



Educational and Cultural Affairs

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

**U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)**

Amendment to the FY 2026 J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative (JCSVEI) Program

Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0017856

Application Deadline: May 29, 2026

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A. Basic Information

1. Overview.

Funding Opportunity Title	FY 2026 J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative (JCSVEI) Program
Funding Opportunity Number	DFOP0017856
Announcement Type	Amendment to the New Cooperative Agreement
Deadline for Applications	May 29, 2026, 11:59pm Eastern (Washington DC time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.415
Length of Performance Period	36 months
Number of Awards Anticipated	Two awards.

Award Amount	Each award will be approximately \$5,000,000.
Total Available Funding	\$10,000,000, pending availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY26 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
Funding Instrument Type	Cooperative Agreement
Anticipated Award Date	September 15, 2026

This notice is subject to availability of funding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government.

ECA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds.

2. Executive Summary.

As 2027 marks 15 years since the loss of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, and in honor of his enduring legacy, the Global Leaders Division, Office of Citizen Exchanges, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), invites proposal submissions for two cooperative agreements to design, administer, and implement activities under the broader J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative (JCSVEI).

ECA anticipates making two separate cooperative agreements to design, implement, and manage the FY 2026 J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative (JCSVEI) under two distinct program options: (1) J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative and (2) J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative: Digital Leaders for Peace and Economic Opportunity. Applicants may submit applications for program option one or program option two. Organizations may submit two separate applications, one for each program option, if they wish to be considered for both. Each application will be evaluated independently. Each application must clearly state in the Executive Summary which program option is being proposed. If applying separately for each program options the applicant must clearly demonstrate the organizational capacity to implement both program options, including the ability to work in the MENA region and the United States and to deliver both online and hybrid program elements.

The JCSVEI advances U.S. foreign policy priorities by championing American scientific excellence, technological leadership, and innovation, while promoting core U.S. principles—freedom of speech, individual liberty, and the rule of law—as foundations of peace and prosperity. The program achieves these goals through American-led virtual exchanges that connects young leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with peers across the United States.

Through interactive digital programming, participants will explore U.S. global leadership in science, technology, business, and civic life, while demonstrating how American freedom of speech, rule of law, and individual liberty underpin prosperity and opportunity. They will collaborate virtually with peers overseas to develop digital storytelling projects, podcasts, vlogs, and other media that illustrate the strength of American communities and the nation’s commitment to open exchange, innovation, and collaboration. The initiative will also challenge participants to apply American ingenuity to practical solutions that promote economic opportunity, job creation, and digital connectivity—contributing to shared prosperity and regional stability. By reinforcing the spirit of the Abraham Accords and advancing U.S. engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, the program will strengthen ties between the United States and key partners in the Middle East while advancing America’s vision of a secure, prosperous, and interconnected region.

Organizations applying for either awards must demonstrate the capacity to either: (1) recruit, select, and manage up to eight partner organizations as subaward recipients to implement virtual exchange components under the JCSVEI umbrella; or (2) implement the virtual exchange components directly, if they have the capacity and infrastructure to do so.

If the primary award recipient elects to engage subaward recipients, it will maintain full oversight of those sub-awards, ensuring compliance, accountability, and alignment with ECA’s goals, performance measures, and branding standards.

The JCSVEI will use a range of virtual exchange formats live dialogues, collaborative digital projects, online trainings, and virtual workshops, to reach approximately 9,000 participants annually. Programming should promote mutual collaboration grounded in U.S. leadership, encouraging youth to view the United States as a trusted partner in science, entrepreneurship, and global problem-solving. An Alumni Leadership Academy will provide continued engagement for participants who demonstrate strong leadership potential, equipping them to serve

as ambassadors of U.S. values and connectors between American and Middle Eastern communities. Follow-on activities should reinforce long-term networks that advance America's economic, security, and diplomatic priorities.

Organizations applying for this award must demonstrate the capacity to recruit, select, and manage up to eight partner organizations as sub-award recipients to implement virtual exchange components under the JCSVEI umbrella. If subawards are used, the primary recipient will maintain full oversight, ensuring compliance, accountability, and alignment with Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs goals, performance measures, and branding standards.

ECA will consider only one proposal per applicant organization for each program option. Organizations may submit one application for program option one and one application for program option two. Applicants must clearly identify in the Executive Summary which program option their proposal addresses. If multiple proposals for the same program option are submitted through grants.gov, only the most recent submission prior to the deadline will be reviewed.

By connecting rising leaders through cutting-edge virtual platforms, the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative will project American excellence, expand U.S. influence, and strengthen networks that promote stability, opportunity, and peace—furthering the United States' enduring leadership and engagement across the Middle East.

This Amendment to the NOFO makes the following changes to the original NOFO:

- Increases the total estimated available funding from \$4,000,000 to \$10,000,000
- Increases the number of anticipated awards from one award to two awards, each funded at approximately \$5 million.
- Extends the anticipated period of performance from 24 to 36 months for each award.
- Clarifies that ECA will consider only one proposal per applicant organization for each program option, allowing organizations to submit one application for program option one and one application for program option two.
- Revises the Executive Summary to reflect a second program option, the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative: Digital Leaders for Peace and Economic Opportunity, and to clarify the language on the use of subawards, if applicable

- Revises the Executive Summary to update subaward requirement language, providing flexibility for both program options. Organizations may choose to implement through subawards (managing up to eight subrecipients) or through direct implementation if they have sufficient capacity and infrastructure.
- Revises the Program Specific Guidelines to clarify the two program options: Option 1, the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative, and Option 2, the Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative: Digital Leaders for Peace and Economic Opportunity.
- Changes Section 3b to clarify participant age ranges for each program option.
- Changes under 3d. Partner Organization Selection to clarify that recipients have the flexibility to identify and work with up to eight subaward recipients or to implement the program independently.
- Changes to Section 3e. Projected Timeline: the program period has been extended from 24 months to 36 months.
- Changes to Section 5. Goals and Objectives: the participant age range has been expanded to include individuals up to 30 years old.
- Some portions of the NOFO have been moved to more appropriate locations within the document.
- The description of the Alumni Leadership Academy has been moved to the Program Specific Guidelines section to reflect that it applies only to Option 1, the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative.
- Deleted redundant J visa text in section I.
- Extends the due date; proposals are now due May 29th 2026.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants.

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

- U.S. Not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations
- U.S. Not-for-profit public and private educational institutions

Please see the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for additional information.

2. Cost Sharing.

There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this program.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements.

