

Department of State

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) Notice of Funding Opportunity

(NOFO): FY 2023 BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative

Announcement Type: New Cooperative Agreement

Funding Opportunity Number: SFOP0009212

Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) Number: 19.451

Key Date/Application Deadline: November 28, 2022

Executive Summary: The Office of Private Sector Exchange (BridgeUSA) of ECA will announce an open competition for the administration of the FY2023 BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative. U.S. public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3) including organizations that represent consortia or other combinations of accredited U.S. community colleges/universities may submit only one proposal to cooperate with BridgeUSA under this competition to provide approximately 20 scholarships to scholars and professionals evenly distributed across participating countries from East Africa (AF) for the FY2023 BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative. The scholarship will cover BridgeUSA program fees, healthcare benefits coverage, visa fees, SEVIS fees, and airfare. The program should be implemented in a 36-month time frame.

The BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative scholarships would further ECA's goal of promoting mutual understanding and lasting partnerships between emerging leaders from foreign countries and the United States as well as provide opportunities for BridgeUSA exchange visitors to collaborate with U.S. counterparts and share ideas, approaches, and strategies to develop solutions to pressing local and global challenges and address foreign malign influence in higher education space in the region. This pilot will initially focus on East Africa including the islands along the east coast of Africa: **Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.** Proposals should address the combination of **at least five** countries from the list above and **the proposed eligible J-1 categories** described under **Section C.2.1 Eligible Countries and J-1 Categories.** ECA program office will finalize participating countries with the regional bureau.

ECA reserves the right to modify eligible countries prior to the issuance of the award. The proposal must demonstrate the applicant's flexibility to work with ECA and demonstrate the interest and ability to deliver customized BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration experiences. No invitations to participate in the BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative program may be issued without U.S. Department of State approval.

For this NOFO, the term polytechnic is defined as an institute of technology. In many countries, it is also known as technological university; university of technology; technological educational institute; technological college; vocational training institute; polytechnic university or just polytechnic. All these names commonly refer to institutions of tertiary education e.g., universities or colleges that specialize in engineering, technology,

applied science, and natural sciences. In many countries, polytechnics focus mainly on applied skills or experiential learning. Polytechnic education combines the in-depth study found at universities with practical, technology-based skills training. Polytechnics offer flexible learning pathways and a more affordable education for students across East Africa.

In consultation with BridgeUSA and relevant embassies, the award recipient will plan, implement, and monitor this program for approximately 20 scholars from selected polytechnics in East Africa region to participate in U.S.-based research, training, capacity building, and networking business opportunities. This program will place African scholars in select regionally diverse U.S. institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In addition to host institutions, scholars will have access to U.S. mentors in their assigned organization. Mentors will assist to develop a customized group activities schedule, including professional development opportunities like networking events, cultural activities, and informational meetings with stakeholders, among others. The award recipient will collaborate with host organizations to select mentors. Mentors will serve as a valuable resource to participating scholars and help them build long-term core capacity of the polytechnics and enhance the sustainability and capacity of East Africa's regional network of polytechnics. Through daily interaction with U.S. educators, industry and policy leaders, scholars will be exposed to, among others, U.S. methodology, workplace code of ethics, adherence to policies/ procedures, and U.S. regulatory framework.

ECA strongly suggests that during the third year from the initial award year and following the conclusion of the U.S.-based portion of the program, exchange visitors and later alumni organize and participate in at least one scholar summit/ conference at a regional participating country in coordination with the award recipient.

Only *one* proposal will be considered by ECA from each applicant organization. In cases where more than one submission from an applicant appears in 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.

The award recipient must either be a designated J-1 sponsor, or if not currently designated, must identify a designated J-1 sponsor as a subaward recipient. Applications must include a Letter of Commitment from the chosen sub-award recipient. A copy of the complete regulations governing the administration of Exchange Visitor (J) programs is available at <http://j1visa.state.gov>. For additional information on current designated sponsors, applicants should contact: Office of Private Sector Exchange Designation, U.S. Department of State, SA-5, Floor C2, Room C2L13 2200 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20522. The award recipient shall abide by the rules and regulations governing the (J) visa Exchange Visitor Program as stipulated in 22 CFR Part 62 <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/chapter-I/subchapter-G/part-62#part-62>

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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.

Purpose: In order to enhance the U.S. Department of State's engagement with BridgeUSA exchange visitors in support of U.S. foreign policy and public diplomacy objectives, BridgeUSA will issue a cooperative agreement for \$100,000, pending the availability of FY 2023 funds, to conduct the FY 2023 BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative.

Background: Through its oversight of the Exchange Visitor Program, BridgeUSA supports the mission of ECA by facilitating educational and cultural exchange programs for approximately 300,000 exchange visitors who come to the United States each year to participate in 13 different J-1 program categories. BridgeUSA designates and monitors approximately 1,500 "sponsor organizations" that recruit, place, and monitor "exchange visitors" from more than 200 countries and territories.

Through people-to-people exchanges, BridgeUSA supports the Department's foreign policy objectives and strategic priorities, e.g., creating resilient communities, countering disinformation by supporting civil society, and by promoting open transparent institutions, global health, climate change, diversity, equity and inclusion, emerging technology, women and underrepresented groups in STEM, and human rights. Since 2006, over four million exchange visitors have participated in BridgeUSA programs. Exchange visitors who experience successful BridgeUSA programs become "citizen ambassadors" who share their new understanding of American values with their family and local community upon return home. In partnership with designated sponsors, BridgeUSA recognizes that the foundation of successful exchanges is ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of all exchange visitors. Other factors that contribute to successful experiences include safe and secure housing and transportation; integration into the community/workplace; and acquisition of new skills, including improved English language proficiency. The Department and program sponsors continuously seek ways to improve all programmatic components to ensure the development of a large cadre of program alumni who serve as lifelong citizen ambassadors. BridgeUSA aims to increase exchange visitor participation from the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

BridgeUSA envisions exchange programs with polytechnics in Sub-Saharan Africa which enroll young leaders, who in turn will put their exchange experiences into practice within local communities through a range of educational and innovation opportunities. Alumni will spearhead change in their home countries, starting with a shift to proactive and preventive planning in rural communities including implementing early warning systems to prepare for climate change-related hazards, investing in public health infrastructure, and expanding educational opportunities through their local polytechnics. Program alumni will also stay in

contact with each other to collaborate on initiatives across the region, including data sharing to raise awareness and prioritize resources to tackle issues like climate change, emerging health risks, and extremism, among others.

