

**Department of State**

**Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO):** FY 2022 Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program: Student Placement and Monitoring

**Announcement Type:** New Cooperative Agreement

**Funding Opportunity Number:** SFOP0008411

**Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) Number:** 19.415

**Key Date/Application Deadline:** December 6, 2021

**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 2022 Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program: Student Placement and Monitoring Component. The FLEX program, created in 1992, supports U.S. foreign policy goals by promoting mutual understanding and enhancing relations between the United States and the participating European and Eurasian countries. The FLEX program provides scholarships for high school students to live with an American family 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 their host communities across the United States to the cultures and traditions of the people of Europe and Eurasia. To date, more than 30,000 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 2022-2023 academic year. The Bureau anticipates that the cooperative agreements will begin on approximately February 1, 2022, and end on approximately September 30, 2025, subject to the availability of funds and pending successful performance.

It is the Bureau's intent to award approximately 10 to 15 cooperative agreements with a duration of one base year (covering academic year 2022-2023) plus two Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) years (covering academic years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025) for an estimated total, combined funding amount of \$31,095,000. Please see sections A3. (Non-Competitive Continuations) and B. (Federal Award Information) below for additional details.

The Student Placement and Monitoring Component of the FLEX program, which is the subject of this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) announcement, is one of two major components of the FLEX program. The other major component, the Organizational Components cooperative agreement, 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 Student Placement and Monitoring Component 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 under this NOFO, the Student Placement and Monitoring Component awards (e.g., the Placement Organizations), work closely and cooperatively with the Organizational Components award recipient. After award, each Placement Organization is provided with the *FLEX Operational Guidelines*, a manual that gives instructions for these overlapping roles that Placement Organizations must follow for the smooth coordination of tasks.

### **A. Program Description:**

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries...; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations...and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world." The funding authority for the program above is provided through legislation.

The FLEX program annually provides up to approximately 975 high school students between the ages of 15 and 18.5 an opportunity to live with an American family, attend high school, engage in community service, and participate in school and community activities. Funding through the Student Placement and Monitoring Component 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 nations. More information about the FLEX program can be found at: <https://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/future-leaders-exchange>

The ECA Bureau 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, the Bureau 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 the Bureau as viable alternatives. The number of students who will participate in a given year is subject to the availability of funding in the FY 2022 base year (academic year 2022-2023) and in the subsequent two Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) years of FY 2023 (academic year 2023-2024) and FY 2024 (academic year 2024-2025).

The overarching goals of the FLEX program are to engage youth, promote leadership, foster lasting ties between Americans and foreign participants, and promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of the participating Eurasian countries, by enabling the students to:

- gain an understanding of American culture, diversity, and respect for others with differing views and beliefs;
- teach Americans about their home countries and cultures;
- 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.

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/>).

FY 2022 base year participants will begin to arrive in their host communities in late July 2022 and remain for 10 or 11 months until their departure mid-May to late June 2023. 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 U.S. Department of State 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 sub-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 students may come from any of the previously mentioned countries, or others as determined by the Bureau.

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 2023. Approximately 100 students will be selected for each workshop. Your proposal should not contain information about this workshop, as it will be managed by the Organizational Components award recipient, but it should include confirmation that you will notify your students of the opportunity. Placement Organizations will receive additional information from the Organizational Components award recipient about how students can apply for the workshop.

Students participating in Bureau-sponsored academic year high school programs, including FLEX, will be eligible to apply to attend a workshop focused on teaching English as a foreign language, which will be conducted under a separate award from the Bureau, pending the availability of funding. The workshop may include approximately 10-15 FLEX students. Dates, requirements, and other details will be provided during the program, and 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:**

- February 1, 2022: Cooperative agreements awarded, pending the availability of FY 2022 funds.
- Spring 2022: Distribution of student applications to Placement Organizations and recruitment of host schools and families.
- June-July 2022: Pre-departure Orientations conducted overseas by “Organizational Components” award recipient.
- Late July-August 2022: Students begin to arrive in groups.
- Late August 2022: 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 2022: Arrival Orientations for students.
- December 2022: First Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) exercised (for academic year 2023-2024), pending successful performance and the availability of FY 2023 funds.
- January-February 2023: Mid-Year Orientations for on-program students.
- Spring 2023: 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 2023: Re-entry Orientations and departure of students.
- December 2023: Second Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) exercised (for academic year 2024-2025), pending successful performance and the availability of FY 2024 funds.
- September 30, 2025: Approximate end date of cooperative agreement.

