



Educational and Cultural Affairs

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

U.S. Department of State

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Funding Opportunity Title: FY 2025 Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program Placement Components

Announcement Type: New Cooperative Agreement

Funding Opportunity Number: DFOP0016888

Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) Number: 19.415

Deadline for Applications: October 21, 2024

Executive Summary:

The Office of Citizen Exchanges of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) announces an open competition for cooperative agreements for the FY 2025 Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program Placement Components. The FLEX program, which began in 1993, supports U.S. foreign policy goals by promoting mutual understanding and enhancing relations between the United States and the participating European and Eurasian countries, which include the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Baltics, the Caucasus countries, the nations of Central Asia, and Mongolia. The FLEX program allows high school students to live in American society for an academic year and acquire leadership skills while attending a U.S. high school. The students live with host families, participate in activities to learn about American society and values, and, in turn, expose host communities across the United States to their own cultures and traditions. To date, more than 32,000 students have participated in the FLEX program.

Public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3) are invited to submit proposals to identify host schools; vet, select, and monitor host families; and place, support, and monitor a portion of the students participating in the FLEX program during the 2025-2026 academic year. ECA anticipates that the cooperative agreements will begin on approximately November 25, 2024, and end on approximately September 30, 2028, subject to the availability of funds and pending successful performance.

This NOFO announcement is for the Placement Components of the FY 2025 FLEX program. The Placement Components are one of two major parts of the FLEX program. The other major part

of the FLEX program is the Organizational Components cooperative agreement that is awarded separately. The recipient of the Organizational Components award will be responsible for overseas recruitment and selection of participants; assignment of participants to Placement Organizations (e.g., recipients of the Placement Components awards); preparation of cross-cultural materials for students and Placement Organizations; pre-departure orientations; international travel from home to U.S. host community and return; facilitation of ongoing communication between the natural parents and the placement organization; support of students with disabilities; administration of language program participants; administering civic education workshops and end-of-stay workshops; maintenance of a student database; and ongoing follow-up with alumni after they return home. It is critical that the recipients of the Placement Components awards (e.g., the Placement Organizations) work closely and cooperatively with the Organizational Components award recipient. Each Placement Organization is provided with the *FLEX Operational Guidelines*, a manual that gives instructions that the Placement Organizations must follow for the smooth coordination of tasks.

It is ECA's intent to award approximately nine (9) cooperative agreements of one base year (covering academic year 2025-2026) plus two Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) years (covering academic years 2026-2027 and 2027-2028, respectively), subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State. See sections A, B, and D for additional information about NCCs.

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.

The Office of Citizen Exchanges of ECA of the U.S. Department of State (Department) is the designated Exchange Visitor Program sponsor with ultimate responsibility for the FLEX program. All award recipients (including their employees, officers, agents, and third parties involved in the administration of the FLEX program) receiving assistance awards to administer the FLEX

program will be considered under the terms of such awards to be “third parties” as explained in 22 CFR § 62.2 of the Exchange Visitor (J-1 Visa) Program regulations.

Because the actions of such third parties are imputed to the designated sponsor, ECA expects that all award recipients (including their employees, officers, agents and third parties involved in the administration of the FLEX program) will both comply with the regulations and requirements of the Exchange Visitor Program and also render all necessary assistance to enable the Office of Citizen Exchanges to be in full compliance with the same. Accordingly, award recipients must ensure their “employees, officers, agents, third parties, volunteers or other individuals or entities associated with the administration of their exchange visitor program are adequately qualified, appropriately trained, and comply with the Exchange Visitor Program regulations and immigration laws pertaining to the administration of their exchange visitor program(s).” (22 CFR 62.9 (f) (2)). Relevant portions of the regulations governing the administration of an exchange visitor program for secondary school students are set forth in the Exchange Visitor (J-1 visa) Program regulations, 22 CFR 62.25.

A.2. Purpose

The FLEX program provides high school students between the ages of 15 and 18 an opportunity to live with an American family, attend high school for an academic year, engage in community service, and participate in school and community activities. Funding through the Placement Components awards is also intended to allow Placement Organizations to sponsor local activities that will enhance students’ understanding of American-style democracy and civil society. The FLEX students are recruited from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. In addition, the program may recruit students in the future from Belarus and/or Russia. These two countries participated previously in FLEX, but the program is currently suspended in both countries. More information about the FLEX program can be found at: .

ECA reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposed project activities, budgets, and participant numbers in accordance with the program’s needs and the availability of funds. In addition, ECA reserves the right to remove countries or add additional countries should conditions change in a partner country or if other countries or regions are identified by ECA as viable alternatives. The number of students who will participate in a given year is subject to the availability of funding in the FY 2025 base year (academic year 2025-2026) and in the subsequent two Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) years of FY 2026 (academic year 2026-2027) and FY 2027 (academic year 2027-2028).

