



Educational and Cultural Affairs

U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

**U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
FY 2026 Tech Youth Program
Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0018281
Application Deadline: July 6, 2026**

- A. Basic Information**
- B. Eligibility**
- C. Program Description**
- D. Application Contents and Format**
- E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines**
- F. Application Review Information**
- G. Award Notices**
- H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration**
- I. Other Information**

A. Basic Information

1. Overview.

Funding Opportunity Title	FY 2026 Tech Youth Program
Funding Opportunity Number	DFOP0018281
Announcement Type	New Cooperative Agreement
Deadline for Applications	July 6, 2026, 11:59pm Eastern (Washington D.C. time)
Assistance Listing Number	19.415
Length of Performance Period	15 months
Number of Awards Anticipated	One award
Award Amount	Approximately \$1,100,000, pending the availability of funds
Total Available Funding	Approximately \$1,100,000, pending the availability of funds
Type of Funding	FY 2026 Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs (ECE) Funds
Funding Instrument Type	Cooperative Agreement

Anticipated Award Date	September 15, 2026
-------------------------------	--------------------

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

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

Pending satisfactory implementation of this program and the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, it is ECA’s intent to renew this award for two additional, consecutive fiscal years, before openly competing it again.

2. Executive Summary.

The Office of Citizen Exchanges of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) is pleased to announce an open competition for proposals to implement the FY 2026 Tech Youth program. Tech Youth is a new three-week, U.S.-based youth exchange that will equip young innovators with essential technical, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills to lead effectively and succeed in emerging industries. Participants will gain hands-on experience through job shadowing, site visits to U.S. companies, meetings with industry leaders, and intensive coursework and hands-on training. The program advances U.S. efforts to secure technological advantage over strategic competitors.

The program will support approximately 96 American and international participants from select countries worldwide (approximately 72 English-speaking international high school students and 24 U.S. high school students) in pre-exchange activities, the three-week U.S.-based exchange (to be conducted in summer 2027), post-exchange alumni engagement, and implementation of required capstone projects that address real-world economic and business challenges.

B. Eligibility

1. Eligible Applicants.

The following organizations are eligible to apply:

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

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

2. Cost Sharing.

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

3. Other Eligibility Requirements.

- a) All organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issued via SAM.gov as well as a valid registration in SAM.gov. Please see *Section E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines* for more information.
- b) ECA's Grant Guidelines require that organizations demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchanges to be eligible for awards exceeding \$130,000 in ECA funding. As noted in *Section A. Basic Information*, ECA anticipates issuing one award, for approximately \$1,100,000. Therefore, organizations must demonstrate four years of experience in conducting international exchanges in your proposal to be eligible to apply under this competition.
- c) All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO and the PSI; not doing so may result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.
- d) All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.
- e) 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. **Please note:** Applicant organizations are defined by their legal name, and EIN number as stated on their completed SF-424 and additional supporting documentation outlined in the PSI document.
- f) Applicants who are current recipients of awards directly from ECA should make sure the application discusses one or more award that will be open with ECA at the start of the anticipated period of performance for this NOFO. Applicants who do not have current awards directly with ECA, please review the information in the PSI, section D, with additional information that must be provided in your application for it to be eligible.

C. Program Description

1. Authority.

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the

Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries...; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations...and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program above is provided through legislation.

2. Purpose.

The Tech Youth program will equip young innovators with the skills and knowledge to succeed in emerging industries and to lead technology collaboration between the United States and partner countries worldwide. American participants will acquire advanced technical and leadership skills while gaining global perspectives and international networks that strengthen U.S. competitiveness and reinforce American leadership in strategic technology sectors. International participants will learn about U.S. innovation, entrepreneurship, and business practices, positioning them as future long-term partners for U.S. technology, trade, and investment. By fostering technological innovation, and entrepreneurial mindsets, Tech Youth will advance U.S. foreign policy priorities and cultivate young leaders who will drive economic and technological progress aligned with U.S. interests.

To achieve these outcomes, Tech Youth will showcase American leadership in technological innovation, prioritize U.S. private sector engagement, and introduce STEM careers through immersive activities such as job shadowing, site visits to U.S. companies, meetings with industry leaders, and hands-on training. During the exchange, participants will explore U.S. advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies across sectors such as advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, cybersecurity, e-commerce, energy, robotics, and quantum computing. They will gain practical perspectives on technological problem-solving and innovation, deepen their understanding of the U.S. tech industry and business practices, and form lasting professional relationships with U.S. counterparts. Participants also will develop an understanding and appreciation of American culture and history through engagement with American communities, homestays with American families, and cultural activities. Engaging young people at a formative age builds a pipeline of globally aware technology leaders equipped to advance international collaboration and address future real-world challenges.

Upon returning home, participants will design and implement capstone projects in their communities that apply the technical skills, leadership abilities, and problem-solving approaches acquired during the exchange. These participant-driven

initiatives will expand program impact, promote continued engagement with U.S. technologies and partners, and strengthen business, educational, and research ties between the United States and participating countries, thereby advancing long-term U.S. strategic and economic interests.

3. Program Specific Guidelines.

The program goals are to:

- 1) **Advance U.S. economic interests and workforce competitiveness** by equipping American and international youth with technical and entrepreneurial capabilities, and by building a global network of young leaders who actively support U.S. businesses, products, and commercial partnerships.
- 2) **Showcase U.S. technological leadership** by demonstrating U.S. excellence and innovation in cutting-edge technologies and innovation, encouraging international young leaders to choose the United States as their preferred partner for future technology research collaboration, investment, and commercial engagement.
- 3) **Build strategic international partnerships** by creating lasting networks between emerging innovators and industry leaders. Through these networks, American youth will gain new global perspectives and problem-solving skills, while international youth will learn how U.S. technologies and standards can position their nations to expand partnerships with the United States.
- 4) **Promote America** by deepening participants' understanding and appreciation of U.S. culture, history, and founding principles, including free expression and speech, citizen participation in government, and rule of law; instilling pride and patriotism in American youth; and inspiring all participants to continue learning about these topics and to share their exchange experiences with their home communities.