According to regional media reports and World Bank data, countries in East Africa have rolled out several initiatives in transportation, oil pipelines, and sustainable energy infrastructure. Moreover, these governments have embraced industrialization as part of the strategy for sustainable economic development and job creation for their population. This has resulted in increased demand for skilled labor to support these growing sectors of their economies. However, there is a shortage of skilled labor to support key growth sectors, particularly in the fields of information technology, transport, energy, manufacturing, and agro-processing. The Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), which is a regional umbrella organization for colleges and universities, has sponsored flagship polytechnics in East Africa to focus on critical sectors of the regional economy, which are believed critical to catalyze industrialization and support economic development of individual countries and regionals growth. Bridging the skills gap will likely reduce the prevalence in youth unemployment and underemployment, as the majority of the youth population in East Africa enroll in polytechnics due to the affordability and accessibility of such institutions.

BridgeUSA's proposed Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative will bring approximately 20 scholars from participating countries in the East Africa region to the United States to collaborate with various exemplary colleges or universities, including HBCUs, across the United States to highlight the regional diversity of the United States. All exchange visitors will be placed at meaningful public or private sector organizations, NGOs, universities, and community-based organizations, tailored to their individual backgrounds, to share, learn, innovate, and grow. Scholars will be required to write an action plan which summarizes their U.S. experience and provides an opportunity for exchange visitors to elaborate on their experience once they return to their home countries. Upon their return, scholars and the award recipient will coordinate, in consultation with BridgeUSA, to organize at least one Regional Scholar Summit to further build upon their experience in the United States by connecting with other Africa-region BridgeUSA scholars and alumni. The award recipient will lead or support follow-on activities for the scholars, including alumni engagement activities using an approved follow-on model and in consultation with BridgeUSA. Such alumni engagement will include reciprocal exchange activities whereby selected U.S participants or hosts will travel to the respective African countries of the scholar they hosted to further collaborate on a range of activities including curriculum development, industry attachment, and involvement of experts in curriculum review, development, and delivery of academic programs, among others. Individuals from the U.S. host organization who had significant interaction with the foreign scholar are eligible to apply for the reciprocal exchange. The award recipient will select only U.S. citizens from participating placement host organizations to attend the in-country Scholar Regional Summit.

The BridgeUSA Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative award recipient will work in close coordination on many program components in consultation with ECA. The award recipient will have the primary oversight responsibility for recruitment, selection, and monitoring of a diverse

group of exchange visitors from the J-1 **Professor, Research Scholar, Short-Term Scholar, and Specialist** categories of the Exchange Visitor Program. The award recipient must have current Exchange Visitor Program designation i.e., be a designated J-1 visa sponsor or must include one current J-1 sponsor as a subaward recipient if it was not designated at the time of its application. The award recipient should propose a candidate recruitment plan that include exchange visitors from all occupational backgrounds and interests with emphasis on diversity of gender, ethnicity, geography, and professional/ academic background. To assist with recruitment purposes, the award recipient is encouraged to establish collaboration with select polytechnics in the East Africa region. For this pilot, the exchange program should focus on exchange visitors from the East Africa region and adjacent islands (eligible countries specified in the Executive Summary and Section C.2.1) and cover program fees, health benefits, visa fees, and airfare. To recruit and select a diverse group of scholars, the award recipient is encouraged but not required to seek partnership with regional higher education organizations e.g., the IUCEA, which is the umbrella body that works directly with colleges and universities in East Africa and is familiar with specific in-country and regional polytechnics.

Mentorship Component Plan: Proposals should demonstrate how Scholars and their program Mentor(s) will collaborate to design and plan an appropriate mentorship activity. The mentorship activity shall serve as a vehicle to expose scholars to the methodology and innovative nature of the U.S. higher education system. ECA is interested in proposals with potential outcomes that include but are not limited to: i) increased awareness and promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion within academic disciplines and communities; ii) mitigating the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on two-year community/technical colleges/polytechnics, iii) making systemic improvements in technical education that include substantive public and private partnerships that contribute towards advancing STEM education in underrepresented populations. The mentorship plan should:

- 1) Be designed collaboratively by the scholar and his/her mentor(s), keeping in mind the expertise of the selected Professional Mentor(s), scholar's professional goals and objectives, and the limited mentorship timeframe.
- 2) Foster networking within the Mentor's organization/institution and exposure to current industry trends in new technology, etc.
- 3) Include a framework for feedback and evaluation
- 4) Provide structure for the Scholar's time during the mentorship

Proposals should describe examples of mentoring activities including, but not limited to; Starting mentorships on Curriculum Development at polytechnics in order to improve the alignment of undergraduate STEM education and training with workforce needs; Academic Advising including transitioning students from 2-year education to bachelors or masters programs; Fostering networking opportunities between private and public sector entities to provide students with internships/training and research, as well as encouraging entrepreneurship and volunteer spirit within local communities; Sharing ways to advance research on effective STEM education practices at polytechnics with a focus on marginalized groups e.g., in small and rural communities, and; Developing collaborations that support administrative capacity building

activities to enhance the capacity of 2-year educational institutes to compete for and manage research and development awards within individual or regional organizations.

Award recipient will be encouraged to reach out to umbrella organizations that oversee regional colleges/universities for potential partnerships. Other areas for potential partnerships include, NGOs, for-profit organizations, local or state agencies, and/or participating U.S. colleges/universities that provide exchange visitors with service learning, internships, cultural exchange, leadership development, and special project opportunities to build exchange visitors' technical skills in applied fields, enhance their leadership capabilities, and strengthen their English language proficiency. The academic program will also help develop the human capital of leaders who will strengthen vocational-technical sectors and individual post-secondary institutions in their countries. Scholars will learn about leadership, governance, student affairs and student services, program assessment, workforce development, private sector partnerships, community engagement, technology, and distance learning. Throughout the program, exchange visitors will be encouraged to think about how they can apply lessons learned in the United States to their home institutions and to share what they have learned within their communities.