FLEX Program Goals: The overall goals of the FLEX program are as follows:

- Promote better understanding by youth from the United States and participating countries about host society, people, institutions, values, and culture;
- Foster lasting personal and professional ties;
- Advance mutual understanding, respect for diversity, leadership skills, and understanding of civil society during the exchange experience and beyond; and
- Enhance understanding of other countries and cultures and increase accurate understanding of American values in communities abroad.

Outcomes/Results: The FLEX inbound program is intended to engage youth and foster relationships between the people of foreign countries and the United States by enabling students to:

- gain an understanding of American culture, diversity, and respect for others with differing views and beliefs;
- educate Americans about their home countries and cultures;
- interact with Americans and generate enduring ties;
- explore and acquire an understanding of the key elements of U.S. civil society, including concepts such as volunteerism, the idea that American 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; and
- share and apply experiences and knowledge in their home communities as FLEX alumni, initiating activities that focus on development and community service.

A.3. Program Specific Guidelines

Organizations applying for this cooperative agreement must be able to dedicate key staff to this program who possess a thorough understanding of the secondary school student Exchange Visitor (J-1 Visa) Program regulations (see <https://j1visa.state.gov/sponsors/current/regulations-compliance/>).

Participants will begin to arrive in their host communities as early as late-July 2025 and remain for 10 or 11 months until their departures from approximately mid-May to mid-June 2026. Students with disabilities and students requiring supplementary English language programming will be among the first to arrive.

Under the terms of their U.S. visas, FLEX participants must return to their home countries following the conclusion of their exchange program in the United States, so that they can share the benefits of their experience in their home countries. Placement Organizations are expected to assist the U.S. Department of State in enforcing this regulation.

FLEX finalists are selected on the basis of merit. The Department seeks to include students of diverse national and ethnic backgrounds and students with disabilities. Finalists also undergo rigorous medical screening. Applicants undergo a series of exams and are interviewed in person for evaluation of their ability to adjust to new cultures and English language proficiency.

Your proposal must include a plan to place and monitor a minimum of 20 students; there is no maximum number of students that may be placed by one organization, and your organization may work with subaward recipients. Placements may be in any region of the United States. Placement Organizations must accept and place students assigned by the Organizational Components award recipient. Your organization's assigned students may come from any of the previously mentioned countries, or from other countries, as determined by ECA. Approval of final student assignments to Placing Organizations will be made by ECA. In addition to describing how your organization will meet the placement and monitoring requirements of this NOFO for students placed directly by your organization, your proposal must also explain how you will provide mentoring, training, oversight, and additional monitoring of students placed by your subaward recipients, if you are proposing to work with any subaward recipients.

All participants in the FLEX program will have an opportunity to apply to attend one of two Civic Education Workshops, which are one-week workshops in Washington, DC, tentatively scheduled for February and March 2026. Approximately 100 students will be selected for each workshop. Your proposal should not include any funding for or planning for this workshop, as it will be managed by the Organizational Components award recipient, but your proposal should include confirmation that you will notify your students of the opportunity and encourage the participation of those who are selected. Placement Organizations will receive additional information from the Organizational Components award recipient about the workshop and how students can apply for it.

Students participating in ECA-sponsored academic year high school programs, including FLEX, may be eligible to apply to attend a workshop focused on teaching English as a foreign language. The workshop may include approximately 10 to 15 FLEX students. If the workshop takes place, the workshop dates, application requirements, and other details will be provided to the Placement Organizations, and the Placement Organizations will be asked to notify their students of the opportunity to apply.

Administration of the program must comply with federal, state, and local tax reporting and withholding regulations as applicable. Recipient organizations must demonstrate regulation adherence in the proposal narrative and budget.

Approximate Program Timeline:

- November-December 2024: Cooperative agreements awarded, pending the availability of FY 2025 funds.
- December 2024-March 2025: Distribution of student applications to Placement Organizations and recruitment of host schools and families.
- June-July 2025: Pre-departure Orientations conducted overseas by Organizational Components award recipient.
- Late July-August 2025: Students begin to arrive in groups.
- Late August 2025: All final placement information (host family names and addresses and confirmed school enrollments) must be submitted to the U.S. Department of State.
- August-September 2025: Arrival Orientations for students.
- June-September 2025: First Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) exercised (for academic year 2026-2027), pending successful performance and the availability of FY 2026 funds. First NCC will follow similar timeline to base year.
- January-February 2023: Mid-Year Orientations for on-program students.
- Spring 2026: Civic Education Workshop for approximately 200 selected FLEX students. (Please note that this activity is implemented by the Organizational Components award recipient; do not offer a plan or budget for this activity in your proposal.)
- May-June 2026: Re-entry Orientations and departure of students.
- June-September 2026: Second Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) exercised (for academic year 2027-2028), pending successful performance and the availability of FY 2027 funds. Second NCC will follow similar timeline to base year.
- September 30, 2028: Approximate end date of cooperative agreement.