The objectives of the program:

- 1) Participants will achieve documented growth in five key workforce competency areas - technical skills (e.g., AI fundamentals, coding, robotics), leadership, teamwork, creative problem-solving, and communication, as measured through pre/post skills assessments and project evaluations.
- 2) Participants will build and sustain relationships with U.S. peers, host families, industry professionals, and mentors through virtual and/or in-person means post-program.
- 3) Participants will complete a capstone project in their home communities within six months of program completion, applying technical skills and approaches learned during the exchange, utilizing U.S. technology platforms where feasible,

and presenting their exchange experience to their communities to promote America.

- 4) International participants will share their U.S. experiences with their home communities through presentations, social media, media interviews, or other venues within a year of completing the program, promoting American culture, collaborative activities, and future partnership opportunities with the United States.

Regions and Countries/Territories: The Tech Youth program is a global initiative that engages participants from the United States and select countries worldwide. ECA anticipates that approximately two countries per region will participate in the program. The Department of State regions can be found at <https://www.state.gov/countries-and-areas-list>.

ECA, in consultation with regional bureaus, will identify and select participating countries of strategic importance to the Administration, based on regional priorities and operational considerations. ECA will communicate country selections to the award recipient in the fall before the summer program.

Note: ECA reserves the right to adjust program configurations, budgets, participant numbers, and participating countries based on program needs, funding availability, and evolving U.S. foreign policy priorities. ECA may also modify the list of participating countries or regions if unexpected situations prevent a partner country from participating or if alternative countries better align with current Department priorities. Any changes may require award amendments.

Participants: ECA anticipates that the award will support approximately 96 American and international participants.

With the support of the award recipient, participating embassies will lead the competitive recruitment of eligible, English-speaking international participants for the program. The award recipient will receive all applications, pre-screen program applicants for eligibility and application quality, and prepare semi-finalist lists for embassy review and candidate interviews.

U.S. embassies will interview semi-finalists and submit their selections to ECA for approval. Once approved, ECA will share finalist lists with the award recipient.

The award recipient will also conduct national outreach and competitive merit-based selection of approximately 24 American youth participants from across the

United States to join the international participants in planned activities throughout the entire program. Proposals should include a clear plan to demonstrate impact on U.S. youth and communities, in addition to overseas communities. ECA **must** approve all U.S. participant selections before participants are notified of their status.

Ideal participants for this program will:

- Be between the ages of 15 and 18 years.
- Be current residents of participating countries or territories.
- Have a strong interest in, and general understanding of, global issues and key technology topics, including artificial intelligence (AI) and its real-world applications, and other emerging technologies.
- Have demonstrated leadership potential through academic excellence, community involvement, and extracurricular activities.
- Be motivated to strengthen their youth leadership, entrepreneurial, and problem-solving skills.
- Be proficient in English to actively participate in all exchange activities and understand technical vocabulary and concepts.
- Demonstrate intent to pursue further studies and/or careers in technology fields.
- Be committed to completing a capstone project and remain engaged with the ECA alumni community after the exchange.

Program Design

Applicants should propose one exchange that will support approximately 96 competitively selected participants in three weeks of U.S.-based activities as well as pre- and post-exchange components.

The overall program design should prioritize AI education and literacy, as well as leadership and entrepreneurial skills development. Participants will engage in the study and in-depth exploration of key STEM topics through the lens of emerging technologies. Topics may include advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, cybersecurity, e-commerce, energy exploration, quantum computing, robotics, space technologies, among others. The program should also include activities that showcase American entrepreneurial spirit and U.S. advancements in technology across various sectors, particularly as they relate to AI.

By equipping participants with AI literacy, the program enables young leaders to design AI-based solutions to both community and global challenges. Participants will also be able to navigate digital spaces safely and leverage digital platforms to exercise free speech through open debate, constructive dialogue, and the free exchange of ideas.

Proposals should include detailed descriptions of all proposed activities. Applicants are encouraged to propose innovative approaches that incorporate the program components outlined in this solicitation and may include additional activities that advance the program's stated goals and objectives. Topics and themes selected for activities should aim to promote and advance current U.S. foreign policy priorities related to youth workforce development and technological advancement. Applicants should propose pre- and post-exchange components that complement and enhance the skills development and learning gained during the in-person exchange.

Proposals should identify specific exchange dates, but the exact timing may be altered through the mutual agreement of ECA and the award recipient. The award recipient must consult with ECA and the participating U.S. embassies before confirming the specific dates of the exchange during the planning phase of the program.

Details on specific program components can be found below, with additional information provided under Recipient Responsibilities.

Key program Components:

Pre-exchange Virtual Activities

Proposals should include substantive pre-exchange virtual activities that prepare participants for active engagement in the U.S.-based exchange and build cohesion among participants. These activities should include sessions that introduce participants to program themes, online safety, and foundational AI concepts and tools, including the role of AI in emerging industries and to personalize learning. ECA encourages applicants to partner with U.S. AI platforms to support these preparatory activities when possible.

U.S. Exchange

The format of the U.S. exchange must be age-appropriate and interactive, designed to build participants' knowledge and technical skills while strengthening their leadership, civic, and entrepreneurial abilities. The format should enable participants to explore program themes in creative and practical ways. Applicants are encouraged to be innovative and adaptable in designing activities that meet program goals while maximizing cost-effectiveness and efficiency. All program components also should be designed to be flexible and responsive to evolving U.S. foreign policies priorities.

While the program experience is intended to be intensive and immersive, daily activities should conclude at reasonable hours. It is important that the high school aged participants be provided with ample opportunity within the schedule for downtime to reflect on program lessons and experiences, to connect with family and friends back home, and to spend unstructured time with Tech Youth peers to form meaningful and lasting friendships that will continue after the program.

Proposals should describe a plan to divide the full delegation of participants into smaller cohorts, when and where logical, to ensure that all participants actively take part in all exchange activities and that program staff can adequately monitor the safety and well-being of the participants.

