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MEPI Local Grants 2024

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Key Information:

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Application Deadline:	**June 18, 2024**
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Federal Agency Contact:	**NEA-Grants@state.gov**

Funding Opportunity Synopsis

Advancing stability and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is critical to the achievement of the United States' foreign policy. There are many challenges, however, which hinder efforts to improve transparent governance, provide inclusive economic opportunities, and encourage civic engagement. Two thirds of the population feel that economic hardship and corruption plague their countries, with trust in government decreasing since 2015.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Local Grants Program's mission is to sustain the United States' commitment to strengthen direct partnerships with local actors to promote prosperity and participatory governance. Its objectives are to support civil society organizations in (1) developing, promoting, and implementing locally-designed solutions to self-identified environmental, economic, or social problems through civic engagement or economic participation; (2) fostering inclusive economic growth that reaches marginalized communities, youth, and women; (3) advancing participatory governance through promoting citizens' engagement and decision-makers' willingness to work with citizen groups and civil society organizations (CSOs); (4) improving civil society's representation of the needs of citizens through collective action on the local level; (5) working towards gender parity in economics and/or politics; (6) increasing youth engagement in meaningful economic and civic activities; and (7) fostering innovative approaches to solving social, economic, or political issues.

All applications must be submitted in English. Complete information on how applicants can submit proposals for this opportunity can be found in Section VI below.

Applicants should read this NOFO in its entirety before writing their proposal and should refer to the full Evaluation Criteria provided in Section VII while drafting all materials.

Eligible Countries and Territories

In this announcement, we seek to support projects in **Algeria, Bahrain, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and West Bank and Gaza.** Please note: Applications that focus on activities in countries and territories other than those listed will NOT be considered.

Background Information about NEA/AC

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) offers Federal assistance to groups and individuals striving to bring about positive change in the Middle East-North Africa region. NEA/AC works in 19 countries and territories, partnering with governments, CSOs, community leaders, youth and women activists and private sector groups to advance their efforts. Competitively selected projects aim to foster participatory governance, economic reform, and educational advancement in response to local interest and needs. NEA/AC is committed to advancing equity and support for minority and marginalized populations. All programs should consider strategies for expanding the pool of individuals/organizations/beneficiaries to afford opportunities for as diverse and inclusive a population as is feasible to bring perspectives based on religion, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, national origin, and age to implementation of the program.

The mission of MEPI is to foster meaningful and effective partnerships between citizens, civil society, the private sector, and governments to resolve local challenges and promote shared interests in the areas of participatory governance and economic opportunity and reform. Focusing on promoting stability and prosperity in the region, MEPI supports partnerships through projects that are responsive to emerging opportunities by being field-driven, applying evidence-based decision-making, and designing results-oriented projects. For more information and additional resources about the MEPI Program visit: https://mepi.state.gov/.

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I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

The MEPI Local Grants Program seeks projects that build links between and among citizens, civil society, government, and the private sector, and are responsive to emerging opportunities at the local level in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The program supports projects that align with U.S. foreign policy goals and promote U.S. interests in the region, enhancing stability and increasing prosperity across MENA.

These grants are designed to support two priority areas of the MEPI Strategic Framework:

- *Participatory Governance:* Enable citizens and civil society to effectively engage with government officials to increase responsiveness to citizen needs. Enhance citizens' ability to actively participate in their governments and develop a more informed citizenry. Enable government officials' engagement with, and responsiveness to, their citizens to resolve issues of shared concern.
- *Economic Reform:* Enable citizens, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector with the skills and resources to provide economic opportunity, foster economic growth, and promote improved business enabling environments.

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The MENA region is dynamic with various political, economic, and social challenges on the national and local levels. Arab Barometer's most recent wave of polling showed that nearly three-quarters of the region's population identifies worsening economic conditions as the single most important challenge facing their countries. Other major concerns include financial and administrative corruption, disenfranchised citizens and marginalized communities, large public sectors, limited opportunities for innovation, high unemployment rates, low workforce retention rates, and a mismatch between the skills needed by the private sector and the skills available in the labor market, especially among youth and women.

An equal percentage of the population – approximately three quarters – expressed deteriorating trust in government institutions and elected officials, and an increasing number feels that the credibility of civil society is diminishing.

Gender inequalities persist despite recent gains in women's political participation and countering gender-based violence laws. While many women have surpassed men in their educational attainment around the region, their participation in the labor force generally remains two to four times lower than men per the World Bank, and their participation in political processes is among the lowest in the world.

While enduring, these challenges were exacerbated during the COVID-19 epidemic, impacting economies and vulnerable populations. Additionally, as the impacts of climate change continue to increase globally, so does the importance of climate adaptation for at-risk populations and economies.

B. ACHIEVABLE OBJECTIVES

A key objective of the Local Grants Program is developing the capacity of local civil society organizations (CSOs) to effectively and efficiently manage U.S. federal assistance. Applications to this NOFO should address and clearly demonstrate how project-specific objectives and activities contribute to the program objectives outlined below. Working primarily on the local level, and using an evidence-based approach, at least one of the following objectives MUST be achieved:

1. Develop and promote locally designed solutions to environmental, economic, or social problems.
2. Foster inclusive economic growth that reaches marginalized communities, youth, and women.
3. Encourage citizens' engagement in participatory governance and decision-makers' willingness to work with citizen groups and civil society organizations.

4. Increase civil society's ability to represent the needs of citizens through collective action on the local level.
5. Work towards gender parity in politics and/or economics.
6. Increase youth engagement in meaningful economic and civic activities.
7. Foster innovative approaches and solutions.

C. PROJECT DESIGN

Competitive applications will include clear, detailed project strategies that illustrate the logic behind each project's design. **All proposed project activities must clearly demonstrate how they will produce impact**.

In addition to the overarching MEPI objectives and requirements identified above, projects **must** meet country/territory-specific project priority areas as outlined below:

Algeria:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$100,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12-18 months

Problem Statement: Economic diversification remains a focus of the Algerian government, though reform has been slow, with preference given to public employment at the expense of private sector job growth that could reduce the high level of youth unemployment and increase economic stability and diversity. Developing non-hydrocarbon sectors such as agriculture, health, construction, renewable energy, telecommunications, tourism, and transportation, as well as improving youth and female economic empowerment will be essential to advancing inclusive growth. Change will require a more transparent, less bureaucratic, and less arbitrary regulatory environment that is open to innovation and investment.

Algeria fell from 97th in 2006 to 144th in 2023 on the Global Gender Gap Index, reflecting growing gender inequality in the country, and is one of three countries with the highest growth of inequality in that year. The World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law Index also scored Algeria 57.5 out of 100 in 2022; seven points lower than Tunisia, and 18 points lower than Morocco. Women have significantly lower rates of participation in the labor force and much higher levels of unemployment. The underrepresentation of women in the formal economy undercuts innovation, diversification, and maximization of resources in Algeria, in addition to limiting the social power of half of Algerian society.

Priorities: Post supports economic diversification, open markets, and growth in the Algerian private sector providing more employment opportunities for Algerians leading to greater economic stability. Women have significantly lower rates of participation in the labor force, undercutting innovation, diversification, and maximization of resources in Algeria. Economic diversification remains a focus of the Algerian government, and developing non-hydrocarbon sectors while improving youth and women economic empowerment will be essential to maintaining shared prosperity. To achieve these objectives, Post seeks projects that:

1. Increase the human and institutional capacities of Algeria's economic and business sectors and strengthen the ecosystem for entrepreneurs and start-ups.
2. Engage employers, labor officials, and women's organizations to increase women's access and outcomes in the job sector and increase opportunities and support for women entrepreneurs.

Geographic/Thematic Focus:

- Priority will be given to proposals that target regions from southern Algeria and other regions with limited access to economic opportunities.
- Priority will be given to proposals that target the participation of women.
- Priority will be given to proposals that promote climate-smart, sustainable economic practices and growth.