A.4. Recipient Responsibilities

1. Materials

Pre-Departure Orientation Materials: Placement Organizations must prepare student materials that will be distributed by the FY 2025 Organizational Components award recipient during Pre-Departure Orientations (PDOs). Materials must be received by the Organizational Components award recipient by May 1, 2025, for distribution at the PDO's. All required materials are listed in 22 CFR 62. Student handbooks or promotional handouts may be more appropriate to distribute after students have arrived in the United States. All materials must identify students as FLEX students and must include information on the U.S. Department of State as the program sponsor.

Promotional Materials: All official documents and materials developed for promotional purposes must acknowledge the U.S. Department of State's role as program sponsor. Documents should include the American flag and the State Department seal. ECA will retain copyright use and may distribute materials related to this program. The Youth Programs

Division may ask you to distribute or engage in other outreach activities as part of a larger outreach strategy. Please see [ECA's Communications Guidance](#) for the most current guidance.

2. Host Families

Placement Organization practices and procedures for recruiting, screening, and selecting host families and placing FLEX participants with host families must meet the Exchange Visitor Program regulations for the secondary school student category, i.e., 22 CFR 62.25. Proposals that demonstrate full compliance with these regulations and illustrate your organization's effective oversight over local coordinators will be deemed more competitive and will be given strong preference during the application review process, under the "Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Program Objectives" and the "Participant Monitoring" review criteria listed in Section E of this document.

3. Host Schools

Placement Organization practices and procedures for placing FLEX participants in accredited public or private secondary schools must meet the Exchange Visitor Program regulations for the secondary school student category, i.e., 22 CFR 62.25. Placement Organizations should also encourage school administrators to utilize students as resources in the classroom and the community, including discussing options for extra-curricular activities that correlate with program goals (e.g., Student Council, Junior Achievement, Future Business Leaders of America, and volunteer opportunities). Due to unique cultural sensitivities, Placement Organizations must obtain ECA concurrence before placing students in religious, private, and non-traditional public schools. For schools with a religious affiliation, student and natural parent approval is also required. Home schooling is not an acceptable option.

4. Clustering

ECA encourages placements in all 50 states and the District of Columbia in a wide range of rural, urban, and suburban settings. Placement Organizations that choose to cluster all or most of their students will be deemed more competitive and will be given strong preference during the application review process, under the "Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Program Objectives" review criterion listed in Section E of this document. A cluster is defined as a minimum of three ECA-funded scholarship students, preferably from different countries, who live within reasonable proximity and can be brought together for program activities such as orientations, re-entry training, and program enhancement activities. The phrase "ECA-funded scholarship students" refers to participants in the FLEX program, the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) program, and the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program. Applicants are expected to cluster at least 60% of their placements. Multiple local coordinators may work together to form a cluster. Applicants must describe how local staff and volunteers will provide non-clustered exchange students the benefits of orientations and enhancement

activities.

5. Language Programming

Although most FLEX students have strong English skills, a small number (approximately 10% of each Placement Organization's overall student number) will need English language training while on program. Your proposal should describe in the narrative appropriate activities for the approximately 10% of your students who will be identified as needing additional English training. Language training should focus on conversational English so students will be better prepared to take part in classroom activities and discussions at the start of the school year. The Language Program should be individualized to meet each student's specific needs. Language Program students should be offered a minimum of 20 hours of intensive in-person instruction (or, if conducted on a virtual platform, then via real-time, live instruction) near the beginning of their exchange program, up to 60 hours maximum, as needed, to be completed in the first three months after arrival. Please note that Language Program costs are funded by the Organizational Components recipient and not the Placement Organization Components recipients. Therefore, these costs do not need to be included in your proposed budget.

6. Students with Disabilities

Since its inception in 1993, the FLEX program has provided special assistance to students with disabilities. In doing so, the program created new opportunities for active participation in society that were largely unavailable to youth with disabilities in the former Soviet republics at the time. Today, operating in 22 countries, the FLEX program continues to place an emphasis on recruiting students with disabilities, bringing approximately 10-20 each year. Your proposal must include a plan for placing, supporting, and monitoring students with disabilities. Students with disabilities will be recruited by the Organizational Components recipient along with all of the other students. Students with disabilities must meet the same standards as other scholarship recipients but may receive reasonable accommodations for testing. The Organizational Components recipient will receive separate funding to conduct training and provide support for students with disabilities and for their Placement Organizations. Your organization will need to coordinate with the Organizational Components recipient regarding the reasonable accommodations required for your students with disabilities. Please note that students with disabilities on the FLEX program may not have been brought up in an inclusive community, or they may not have attended a mainstream school before. After a Preparatory Workshop facilitated by the Organizational Components recipient, the students with disabilities will arrive in their permanent host communities. Your proposal should include a plan for helping your students with disabilities become acclimated to their communities and for finding appropriate resources and accommodations as needed and as required by law. Please note that the Organizational Components recipient, not the Placement Organizations, will be responsible for:

- Contacting disability organizations for hosting outreach.
- Conducting a 3- to 4-day Preparatory Workshop for students immediately upon their arrival to educate students on the laws and resources available for people with disabilities in the United States. The Organizational Components award recipient will be responsible for travel to and from the workshop.
- Thoroughly assessing each student's condition and specific needs during the Preparatory Workshop and providing an assessment report to the appropriate Placement Organization.
- Conducting an Inclusion Workshop for Placement Organization representatives for sharing best practices of working with students with disabilities and educating representatives regarding disability issues. The Organizational Components award recipient will be responsible for travel to and from the workshop.
- Providing Placement Organizations with support and resources throughout the year.
- Providing funding for reasonable accommodations for your students with disabilities.

7. Trainings/Orientations

Proposals should include (as an appendix) sample outlines with relevant topics to be covered in all trainings and orientations.

Staff/Volunteer Training and Orientation: Placement Organizations are responsible for conducting FLEX-specific training for all employees, including all local coordinators, volunteers, and any other parties who are involved in placing FLEX students. This training should be designed to provide the methods and tools necessary for monitoring and counseling FLEX students, 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 program, as well as the J-1 Visa requirements. J-1 regulations require that all local coordinators be trained and knowledgeable regarding the J-1 Visa requirements. Your proposal must describe a training and knowledge-review plan to meet this obligation. If you receive an award, your semi-annual performance reports (see item 13 below) must detail and confirm the implementation of your training and knowledge-review plan, and your organization will be required to submit a copy of all local coordinator training materials.

Host Family Orientation: Prior to the student's arrival, Placement Organizations must conduct in-person FLEX-specific orientations for all screened and selected host families and provide them with the information and reference materials necessary to host and support a FLEX student. The program office recommends that FLEX host family orientations not include families who are hosting private students, in order to ensure that adequate attention is given to program and cross-cultural issues that are specific to FLEX (or other ECA-sponsored) scholarship

students. It is appropriate to hold host family orientations together for families hosting FLEX, YES, and/or CBYX students.

Arrival Orientation for Participants: Placement Organizations' arrival orientations for FLEX students must comply with J-1 Visa regulations and the Secondary School Student category-specific orientation requirements. Orientations should take place within one month of the students' arrival and should address the Placement Organizations' policies, procedures, and rules, as well as the Placement Organizations' procedures for communicating with students and for monitoring and supporting their exchange with sensitivity to cultural issues unique to this exchange population.

Mid-Year Orientation: Placement Organizations must arrange a mid-year orientation to meet with all FLEX participants approximately halfway through their exchange programs, preferably in January. 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.

Re-entry Training: Placement Organizations are responsible for preparing students to bring closure to their U.S. exchange experience and preparing them for re-entry to their home countries. Placement Organizations should inform students about FLEX alumni opportunities in their home countries and discuss plans for possible alumni projects. Please note that FLEX alumni activities in the students' home countries will be coordinated by the Organizational Components recipient.

8. Participant Monitoring

ECA employs a team of Participant Monitoring Specialists who oversee the health and safety of all FLEX students during their time on program in the United States, and Placement Organizations will need to work closely with ECA's Participant Monitoring Specialists on student cases, which must be documented in a timely way. Your practices and procedures for monitoring FLEX participants must meet the Exchange Visitor Program regulations for the secondary school student category, i.e., 22 CFR 62.25. ECA's Youth Programs Division in the Office of Citizen Exchanges provides the following further guidance that Placement Organizations must follow.

Monitoring Guidance

- **Local Coordinators:** A local coordinator is essential to the day-to-day support of each FLEX student and is defined as a representative of the PO who lives in or in proximity to the host community, identifies and vets potential host families, processes the enrollment of the student in the host school, and provides guidance and support for the student and host family during the program year, among other duties listed in the J-1

Visa regulations. The PO will ensure that each FLEX student has access to a local coordinator within 120 miles of their host family home, per J-1 Visa regulations. Local coordinators must report all placement changes and student on-program support concerns to the PO in a timely manner.