- a) **Technology Camp:** The three-week, U.S.-based exchange should feature an academically rigorous technology camp designed specifically for Tech Youth participants. Technology camp key objectives include developing participant technical skills and inspiring their deeper engagement and long-term interest in artificial intelligence by demonstrating its everyday applications and how it can be used to personalize learning. The camp should also provide opportunities for participants to explore how individuals can use digital technologies constructively and safely for open debate and the exchange of information and ideas, and to learn how freedom of speech and expression in the United States drives American innovation and prosperity.

Note: Participants may have varying levels of technology and STEM experience. Applicants therefore should design camp activities that develop and strengthen skills for all competency levels.

- b) **Job Shadowing, Mentorships, and Career Readiness:** The program prioritizes robust U.S. business engagement by integrating substantive job shadowing, mentorships, and site visits that give participants deeper insight into STEM careers, U.S. business practices, and U.S. innovation and technological advances, while helping them build professional networks they can draw on as their careers develop.

Proposals that clearly promote U.S. business engagement and foster public-private partnerships will be most competitive, particularly those that: (1) connect the program with local businesses and industry leaders for site visits; (2) identify corporate partners for job shadowing; and (3) secure expert speakers for trainings, workshops, or events.

- c) **Other exchange activities:** To provide a well-rounded experience, the program should include additional activities that support program themes and advance the program's stated goals. These include cultural and recreational activities that introduce participants to U.S. culture, history, and founding principles (individual liberties such as freedom of speech), and U.S. community activities that further build leadership skills and allow for direct engagement with Americans.

The program also should afford participants opportunities throughout the duration of the exchange to engage in small group work to design and develop capstone projects that are relevant to the field and their home communities and will produce tangible, presentable outcomes.

Organizational Capacity: Proposals should demonstrate strong organizational capacity to implement a program of this nature, focusing on three core competencies: (1) a track record in conducting leadership- and technology-focused programs; (2) expertise in implementing substantive, age-appropriate activities for secondary school youth; and (3) experience managing complex, multi-phase, global programs and maintaining engagement with participants following the U.S.-based exchange.

Applicants may propose U.S.-based partners to assist with program implementation, such as delivery of the technology camp or specialized training components. Proposals should include letters of commitment or support from partner organizations and a brief description of any previous cooperative activities, along with relevant information on partners' mission, activities, and accomplishments. Applicants should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all partner organizations in program logistics, management, and oversight.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to secure private sector support, where possible. Private sector funds and in-kind contributions may support activities such as additional visits to U.S. technology companies, increased participation of American students in program activities, or expanded offerings during the technology camp.

Partner Organizations and/or Affiliates: While not required, applicants are strongly encouraged to identify partner(s) in participating regions/countries (e.g., branch offices, non-governmental organizations, alumni, or other affiliates/consultants) to assist with in-country implementation, including internal travel logistics, disbursement of travel allowances, pre-departure orientations, and

follow-on activities. This capacity may take the form of a branch office of the U.S. applicant organization, a non-governmental partner, or other entities with demonstrated experience implementing educational exchanges. Individuals from ECA's exchange alumni network also may serve as in-country partners. The award recipient must have systems in place to assist participants with pre-departure arrangements, including coordinating travel and lodging for visa interviews, conducting pre-departure orientations, managing international departures, and disbursing funds for domestic expenses (e.g., travel to the capital city, passport fees, travel allowances). The award recipient will be responsible, both programmatically and financially, for all partner activities under the cooperative agreement. All applicants should identify proposed in-country partner(s), describe each partner's responsibilities and qualifications, and provide signed letters of commitment, where applicable. The award recipient (and its partners) must be able to manage program activities in partner countries with minimal reliance on U.S. embassy staff.

U.S. Embassy-Specific Involvement: In collaboration with the U.S. award recipient and ECA, participating U.S. embassies will: 1) take the lead on participant recruitment and selection, utilizing materials provided by the award recipient. Applicants should outline in their proposals how they will support U.S. embassies in these efforts, including responding to applicant inquiries and hosting information sessions to encourage applications from the posts' target demographics; 2) interview semi-finalists after the award recipient's initial applicant screening and nominate Tech Youth finalists and alternates (for ECA approval); 3) facilitate visa appointments, pre-departure briefings, and alumni engagement. The costs associated with these activities should be covered through the award; 4) participate in planned alumni activities, as feasible; 5) conduct post-exchange debriefs with participants to learn about their experiences and impressions; and 6) assist in integrating Tech Youth alumni into the broader ECA alumni network in their home countries to the greatest extent possible.

Note: Once a cooperative agreement is awarded and countries are selected for the year, the recipient must consult regularly with embassies to implement the project and coordinate participants' international and domestic travel needs. All program materials, promotional items, and application forms are subject to ECA approval before dissemination to the public.

4. Recipient Responsibilities.

The responsibilities of the award recipient are as follows.

- 1) Recruitment and Selection – Proposals must include a detailed description of the proposed plans/processes to accomplish all elements outlined below, as well as a sample application form in the appendices.
 - a) Prepare recruitment materials including applications, flyers, frequently asked questions, information session presentations, online application portal, social media posts, and a workplan/timeline to support the participating embassies' recruitment of qualified participants. The award recipient will work with ECA to finalize the materials before disseminating them to embassies.
 - b) Develop an online application form, in consultation with ECA, for the merit-based open competition for both international and American participants to be utilized during program outreach and participant recruitment. ECA must approve the application form prior to it going live. Additionally, the award recipient must house the application form and subsequent program applicant data on a secure, private, password-protected platform or website that is accessible only to the award recipient, participating embassies, and ECA.
 - c) Conduct and manage open recruitment and competitive, merit-based selection of a secondary school youth from the United States, in close consultation with ECA.
 - d) Consult with ECA to establish a mutually agreeable recruitment and selection timeline, incorporating time for outreach to prospective applicants, initial screening of applicants, the preparation of semi-finalist lists for the embassies' review, and candidate interviews by embassy staff.
 - e) Develop a screening process and manage the initial screening of program applicants by performing a technical review of all applications received for eligibility and completeness. The award recipient should use a transparent process, with a consistent scoring mechanism and clearly identified evaluation criteria for assessing applications. Review criteria should be developed in close consultation with ECA and participating embassies.
 - f) Provide each embassy (copying ECA) with a list of semi-finalists by the agreed upon deadline (determined after the award has been made) to be interviewed by embassy staff. Any notes or recommendations from the initial screening should be shared with the embassies to aid them in their selection of participants that would be a good fit for the proposed U.S.-based exchange. The award recipient may serve in an advisory role to participating embassies, as needed/requested, during the selection process.