Program Goals: The mission of BridgeUSA is to provide countless opportunities for international candidates looking to travel and gain experience in the United States. The multifaceted programs enable foreign nationals to come to the United States to teach, study, conduct research, demonstrate special skills or receive on the job training for periods ranging from a few weeks to several years. BridgeUSA's mission – to increase mutual understanding between Americans and people of other countries – remains vital to U.S. national security and building people-to-people connections around the world. The BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative seeks to address the need to develop skills for a global dynamic marketplace by providing educational, technical, and industry partnerships aimed at upping the relevance and quality of training through exchange programs. Exchanges will promote expertise and resources in technological developments especially in marginalized communities, including fundamental freedoms in the global digital space; focus on innovation among scholars so that they are better equipped to innovate in the creation of policies, programs, projects, initiatives, or products that support the practical applications in their local communities; promote diversity and inclusion as a vessel for creating an innovative society and framework for problem-solving; and, highlight U.S. industry and regulatory framework as a leading global standard. Finally, the program will aim to build the capacity of young professionals to address challenges in their communities, specifically on issues related to occupational standards and qualifications framework; public administration; policy making; digital networks protections; diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems; and government transparency and accountability. Objectives may include but are not limited to the following:

1. Provide opportunities to strengthen Sub-Saharan Africa's technical education, economy, promote U.S. scientific norms and values, and form stronger U.S. business connections;
2. Ensure women and other underrepresented groups are well-represented (technical experts, judges, journalists, and mentors), and deliver activities that address skill and resource gaps in priority entrepreneurial ecosystems, build confidence, etc.;

3. Provide opportunities for exchange visitors to collaborate and share ideas, approaches, and strategies to develop solutions to pressing local and global challenges; provide a platform to promote exchange of students and faculty mobility;
4. Increase Americans' global competitiveness through new and expanded partnerships with alumni professionals from around the world;
5. Strengthen the ability of digital networks protection providers to produce collections of relevant learning resources to respond to identified expertise gaps thereby strengthening resilient communities, combatting disinformation, and supporting civil society, open transparent institutions, global health, climate change, diversity and inclusion, and human rights;
6. Increase the diversity of relevant and specialized technical expertise available to support local needs and integrate them into global network of like-minded professionals committed to creating positive change in their workplaces and communities;
7. Create a motivated and engaged cohort of professionals and BridgeUSA alumni network, by promoting life-long learning approaches including on virtual/ digital platforms.

BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative Administration and

Implementation: Any organizations that represent consortia or other combinations of community/technical colleges are encouraged to apply to administer the Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative program-wide activities and to oversee the implementation of program exchange visitor placement at individual U.S. host institutions and college campuses. In addition, applicant organizations must demonstrate the breadth of their experience working with a diverse group of exchange visitors including professional development programming, virtual engagement, and the development of action plans, and alumni networks. Experience implementing U.S. programming for African exchange visitors is recommended, but not required. Applicant organizations must demonstrate the ability to manage various grants initiatives for exchange alumni, provide resources for alumni to develop strong proposals, and facilitate a transparent process for selecting competitive proposals that include U.S. Department of State representation. Applicants should demonstrate the capacity to administer these BridgeUSA Programs activities including managing the recruitment, application review and placement cycle; coordinating pre-departure information/material and participation in virtual orientations; planning and executing at least one cultural event for all academic or calendar year exchange visitors; implementing a comprehensive evaluation plan; and overseeing the branding and alumni engagement efforts. Applicants must also demonstrate the capacity to implement exchange programming at individual host campuses that include U.S. arrival orientation and pre-academic programs, academic year programs for exchange visitors, and theme-based programs that maximize institution-specific expertise. Proposals should demonstrate the proposed institutions' ability to include flexibilities to implement in-person, hybrid, or virtual programming as conditions merit.

Partnership Organizations: Applicants should provide examples of domestic or international organizations and individuals with whom they would collaborate, including other BridgeUSA sponsors, and describe previous partnership activities. The award recipient must either be a designated J-1 sponsor, or if not currently designated, must identify a designated J-1 sponsor as a

subaward recipient. Applications must include a Letter of Commitment from the chosen sub-award recipient. For example, if an award recipient does not hold current EVP/J-1 designation, one approach would be for a proposal to i) choose a J-1 sponsor designated with relevant J-1 visa categories, as a sub-recipient and ii) choose an organization with offices in Africa, that would assist in planning and developing the program, has familiarity with appropriate host institutions, and can provide examples of individuals who can assist the award recipient in developing the most appropriate substantive aspects of the program design. Strong proposals should include partners that may assist in the selection of exchange visitors and development of follow-up activities, including the proposed Regional Scholar Summit in Africa.

Applications Review and Placements

The proposal shall describe in detail a system for receiving and reviewing all application submissions from U.S. Embassies and BridgeUSA; conducting a technical review of applications and ensuring completeness of documentation; conducting a medical review and clearance process for each candidate; distributing complete applications among host institutions to ensure the best program placements for exchange visitors' academic and professional goals; and recommending placements to ECA. Final approval of principal and alternate slates of candidates and placements remains with ECA.

The proposal narrative must clearly state the applicant's commitment to consult closely with ECA in the placement of scholars in diverse multinational cohorts and in the communication about placements with the ECA and Public Affairs Sections of the U.S. Embassies. Each host organization or campus shall have a diverse mix of exchange visitors by professional background, geography, and gender to the extent possible. No invitations to participate in the program may be issued without U.S. Department of State approval.

Host Organization Institutional Capacity

The selection of appropriate U.S. host colleges and organizations that can create a customized BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative experience is essential to the success of the overall program. Host organizations must be identified in the proposal, and letters of participation commitment from the senior administrative official authorized to make such a commitment shall be included for each organization.

The proposal must describe the accredited U.S. institutions, including participating HBCUs, that will host multinational cohorts of BridgeUSA African scholars by field of study for programs that shall include academic research, professional training, service learning, culture sharing, and leadership development activities. Each host organization should be selected based on excellence in the field(s) of study in which the college is hosting exchange visitors, geographic diversity, ability to leverage institutional and private sector funding, resources to safely support international scholars, proven success hosting international students, commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and availability of appropriate, safe, and cost-effective housing. Host institutions must be committed to assisting with housing the exchange visitors, preferably in dormitories or, if non-academic hosts, apartments nearby.

Host organizations will be expected to have experience in conducting international education exchange programs, including successfully hosting international students and visitors or providing a well-documented plan that demonstrates the capacity to do so. Proposals shall also describe how the proposed BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative program at each host organization would contribute to internationalization efforts at each campus and advance the BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative program objectives as stated in the NOFO. Each host organization must assign an adviser or mentor who is responsible for guiding exchange visitors in individual development plans and serving as a central resource regarding scholarships, the J-1 visa program, aspects of academic and cultural adjustment, and integration into the campus or local community. The adviser also serves as a link between the exchange visitors and the award recipient. The adviser may be the immediate supervisor, Principal Investigator, or selected Mentor, Responsible Officer (RO) or Principal Designated School Official (PDSO).

It is strongly encouraged that the organizations cooperating with ECA on this program work to obtain if available, financial aid, scholarships, or other private sector funding, including support from foundations, businesses, or civic groups as cost-sharing for the program.

