

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

Funding Opportunity Title: FY 2024 Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program Organizational Components

Announcement Type: New Cooperative Agreement

Funding Opportunity Number: SFOP0010088

Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) Number: 19.415

Deadline for Applications: November 27, 2023

Executive Summary:

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) announces an open competition for a cooperative agreement to manage the FY 2024 Organizational Components of the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program. The FLEX program advances the U.S. foreign policy goals of engaging youth populations and building civil society by providing in-person, academic-year exchanges, and building lasting ties between foreign and U.S. high school students and the communities that host them. The program consists of two exchange programs: (1) the “FLEX inbound” program that brings international high school students to the United States, and (2) the “FLEX Abroad” program that sends American high school students to select FLEX countries. The FY 2024 Organizational Components cooperative agreement will fund the recruitment, selection, orientation, travel, liaison activities with natural parents, and alumni support. This award will also fund the placement and support of American participants abroad. NOTE: Placement and support of the international students coming to the United States will be conducted under separate awards through the FLEX Placement Components. The relationship and interactions among award recipients is explained further under section A. Program Description.

U.S. public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3) may submit proposals to: (1) recruit and select international students from designated countries (referred to herein as “inbound” participants) and American students (referred to herein as “FLEX Abroad” participants); (2) identify host families and schools, and provide programs and support to American participants in selected FLEX countries overseas; (3) provide orientations to all groups; (4) coordinate travel and logistics; (5) liaise with U.S. embassies and natural families; (6) provide advice and counseling for students and placement organizations (POs); (7) provide two Civic Education Workshops in the United States for the inbound students; and (8) provide follow-on alumni programs that promote civil society, leadership, and mutual understanding. ECA intends to award one cooperative agreement for approximately \$13,000,000, pending the availability of FY 2024 funds.

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.

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A.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.

A.2. Purpose

The primary goal of the FLEX program is to improve mutual understanding and develop and strengthen long-term relationships between citizens of the United States and other peoples and countries. Participants develop leadership skills, develop ties in other countries, and learn about a new culture by living with a host family and attending a local high school. They also teach people in the host community about their country, culture, and traditions.

A.3. Program Specific Guidelines

The FLEX inbound program advances U.S. foreign policy goals and brings approximately 825 high school students to the United States to spend an academic year in the United States. Students live with host families, attend high school, engage in activities to learn about American society and values, acquire leadership skills, and educate Americans about their countries and cultures.

The FLEX Abroad program provides international programming for approximately 20 American high school students and recent graduates from the United States to study abroad in select FLEX countries for an academic year. Students also live with host families, attend high school, engage in activities to learn their host country society and values, acquire leadership skills, and share U.S. culture.

ECA has provided funding for the FLEX inbound since FY 1993 and for the FLEX Abroad program since FY 2021.

Participating countries and their prescribed allotments are outlined under the Recruitment Targets section that follows. Please note that the award recipient must also demonstrate the willingness and ability to recruit in Belarus and Russia (previous FLEX countries) should it become possible to do so.

Under the FY 2024 FLEX Organizational Components cooperative agreement, the recipient will be responsible for recruitment, selection, orientation, travel, liaison with natural parents, support for students and placement organizations, two Civic Education Workshops in the United States for the inbound students, alumni, and the placement and support of American participants abroad. Information on the program is available at <https://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/future-leaders-exchange> and <https://exchanges.state.gov/us/program/future-leaders-exchange-flex-abroad>. Note that inbound participant placement and support in the United States will be conducted under separate awards as explained below.

Under the terms of the program, all participants must return to their home countries following the conclusion of their exchange programs. For the international students, the award recipient is expected to assist and represent the U.S. Department of State in adhering to all requirements and regulations of the J-1 Secondary School Student visa program. (See <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/chapter-I/subchapter-E/part-41/subpart-G/section-41.62>) In conducting the FLEX Abroad program, which is not subject to J-1 visa regulations, the recipient will be expected to uphold similar standards to ensure the safety and well-being of participants.

The award recipient organization will be expected to conduct broad outreach and recruitment that addresses priorities of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. embassies abroad for both programs. The Department seeks to include students with disabilities and of diverse national, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. The recipient will select participants for the program on the basis of merit and personal character. In consultation with ECA, the recipient will establish methods and minimum English language test scores and minimum academic standards to ensure that students meet U.S. high school enrollment requirements. You will administer a series of tests and activities and in-person interviews in order to evaluate applicants on their ability to adjust to new cultures. In consultation with ECA and the U.S. embassies for the international students, you will establish citizen/residence requirements for students in the country of their recruitment.

You will conduct activities for FLEX inbound students as outlined in detail below in direct coordination with U.S. Placement Organizations (POs) responsible for placement and support of these students working under separate placement awards. It is imperative for the success of the participants and the program that your organization work efficiently with ECA and the POs throughout the duration of the award. While your organization will be responsible for the

coordination of many overarching activities involved in the implementation of the FLEX program, the POs will recruit, screen, and select and vet U.S. host families for participants; select schools and secure school enrollments for participants; conduct in-person host family and student community-based orientations; monitor and support students throughout the school year; and organize enhancement activities for students. Under this award, your organization will maintain an Operational Guidelines manual for POs that gives them instructions to ensure the smooth coordination of tasks.

FLEX Program Goals

The overall goals of the FLEX program are to:

1. Promote better understanding by participating youth from the United States and selected countries about host society, people, institutions, values, and culture;
2. Foster lasting personal and professional ties;
3. Advance mutual understanding, respect for diversity, leadership skills, and understanding of civil society during the exchange experience and beyond; and
4. Enhance understanding of other countries and cultures among host communities and improve realistic understanding of values in host and alumni communities.

The following outcomes will indicate a successful exchange:

- FLEX inbound participants will develop an appreciation for U.S. culture, an understanding of the underlying values and diversity of U.S. society, and increased tolerance and respect for others with differing views and beliefs. Conversely, FLEX Abroad participants will develop an appreciation for their host cultures and increased tolerance and respect for others with differing views and beliefs.
- FLEX and FLEX Abroad participants will share with their hosts and others about the cultures of their home countries.
- FLEX and FLEX Abroad participants will interact with their host communities and generate enduring ties.
- FLEX inbound participants will acquire an understanding of important elements of a civil society. This includes concepts such as volunteerism, the idea that U.S. citizens can and do act at the grassroots level to deal with societal problems, and an awareness of and respect for the rule of law. FLEX Abroad participants will share and demonstrate these ideals of U.S. civil society in their host communities.
- FLEX and FLEX Abroad participants will gain leadership skills that will enable them, as FLEX and FLEX Abroad alumni, to initiate activities in their home countries that focus on development and community service.

Program Timetable

Funding for the FLEX inbound program will support 2025-2026 academic year exchanges taking place between August 2025 and June 2026. All students must be enrolled in accredited U.S. schools and placed with host families. Funding for FLEX Abroad will support academic year

exchanges between July 2025 and June 2026 with specific dates depending on the host countries' academic schedules. A notional timetable follows:

- February 1, 2024: Cooperative Agreement awarded
- Spring 2024-Fall 2024: Student outreach and recruitment conducted
- Late 2024-February 2025: Selection of inbound student finalists and alternates
- January-February 2025: Youth Programs biennial meeting in Washington, D.C.
- Late 2024-March 2025: Inbound students' applications submitted to POs
- March-April 2025: FLEX Abroad students selected
- June-August 2025: Pre-Departure orientations
- July 2025: English Language workshop for Language Program participants
- July-August 2025: FLEX Abroad student travel. FLEX Abroad host family and school placement information to be submitted two weeks prior to departure.
- August 2025: Inbound student travel
- August 2025: Arrival workshop for FLEX inbound students with disabilities
- Late August 2025: All placement information (host family names and addresses, confirmed school enrollments, and other essential information) to be submitted to Department of State for inbound students by August 31, 2025
- August-Early September 2025: Post-Arrival orientations for FLEX Abroad students
- January-February 2026: Youth Programs biennial meeting in Washington, D.C.
- Spring 2026: Civic Education Workshop for approximately 200 selected FLEX inbound students
- June 2026: Re-Entry orientations and return travel
- June 2026-Summer 2027: Alumni programming
- September 30, 2027: Cooperative Agreement end date

Recruitment Targets

The recruitment targets for each country are tentative, represent recruitment goals only, and may differ from finalist allocations. Finalist allocations are ultimately dependent on the availability of funding, legislative mandate, policy considerations, security situations, applicant pools, and PO placement commitments. For planning purposes, use the following country targets which are based on approximately 825 total inbound participants and are subject to change. The proposal should demonstrate that you are capable of recruiting these target numbers in these countries.