Please note - U.S. embassies will interview candidates and make final selections, which will be sent to ECA for approval in the form of ranked nominations. Once approved, ECA will notify the award recipient of the final, approved selections.

2) Preparation

a) Pre-departure Orientations (PDOs):

- In consultation with ECA, design pre-departure orientation materials for participants and their parents/guardians prior to exchange. Materials should cover key topics, including program objectives, themes, expectations, intercultural training, preparation for homestays, and important information on travel arrangements and other logistics. PDO materials for international participants must include a general political, historical, educational, and cultural introduction to the United States. PDO materials for American participants must include general introductions to the home countries and cultures of the international participants.
- In collaboration with ECA, coordinate with all participants before the program to provide program information and pre-departure materials, and to gather information about their specific interests. **Note:** All participants must be made fully aware that the program is funded by the U.S. Department of State and supported by the U.S. Government (ECA and participant embassies).
- b) Collect medical information from all participants and ensure that each participant has submitted the necessary health documents for the program.
- c) Enroll international participants in the Bureau's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) health benefits plan for the duration of the exchange and assist with claims as necessary. ECA can provide training for this task, if necessary.
- d) Prepare emergency contact information/cards for all participants. Participants must receive cards prior to traveling to the site of program activity in the United States.
- e) Participant Travel Arrangements:
 - For the international participants, facilitate the passport and J-1 visa application process, in collaboration with ECA and embassies prior to travel to the United States. This includes coordinating, and budgeting for travel for visa interviews. When possible, J-1 visas should be applied for approximately 90 days prior to travel to the United States. All international participants will travel on a U.S. Government designation for the J Exchange Visitor Program with ECA as the sponsor.
 - Identify an individual to serve as Alternate Responsible Officer to issue DS-2019 forms. ECA can provide training for that individual, if necessary.
 - Facilitate, and budget for, the identification needs of American participants. This includes coordinating and budgeting for TSA approved

- identification for domestic participants.
 - Arrange and manage all round-trip international (complying with the Fly America Act) travel arrangements for international participants. ECA and U.S. embassies must be provided the opportunity to review international flight itineraries. ECA will approve all international itineraries prior to purchase to ensure cost effectiveness.
 - Manage/arrange in-country domestic travel for all participants (including American participants). Related in-country expenses (for international participants) may include passport fees, participant travel allowances, inter-country travel to the capital city for visa interview, and lodging and meals for pre-departure orientations, as needed. The proposal should detail a plan for providing funds to participants to cover their required pre-program costs.
- f) Flight Chaperones:
- Identify and arrange for adult flight chaperones (at least 25 years of age) to accompany participants who are minors on international (transatlantic) flights to and from the United States, in close consultation with ECA and U.S. embassies, to ensure participant safety and ease parental concerns. Once participants arrive in the United States, award recipient staff will meet and supervise them for the duration of the exchange.
 - To the greatest extent possible, select flight chaperones from among ECA program alumni to strengthen the ECA alumni network. Chaperones should be competitively selected through a brief application and interview process. When ECA alumni are not available, chaperones may include award recipient staff, local NGO staff, educators, or consultants. Selected chaperones must commit in writing to fulfilling travel-related responsibilities and serving as mentors or resources to participants following the exchange.
 - Ensure that flight chaperones participate in part or all PDOs with participants to prepare for assisting participants and to allow parents or guardians to meet them. Once approved by ECA and U.S. embassies, the award recipient should introduce chaperones to participants and parents or guardians in advance of travel. While flight chaperones will not have a role in the U.S.-based exchange, applicants are encouraged to provide opportunities for them to participate in orientation or closing workshop events when feasible.
 - Manage and arrange all round-trip international travel (in compliance with the Fly America Act) and any necessary U.S. domestic travel for approved flight chaperones, including lodging and per diem for the appropriate number of days in the United States (typically two days). Proposals

should include a cost-effective plan for identifying flight chaperones, coordinating their travel, and budgeting for all related expenses. ECA and U.S. embassies may assist in facilitating connections with ECA alumni, as needed.

- g) Arrange for U.S. ground transportation, group meals, and the disbursement of pocket money.
- h) Hire and train staff, as needed, to accompany participants during the exchange period. Criminal background checks, including a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry, must be conducted for all program staff and for new staff prior to hiring.
- i) Orient staff and those participating from the U.S. host communities, including host families, to the goals of the program.
- j) Housing Accommodations:
 - Arrange housing for participants in dormitories, hotels, homestays, or a combination thereof, and ensure appropriate staffing to monitor these arrangements throughout the exchange. To maximize interaction with American peers, international participants should be paired with American roommates in all housing accommodations to the greatest extent possible. Applicants must also explain how they will provide supervision of participants when they are not in homestays.
 - Incorporate homestays with American families for a portion of the program to provide participants with insight into everyday life in the host community, increase exposure to American culture, and foster lasting relationships. American participants should be placed in homestays with their international peers whenever possible. Applicants should maximize homestay opportunities within the overall program design.
 - Carefully recruit, screen, and select host families for homestay opportunities through a comprehensive process that includes home visits to meet all household members and ensure a comfortable, nurturing environment. Host families must receive an orientation prior to the arrival of exchange participants covering program goals, participation parameters, duties, obligations, and cultural differences.
 - Conduct criminal background checks for all host family members and other individuals residing in the home who are 18 years of age or older, including a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry. Host families must also demonstrate adequate financial and personal resources and sufficient time to spend with participants. Proposals must include a clear and detailed host family recruitment, screening, and selection plan.
 - Ensure participants have appropriate accommodations within host family

homes. Participants should have private space; while they may share a room with someone of similar age and the same sex, each participant must have their own bed. Participants may be placed with host families individually or in pairs.