- **Student Progress:** Local coordinators will monitor students' progress in academics, social adjustment, and activities such as community service, exemplary achievements, and other program-related endeavors and track their progress in monthly contact reports.
- **Reporting Systems:** Placement Organizations must use a reporting system to distribute and collect monthly updates, reports, surveys, or other communications that students will fill out and submit themselves. Your proposal should provide details on your reporting system. Plans that describe ways to attain 100% student participation in completing reports and surveys will be deemed more competitive and will be given strong preference during the application review process, under the "Participant Monitoring" review criterion listed in Section E of this document. The purpose of these student monthly updates is to allow FLEX students to report issues and to allow Placement Organizations to track these issues effectively. Placement Organizations must promptly notify ECA and the Organizational Components recipient about problems, inconsistencies, or concerns that are identified from these updates.
- **Student Support:** Local coordinators must identify when students may need additional support from their natural parents or peers, or from other Placement Organization staff; arrange counseling for participants if needed; document the circumstances of each case; and notify the Placement Organization headquarters office, which will, when necessary, notify the Organizational Components recipient in order for them to obtain natural parent perspective or concurrence. Placement Organizations must also notify ECA of any escalated cases in accordance with the policies described in the *FLEX Operational Guidelines*, which are referenced in the Executive Summary of this document.
- **Placement Organizations must report to ECA** (by sending an Incident Report to the OPS-FLEX email address) within 24 hours any matters that are required to be reported by a sponsor pursuant to the regulations at 22 CFR Part 62. ECA will be responsible for reporting to the Office of Designation. Information on this process, as well, is included in the *FLEX Operational Guidelines*.
- **Early Returns:** If a situation leads to an early return request, the Placement Organization should provide ECA with consistent and thorough documentation that ensures that the involved students, host families, and natural families are aware of the situation and have been consulted on its resolution. Placement Organizations will promptly prepare a clear and concise Incident Report of the circumstances, detailing actions taken and communication between parties. The report will be shared with the Organizational Components recipient and ECA. Only ECA's Youth Programs Division can

make the decision to terminate and repatriate a FLEX student. Under no circumstances will Placement Organizations or anyone acting on their behalf inform FLEX participants, or imply to them, that their programs will terminate or that they will be repatriated, without specific direction from ECA's Youth Programs Division. Similarly, probation or warning letters that explicitly inform a participant that they are not being sent home should not be issued without express ECA approval.

- Placement Organizations must develop methods to ensure that staff who work to support participants are trained and well prepared to address issues of race, sexual orientation, gender, and other common issues that a diverse group of participants may encounter during an exchange year.
- Placement Organizations must ensure that its staff are trained and proficient at developing strong relationships with participants and follow best practices of eliciting substantive responses from teenagers to ensure that participants are comfortable confiding significant issues with Placement Organization representatives.

Site Visits

Full-time permanent employees or official designees of the Placement Organization's headquarters office must conduct site visits to 20% of the Placement Organization's FLEX students in their host family/community environments. The visits should cover a combination of clustered and non-clustered students.

Placement Organizations must submit site visit plans to ECA through the on-program support email address provided to award recipients. Site visit plans for October-December should be submitted by September 15 of the program year. Site visit plans for January-June should be submitted by December 15 of the program year.

The ECA Participant Monitoring Unit will, in addition to making site visits to Placement Organizations, also conduct site visits to students in their host schools and host communities. Placement Organizations must be prepared to assist the ECA Participant Monitoring Unit in the scheduling of ECA monitoring visits throughout the program year.

Communication Guidance

Placement Organizations, whether or not they are designated as exchange visitor sponsors by the U.S. Department of State, must report to the ECA program office any matters that are required to be reported by a sponsor pursuant to the above regulations.

Placement Organizations must enter complete, accurate, and up-to-date placement information into the FLEX web-based database, including host family and local coordinator changes that occur during the year, within 48 hours of the time that the change took place.

Additional information on entering placement information will be provided in the *FLEX Operational Guidelines*.

Placement Organizations must, in a timely fashion, distribute to all FLEX students information that ECA provides regarding Department of State-initiated FLEX program activities. Such activities include International Education Week, the Civic Education Workshop, Global Youth Service Day, and ad-hoc program-related activities that may arise during the year (e.g., online chats, meetings, briefings).

Placement Organizations must inform ECA of any publicity featuring FLEX students or the FLEX program, particularly any engagements with government officials or articles in the media. When the media interact with FLEX students, Placement Organizations must identify FLEX as a U.S. Department of State program.

9. **Cultural Enhancement and Leadership Development Activities**

Placement Organizations are required to conduct cultural enhancement and leadership development activities for the participants during the academic year. Your proposal should detail your planned activities and should include \$400 per student in the proposal budget to cover the cost of these activities. Funding for enhancement activities should ideally be disbursed in small increments throughout the year to encourage a variety of activities. Please note that these funds may not be spent on packaged commercial sightseeing trips. Cultural enhancement activities should increase the participants' understanding of American culture, values, and history. These activities should increase students' understanding of key elements of American civil society and foster dialogue and enduring ties between the students and their host communities. Examples of cultural enhancement activities include briefings on local or state government and the judicial system, programs on community issues and concerns, and activities that increase participants' understanding of the diversity that exists in American society. Leadership development activities should offer specialized training in leadership skills such as public speaking, team building, critical thinking, and goal setting. Leadership training should explore issues that foster civic responsibility, tolerance, public service, and conflict resolution. All cultural enhancement and leadership development activities should include debrief sessions that allow participants to compare perspectives and discuss what they have learned.