Pre-departure Information, Advising, and Support

Pre-departure support must be coordinated closely across ECA, U.S. Embassies, and host organizations/campuses. Support will include participation in pre-departure orientations, the development of printed and electronic pre-departure materials, access to English-language learning materials, and direct engagement with host organizations prior to departure to assess any needs for individual program accommodations and to ensure readiness for travel and participation in the program. The applicant is encouraged to propose additional virtual or in-country programming between the cooperating partner/host organization and exchange visitors, including with program alumni, to support exchange visitors prior to departure. Programming and materials should be designed for exchange visitors who may be traveling abroad for the first time.

The proposal must demonstrate plans for developing and disseminating BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative-specific pre-departure orientation materials for exchange visitors and U.S. Embassies in participating countries. The proposal shall also describe plans to participate virtually in home country pre-departure orientations (PDOs) and coordinate participation of ECA in these orientations.

Identification of resources for pre-departure English language learning is encouraged. The proposal shall describe creative ideas to connect exchange visitors with the State Department's English language resources both in-country and online (<http://www.americanenglish.state.gov/>), as well as with host campus-based resources when available to facilitate language learning prior to arrival.

U.S. Arrival and Pre-program Orientation

A U.S. arrival orientation must be provided for all exchange visitors prior to the start of the program activities year, anticipated in summer 2023. Programs shall be no less than 80 hours of orientation and arrival content over a span of no more than three weeks. Applicant organizations must clearly justify the length of time proposed.

The pre-program activities must provide incoming scholars with English language immersion and orientation to U.S. academic and organizational culture to improve their readiness for U.S. higher education system. In addition to building familiarity with the resources available at college campus, the pre-academic program also aims to facilitate success outside of the campus by building skills for success and familiarizing exchange visitors with expectations for behavior and program participation, the rules and regulations of the host organizations, and the laws of the U.S. communities with a focus on navigating topics such as gender and diversity within the U.S. context. The pre-program orientation must also provide scholars with opportunities for cultural exchange as well as foster a basic understanding of current issues in U.S. society and U.S. social values to foster richer intercultural exchange and engagement with their host communities. Programming should represent the diversity of U.S. society and culture and include a balance of speakers that represent American diversity and offer diverse perspectives and viewpoints.

Current BridgeUSA program eligibility requirements state that applicants need a basic working knowledge of the English language as demonstrated by achieving standardized testing scores or hailing from countries or schools where English language is the main mode of instruction in schools.

BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative Model

The BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative model provides for duration necessary to complete stated program activities beginning summer 2023 pending international travel restrictions. ECA reserves the right to amend the program delivery, duration, and timing of participation within the dates of the award based on U.S. foreign policy needs and program objectives, to maximize exchange visitor numbers and/or respond to unforeseen circumstances. Final program models and delivery will meet program objectives as outlined therein.

The BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative mentorship component has four pillars of equal importance. The proposal must demonstrate how exchange visitors will be guided to participate in all aspects of the program and to understand how the individual components work together to create a stronger overall experience. The four pillars include: 1) practical education/ professional development; 2) service learning/ apprenticeship training; 3) cultural exchange; and 4) leadership development/capacity building.

ECA reserves the right to modify eligible J-1 categories or host/placement organizations prior to each recruitment/selection of cohorts. The proposal must demonstrate the applicant's flexibility to work with ECA and demonstrate the interest and ability to deliver customized BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnics Collaboration experiences. The proposal must outline procedures for advising, monitoring, and supporting exchange visitors in their professional and personal development throughout the year and as alumni.

Practical Education/Professional Development: Proposals shall describe how exchange visitors will be supported in substantive practical education placements (e.g., internship, cooperative education) directly related to fields of study and/or career paths. This component is intended to provide exchange visitors with practical experience in their field of study and help them develop professional and soft skills that are necessary to be successful in the workplace. Descriptions shall include how these practical educational placements are supported as part of (or independent from) existing organizational services. Host colleges shall guide the exchange visitors in their search, developing the skills to apply and interview for positions, approve placements, monitor exchange visitors, assess learning, guide reflection on the relevance of learning to exchange visitors' home country contexts, and evaluate this component of the program.

Service Learning/Apprenticeship Training: Proposals shall describe how the program will provide program exchange visitors with opportunities to volunteer at an organization or on a project or program within a framework of service learning. This program pillar shall be designed to introduce exchange visitors to volunteerism as an American cultural value, to expose exchange visitors to U.S. work culture and opportunities for networking, and to foster exchange visitor engagement within their local communities. Service learning could also strengthen field of study programming and practical education components that exchange visitors can take back to their home academic advising centers.

Cultural Exchange: The proposal must explain how exchange visitors will engage in enrichment activities and shall include creative ideas for exposing exchange visitors broadly throughout the academic year to U.S. institutions, society, and culture, including opportunities for students to better understand and appreciate diversity in the United States. Programming must represent the diversity of America and include a balance of speakers who share diverse perspectives and viewpoints. BridgeUSA welcomes creative ideas for introducing exchange visitors to American institutions. Past examples include, but are not limited to, visits to political campaign offices and polling places, attendance at school board or city council meetings, and visits to museums, concerts, plays, and other cultural events featuring American content. The proposal must include a program component that matches exchange visitors with U.S. friendship families, mentors, or peers to facilitate the development of personal friendships and exposure to U.S. culture.

Exchange visitors must also have opportunities to share their cultures and perspectives with Americans. For example, activities may include exchange visitor presentations about their country or culture to college classes, local schools and community groups, and participation in community programming.

Leadership Development/ Capacity Building: The proposal must describe how the program will develop the leadership skills of BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative exchange visitors to enhance their capacities as emerging industry leaders and to prepare them to share what they have learned with others in their communities upon return home. This component could include academic research and curriculum development for specific technical courses including STEM at 2-year terminal institutions.

Health, Safety, and Security of Exchange Visitors

Proposals must demonstrate how the program administrator will safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of exchange visitors in the program design and through exchange visitor monitoring. Proposals shall also include flexibilities and contingency planning to demonstrate the proposed institutions' ability to respond to needs that may arise during implementation of the program. For example, best practices for responding to local, national, or international events or emergencies, such as the Coronavirus pandemic and/or natural disasters, should be incorporated into planning and implementation for exchange visitors. Proposals should include clear protocols on responding to exchange visitor emergencies.

Alumni Engagement, Follow-On Activities, and Reporting

Many exchange visitors return home to challenging environments with high unemployment rates and limited access to technological and financial resources. The applicant organization shall implement in-depth re-entry programming to prepare BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative exchange visitors for their transitions prior to returning home. The award recipient shall be encouraged to reach out to organizations like the IUCEA to ensure seamless transitions to home colleges.