Specific eligibility requirements: N/A

Bahrain:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$100,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12-18 months

Problem Statement: With a high unemployment rate among its youth, the government of Bahrain aims to expand opportunities for individuals and small businesses to grow and introduce meaningful reforms into the business and economic environments. Economically marginalized communities need to build leadership knowledge and skills. The skills of the available workforce do not respond to employers' needs, which impedes economic growth.

Priorities: Post will utilize MEPI programs to equip youth, people with disabilities, and women, from economically underserved communities, with knowledge and technical tools to build leadership skills to effectively engage with the government and with the private sectors. Post encourages economic reform in Bahrain and supports business-enabling environments. Post supports government initiatives to:

- Improve its policies and procedures to expand opportunities for entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly from marginalized groups, to achieve economic growth and job creation.
- Increase workforce employability and skill level among citizens – including youth, people with disabilities, and those from underserved communities – and access higher value opportunities through demand-driven vocational training and job placement, primarily in the private sector.
- Promote economic growth through increasing the participation of youth, people with disabilities, and women from underserved

communities in economic activities. Pilot projects in emerging markets which diversify the economy to create jobs while reducing vulnerability to external shocks such as changes in commodities markets.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Youth, people with disabilities, and women from economically-vulnerable communities are the target audience.

Specific eligibility requirements: Post will target applicants with established local offices which are formally registered to operate in Bahrain. Applicants with strong government or private sector connections are encouraged to apply.

Israel:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$100,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	18-24 months

Problem Statement: Israel is a leader in business and entrepreneurship as evidenced by its flourishing hi-tech sector. However, women have not benefitted from the country's economic prosperity to the same degree as men, in particular Arab women who face steep obstacles. Labor force participation has increased in recent years, especially for women, but remains very low among Israeli-Arab women. As noted by the OECD, in Israel "accelerating the integration of population groups with historically weak labor market attachment, which are projected to reach 50% of the population in 2060, from 30% today, is vital for future growth and fiscal sustainability. In addition, reducing large labor market income disparities would improve opportunities for all and strengthen social cohesion."

Access to the labor market begins with education and the quality of education varies widely across communities in Israel. It is the municipal governments of Israel that administer budgets for education and community resources, and thereby play a pivotal role in creating the conducive environments for economic growth and advancing gender parity. The local governments of Israel need capacity-building, coordination with the national government, and economic development opportunities with relevant sectors, alongside civil society engagement, to improve the lives of their citizens. Proposals should focus on advancing local governance and their partnership with civil society and the private sector, as a means toward addressing the challenges mentioned above.

Priorities:

- Economic empowerment of disadvantaged groups through advocacy, skills training that leads to job placement, integration into advanced industries and entrepreneurial ecosystem, regional cooperation, and industrial/tech zones.
- Working towards gender parity by enhancing access to resources, skills development, and networking opportunities.
- Strengthening cross-sector partnerships with government agencies, civil society, private entities, and academia to develop innovative solutions and leverage resources effectively in advancing gender parity and economic growth objectives.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Target beneficiaries will be from periphery communities and disadvantaged groups, as well as relevant key policy figures.

Specific eligibility requirements:

- NGOs or non-profit institutions including academia with operations in Israel.
- Must be registered with the Israeli Ministry of Justice.
- Priority will be given to applicants with at least 8 years of experience.
- Applicants are encouraged to have existing private sector or government partnerships when relevant.

Jordan:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$100,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12-18 months

Problem Statement: Jordan's weak economy remains the greatest threat to the country's long-term stability. The situation is even more challenging in light of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, which will have long-term impacts on several of Jordan's key economic sectors (such as the tourism sector). Approximately 40 percent of Jordanian youth (those under 30, which comprises an estimated 63 percent of the country's population) are unemployed, and 28 percent of degree-holding Jordanians are unemployed. Roughly 40 percent of Jordan's workforce is employed in the public sector, and only 14 percent of women are employed in Jordan's formal economy. Additionally, the majority of resources and opportunities for Jordan's young people are most accessible in key cities, primarily Amman.

Priority: MEPI's cross-cutting and economic reform goals align with the problem statement highlighted above, as well as post's current efforts to advance economic growth by creating inclusive opportunities for Jordanian youth. Jordan offers one of the region's most vibrant environments for innovation, research, and development. Post engagement includes providing professional and transferable skills (in English language, entrepreneurship, the creative economy, or promising ICT sectors such as cybersecurity and artificial intelligence) to empower individual and career growth, civic engagement, and leadership among Jordan's young people. By meeting labor market demands and fostering a shift in Jordanian job creation away from the public sector, post can help advance innovation and growth and help diverse cohorts of young, rising influencers in Jordan engage constructively in civil society, government, and the private sector.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Post seeks to increase engagement beyond Amman. The dearth of easily accessible resources and training for Jordanian youth outside of Amman results in key audiences with limited information about USG commitment to inclusive economic growth in Jordan.

Fast-growing sectors in Jordan include tourism, ICT fields (e.g. cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, gaming, etc.), and the creative economy. Jordan is home to a vibrant and growing community of innovators, giving it the potential to create an environment for new ideas, emerging technologies, and a flourishing startup ecosystem.

Specific eligibility requirements: Eligible organizations should be registered, not-for-profit organizations, including but not limited to think tanks, civil society/non-governmental organizations, and governmental educational institutions with prior programming experience. In order to receive foreign funds, civil society organizations must obtain approval from the Government of Jordan.

Kuwait:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$75,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12-18 months

Problem Statement:
Kuwait Vision 2040 outlines a transformative journey towards a brighter future for the country, focusing on the younger generation to lead the country’s development. Kuwait will dedicate special attention to its youth to provide them with resources to help them attain their aspirations and contribute to Kuwait’s development.

Approximately 70 percent of the Kuwaiti population is under the age of 40, and they seek dedicated physical spaces and virtual platforms for civic engagement and participation.

Despite increasing levels of education, young Kuwaitis also suffer from unemployment and face hiring challenges. The National Assembly passed laws to develop the private sector and encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. Kuwaiti youth are enthusiastic about this progress but lack knowledge about business start-ups and their practices.

Post continues to advocate for increasing the inclusion and participation of women in civic, economic, and political activities. Although women gained the right to vote and run for office in 2005, they continue to face cultural, social, and financial barriers to full political participation. In the Kuwaiti labor market, women constitute approximately 47 percent of the workforce and Kuwait ranked 119 out of 146 countries for female labor participation. Women feel discouraged from pursuing certain jobs and tend to work in others, such as education and health. Kuwait aims to boost women's engagement in the labor market under the Creative Human Capital pillar, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals of Vision 2040 on gender equality, to eliminate obstacles such as occupational segregation, a low female labor force participation rate, and social norms that restrict women's access to economic opportunities.

Kuwait is one of the world's hottest and most water-scarce countries, making climate change one of the most challenging issues that Kuwait faces. The increasing frequency and intensity of heat waves, decreasing precipitation, and rising sea levels endanger health, life, water, and housing . Kuwait has shown a high level of interest in reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts and has put in place the "Kuwait National Adaptation Plan 2019-2030" to integrate the adaptation of climate change into policies, programs, and activities within all relevant national sectors. Kuwait is confident that investing in green skills for youth will help establish a green economy and cope with the climate change issues toward a sustainable world.

Post's engagement will support the Kuwaiti government's implementation of Kuwait Vision 2040. Post seeks civil society organizations, interested groups, and non-profit organizations to engage Kuwaiti youth, with a special focus on women, on programs focused on employment, human rights, environmental awareness, cross-cultural communication, entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and social engagement.

Priorities: Increased engagement with Kuwaiti youth, especially through participation in civil society, will encourage younger Kuwaitis to contribute to meaningful economic and civic activities and political discourse.