#### **A1. Recipient Responsibilities**

The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:

## **1. Materials**

***Pre-Departure Orientation Materials:*** Placement Organizations must prepare student materials, such as a pamphlet or brochure, that will be distributed by the Organizational Components award recipient during Pre-Departure Orientations (PDOs). Materials must be received by the Organizational Components award recipient by May 1, 2022, for distribution at the PDOs. 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. The Bureau will retain copyright use and may distribute materials related to this program. 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. Please see the additional guidance on host family orientations below in section 7. Trainings/Orientations.

## **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. A cluster is defined as a minimum of three ECA-funded scholarship students 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 FLEX, the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX), and the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and

Study (YES) programs. 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 award recipient and not the Placement Organizations award 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 included 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 including 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 award 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 award recipient will receive separate funding to conduct training through a Preparatory Workshop and to provide support for students with disabilities and their Placement Organizations. Your organization will need to coordinate with the Organizational Components award 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 the Preparatory Workshop, 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.

The Organizational Components award recipient, not the Placement Organization, 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 FLEX 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. Your local coordinator training data will be included in ECA's required annual compliance reporting to the Office of Private Sector Programs.

***Host Family Orientation:*** Prior to the students' arrival, the Placement Organization must conduct an in-person FLEX-specific 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. The Program Office recommends that FLEX host family orientations not include families who are hosting private students (unless the family is also hosting an ECA-sponsored scholarship student), 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 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 for 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 award 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 monitors on escalated cases. Placement Organizations' practices and procedures for monitoring FLEX participants must meet the J-1 Visa regulations for the Secondary School Student category (e.g., 22 CFR 62.25). ECA's Youth Programs Division in the Office of Citizen Exchanges provides the following additional guidance that FLEX 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 Placement Organization who lives in 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 Placement Organization 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 Placement Organization 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 will implement a system to collect monthly reports that students fill out and submit themselves. The purpose of these monthly student reports is to allow FLEX students to self-report issues and to allow Placement Organizations to track these issues effectively. Your proposal should provide details on this reporting system, including measures to ensure full participation by the students. Placement Organizations must promptly notify the ECA Participant Monitoring Team and the Organizational Components award recipient about any problems or concerns that are identified from these reports.
- **Student Support:** Local coordinators will identify when students may need additional support from their natural parents, peers, or other Placement Organizations staff; arrange counseling for participants if needed; document the circumstances; and notify Placement Organization staff, who will, when appropriate, notify the Organizational Components award recipient, in order to gain natural parent perspective or concurrence. Placement Organizations will be responsible for communicating with ECA's Participant Monitoring Team in cases of escalated concern, including preparing clear and concise Incident Reports detailing the circumstances of the concern and case developments. .
- **Early Returns:** If a situation leads to an early return request, the Placement Organization should provide ECA with thorough documentation that ensures that the involved parties (e.g., students, host families, and any other involved parties) are aware of the situation and have been included in its resolution. The Organizational Components award recipient will be responsible for liaison with students' natural parents, whose input also must be included in the resolution of the case. Placement Organizations will prepare a clear and concise Incident Report detailing the circumstances and the communications among parties. The report will be shared with the Organizational Components award recipient and the ECA Participant Monitoring Team. Only ECA's Youth Programs Division can make the decision to terminate and repatriate a student. Under no circumstances should Placement Organizations, or anyone acting on their behalf, inform FLEX participants or imply to them that they will be repatriated without specific direction from ECA's Youth Programs Division.

***Site visits:***

- Full-time permanent employees, or official designees of the Placement Organization's headquarters office, must conduct site visits to 20% of its FLEX students in their host communities. The purpose of these visits is to see the FLEX students in their host family and host community environments. The visits should cover a combination of clustered and non-clustered students.
- Placement Organizations should submit site visit plans to ECA at least one month in advance through the on-program support (OPS) email address that will be provided to award recipients.
- In addition to Placement Organization site visits, the ECA Participant Monitoring Team will conduct site visits to students in their host schools and host communities. Placement

Organizations must be prepared to assist the ECA Participant Monitoring Team in the scheduling of ECA monitoring visits throughout the program year.