Alumni activities are an important part of BridgeUSA programs. Activities will ease the returnees' transitions home, strengthen the BridgeUSA alumni network, and build the Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative brand. Alumni programming in the form of professional development activities, virtual programming, blogs, newsletters, and use of social media provides critical program follow-on and maximizes and extends the benefit of the exchange visitors' experiences in the United States. Proposals should outline how host organizations or colleges will creatively organize and support alumni activities in close collaboration with ECA and the appropriate U.S. Embassies. Proposals should describe how long-term links with BridgeUSA alumni will be fostered and maintained. Proposals should provide a purposeful plan with an anticipated timeline for continued follow-on BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative program-wide alumni engagement and country-specific alumni engagement using both ECA and BridgeUSA resources and networks and in partnership with U.S. Embassies. Plans should be designed to be sustainable without continued ECA support.

Alumni tracking is critical for the evaluation of the program and for the implementation of worthwhile follow-on programs. Exchange visitor and alumni data must be transferable to the database maintained at ECA. Alumni impact stories and social media properties must also be transferred to ECA at the end of any award agreement. Recipients are required to collect, maintain, store, and transfer data on exchange visitors'/alumni, ensuring personally identifiable information (PII) is protected per ECA guidelines. Proposals must demonstrate capacity to manage exchange visitor data per ECA guidelines, respond to ECA data requests, and maintain or transfer historical records beyond the duration of the cooperative agreement.

A.1. Recipient Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:

- 1) Assist with design and planning events with the host organizations to identify various opportunities for scholars to engage with their placement hosts, including delivering lectures at colleges/ universities, interacting with high school and college students, volunteering at community organizations, and engaging with the local business community;
- 2) Identify speakers, trainers, and local business contacts to participate in the mentoring opportunities and follow-on activities;
- 3) Coordinate the development of appropriate virtual and follow-on activities, such as webinars, mentorship programs, and other opportunities;
- 4) Develop and execute a communication strategy to manage recruitment and provide participating exchange visitors with program materials and logistical information prior to each seminar;
- 5) Recruit academic and professional placement hosts as well as local mentors in participating U.S. institutions/organizations who will assist with scheduling events;
- 6) Oversee the responsible transfer and monitoring of funds to selected exchange visitors for the proposed Regional Scholar Summit/project to take place in Africa three years from award start date (if applicable);
- 7) Establish a reporting plan for the scholars' activity reports, and regularly update ECA with the results of alumni projects where applicable.

Recruitment, Selection, and Placement:

1. Establish a system for receiving candidate applications or nominations, review each application for technical eligibility, and manage review of each candidate for medical clearance;
2. Create and maintain an up-to-date file on each selected exchange visitor;
3. Follow up with the BridgeUSA regarding missing documents and respond to their inquiries, copying the appropriate program officer in ECA;
4. Review candidate dossiers and determine the best organization or college placement for each exchange visitor that will meet his/her academic and professional goals;
5. Ensure that final placements establish diverse cohorts of exchange visitors at each host e.g., that are multinational and mixed gender. It is ECA's intention that no more than 25% of the campus or research host organization exchange visitors be from the same country;
6. Obtain approval of the ECA program officer on final candidate placements and assist program officer with communicating approved placements to the Public Affairs Sections of the U.S. Embassies in the partner countries;

Pre-departure Support and Programming:

1. Prepare and distribute pre-departure materials for U.S. Embassies or local partners to use during their in-country pre-departure orientations and coordinate virtual participation of consortia and ECA representatives in these events;
2. Prepare pre-departure materials for individual exchange visitors that describe program components, participation expectations, and preparation guidelines, and oversee the dissemination of these materials to exchange visitors through U.S. Embassies or in-country partners;

3. Ensure that each exchange visitor signs a Terms and Conditions document (approved by ECA) and completes all other participation requirements and necessary pre-travel paperwork;
4. Identify resources for pre-departure virtual and/or in-country English language learning and coordinate proposed opportunities;
5. Prepare and send Forms DS-2019 as soon as possible after placement to facilitate the visa application and adjudication process and at least 60 days before departure;
6. Notify the U.S. Embassies of each candidate's proposed U.S. arrival date and the date for sending travel itineraries for each exchange visitor;
7. Arrange round-trip travel for the exchange visitors from their home cities to their U.S. host institutions that is compliant with the Fly America Act and send this itinerary along with general travel information to each exchange visitor and the respective nominating Fulbright Commission or U.S. Embassy;
8. Coordinate pre-departure communication between campus program coordinators and individual exchange visitors with pre-existing physical or mental health needs to facilitate pre-departure preparations and appropriate accommodations, as needed;

Program Planning and Exchange Visitor Monitoring

1. Arrange housing for each exchange visitor in conjunction with host organizations and share rules and regulations for housing with exchange visitors;
2. Ensure that each exchange visitor receives an orientation upon arrival in the United States;
3. Enroll exchange visitors in ECA's ASPE health benefits plan or alternative plan that meets J-1 visa requirements and is approved by ECA, advise exchange visitors about the benefits plan, and assist with claims as necessary;
4. Monitor exchange visitors' adjustment, health and well-being, and program performance. Oversee the coordination and implementation of health and safety protocols and procedures between all individual host campuses and the administrative partner. Manage exchange visitor issues and emergencies at all times in coordination with BridgeUSA, and submit exchange visitor incident report forms, as needed, based on ECA policy guidelines;
5. Assist exchange visitors in developing an individual development plan;
6. Develop and facilitate programming that will increase exchange visitors' employability skills and assist them in applying for, obtaining, and participating in a professional training or continuing education directly related to the exchange visitors' professional background;
7. Assist exchange visitors in contributing to service-learning opportunities and developing leadership skills;
8. Develop and facilitate educational and cultural enrichment activities;
9. Plan and implement at least one BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative -program cultural exchange event that facilitates exchange visitors' personal and professional development and helps exchange visitors maximize their BridgeUSA experiences;

10. Assist exchange visitors in preparing for re-entry and their transitions upon return home;
11. Manage and monitor the J-1 visa duration and SEVIS status of the exchange visitors;
12. Manage financial aspects of the program where applicable including accident and sickness benefits, host university agreements, taxes, and other activity costs;
13. Assume overall responsibility for complying with all applicable tax treaties and federal, state, and local laws on tax withholding and reporting for exchange visitors;

Alumni Programming and Ongoing Engagement

1. Track and maintain updated lists of alumni and facilitate follow-on activities with alumni after they return home; and
2. Plan and coordinate activities that would create opportunities for BridgeUSA Africa Polytechnic Collaboration Initiative-wide alumni engagement and amplify host organization alumni engagement efforts to strengthen both the program-specific brand and the BridgeUSA alumni network.