Through these funds, the embassy encourages applications that:

- Support Kuwait's youth as a powerful driver for development by creating opportunities for growth and prosperity:
    - Educate them on emerging technologies and develop their potential to come up with innovative and creative solutions for socioeconomic concerns.
    - Expand their social role as peacemakers and conflict mediators.
    - Make them more competitive nationally and across the region by improving education, employment, and entrepreneurship.
    - Empower their sense of leadership and educate them to communicate effectively with their government.
    - Build capacity to advocate effectively for the rights of women and marginalized populations in Kuwait and advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to help communities thrive locally and globally.
- Develop green economy knowledge and skills among Kuwait's youth to boost their role as economic players. Create and implement environmental initiatives to advance Kuwait's efforts to tackle the impacts of climate change.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Proposals should target Kuwaiti youth, women, marginalized groups, and civil society organizations and focus on engagement and collaboration with municipal and national government to find solutions to longstanding problems.

Specific eligibility requirements:

- Registered nonprofit companies, registered, or unregistered civil society organizations, and societies can all apply for local grants.
- It is preferred that applicants have existing private and government sector partnerships, like MOUs or ongoing partnerships.

Lebanon:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	\$200,000 for one-year awards; \$300,000 for two-year awards
Estimated Award Floor	\$150,000 for one-year awards; \$200,000 for two-year awards
Estimated Length of Project Period	12-24 months

Problem Statement: Lebanon has experienced decades of governmental mismanagement and corruption. The lack of political progress underscores the need for long overdue political reform. The current economic crisis, as well as Parliament's failure to elect a president, and postponed local elections have further eroded public trust in the government.

A June 2021 World Bank report estimated that Lebanon's economic depression is likely to rank among the world's top three most severe economic crises since the 1850s, noting that the "brutal and rapid" contraction in Lebanon's GDP was of a magnitude usually affiliated with conflicts or wars. In 2022, Lebanon's unemployment rate reached 29.6%, indicating that almost one-third of the active labor force was unemployed. As of January 2024, Lebanon continues to face fundamental challenges stemming from the onset of the economic crisis in October 2019. At the same time, following the October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attack in southern Israel, hostilities have broken out between U.S.-designated terrorist group Hizballah and Israel in southern Lebanon, presenting yet another compounding crisis for Lebanon to weather.

The World Bank estimated Lebanon's real GDP fell 0.6 percent in 2022, after 7 percent and 21.4 percent contractions in 2021 and 2020, respectively. As of January 2024, the Lebanese pound (LBP) has lost more than 98 percent of its value since 2019, and inflation reached an estimated 171.2 percent in 2022. In 2020, Lebanon defaulted on its nearly $31 billion dollar-denominated debt, the first such default in Lebanon's history. Lebanon and the IMF reached a staff-level agreement on Lebanon's proposed economic reforms in April 2022, in which the Lebanese government committed to eight prior actions before the IMF's Executive Board would consider financing a $3 billion, four-year loan. However, as of January 2024, the government had made only limited progress on these prior actions. The primary obstacle to undertaking these and other much-needed reforms remains persistent political paralysis.

The Government of Lebanon has not implemented long-overdue reforms, elected a president, and formed a government to put the country on a path to recovery. Since the end of President Michel Aoun's term in October 2022, Lebanon's presidency has remained vacant. Meanwhile, the country's Premiership and Cabinet are in caretaker status with reduced authorities per the country's constitution, creating a "double vacancy" for the first time in Lebanon's history. Even before this double vacancy, Lebanon's politicians did not pursue reforms at a speed commensurate to the severity of the country's economic crisis.

<u>Priorities</u>:

1. Foster inclusive economic growth: Reduce poverty and help the private sector recover from the deteriorating financial environment in order to help stabilize the Lebanese economy.
2. Encourage citizens' engagement in participatory governance and decision-makers' willingness to work with citizen groups and civil society organizations to advance needed reforms: A public informed about

peaceful political participation and civic action is better prepared to engage with Lebanon's government and/or political parties, including new ones, and to advocate for and implement reforms that will forestall total collapse, spur recovery, and put the country on a stronger footing for the future.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Priority will be given to proposals that include regions outside the greater Beirut area. Successful proposals should focus on one or both of the following areas of priority:

1. Foster inclusive economic growth: Examples could include, but are not limited to:
    - Business incubation centers or other direct assistance to micro and small business start-ups, and expansion of existing businesses;
    - Providing training, coaching, and mentoring to the country's youth to enable them to be economically productive and self-sustaining;
    - Fostering Lebanese exports and/or establishing new local production as substitutes for goods typically imported but increasingly unaffordable given the plunge in value of the local currency;
    - Programs that combat corruption, improve access to information, or promote a transparent public procurement process to improve Lebanon's business climate; and
    - Grants that promote collaboration between the private sector and civil society in order to drive reforms and inclusive economic growth.

2. Encourage citizens' engagement in participatory governance and decision-makers' willingness to work with citizen groups and civil society organizations to advance needed reforms: Examples could include, but are not limited to:

- Programs that identify and empower new civil society organizations or politically-oriented groups that can compete nationally to influence electoral outcomes;
- Educate Lebanese civil society organizations so they can build stronger coalitions to support shared causes and political goals;
- Programs that improve the capacity of civil society organizations' to influence change; and
- Information campaigns on peaceful, legal, civic actions within the framework of the Lebanese Constitution.

Specific eligibility requirements: Registered civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), registered community groups/movements, professional or educational organizations, or other for-profit or non-profit groups are eligible. Priority will be given to organizations with demonstrated competence in the areas of focus of their proposed activities.

Libya:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$50,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	24 months

Problem Statement: The Embassy's focus remains fostering national reconciliation, stabilization, and prosperity for the country to emerge peacefully from years of conflict.

Post would like to promote efforts to empower diverse Libyan stakeholders and communities to have active buy-in during the political transition process to advance community cohesion and reconciliation, promote accountable and inclusive governance, and mitigate drivers of instability.

U.S. efforts will facilitate key Libyan communities, institutions, and stakeholders to more actively participate in the country’s political transition, including through increased positive political engagement and collaboration across regional and political divides.

Also, the United States will continue supporting efforts to build the capacity of communities to more effectively address grievances that undermine political progress or cause instability, including barriers to women’s meaningful political and economic participation and access to justice.

The devastating September 2023 floods in Derna and other areas of eastern Libya led to over 4,000 confirmed deaths; over 8,000 people remain missing and approximately 45,000 were displaced. The reconstruction of Derna and other flood-affected communities is yet another challenge facing the Libyan people, and Libya’s fragmented governance and security institutions will complicate the effort.

In a media environment made more hostile by ongoing conflict in the region, Post will enhance partnerships with civil society organizations, the media, influencers, and others to counter hate speech and disinformation in favor of inclusion, reconciliation, and unity, as well as to facilitate the dissemination of accurate information on U.S. policy and initiatives in the Libyan information space. To this end, grants will focus on boosting Libyan civil societies and professional media organizations' capacity to engage in political processes, promote positive civic education, and combat hate speech and disinformation.

<u>Priorities</u>: As Libya moves beyond a state of crisis and conflict, citizens must have faith to rebuild a sovereign, unified, and prosperous state. Libya remains fractured politically with militias actively seeking to recruit young Libyans for various militant groups and criminal operations across the country.

Post supports positive engagements with youth, women, and Libyans representing traditionally marginalized communities to raise public awareness about the benefits of social cohesion, national unity, reconciliation, and women and girls' empowerment.

Empowering diverse Libyan stakeholders and communities to have active buy-in during the political transition process will advance community cohesion and reconciliation, promote accountable and inclusive governance, and mitigate drivers of instability.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Libya was selected as a priority country for the newly launched U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. Working under the provisions of the Global Fragility Act, this 10-year strategy would support Libya's political transition to democracy and good governance, efforts to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and secure its border, among other shared priorities. Many Libyans have responded positively to this plan for long-term U.S. engagement in Libya.

Post would particularly like to encourage individuals and organizations from the southern geographic region of Libya, as well as persons and organizations representing marginalized communities, including women, to apply. These align with Posts' priorities as determined by the Global Fragility Act (GFA).

