Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO):
FY 2023 United States South Pacific Scholarship Program and FY 2023 United States Timor-Leste Scholarship Program
Announcement Type: New Cooperative Agreement
Funding Opportunity Number: SFOP0009590
Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) Number: 19.011
Key Date/Application Deadline: June 2, 2023

Executive Summary:

The Office of Academic Exchange Programs of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) announces an open competition for an assistance award to administer the FY 2023 United States South Pacific (USSP) Scholarship Program and the FY 2023 United States Timor-Leste (USTL) Scholarship Program. Eligible applicants may submit a proposal to administer one or both of the scholarship programs. U.S. public and private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in Internal Revenue Code section 26 CFR 1.501(c)(3) may submit proposals to organize and carry out academic exchange program activities for approximately eight (8) participants for USSP program (eligible nations for USSP are listed below in the Overview section) and three (3) participants for the USTL program.

The Office plans to issue a cooperative agreement to support eight participants to undertake degree studies in the United States for the FY 2023 USSP program for approximately $1,000,000. The Office also plans to issue a cooperative agreement to support three participants to undertake degree studies in the United States for the USTL program for approximately $375,000. Working closely with Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies in the East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region, the award recipient(s) will be responsible for the administration of the programs, including publicity and recruitment, review of academic credentials, convening review panels and assisting with merit-based competitive selection and nomination, placing students at appropriate U.S. institutions for academic degree study leading to an undergraduate or graduate degree, facilitating student travel to the United States, providing orientation, enrichment activities, and pre-return activities, providing monitoring and support services, conducting on-going monitoring and evaluation, and follow-up with program alumni.

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.

In response to Public Law 103-236, which directed the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to provide scholarships to students from the sovereign island nations of the South Pacific region and Timor-Leste, ECA created the USSP Scholarship Program and the USTL Scholarship Program for academic study at accredited colleges and universities in the United States.

A.2. Purpose
United States South Pacific Scholarship Program Overview:
The USSP Scholarship Program was established by the United States Congress to provide opportunities for eight (8) U.S. undergraduate and graduate degree students from South Pacific nations to study in fields important for the region's future development. Public Law 103-236 authorized academic scholarships to qualified students from the sovereign island nations of the South Pacific region to pursue degree study at institutions of higher education in the United States. Students from the following nations are eligible to apply for these scholarships: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Fields of study are based on recommendations from U.S. Department of State EAP regional bureau representatives and Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies in the region and include public administration, public health, STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), education, environmental studies, agriculture, business, NGO management, political science, gender studies, journalism, and others. Students selected for these scholarships enroll in undergraduate degree programs or in master's degree programs. South Pacific student applicants will not require pre-academic English training, but at the master's level may benefit from up to one year of preparatory study in the U.S. prior to enrolling in a formal master's degree program if they possess the three-year baccalaureate degree commonly offered in the Pacific Islands region.

United States Timor-Leste Scholarship Program Overview:
The goal of the USTL Scholarship Program is to identify a select cadre of academically talented Timorese who are expected to assume future leadership roles in Timor-Leste's development and support their undergraduate level study and degrees at accredited higher education institutions in the United States. An objective of the USTL program is to develop the human resource capacity of the Timorese people, especially in fields such as agricultural science, business, communications, economics, education, environmental science, international relations, political science, psychology and sociology.

The eligible academic fields of study were selected to emphasize the areas of critical development need in Timor-Leste. Students selected for these three (3) scholarships can pursue undergraduate degree programs plus up to one year of pre-academic English training. In almost all cases, USTL students will have undergraduate credits for transfer from their home institutions.

A.3. Program Specific Guidelines
Program administration activities should cover the time period of approximately September 1, 2023 through August 31, 2028. It is expected that funding will annually support approximately eight (8) students in the USSP program and approximately three (3) students in the USTL program for up to four years of academic study plus pre-academic English language instruction or a preparatory bridging semester/year as needed. This federal assistance award will cover the entire program in the United States for selected participants. Students must return home following the completion of their ECA-funded programs.