Anticipated Countries

Armenia	35	Moldova	44
Azerbaijan	23	Mongolia	20
Czech Republic	15	Montenegro	15
Estonia	20	Poland	40
Georgia	65	Romania	28

Greece	12	Serbia	45
Hungary	15	Slovakia	12
Kazakhstan	100	Tajikistan	35
Kyrgyzstan	62	Turkmenistan	20
Latvia	22	Ukraine	120
Lithuania	22	Uzbekistan	55

The approximately 20 FLEX Abroad students should be assigned evenly among FLEX host countries. Please propose FLEX host countries, with no fewer than three students initially assigned to each proposed country.

Note: The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposed project configurations, budgets, and participant numbers in accordance with the program's needs and the availability of funds. In addition, the Bureau reserves the right to adjust and/or add host countries should conditions change in a host country and/or if other countries and/or regions are identified as viable alternatives and/or Department priorities. You must propose how to recruit the target number in each of the countries listed, assuming conditions permit recruitment in each country, and you may not deviate from the recruitment targets without prior written approval from the program office.

A.4. Recipient Responsibilities

The following general responsibilities apply to both the FLEX inbound and FLEX Abroad programs.

1. U.S. Department of State and Embassy Liaison and Consultation

Your organization will work closely with the ECA program office in carrying out all aspects of the programs. At times of heightened activity, you should anticipate the likelihood of daily communication to coordinate efforts and share information. It will be imperative that you delineate clear points of contacts for various functions and establish appropriate chains of communications for any situation.

Ensure that all overseas program representatives establish a positive and effective working relationship with the respective U.S. embassy's/consulate's Public Diplomacy Section (PDS). Meet with PDS of each U.S. embassy within 30 days of the award to discuss the geographic and other priorities for student recruitment in each country, and, if applicable, the processes for placement of FLEX Abroad participants. Promptly notify ECA of any embassy requests that affect budget or capacity concerns. Summarize the results of these meetings and subsequent similar meetings for submission to the ECA program office, as requested.

Facilitate PDS involvement in recruitment, selection, orientations, and alumni activities, as well as briefings and joint activities for FLEX Abroad students, as determined through discussions between your organization's in-country representatives and PDS. During the program-planning phase, implementing organizations should discuss and obtain any requested concurrence on the placement of FLEX Abroad students, if applicable, including the locations of host family or other long-term accommodations, including regions and neighborhoods, as well as schools.

Maintain an open consultative relationship with PDS and the ECA program office. Your organization must have at least monthly contact with PDS personnel regarding recruitment and selection, security, travel, student issues, advance invitation to orientations, alumni activities, and/or other matters that may be of concern. This includes informing them of student successes. In situations where the political situation prevents or limits your organization's implementation of program activities within a particular country, make special provisions to conduct program functions. Conduct all these functions efficiently and cost-effectively.

2. Overseas Infrastructure and Communications

Maintain the appropriate infrastructure in participant countries to carry out the in-country functions of a youth exchange program. The ongoing communications with natural parents, follow-on activities with alumni, and relations with foreign government officials all require that your organization maintain a year-round presence in participant countries.

3. Issuing DS-2019 Forms and Adherence to J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program Regulations

Designate an Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) and a back-up for compliance with all relevant Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requirements, including issuing DS-2019 forms for international participants and alternates (all international participants will travel on a U.S. government designation for the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor program). Create and update inbound participants' SEVIS status and maintain all SEVIS records. Submit placement reports and change of placement reports to ECA's Youth Programs Division's Responsible Officer. Provide assistance to ECA with SEVIS-related matters as requested.

4. Program and Promotional Materials

Design and develop materials that support all components of the program and inform and orient program constituents overseas and in the United States (e.g., application forms and resources; participant, host family, and school administrator handbooks; operational guidelines; predeparture orientation materials; other essential materials). ECA may request that additional program materials be developed as deemed necessary. Whenever possible, current materials should be amended to fit changing needs and circumstances overseas and in the United States.

Brand the programs as U.S. Department of State programs and adhere to the Communications Guidance for ECA Grant Recipients at <https://eca.state.gov/comms-guidance> in all official documents and materials developed for promotional purposes. Coordinate all program and promotional material development with and obtain clearances from ECA prior to publication and distribution. Unless a waiver is granted, materials will display the American flag and the U.S. Department of State seal. The Bureau will retain copyright use of and may distribute materials related to these programs. Your organization must also communicate with POs and ECA to coordinate information for program websites.

5. Online Presence

Social Media, Mobile Technologies, and Department of State Online Communities

Dedicate staff to coordinate information for program websites and maintain online program webpages that market the program; disseminate information to U.S. and foreign publics; serve as a secure participant application and resource tool for students; and develop and implement strategies for the effective use of mobile technologies and other social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and platforms for blogging, to promote the programs.

U.S. Department of State Web Resources

Outreach Resources: Support ECA promotional campaigns by providing information to ECA and updating promotional materials as needed.

Develop and implement a strategy to leverage mobile and online technologies and networks, and the Department's digital properties, in consultation with ECA's program office and in coordination with its Alumni Affairs and Web and Social Media teams, as appropriate. These may include the International Exchange Alumni website, Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms that are key resources to promote the program, augment the impact of the in-person exchange, and engage program alumni.

Online Communities: All organization staff, program personnel, and regional and local volunteers associated with the FLEX and FLEX Abroad programs are expected to be knowledgeable about the Department of State's resources including but not limited to exchangealumni.state.gov, and to facilitate member registration on the website.

6. Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

In the course of any activities involving the gathering and maintaining of records of personal information, develop and ensure appropriate protocols and processes to protect personally identifiable information (PII) of individuals, including applicants, participants, alumni, host families, staff, and volunteers associated with the program. Ensure staff members who handle records containing PII adhere to legal, regulatory, and Department of State policy requirements regarding privacy. Take appropriate action when you discover or suspect failure to follow the

rules of behavior for handling PII. Conduct an administrative fact-finding task to obtain all pertinent information relating to a suspected or confirmed exposure of PII. Implement rules of behavior for handling PII. Ensure staff members receive the training necessary to safeguard PII. Notify and cooperate with ECA's Grants Office to properly escalate, refer, and respond to a data exposure.

7. Medical Screening

Arrange in-country medical clearances to ensure that students are healthy and have immunizations necessary for program participation prior to leaving their home countries. Review medical documents in the United States to confirm that all requirements have been met.

To the extent possible, identify and inform the ECA program office of pre-existing physical and mental health conditions that may have implications for insurability and student support in the United States. Perform a special review that includes ECA staff, carried out by a medical doctor, to confirm that applicants with disabilities are medically fit to travel and participate in the program.

8. Travel

Arrange roundtrip international airline tickets, originating from students' home communities in all participating countries to students' host communities, and assist with passports and visas. Arrange travel in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible, in accordance with the Fly America Act and all other USG travel regulations. Select adult flight leaders for their ability to manage a group of teenage travelers and provide training for flight leaders to ensure their competence and independence while traveling. When possible, you are encouraged to assign as escorts staff or alumni who can also serve as trainers and facilitators at orientations. Alternatively, escorts might attend meetings and/or engage in representational activities that support the FLEX and FLEX Abroad programs.