A.2. Substantial Involvement:

Please note: In a cooperative agreement, ECA is substantially involved in program activities above and beyond routine grant monitoring. The Department of State will be substantially involved in carrying out the following aspects of this cooperative agreement:

- 1) Collaborating with the award recipient on the outreach and selection of mentors and host sites of activity;
- 2) Coordinating with relevant U.S. Embassy on approval of scholarship program exchange visitors and host organizations/ institutions;
- 3) Liaising with relevant U.S. embassies and country desk officers at the U.S. Department of State, specifically in terms of recruitment and selection efforts;
- 4) Assisting with connecting scholarship program alumni with relevant U.S. Embassy Alumni Network.
- 5) Reviewing and approving of all program publicity and other material;
- 6) Approving of program timelines and agendas;
- 7) Assisting with all exchange visitor emergencies;
- 8) Assisting in arrangements for the debriefing session with Department of State and Public Affairs Sections (PASs) at U.S. embassies/consulates overseas;
- 9) Coordinating with the award recipient to publicize the program through various media outlets and social media platforms of ECA and Public Affairs Sections (PASs) at U.S. embassies/consulates overseas.

B. Federal Award Information

Type of Award: Cooperative Agreement. ECA's level of involvement in this program is listed under A1. Substantial Involvement under A. Program Description.

Fiscal Year Funds: FY 2023

Approximate Total Funding: \$100,000, pending the availability of FY 2023 funds.

Approximate Number of Awards: One.

Approximate Average Award: \$100,000, pending the availability of FY 2023 funds.

Minimum “Floor” of Award: \$100,000, pending the availability of FY 2023 funds.

Maximum “Ceiling” of Award: \$100,000, pending the availability of FY 2023 funds.

Anticipated Award Date: January 1, 2023, pending the availability of FY 2023 funds

Anticipated Project Completion Date: January 1, 2026.

Additional Information:

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

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

C.1. Eligible Applicants

U.S. public and private academic and cultural institutions, exchange-of-persons, and other not-for-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3) may submit applications for this competition. Applicants must have nonprofit status with the IRS at the time of application. Please see the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for additional information.

All applicants must also have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number and be registered in SAM.gov (see additional information about this requirement in D.3. and D.5. below).

C.2. Other Eligibility Requirements

The following additional eligibility requirements apply to this NOFO announcement:

a.) All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO, POGI (if applicable), and the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI); non-compliance will result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.

b.) For this program:

Only *one* proposal will be considered by ECA from each applicant organization. In cases where more than one submission from an applicant appears in 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.

U.S. public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3) that represent consortia or other combinations of accredited U.S. community colleges, or accredited specialty colleges such as HBCUs may submit only one proposal to cooperate with BridgeUSA under this competition.

For this NOFO, the term **polytechnic** is defined as an institute of technology. In many countries, it is also known as technological university; university of technology; technological educational institute; technological college; vocational training institute; polytechnic university or just polytechnic. All these names commonly refer to institutions of tertiary education e.g., universities or colleges that specialize in engineering, technology, applied science, and natural sciences. In many countries, polytechnics focus mainly on applied skills or experiential learning. Polytechnic education combines the in-depth study found at universities with practical, technology-based skills training. Polytechnics offer flexible learning pathways and a more affordable education for students across East Africa.

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 Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) document.

C.2.1 Eligible Countries and J-1 Categories: Under this NOFO, a single award will be issued for the following regions: East Africa and adjacent Indian Ocean Islands including Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Applicants can submit only one proposal. **Proposals should address the combination of at least five countries from the list above and stated eligible J-1 categories described below.**

The award recipient must have current Exchange Visitor Program designation i.e., J-1 visa sponsor or must include one current J-1 sponsor as a subaward recipient if it is not designated at the time of its application. The award recipient will have the primary responsibility for recruitment and selection of a diverse group of exchange visitors from the following J1 categories: ***Professor, Research Scholar, Short-Term Scholar, and Specialist***. A brief description of each category is provided below:

Professor: This category is for individuals who are involved primarily in teaching, lecturing, observing, or consulting at accredited post-secondary educational institutions, museums, libraries, or similar types of institutions. A professor may also conduct research, unless disallowed by the sponsor. The duration of participation for this category shall not exceed three years. An Out of Country record can be created in SEVIS after validation to identify a professor exchange visitor continuing to participate in the program activity outside the United States.

Research Scholar: Research scholars primarily conduct research, observe, or consult in connection with a research project at research institutions, corporate research facilities, museums, libraries, accredited post-secondary educational institutions, or similar types of institutions. The research scholar may also teach and lecture – unless disallowed by the sponsor – provided that these activities are incidental and do not extend the period of participation beyond that maximum duration in this category (three years for the purposes of the program).

An Out of Country record can be created in SEVIS after validation to identify a research scholar exchange visitor who is continuing to participate in the program activity outside the United States.

Short-Term Scholar: A short-term scholar is a professor, research scholar, or a person with similar education or accomplishment coming to the United States on a short-term visit for the purpose of lecturing, observing, consulting, training, or demonstrating special skills at research institutions, museums, libraries, accredited post-secondary educational institutions, or similar types of institutions. The duration of participation in this category is not to exceed six months.

Specialist: The purpose is to promote the interchange of knowledge and skills among foreign and American specialists who are defined as experts in a field of specialized knowledge or skills, and who visit the United States for the purpose of observing, consulting, or demonstrating their special skills. This category is intended for exchanges with experts in such areas, e.g., mass media communication, environmental science, youth leadership, international educational exchange, museum exhibitions, labor law, public administration, and library science. The exchange of specialists is seen as promoting mutual enrichment and furthering linkages among scientific institutions, government agencies, museums, corporations, libraries, and similar types of institutions. Such exchanges are primarily non-academic and provide opportunities to increase the exchange of knowledge and ideas between American and foreign specialists. Participation in this category shall not exceed one year.

C.3. Cost Sharing or Matching Funds

There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this competition. However, 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.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the NOFO deadline has passed, ECA staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

D.1. Solicitation Package Location

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

D.2. Content and Form of Submission

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package, including the Proposal Submission Instruction (PSI) document, which consists of required application forms and standard guidelines for proposal preparation. The application should be submitted per the instructions under D.15. “Application Deadline and Method of Submission” section below.