Themes of interest include reconciliation, entrepreneurship, and English language learning.

Specific eligibility requirements: N/A

Morocco:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$100,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	18-24 months

Problem Statement:
Continued, sustained, and enhanced inclusive economic growth is critical to the well-being of Morocco and its citizens. Post aims to address these issues through diversification, education, and economic opportunities, that, along with targeted policies, can contribute to more sustainable and inclusive economic development not just in the most impacted areas but as a multiplier effect for the entire country. Additionally, our focus would be to enhance women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in the selected regions, in an effort to overcome gender-based economic disparities, while contributing to sustained economic growth.

Morocco’s growth fell from 8 percent in 2021 to 1.3 percent in 2022 before rebounding to 3 percent in the first half of 2023 as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine faded away, supported by the partial recovery of agricultural production, the rebound of the tourism sector, and the positive contribution of net exports. Despite these recent signs of progress and Morocco’s status as a regional economic leader, the country continues to be hindered by high unemployment rates, income inequality, and dependence on agriculture. Morocco has suffered six consecutive years of drought, which has increased dependence on food imports and caused hundreds of thousands of lost jobs in rural areas in 2022 and 2023 because of lack of rainfall. Additionally, the tragic earthquake that struck the Atlas Mountains in September 2023 killed nearly 3,000 people, affected some of the most vulnerable communities, and unveiled critical local needs and challenges at many levels. Soon after the earthquake, Morocco announced a five-year reconstruction package to support Al Haouz and surrounding provinces and regions, and also allocated additional funds to alleviate isolation and poverty within the most marginalized populations, including youth and women in the Atlas Mountains, the Rif, and the Oriental regions.

Priorities:

(1) Foster inclusive economic growth: Proposals must focus on creating jobs, promoting economic advancement, and bridging the gap

between the education system and the job market. Activities could include but are not limited to:

a. Promoting the creation of small- and medium-size businesses by providing technical assistance to address challenges to private sector development, including legal procedures, and difficulties in accessing finance. For example: Supporting startups, social enterprises, and handicraft and agricultural cooperatives in rural areas to develop initiatives and build capacities to better market their products.
b. Improving job seekers' skills and employability through technical and skills training that lead to placement in internships and employment opportunities.

(2) Develop and promote locally-designed solutions to environmental, economic, or social problems, with a focus on water management and climate adaptation. MEPI could partner with local associations working on climate challenges and support projects promoting green entrepreneurship, recycling, and innovative high tech startups finding solutions to water management and improved agricultural practices.

Geographic/Thematic Focus:

- Priority will be given to proposals that focus on the Marrakech-Safi, Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, Al Haouz, Rif, and Oriental regions, plus other regions with limited access to economic opportunities.
- Priority will be given to proposals that concentrate on women's empowerment and entrepreneurship.
- Priority will be given to proposals that promote climate-smart, sustainable economic practices and growth, including in the eco-tourism sector and the digital market.

Specific eligibility requirements:

- Applicants must be registered with the Government of Morocco.
- Applicants must have an office in Morocco.
- Applicants must have an active SAM.gov registration.

- Applicants are encouraged to have existing private sector or government partnerships, when relevant.
- Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals that actively contribute to women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, and economic growth, and that foster diversity and inclusivity in project implementation.
- Eligible applicants include:
  - Non-profit organizations;
  - For-profit organizations;
  - Private institutions of higher education; and
  - Public international organizations.

Saudi Arabia:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$150,000
Estimated Award Floor	$50,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12 months

Problem Statement: Since 2016, Saudi Arabia has embarked on comprehensive social and economic reforms aimed at modernizing the Kingdom's economy, enhancing equality, and building a sustainable future. However, while programs designed help develop emerging voices in various economic sectors in Saudi Arabia, such as the creative economy, entrepreneurship, and STEAM fields often fail to reach women and disadvantaged youth groups, particularly those residing outside of the major cities, limiting their ability to fully participate in the economy.

Priorities: Projects should be aimed at fostering inclusive economic growth, particularly those centered on development of skills critical to economic and social advancement among Saudi youth, women, or underserved groups (including the disabled and people living outside major cities). These are groups that have traditionally had fewer opportunities and would benefit the most from MEPI local grants.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Proposals should target Saudi youth, particularly women or underserved groups. A majority of Saudi citizens are under the age of 30, so programs aimed at youth have a higher chance of reaching disadvantaged groups. Women have achieved impressive gains, moving from 17 percent of the workforce in 2017 to 36 percent of the workforce by the end of 2023. However, retention in the workforce and women's employment in the creative economy remains limited.

Proposals should target the creative fields (such as media, comedy, film/television, music, sound engineering, the visual arts, sports entertainment and management, and e-gaming), environmental protection, and/or cultural heritage. These are all areas where the Saudi government and Saudi youth have been increasingly active and proposals in these areas would be beneficial to disadvantaged groups.

Specific eligibility requirements:

- Registered not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations with programming experience.
- Individuals
- Non-profit or governmental educational institutions
- Public and private universities and research institutions
- Governmental institutions

Tunisia:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$50,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12 months

Problem Statement: Tunisian students face multiple complex challenges in turning creative ideas into profitable ventures. Barriers to entrepreneurship among youth include a regulatory framework that is not conducive to new and small business development, limited access to capital, and an underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem (an education system that fosters an entrepreneurial mindset, universities that promote business development, etc.). Students and young potential entrepreneurs need access to professional networks and mentoring from skilled business professionals to be able to move from business ideation to implementation. Moreover, startups' potential to grow is constrained by the size of the local market and a regional economic climate that limits scalability. These limitations hinder Tunisia's potential for innovation, suppress the entrepreneurial spirit among young Tunisians, and limit overall economic growth.

Priorities: This project seeks to foster inclusive economic growth for youth as related to the ICS Mission Objective 1.3: Tunisian citizens, particularly youth, women, and other geographically marginalized populations have equal access to government services and fully benefit from economic development.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: The project should focus on young Tunisian student entrepreneurs as defined below:

- Participants must be aged 18-30 and enrolled in university seeking a bachelors, masters, or doctorate degree; and
- Participants should be split 50 percent men, 50 percent women.

The project should select participants from different governorates and or regions within Tunisia. Applicants should justify the selection of governorates. Final selection must receive approval from the USG.

Proposals should target one of the following fields including environmental protection, agriculture, climate change, cultural heritage, sports entertainment, and management, and/or e-gaming.

Specific eligibility requirements: N/A

West Bank and Gaza:

Funding Mechanism Type:	Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award
Estimated Award Ceiling	$200,000
Estimated Award Floor	$50,000
Estimated Length of Project Period	12-24 months

Problem Statement: A broad set of challenges has impeded Palestinians' economic opportunities and civil society capacity for many years. The space for Palestinian civil society is highly constrained, and civil society organizations (CSOs) often struggle with institutional capacity. Startups and small businesses are the most successful drivers of economic growth and job creation around the world; however, a thriving small business sector requires a better regulatory enabling environment, and a labor force with skills that match market needs. Since the start of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the challenges in Gaza have reached unprecedented levels; the conflict is also having significant spillover effects in the West Bank, especially on the economy and employment. At the same time, many Palestinians remain very motivated to better their local communities and Palestinian society writ large; with local level institutional structures such as municipalities, community councils, professional associations and chambers playing a vital role in those efforts. Empowering citizens and building their capacity to advocate for themselves and their communities at a local level will catalyze these important improvements.

Priorities: Increasing civil society's representation of the needs of citizens through collective action at the local level aligns with Post's ICS Goal #2: Building Palestinian institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, that effectively address the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Developing and promoting locally-led solutions aligns with Post's ICS Goal #3: Building a prosperous Palestinian economy, led by a thriving private sector, that provides equitable and inclusive economic opportunities and improves daily life for Palestinians, as well as Goal 2 above.