- a. All organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via SAM.gov as well as a valid registration in SAM.gov. Please see *Section E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines* for more information.
 - b. Grants or Cooperative Agreements awarded to organizations which do not demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$130,000.
 - c. All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO, and the PSI; not doing so may result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.
 - d. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
 - e. Applicants may submit applications for program option one or program option two. Organizations may submit two separate applications, one for each program option, if they wish to be considered for both. Applicants must clearly identify in the Executive Summary which program option their proposal addresses.
 - f. ECA will consider only one proposal per applicant organization for each program option. If multiple proposals for the same program option are submitted through grants.gov, ECA will only consider the submission made closest in time to the NOFO deadline; that submission would constitute the one and only proposal ECA would review from that applicant for each program option.
- Please note:** Applicant organizations are defined by their legal name, and EIN number as stated on their completed SF-424 and additional supporting documentation outlined in the PSI document.
- g. Applicants who are current recipients of awards directly from ECA should make sure the application discusses one or more award that will be open with ECA at the start of the anticipated period of performance for this NOFO.

Applicants who do not have current awards directly with ECA, please review the information in the PSI, section D, with additional information that must be provided in your application for it to be eligible.

C. Program Description

1. Authority.

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries...; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations...and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program above is provided through legislation.

2. Purpose.

Established in 2015, the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative (JCSVEI) honors the legacy of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, whose career reflected the best of American diplomacy—curiosity, optimism, and a belief in the power of open dialogue. His example embodies America’s founding values of liberty, opportunity, and engagement with the world.

The JCSVEI advances U.S. foreign policy priorities by championing American scientific excellence, technological leadership, and innovation, while promoting core U.S. principles—freedom of speech, individual liberty, and the rule of law—as foundations of peace and prosperity. The program achieves these goals through American-led virtual exchanges that connects young leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with peers across the United States.

Through immersive digital platforms, participants will explore America’s leadership in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and apply these skills to address shared global challenges. The program will integrate cutting-edge virtual exchange tools, including virtual reality (VR) environments, hackathons, and collaborative online innovation labs that simulate real-world problem-solving. Participants will engage in projects that showcase U.S. expertise in entrepreneurship, research, and technology-driven development, reinforcing the United States as the global standard for excellence and ingenuity.

Program themes will include Science and Technology Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Economic Prosperity, Digital Media and Storytelling, and Civic Engagement grounded in American founding principles including freedom of speech and the rule of law. These focus areas will connect American youth ages 18–25—particularly those from rural communities—with peers in the Middle East through virtual exchanges that showcase U.S. excellence in innovation, leadership, and enterprise.

A signature feature of the initiative, the JCSVEI Alumni Leadership Academy, will provide advanced learning opportunities and mentorship for high-performing alumni. Through multi-month programming and in-person engagement, participants will gain deeper exposure to American approaches to scientific innovation, digital entrepreneurship, and civic leadership—equipping them to serve as catalysts for peace, stability, and opportunity in their own communities.

The JCSVEI directly supports key U.S. strategic objectives in the MENA region by:

1. Promoting enduring partnerships between the United States and regional stakeholders that advance peace, prosperity, and security.
2. Showcasing American excellence in science and technology, demonstrating how innovation and enterprise drive growth and strengthen free societies.
3. Championing open exchange and freedom of speech through modern digital platforms that connect future leaders in shared learning and innovation.
4. Developing leadership, STEM, and professional capacity among participants to reinforce economic opportunity and regional stability.
5. By linking rising leaders with America’s scientific innovation, digital technologies, and founding values, the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative strengthens U.S. leadership, expands American influence, and promotes peace through knowledge, collaboration, and technological excellence across the Middle East and North Africa.

3. Program Specific Guidelines.

Program Option One: Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative

The JCSVEI will use a range of virtual exchange formats—live dialogues, collaborative digital projects, online trainings, and virtual workshops—to reach approximately 9,000 participants. Programming should promote mutual

collaboration grounded in U.S. leadership, encouraging youth to view the United States as a trusted partner in science, entrepreneurship, and global problem-solving.

Through immersive digital platforms, participants will explore America's leadership in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and apply these skills to address shared global challenges. The program will integrate cutting-edge virtual exchange tools, including virtual reality (VR) environments, hackathons, and collaborative online innovation labs that simulate real-world problem-solving. Participants will engage in projects that showcase U.S. expertise in entrepreneurship, research, and technology-driven development, reinforcing the United States as the global standard for excellence and ingenuity.

Program themes will include Science and Technology Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Economic Prosperity, Digital Media and Storytelling, and Civic Engagement grounded in American founding principles such as freedom of speech and the rule of law. These focus areas will connect American youth ages 18–25—particularly those from rural communities—with peers in the Middle East through virtual exchanges that showcase U.S. excellence in innovation, leadership, and enterprise.

The recipient will design and implement a robust Alumni Leadership Academy that advances program themes such as American innovation and STEM excellence, digital media and freedom of speech, economic and career preparedness, and civic engagement rooted in America First principles.

The Academy should be a multi-month hybrid experience that includes one to two in-person components and serves approximately 40 alumni annually from the United States, the Middle East, and North Africa. Each cohort should provide participants with advanced learning, mentorship, and leadership development opportunities that reinforce U.S. values of liberty, entrepreneurship, and collaboration.

Proposals should define clear learning outcomes and engagement goals and include a grants component enabling alumni to apply their skills through community-based projects following completion of the program. The recipient may propose one or two Academy cohorts per year.

Program Option Two: J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative: Digital Leaders for Peace and Economic Opportunity: Building directly on the foundation established by Program Option One, this expanded initiative represents the next phase of JCSVEI programming. Proposed in recognition of 2027 marking 15 years since the loss of Ambassador Stevens, this option deepens and extends the

virtual exchange model by engaging young professionals ages 20 to 30 in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region through a more intensive, multi-stage leadership development pathway.

While Program Option One introduces participants to U.S. leadership in innovation and civic engagement through virtual exchanges, Program Option Two advances these connections by providing structured opportunities for participants to apply their learning, develop professional skills, and create lasting impact. This option is designed to complement and expand the reach of the core JCSVEI model by offering a progression from initial engagement to sustained collaboration and tangible outcomes.

The program will consist of four interconnected components that build sequentially on one another. Short-term virtual exchanges will serve as the entry point, reaching approximately 4,000 participants and building foundational knowledge, leadership capacity, and professional skills—while targeting young professionals ready for deeper involvement. Virtual internships with either U.S. or MENA placement organizations, and/or project-based learning, will then advance approximately 1,000 participants from the initial virtual exchange phase into applied professional experiences, strengthening 21st-century workforce readiness skills and fostering professional linkages with U.S. and MENA-based organizations. In-person Alumni Accelerator workshops will bring together a select cohort of participants who have successfully completed the earlier phases for solution-focused convenings around themes aligned with Administration priorities, including STEM and artificial intelligence, digital media and nontraditional media, peace and conflict resolution, and innovation and entrepreneurship. Finally, alumni seed funding will support participant-led projects in the United States and MENA that emerge from the Alumni Accelerator workshops, enabling participants to apply the skills, networks, and ideas developed throughout the program to create tangible community impact.