***Communications Guidance:***

- Placement Organizations must report to ECA any matters that are required to be reported by a sponsor pursuant to the J-1 Visa regulations.
- Placement Organizations must provide ECA's Participant Monitoring Team with reports of all situations that affect the health, safety, or well-being of participants. (Please note that ECA's Youth Programs Division will in turn be responsible for the required reporting of such cases to ECA's Office of Private Sector Programs)
- Placement Organizations are required to enter complete, accurate, and up-to-date placement information into the FLEX web-based database, including any host family or local coordinator changes that may occur during the year, within 48 hours of the time that the change took place.
- Placement Organizations must distribute to all FLEX students information that ECA provides regarding State Department-initiated program activities, including International Education Week, Civic Education Workshop, Global Youth Service Day, and ad-hoc program activities that may arise during the year (e.g., in-person or virtual meetings, briefings, or special events).
- Placement Organizations should inform ECA of any publicity featuring FLEX students or the FLEX program, particularly any engagements with government officials or articles in the media. During the course of any media interaction with FLEX students, Placement Organizations should identify FLEX as a program of the U.S. Department of State.

**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 Benefits Coverage**

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 that opts 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 Disability Components Preparatory Workshop must be covered by the Placement Organization's health benefits policy, or the ASPE benefits plan, while they are participating in the workshop. If you choose not to use ASPE, your proposal must include a copy of your chosen health benefits policy and must include the cost of the policy in the proposed budget. The benefits plan 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. 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 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. Reporting Requirements for detailed instructions on how to submit performance and financial reports.

## **14. 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.

### **15. Placement Organization Website Management**

Your FLEX website page must be easily accessible from your organization's homepage and be kept updated. Please use the U.S. Department of State seal and the American flag 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.

### **16. 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.

### **17. 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.

### **A2. Substantial Involvement:**

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

1. Providing advice and assistance in the execution of all program components.
2. Serving as the liaison between the award recipient and personnel within the U.S. Department of State, including the ECA Bureau, regional bureaus, and overseas posts.

3. Monitoring and evaluating the program and its participants through communications by email, phone, and site visits and providing guidance and decisions on issues regarding student health, safety, and welfare on program. As J-1 visa sponsor, submitting all reports required by J-1 visa regulations to ECA's Office of Private Sector Programs.
4. 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 it, 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.
5. Approving program promotional materials and website information.
6. Representing the U.S. Government as the program sponsor at program activities, orientations, and other program-related events.
7. Publicizing program highlights and responding to Congressional and Department requests for information.
8. Performing an annual performance evaluation and review. Satisfactory performance is a condition of continued administration of the program and execution of Non-Competitive Continuations (NCC's).

### **A3. Non-Competitive Continuations:**

Proposal narratives should include a commitment to implement the program for the base year (covering academic year 2022-2023) plus two additional Non-Competitive Continuation (NCC) years (covering academic years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025), pending successful performance and the availability of funds. The proposal narrative should focus primarily on details specific to the implementation of the base year program, with the understanding that the program design, duration, and participant numbers would be similar when/if the subsequent two Non-Competitive Continuations are exercised. ECA will conduct an annual performance review to determine if a Non-Competitive Continuation will be exercised. Satisfactory performance and the availability of funds is a condition of continued administration of the program and execution of all Non-Competitive Continuations.

### **B. Federal Award Information:**

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

**Fiscal Year Funds:** FY 2022 – base year - \$10,365,000; FY 2023 – first NCC year – \$10,365,000, pending successful performance and the availability of funds; FY 2024 – second NCC year – \$10,365,000, pending successful performance and the availability of funds

**Approximate Total Funding:** \$31,095,000. This figure includes the base year plus two Non-Competitive Continuation years, pending successful performance and the availability of funds. (This is the estimated total, combined funding amount of the 10 to 15 cooperative agreements ECA anticipates awarding through this announcement.)

**Approximate Number of Awards:** 10 to 15 cooperative agreements.

**Average Award Amount:** Funding level is dependent on the number of proposed students, the monitoring plan, the quality of support, and the volume of activities.

**Floor of Award Range:** To be eligible, 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 sub-recipients.

**Ceiling of Award Range:** See immediately above.

**Anticipated Award Date:** February 1, 2022, pending the availability of funds.

**Anticipated Project Completion Date:** September 30, 2025. This date reflects the anticipated duration of the award – one base year (2022-2023) plus two NCC years (2023-2024 and 2024-2025).

**Additional Information:** The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Cooperative agreements will be awarded for an initial period of 20 months (the base year) with Non-Competitive Continuations for two additional 12-month periods (the first NCC year and the second NCC year). ECA will notify the recipient of its intention to exercise or not to exercise a Non-Competitive Continuation at least 90 days in advance of expiration of the current year after an internal evaluation of the recipient's performance. The decision to exercise a Non-Competitive Continuation will depend both on the satisfactory performance of the recipient and the availability of funds.