For both programs, administrative responsibilities include the following broad categories: program planning and management; recruitment and selection support; placement; orientation; participant supervision and support services; fiscal management and budgeting; and program reporting and monitoring and evaluation. The proposal should include yearly budget projections for the full duration of the award(s). Programs must comply with J-1 Exchange Visitor Program regulations.

Participants
The U.S. South Pacific Scholarship Program and the U.S. Timor-Leste Scholarship Program emphasize the selection of young men and women with leadership experience or potential who will have a positive impact on their country's future development. The Bureau seeks scholarship participants who represent all aspects of their home country's diversity. Individuals living in the United States are not eligible and preference is given to those without significant U.S. or third-country undergraduate study experience.

Timorese applicants should have functional English skills but often require pre-academic English training in the United States prior to beginning their undergraduate study. South Pacific applicants will not need pre-academic English training, but at the master's level may benefit from up to one year of preparatory study, known as a bridging semester or year, if they possess the three-year baccalaureate degree commonly offered in the Pacific Islands region.

Recruitment and Selection
The award recipient(s) should maintain separate identities for the U.S. South Pacific Scholarship Program and the U.S. Timor-Leste Scholarship Program. The description of study opportunities should include essential information for prospective participants who are unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system. Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies in Timor-Leste and across the South Pacific region will assist with initial screening for minimum eligibility.

The award recipient(s) will convene panels for final academic review, including at least one country/regional expert to provide country expertise, and will present a final slate of principal and alternate candidates to ECA for approval. Review panels taking place in the region will include one U.S. Mission representative and selection methodology should prominently reinforce the expectation that students will be active alumni and leaders in their home communities following the conclusion of the program.

Pre-academic and English Language Training

For the U.S. Timor-Leste Program, the proposal must describe plans for pre-academic preparation and English language training, and for administering TOEFL/IELTS or other placement tests as required by U.S. host institutions. It is assumed that most USTL participants will need up to one year of English language instruction in the United States. Several levels of intensive English-language courses, from beginning to advanced, should be made available.

Placement

The award recipient will work with those participants who have prior undergraduate study to obtain transcripts from their home institutions and ensure that they receive maximum academic credit. The award recipient should arrange academic placement of the students at appropriate U.S. institutions. The award recipient will work to obtain financial aid, scholarships, tuition awards, in-state tuition, etc., and explain the nature of, and funding for, the program to U.S. academic host institutions. Students may be clustered together or receive separate placements. The proposal should describe how students will be identified as participants of the U.S. South Pacific and/or U.S. Timor-Leste Scholarship Program on their host campuses.

Orientation Programs

The U.S. Embassy will arrange pre-departure orientations, as appropriate, in close coordination with the award recipient. Key points concerning academic requirements and coursework, housing, U.S. campus life, what to pack, finances, health and safety, and other critical issues should be included in the material. The award recipient should design the materials to serve as a useful post-arrival reference as well, supplemented with additional information.

Internships (Optional)

Applicants may propose a U.S. internship experience for students, either physical or virtual, with or without academic credit. The goal of this program is to provide students with a paid or unpaid practical internship of approximately four to six weeks over a summer during their scholarship program, authorized under the Academic Training section of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program regulations. Internships must directly relate to the participants' major field of study and the students must be in good academic standing. ECA's intention for this component is to provide students with internships and not summer jobs.

The applicant should estimate internship costs, such as public transportation, within the proposed budget and should guide students in their search and be responsible for approving internship placements, granting academic training in advance, arranging for academic credit, if applicable, monitoring students during their internships, and conducting an overall review of the internship component of the program.

Program Activities
The proposal should describe innovative plans for orientations, goals, and approaches for the academic portion of the program, including any special academic enrichment activities, cultural and community projects, performance monitoring and follow-up, and alumni tracking. Proposed activities might include volunteer work, student presentations to the local community, and matching of students with Americans, such as a local host family. The proposal must demonstrate that the recipient organization(s) can provide effective support systems (such as tutoring, counseling, host family, mentor or buddy system, consultation with student adviser) to the students during the program. The applicant should assign an adviser or coordinator who can serve as a central resource to students regarding their scholarship, the J-1 visa program, and cross-cultural adjustment. The adviser also serves as a link between the students and ECA.