Develop detailed written standard travel procedures, with POs' input, for FLEX inbound participants. Procedures should detail how group flights are scheduled, how individual students are assigned to a flight, how date-change requests from POs should be made, and how and when itineraries will be provided to POs. Travel must include domestic travel from and to locations that are outside main capital cities, i.e., full roundtrip itineraries. These procedures should also explain PO travel obligations, including the deadline by which arrival airport codes are due from the POs. Present a detailed description of the support provided to students while they are enroute, including airport staffing and emergency communication procedures.

Coordinate travel for students who are unable, for any reason, to travel with an escorted group, including those who are repatriated prior to the end of the exchange. Budget for escorted travel of approximately twelve (12) individual students returning early from the FLEX inbound

or FLEX Abroad programs when the escort is deemed necessary due to health, behavior, or security risk. Coordinate beginning and end-of-program travel dates prior to making commitments and contracts with travel agencies or program venues for both FLEX inbound and FLEX Abroad with ECA.

Note: It is ECA's intent that applicants and their natural families incur minimal out-of-pocket costs related to their application or participation, whether or not they are selected for the FLEX program. Students will receive stipends from their POs for pocket money during the program. The award recipient and sub-award recipient(s) should not charge students or their parents for application or program fees.

Student Travel Documents

Obtain, and retain for three years, copies of the following documents for each program participant:

- Name/photo page of international passport;
- Visa page in passport; and
- DS-2019 with stamp issued at U.S. port of entry (for FLEX inbound students).

9. Student and Alumni Highlights

Provide timely reports of significant participant and alumni accomplishments demonstrating program impact.

10. On-Program Student Support Liaison

Designate a staff member(s) as a "Student Support Liaison" to serve as a point of contact for ECA on all FLEX inbound and FLEX Abroad student support issues. The liaison is also a channel of communication between the POs and the Overseas Partners for FLEX inbound students, and you will consult with ECA Program staff about this role.

11. Additional Support for Students and Alumni with Disabilities

Designate a staff member to have primary responsibility for working with students with disabilities. The responsibilities of this person will include, but not be limited to, developing a strategy and staff expertise in recruiting and supporting students and alumni with disabilities; providing resources and overseeing identification and procurement of reasonable accommodations (equipment, materials, and services); developing training opportunities for program implementers; coordinating placement needs assessments for POs; and coordinating orientation of students upon arrival.

12. Communication of Student Concerns

Provide on-program support for FLEX Abroad students and communication with natural families and overseas placement partners. For international participants, in coordination with POs,

provide communication about students' well-being to their natural families. Efforts must correspond to the Federal Regulations as outlined in 22 CFR 62 and should be closely coordinated with ECA's program office. Report immediately to the ECA program office any situation that affects the safety, health, or well-being of a participant, or any student disciplinary action at the second warning/probation level that could ultimately result in the student's repatriation. Only the ECA Youth Programs Division can make the decision to terminate the program and repatriate a student; under no circumstances will the organization, its employees, volunteers, or third parties acting on its behalf inform participants that they will terminate a student's program and repatriate them without specific directions from the ECA program office.

13. Communication with Natural Families

Communicate and liaise with the students' natural families during the program year. A student's family must be informed in a timely manner of problems that arise with the student, including academic deficiencies, behavioral concerns, health and safety issues, transfers to a new host family or school, and any situations that may necessitate early termination from the program. Provide on-program support for students, staff, and volunteers in dealing with natural parents about student problems that arise during the program.

14. Student Likeness (Photo and Video) Usage

Request and maintain documentation of permission from each student and their natural family (if a minor) to have photographic or video images of the student taken and reproduced in ECA-approved printed and electronic promotional materials.

15. Alumni Programming Coordination

Organize and facilitate alumni activities that promote FLEX program goals and coordinate participation and travel of alumni as needed to increase inclusiveness and outreach. Provide opportunities and training for alumni to reinforce skills learned on program and apply them at home. Maintain a database to track alumni that must be compatible with ECA's database systems and must be shared with the Exchange Alumni Office as well as the respective U.S. Embassies. Collaborate with organizations that may conduct other ECA-funded workshops or programs for FLEX students or alumni. Inform students/alumni about and provide instruction on registering on ECA's International Exchange Alumni website. Your organization's representatives in each country should support alumni in maintaining or, where feasible, assist returned students in forming FLEX Alumni associations to help organize their efforts.

Coordination of Additional Alumni Opportunities

Develop and provide additional activities as resources allow, as an important way of keeping alumni involved in the program and sharing their U.S. experience. These activities should include:

- a. A small grants competition for which alumni may submit proposals for group and individual grants to execute a project that advances FLEX program goals in their home country. These and other alumni competitions should be publicized widely throughout all FLEX countries to reach as many alumni as possible.
- b. FLEX alumni workshop(s) for competitively selected alumni from the FLEX inbound and FLEX Abroad programs as well as webinars and other online training resources that can reach larger alumni audiences. Such workshops and online resources should be developed on themes relevant to program goals or U.S. Department of State foreign policy objectives such as alumni association development, leadership, civic awareness, social media for social causes, and support for people with disabilities.
When developing alumni workshops that are for small, select groups, follow-on plans should include sharing information learned to a larger alumni audience. Strategies may include but are not limited to written reports, presentations, and training-of-trainers activities. Workshops should have clear and substantive purposes, with measurable outcomes and results and clear follow-on activities.
- c. An alumni photo and video contest to build a multimedia reserve to publicize and market the FLEX and FLEX Abroad programs.
- d. Collaboration with U.S.-based organizations that conduct activities such as the Global Village for Future Leaders of Business and Industry.

Alumni Resources Positions

Coordinate with overseas representatives and ECA to select successful alumni from any program year of the FLEX and FLEX Abroad programs to participate in various events in the United States. Budget for travel to and within the United States and accommodations for select alumni to participate in events such as arrival orientations, re-entry workshops, Civic Education Workshops, broader Exchange Alumni events, PO Coordinator trainings, national teacher and school administrator conferences, ECA FLEX program presentations, and FLEX Abroad pre-departure orientations.

16. Information Management

Maintain a student placement information database accessible to ECA and POs and that is compatible with ECA's database for quick uploading of information; track applicants through the stages of recruitment and through their selection as finalists, their placement, and their transition to alumni status. Regularly maintain and update for accurate report generation. Data should be available in a format that can be shared with ECA databases. Staff should access records on a "need to know" basis and only for those records that are specifically relevant to the performance of their official duties. Database staff should not disclose sensitive PII to individuals or outside entities unless they are authorized to do so as part of their official duties and doing so is in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, and

Department of State privacy policies. Data should not be corrected, altered, or updated in official records except when necessary, as part of staff's official duties.

17. Financial Management

Manage fiscal data and accounting for award funding, as required by federal law, including cost-sharing and any funds provided to approved sub-award recipients, as applicable.

18. Sub-award Management

If sub-award recipients are involved, ensure that sub-recipients have received a copy of the parts of the POGI that are relevant to their duties and are versed in all requirements of the POGI, your organization's expectations, J-1 visa regulations, and OMB Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600. Provide oversight to sub-recipients to ensure quality performance of the duties covered in their sub-awards.

19. Evaluation

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

Specific Responsibilities for FLEX Inbound Program

1. Recruitment and Selection

Develop an outreach plan that addresses country-specific interests of the U.S. mission and will aid in recruiting a pool of students that in most cases will reflect the diversity of the country. Outreach may be conducted at any time during the activity period of this award. Recruit and screen applicants and select FLEX finalists and alternates through an open, transparent, merit-based competition. Develop a standard recruitment and selection process to use in all countries and maintain statistics at each stage by country, region, diversity factors, gender, and prior participation in the English Access Microscholarship Program. Application forms used in all countries must be uniform except for country-specific requirements that should be kept separate from the standardized application form. Application fees are not allowable. The recruitment process must be open to make it possible for any student who meets the eligibility criteria to apply and must seek to represent a diverse applicant pool. A special recruitment effort should target eligible individuals with significant physical disabilities. Students with special needs (e.g. asthma, diabetes) should also be identified as should students needing additional pre-program English language instruction.