This program option also serves as a pilot to test and compare a range of virtual, hybrid, and in-person program models and components. Lessons learned will inform the expansion and refinement of future JCSVEI offerings, strengthening the overall initiative's ability to advance U.S. foreign policy priorities through sustained engagement with emerging leaders across the MENA region.

Applicants should integrate the program's strategic goals throughout all aspects of program design and implementation. Proposals must demonstrate a clear understanding of U.S. foreign policy priorities, including the promotion of American innovation, STEM and scientific excellence, free enterprise, and

democratic principles. Applicants should highlight relevant regional and thematic expertise, as well as their capacity—and that of any subrecipients—to conduct high-quality virtual exchange programming that connects American youth with peers in the Middle East and North Africa.

Program design should emphasize the application of digital technologies, including virtual reality, collaborative platforms, and online hackathons, to foster engagement, creativity, and problem-solving. Applicants should address strategies for effectively implementing these virtual exchanges in locations with limited internet access while continuing to advance U.S. strategic interests, promote American values of freedom, opportunity, and the rule of law, and deliver lasting benefits for both U.S. citizens and international participants.

The recipient will oversee and support all virtual, domestic, and international program activities and will serve as the primary liaison with U.S. embassies engaged in program implementation. The award recipient must work closely with participating U.S. embassies to obtain approval of local partners, recruitment strategies, and in-country activities, and to coordinate the selection of alumni for the Alumni Leadership Academy. All activities should consistently reflect U.S. leadership, innovation, and commitment to strengthening peace and prosperity through American excellence and engagement.

3a Participating Countries

Activities must be conducted in the United States and in one or more of the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

3b Participants

Program Option 1 – JCSVEI: Participants must be 18 to 25 years old.

Program Option 2 – J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative: Digital Leaders for Peace and Economic Opportunity: participants must be 20 to 30 years old.

For both program options, participants in the JCSVEI should be at least 18 years of age, from the United States, and from one of the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

3c Program Themes

Applicants should propose a portfolio of virtual exchange programming that addresses at least three of the following themes:

- **STEM and American Excellence in Science and Technology** – Highlight U.S. leadership in innovation, research, and applied technology as drivers of progress and prosperity.
- **America First Principles** – Promote understanding of freedom of speech, rule of law, civic responsibility, and individual liberty as the foundation of democratic societies.
- **Digital Media and Freedom of Expression** – Encourage responsible communication, storytelling, and digital collaboration that reflect America’s commitment to openness and truth in the digital age.
- **Entrepreneurship, Employment, and Career Preparedness** – Showcase American approaches to workforce development, business creation, and skills that power the modern economy.
- **American Excellence and Global Leadership** – Demonstrate how U.S. innovation, enterprise, and civic engagement advance peace, stability, and shared prosperity around the world.

3d. Overview of Key Program Components

All proposals should include detailed information addressing the following key components of the JCSVEI:

Partner Organization Selection

Applicants may choose to use subawards to partner organizations to implement virtual exchange programs under the both program options, but subawards are not required. If applicants elect to use subawards, they may select up to eight partner organizations as subaward recipients. Proposals that include subawards must describe the selection process, criteria, and rationale for selecting each partner organization. Applicants must submit information on potential subaward recipients prior to award issuance and provide a letter of intent from each proposed subaward recipient.

Selected partner organizations should implement exchanges that highlight American excellence in science and technology, entrepreneurship, civic leadership, and the rule of law. Proposals should include letters of commitment or intent from all proposed subaward partners and describe how each organization’s programming advances U.S. leadership and strengthens collaboration between the United States and the Middle East.

Partner Organization Management and Oversight

The award recipient will maintain full responsibility for the management and oversight of all partner organizations and subawards under the JCSVEI. Proposals should demonstrate proven capacity to administer multiple subawards and present a detailed management and accountability plan. Applicants should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each partner, outlining expectations for program quality, fiscal compliance, and impact reporting consistent with ECA and U.S. government standards.

Program Promotion and Outreach

The recipient will develop and manage all program communication and outreach platforms, including a website, informational materials, and official social media accounts. All materials should amplify U.S. leadership, innovation, and values while maintaining compliance with ECA branding and public diplomacy guidelines. Coordination with ECA and U.S. embassies abroad is required for the review and dissemination of all content.

Alumni Engagement

Applicants must include a plan to build and sustain an active alumni network beyond the Alumni Leadership Academy. This network should reinforce U.S. strategic and public diplomacy objectives, foster continued collaboration, and highlight American impact.

Proposals should integrate ECA-wide alumni initiatives, including the International Exchange Alumni platform (exchangealumni.gov), and connect participants to U.S. Department of State alumni opportunities such as small grants and professional development seminars. All alumni activities must strengthen participants' ongoing connection to the United States and adhere to ECA guidance for attribution and branding.

3e. Projected Timeline

The cooperative agreement is expected to begin on or about **September 15, 2026**, for a total duration of **approximately 36 months**. Applicants should include a proposed implementation timeline outlining major program milestones. Specific exchange and activity dates will be finalized following ECA approval.

4. Recipient Responsibilities.

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:

- a) The recipient organization will serve as the lead implementer of the JCSVEI, ensuring that all activities advance the program's U.S.-based impact, strengthen people-to-people ties, and promote mutual understanding between the United States and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).
- b) Foster meaningful connections and collaboration between participants and institutions in the United States and MENA.
- c) Identify and thoroughly vet U.S. and MENA-based partner organizations to design and deliver innovative virtual exchange programs that reflect the distinctiveness within the region, in theme, and in participant backgrounds.
- d) Ensure all subaward partners uphold U.S. values of fairness, respect, and equal opportunity.
- e) Develop clear program guidelines, Terms & Conditions, and resource materials that highlight the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), U.S. Department of State, as the program sponsor.
- f) Seek ECA and U.S. embassy approval for participant recruitment and partner engagement.
- g) Submit all subaward agreements, amendments, and related documentation to ECA prior to implementation.
- h) Oversee partner performance and conduct routine assessments to ensure quality, accountability, and alignment with ECA objectives.
- i) Monitor participant progress, engagement, and outcomes throughout their JCSVEI experience.
- j) Maintain strong safeguarding measures to protect participants' safety and well-being.
- k) Immediately inform ECA and relevant U.S. embassies of any participant or program-related issues and actions taken.
- l) Coordinate with ECA and U.S. embassies on all in-person exchanges, ensuring U.S.-based activities highlight American innovation, civic engagement, and community leadership, and conduct selection activities for the Alumni Fellowship Academy in consultation with U.S. embassies, inviting embassy representatives to participate in application reviews and interview panels.
- m) Manage DS-2019 issuance for international participants traveling to the United States on the J-1 Exchange Visitor visa.
- n) Enroll in-person participants in the Bureau's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) and provide necessary support.
- o) Conduct comprehensive pre-departure orientations and assist U.S. embassies in preparing outbound participants.
- p) Arrange all program-related U.S. and international travel logistics.