Geographic/Thematic Focus: Priority will be given to applications that clearly demonstrate the impact of the project on local communities in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Increase civil society's representation of the needs of citizens through collective action on the local level:

- Empower and enhance rights of marginalized groups including youth, women, people with disabilities, rural communities, and vulnerable communities.
- Increase transparency, accountability, and citizen oversight of services provided by authorities.
- Strengthen women's many and varied roles as community leaders.
- Build CSO capacity to articulate and advocate for the rights of the Palestinian people.

Develop and promote locally-designed solutions to environmental, economic, or social problems:

- Support economic empowerment for marginalized groups including youth, women, people with disabilities, rural communities, and vulnerable communities.
- Strengthen women's participation and/or decrease gender gaps in the private sector (especially leadership positions).
- Create employment opportunities for recent graduates and young professionals in private sector entities that are seeking to also improve their communities (i.e. social entrepreneurship programs).
- Build the capacity of CSOs and private sector institutions to advocate for improvements to policy and regulations for the business enabling environment.
- Support Palestinian communities' efforts to combat climate change, develop local clean energy solutions, and/or adapt to/mitigate its effects.

Specific eligibility requirements: Awardees must be operating/have offices in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and/or Gaza.

For each country/territory listed above the following activities and costs are **NOT ALLOWED** under this announcement:

- Job training that does not lead to an internship or job placement opportunities;
- Development of mobile applications (apps);
- Cash awards/prizes;
- Foreign travel, unless specifically justified within the project;
- Agriculture, unless it focuses on job creation and economic diversification to combat the effects of climate change and promote resiliency;
- Polling/surveying;
- Handicrafts;
- Costs related to renovation, remodeling, or purchase or lease of real estate beyond usual office rent;
- Purchase of office décor;
- Purchase of equipment (tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and is $5,000 or more per unit);
- Language training courses;
- Exchange activities with other countries or territories;
- Social welfare and healthcare projects;
- Paying to complete activities begun with other funds;
- Activities that appear partisan or that support individual or party electoral campaigns;
- Academic or analytical research (if not necessary as part of a larger project);
- One-time events, such as stand-alone conferences and one-off round tables;
- Medical and psychological research and clinical studies;
- Projects of a commercial or profit-making nature;
- Cultural presentations, cultural research, cultural clubs, or festivals,

etc.; and
- Entertainment costs (e.g., receptions, social activities, ceremonies, alcoholic beverages, guided tours).

NOTE: Applications that include any of these activities or costs may be eliminated at the Technical Eligibility Review stage and will not advance to the Merit Review Panel.

D. GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION INTEGRATION

NEA/AC requires that all activities fully address intersectional gender and inclusion considerations, ensuring that individuals of all genders and diverse backgrounds[1] benefit from support to the extent feasible, and that gender and inclusion awareness is a built-in component of project activities. This should be documented through gender and social inclusion analysis in the project narrative that identifies any relevant gender and inclusion gaps and ways the proposed activities will address those gaps. Proposals should demonstrate how addressing relevant gender and inclusion gaps will enhance the project's goals and objectives. Applicants who are unfamiliar with integrating gender in foreign assistance programing should view the training video located here: https://encompassworld.com/elearningfiles/DOS/DOS_Gender_Integration_E-Course/story_html5.html

E. DEFINITIONS

The following are **definitions** of activities accepted under this announcement:

Capacity Building:
Strengthen the capacity of CSOs for policy analysis, advocacy, coalition-building, internal governance, membership representation and services, and

1 Consideration of diversity of race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or other status.

engage in other activities aimed at fostering more peaceful and democratic societies. CSOs include, but are not limited to, human rights organizations, women's groups, labor unions, business and professional associations, youth movements, religious organizations, indigenous organizations, think tanks, and organizations representing vulnerable populations. Areas of capacity building may include, but are not limited to, technical expertise (e.g. human rights, legal reform); CSO self-regulation (e.g. establishing NGO Codes of Conduct); organizational capacity (e.g. strategic planning, financial management and accountability, public relations, issue management, and outreach, revenue generation, accountable fundraising); and targeted advocacy training and technical assistance.

Diversity:
The term "diversity" means the practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of a community.

Inclusion:
The term "inclusion" means the recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of persons of all backgrounds.

Equity:
The term "equity" means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as ethnic minorities, and indigenous persons, members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Underserved communities:
The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding

definition of “equity”.

II. MEASUREMENT OF RESULTS

Proposals should articulate a clear, measurable, relevant, and realistic set of objectives that the project aims to achieve over the lifetime of the award. Without a well-articulated set of project objectives, it is difficult to objectively assess project success. Project objectives should be distinct from the application’s proposed activities.

Applicants shall provide a Logic Model and a Theory of Change/Program Logic statement to demonstrate how the proposed project (including activities, the project design, and the surrounding context) will achieve the stated objectives, with particular attention to how your approach will reach individuals of diverse backgrounds relevant to your specific context. The Logic Model and Theory of Change statements can be generated using the template in Appendix 2.

Successful applicants will work with the NEA/AC program and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) teams to create a Results Monitoring Plan (RMP) based on the proposed Logic Model to measure qualitative and quantitative indicators as part of the award negotiations process. The successful applicants will be responsible for collecting data against these indicators – which will be monitored throughout the period of performance of the award to gauge necessary modifications to the project’s design – and assess the results of the project’s success in meeting expected outcomes.

All projects funded as a result of this NOFO will be required to complete a final evaluation of the project at the end of the period of performance with support from the NEA/AC MEL team.

III. AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Mechanism Type:	**Cooperative Agreement, Grant, or Fixed Amount Award**
Estimated Number of Awards:	**7 - 30**
Estimated Total Program Funding:	**$2,100,000**
Estimated Award Ceiling:	**See country/territory specific information above**
Estimated Award Floor:	**See country/territory specific information above**
Cost-Sharing or Matching:	**Encouraged; NOT Required**
Estimated Length of Project Period:	**12-36 Months**

Contingent on the availability of funds, approximately $2,100,000 in Economic Support Funds for approximately 7 to 30 awards will be awarded through this announcement. If selected to receive an award, an applicant will be awarded funds for 12-36 months, depending on the activities and countries proposed. The estimated start date for projects funded through this NOFO is **October 1, 2024**.

NEA/AC reserves the right to award more or less than the estimated program funding, and reserves the right to award funding under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

This request for full applications **does not** constitute an award or commitment on the part of the U.S. government to make any awards, **nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.**

IV. SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT

NEA/AC may be involved in the program and management performance of any cooperative agreements through consultation and technical collaboration on specified project activities.

<u>Examples of NEA/AC responsibilities for a cooperative agreement may include:</u>

- Collaboration in development of training materials;
- Collaboration in finalizing project work plan, including monitoring and evaluation plans;
- Collaboration in assessing progress and identifying issues that might affect the success of the project; and
- Participate in selection process of candidates.

V. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

All applicants will be screened by NEA/AC to determine whether they meet all of the program eligibility requirements detailed below.

<u>NOTE</u>: Applications that do not demonstrate that they meet all of the eligibility requirements in <u>Section A</u> and <u>Section B</u> will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage and may be deemed ineligible for funding under this announcement. Nothing can be added to an application once the competition deadline has passed.

A. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants include local civil society organizations, non-profit organizations, community groups, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, private sector organizations, and universities based in the Middle East and North Africa region, specifically **Algeria,**

Bahrain, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and West Bank and Gaza.

NEA/AC is committed to an anti-discrimination policy in all of its programs and activities. NEA/AC welcomes applications irrespective of an applicants' race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. We encourage applications from organizations working with underserved communities, including women, people with disabilities, and youth.

<u>All applicants should meet the following minimum eligibility requirements, in addition to specific eligibility requirements detailed per country/territory in Section 1</u>:

1. **<u>Location Requirement</u>:** Only organizations that have an established local office in the country/territory they propose to implement their project will be eligible to apply. Awards will be issued to the local office and not any partner or affiliate office that may be located outside of the country/territory of implementation.