Ensure that all finalists meet established age, academic, and English proficiency requirements to facilitate enrollment in U.S. high schools. Finalists should reflect the cultural, ethnic, national, and geographic diversity of the country from which they are selected, as well as gender diversity, though precise balance with a country's population demographics is not required. However, in some cases, ECA and/or the U.S. embassy may advise that U.S. interests necessitate a focus on particular populations. Finalists must generally be citizens or permanent

residents of the countries from which they are chosen. ECA must approve the selection of all non-citizens, including permanent residents, or provide general guidance to be followed in particular countries. Given budget constraints and/or security concerns, it may not be possible to conduct recruitment activities in all regions of each country. If necessary, in consultation with the U.S. embassy, recruitment may focus on major population areas or specific geographic areas. Devise contingency plans for recruitment in countries where challenging governments may impede the standard selection process. Any “quota” plans for selection must be reasonable, considering all influencing factors within a country, and be approved by ECA.

Criteria for FLEX Inbound Students

- a. Citizen or a permanent resident of the country of application.
- b. Ages 15-18.5 at the program start date (specific age requirements may be set in each country based on local educational system restrictions).
- c. Sufficient ability to speak and study in English; the recipient must be familiar with English language testing resources and general levels required for U.S. high school admission, and establish minimum test scores to be met by all selected students.
- d. Preference will be given to applicants who have spent more than 50% of the last five years in the country of application.
- e. Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously studied in the United States.
- f. Commitment to cultural immersion in the United States through a homestay experience.
- g. Ability to meet cross-cultural challenges with maturity, humor, and an open mind.
- h. Plans for sharing their U.S. experience with their home school and community upon return home.

2. Recruitment and Support of Students with Disabilities

Recruit and provide necessary support and accommodation for approximately 20 students with disabilities. Students with disabilities must meet the same standards as all other applicants but may receive reasonable accommodations for testing. Implement a review process carried out by a medical doctor to adequately assess the unique needs of each student and confirm that applicants with disabilities are medically fit to travel and participate in the program. Ensure that interviews, orientations, and other pre- and post-program activities include reasonable accommodations. Coordinate student assignments with each PO to ensure that they have the resources and capacity to place and support the student(s). Provide each PO with written, detailed, and accurate support and accommodation needs assessment results for each student prior to student travel. Serve as a resource through the year in providing funds for reasonable accommodations, guidance, and assistance to POs in meeting these students’ needs.

3. Arrival Orientation(s) for Students with Disabilities

Plan and develop a separate arrival workshop and assessment event(s) to take place prior to the students' arrival to their host communities, and that will include further professional review of each student to confirm and refine a support plan to be coordinated with each respective PO. Arrange associated travel for students. The workshop will also present the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and resources available to people with disabilities in America and will provide independence training and tools for these students. Coordinate dates and location with ECA, overseas partners, and POs.

4. Pre- and On-Program English Assistance

Provide pre-program English language instruction and enhancement activities for countries where the standard of English instruction does not result in an adequate pool of qualified applicants. This pre-program English assistance also helps to ensure that the weaker language qualifications of students from more remote areas will not preclude their selection. This additional language and cultural support should enhance the student's ability to adjust to the U.S. host environment and assists in the school placement process. Re-test finalists with low initial English test scores as needed prior to their departure to the United States. Coordinate with ECA and each respective U.S. embassy recruitment plans and efforts to build on existing USG-funded English language programs for youth, such as the English Access Micro-Scholarship Program, which ECA seeks to utilize as a "feeder program" to the FLEX program.

Support for Inbound Students who Need English Language Programming

While all students coming to the United States must successfully demonstrate English proficiency and pass with establish minimal English test results, it is anticipated that a smaller number may have difficulty with the immersion in their host community and classroom settings. Your organization must work with and provide funds to POs as appropriate for inbound students who the PO determines need additional English language support. Upon the request from the PO, you will coordinate with them to develop an individualized plan to meet each student's specific needs, which may focus on oral/aural proficiency, including conversation practice, comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary development, and sentence patterns. Students who will be identified as needing additional English language support should be offered, through the POs, a minimum of 20 hours of intensive tutoring at the start of their exchange program, up to 60 hours maximum, to be completed in the first three months of their arrival to the United States.

5. Passports, Visa, and Other Travel Documentation

Assist all FLEX inbound students in obtaining passports, U.S. visas, and any necessary transit visas, in coordination with the respective U.S. embassies. Your organization must work with the U.S. embassy in each country to ensure timely processing of U.S. visas for all participants. Collect and process all student data in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System and prepare DS-2019 forms for finalists and alternates. Maintain and update SEVIS records as required, including appropriate finalization of SEVIS records when students' programs end and

for students who do not ultimately participate. Data on students must also be submitted to ECA in an Excel spreadsheet provided by ECA.

6. Coordination of Student Information and PO Assignment

Develop and implement a plan for the equitable, transparent, and timely distribution of finalist documentation to the POs, taking into consideration such factors as gender, age, country of origin, need for English language instruction, and disabilities. Ensure that placement information about host families and schools is available to overseas partners. Throughout the exchange, in coordination with POs, oversee informational changes in school or family addresses and local coordinator assignments in the program database. Your organization will be responsible for reporting such changes within ten days to ECA or as stipulated by the J-1 regulations.

7. Pre-Departure Orientations

Provide uniform pre-departure orientation (PDO) programming to prepare students for life in the United States. Uniformity is essential because it reinforces participants' identity as participants in a U.S. government scholarship program and enables the dissemination of information, policies, and procedures critical to the students' success. PDO topics should include sessions on living with a host family, American high school education, American culture and respecting cultural differences, gender roles, diversity, student safety and resources available, sexual harassment and resources available, obeying rules, personal responsibility, realistic expectations, mental health, on-program participant support, budgeting, and community service.

Invite U.S. embassy personnel to PDOs with sufficient notice. In countries where your organization cannot conduct PDO sessions due to security concerns, make provisions for these orientations to be conducted by U.S. embassy staff, in a neighboring country, or, with the agreement of the program office, in the United States immediately after the students arrive. Provide orientations for the natural parents prior to the students' departure for the United States.

Schedule pre-program activities and orientations for students with disabilities at a time that takes into account their earlier departure from their home countries.

Distribute PO-specific materials prior to or during the PDO.

8. ECA Academic Year Programs Meeting

Participate with at least one to two program representatives in the ECA academic year programs Annual Meeting to be held for two days in Washington, D.C. in early 2025.

9. Civic Education Essay Contest and Workshop

Develop and conduct a Civic Education Workshop (CEW) for approximately 200 of the participating students during the academic year in Washington, D.C. Arrange dates for the CEW in coordination with ECA, including arrival and departure, during a time when the U.S. Congress is in session. This program component should include sessions on U.S. domestic and foreign policy, the role of the media in a civil society, media literacy, citizen empowerment, volunteerism, community activism, and federalism. The workshop may also include cultural events and visit museums and monuments. Include in your proposal a description of the ways in which all students will be encouraged to share and apply what they have learned with their U.S. host and home country communities. Include the participation of several alumni to serve as mentors to enhance the students' experience. Provide a mechanism for evaluation of CEW's impact on the students and in fulfilling FLEX objectives. The budget narrative should include a separate explanation of costs associated with this component.

Coordinate a competitive application and essay contest to select participants, collaborate with POs to ensure students' good standing, make final selections and arrange roundtrip transportation from the host communities to Washington, D.C., and provide room and board for students during their time in Washington, D.C. Provide ground transportation for participants in the Washington, D.C. area, including to and from area airports.