- q) Develop a dynamic media and outreach strategy that amplifies JCSVEI's U.S. impact and showcases American expertise and values.
- r) Collaborate closely with U.S. Embassy Public Diplomacy Sections to promote recruitment and success stories.
- s) Highlight participant and alumni achievements that demonstrate the mutual benefit of U.S.–MENA collaboration.
- t) Produce narratives and data-driven stories that show how JCSVEI advances U.S. foreign policy goals and public diplomacy impact.
- u) Establish an Alumni Leadership Academy that deepens connections to U.S. mentors, institutions, and learning opportunities.
- v) Implement a grants program to support alumni-led projects that sustain U.S.–MENA collaboration.
- w) Expand alumni networks, activities, and engagement to enhance the long-term influence of U.S. exchange programs.
- x) Incorporate the ECA Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) framework.
- y) Maintain transparent communication with ECA through regular reviews, reports, and monthly updates.
- z) Submit staffing plans, key personnel changes, and all external funding agreements for ECA approval.

The activities and the roles and responsibilities of the recipient for this program are outlined in the attached POGI document.

5. Goals and Objectives.

1. Advance U.S. foreign policy priorities by connecting American youth with peers in the Middle East through virtual exchanges that promote U.S. excellence in science, innovation, and leadership.
2. Empower U.S. participants ages 18–30, including those from rural areas, to share America's story—its entrepreneurial drive, technological achievements, and democratic principles—through collaborative digital projects.
3. Promote America First principles such as freedom of expression, rule of law, and individual liberty as foundations for creativity and prosperity.
4. Build sustained networks of emerging leaders who strengthen U.S. engagement, expand digital connectivity, and advance shared prosperity and regional stability through continued alumni and exchange activities.

6. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).

Distinct from grants or cooperative agreement monitoring and participant monitoring, performance monitoring is designed to assess progress against a

program's goals and objectives. A performance monitoring framework is vital to tracking the direction, pace, and magnitude of change that result from ECA programs.

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.** 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/>.

The proposal must include the MODE Framework objectives and indicators listed below (note that, because not all MODE objectives and indicators are relevant for a program, the numbering below will not be sequential). In addition to the ECA-required objectives and indicators, applicants may also select additional MODE Framework indicators (see the *Indicator Book* on the MODE Framework website), or design custom objectives and indicators that are specific to the proposed program and this proposal.

- Demographic Questions as outlined in the *Indicator Book* on page v and *Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)* (See the MODE Resource Guide - <https://app.box.com/s/qjo8icwj46tc8h1i1qtg80zl7ibwgtua> – found on our website <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>)
- **Objective 1:** Advance participant and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
 - o **Sub-Objective 1.1:** Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between participants and their host communities
 - E1.1.01: Percent of participants reporting that their program experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
 - E1.1.04: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
 - E1.1.09: Percent of participants who traveled abroad for the first time because of their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.11: Percent of American participants indicating a change in their understanding of their host country's culture and values
 - E1.1.12: Percent of foreign participants indicating a change in understanding of third-party countries' cultures and values

- E1.1.13: Percent of foreign participants who are more likely to recommend the United States as a good place to study
- E1.1.16: Percent of virtual exchange (VE) participants who report VE as their only likely way to interact with citizens from other countries in the future
- E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American people (core indicator)
- E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values (core indicator)
- E1.1.19: Percent of foreign participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values (core indicator)
- **Objective 2:** Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities / countries
 - E2.0.01: Percent of foreign participants that volunteer in their host communities
 - E2.0.04: Number of hours that foreign participants spend volunteering in their host communities
- o **Sub-Objective 2.2:** Foster participants' belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
 - E2.2.01: Percent of participants who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country (core indicator)
- **Objective 3:** Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions
 - E3.0.02: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of Americans (core indicator)
 - E3.0.04: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of third country nationals
 - E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)
- o **Sub-Objective 3.1:** Alumni subscribe to platforms for resources and information-sharing
 - E3.1.02: Percent of participants who learned about new resources
 - E3.1.05: Percent of participants who are connected to ECA through a U.S. Department of State-managed platform
- **Objective 4:** Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
 - E4.0.01: Percent of participants reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation
 - E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation

- E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
- E4.0.09: Percent of participants reporting an increase in language skills as a result of their program participation
- E4.0.14: Percent of participants reporting new digital skills/competencies gained from virtual exchange (VE) programming
- o **Sub-Objective 4.1:** Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
 - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
 - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)
 - E4.1.03: Number of ECA-supported international scholarships provided
 - E4.1.04: Number of professional placements
 - E4.1.06: Number of participants in programs with formal, dedicated language learning activities
 - E4.1.07: Number of instruction methodology trainings implemented
 - E4.1.08: Number of language teaching fellows enrolled
 - E4.1.11: Number of American reciprocal exchange participants
 - E4.1.13: Number of fellows completing language teaching fellowships
 - E4.1.14: Number of virtual exchange (VE) programs
 - E4.1.15: Number of participants in virtual exchange (VE) programs
 - E4.1.16: Number of audience members attending cultural events
- **Objective 8:** Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau’s resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
 - E8.0.03: Response rate for participant surveys (core indicator)

While the MODE Framework provides core measures, applicants are encouraged to propose additional, program-specific indicators that assess progress toward the objectives outlined on page five (Strategic Objectives) and page seven (Program Themes) and reflect the unique design of their proposed activities.

Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs)

ECA recommends the use of a PMP to serve as the primary reference document for performance monitoring for this award. If used, the PMP is an important part of any proposal, as it outlines how the applicant plans to track progress towards the proposed program’s goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. A PMP document that includes all MODE Framework indicators is a part of this solicitation’s attachments. Specific instructions on how to modify the PMP to be responsive to this solicitation are included in that document; there is also a support video available for more information on how to fill out the PMP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBHC1oLNZvI>. While

ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. Successful PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the following:

- **Objectives.** Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.
- **Indicators.** Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning, breakdowns of the data by subgroups; the PMP lists the demographic questions required to obtain the information necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.
 - If you do not use the PMP format provided, note that any performance monitoring reference document the applicant submits should include the information in the column headers (Indicator Name, Definition, Target, Survey Question, etc.) in the PMP attachment at a minimum.
 - In addition to those indicators outlined in above, the applicant may propose additional custom, program-specific indicators in the PMP (ECA recommends the proposed PMPs include a minimum of one indicator for each custom programmatic objective).
 - During the period of performance of the award, the ECA program office may further revise, add, or remove indicators. Therefore, the applicant's PMP and data collection instruments should be flexible enough to incorporate those once established.