D.3. Unique Entity Identifier Number

You are required to have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number to apply for a grant or cooperative agreement from the U.S. Government. This number is a nine-digit identification number, which uniquely identifies business entities. Obtaining a UEI number is easy and there is no charge. To obtain a UEI number, access <http://www.dnb.com> or call 1-866-705-5711. Please ensure that your UEI (Data Universal Numbering System or DUNS) number is included in the appropriate box of the SF – 424 which is part of the formal application package. For more detailed instructions for obtaining a UEI (DUNS) number, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html>

D.4. Required Proposal Elements

All proposals must contain an executive summary, proposal narrative, budget, and budget narrative.

D.5. Required Registration with the System for Award Management (SAM)

All federal award applicants must be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) database in order to submit a proposal in response to an open competition on Grants.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 is 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. Failure to register in SAM.gov will render applicants ineligible to receive funding.

For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html>

D.6. Federal Awardee Performance & Integrity Information System (FAPIIS)

Prior to making a Federal Assistance award over \$250,000, the Federal agency is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in FAPIIS (see 41 U.S.C. 2313)

and accessible through SAM.gov. If an Applicant is currently in FAPIIS, they can comment on any information about its organization that a Federal awarding agency previously entered. The Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in FAPIIS, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR §200.205 Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

D.7. Required Registration with SAMS Domestic

All ECA award recipient organizations and recipient contacts and signatories must be registered with the U.S. Department of State's SAMS Domestic by accessing <https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com> and clicking the "create an account" link. SAMS Domestic 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 SAMS Domestic 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/>.

In the event the ILMS Help Desk is unable to provide you with assistance in a timely manner, please contact ECA_SAMSDomestic@state.gov and copy the program officer associated with the solicitation.

Please take into consideration the following information when preparing your proposal narrative:

D.8. Adherence To All Regulations Governing The J Visa

ECA places critically important emphases 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 exchange visitors, provision of pre-arrival information and orientation to exchange visitors, monitoring of exchange visitors, proper maintenance and security of forms, record-keeping, reporting and other requirements.

The award recipient will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to exchange visitors 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

Please refer to Solicitation Package for further information.

D.9. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Freedom and Democracy Guidelines

Pursuant to ECA's authorizing legislation, "Diversity" should be interpreted in the broadest sense and encompass differences including race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic origin, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. Proposals should demonstrate how diversity, equity, and inclusion will enhance the program's goals and objectives and the exchange visitors' experience. Proposals should demonstrate how the program will further engage diverse and underserved communities. Programs must maintain a non-political character and should be balanced and representative of the diversity of political, social and cultural life in the United States and abroad. Please refer to the "Support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" review criterion of this document for more information on how this will be reviewed as a part of any application. Please also refer to the "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" section in the "Proposal Submission Instructions" document for specific suggestions on incorporating DEI into the proposal.

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," ECA "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.

D.10. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Distinct from grants or cooperative agreement monitoring and exchange visitor 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://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/mode-framework-eca-applicants-and>.

For this proposal, ECA requires the applicant 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 (page vi: <https://app.box.com/s/7ms6e5f66kji0h8sgao8uno13drvsg1z>) and Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)
- Objective 1: Advance exchange visitor and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
 - o Sub-Objective 1.1: Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between exchange visitors and their host communities
 - E1.1.01: Percent of exchange visitors reporting that their exchange experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
 - E1.1.04: Percent of foreign exchange visitors with more favorable opinions of the United States Government
 - E1.1.09: Percent of exchange visitors who traveled abroad for the first time because of their program
 - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign exchange visitors who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program
 - E1.1.13: Percent of foreign exchange visitors who are more likely to recommend the United States as a good place to study
 - E1.1.17: Percent foreign exchange visitors with more favorable opinions of the American People
 - E1.1.18: Percent of foreign exchange visitors indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values
 - E1.1.19: Percent of exchange visitors agreeing with statements in support of democratic values
- Objective 2: Increase the impact that exchange visitors and alumni have on their communities / countries
 - o Sub-Objective 2.2: Foster exchange visitor's belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
 - E2.2.01: Percent of exchange visitors who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country
- Objective 3: Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions
 - E3.0.02: Percent of foreign exchange visitors who report increasing their network of Americans
 - E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program exchange visitor

- o Sub-Objective 3.1: Alumni subscribe to platforms for resources and information-sharing
 - E3.1.02: Percent of exchange visitors who learned about new resources
 - E3.1.05: Percent of exchange visitors 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 exchange visitors and beneficiaries
 - E4.0.01: Percent of exchange visitors reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation
 - E4.0.03: Percent of exchange visitors reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of exchange program participation
 - o Sub-Objective 4.1: Exchange visitors engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
 - E4.1.01: Total number of exchange visitors
 - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts
 - o Sub-Objective 4.2: Increase ability of exchange visitors to recognize and counter disinformation
 - E4.2.01: Percent of exchange visitors that increased ability to counter disinformation
- Objective 6: Increase Capacity of ECA partner institutions to achieve program strategic goals
 - o Sub-Objective 6.1: Increase capacity of implementing partners and educational institutions for the internationalization of programs
 - E6.1.02: Number of exchange visitors from or hosted by Minority-Serving Institutions participating in ECA (both funded and private sector) exchanges
- Objective 8: Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the ECA's resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
 - E8.0.03: Response rate for exchange visitor surveys

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. 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. A training on how to complete a PMP is available here: <https://youtu.be/RBUF9pllBwc>. 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; see the ECA Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Innovation (MELI) Unit's pages on the ECA website for more information: <https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-evaluation-division/capacity-building>). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework, the Functional Bureau Strategy (<https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau>), 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, such as gender or country; 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. (For more information on how to set targets, access this webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUCQbc0I7Nw>).
 - 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 impact of ECA programming unless otherwise specified in the NOFO and/or POGI. 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.

Award recipients will be required to submit an upload of the raw data (in CSV format) along

with the State Assistance Management System Domestic (SAMS-D RPM) reporting (see below). 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

The applicant should include information within the program narrative section(s) of the proposal 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://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/eca_eval_division_survey_response_rates.pdf), 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.

SAMS-D RPM Reporting Requirements

The SAMS-D 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 SAMS-D 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 SAMS-D RPM. The data stored in the SAMS-D 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.

D.11. 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 component(s) could come before, during and/or after the physical exchange. The objective for the virtual exchange component(s) 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.

D.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.

D.13. Budget Format

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.

The provided budget format is provided as an aid in organizing the budget, it is suggested but not required as a submission format for your proposal budget.