## **C. Eligibility Information:**

**C.1. Eligible applicants:** U.S. public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 USC 501(c)(3) may submit applications for this competition. Applicants must have nonprofit status with the IRS at the time of application. Please see the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) for additional information.

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

**C.2. Other Eligibility Requirements:** The following additional eligibility requirements apply to this NOFO announcement:

- a.) Grants or Cooperative Agreements awarded by ECA to organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs are limited to \$130,000. Since an award under this NOFO must support at least 20 students, and since the costs required to support this number of students will exceed \$130,000, organizations with fewer than four years' experience in conducting international exchanges are

ineligible to apply under this competition. The Bureau encourages all eligible applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing in support of its programs.

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.) 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, the Bureau encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing 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 that 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, Bureau 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 Bureau'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.3o.. “Application Deadline and Method of Submission” section below.

**D.3a. Unique Entity Identifier Number:** You are required to have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number to apply for a grant or cooperative agreement from the U.S. Government. This number is a nine-digit identification number, which uniquely identifies business entities. Obtaining a UEI number is easy and there is no charge. To obtain a UEI number, access <http://www.dnb.com> or call 1-866-705-5711. Please ensure that your UEI (Data Universal Numbering System or DUNS) number is included in the appropriate box of the SF – 424 which is part of the formal application package. For more detailed instructions for obtaining a UEI (DUNS) number, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html>

**D.3b. Required Proposal Elements:** All proposals must contain an executive summary, proposal narrative, budget, and budget narrative. The executive summary should, in one double-spaced page, describe your organization’s vision for the program; requested funding level; number of participants supported; cost-sharing amount; and anticipated program impact. The proposal narrative should, in no more than 20 double-spaced pages, describe your proposed program structure; staffing pattern; project management; geographic scope; participant monitoring plan; host family recruitment plan; program evaluation methodology; planned program activities; and work plan/calendar of activities. In addition, please include staff resumes, sample evaluation instruments, sample training and orientation agendas, and sample resource materials or handbooks (these sample items can be included in an appendix that does not count under the 20-page proposal narrative limit). Please see sections D.3k. Budget Format and D.3n. Allowable costs for the program below, as well as the Proposal Submission Instruction (PSI) document, for detailed information on the budget format, allowable costs, and the required budget narrative.

**D.3c. Required Registration with the System for Award Management (SAM):** All federal award applicants must be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) database in order to submit a proposal in response to an open competition on Grants.gov.

All federal award recipients must maintain a current registration in the SAM database. Recipients must maintain accurate and up-to-date information in [www.SAM.gov](http://www.SAM.gov) until all program and financial activity and reporting is completed on any issued award. Recipients must review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration and more frequently if required information changes or another award is granted. There is no cost associated with registering or updating SAM.gov accounts. Failure to register in SAM.gov will render applicants ineligible to receive funding.



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

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

**D.3.d. Federal Awardee Performance & Integrity Information System (FAPIIS):** Prior to making a Federal Assistance award over \$250,000, the Federal agency is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in FAPIIS (see 41 U.S.C. 2313) and accessible through SAM.gov. If an Applicant is currently in FAPIIS, they can comment on any information about its organization that a Federal awarding agency previously entered. The Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in FAPIIS, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR §200.205 Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

**D.3e. 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://afsism.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](mailto: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.3f. Adherence To All Regulations Governing The J Visa:** The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs places critically important emphases on the security and proper administration of the Exchange Visitor (J visa) Programs and adherence by award recipients and sponsors to all regulations governing the J visa. Therefore, proposals should demonstrate the applicant's capacity to meet all requirements governing the administration of the Exchange Visitor Programs as set forth in 22 CFR 62, including the oversight of Responsible Officers and Alternate Responsible Officers, screening and selection of program 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 Organizational Components award recipient (not the Placement Organization award recipients under this NOFO announcement) 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 Designation, Private Sector Programs Division  
U.S. Department of State  
SA-4E (Bldg. 3)  
2430 E Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20037

**D.3g. Diversity, Freedom, and Democracy Guidelines:** Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, 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. 'Diversity' should be interpreted in the broadest sense and encompass differences including race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. Proposals should demonstrate how diversity will enhance the program's goals and objectives and the participants' exchange experience. Please refer to the review criteria under the 'Support of Diversity' section of this document as well as the DIVERSITY, FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY section in the "Proposal Submission Instructions" document for specific suggestions on incorporating diversity into the total 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," the Bureau "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries." Public Law 106 - 113 requires that the governments of the countries described above do not have inappropriate influence in the selection process. Proposals should reflect advancement of these goals in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

**D.3h. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation:**

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 Organization 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. 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 A1.8.