10. **Community Service**

All FLEX students are required to participate in community service activities. Placement Organizations should provide participants and their host families with clear guidelines that reflect the expectations of their organizations, including the minimum number of hours of required community service and the method by which Placement Organizations will monitor

community service activities.

11. Health Insurance

The Bureau offers the Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) benefits plan for students participating in the program. Detailed information on ASPE can be found at: <https://www.sevencorners.com/about/gov/usdos> There is no cost to the Placement Organization if you opt to use the ASPE plan. Placement Organizations wishing to use a different plan must demonstrate that such alternate plan provides comparable or more comprehensive coverage. Coverage must begin when students depart their home countries and not conclude until they return home. Please keep in mind that the students with disabilities who participate in the Preparatory Workshop must be covered by the Placement Organization's health insurance policy while they are participating in the workshop. If you choose not to use ASPE, your proposal must include a copy of your chosen insurance policy and must include the cost of the insurance in the proposed budget. The insurance you propose to use must meet the requirements of 22 CFR 62.14. Students and natural families must be informed in writing of any limitations of coverage noted in the policies.

12. Student Financial and Gift Incentives

As recipients of a full scholarship, and with continuing support and opportunities available to them when they become alumni, FLEX students accept considerable responsibilities in return. Participation in program activities, including orientations, cluster meetings, program events, community service projects, and presentations during International Education Week are requirements. Therefore, Placement Organizations may not request funds to give students monetary or other significant material incentives to participate in required program activities.

13. Department of State Web Resources

During the cooperative agreement period, the Bureau may develop hosting resources to assist Placement Organizations with hosting outreach, and to promote FLEX as a U.S. Department of State program. Placement Organizations are expected to support promotional campaigns by providing information to ECA and updating promotional materials as needed. All Placement Organization staff and volunteers associated with FLEX are expected to be knowledgeable of and familiar with the Bureau's web resources, such as <https://exchanges.state.gov/> and <https://alumni.state.gov/> and to register as members or guest members, as applicable. Staff and coordinator trainings, as well as student and host family orientations, should include sessions familiarizing the audience with these resources. While Placement Organizations may provide their own web resources and opportunities for online engagement, those should supplement, not replace, participation in the Department of State's online communities for exchange students and alumni.

14. Placement Organization Website Management

Your FLEX website page must be easily accessible from your organization's homepage and be kept updated. The U.S. Department of State seal and the American flag must appear on the FLEX webpage. For online student profiles, your website must be secure, so only those who have been fully vetted will be able to see a photo or view personally identifiable information. These profiles, both online and in printed materials, should identify students as FLEX, to differentiate them from your organization's private students.

15. Financial Management

Fiscal data and accounting for award funding must be managed as required by Federal law, including cost-sharing and any funds provided to approved sub-award recipients, if applicable.

16. Sub-Award Recipient Management

If you have sub-award recipients, your organization must ensure that they have received a copy of this Notice of Funding Opportunity and that they are versed in all requirements, including OMB Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards), as well as the J-1 Visa regulations. Your organization must provide oversight to any sub-award recipients that ensures the quality of their performance of FLEX program duties under your organization's award.

17. Performance Reports

The FLEX program office in ECA will supply semi-annual report guidelines. Placement Organizations must submit semi-annual performance reports no more than 30 days after the reporting period end date. These due dates will be listed in the award agreement. As noted in item 7. Trainings/Orientations above, J-1 regulations require that all local coordinators be trained and knowledgeable regarding the J-1 Visa requirements. Your proposal must describe a training and knowledge-review plan to meet this obligation, and your semi-annual performance reports must detail and confirm the implementation of your training and knowledge-review plan. Please see section F.3 below for detailed instructions on how to submit performance and financial reports.

A.5. Substantial Involvement:

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

1. Hosting an in-person annual meeting for all award recipients to provide program guidance, share best practices, and foster deeper connections with and among implementing partners. If conditions require, the annual meeting in a given year may need to be moved to a virtual format, but ECA's intent is to have in-person annual meetings every year.
2. Requesting additional reporting or information, when needed, beyond the routine monitoring and reporting requirements described elsewhere in this document, in order to respond to unexpected contingencies or circumstances, such as Congressional inquiries or requests from other Department offices.

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Type of Award: Cooperative Agreement. ECA's level of involvement in this program is listed under Substantial Involvement in section A.5.

Fiscal Year Funds: FY 2025 base year \$10,240,000; FY 2026 – first NCC year \$10,240,000; FY 2027 – second NCC year \$10,240,000. The NCCs are subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

Approximate Total Funding: \$30,720,000 (including base year and two NCC years)

Approximate Number of Awards: Approximately nine (9) cooperative agreements

Approximate Average Award: \$1,140,000

Minimum "Floor" of Award: \$200,000

Maximum "Ceiling" of Award: \$10,240,000

Anticipated Award Date: November 25, 2024, pending the availability of funds.

Anticipated Award Completion Date: September 30, 2028.