- Monitor all housing arrangements throughout the exchange to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of participants.
- k) Design and conduct pre-exchange virtual activities that prepare participants for active engagement in the U.S.-based exchange and build cohesion among participants.

3) Exchange Activities

- a) Design, plan, and implement a substantive and interactive exchange in the United States designed to develop the youth participants' knowledge and skill base in the field of technology, including AI foundational concepts and ways AI can provide creative solutions and efficient solutions to real world challenges. The exchange must include a technology camp component and a short trip to Washington, D.C. Exchange activities must include creative and interactive activities, practical experiences, and other hands-on opportunities that provide a substantive experience on the program themes and achieve program objectives outlined in the NOFO. The program should be somewhat flexible, as the proposed exchange dates may be adjusted once the award has been made due to the number of participating countries and varying academic calendars.
- b) Conduct a welcome orientation for all participants at the start of the exchange to review program goals, objectives, and expectations. The welcome orientation should include a general political, historical, educational, and cultural introduction to their host communities, and practical and administrative information. During this orientation award recipients must ensure that participants are in possession of the printed emergency contact card.
- c) Arrange appropriate community, cultural, and social activities that build participant leadership skills and deepen their understanding of U.S. history, culture, and founding principles, such as American individual liberties.
- d) Identify, arrange, and manage substantive job shadowing opportunities for participants.
- e) Facilitate the creation of structured mentorships for participants that begin before (or during) the U.S.-based exchange and continue once the participants return home. Mentors may include American job shadow hosts, alumni of ECA-funded professional programs who are now university graduates, among others.

- f) Plan a short, substantive visit to Washington, D.C. at the conclusion of the program. The proposal should detail plans for the Washington, D.C. visit which should include:
 - a visit to the U.S. Department of State where participants will debrief Department representatives on their exchange experiences and individual or team projects.
 - a closing session to summarize exchange activities, prepare participants for their return home, and present opportunities for alumni engagement.
 - cultural activities that showcase American civic history.
- g) Develop, and implement, a comprehensive plan to monitor the participants' safety and well-being during the exchange.

4) Participant Monitoring:

Develop and implement a detailed plan to monitor participants' well-being, safety, and security during all stages of the program. The award recipient must conduct daily monitoring of participants while on exchange and create opportunities for participants to share concerns or potential issues so they can be addressed promptly. Program staff should take appropriate steps to prevent or address misunderstandings or adjustment issues and assist youth with cultural adaptation, provide societal context to enhance learning, and counsel participants as needed. A competitive monitoring plan should include the following:

- Information provided in pre-departure materials on safety and avenues for participants to communicate concerns to program staff. Participants must also receive emergency contact information or cards prior to their travel.
- An age-appropriate staff supervision plan to ensure participants are safe and properly supervised while participating in program activities and when staying in hotels and/or dormitories.
- Screening of host families, as outlined above.
- Monitoring and support of participants while they are in homestays.
- A comprehensive emergency response plan, including procedures for responding to health, safety, or security concerns. The award recipient must immediately inform ECA and relevant U.S. embassies of any significant health or safety issues affecting program participants. Regardless of the situation, the award recipient must notify ECA immediately.
- Criminal background checks for all program staff, including a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry.
- Inclusion of a detailed participant monitoring and supervision plan in the proposal submission.

5) Follow-on Activities and Alumni Engagement

- Plan, organize, and manage follow-on activities and alumni engagement in participants' home countries in close collaboration with ECA, overseas partner(s) (if applicable), and participating U.S. embassies (advisory role).
- The award recipient should support participants in brainstorming, planning, and developing capstone projects that address program themes and local needs. Projects should incorporate technical skills and innovative approaches learned during the exchange and utilize U.S. AI applications or technology platforms where/if feasible. Applicants should include a clear plan for ongoing mentoring and support upon participants' return home. Follow-on activities may include virtual components to address connectivity limitations.
- Assist alumni in sharing their experiences with their communities through presentations, articles, digital media content, or other appropriate formats.
- Connect newly returned program alumni with alumni of other ECA and U.S. Government-sponsored programs in coordination with participating U.S. embassy alumni coordinators (where applicable) and ECA's alumni team. These connections should help participants reintegrate into their home communities and strengthen the alumni network.
- Communicate and consult with ECA and participating embassies prior to organizing in-person or virtual alumni events to account for local cultural, political, or security considerations, and provide opportunities for participation when feasible.
- Keep ECA and embassies informed of plans for and progress on participants' capstone projects and other activities.
- Provide detailed summaries of alumni activities or events to ECA and posts within two weeks of the event. Summaries should include who, what, where, when, and why, and highlight specific outcomes and notable successes.
- Propose strategies to engage all U.S. program alumni post-exchange to foster a strong network that supports participants in their educational and professional advancement.
- Incorporate ECA alumni initiatives, including the International Exchange Alumni website (alumni.state.gov), the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) grants, and other U.S. Department of State alumni opportunities.
- Ensure all alumni programs strengthen a sense of affinity with the U.S. government and follow ECA communications guidance for crediting the U.S. Department of State.
- Ensure all alumni contact information gathered on behalf of the program is made available to the Department of State. Please refer to the PSI for additional guidance.
- Include a detailed plan for follow-on activities, project action planning, and participant support tailored to high school students that demonstrates how the

program will achieve its objectives.

6) Performance Monitoring and Evaluation:

Design a Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) that outlines plans to track progress towards the proposed program's goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. Please see section 6. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation of the NOFO for more information.

7) Communication:

- a) Prepare and share program and alumni highlights and success stories by email in a timely fashion with ECA and relevant U.S. embassies while participants are in the United States and post-exchange.
- b) Present a communications plan for keeping ECA and posts informed of program progress, including programmatic and/or participant concerns/issues, as well as alumni activities and success stories.
- c) Coordinate digital engagement for the program in coordination with ECA and posts in accordance with ECA's communications and social media guidelines to ensure media is appropriate for the program's level of sensitivity and maintains the online security of those involved.