Award recipients are responsible for collecting indicator data only on participant outcomes during the period of performance of the award itself (see the PMP for guidelines as to when these data collection efforts should occur). ECA will measure outcomes of ECA participants at one, three, five, and 10 years after the exchange has ended to capture the long-term outcomes of ECA programming unless otherwise specified in the solicitation. In this instance, the recipient will be

responsible for coordinating with ECA on any alumni surveys to de-duplicate questions and minimize potential survey fatigue.

Regardless of the survey platform used, **all** MODE Framework survey questions outlined above are **required** (i.e., should be forced response); please see the Consent Language in the MODE Framework *Indicator Book* for more information on how to convey this to participants/survey respondents.

Program Performance M&E Narrative

Proposals should include information within the program narrative section(s) that outlines how the applicant intends to measure the indicators listed above. This will be separate from the PMP and should include but not be limited to:

- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.
- The mechanism(s) through which surveys and other data collection tools (if applicable) will be administered, including which platform will be used, and when and how surveys will be advertised to participants – detailing strategies to ensure adequate survey response rates (<https://app.box.com/s/pn6tavyg7sh064i502fzap49ox63y38a>), and to reduce selection and non-response bias.
- A brief explanation of data analysis and reporting procedures.
- An overview of a proposed learning plan and feedback loops to ensure that the Grant Officer (GO)/Grant Officer Representative (GOR) are informed on performance monitoring issues at regular intervals.

Nonmandatory Use of the Qualtrics MODE Survey Builder Data Collection System

ECA has created a guided tool (the MODE Survey Builder) within the Qualtrics survey platform for ECA implementing partners to generate surveys to facilitate the seamless collection and reporting of MODE Framework data. The MODE Survey Builder offers implementing partners a guided workflow that will generate a ready-to-send MODE survey, allows the addition of custom survey questions, and offers a standard report template for a quick overview of survey results that can be submitted in MyGrants (see section below) to fulfill RPM Reporting Requirements. Use of the Qualtrics survey platform can be utilized at no cost to implementing partners. Additional information about the MODE Survey Builder can be found here: <https://app.box.com/s/jjr98hmx6deorxj3lwgaxjrwdfec2r91> and here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jus4fRqOTcM>. You can propose use of an

alternate survey tool or use the MODE Survey Builder, but if you are utilizing the MODE Survey Builder, you must indicate such in your proposal.

MyGrants RPM Reporting Requirements

MyGrants is a database solution that serves as the official system of record for all U.S. Department of State and ECA awards. The Results Performance Monitoring (RPM) module within MyGrants is an extension module that enables users to report performance monitoring data in the same system where they currently manage federal assistance actions. As part of ECA's efforts to streamline data collection and management, the recipient(s) of this award will be required to input performance reporting data outlined in this solicitation into the MyGrants RPM. The data stored in the MyGrants RPM will provide ECA with a bureau-wide, uniform M&E reporting tool that is already linked with other elements of the awards familiar to existing awardees.

7. Allowable Costs.

- Staff salaries and benefits. Each staff person must be listed separately. Provide the percentage of time spent on the program.
- Other direct expenses
- Indirect costs
- Subawards
- Curriculum Development
- In-person Alumni Leadership Academy event costs including, but not limited to, honoraria for speakers, educational materials, lodging, room rental(s), welcome and farewell events, and participant admissions
- Participant travel costs including, but not limited to, round trip international airfare, visa travel, ground transportation, domestic travel, and other transit costs
- Per participant allowances for travel including baggage allowance, travel allowance, and meals and incidentals
- Alumni Programming/follow-on activities, including grants, etc.
- Tax withholding
- Wire transfer fees
- Consultant fees
- Web hosting
- Communications (i.e., participant cell phones or sim cards, internet access fees)
- Recruitment, outreach, and program materials
- Medical expenses

- Medical costs related to pandemics/ public health emergencies, including but not limited to, testing and medically required quarantine (outside of medical facilities covered under ASPE)
- Covid protection and contingency costs
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Reasonable accommodations
- Media and Digital Production Costs: Allowable expenses for creating digital and media content that highlights program outcomes and impact.
- Other cost categories as necessary

8. Cost Share.

ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

9. Freedom and Democracy Guidelines.

Public Law 104-319 provides that "in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy," the Bureau "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries." Public Law 106 - 113 requires that the governments of the countries described above do not have inappropriate influence in the selection process. Proposals should reflect advancement of these goals in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

10. Virtual Exchange Component.

When changing political, health, environmental, or other similar circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a

virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges.

Proposals should demonstrate the organization's capacity to provide innovative options for virtual activities to substitute for in-person engagement for program participants. Organizations should consider how they will implement virtual exchange activities, given the potential limits to internet access from participants in some locations and while continuing to advance foreign policy objectives and achieve lasting benefits for U.S. citizens and international participants.

In addition to planning for virtual exchange activities if in-person programming is prohibited, ECA welcomes innovative ideas on how organizations can leverage virtual programming technologies during or in addition to in-person programming. ECA encourages organizations submitting proposals in response to this solicitation to suggest one or more virtual exchange components to complement the in-person exchange. The virtual exchange components could come before, during and/or after the physical exchange. The objective for the virtual exchange components is to augment the impact of the in-person exchange described in this solicitation. ECA encourages organizations to propose virtual exchange ideas that take advantage of ECA's existing web and social networking platforms. Virtual exchange components would be coordinated with and approved by the ECA program office and U.S. missions abroad on a project-by-project basis.

12. Communications Guidance for ECA Recipients.

All ECA Recipients must adhere to the requirements in [ECA's Communications Guidance](#) on the creation of program branding and attribution, websites, social media, and press.

13. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial.

ECA is excited to play a key role in making the Semiquincentennial – commonly known as “Freedom 250” – a truly global celebration. As the period of performance for this award is scheduled to cover part or all of calendar year (CY) 2026, the applicant may wish to consider ways the program can celebrate Freedom 250. Any Freedom 250 focused activities or plans will be subject to ECA approval and direction, and changes may be requested by ECA. Use of any ECA-provided Freedom 250 brand elements will be subject to advance ECA approval and require adherence to Department of State and ECA guidelines for such branding.

14. Substantial Involvement.

In a cooperative agreement, the Department is substantially involved in program activities above and beyond routine monitoring, as follows:

- a. Participate and provide guidance in the design and execution of all program activities, events, and approve locations of all main program components.
- b. Approve partner organizations, including in-country partner organizations and subaward recipients, and any changes in partners made.
- c. Approve all amendments for subawards of the JCSVEI.
- d. Review and approve program timelines and agendas.
- e. Liaise with relevant U.S. embassies and country desk officers at the U.S. Department of State.
- f. Review and approve all program publicity and other materials.
- g. Review and approve, in advance, all travel paid for using ECA funds.
- h. For non-U.S. Fellows, issue DS-2019 forms and assist with SEVIS-related issues, including providing Citizen Exchange Research Center (CERC) spreadsheets to the Program Office.
- i. Assess the program, as necessary, through site visits and debriefing sessions.
- j. Approve decisions related to special circumstances or problems throughout the duration of the program and assist as needed with participant emergencies.
- k. Approve all outside funding sources supporting the JCSVEI.
- l. Approve virtual internships and project-based learning program components under the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative: Digital Leaders for Peace and Economic Opportunity .