**D.3i. Virtual Exchange Component:** ECA welcomes innovative ideas on how organizations can leverage appropriate mobile and/or online technologies to maintain engagement among exchange participants, encourage project collaboration and widen participation in the overall project to a broader audience. ECA strongly encourages organizations submitting proposals in response to this solicitation to suggest one or more virtual exchange components to complement the in-person exchange. The virtual exchange components could come before, during, or after the physical exchange. The objective for the virtual exchange components, defined as technology-enabled, sustainable, people-to-people, cross-cultural exchanges, 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, including our International Exchange Alumni space. 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.3j. 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.3k. Budget Format:** Applicants must submit SF-424A – “Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs” along with a comprehensive budget for the entire program. There must be a summary budget, a detailed budget, and a budget narrative. Applicants may provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

### **D.3l. 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.3m. Non-Competitive Continuations: For competitions that will exercise a Non-Competitive Continuation applicants must submit:**

- the SF-424A, which must include the budget request amount for the base-year of the program;
- a detailed proposal narrative and budget for the base year of funding (Please refer to the Proposal Submission Instruction Document (PSI) for general budget guidance.). The narrative should also include a brief commitment to implement the program for the base year, plus two additional non-competitive continuation years, pending successful program performance and the availability of funds; and
- an abbreviated/estimated summary budget presenting the total projected costs for the anticipated total duration of programming (base year, plus one/two non-competitive continuation years).

**To exercise the Non-Competitive Continuation mechanism the recipient will be required to submit:**

1. performance and financial reports on time;
2. a request in writing to ECA at least 30 days in receipt of the NCC invitation;
3. a summary budget that projects expenses through the end of the current year;
4. a detailed budget outlining expenses for the requested non-competitive continuation year; and
5. a brief narrative to support the continuation of the award.

**The ECA Grants Officer and Program Officer will:**

- 1.) Closely 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 non-competitive continuations. (Additional details regarding monitoring and oversight of the program by ECA representatives will be provided at the time the base-year award is made.)
- 2.) Review and evaluate all mandatory semi-annual program and financial reports.
  - All program and financial reporting requirements must be current and up-to-date before the Bureau will exercise additional non-competitive continuations.
  - Any/all concerns, issues, or modifications requested by the Grants Officer or Program Officer to the original program design or method of implementation must be responded to in writing.
  - The ECA Grants Officer and Program Officer will review and advise of ECA's approval or disapproval of the response before issuing subsequent non-competitive continuations.
- 3.) Prior Grants Officer approval is required to utilize the remainder from an unobligated balance 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 utilize the remainder from the unobligated balance.

The Grants Officer may, at their discretion, use the unobligated balance to reduce or offset future funding for a subsequent funding period. An unobligated balance at the end of a funding period is not sufficient justification to utilize the remainder of funds. A final determination and approval to utilize the remainder of any funds will be communicated via a cost amendment with adjustment, if any, to new obligation amounts.

- i. The request to utilize the remainder from an unobligated balance must include:
  - a. A brief narrative why funds remain unobligated and how the unobligated funds will be used to complete the previously approved goals and objectives of the program; and,
  - b. A detailed budget that reflects the amount of unobligated funds to date, and anticipated expenditures in the subsequent period of performance for all cost categories under the authorized budget.

**D.3n. 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)
  - 8) Insurance costs, if not using the Bureau's ASPE benefits plan
  - 9) Salaries and benefits, 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) \$125 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 (such as yearbook, locker fees, gym clothing, etc.) 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 visits to 20% of students

6) Travel costs for at least one person (and not more than two) from each organization, including any sub-award recipients, to attend the in-person, two-day ECA Youth Programs Division annual meeting in Washington, DC every year.

### **D.3o. Application Deadline and Method of Submission:**

Application Deadline Date: Monday, December 06, 2021

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.3p. 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>).