8) Administrative

- a) Work in consultation with the ECA and participating U.S. embassies on the program implementation, providing timely progress reports to ECA and posts, and complying with financial and program reporting requirements and ECA directives.
- b) Manage all financial aspects of the program, including stipend disbursements to the participants, and management and oversight of sub-award relationships with U.S. and overseas partner organizations, as applicable.
- c) Participate in regular program reviews with ECA to assess program implementation and identify matters of concern and improvement. The award recipient should provide ECA brief, monthly email updates (at minimum) outlining general programmatic activities conducted during the past month and anticipated programmatic activities to be conducted the following month.
- d) Provide all printed or web-based program materials, including applications, program-wide communications with post, and publicity materials to ECA for approval. Note: All materials and correspondence related to the program will acknowledge this as a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. ECA will retain copyright use of and be allowed to distribute materials related to this program as it sees

- fit.
- e) Accommodate ECA site visit requests.
 - f) Recipients will send at least one organization representative (and not more than two) to attend the in-person, two-day ECA Youth Programs annual meeting in Washington, D.C., typically held in January or February every year.
 - g) Submit proposed changes to staffing plans and/or key personnel to the ECA program and grants officers for approval.
 - h) Respond fully and promptly to requests for program information from the ECA program office.
 - i) Inform, and consult with, ECA about any program or participant problems, emergencies, or other issues, as well as the progress of necessary corrective action.

5. Goals and Objectives.

The program design and implementation must advance American foreign policy objectives and fully integrate the program goals and objectives listed under section 3. Program Specific Guidelines of this solicitation.

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

Distinct from grants or cooperative agreement monitoring and participant monitoring, performance monitoring is designed to assess progress against a program's goals and objectives. A performance monitoring framework is vital to tracking the direction, pace, and magnitude of change that result from ECA programs.

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

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

Demographic Questions as outlined in the *Indicator Book* on page v and *Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)* (See the MODE Resource Guide - <https://app.box.com/s/qjo8icwj46tc8h1i1qtg80zl7ibwgtua> – found on our website <https://www.state.gov/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/>)

- **Objective 1:** Advance participant and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
 - **Sub-Objective 1.1:** Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between participants and their host communities
 - E1.1.01: Percent of participants reporting that their program experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
 - E1.1.04: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
 - E1.1.09: Percent of participants who traveled abroad for the first time because of their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American people (core indicator)
 - E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values (core indicator)
 - E1.1.19: Percent of foreign participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values (core indicator)
- **Objective 2:** Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities / countries
 - **Sub-Objective 2.2:** Foster participants’ belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
 - E2.2.01: Percent of participants who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country (core indicator)
- **Objective 3:** Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions
 - E3.0.02: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of Americans (core indicator)
 - E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)
- **Objective 4:** Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
 - E4.0.01: Percent of participants reporting increases in their job skills as a result of their program participation

- E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation
- E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
- **Sub-Objective 4.1:** Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
 - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
 - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)
- **Objective 8:** Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau’s resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
 - E8.0.03: Response rate for participant surveys (core indicator)

Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs)

ECA recommends the use of a PMP to serve as the primary reference document for performance monitoring for this award. If used, the PMP is an important part of any proposal, as it outlines how the applicant plans to track progress towards the proposed program’s goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. A PMP document that includes all MODE Framework indicators is a part of this solicitation’s attachments. Specific instructions on how to modify the PMP to be responsive to this solicitation are included in that document; there is also a support video available for more information on how to fill out the PMP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBHC1oLNZvI>. While ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. Successful PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the following:

- Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.
- Indicators. Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning, breakdowns of the data by subgroups; the PMP lists the demographic questions required to obtain the information necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a

target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.

- If you do not use the PMP format provided, note that any performance monitoring reference document the applicant submits should include the information in the column headers (Indicator Name, Definition, Target, Survey Question, etc.) in the PMP attachment at a minimum.
- In addition to those indicators outlined in above, the applicant may propose additional custom, program-specific indicators in the PMP (ECA recommends the proposed PMPs include a minimum of one indicator for each custom programmatic objective).
- During the period of performance of the award, the ECA program office may further revise, add, or remove indicators. Therefore, the applicant's PMP and data collection instruments should be flexible enough to incorporate those once established.

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

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

Program Performance M&E Narrative

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

- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.
- The mechanism(s) through which surveys and other data collection tools (if applicable) will be administered, including which platform will be used, and when and how surveys will be advertised to participants – detailing strategies to

ensure adequate survey response rates (<https://app.box.com/s/pn6tavyg7sh064i502fzap49ox63y38a>), and to reduce selection and non-response bias.

- A brief explanation of data analysis and reporting procedures.
- An overview of a proposed learning plan and feedback loops to ensure that the Grant Officer (GO)/Grant Officer Representative (GOR) are informed on performance monitoring issues at regular intervals.

Nonmandatory Use of the Qualtrics MODE Survey Builder Data Collection System

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

MyGrants RPM Reporting Requirements

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

7. Allowable Costs.

Allowable costs may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Staff salaries and benefits
- Staff travel
- Application and educational materials

- Participant travel (international airfare, domestic travel, ground transportation within the United States, passport and visa fees). This should include travel expenses for American participants
- Flight chaperone travel expenses
- Orientations
- Food (primarily group meals)
- Cultural and social activities
- Meeting costs/room rentals
- Lodging when not in homestays
- Follow-on activities (including alumni events/activities that Tech Youth participants together with other ECA program alumni for networking and mentorships)
- Participant support (to be used to accommodate participants who may require extra support to fully participate in the program, including, but not limited to, those with disabilities or financial hardship)
- Program performance monitoring and evaluation
- Participant stipends for incidental expenses
- Costs related to the development of an online application system
- Other justifiable expenses directly related to supporting program activities

Travel costs for at least one person (and not more than two) from each organization to attend the in-person, two-day ECA Youth Programs annual meeting in Washington, D.C., must be included in the budget. This meeting typically takes place in January or February.

Please note that there are no fees for the J-1 visas that foreign participants will use to enter the United States. Applicants should budget for program participants to travel to the applicable embassy for visa interviews and should budget to cover the costs associated with participants obtaining passports, if necessary.

Exchange participants will be enrolled by the recipient in ECA's Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE). This cost of the ASPE coverage *does not* need to be included in the budget. More information on ASPE is available at [USDOS | Seven Corners Government Solutions](#).