D. Application Contents and Format

Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals.

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package, including the PSI, which contains guidelines for proposal preparation.

1. Budget Format.

Applicants must submit a budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and a budget narrative. See the PSI section III for more information on the budget requirements.

Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

Applicants must submit SF-424A – “Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs” along with a comprehensive budget for the entire program. There must be a summary budget, a detailed budget, and a budget narrative. Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

2. Content of Application.

Please see the PSI for information about the application and formatting guidelines.

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

a. Address to Request Application Package.

The entire Solicitation Package may be downloaded from the Grants.gov website at <https://www.grants.gov> or from the ECA website at <https://www.state.gov/eca-grant-opportunities/>.

b. Department of State Contacts

For questions about this announcement, please contact Program Officer Davron Mirsagatov at the U.S. Department of State, Office of Citizen Exchanges, Global Leaders Division (ECA/PE/C/GL), at 202-632-2718 or mirsagatovd@state.gov, with a copy to Dawnjalice Brown, Branch Chief, at brownd4@state.gov.

All correspondence with ECA concerning this solicitation should reference the title and funding opportunity number listed at the top of this solicitation. Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the deadline has passed, ECA staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

The terms and conditions published in this solicitation are binding and may not be modified by any ECA representative. Explanatory information provided by ECA that contradicts published language will not be binding.

c. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Required Registrations

All organizations, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and an active registration in SAM.gov. A UEI is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards. An

applicant must maintain an active registration while it has a proposal under review by the Department and must continue to keep the registration active for the entire duration of the period of performance of any Federal award that results from this NOFO.

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

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

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

All federal award recipients must maintain a current registration in the SAM database. Recipients must maintain accurate and up-to-date information in www.SAM.gov until all program and financial activity and reporting are completed on any issued award. Recipients must review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration and more frequently if required information changes or another award is granted. There is no cost associated with registering or updating SAM.gov accounts.

For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to: <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>

Exemptions

An exemption from the UEI and sam.gov registration requirements may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. See [2 CFR 25.110](#) for a full list of exemptions.

Organizations requesting exemption from UEI or SAM.gov requirements must email the point of contact listed in the NOFO at least two weeks prior to the deadline in the NOFO providing justification of their request. Approval for a SAM.gov exemption must come from the warranted Grants Officer before the application can be deemed eligible for review.

d. Required Registration with MyGrants.

All ECA award recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories must be registered with the U.S. Department of State's MyGrants system by accessing

<https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com> and clicking the “create an account” link. MyGrants is the U.S. Department of State’s grants management system and is supported by the Department’s Integrated Logistics Management System (ILMS). Recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories that have previously used MyGrants as a U.S. Department of State award recipient do not need to register again. If the organization is not able to access the system, please contact the ILMS Help Desk for help in gaining access.

Support for Recipient Organizations and recipient contacts and signatories is available 24 hours, 7 days a week (except federal holidays), and can be reached at 1-888-313-ILMS (4567) or through the ILMS Self Service Portal at <https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/>.

e. Submission Instructions.

Method of Submission

Applications may only be submitted electronically through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Complete solicitation packages are available at Grants.gov in the “Search Grants” portion of the system.

Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures

Eligible organizations should follow the instructions available in the ‘Get Started’ portion of the site (<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants>).

How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov

Applicants should read instructions carefully and prepare the information requested before beginning the registration process. Reviewing and assembling the required information before beginning the registration process will alleviate last-minute searches for required information.

The registration process can take up to four weeks to complete. Therefore, registration should be done in sufficient time to ensure it does not impact your ability to meet required application submission deadlines. Applicants should check with appropriate staff within their organizations immediately after reviewing this NOFO to confirm or determine their registration status with Grants.gov.

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration>

How to Submit an Application to ECA via Grants.gov

For access to complete instruction on how to apply for Notice of Funding Opportunities on Grants.gov, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/grant-applications/how-to-apply-for-grants>

Grants.gov Support and Submission Issues

Direct all questions regarding Grants.gov registration and submission issues to:

Grants.gov Customer Support

Contact Center Phone: 800 -518-4726

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; closed on federal holidays.

Email: support@grants.gov

f. Submission Dates and Times.

Application Deadline Date.

May 29th 2026. (Eastern Time)

Applicants have until 11:59 p.m., Washington, DC time of the closing date to ensure that their entire application has been uploaded to the Grants.gov site. There are no exceptions to the above deadline. Applications uploaded to the site after the application deadline date and time will be automatically rejected by the Grants.gov system and will be found technically ineligible.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you begin the submission process through Grants.gov well in advance of the application deadline.

Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov. An electronic date/time stamp is generated within the system when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant Grants.gov Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov with the successful transmission of their application. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov Tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When ECA successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgement of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Please also be mindful of any Grants.gov generated error messages that may appear during the

application process as they may result in some documents not transmitting correctly.

Applicants using slow internet should be aware that transmission can take some time before Grants.gov receives your application. Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role. The Grants.gov Support Center reports that some applicants end the transmission because they think that nothing is occurring during the transmission process. Please be patient and give the system time to process the application.

The Grants.gov website includes extensive information on all phases/aspects of the Grants.gov process, including an extensive section on frequently asked questions, located under the “Applicant FAQs” section of the website. ECA strongly recommends that all potential applicants review thoroughly the Grants.gov website, well in advance of submitting a proposal through the Grants.gov system. ECA will not notify you upon receipt of electronic applications.

PLEASE NOTE: ECA bears no responsibility for applicant timeliness of submission or data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes for proposals submitted via Grants.gov. 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 the Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://grants.gov/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility>

It is the responsibility of all applicants submitting proposals via the Grants.gov web portal (<https://www.grants.gov>) to ensure that proposals have been received by Grants.gov in their entirety, and ECA bears no responsibility for data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes.

g. Funding Restrictions for this Announcement.

a. 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).

b. Palestinian Authority, West Bank, and Gaza Programming.

All awards made under this competition must be executed according to all relevant U.S. laws and policies regarding assistance to the Palestinian Authority, and to the West Bank and Gaza. Organizations must consult with relevant Public Affairs Offices before entering into any formal arrangements or agreements with Palestinian organizations or institutions.

Note: To assure that planning for the inclusion of the Palestinian Authority complies with requirements, please contact insert program office contact name, telephone and e-mail for additional information.

c. Award Activities in a Designated Area of Combat Operations: SPOT Reporting.