#### **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>

#### **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>

#### **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](mailto:support@grants.gov)

#### **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 technically ineligible.

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

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

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

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

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

**PLEASE NOTE:** ECA bears no responsibility for applicant timeliness of submission or data errors resulting from transmission or conversion processes for proposals submitted via Grants.gov. Prior to submitting applications through Grants.gov, please ensure you meet all Grants.gov system and software requirements, including Adobe software compatibility. You can verify if your version of Adobe software is compatible with Grants.gov, by visiting <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>.

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

**D.3q. Intergovernmental Review of Applications:** Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

## **E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

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

### **E.1. Review Criteria**

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

- 1. Program Planning/Ability to Achieve Program Objectives:** The program narrative should exhibit originality, substance, and relevance to the Bureau'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. Support of Diversity:** Proposals should show substantive support of the Bureau's policy on diversity. Proposals should demonstrate how diversity will be achieved in the different aspects of program administration and of program design, content and implementation, including individual grantee/participant recruitment, selection and placement. It is important that proposals have a clearly articulated diversity plan and not simply express general support for the concept of diversity.
- 3. 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.

- 4. Participant Monitoring:** Proposals must include a detailed monitoring plan that addresses student monitoring and support, and the role of local coordinators, host families, and others. Given the importance the U.S. Department of State places on ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of participants, you should dedicate a significant percentage of the narrative to explaining how you will support and ensure the health, safety, and welfare of program participants. You may use the appendices to house additional details and supporting documentation.
- 5. Project Evaluation:** Proposals should include a plan to evaluate the activity's success, both as the activities unfold and at the end of the program. The Bureau recommends that the proposal include a draft survey questionnaire or other technique plus description of a methodology to use to link outcomes to original project objectives. Award-receiving organizations/institutions will be expected to submit intermediate reports after each project component is concluded or quarterly, whichever is less frequent.
- 6. 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, then allocated and committed through internal Bureau procedures. Successful applicants will receive a Federal Assistance Award (FAA) from the Bureau's Grants Office. The FAA and the original proposal with subsequent modifications (if applicable) shall be the only binding authorizing document between the recipient and the U.S. Government. The FAA will be signed by an authorized Grants Officer, and transmitted to the recipient's responsible officer as identified in the application.

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

**F.2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements:** Terms and Conditions for the Administration of ECA agreements include the following: 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 (Effective December 26, 2014, replacing the previous circulars).

For a copy of the OMB Guidance cited, please contact the U.S. Government Publishing Office or download from the [www.ecfr.gov](http://www.ecfr.gov) website.

Please reference the following websites for additional information:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb>  
<https://www.state.gov/m/a/ope/index.htm>

**F.3. Reporting Requirements:** You must provide ECA with an electronic copy of the following required reports:

- 1.) Performance Progress Reports (PPRs) shall be required at a minimum annually and no more frequently than quarterly. Annual reports shall be due 120 calendar days after the cooperative agreement 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](mailto:ECA_SAMSDomestic@state.gov).

- 3.) A final program and financial report no more than 120 days after the expiration or termination of the award.
- 4.) Because the Competition will allow for the exercise of Non-Competitive Continuations (NCC), 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.

Award recipients will be required to provide reports analyzing their evaluation findings to the Bureau in their regular program reports. (Please refer to D.3h. Program Performance Monitoring and Evaluation information.)

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

**F.4. Program Data Requirements:** Award recipients will be required to maintain specific data on program participants and activities in an electronically accessible database format that can be shared with the Bureau as required. Award recipients must ensure that all Personally Identifiable Information (PII) from the participants is protected from access by unauthorized parties and that ECA is notified immediately if the recipient discovers any leaks of PII. At a minimum, recipients must maintain the following data:

- 1) Name, address, contact information, and biographic sketch of all persons who travel internationally on funds provided by the agreement or who benefit from the award funding but do not travel.

- 2) Itineraries of international and domestic travel, providing dates of travel and cities in which any exchange experiences take place. Final schedules for in-country and U.S. activities must be received by the ECA Program Officer at least three work days prior to the official opening of the activity.

## G. Agency Contacts

For questions about this announcement, contact: Paul Schelp, U.S. Department of State, Office of Citizen Exchanges, ECA/PE/C/PY, SA-5, Floor 3, 2200 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037, telephone (202) 632-6363, or e-mail [pschelp@state.gov](mailto:pschelp@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 Bureau representative. Explanatory information provided by the Bureau that contradicts published language will not be binding. Issuance of the NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. The Bureau reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards will be subject to periodic programmatic and financial reporting and evaluation requirements as outlined in the NOFO.

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Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
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