8. Cost Share.

ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement.

Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs from private or public sources. The Department of State must review and approve any proposed co-funding with foreign governments before finalizing such arrangements. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

9. Freedom and Democracy Guidelines.

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

10. Virtual Exchange Component.

When changing political, health, environmental, or other similar circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges.

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

missions abroad on a project-by-project basis.

11. 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.

12. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial.

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

13. Substantial Involvement.

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

- a) Provide advice and assistance in the execution of all program components.
- b) Approve lists of finalists before applicants are notified of their selection.
- c) Approve all program materials (such as applications, student handbooks, etc.) and promotional materials (such as press releases and website information).
- d) Perform site visits, as feasible.
- e) As sponsor, arrange issuance of DS-2019 forms for the international participants by implementing partners. All participants will travel on a U.S. government designation for the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program. ECA will determine program start and end dates based on input from award recipients.
- f) Represent the U.S. Government as the program sponsor at exchange events, program events, and orientations.
- g) Arrange meetings with U.S. Department of State officials in Washington, D.C., when feasible.
- h) Liaise between the award recipient, regional bureaus, and U.S. embassies regarding program implementation, as needed.

D. Application Contents and Format

Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting

proposals.

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

1. Budget Format.

Applicants must submit a budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and a budget narrative. See the PSI section III for more information on the budget requirements. Budget requests may not exceed the award amount listed on page one of this solicitation. Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, or activity to provide clarification.

The available funding may be used for participant support and non-participant support costs necessary to implement the program as described in this solicitation. An explanatory budget narrative must be included and should elaborate on the detailed budget (e.g., how costs were calculated) not simply repeat with words what is stated numerically in the budget. The budget narrative is the place to communicate to ECA any information that might not be readily apparent in the budget, such as to help explain the reasonableness of costs.

2. Content of Application.

Applicants must submit a complete and thorough proposal that addresses the program's objectives and requirements. Please see the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for information about the application and formatting guidelines.

Since there is no opportunity for applicants to meet with reviewing officials, the proposal should respond to the criteria set forth in the solicitation and other guidelines as clearly as possible.

Applicants may choose to submit additional materials to support their application. Optional documents may include sample calendars of activities or itineraries, resumes or CVs, and letters of endorsement or commitment.

E. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

1. Address to Request Application Package.

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

2. Department of State Contacts

For questions about this announcement, contact: Sarah Shields, U.S. Department of State, Youth Programs Division, ECA/PE/C/PY, ShieldsSD@state.gov. All correspondence with ECA concerning this solicitation should reference the title and funding opportunity number listed at the top of this solicitation. Please read the complete announcement before sending inquiries or submitting proposals. Once the deadline has passed, ECA staff may not discuss this competition with applicants until the proposal review process has been completed.

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

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

Required Registrations

All organizations, whether based in the United States or in another country, must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and an active registration in SAM.gov. A UEI is one of the data elements mandated by Public Law 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), for all Federal awards. An applicant must maintain an active registration while it has a proposal under review by the Department and must continue to keep the registration active for the entire duration of the period of performance of any Federal award that results from this NOFO.

The 2 CFR 200 requires subrecipients to obtain a UEI. Please note the UEI for subrecipients is not required at the time of application but will be required before an award is processed and/or directed to a subrecipient. However, the submission of subrecipient UEIs at the time of application is appreciated as it facilitates award processing once the award recipient has been selected and approved.

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

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

All federal award recipients must maintain a current registration in the SAM database. Recipients must maintain accurate and up-to-date information in

www.SAM.gov until all program and financial activity and reporting are completed on any issued award. Recipients must review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration and more frequently if required information changes or another award is granted. There is no cost associated with registering or updating SAM.gov accounts.

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

Exemptions

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

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

4. Required Registration with MyGrants.

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

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

5. Submission Instructions.

Method of Submission

Applications may only be submitted electronically through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Complete solicitation packages are available at

Grants.gov in the “Search Grants” portion of the system.

Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures

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

How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov

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

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

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

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

How to Submit an Application to ECA via Grants.gov

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

Grants.gov Support and Submission Issues

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

Grants.gov Customer Support

Contact Center Phone: 800 -518-4726

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

Email: support@grants.gov

6. Submission Dates and Times.

Application Deadline Date.

Monday, July 6, 2026

Applicants have until 11:59 p.m., Washington, D.C. time of the closing date to ensure that their entire application has been uploaded to the Grants.gov site. There

are no exceptions to the above deadline. Applications uploaded to the site after the application deadline date and time will be automatically rejected by the Grants.gov system and will be found technically ineligible.

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

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

When ECA successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgement of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Please also be mindful of any Grants.gov generated error messages that may appear during the application process as they may result in some documents not transmitting correctly.

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

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

PLEASE NOTE: ECA bears no responsibility for applicant timeliness of

submission or data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes for proposals submitted via Grants.gov. Prior to submitting applications through Grants.gov, please ensure you meet all Grants.gov system and software requirements, including Adobe software compatibility. You can verify if your version of the Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://grants.gov/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility>

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

7. Funding Restrictions for this Announcement.

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

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

b) Prohibition on Funding Activities that Encourage Mass-Migration Caravans towards the United States Southwest Border.

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

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

c) Palestinian Authority, West Bank, and Gaza Programming.

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

agreements with Palestinian organizations or institutions.

Note: To assure that planning for the inclusion of the Palestinian Authority complies with requirements, please contact ECA Program Officer Sarah Shields, ShieldsSD@state.gov for additional information.

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

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

- i. Its compliance in all respects with all applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws is material to the government's payment decisions for purposes of section 3729(b)(4) of title 31, United States Code and;
- ii. It does not operate any programs promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws. A program promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means a program whose purpose is to promote preferences based on race, color religion, sex, or national origins, such as in training or hiring.

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

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

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

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

(a) Definitions.

American Security Drone Act-covered foreign entity means an entity included on

a list developed and maintained by the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC) and published in the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>

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

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

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

(b) Prohibition.

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

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

(c) Exemptions, exceptions, and waivers.