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

ECA anticipates issuing a cooperative agreement for a period of 24 months (base year), with two additional 12-month periods (NCC years one and two). ECA will notify the recipient at least 90 days before the end of the current year if an NCC will be exercised or not. The decision to exercise a NCC will be subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

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:

- a. ECA's grant guidelines require that organizations demonstrate at least four years of experience in conducting international exchanges to be eligible for awards exceeding \$130,000 in ECA funding. As noted in section B above, ECA anticipates issuing approximately nine cooperative agreements with a minimum award amount of \$200,000. Therefore, organizations must demonstrate four years of experience in conducting international exchanges in your proposal to be eligible to apply under this competition.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. 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 consider only 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.

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 Grants.gov website at <https://www.grants.gov> or from ECA website at <https://eca.state.gov/organizational-funding>.

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.17. "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 a SF-424, executive summary, proposal narrative, budget (SF 424A),

detailed 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)

- a. 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);
- b. 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;
- c. 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 MyGrants

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

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

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.

ECA will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to participants in this program, under its designation which falls under the J-1 Secondary School Student Program category. The Responsible Officer for the FLEX program will be an ECA official.

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)

A performance monitoring framework is vital to tracking the performance and the direction, pace, and magnitude of change that result from ECA programs. This section pertains to performance monitoring in particular, as this type of monitoring is distinct from grants monitoring or other program monitoring discussed elsewhere in this solicitation. Performance monitoring is designed to assess program impact against established goals and objectives across the Bureau and as established for each award.

In establishing strong performance management practices, ECA is concerned with collecting indicator data on participant outcomes. Because the FLEX program is implemented by both Placement Components awardees and an Organizational Components awardee, a determination has been made that the primary responsibility for collecting indicator data on participant outcomes will lie with the Organizational Components awardee, through the MODE (Monitoring Data for ECA) framework. Therefore, your proposal should confirm that your organization will, if it receives a Placement and Monitoring Component award under this NOFO, support the Bureau's overall performance monitoring efforts established for the FLEX program, to include updating and providing contact information, as requested by ECA, as well as making FLEX stakeholders aware they may be requested to take a survey.

In addition, proposals must also describe your organization's plan to monitor the project's activities both during and after program implementation, to include tracking participants, and providing information on host families, host schools, materials, and trainings/orientations, and other aspects of the program found in Section A.1.

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.

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

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

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

1. National and regional coordinator trainings
2. Orientations (post-arrival, mid-program, re-entry) for students and host families
3. Stipends and honoraria for non-salaried staff and volunteers
4. Host family screening (criminal background checks, interviews, home visits)
5. Student and host family monitoring (counseling, troubleshooting, moving students as needed)
6. Program materials (including description of how they will be used)
7. Mandatory school fees (including books, activity fees, or registration costs; in exceptional instances only, tuition may be an allowable cost)
8. Insurance costs, if not using the Bureau’s ASPE benefits plan
9. Salaries and benefits, domestic travel, communications, equipment, and supplies

Please refer to the Proposal Submission Instruction (PSI) document for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

Your proposal budget should also include these **required** costs:

1. \$200 fixed-rate monthly allowance for each student for 11 months
2. \$300 average per student incidentals allowance to be spent by host family for school-related expenses (e.g., yearbook, locker fees, gym clothing) for which receipts must be provided
3. \$100 average per student emergency expense fund to be retained by Placement Organization for small emergency expenses (e.g., eyeglasses, minor dental problems)

4. \$400 average per student enhancement activities fund (all field trips, cultural enhancement and leadership development activities, community service projects, etc. must be included in this amount; additional funding requests will not be accepted)
5. Support and monitoring of local staff, including support for home/community visits to 20% of students
6. Travel costs for at least one person (and not more than two) from each organization, to attend the in-person, two-day ECA Youth Programs Division annual meeting in Washington, DC, every year. If your proposal includes sub-recipients, then your proposal budget should also include travel costs for one or two representatives from each sub-recipient to attend the annual meeting.

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, E. Recipient Responsibilities and Compliance with Federal Requirements (link to: <https://www.state.gov/about-us-office-of-the-procurement-executive/>).

D.16. NCCs

ECA intends to use NCCs based on the requirements discussed below and subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the program, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the U.S. Department of State.

D.16.a. For competitions that will include a NCC, applicants must submit the following as a part of your initial proposal:

- A complete SF-424A which includes the budget request for the base year of the program.
- A detailed proposal narrative and budget for the base year of funding. This should include a brief commitment to implement the program for two additional NCC years. (Please refer to the PSI for budget guidance.)
- An estimated summary budget presenting the total projected costs for the anticipated total duration of programming – the base year plus two NCC years.

D.16.b. To exercise the NCC mechanism, the recipient must submit:

- Performance and financial reports on time.
- A request in writing to ECA within 30 days of receiving the NCC invitation from ECA.