10. End-of Year Combined Re-Entry Workshops

Develop and implement one or more multiple-country re-entry workshops in the Washington D.C. area at the end of the exchange year to include meetings with U.S. Department of State and other government officials, topics of reverse culture shock, the U.S. Department of State's alumni programs, potential programs provided by U.S. Embassies, and skills and leadership development for becoming effective FLEX alumni. Dates must be coordinated with ECA's program office prior to reserving facilities or planning agendas to ensure coordination of official guests meeting with the students.

11. Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Workshops

Develop and implement multiple online lessons and alumni workshops, both for current FLEX students and FLEX alumni. These activities may be done via social media platforms, for current students and alumni, or in-person workshops for alumni. Sessions for current students should be incorporated during civic education workshops and end-of-program workshops. These lessons and workshop activities should educate current students and alumni on analyzing media to identify misinformation and consider ways to address it effectively. This should include a range of media including television, radio, print, and digital media. Project development must be coordinated with ECA's program office prior to launching activities. The costs for these activities should be clearly identified in the budget.

Specific Responsibilities for FLEX Abroad Program

1. U.S. Marketing

Develop and implement a comprehensive and robust outreach and marketing plan for recruitment; a program and application website; and printed handbooks and other informational materials. Outreach may be conducted at any time during the activity period of this award. Provide informational materials to POs upon request. (Although POs are not responsible for recruitment, ECA encourages them to distribute information and materials about the FLEX Abroad program.)

2. FLEX-specific Staff/Volunteer Training and Orientation

Ensure that all overseas implementing partner staff and volunteers who have regular contact with the FLEX Abroad participants have undergone screening for suitability and training. This training should be designed to provide the methods and tools necessary for monitoring, supporting, and counseling FLEX Abroad participants, their host families, and school personnel with sensitivity to cross-cultural issues unique to this exchange population. The training must ensure understanding of the goals, expectations, and requirements of the FLEX Abroad Program. Ensure the proper reporting procedures are developed and that staff and volunteers understand their roles in communication participant and placement concerns that may arise.

3. Recruitment

Develop an extensive, nationwide recruitment and selection process that seeks to achieve a strong applicant pool representing the cultural, ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity of the United States; and maintain statistics at all levels (e.g. initial applications received, full applications with essays received, interviews conducted, diversity of applicants).

4. Selection

Select finalists and alternates from a diverse pool of candidates. Implement a fair and objective multi-stage process of evaluating applications and selecting students.

Criteria for FLEX Abroad Students

- a. U.S. citizen.
- b. At least 15 years of age but not more than 18.5 years of age as of the program start date (age range eligibility may be narrower depending upon specific country high school and MOE requirements).
- c. May not be a family member of U.S. Department of State or USAID employees or a family member of award recipient employees whose official duties involve ECA Youth Programs Division-funded programs.
- d. Demonstrated maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude.

- e. Commitment to cultural immersion in a host culture through a home-stay experience.
- f. Interest in learning the predominant language of the host culture.
- g. Ability to meet cross-cultural challenges with maturity, humor, and an open mind.
- h. Ability to develop and articulate ideas and plans for sharing their overseas experience in their U.S. home school and community.

5. Community-Based Recruitment for Underserved Student Populations

Develop and implement a strategy for community-based recruitment that allows students from populations less likely to participate in exchange to learn about FLEX Abroad and support their access to the program. To this end, you may expand overall recruitment and marketing strategies, as well as identify a limited number of target groups, schools, or communities for these efforts for the greatest impact.

6. Pre-Exchange Student Resources

Develop and distribute language and cultural resource packets for finalists upon notification of acceptance into the program. Materials should outline the goals and requirements of the FLEX Abroad program.

7. Passports and Visas

Coordinate with finalists and alternates to obtain all required documents such as passports and visas, and facilitate the process to the greatest extent possible.

8. Pre-Departure Orientations

Provide pre-program orientations prior to the students' departures. Orient host institutions, staff, families, and students about the purpose and the foreign policy context for the FLEX Abroad program, as well as its goals and expectations, rules, and practical information. The orientation should include an introduction to personal and cultural adjustment issues, as well as prepare students to have an awareness of and sensitivity to aspects of their host cultures that will require their adaptation. Train host country support staff to communicate cultural differences that Americans must navigate to have a successful exchange. The students' pre-departure preparation should also include a general political, historical, educational, and cultural introduction to the host countries; information related specifically to the objectives and themes of the program; and practical/ administrative information. Prepare participants for encountering a variety of interpretations of U.S. policy positions and interpretations of U.S. history while living abroad.

8. Participant Tax Liabilities

Assume overall responsibility for compliance with all applicable tax treaties and Federal, State, and local tax withholding and reporting for American FLEX Abroad participants.

9. School Enrollment

Identify and enroll students in private or public high schools that enroll a high proportion of host country nationals and are accredited by the Ministry of Education of the host country. Your budget may include costs for tuition, room, and board in dormitories, if needed, with prior approval from ECA. If the only appropriate school requires dormitory living during the week, students may be placed in this setting; however, in such cases, the in-country partner must identify a suitable family who can consistently host the student on weekends and holidays in order for the student to have the cultural experience of family life.

10. Host Family Placement and Orientation

Host Family Selection:

Develop a plan for monitoring participants' safety and welfare that parallels, to the extent possible, the standards for J-1 visa regulations for international academic year participants found in 22 CFR 62. This includes, among other points, the identification and use of appropriate means of verifying the integrity and suitability of each host family.

Your budget may include reasonable stipend payments to host families to cover actual costs of food and expenses incurred by hosting a student. The location (city) and neighborhood of host-family and/or dormitory housing arrangements must be approved by the Public Affairs Section of the relevant U.S. embassy and by ECA. Provide an orientation for host families before the students' arrival that covers program goals and policies as well as cultural information to facilitate adjustment and communications across cultures.

Host Family Orientation: Prior to the student's arrival, conduct an in-person orientation for all screened and selected host families and provide them with the information and reference materials necessary to host and support a FLEX student. (Note: Previous interviews during the screening and selection process do not constitute this FLEX-specific orientation.) The FLEX program office recommends that orientations for families hosting FLEX students not include other non-FLEX host families to ensure that adequate attention is given to FLEX program-related and cross-cultural issues.

11. Placement Reports

Provide ECA with confirmation of Embassies' concurrence with general school and housing placement strategy and locale well in advance of program and prior to significant engagement with prospective host families and schools. Provide ECA with a detailed electronic placement report, including plotted country placement maps, prior to FLEX Abroad students' departures, including names of all FLEX Abroad program participants and host country, their host family names and addresses, name of host school, and language of instruction.

12. Arrival Orientation, Including Safety and Security Briefing

Organize an in-country arrival orientation. Orientations should take place within one month of the students' arrival, and they should address program policies, procedures, and rules, as well as the implementing organization's procedures for communicating with students and for monitoring and supporting their exchange with sensitivity to cultural issues unique to this exchange population and the host country. The orientations must ensure understanding of the goals, expectations, and requirements of the FLEX Abroad Program as explained in this document.

Contact the U.S. embassy/consulate far in advance of participants' arrival to arrange for PDS participation in the orientation and a security briefing by the embassy's Regional Security Officer (RSO) or another U.S. embassy official, if possible. Inform participants of relevant local and country-specific information, including personal and general safety considerations, as well as emergency services offered by the embassy to American citizens. Ensure that participants and their parents/legal guardians complete relevant consular forms and participants are registered in the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at <https://step.state.gov/step/>.

13. In-Country Language Program

Evaluate the language needs for participants in each country and provide language instruction that will support students in school, with host families, and in the community. Provide FLEX Abroad students with a minimum two-week intensive language program upon arrival in country. Include continued language and cultural education courses throughout the duration of the program as needed. Students must be offered individual language tutoring beyond the first semester if needed and/or requested. Funding may be requested for tutors/instructors, meeting space, students' travel and lodging to language course if necessary, and language learning materials and on-line courses and other resources.