Each award within areas of combat operations or future contingency operation, as designated by the Secretary of Defense (currently Iraq and Afghanistan), over \$150,000 or providing for performance over 30 days must be registered in the Department of Defense maintained Synchronized Pre-deployment and Operational Tracker (SPOT) system. Each award shall be registered in SPOT before personnel deployment. The DOS SPOT Program Manager can assist with entering awards in SPOT. Please send an email to GAOPS@state.gov for information. Information on how to register in SPOT and how to report the total number of recipient personnel deploying under each award will be contained in a Special Provision within each award.

Recipients that do not utilize personnel who are performing a private security function, or require access to U.S. facilities, services, or support, can be entered through the SPOT aggregate functionality.

- The recipient will request an aggregate count template from the GO or GOR, who will obtain the template from the Department's SPOT Program Manager (GAOPS@state.gov) by submitting an ILMS Service Now ticket here: <http://ilmshelp.state.sbu/> Select "Global Acquisition Request" from the support ticket selection tiles.
- The recipient will complete the template and return to the Department's SPOT Program Manager via Service Now. The SPOT Program Manager will enter the aggregate count data into the SPOT reporting system. The recipient is responsible for updating the aggregate count every quarter by providing updated information via the "Aggregate Count" template to Department SPOT Program Manager for each SPOT award.

Recipients utilizing personnel who ARE performing a private security function; or require access to U.S. facilities, services, or support; or who may be eligible for special refugee or immigration status under U.S. regulation must be entered into SPOT individually with all required personal information.

The recipient must enter this information into the SPOT database directly. Unlike the aggregate count process, the Department's SPOT Program Manager does not enter this information into SPOT on behalf of the recipient.

- The recipient starts the process by referring to the DOS Business Rules and registering for an account in SPOT by contacting the DoD SPOT Help desk here: <https://spot.dmdc.mil/>. Include GAOPS@state.gov when reaching out to DoD.

Recipients with personnel outside of Iraq and/or Afghanistan have no mandate for SPOT use. However, if there are awards needing to interact with DoD elements where a SPOT LOA would benefit, then please send an email to GAOPS@state.gov for information, and to consider setting up the awards in SPOT for that purpose. Ensure your GO and GOR are on the email to GAOPS.

Recipient performance may require the use of armed private security personnel, whether employed directly or via contract, are required to adhere to post policies and procedures regarding private security contractors. As specific post policies and procedures differ in scope and applicability, recipients are advised to review post policies carefully and direct any questions to the Embassy Regional Security Office through the GO or GOR.

d. Certification Regarding Compliance with Applicable Federal Anti-Discrimination Laws

If the place of performance or delivery of any award made under this NOFO will be within the United States, applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award:

- i. Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government's payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and;
- ii. It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. A program promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means a program

whose purpose is to promote preferences based on race, color religion, sex, or national origins, such as in training or hiring.

e. Certification Regarding Compliance with 20 U.S.C. 1011f and Any Other Applicable Foreign Funding Disclosure Requirements for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE).

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

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

f. Certification of Trafficking in Persons Compliance and Compliance Plan

For grants and cooperative agreements under which the estimated value of services to be performed outside the United States exceeds \$500,000 include the following

Applicants are advised that they will be required to certify the following at the time of award for awards where the estimated value of services to be performed outside the United States exceeds \$500,000:

- To the best of the recipient's knowledge, neither the recipient, nor any subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor of the recipient or any agent of the recipient or of such a subrecipient, contractor, or subcontractor, is engaged in any of the activities described in 2 CFR 175(a);

The recipient has implemented a Trafficking in Persons compliance plan to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175(a) and is compliant with it; and compliance plan must be consistent with the requirements of 2 CFR 175(b)(4) and (5).

- That the recipient has procedures to prevent activities described in 2 CFR 175(a) and to monitor, detect, and terminate any subrecipient, contractor, subcontractor, or employee of the recipient engaging in them.

Recipients do not need to submit a copy of the plan. However, they must provide it to the Grants Officer upon request, and as appropriate, must post the useful and relevant contents of the plan or related materials on their

website and at the workplace. Recipients must re-certify on an annual basis for the entire award period of performance.

g. Prohibition on Unmanned Aircraft Systems Manufactured or Assembled by American Security Drone Act-Covered Foreign Entities

(a) Definitions.

American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity means an entity included on a list developed and maintained by the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC) and published in the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>

FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system means an unmanned aircraft system manufactured or assembled by an American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity.

Unmanned aircraft means an aircraft that is operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft .

Unmanned aircraft system means an unmanned aircraft and associated elements (including communication links and the components that control the unmanned aircraft) that are required for the operator to operate safely and efficiently in the national airspace system.

(b) Prohibition.

Recipients of funding under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (including subawards and subcontracts issued by the recipient) will be prohibited from:

- (1) delivering any FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system, which includes unmanned aircraft (i.e., drones) and associated elements;
- (2) Operating a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system in the performance of the award; and
- (3) Using Federal funds for the purchase or operation of a FASC-prohibited unmanned aircraft system .

c) *Exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.*

The prohibitions described above will not apply if the agency determines that an exemption, exception, or waiver applies and the award indicates that such a determination has been made. [See sections 1823 through 1825 and 1832 of Public Law 118-31 ([41 U.S.C. 3901](#) note prec.) for statutory requirements pertaining to exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.].

8. Other Submission Requirements.

- a. Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.
- b. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
- c. **Key Personnel**
ECA recommends that the applicant identify intended key personnel positions via an asterisk (*) or other marking in the proposal budget, budget narrative, or a separate appendix. If not provided in the application, recipients must submit the names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Applicants should also identify what proportion of their time will be used in support of the program. Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department's Standard Terms and Conditions.
- d. **Intergovernmental Review of Applications**
Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

F. Application Review Information

1. Review Process.

ECA will check that all proposals meet the technical requirements in this solicitation. Proposals that do not meet the guidelines, including those under the eligibility section above or in the PSI, will be ineligible for further review.

All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office before being reviewed by an ECA grant panel. Applications may also be reviewed by Public Diplomacy sections overseas, State Department regional bureaus, or other State Department

offices, as appropriate. All reviewers, including the ECA grant panels, will review any eligible proposals based on the criteria below.

Proposals recommended by an ECA grant panel will be reviewed for compliance with Federal and Bureau regulations and guidelines and assessed for risk. Final funding decisions are made by the ECA's Assistant Secretary. Only an ECA Grant Officer has the final authority to issue assistance awards.

2. Review Criteria.

An ECA grants panel will competitively evaluate all technically eligible applications according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered, and all carry equal weight in the proposal review.

An ECA grants panel will competitively evaluate all technically eligible applications according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered, and all carry equal weight in the proposal review.