- A summary budget that projects expenses through the current year's end.
- A detailed budget outlining expenses for the requested NCC year.
- A brief narrative to support the continuation of the award.

D.16.c. Program Monitoring

For awards using NCCs, in addition to the Substantial Involvement for the Cooperative Agreement, ECA Grants Officer and Program Officer will:

- Monitor the recipient's performance through site visits, desk audits, mandatory performance and financial reports, consultations, and other forms of communication and dialogue before exercising additional NCCs.
- Review and evaluate all quarterly or semi-annual program and financial reports.

Prior Grants Officer approval is required to utilize any remaining unobligated funds from a prior funding period to the subsequent funding period. If the Grants Officer determines that some or all of the unobligated funds are not necessary to perform the program activity, the Grants Officer may decline the recipient's request to use the remainder of the unobligated balance. The Grants Officer may use the unobligated balance to reduce or offset future funding for a subsequent funding period at their discretion. An unobligated balance at the end of a funding period is not sufficient justification to utilize the remainder of funds. ECA will communicate any final determination and approval to use the remainder of any funds via a cost amendment, including any adjustment to new obligation amounts.

D.17. Application Deadline and Method of Submission

Application Deadline Date: Friday, October 4, 2024

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.18. 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.18.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.18.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.18.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.18.d. Timely Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

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

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

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

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

documents not transmitting correctly.

Applicants using slow internet 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.19. 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 ECA Assistant Secretary. 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. Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Program Objectives:** The program narrative should exhibit originality, substance, and relevance to ECA's mission. Reviewers will assess the degree to which proposals engage participants in community activities that involve skills development and leadership training. Proposals should incorporate strategies that creatively utilize local resources to ensure an efficient use of program funds. Strong preference will be given to organizations that choose to place participants in clusters of at least three students (these students should be from different countries, when possible) in a particular Local Coordinator's area of responsibility. A detailed agenda and work plan should adhere to all guidelines described in the solicitation package.
- 2. Multiplier Effect/Impact:** Proposed programs should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of information and establishment of long-term institutional and individual linkages. Reviewers will assess ways in which proposals include innovative ideas to expose U.S. communities to FLEX-related goals and activities that involve students, host families, and schools. These include media outreach, visits to local and national government representatives, internet-based applications, and other interactions. Reviewers will also evaluate substantive plans to prepare FLEX students for their role as active, effective FLEX alumni.
- 3. 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.
- 4. Placement Organization's Record/Institutional Capacity:** Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve program goals.

Reviewers will assess the applicant (and any sub-award recipients) to determine if they offer adequate resources, expertise, and experience to meet program objectives. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with reporting and J-1 Visa regulatory requirements, including monitoring of participants, record-keeping, reporting, and other requirements. ECA will review the record of compliance with 22 CFR 62 et seq. of applicant organizations designated as Exchange Visitor Program Sponsors by ECA's Office of Private Sector Exchange. The applicant organization's record of compliance will be used as one factor in evaluating the record and institutional capacity of the applicant.

5. **Participant Monitoring:** Proposals must include a detailed monitoring plan which addresses student, local coordinator, and host family monitoring and support. Given the importance the U.S. Department of State places on this review criterion, you should dedicate a significant percentage of the narrative to explaining how you will achieve the Department's goals in regard to monitoring the health, safety, and welfare of program participants. You may use the appendices to house additional details and supporting documentation.
6. **Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should include a plan to monitor and evaluate the activity's success by adhering to the information provided in the D.10 Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) section above. 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:** Reviewers will analyze proposed budgets for clarity and cost-effectiveness. They will assess the rationale of the proposed budget and whether the allocation of funds is appropriate to complete tasks outlined in the proposal narrative. Overhead components of the program, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions. Preference will be given to organizations whose proposals demonstrate a high-quality and cost-effective approach to programming.

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 period of performance of the award ends; 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 MyGrants.

- 2.) Required MODE data (see Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation section) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. Frequency of these reports will be determined by MELI and the Program Officer. Aggregate data and the raw data file must be uploaded by the Recipient as an *RPM Performance Report* under the corresponding record for this Cooperative Agreement/Grant in the U.S. Department of State's MyGrants.
- 3.) 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 MyGrants, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the recipient's eligibility for future Cooperative Agreements/Grants.
- 4.) Because the competition will allow for the exercise of NCCs, applicants must submit program and financial reports on time. The due dates for these reports will be included in the cooperative agreement. The program and financial reports must demonstrate substantial progress by addressing progress towards the original approved goals and objectives, relative activities and events, and supporting fiscal data. The reports will be reviewed by both the assigned Grant Officer and Program Officer.
- 5.) Award recipients will be required to present findings from their data collection efforts 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: Paul Schelp, U.S. Department of State, Office Citizen Exchanges, ECA/PE/C/PY, Pschelp@state.gov.

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

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

H. Other Information

Notice

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

Scott Weinhold

Date

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