14. Enhancement Activities

Design, plan, and implement an intensive and substantive extracurricular enhancement program for FLEX Abroad students on the concepts of mutual understanding, leadership development, and community service. Engage participants in community service activities during the program. Prepare, encourage, and track participants' sharing of their experiences after returning to the United States. Where possible, participants should interact with FLEX alumni, English Access Microscholarship students, and peers at America Spaces.

15. Student Support and Monitoring

During the program, maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the FLEX Abroad students and host families. Ensure the schools have contact information for the local organization representative and the program sponsor's main office. Provide ECA with

immediate reports of all situations that affect the safety, health, or well-being of participants and a monthly summary of each student's adjustment, activities, and well-being. Develop reporting systems that include at minimum: 1) a brief monthly summary of program activities, challenges, and accomplishments; 2) an objective assessment of each participant's adjustment and progress; and 3) a monthly survey that students are required to complete and submit themselves. The type of system and detailed questions are left to the discretion of the organization but must be cleared through ECA.

Immediately report to ECA any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation, harassment, or abuse of an exchange student participant. Inform ECA promptly of any serious problem or controversy that could be expected to bring the U.S. Department of State or the exchange program into notoriety or disrepute.

Ensure that in-country representatives have a plan for monitoring participants on a regular basis and provide adequate support and guidance to participants during their programs. All in-country representatives must maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the participant and regular, monthly contact with the host family, addressing legitimate concerns in a timely fashion and apprising ECA in a timely manner about significant issues. All records and data collected, including survey responses and contact information, must be maintained for a minimum of three years and be provided to ECA upon request.

16. Mid-Year and End-of-Year Orientation

Plan and implement Mid-Year and End-of-Year orientations for students in each country to monitor progress; address students' needs appropriate to the timing of each event; and provide additional leadership skills, teambuilding, and other enhancement activities.

Mid-Year Orientation: Arrange a mid-year orientation to meet with all FLEX Abroad Program participants approximately halfway through their exchange programs. The purpose of this meeting is to assess their progress in achieving Program and personal goals and to provide the necessary assistance to enable them to meet these goals. Discuss participants' experiences so far on the exchanges as a way to reinforce cultural understanding and expectations. As appropriate, the mid-year orientation is a time to review and update communication protocols, program policies, rules, and procedures, as well as health and safety protocols and resources.

End-of-Year Orientation: Prepare participants for bringing closure to their exchange experiences as well as re-entry to their home communities. Ensure that students receive relevant information concerning FLEX Abroad Program alumni resources and opportunities and discuss individual plans for possible alumni projects.

17. Insurance

Enroll FLEX Abroad students in ECA's ASPE health benefits plan or another comparable plan, that meets required standards, including emergency medical evacuation and repatriation coverage for the duration of the exchange.

18. Cell Phones

Provide each FLEX Abroad student with a cell phone and minutes for use in emergencies.

19. Stipends

Provide each FLEX Abroad student with a monthly stipend of up to \$125, depending on the local cost of living, for pocket money, incidentals, and other expenses.

A.5. Substantial Involvement:

In a cooperative agreement, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and U.S. embassies in participating countries are substantially involved in program activities above and beyond routine monitoring. ECA's involvement may vary depending on level of oversight deemed necessary by ECA throughout the life of the program. ECA, in consultation with embassies and other offices at the Department, is the final authority in making all decisions and providing guidance regarding any programmatic and administrative matters for the FLEX and FLEX Abroad programs. The responsibilities of ECA may include:

- Requesting periodic and unscheduled reports on students' status and placement details, activities, accomplishments, and well-being.
- Coordinating with FLEX and FLEX Abroad students and alumni their participation in appropriate U.S. Department of State activities; coordinating media coverage and outreach as appropriate to simplify alumni success in the U.S. and abroad.
- Storing information about FLEX and FLEX Abroad participant biographical data, Placement data, and alumni contact information. (Note that all PII must be appropriately protected.)
- Determining populations and priority areas of focus for FLEX and FLEX Abroad recruitment.
- Providing guidance and clearance on geographical location and type of school(s) for FLEX Abroad participants.

U.S. Embassies: Involvement by U.S. embassies varies by country and as the level of oversight deemed necessary by ECA and U.S. embassy personnel changes. The list below contains activities that the U.S. embassy may or may not elect to undertake, in agreement with ECA. The recipient and its representatives in each country must be responsive to U.S. embassies' requests and at a minimum follow the guidelines explained in Section #1: U.S. Department of

State and Embassy Liaison and Consultation under the “Responsibilities of the Award Recipient” in establishing a strong working relationship with the U.S. embassies in each country. The responsibilities of U.S. embassies may include:

- Advising on populations and priority areas of focus for FLEX inbound recruitment.
- Requesting updates on students identified in on-program support cases.
- Requesting information about FLEX and FLEX Abroad participant biographical data, FLEX Abroad placement data, and FLEX inbound alumni contact information. (Note that all PII must be appropriately protected.)
- Representing the U.S. government as the program sponsor at events and orientations.

Note that there is often similarity in ECA’s and embassies’ roles; for example, where ECA provides general guidance, embassies may assist in refining the guidance for in-country needs and applications; or ECA may have oversight of activities in the United States, whereas embassies may provide further support and oversight of similar activities in-country. Whenever guidance received by ECA and a U.S. embassy appears to conflict, the recipient will notify and discuss with ECA’s Program Office for clarification and resolution. ECA will make all final decisions for program guidance in such cases.

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Type of Award: Cooperative Agreement. ECA’s level of involvement in this program is listed under A5. Substantial Involvement under A. Program Description.

Fiscal Year Funds: 2024

Approximate Total Funding: \$13,000,000, pending the availability of funds

Approximate Number of Awards: 1

Approximate Average Award: \$13,000,000, pending the availability of funds

Minimum “Floor” of Award: \$13,000,000

Maximum “Ceiling” of Award: \$13,000,000, pending the availability of funds

Anticipated Award Date: February 1, 2024

Anticipated Project Completion Date: September 30, 2027

Additional Information: Pending successful implementation of this program and the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, it is ECA's intent to renew this cooperative agreement for two additional, consecutive fiscal years, before openly competing it again.

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

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

C.1. Eligible Applicants

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

C.2. Other Eligibility Requirements

The following additional eligibility requirements apply to this NOFO announcement:

- 1.) ECA's grant guidelines require that organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchanges be limited to \$130,000 in ECA funding. ECA anticipates making one cooperative agreement, in an amount of \$13,000,000 to support all costs required to implement this exchange program. Therefore, organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchanges are ineligible to apply under this competition.
- 2.) All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO and the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI); non-compliance will result in your proposal being declared technically ineligible and given no further consideration in the review process.
- 3.) In order to be eligible to receive an award, all organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number issued via www.SAM.gov as well as a valid registration on www.SAM.gov. Please see Section D.3 & D.5. for more information.
- 4.) 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 Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) document.

For this program:

- a. Proposed programs may not include multiple academic year exchanges.

- b. Proposals must identify sub-award recipients, if anticipated, and include letters of commitment from such implementing partners.
- c. Proposals must include all components outlined and involve all countries listed in the NOFO. Applications for the program in a limited list of countries, in countries not listed, having only an inbound or outbound exchange, or omitting other major activity requested or introducing activity clearly outside the scope of the solicitation, will be considered unresponsive to the solicitation and be deemed ineligible for consideration.

C.3. Cost Sharing or Matching Funds

There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this competition. However, ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

D.1. Solicitation Package Location

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

D.2. Content and Form of Submission

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package, including the Proposal Submission Instruction (PSI) document, which consists of required application forms and standard guidelines for proposal preparation. The application should be submitted per the instructions under D.16. "Application Deadline and Method of Submission" section below.

