted using the designated AEIF 2025 budget form;
* All pages are numbered.
* Documents are not in ZIP or RAR file or the size of the email exceeds 6MB.

The following documents and information are required:

1. **Mandatory application forms**
2. AEIF 2025 Proposal Form in Word format
3. AEIF 2025 Budget Form in Excel format
4. SF-424-I (Application for Federal Assistance -individuals) for applicant alumni.
5. SF424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs)
6. SF424B (Assurances for Non-Construction programs)

All mandatory forms and their Instructions (both in English and Georgian) are available to download from the U.S. Embassy Tbilisi website.

**SF424 forms do not open in any internet browsers (chrome, internet explorer...). Please make sure to download the forms on your device, open via Adobe and click ‘enable all features’.**

In **AEIF 2025 Budget Form in Excel** please make sure that you submit mandatory budget justification under each budget category. For more instructions please visit the separate tab called the Budget Guidelines in the same document. Costs need to be itemized.

**RAR and ZIP files will not be accepted. If the size of the email exceeds 6MB, please make sure to send the required documents into separate emails.**

1. **Project Team Information**: At least two exchange alumni team members are required for a project to be considered for funding. Applications need to provide the name and contact information, describe the role each team member will have in the project, and their experience, qualifications, and ability to carry out that role. Applicants need to indicate what proportion of the team member’s time will be used in support of the project.
2. **Proposal Summary:** A **s**hort narrative which outlines the proposed project, including challenge/s to be addressed, project objectives, and anticipated impact.
3. **Project Goals and Objectives:** The goal/s of the proposed project need to describe what the project is intended to achieve and include the objectives which support the goal/s. Objectives should be specific, measurable, and realistically achievable in a set time frame.
4. **Project Methods, Design, and Timeline**: A description of how the project is expected to work to solve the stated problem and achieve the goal/s. This should include a description of the project’s direct and indirect beneficiaries as well as a plan on how to continue the program beyond the grant period, or the availability of other resources, if applicable. The proposed timeline for the project activities should include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events. Applicants may also submit proposed workshop or training agendas and materials.
5. **Local Project Partners:** A list of partners who will support the proposed project, if applicable.
6. **Communication Plan:** The communication plan should include a communication and outreach strategy for promoting the proposed project. It may include social media, websites, print news, or other forms of media intended to use to share information about the project to beneficiaries and the public. Communications should include AEIF 2024, ExchangeAlumni, and U.S. Embassy branding.
7. **Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan:** The Monitoring and Evaluation component of the proposal should outline in detail how the proposal’s activities will advance the program’s goals and objectives. This should include any outcomes showing a change in knowledge, awareness, and attitudes; improved quality of services; increased capacity at a school, group; etc. Proposals should also include how the grantee will measure the impact of planned activities.
8. **Budget Justification Narrative:** Applicants must submit a detailed budget and budget narrative justification utilizing the template provided. Line item expenditures should be listed in the greatest possible detail. Budgets shall be submitted in U.S. dollars and final grant agreements will be conducted in U.S. dollars.

**Project management costs should not be more than 30% of the total requested budget amount.**

#####  ***Attachments***

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

### **Submission Requirements and Deadlines**

##### ***Address to Request Application Package***

Application and budget templates are available at U.S. Embassy Tbilisi website and Grants.gov.

##### ***Department of State Contacts***

If you have any questions about the grant application process, please contact: TbilisiGrants@state.gov with the **subject line AEIF 2025.**

##### ***Submission Dates and Times***

Applications are due no later than **January 31, 2025, 18:00**

##### ***Funding Restrictions***

1. Funding Restrictions for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

None of the funds awarded resulting from this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be made available for subawards, direct financial support, or otherwise used to provide any payment or transfer to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

1. None of the funds awarded under this grant may be made available to encourage, mobilize, publicize, or manage mass-migration caravans towards the United States southwest border. Funds may not be made available for legal counseling on the United States asylum process; and/or for referrals to legal representation in the United States.

Funds may only be used for cash cards for use in the country in which they are provided or to facilitate assisted voluntary returns and other purposes that do not encourage, mobilize, publicize, or manage mass migration caravans towards the United States southwest border. The provision of humanitarian assistance is permitted.

**Budget Restrictions:** AEIF 2025 does not support the following activities or costs, and the selection committee will deem applications involving any of these activities or costs ineligible:

* Any airfare to/from the United States and its territories
* Activities that take place in the United States and its territories
* Staff salaries, office space, and overhead/operational expenses
* Large items of durable equipment or construction programs
* Alcohol, excessive meals, refreshments, or entertainment
* Academic or scientific research
* Charitable or development activities
* Provision of direct social services to a population
* Individual scholarships
* Social travel/visits
* Gifts or prizes
* Duplication of existing programs
* Institutional development of an organization
* Venture capital, for-profit endeavors, or charging a fee for participation in project
* Support for specific religious activities
* Fund-raising campaigns
* Support or opposition of partisan political activity or lobbying for specific legislation

**AEIF 2025 can support the following budget items:**

* Intra-regional or in-country transportation
* Rental of venues for project activities
* PPE and sanitizing equipment
* Meals/refreshments integral to the project (i.e., working lunch for a meeting)
* Reasonable costs to support virtual programming (i.e., subscription to Zoom, WebEx, camera/microphones for virtual meetings, mailing services, etc.)
* Trainer or speaker honoraria expenses (i.e., maximum $250/day fee, travel, lodging, per diem)
* Reasonable equipment and materials
* Communications and publicity materials, such as manuals or project advertisements

##### ***Other Submission Requirements***

All application materials must be submitted by email to TbilisiGrants@state.gov with the **subject line AEIF 2025**.