2. **<u>Formal Registration</u>:** Only organizations that formally operate in the country/territory for which they are applying will be eligible.

3. **<u>Organizational Capacity</u>:** Applicants must be able to demonstrate meeting the following criteria:
   - Established for at least one (1) year; and
   - Managed at least one (1) project/initiative with donor funding (governmental, private, etc.).

<u>NEA/AC will consider the following special considerations when reviewing applications:</u>

1. **Previous MEPI Connections**: We value the alumni of our many MEPI-sponsored projects and programs and would like to enhance the

connection between ongoing initiatives of our implementing partners and our ever-growing base of alumni and those detailed under country/territory-specific information detailed above. Therefore, we will give priority to projects that include and detail MEPI alumni engagement in activities and project components. For the purposes of this evaluation criteria, MEPI alumni are considered as former participants of MEPI exchange projects; or beneficiaries in previous MEPI training projects lasting more than five weeks; or previous recipients of a MEPI Local Grant. Alumni of other USG exchanges will also be considered.

B. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

To apply for NEA/AC (Federal) funding, organizations, whether based in or outside the U.S., must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number and an active account with the System for Award Management (SAM). Applicants who do not meet all registration requirements are NOT eligible for funding under the opportunity.

UEI Number

All applicants must have a Unique Entity Identification (UEI) number.

Entities must register in SAM.gov and will be assigned their Unique Entity ID (SAM) within SAM.gov. Entities will no longer obtain or use a UEI (DUNS) for entity registration or reporting.

System for Award Management (SAM)

SAM is a U.S. government wide registry of vendors doing business with the Federal government and requires annual renewal. The system centralizes information about grant applicants/recipients, and provides a central location for grant applicants/recipients to change organizational information.

Further, each applicant must maintain an active account, with current information, while its application is under consideration for funding. To keep an active SAM.gov account, an applicant must renew it at least once each year. **If an organization's account expires, the organization cannot submit a grant application until it is renewed.**

To create a new SAM account, go to https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration.

For help with SAM.gov, please visit their support page at https://www.fsd.gov or contact them at: 866-606-8220 (U.S.) or +1-334-206-7828 (international).

Note: Obtaining an active SAM.gov registration may take **12 - 15 business days** to complete the process of creating an account in the system.

C. ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Cost-Sharing or Matching

There is no minimum or maximum percentage required for this competition. However, NEA/AC encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs.

Cost-sharing or matching is not an evaluation criteria of this NOFO.

VI. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

All applications must include the application components detailed below. **All application documents must be submitted in English. Applicants may submit only 1 application.** Please refer to Section B below for additional submission guidance and requirements.

NOTE: Applications that do not include all the required documentation described in Section A.1. below will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage. Further, applications that exceed the allowable page limits will not be reviewed by the review panel. **Applicants may not add any materials to an application once it has been submitted and the competition deadline has passed.**

A.1. Required Documents

Federal Assistance Application Forms (SF-424, SF424a, SF-424b)

Applicants must complete each of these forms online to be considered for funding. The SF-424B is only required for those applicants who a) have not registered in SAM.gov or b) have not recertified their registration in SAM.gov since February 2, 2019.

If an organization has an active registration in SAM.gov that was either created or updated **on or after** 2/2/2019, then the applicant does ***NOT*** need to submit the SF-424B because their registration or recertification will have included the necessary information.

Guidance on how to complete the SF-424 and SF424a is provided in Appendix 3. NOTE: In addition to following all guidance outlined below regarding application materials, applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Application Evaluation Criteria section of this NOFO closely as they prepare their proposal. The Evaluation Criteria section is the rubric by which each application will be scored.

Project Narrative

The Project Narrative describes the efforts the applicant will undertake to address the priorities and goals of this announcement. It may **be no longer than 12 pages**. More details on preparing the Project Narrative are provided in Appendix 3. A template of the application can be found in

Appendix 4. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to review Appendix 3 before preparing their Narrative.**

Budget & Budget Narrative Submission

Applicants must provide the following three elements as part of their budget submission:

- Summary Budget
- Detailed Line-Item Budget
- Budget Narrative

A sample fillable budget and budget narrative template can be found in **Appendix 1.** Applicants are strongly encouraged to review Appendix 1 before preparing the Project Narrative Application. <u>The Appendix 1 template includes three tabs:</u>

1. The first tab includes written guidance on preparing the **Budget Narrative.** Applicants are strongly encouraged to create their Budget Narrative in Word and submit as either a Word Doc or PDF file. Please note that the Budget Narrative should include designations of who is considered Key Personnel for this project.
2. The second tab has the template for the **Summary Budget**. This tab will auto-fill as you complete the Detailed Line-Item Budget, which can be found on the third tab.
3. The third tab is where you can fill in the template for the **Detailed Line-Item Budget** as stated above. NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as provided in the template, and to submit summary and detailed line-item budgets in Excel form, and the Budget Narrative as either a PDF or Word file. If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. **This section has no page limit.**

Logic Model and Theory of Change/Program Logic Statement

Applicants shall provide a Logic Model and Theory of Change/Program Logic statement to demonstrate how the proposed project (including activities, the project design, and the surrounding context) will achieve the stated objectives, with particular attention to how the applicant's approach will reach individuals of diverse backgrounds relevant to the project's specific context. A Theory of Change/Program Logic statement describes how and why a program is expected to achieve its stated outcomes using if-then-because language. If the Gender & Inclusion Analysis (see A.2. Optional Documents) is submitted, findings from this analysis should be clearly addressed in the program design and Logic Model. The Logic Model and Theory of Change/Program Logic statements can be generated using the template in **Appendix 2**. **NOTE: Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the same format as found in the sample.** If the applicant does not use the template, the applicant must ensure that their submission includes all elements outlined in the sample. This section **may be no longer than 3 pages.**

Project Timeline

Applicants must provide an overall breakdown of the order and timeframe in which all project activities will take place. This item should provide a macro snapshot of what will take place from beginning to end of the project. Applicants must ensure that the timeline of activities/events corresponds with details provided in the Project Narrative and Logic Model/ Theory of Change. This section **may not exceed 2 pages.**

Job Descriptions / Biographical Info for Key Personnel Positions

For each position designated as key personnel for this project, applicants must provide the following:

1. <u>If the position is already filled:</u> Provide brief biographical information summarizing the person's qualifications, as well as a brief description of the roles or responsibilities pertaining to this project.

OR

2. <u>If the person to fill a key position has not yet been hired</u>: Provide a brief summary of the job description, which should include a description of the roles and responsibilities pertaining to this project, as well as a description of qualifications of eligible candidates.

<u>**NOTE:**</u> If an applicant is proposing sub grant partner(s) as part of their project design, **Key Personnel/Positions of the sub grantee must also be included.** This section of the application **may not exceed 5 pages.**

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement

Applicants proposing indirect costs in the Budget greater than a 10% de minimis rate must provide a copy of their Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA). This item will not be counted toward any page limits.

A.2. Optional Documents

Applicants may submit additional documents for consideration with their application. These documents are not required and there is a 10-page limit for this section of the application. Below are examples of some additional documents an applicant may wish to submit.

1. **Letters of Agreement or Letters of Intent:** Applicants proposing partner organizations and/or government bodies should include Letters of Intent or Letters of Agreement from their proposed partners.
2. **Organizational Chart:** The organizational chart outlines the clear lines of responsibility and authority in the applicant organization to include budgeted level of effort listed by each person.
3. **Sustainability Plan:** The sustainability plan outlines how the proposed project will be sustained beyond the initial award period. More information on preparing the Sustainability Plan is provided in **Appendix 3**.
4. **Security, Risk Mitigation, & Contingency Planning Summary:** This item should provide detail regarding the applicant's intended due

diligence to assess and mitigate risks, and put in place adequate security measures to ensure the safety and well-being of project staff, participants, and partners, if applicable. This should include specific actions by the applicant to ensure risks are adequately and routinely assessed, and that security measures are commensurate with operational concerns specific to the locale. The applicant should also include a contingency plan that highlights potential challenges and limitations to project implementation in the operating environment and propose contingency plans should program activities be impacted. Please note that this section should not be limited to physical security and risk but should cover any applicable factors relevant to the given operating environment.