D.13.a. Allowable costs for the program include the following:

- 1) Travel: International and domestic airfare; airline baggage and seat fees; visas; transit costs; ground transportation costs for American participants. Please note that all air travel must be in compliance with the Fly America Act.
- 2) Overhead. Costs necessary for the effective administration of the project may include salaries for employees, benefits, and other direct and indirect costs per detailed instructions in the PSI. Proposals should show strong overhead cost sharing contributions from the applicant, the in-country partner and other sources. Award recipient staff travel should NOT be included in the exchange participant numbers.
- 3) SEVIS/ I-901 Fees. This is a one-time fee for persons applying for J-1 visas. The fee covers the costs of administering the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System ([SEVIS](#)) and related enforcement efforts. Only principal J-1 applicants must pay the [SEVIS I-901](#) fee.
- 4) J-1 Visa Fees. All program participants/applicants must pay the machine-readable visa (MRV) fee to obtain a visa interview appointment.

5) Healthcare Benefits Coverage. Enroll participants in the ECA’s ASPE health benefits plan or alternative plan that meets J-1 visa requirements and is approved by ECA.

Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

D.14. 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, and brief biographical sketches of key personnel to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department’s Standard Terms and Conditions, VI. Recipient Responsibility and Compliance with Federal Requirements (link to: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>).

D.15. Application Deadline and Method of Submission

Application Deadline Date: Monday, November 28, 2022.

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.

D.16. Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures

Eligible organizations should follow the instructions available in the ‘Get Started’ portion of the site (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>).

D.16.a. 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/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>

D.16.b. How to Submit an Application to ECA via Grants.gov

For access to complete instruction on how to apply for NOFOs on Grants.gov, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>

D.16.c. 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

D.16.d. Timely Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

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 not wait until the application deadline to begin the submission process through Grants.gov.

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 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, such as dial-up connections, 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 Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>.

It is the responsibility of all applicants submitting proposals via the Grants.gov web portal 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.

D.17. Intergovernmental Review of Applications

Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

E.1. Review Process

ECA will review all proposals for technical eligibility. Proposals will be deemed ineligible if they do not fully adhere to the guidelines stated herein and in the Solicitation Package. All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office, as well as the Public Diplomacy section overseas and State Department regional bureaus, where appropriate. Eligible proposals will be subject to compliance with Federal regulations and ECA guidelines and forwarded to ECA grant panels for advisory review. Proposals may also be reviewed by the Office of the Legal Adviser or by other Department elements. All awards will be assessed for risk prior to their issuance. Final funding decisions are at the discretion of the U.S. Department of State's Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Final technical authority for assistance awards resides with the ECA's Grants Officer.

E.2. Review Criteria

Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered, and all carry equal weight in the proposal evaluation:

- 1. Quality of the program idea:** Proposals should exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to ECA's mission.
- 2. Program planning and Ability to achieve program objectives:** A detailed agenda and relevant work plan should demonstrate substantive undertakings and logistical capacity. The agenda and plan should adhere to the program overview and guidelines described above. The objectives should be reasonable, feasible, and flexible. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan.
- 3. Support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Proposals should show substantive support of ECA's policy on Diversity. Proposals should demonstrate how DEI will be achieved in the different aspects of program administration and of program design, content and implementation, including individual participant recruitment, selection and placement. It is important that proposals have a clearly articulated DEI plan and not simply express general support for the concept of DEI. Proposals should demonstrate how DEI will enhance the

program's goals and objectives and the participants' exchange experience. Proposals should demonstrate how the program will further engage diverse and underserved communities.

4. Institutional Capacity and Institution's Record/Ability: Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program or project's goals. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past ECA awards (grants or cooperative agreements) as determined by ECA's Grants Division. ECA will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.

5. Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Proposed programs should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of information and establishment of long-term institutional and individual linkages. Proposals should include a fully developed performance M&E narrative and a PMP (or similar document) that includes the goals, objectives, and indicators used. Proposals will be evaluated for feasibility and alignment with the M&E section of this solicitation, including if: 1) M&E resources, monitoring mechanisms, and data analysis and reporting procedures are sufficiently detailed and realistic; 2) a realistic learning plan provides a strategy to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices in conjunction with the Grant Officer/GOR; and 3) a PMP (or other document that includes similar information) is complete, clear, and well-organized. All submitted PMPs and M&E narrative sections will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided information on the minimum data required as per the solicitation.

6. Cost-effectiveness and Cost-sharing: The overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All costs should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions. If possible, proposals should provide a plan for continued follow-on activity (without ECA support) ensuring that ECA supported programs are not isolated events.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

F.1. Award Notices

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal ECA procedures. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from the ECA's Grants Division. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer as identified in the application.

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.

F.2 Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Terms and Conditions applicable to all ECA agreements include:

- 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.
- U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions.

For a copy of the OMB Guidance cited, please download from the www.ecfr.gov website.

For a copy of the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, or to review other Department of State assistance information, please download from: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>

F.3. Reporting Requirements

All reports must be submitted in a timely manner. You must provide ECA with an electronic copy of the following required reports:

- 1.) Performance Progress Reports (PPRs) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual reports shall be due 120 calendar days after the **cooperative agreement**; quarterly or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. (Frequency of these reports will be determined by the Grants Officer and Program Officer.) The complete report and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the Recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this Cooperative Agreement/Grant in the U.S. Department of State's [SAMS Domestic](#).
- 2.) The Federal Financial Report (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: <http://www.dpm.psc.gov/>. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the Recipient must upload the approved report to [SAMS Domestic](#), in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the Recipient's eligibility for future Cooperative Agreements/Grants.

In the event you are having difficulty uploading reports and the ILMS help desk is not providing sufficient assistance, please email ECA_SAMSDomestic@state.gov.

- 3.) A final program and financial report no more than 120 days after the expiration or termination of the award;

Award recipients will be required to provide reports analyzing their evaluation findings to ECA in their regular program reports. (Please refer to D.10. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) information.)

All data collected, including survey responses and contact information, must be maintained for a minimum of three years and provided to ECA upon request.

F.5. 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

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.

G. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions about this announcement, contact: Elizabeth Ongao, ongaoe@state.gov and David Benze, benzedk@state.gov, U.S. Department of State, BridgeUSA, ECA/EC, 2200 C St, NW, Washington, DC 20037, or by telephone, 202-676-7895.

All correspondence with ECA concerning this NOFO 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 NOFO deadline has passed, ECA staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

H. OTHER INFORMATION

Notice

The terms and conditions published in this NOFO are binding and may not be modified by any ECA representative. Explanatory information provided by ECA that contradicts published language will not be binding. 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. Awards will be subject to periodic programmatic and financial reporting and evaluation requirements as outlined in the NOFO.

Scott Weinhold
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State

September 26, 2022