### **Application Review Information**

**Evaluation Criteria**:

The AEIF Selection Committee will use the criteria below to review and evaluate applications.

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| **Relevance to ICS goals and Integration into Mission PDIP**The proposal provides sufficient information on how the activities will support the Mission's ICS goals and the U.S. Mission explains how the project supports alumni engagement laid out in the PDIP. The narrative explains any relevant local context or Mission priorities the D.C. Selection Committee may not be aware of in relation to this project and your post. Proposed project ideas must be public diplomacy and public service oriented in nature (i.e., not development or military).  |
| **Purpose and Summary, Description, and Implementation Plan**When developing the purpose, summary, description, and implementation plan, applicants should aim to make all descriptions clear, concise, and compelling. Reviewers will judge the proposals based on the likelihood of the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the community where it is undertaken. Does the project address an important gap of understanding or need? If the aim of the project is achieved, how will existing knowledge or practice be improved? What audience do the applicants hope to reach with this project? How many will participate? How will they be selected?  |
| **Degree of Alumni Involvement**Projects must include the involvement of at least two (2) exchange alumni. They may be the project team leaders or collaborate directly with PAS in formulating the project. More than two alumni may comprise the team; however, the minimum is two. As the team leaders, the alumni must be closely involved in project planning, implementation, etc. Applicants should ensure that the proposal includes the following information for each alumni team member: first name, last name, exchange program, country of citizenship, roles and responsibilities, and degree of time spent on the project.  |
| **Participation and Support from Local Partners**The proposal demonstrates buy-in and support from the community where the project will take place. Local partner involvement is a strong sign that there is community support and that the project will engage a broad array of experts, such as subject matter experts, community centers, academic institutions, businesses, local/national government, non-governmental organizations, American Spaces, etc.  |
| **Monitoring and Evaluation of the Project** A monitoring & evaluation (M&E) plan is pivotal to project implementation and important tracking of progress towards the project’s objectives and goals. An M&E plan should consider the data needed to effectively monitor progress toward specific outputs and outcomes as well as how that data collection will be accomplished. Well-crafted indicators should be used to understand a program’s progress toward the desired results. An M&E plan should be reviewed for the following: • Completeness• Applicability and logic of objectives and indicators • Clear approach to monitoring • Adherence to SMART criteria • Data quality plan • Capacity to implement plan |
| **Communication, Media, and Outreach Plan**The project should include a clear plan and timeline for how and when the team will share information about the project. It is important to ensure that the U.S. Embassy gets recognition throughout the process, if circumstances permit.  |
| **Budget and Budget Narrative**The budget and narrative justification are sufficiently detailed. 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. The results and proposed outcomes justify the total cost of the project. Budget items are reasonable, allowable, and allocable. |

***Disclaimer:***This notice is subject to availability of funding. U.S. Embassy Tbilisi does not guarantee availability of funding by receiving applications under this announcement. Only successful applicants will be contacted.

##### ***Review and Selection Process***

The U.S. embassy Tbilisi, Public Diplomacy Sections will use the criteria outlined above to evaluate all applications. The proposals will be reviewed by a Selection Committee made up of regional and exchange program experts located at the Department of State in Washington, DC. Panelists will use the criteria below to review and evaluate applications.

##### ***Risk Review***

1. Risk factors

Under the merit review as required by 2 CFR 200.206, prior to making a Federal Award the Department will review and consider the following risk factors:

* 1. Financial stability
	2. Management systems and standards
	3. History of performance
	4. Audit reports and findings (If applicable)
	5. Ability to effectively implement requirements

### **Award Notices**

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

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

Issuance of this NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

**Unsuccessful applicants:** Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by email.

**Payment Method:** All payments will be made through Electronic Funds Transfer in predetermined installments.

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

### **Post-Award Requirements and Administration**

##### ***Administrative and National Policy Requirements***

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

 These include:

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

* [Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5) (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register’s 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, particularly on:
	+ Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an impartial process of evaluating Federal award applications (2 CFR part 200.205),
	+ Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
	+ Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and
	+ Terminating agreements pursuant to the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, including, to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340).
* [2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.25&rgn=div5)
* [2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.170&rgn=div5)
* [2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.175&rgn=div5)
* [2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.182&rgn=div5)
* [2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&node=pt2.1.183&rgn=div5)
* [2 CFR 600 – DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=81a5f41de81c46a9844617d93a9db081&mc=true&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2chapterVI.tpl)
* [U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS](https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/)

##### ***Reporting***

**Reporting Requirements:** Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify how often these reports must be submitted. Copies of video materials, CDs, and other video and audio aids generated during the implementation of the project attesting to the success of the grant activities are welcome.

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

### **Other Information**

**Guidelines for Budget Justification**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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