D.3. Unique Entity Identifier Number

All organizations are required to have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number to apply for a grant or cooperative agreement from the U.S. Government. 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. ***Note: As of April 2022, a DUNS number is no longer required for federal assistance applications. A UEI is issued as part of the required SAM.gov registration below in section D.5.***

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

D.4. Required Proposal Elements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 number prior to registering in SAM.gov.

D.6. Responsibility/Qualification Information in SAM.gov (formerly, FAPIIS)

- 1.) 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);
- 2.) An applicant, at its option, may review and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered. Currently, federal agencies create integrity records in the integrity module of the Contractor Performance Assessment and Reporting System (CPARS) and these records are visible as responsibility/qualification records in SAM.gov;
- 3.) The Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in §200.206 Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

D.7. Required Registration with SAMS Domestic

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

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

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

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

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

ECA places critically important 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, DC 20522

Please refer to Solicitation Package for further information.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Demographic Questions as outlined in the Indicator Book on page vi, and Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) (<https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/mode-framework-eca-applicants-and>)
- Objective 1: Advance participant and beneficiary cross-cultural competence and global perspective
 - o Objective 1.1: Promote cultural exchanges and enhance understanding between participants and their host communities
 - E1.1.01 Percent of participants reporting that their exchange experience offered opportunities to engage with other cultures
 - E1.1.04: Percent of participants with more favorable opinions of the United States Government (core indicator)
 - E1.1.09: Percent of participants who traveled abroad for the first time

- because of their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
 - E1.1.11: Percent of American participants indicating a change in their understanding of their host country's culture and values
 - E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American people
 - E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values
 - E1.1.19: Percent of participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values
- Objective 2: Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities/countries
 - E2.0.01: Percent of participants who volunteer or give back to their host communities
 - E2.0.04: Number of hours that foreign participants spend volunteering in their host communities
 - Sub-Objective 2.2: Foster participant's 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
 - E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of exchange program participation
 - E4.0.09: Percent of participants reporting an increase in language skills as a result of exchange program participation
 - Objective 4.1: Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
 - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
 - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)

- E4.1.05: Number of participants in exchange programs with a media literacy component
 - o Objective 4.2: Increase ability of participants to recognize and counter disinformation
- E4.2.01: Percent of participants that increased ability to counter Disinformation
- Objective 6: Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau's resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
 - E6.1.02: Number of US study abroad exchange participants from or hosted by Minority-Serving Institutions participating in ECA (both funded and private sector) exchanges (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)

ECA recommends that applicants use the indicators listed in this section as the minimum requirement for measurement. Applicant-designed objectives and indicators that are specific to the proposed program and this proposal should be added as necessary to sufficiently measure the relevant proposed program outputs, outcomes, and impact over the course of the proposed period of performance.

Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs)

ECA recommends the use of a PMP to serve as the primary reference document for performance monitoring for this award. If used, the PMP is an important part of any proposal, as it outlines how the applicant plans to track progress towards the proposed program's goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. A PMP document that includes all MODE Framework indicators is a part of this solicitation's attachments. Specific instructions on how to modify the PMP to be responsive to this solicitation are included in that document. While ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. A training on how to complete a PMP is available here: <https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/mode-framework-eca-applicants-and>. Successful PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the following:

- Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant

and time-bound (SMART; see the ECA Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Innovation (MELI) Unit's pages on the ECA website for more information:

<https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-evaluation-division/capacity-building>). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework, the Functional Bureau Strategy (<https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau>), or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.

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

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

Award recipients will be required to submit an upload of the raw data (in CSV format) along with the State Assistance Management System Domestic (SAMS-D RPM) reporting (see below). Regardless of the survey platform used, **all** MODE Framework survey questions outlined above are **required** (i.e., should be forced response); please see the Consent Language in the MODE Framework Indicator Book for more information on how to convey this to participants/survey respondents.

Program Performance M&E Narrative

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

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

SAMS-D RPM Reporting Requirements

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

D.11. Virtual Exchange Component

When changing political, health, environmental, or other similar circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges. Proposals should demonstrate the organization's capacity to provide innovative options for virtual activities to substitute for in-person engagement for program participants. Organizations should consider how they will implement virtual exchange activities, given the potential limits to internet access from participants in some locations and while continuing to advance foreign policy objectives and achieve lasting benefits for U.S. citizens and international participants.

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

D.12. Communications Guidance for ECA Recipients

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

D. 13. Celebration of America's Semiquincentennial

ECA is excited to play a key role in making the Semiquincentennial – commonly known as “America250” – 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 America250. Any America250 focused activities or plans will be subject to ECA approval and direction, and changes may be requested by ECA. Use of any ECA-provided America250 brand elements will be subject to advance ECA approval and require adherence to Department of State and ECA guidelines for such branding.

D.14. Budget Format

Budget Format: Applicants must submit SF-424A – “Budget Information – NonConstruction Programs” along with a comprehensive budget for the entire program. There must be a summary budget, a detailed budget, and a budget narrative. There must be detailed budgets and budget narratives for each sub-award partner, if proposed. Please indicate the number of students funded by country as well as each country's domestic operating costs. Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

The summary and detailed budgets must use the Standard Budget Categories specified in Parts III.B and B. Detailed Budget of the PSI.

D.14.a. Allowable costs for the program include the following:

Budgets may include, but are not limited to, the following items:

1. Overseas infrastructure and overhead costs

2. Program materials (an explanation of how materials are used must be included in the proposal)
3. Promotional materials, including social media and website development and maintenance (proposals must offer examples and provide substantive justification for promotional requests and how the funds will advance marketing needs specific to the programs. General, ongoing promotion and marketing expenses of the organization may not be requested as a direct cost.)
4. U.S. and overseas recruitment and selection costs
5. All international and domestic travel for participants and for staff and volunteers as needed to conduct and support program requirements. International travel for staff should be limited to what is essential for the success of the program, and detailed justification of such must be included in the Budget Narrative.
6. Costs associated with monitoring students, troubleshooting, counseling, and resettling students, as necessary
7. Salaries, communications, and supplies
8. Promotional material, including website development and maintenance
9. Alumni activities
10. Necessary passport costs if participants are financially unable to pay, and visa costs for American students. (U.S. visa fees are waived for FLEX inbound students on J-1 visas.)
11. Civic Education Workshop costs for 200 students during the academic year
12. Reasonable accommodations funds (which are provided to POs upon request to support students with disabilities and additional English language tutoring and resources, as needs arise)
13. Alumni programming costs
14. Stipends and honoraria for non-salaried staff and volunteers
15. Roundtrip transportation for students from their homes to the U.S. embassy or consulate for visa interviews
16. Developing the capacity of award recipient's U.S. staff or domestic and overseas partner organizations to manage FLEX program responsibilities
17. Public relations efforts and other activities that promote the expansion of FLEX specific recruitment and hosting capacity
18. Regional or national workshops for students/alumni that focus on FLEX program themes
19. Specially skilled consultants who support cross-cultural communication and understanding.

These consultants may provide training for award recipient staff and volunteers and/or develop printed and online resource materials that support the unique cultural needs of FLEX students; offer services such as on-call resources for staff, volunteers, host and natural families; and provide additional student support.

For FLEX Abroad, the following items should be included in the budget submission as part of the per-participant costs:

1. Incidentals allowance: FLEX Abroad host families can be compensated from a fund based on a rate of \$300 for school start-up costs and other school-related expenses. Receipts must be presented to the implementing organization for reimbursement.
2. Monthly stipends of up to \$125 each per FLEX Abroad student; stipends must be consistent with the local in-country cost of living for an average teenager.
3. Stipends for host families based on actual expenses may be requested, if the cultural and economic conditions in an otherwise viable country prohibit the identification of appropriate host families. The request will be subject to Bureau and Post review and approval.
4. School tuition and fees, if necessary
5. Minimum two-week language instruction
6. Emergency fund: Based on a rate of \$100 per participant to be used for small emergency expenses, e.g. eyeglasses, minor dental problems, and non-reclaimable student debt.
7. Enhancement activities fund: Award recipients should plan significant program enhancements and budget based on a rate of \$400 per student.
8. Tax withholding, as determined necessary, for American FLEX Abroad participants
9. Cost Sharing: You are encouraged to develop sources of funding to complement the award funds. Private partnerships with corporations or foundations are encouraged. Direct contributions from the applicant organization itself are welcome, both cash and in-kind. Costs borne by host families are considered “in-kind contributions” but may not be declared as a cost share item.