NOTE: Applicants must adhere to all maximum allowed page counts. Applications that exceed any of the allowable page limits will not advance past the Technical Eligibility Review stage.

B. APPLICATION FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

The required font is 15-point, Calibri. All application documents must be single spaced, with all margins (left, right, top, and bottom) of at least one inch each. These settings do not apply if using provided templates. Applicants should ensure all pages in the application package are numbered consecutively and meet the page limit requirements outlined in Section VI above. **The Standard Forms 424 (SF-424, SF-424a, and SF-424b) <u>are excluded</u> from the page numbering.**

It is strongly recommended that applicants submit grant applications using Microsoft Office. If applicants do not have access to Microsoft Office products, Adobe PDF files may be submitted.

C. SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

Applicants must submit their application electronically using MyGrants. This system requires that the applying organization have an account with the system and requires a UEI number and SAM.gov account as detailed in Section V. **It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they have an active account and will be able to submit its application.** There are no exceptions to these requirements.

The application process is not complete until the applicant receives notification that its application has been validated and forwarded to the granting agency (NEA/AC). Please allow sufficient time for entering the application into the system. It is the responsibility of the applicant to monitor its application to ensure that it is successfully received and validated.

MyGrants

MyGrants is a comprehensive grants management system that allows applicants to apply for, manage, and report on the use of U.S. government funds for multiple projects, accessed online at **mygrants.service-now.com**.

To create an account, please follow the below steps:

1. **Navigate to the MyGrants log in page at https://mygrants.servicenowservices.com/mygrants**
2. **Click the Create an Account link.**
3. **Click the Create a MyGrants Applicant/Grantee Account button.**

Note that applicants/recipients must use multi-factor authentication to log in to MyGrants.

MyGrants has Quick Tours available to educate users about the system.

D. SUBMISSION DATES AND TIMES

Applications must be time stamped before 17:00:00 eastern time (ET) on June 18, 2024 There will be no grace period, and any application not received by the application deadline will be deemed ineligible and will not advance to be reviewed. **Each applicant is encouraged to submit an**

application far enough in advance of the deadline so that the applicant can alert NEA/AC (nea-grants@state.gov) of any technical difficulties and allow sufficient time to resolve difficulties before the deadline. Although NEA/AC will work with applicants to resolve technical issues, there are no exceptions to the submission requirements outlined in this announcement.

VII. FUNDING LIMITATIONS, RESTRICTIONS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

A. AWARDS TO COMMERCIAL FIRMS OR FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Department of State prohibits profit under its assistance awards to commercial organizations. No funds will be paid as profit to any recipient that is a commercial organization. Profit is defined as any amount in excess of allowable direct and indirect costs. The allowability of costs incurred by commercial organizations is determined in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) at 48 CFR Part 31. Program income earned by the recipient may be:

- added to the total of the amount of this award, including the required cost sharing or matching, and use it to further eligible project objectives;
- used to meet the Recipient's cost sharing or matching requirement;
- OR deducted from the total project or program allowable cost in determining the net allowable costs on which the federal share of costs is based.

B. AUDIT REQUIREMENTS

Domestic and foreign organizations that expend $750,000 or more in a fiscal year in federal assistance must perform an independent, recipient-contracted Single Audit or Program Specific Audit. (***Program-specific Audit*** means an audit of one Federal award program. ***Single Audit*** means an audit which includes both the entity's financial statements and the Federal Awards to be conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted

Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). The audits must be independently and professionally executed in accordance with GAGAS either prescribed by a government's Supreme Audit Institution with auditing standards approved by the Comptroller General of the United States, or the host country/territory's laws or adopted by the host country/territory's public accountants or associations of public accountants, together with generally accepted international auditing standards. However, foreign entity audits consistent with International Standards for Auditing or other auditing standards are acceptable with the Grants Officer's approval. More information can be found at https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/693136.pdf

For sub-non-Federal entities expending $750,000 or more in Department of State award funding during their fiscal year, Department of State standard audit provisions require that Prime non-Federal entities certify that audits of sub-non-Federal entities are performed annually and according to the standards described above. The cost of audits required under this policy may be charged either as an allowable direct cost to the award OR included in the organizations established indirect costs in the award's detailed budget.

C. COMPLIANCE WITH APPLICABLE FEDERAL FUNDING REGULATIONS AND DOS TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Payment of funds awarded under this Notice of Funding Opportunity will not be disbursed until the DOS has been assured that the Recipient's financial management system will provide effective control over and accountability for all Federal funds in accordance with 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable. Awards issued under this NOFO are subject to the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/U.S.-Department-of-State-Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-10-21-2020-508.pdf) and 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 600 as applicable.

VIII. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

Approach and Responsiveness (25 points)

- The applicant explains how the proposed activities respond to one of the objectives listed in the NOFO.
- The proposed project activities target the priority geographic regions and/or thematic focus stated in the applicable country/territory.
- The application addresses how the project will engage or obtain buy-in and support from relevant stakeholders.

Project Design & Ability to Achieve Objectives (45 points)

- The applicant provides a clear articulation of how the proposed activities will contribute to the proposed project objective(s.).
- The applicant describes realistic results to be accomplished within the timeframe of the proposed award.
- The applicant clearly identifies the anticipated beneficiaries and explains how the project's objectives will positively affect them, and explains how participants will be selected.
- The applicant proposes activities that are feasible, practical, and/or experiential in nature to encourage innovation.
- The applicant acknowledges if activities similar to those proposed are already taking or have taken place previously, and provides an explanation as to how proposed new activities will not duplicate or merely add to existing/recent activities.
- The applicant articulates programming assumptions and potential challenges to project implementation and proposes contingency plans.
- If applicable, the application describes the division of labor among the applicant and any partners.

Organizational Capacity (25 points)

- A description of the roles of each person or position on the project – whether staff, partner, consultant, or volunteer – demonstrates that the project will be adequately but efficiently staffed, avoiding redundancy or duplication of effort.

- A job description, including hiring criteria, is provided for each open key position.
- Pre-identified key staff members – including volunteers – demonstrate experience and knowledge in the proposed content area.
- The applicant proposes adequate staffing and demonstrates the capacity to manage the proposed project.
- The applicant demonstrates capacity for responsible fiscal management of donor funding (e.g., successful management of a previous sub-award or grant).
- The applicant sufficiently meets/addresses the specific eligibility requirement(s), if any, for the applicable country/territory.

MEPI Alumni Connection (5 points if applicable)

- The applicant demonstrates one of the following:
    - That associated individuals are former participants of MEPI exchange programs; **OR**
    - That the organization or associated individuals are beneficiaries in previous MEPI training programs lasting more than five weeks; **OR**
    - That the organization is a previous recipient of a MEPI Local Grant.

Budget & Budget Narrative (Acceptable or Not Acceptable)

- The costs proposed are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results, which are clearly explained in the budget narrative.
- The budget provides details of calculations, including estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail sufficient for the calculation to be duplicated.
- The preponderance of the budget is spent on supporting the project participants/activities in country/territory. Adequate travel costs

are proposed.
- The budget demonstrates a reasonable cost per participant.

B. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

NEA/AC is committed to ensuring a competitive and standardized process for awarding funding. Applications will be screened initially in a Technical Eligibility Review stage to determine whether applicants meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Section V and have submitted all required documents outlined in Section VI. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not advance beyond the Technical Eligibility Review stage and will be deemed ineligible for funding under this NOFO.

NEA/AC reserves the right to have all applications deemed to be technically eligible undergo a Subject Matter Expert (SME) review prior to the Merit Review Panel. Applications that do not pass SME review will not proceed to the Merit Review Panel.