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

8. Other Submission Requirements.

- a. Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.
- b. All proposals must contain a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative,

budget (SF-424A), detailed line-item budget, and budget narrative.

c. **Key Personnel**

ECA recommends that the applicant identify intended key personnel positions via an asterisk (*) or other marking in the proposal budget, budget narrative, or a separate appendix. If not provided in the application, recipients must submit the names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the program to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Applicants should also identify what proportion of their time will be used in support of the program. Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department's Standard Terms and Conditions.

d. **Intergovernmental Review of Applications.**

Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

F. Application Review Information

1. Review Process.

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

All eligible proposals will be reviewed by the program office before being reviewed by an ECA grant panel. Applications may also be reviewed by Public Diplomacy sections overseas, State Department regional bureaus, or other State Department offices, as appropriate. All reviewers, including the ECA grant panels, will review any eligible proposals based on the criteria below.

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

2. Review Criteria.

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

- a) **Quality of the program idea:** Proposals should be original, well-defined, and relevant to ECA's mission. They should be clearly written, substantive, and

include sufficient detail on proposed, age-appropriate activities. Proposals should describe a plan for continued follow-on activity (without ECA support), ensuring that ECA-supported programs are not isolated events as well as how to incorporate participants into the wider ECA alumni network. The proposed program should aim to strengthen creating long-term institutional and individual linkages.

- b) **Program planning and Ability to achieve program aims and purpose:** Proposals must include a detailed agenda and work plan that demonstrates the institution's ability to carry out the program and meet program goals and objectives. The plan should follow the program guidelines described in this solicitation and demonstrate maximum impact in achieving the proposed results. Proposals should describe in detail the substance of all program activities, including the technology camp, workshops, site visits, and capstone project planning. Plans must also describe comprehensive, multi-channel monitoring of participant safety and well-being throughout the program.
- c) **Institutional Capacity and Institution's Record/Ability:** Proposals should include the necessary personnel and institutional resources to achieve program results and demonstrate internal controls to manage federal funds. The proposal should effectively demonstrate an institutional record of successful youth exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management. ECA will consider the past performance of prior recipients, including the timely submission of reports, and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.
- d) **Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should have a fully developed M&E plan that includes goals, objectives, and indicators. The plan should be feasible and aligned with the M&E section of this solicitation. Proposals should include a realistic learning plan that outlines how your organization plans to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices. All submitted M&E plans will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided at least the required information outlined in the M&E section of this solicitation and demonstrated the applicant's capacity to carry out the M&E plan.
- e) **Cost-effectiveness and Cost share:** Proposals should keep the overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, as low as possible. All costs should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost share through other private sector support and institutional direct funding contributions.

3. Indirect Costs

If two or more applications receive equivalent scores based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this NOFO, preference will be given to the applicant with the

lower indirect cost rate, as consistent with Executive Order 14332, Section 4(b)(iii). This preference will only be applied as a tie-breaking mechanism and does not supersede the primary evaluation criteria.

4. Risk Review

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

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

5. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov.

The Federal awarding agency, prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the U.S. government designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.gov (see 41 U.S.C. 2313) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313)

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

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

G. Award Notices.

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

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

funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding.

Unsuccessful applicants:

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

Payment Method:

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

H. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

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

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

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

Department has sole discretion over the determination that an award no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities, and this provision permits awards to be terminated at the Department's convenience, including when it determines that the award no longer advances the national interest.

- 2 CFR 25 - UNIVERSAL IDENTIFIER AND SYSTEM FOR AWARD MANAGEMENT
- 2 CFR 170 - REPORTING SUBAWARD AND EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION INFORMATION
- 2 CFR 175 - AWARD TERM FOR TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
- 2 CFR 182 - GOVERNMENTWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)
- 2 CFR 183 - NEVER CONTRACT WITH THE ENEMY
- 2 CFR 600 – DEPARTMENT OF STATE REQUIREMENTS
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS
- Recipients must comply with all applicable Executive Orders A searchable list can be found in the Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

2. Reporting.

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

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

- a) **Performance Progress Reports (PPRs)** shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual, quarterly, or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. All reports and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
- b) **The Federal Financial Reports (FFR SF-425/SF-425a)** must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/forms-repository/post-award-reporting-forms>. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the recipient must upload the approved report to MyGrants, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may

- jeopardize the recipient's eligibility for future awards.
- c) **MODE data** (see Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation section) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. MODE data reporting shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. The frequency of these reports will be determined by R/PPR/DOME and the Program Officer. Either a standard report template (if using the MODE Survey Builder) or aggregate data and the raw data file (if Recipient uses their own survey platform) must be uploaded by the Recipient as an RPM Performance Report under the corresponding record for this award in MyGrants.
 - d) **A final program and financial report** no more than 120 days after the period of performance of the award ends or termination of the award.
 - e) **Program Data Requirements:** Award recipients will be required to maintain specific data on program participants and activities in an electronically accessible database format that can be shared with ECA as required. At a minimum, the data must include the following:
 - Name, address, contact information and biographic sketch of all persons who travel internationally on funds provided by the agreement or who benefit from the award funding but do not travel.
 - Itineraries of international and domestic travel, providing dates of travel and cities in which any exchange experiences take place. Final schedules for in-country and U.S. activities must be received by ECA at least **ten workdays** prior to the official opening of the activity.

Applicants should be aware of the post award reporting requirements reflected in 2 CFR 200 Appendix XII—Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

3. Branding and Marking

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

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

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

I. Other Information

Adherence To All Regulations Governing the J Visa

ECA places critically important emphasis on the security and proper administration of the Exchange Visitor (J visa) Programs and adherence by award recipients and sponsors to all regulations governing the J visa. Therefore, proposals should demonstrate the applicant's capacity to meet all requirements governing the administration of the Exchange Visitor Programs as set forth in 22 CFR 62, including the oversight of Responsible Officers and Alternate Responsible Officers, screening and selection of program participants, provision of pre-arrival information and orientation to participants, monitoring of participants, proper maintenance and security of forms, record-keeping, reporting and other requirements.

The award recipient will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to participants in this program.

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

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