Overall Cost Efficiencies

It is anticipated that differing conditions (e.g., geography and country size, scope of outreach, available resources, application volume, and security concerns) in the diverse countries participating in the program will require different strategies for outreach and recruitment, use of resources, orientations and workshops, alumni support, and many other aspects of programming overseas. Your organization should establish cost guidelines and standards to help individual country teams develop plans and budgets that are cost effective and focused on the primary objectives of recruiting and preparing students for the international exchange and supporting alumni.

Recommended Guidelines

1. Large-scale selection events or activities with significant travel and implementation costs should be limited to participant number of no more than 200% of the final selection number. (e.g. “Selection Camps”)
2. Fee-based testing mechanisms for selection processes should be limited to 500% of the final selection number. (Simpler, recruiter-developed testing processes could

supplant the expense of using outside test providers when culling large applicant numbers in initial recruitment stages.)

3. Establishment of internal funding guidelines. In developing and reviewing country budgets, ensure that there is relative consistency and similarity in programs and activities, and that large deviations in cost or level of activity from the average are justified and reasonable.

Budget Narrative

A budget narrative must be included that provides detailed explanation for each budget line item where the activity purpose or means of calculation may not be clear or requires further justification. The budget narrative should include at minimum:

1. Formulae used to calculate totals unless clearly noted in the “description” field of the budget (e.g., travel and per diem costs for multiple people; training materials and expenses based on participant number);
2. Supportive explanation and justification for activities and expenses determined essential, but that may not be understood from the “description” field or from the proposal narrative (e.g., security expenses, unique training, recruitment testing, or support needs due to country-specific conditions); and
3. Breakdown of costs associated with relatively high amount line-item requests that may be unclear. (For example, if requesting \$50K for “training materials,” or \$100K for “public relations,” you must provide justification as well as an itemized breakdown.)

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

D.15. Key Personnel

ECA recommends that the applicant identify intended key personnel positions via an asterisk (*) or other marking in the proposal budget, budget narrative, or a separate appendix. If not provided in the application, recipients must submit the names, titles, and brief biographical sketches of key personnel to the Grants Officer and GOR within 30 days of an award being issued. Additional information regarding key personnel requirements can be found in the State Department’s Standard Terms and Conditions, VI. Recipient Responsibility and Compliance with Federal Requirements (link to: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>).

D.16. Application Deadline and Method of Submission

Application Deadline Date: Monday, November 27, 2023

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

D.17. Grants.gov Registration, Application Submission, and Receipt Procedures

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

D.17.a. How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov

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

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

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>

D.17.b. 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/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>

D.17.c. Grants.gov Support and Submission Issues

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

Grants.gov Customer Support

Contact Center Phone: 800 -518-4726

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

Email: support@grants.gov

D.17.d. Timely Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

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

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you not wait until the application deadline to begin the submission process through Grants.gov.

Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov. An electronic date/time stamp is generated within the system when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) will receive an

acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXX) 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 Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>.

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

D.18. Intergovernmental Review of Applications

Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

E.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 and may 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.

Recommended proposals will be reviewed for compliance with Federal and Bureau regulations and guidelines, and assessed for risk. Final funding decisions are made by the U.S. Department of State's Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Only an ECA Grant Officer has the final authority to issue assistance awards.

E.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 evaluation.

1. Quality of the Program Idea and Planning: The proposal should exhibit originality, substance, precision, and relevance to ECA's mission and the purposes outlined in the solicitation. A detailed agenda and relevant work plan should demonstrate the ability to ensure that the proposed project accomplishes the stated objectives in the desired timeframe. The proposal should demonstrate how students will be recruited, selected, monitored, trained, and prepared for their role as FLEX and FLEX Abroad alumni. The level of creativity, resources, and effectiveness will be primary factors for review. The proposal should be clearly and accurately written, with sufficient, relevant detail.

2. Support of DEIA: Proposals should show how the program and your institution supports ECA's policy on diversity. Proposals should have a clear DEIA plan that is integrated into all aspects of program administration, design, content, and implementation. Proposals should demonstrate how DEIA will enhance the program's goals, objectives, and the participants' exchange experience. Proposals should demonstrate how the program will further engage diverse and underserved communities. It is important that proposals have a clearly articulated DEIA plan and not simply express general support for the concept of DEIA.

3. Organization's Record/Institutional Capacity: Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program's goals. Reviewers will

assess the applicant and its partners to determine if they offer adequate resources, expertise, and experience to fulfill program objectives. Partner activities should be clearly defined. The proposal should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting and J-1 visa requirements for past Bureau grants as determined by Bureau grant staff. The proposal should include a description of your organization's management of the impact on exchange program administration resulting from the global pandemic. ECA will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants for this program. In addition, organizations designated as Exchange Visitor Program Sponsors must include a discussion of their record of compliance with 22 CFR 62 et seq., including the oversight of their 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 proposal that fails to include the above information in their narrative will be deemed less or not competitive under this review criterion. ECA will review the record of compliance with 22 CFR 62 et seq. of organizations designated as Exchange Visitor Program Sponsors as one factor in evaluating the record/ability of organizations to carry out successful exchange programs.

4. Multiplier Effect/Follow-on Activities: Proposed activities should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of information and establishment of long-term institutional and individual ties both during the exchange and after the participants return home. The proposal should provide a plan for continued contact with alumni to ensure that they are tracked over time, utilized and/or organized as alumni, and provided opportunities to reinforce the knowledge and skills they acquired on the exchange and share them with others.

5. Participant Monitoring: The proposal narrative must include a detailed monitoring plan for FLEX Abroad students, given the importance the Department places on participant well-being. You may use the appendices to house additional details and supporting documentation.

6. 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.

7. Cost-Effectiveness and Cost-Sharing: Budgets must be accurate, clear, and cost-effective. Applicants must include a budget narrative, which is separate from the proposal narrative that clarifies formulas used and costs that require further explanation and/or justification. Detailed

budgets are required, and budget narratives should be included for sub-awards. Applicants must ensure the budget is appropriate and sufficient to complete tasks outlined in the project narrative. The overhead costs of the program, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. The proposal should maximize cost sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions. The proposal should demonstrate a high quality, cost-effective program.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

F.1. Award Notices

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

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

F.2 Administrative and National Policy Requirements:

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.

Terms and Conditions applicable to all ECA agreements include:

- Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.
- U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions.

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

For a copy of the U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions, or to review other Department of State assistance information, please download from:

<https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>

F.3. Reporting Requirements

Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify 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:

- 1.) Performance Progress Reports (PPRs) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual reports shall be due 120 calendar days after the cooperative agreement year; quarterly or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. (Frequency of these reports will be determined by the Grants Officer and Program Officer.) The complete report and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the Recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this Cooperative Agreement/Grant in the U.S. Department of State's [SAMS Domestic](#).
- 2.) The Federal Financial Report (FFR SF-425/SF-425a) must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: <http://www.dpm.psc.gov/>. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the Recipient must upload the approved report to [SAMS Domestic](#), in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the Recipient's eligibility for future Cooperative Agreements/Grants.

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

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

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

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

G. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions about this announcement, contact Program Officer Amy Schulz by phone: 202-718-5863, or email: SchulzAJ@state.gov.

All correspondence with the Bureau concerning this NOFO should reference the title and funding opportunity number listed at the top of this solicitation.

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

H. Other Information

Notice

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

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

September 29, 2023