- a. Program Planning and Ability to Achieve Objectives:** Proposals should exhibit originality, substance, direct linkage to the goals of the JCSVEI program, and relevance to the Bureau's mission. Proposals should have a detailed agenda and work plan that demonstrates your institution's ability to carry out the program. The plan should follow the program guidelines described in this solicitation. Proposals should demonstrate a realistic and achievable scope that fits within the budgetary and time parameters set forth in this NOFO. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how program objectives and key program elements will be achieved through programmatic activities.
- b. Institutional Capacity and Track Record:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve the program results, including descriptions and resumes of key staff who will implement the program. Proposals should include detailed information about proposed subawards including a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. The proposal should reflect the institution's expertise in the subject area and an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Bureau awards.
- c. Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should have a fully developed M&E plan that includes goals, objectives, and indicators. The plan should be feasible and aligned with the M&E section of this

solicitation. Proposals should include a realistic learning plan that outlines how your organization plans to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices. All submitted M&E plans will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided at least the required information outlined in the M&E section of this solicitation and demonstrated the applicant's capacity to carry out the M&E plan.

- d. Cost-effectiveness and Cost-sharing:** The overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support, as well as institutional direct funding contributions.
- e. Improved Productivity and Innovation:** Proposals should clearly outline and provide evidence of how the activities proposed will improve productivity and introduce program innovations.
- f. Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should have a fully developed M&E plan that includes goals, objectives, and indicators. The plan should be feasible and aligned with the M&E section of this solicitation. Proposals should include a realistic learning plan that outlines how your organization plans to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices. All submitted M&E plans will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided at least the required information outlined in the M&E section of this solicitation and demonstrated the applicant's capacity to carry out the M&E plan.

3. Indirect Costs

If two or more applications receive equivalent scores based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this NOFO, preference will be given to the applicant with the lower indirect cost rate, as consistent with Executive Order 14332, Section 4(b)(iii). This preference will only be applied as a tie-breaking mechanism and does not supersede the primary evaluation criteria.

4. Risk Review

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

- a. Financial stability
- b. Management systems and standards
- c. History of performance
- d. Audit reports and findings
- e. Ability to effectively implement requirements

5. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov.

The Federal awarding agency, 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 U.S. government designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov (see 41 U.S.C. 2313) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313)

An applicant can review and comment on any information in the responsibility/qualification records available at SAM.gov.

Before making decisions in the risk review required by 2 CFR 200.206, the Department will consider any comments by the applicant, along with information available in the responsibility/qualification records in SAM.gov.

G. Award Notices.

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal ECA procedures. The award or cooperative agreement will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer in ECA's Grants Division and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer (as identified in the application) for review and countersignature. The recipient may only start incurring project expenses beginning on the start date shown on the fully signed award document.

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. If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding.

Unsuccessful applicants:

Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification of the results of the application review from the ECA program office coordinating this competition following the completion of the review process.

Payment Method:

Payments under this award will be made through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Payment Management System (PMS).

H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

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

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 proposals for funding, as applicable to specific programs, pursuant to this NOFO in accordance with the following:

- [Guidance for Grants and Agreements in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations](#) (2 CFR), as updated in the Federal Register's 89 FR 30046 on April 22, 2024, particularly on:
 - Selecting recipients most likely to be successful in delivering results based on the program objectives through an impartial process of evaluating Federal award applications (2 CFR part 200.205),
 - Promoting the freedom of speech and religious liberty in alignment with *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty* (E.O. 13798) and *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (E.O. 13864) (§§ 200.300, 200.303, 200.339, and 200.341),
 - Providing a preference, to the extent permitted by law, to maximize use of goods, products, and materials produced in the United States (2 CFR part 200.322), and
 - Terminating agreements pursuant to the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, including, to the greatest extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities (2 CFR part 200.340). For the avoidance of doubt, the Department has sole discretion over the determination that an award no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities, and this provision permits awards to be terminated at the Department's convenience, including when it determines that the award no longer advances the national interest.

- [2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT](#)

- [2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION](#)

- [2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS](#)
- [2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE \(FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE\)](#)
- [2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY](#)
- [2 CFR 600 – DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS](#)
- [U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#)
- Recipients must comply with all applicable Executive Orders A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

2. Reporting.

Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify what reports are required and how often these reports must be submitted. All reports must be submitted in a timely manner.

For planning purposes, applicants can expect to provide ECA with an electronic copy of the following required reports:

- a. Performance Progress Reports (PPRs)** shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual, quarterly, or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. All reports and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
- b. The Federal Financial Reports (FFR SF-425/SF-425a)** must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the recipient must upload the approved report to MyGrants, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the recipient's eligibility for future awards.
- c. Required MODE data** (see Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation section) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. MODE data reporting shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. The frequency of these reports will be determined by MELI and the Program Officer. Either a standard report template (if using the MODE Survey Builder) or aggregate data and the raw data file (if Recipient uses their own

survey platform) must be uploaded by the Recipient as an RPM Performance Report under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.

d. A final program and financial report no more than 120 days after the period of performance of the award ends or termination of the award.

e. Program Data Requirements: Award recipients will be required to maintain specific data on program participants and activities in an electronically accessible database format that can be shared with ECA as required. At a minimum, the data must include the following:

- Name, address, contact information and biographic sketch of all persons who travel internationally on funds provided by the agreement or who benefit from the award funding but do not travel.
- Itineraries of international and domestic travel, providing dates of travel and cities in which any exchange experiences take place. Final schedules for in-country and U.S. activities must be received by the ECA Program Officer at least three workdays prior to the official opening of the activity.

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.

3. Branding and Marking

The Department of State, its programs, and U.S. Government funding and assistance should be easily identifiable to the Department's global audiences.

Recipients of federal assistance awards must follow the branding guidance published at Guidance for Contracts and Grants - U.S. Department of State Brand System. Branding policy exceptions are outlined in the U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual 10 FAM 416, Policy Exceptions.

For more information, visit: <https://brand.america.gov/>

I. Other Information

Adherence To All Regulations Governing the J Visa

ECA places critically important emphasis on the security and proper administration of the Exchange Visitor (J visa) Programs and adherence by award recipients and sponsors to all regulations governing the J visa. Therefore, proposals should demonstrate the applicant's capacity to meet all requirements governing the administration of the Exchange Visitor Programs as set forth in 22 CFR 62, including the oversight of Responsible Officers and Alternate Responsible Officers,

screening and selection of program participants, provision of pre-arrival information and orientation to participants, monitoring of participants, proper maintenance and security of forms, record-keeping, reporting and other requirements.

ECA will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to participants in this program.

A copy of the complete regulations governing the administration of Exchange Visitor (J) programs is available at <http://j1visa.state.gov> or from:

Office of Private Sector Exchange Designation
U.S. Department of State
SA-5, Floor C2, Room C2L13
2200 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20522