All applications that proceed to the Merit Review Panel will be evaluated by U.S. government and non-governmental subject matter and/or country/territory-specific experts and will be rated on a 100-point scale. Point values for individual elements of the application are presented in Section VIII. Panel Reviewers' ratings, and any resulting recommendations, are advisory.

A MEPI Merit Review Panel consisting of staff from the Washington, DC MEPI team, NEA/AC Regional Office (ACRO), and members of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate within each country/territory of proposed programming will review all Local Grant Program proposals. The Merit Review Panel will rank order proposals by overall average score to be recommended for funding.

Proposals recommended for funding will proceed to a secondary, region wide competitive review panel. The panel may consist of staff from the Washington, DC MEPI team, ACRO, and other relevant stakeholders. As this panel is subject to funding and regionally competitive, it is not possible to indicate the number of potential awards that may be funded nor what country/territory priorities they may support.

The applicant will be informed if their proposal will or will not be shortlisted for further consideration. Only the most competitive proposals received by the MEPI Merit Review Panel will be selected for further consideration by the ACRO, which will process and negotiate the awards. The issuance of a grant award by a NEA/AC Regional Office is contingent on the availability of funds and the negotiation and finalization of an approved budget and award package.

The MEPI Program's Regional Offices located in the Middle East and North Africa manage the Local Grants Program. The Regional Office in Morocco or Kuwait will issue and administer the federal assistance awards.

<u>Additional information that successful applicants must submit after notification of intent to apply for a Federal award, but prior to issuance of a Federal award, may include</u>:

1. Written responses and any revised application documents addressing any conditions or recommendations from the MEPI Merit Review Panel;

2. Submission of required documents to register in applicable U.S. government grant systems, if receiving MEPI Program funding for the first time;

3. Other requested information or documents included in the notification of intent to apply for a Federal award; and/or

4. A security and/or contingency plan if the applicant proposes working in certain countries.

Final award decisions will be influenced by whether the application meets NEA/AC's programmatic goals and objectives, how it supports the Department's overarching foreign policy priorities, and the geographic distribution of the top-ranking applications.

IX. ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. AWARD NOTICES

Applicants who do not advance beyond the Technical Eligibility Review stage will be notified 30 business days after the closing of the announcement. The authorized representative and program point of contact listed on the SF-424 will receive the notification via email. If an applicant does not receive such a notification, their submission was put forward for review.

NEA/AC expects to notify applicants who proceeded past the Technical Eligibility Review stage about the status of their application by October 1, 2024 Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated, and committed through internal bureau procedures. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from the bureau's Grants Office. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer identified in the application. NEA/AC reserves the right to award funding to applicants under this announcement for a period of up to two years after the announcement's close date.

B. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting is critical to effective program management and oversight. Reports are required as a means of evaluating the recipient's progress and utilization of resources. They are divided between a performance progress report and a financial status report.

Recipients will, at a minimum, be required to submit Quarterly Performance Reports (QPR) and a Quarterly Financial Report (QFR). The QPRs will compare actual to planned performance and indicates the progress made in accomplishing each assistance award tasks/goals noted in the grant agreement and will contain analysis and summary of findings, both quantitative and qualitative, for key indicators. The QFRs provide a means of monitoring expenditures and comparing costs incurred with progress.

Recipients must report ***immediately*** when a program faces unplanned delays in implementation, fails to meet program targets or milestones, or costs increase. Any changes or revisions to the approved budget require prior approval from the NEA/AC Grants Officer.

Recipients are required to report program and beneficiary achievements on a quarterly basis (or provide written confirmation that there is no related news for the given quarter) beginning with second quarter's program report.

Maktabat: Recipients will be required to submit to MEPI all materials developed under awards for the training of participants. These documents (including but not limited to manuals, curriculums, videos, websites, and presentations used in workshops or distributed to participants) will be considered for inclusion in the Maktabat MEPI website: http://maktabatmepi.org. The Recipient should make every effort to submit training materials as they are developed and used rather than waiting until the end of the award. The materials can be submitted in English, French, and/or Arabic. The Recipient can submit materials to the Maktabat MEPI website: www.maktabatmepi.org. The Recipient is asked to add a link to the Maktabat website on the Recipient's website if feasible.

C. TRAVEL NOTIFICATIONS

Successful applicants will be required to provide prior notification of all international travel as a requirement of their agreement. This includes travel which is already included in the approved budget and Scope of Work. The purpose of this notification is to enable NEA/AC to inform the relevant U.S. Embassy or post of the recipient's intent to travel. The recipient must notify the Grants Officer at least three (3) business days prior to any travel. The Grants Officer reserves the right to advise against specific travel arrangements for security-related reasons.

D. APPLICANT VETTING AS A CONDITION OF AWARD

Applicants are advised that successful passing of vetting to evaluate the risk that funds may benefit terrorists or their supporters is a condition of award. Applicants may be asked to submit information required by DS Form 4184, Risk Analysis Information about their company and its principal personnel. Only those individuals for whom vetting is required, as identified by the grants officer, and have been determined to be eligible to participate in the program may receive assistance or participate in this award. Vetting information is also required for all sub-award performance on assistance awards identified by the Grants Officer, information may be submitted on the secure web portal at https://ramportal.state.gov, via Email to RAM@state.gov, or hardcopy to the Grants Officer. Questions on the form may be emailed to RAM@state.gov. Failure to submit information when requested, or failure to pass vetting, may be grounds for rejecting an application for award.

E. BRANDING AND MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTEES

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to make all materials produced under the award with the standard U.S. flag in a size and prominence equal to (or greater than) any other logo or identity. Materials are defined as but not limited to: training materials, materials for recipients, or materials to communicate or promote with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity under this award, including but not limited to invitations to events, press materials, event backdrops, podium signs, etc. In addition, sub-recipients or sub-awardees are subject to the marking requirements and the grantee shall include a provision in the sub-recipient or sub-awardee’s agreement indicating that the standard, rectangular U.S. flag is a requirement. Exceptions to this requirement can be discussed with NEA/AC when negotiating an award.

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to follow MEPI social media guidelines for any and all online presences related to the project. Grantees will be expected to tag @USMEPI in all social media posts and utilize the official hashtag #MEPI for any social media posts in Arabic or English. Grantees will be expected to highlight MEPI online and share as many MEPI stories as possible, including demonstrating how each MEPI programs strive to achieve its assistance objectives of participatory governance and economic reform.

F. UEI NUMBER REQUIREMENT FOR SUB AWARDEES

All sub-awardees are required to have a UEI number. For information on obtaining a UEI number, please see Section V. B. **Proposed sub-awardees are not required to have a UEI number prior to the submission of an application but must have one prior to a sub-award being issued.**

G. SUB AWARDEE REPORTING REQUIREMENT

Grantees awarded under this announcement will be required to report all sub-awardees receiving funds of $25,000 or more to http://www.fsrs.gov. More information about this requirement can be found at this site.

X. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions regarding this funding opportunity including: completing an application, financial and grants management issues, or technical matters, contact:
nea-grants@state.gov

All questions must be submitted in writing to **nea-grants@state.gov** by **May 21, 2024** at 17:00:00 eastern time (ET). NEA/AC will create a document of the submitted questions along with the answers and post it on MyGrants and Grants.gov. Questions submitted after the deadline will not be addressed.

For questions regarding creating an account or using MyGrants to submit an application, contact the ILMS Help Desk. The Help Desk is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, excluding Federal holidays. The ILMS Help Desk utilizes a user-facing ticketing interface that allows users to submit and monitor their MyGrants tickets. The ILMS Self Service Portal can be accessed by going to https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/.

ILMS Help Desk
(888) 313-ILMS (4567)
https://afsitsm.servicenowservices.com/ilms/

XI. DISCLAIMER

The terms and conditions published in this NOFO are binding and may not be modified by any Bureau representative. Explanatory information provided by the bureau that contradicts public language will not be binding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government. The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements listed in this NOFO.