To support the Department's goal of promoting mutual understanding, opportunities for academic and enrichment experiences related to U.S. institutions, society, and culture are essential. ECA expects students to study in the United States throughout the term of the program, and not to travel to third countries for study there, even with other sources of funding. ECA welcomes creative ideas for exposing students to, and increasing their understanding of, key elements of American civil society, such as discussion groups on community issues, visits to political campaign offices and polling places, attendance at school board or city council meetings, and civic-related volunteer work. Student attendance at museums, concerts, plays, and other cultural or community events should be encouraged and facilitated whenever possible.

As a way to enrich the campus experience and ensure greater interaction with American peers, students may be eligible for part-time campus employment not to exceed ten hours per week with ECA approval. Prior to eligibility, students must successfully complete one academic semester with at least a 3.0 grade point average.

Participant Monitoring and Tracking
The proposal should discuss how the award recipient will monitor participants' progress in achieving program goals and objectives at their U.S. host institutions (e.g. surveys, interviews, work plans). The proposal should describe the frequency of communication with the participants and with representatives of the U.S. host institutions, and outline performance goals or benchmarks for each semester in the United States.

The proposal should also discuss the methods for gauging the quality of program activities, tracking each participant's success, and monitoring and resolving any problems that arise. Program staff working with the participants should demonstrate strong interpersonal and communication skills, sensitivity, and a flexible approach that is responsive to each student and his or her circumstances. Senior management should ensure appropriate oversight.

Participant Responsibilities
In accordance with J-1 regulations, ECA expects participants to maintain the equivalent of a full course of study. They should also maintain at least a "B" average and must comply with the academic and other requirements of the program and host institution.

USSP and USTL participants are subject to the 212(e) two-year home residency requirement and must return immediately to their home countries upon completion of the academic program. ECA may remove students from the program for academic failure, behavioral misconduct, or inability to fulfill the terms of the program. The award recipient will make the final decision to remove a student after it consults with and receives written approval from ECA. Each student shall be required to read and sign a grant Terms and Conditions document.

Alumni Tracking and Follow-On Activities
Alumni activities are an important part of ECA's academic exchange programs. The applicant should indicate how they will facilitate and promote participant and alumni use of the U.S. Department of State's International Exchange Alumni website (www.alumni.state.gov). Alumni tracking is critical for measuring the longer-term impact of the program and for the implementation of worthwhile follow-on activities. The proposal should describe how the award recipient will maintain long-term linkages with alumni and should detail how the award recipient will update alumni records beyond the duration of the award. ECA strongly urges the applicant to outline how it will creatively organize and financially support alumni activities at a minimal cost to ECA, and how its efforts will be coordinated with ECA and Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies. Additionally, the award recipient should share noteworthy alumni activities and accomplishments with ECA regularly.

Visa and Tax Requirements
The award recipient must sponsor all participants under an Exchange Visitor Program on a J-1 visa. ECA will designate a representative from the recipient organization as an Alternate Responsible Officer, who will be responsible for processing DS-2019 forms and ensuring that all needed documentation reaches the relevant overseas U.S. consular offices. In addition, administration of these full scholarships must comply with reporting and withholding regulations for federal, state, and local taxes as applicable.

A.4. Recipient Responsibilities
The responsibilities of the recipient organization are as follows:

1. Support outreach and publicity efforts by Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies by announcing and publicizing the annual scholarship competition broadly;
2. Distribute application and informational materials about the scholarship programs to Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies, which will take the lead on recruitment and nomination;
3. Field inquiries from prospective candidates;
4. Convene review panels, including at least one country/regional expert for final academic review and assessment of U.S. university admissibility;
5. Review candidate applications to determine competitiveness and suitability for program; review academic credentials for completeness and relevance to proposed field of study;
6. Place the participants at appropriate U.S. institutions for academic degree study leading to a bachelor's or master's degree in one of the pre-approved fields of study listed in the solicitation;
7. Arrange round-trip travel for the participants from their home cities to their U.S. host institutions;
8. Ensure that participants receive pre-departure and arrival orientations;
9. Enroll participants in the Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) Health Benefit Plan, in order to comply with J-1 visa requirements and assist with claims as necessary;
10. Develop and facilitate innovative cultural enrichment activities;
11. Assist participants in arranging optional local, U.S.-based summer internships, as applicable, including virtual opportunities;
12. Monitor participants' adjustment and academic performance;
13. Ensure participant health, safety and well-being;
14. In close consultation with ECA, assess the program and its impact on the participants during their stay in the United States and after they return to their home countries, developing follow-on activities to facilitate long-term linkages and relationships;
15. Manage all financial aspects of the program (e.g., participant stipends, housing allowances, host university agreements, activity costs);
16. Report programmatic, financial and statistical information to ECA;
17. Manage and monitor all aspects of the participants' J-1 visa status, including the issuance of DS-2019 forms; and
18. Respond fully and promptly to requests for information from ECA or U.S. Embassies relating to the participants and alumni.

A.5. Substantial Involvement:

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

1. Liaise with Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy, and country desk officer at the Department of State.

2. Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies assist with recruitment and selection activities, including but not limited to - announce and publicize annual scholarship competition(s) broadly; distribute scholarship application materials; advise prospective participants and/or direct inquiries to the award recipient; assist with screening applications; and coordinate pre-departure and alumni activities as appropriate.
3. Provide input and approve host institutions;
4. Review and approve selection decisions and academic placement assignments prior to offer of award;
5. Approve changes to students' proposed academic field or institution, and any other decisions related to extraordinary circumstances during the award.

B. Federal Award Information

Type of Award: Cooperative Agreement. ECA's level of involvement in this program is listed under A.5. Substantial Involvement.
Fiscal Year Funds: 2023
Approximate Total Funding: $1,375,000
Approximate Number of Awards: 1-2
Approximate Average Award: $1,000,000 for the administration of USSP program; $375,000 for the administration of USTL program
Floor of Award Range: $375,000
Ceiling of Award Range: $1,375,000
Anticipated Award Date: September 1, 2023
Anticipated Project Completion Date: August 31, 2028
Additional Information: Pending successful implementation of these programs and the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, it is ECA's intent to renew this/these cooperative agreement(s) for two additional consecutive fiscal years, before openly competing it/them again.

The Department reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase proposed project configurations, budgets, and participant numbers in accordance with the programs' needs and the availability of funds.

The Department also reserves the right to modify the composition of the final award(s).

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. 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.3. and D.5. below).

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

a.) ECA's grant guidelines require that organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchanges be limited to $130,000 in ECA funding. ECA anticipates making one to two cooperative agreement(s), in an amount of over $130,000 to support all costs required to implement this exchange program. Therefore, organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchanges are ineligible to apply under this competition.

b.) All proposals must comply with the requirements stated in the NOFO, POGI (if applicable), 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 *only* consider the submission made closest in time to the NOFO deadline; that submission would constitute the one and only proposal ECA would review from that applicant.

Please note: Applicant organizations are defined by their legal name, and EIN number as stated on their completed SF-424 and additional supporting documentation outlined in the Proposal Submission Instructions (PSI) document.

C.3.   Cost Sharing or Matching Funds
There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost sharing required for this competition. However, ECA encourages applicants to provide maximum levels of cost sharing and funding in support of its programs. When cost sharing is offered, it is understood and agreed that the applicant must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in its proposal and later included in an approved agreement. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. For accountability, you must maintain written records to support all costs which are claimed as your contribution, as well as costs to be paid by the Federal government. Such records are subject to audit. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's Guidance 2 CFR Parts 200 and 600, entitled the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

In the event you do not provide the minimum amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the approved budget, ECA's contribution may be reduced in like proportion.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

D.1.   Solicitation Package Location

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

D.2.   Content and Form of Submission

Applicants must follow all instructions in the Solicitation Package, including the Proposal Submission Instruction (PSI) document, which consists of required application forms and standard guidelines for proposal preparation. The application should be submitted per the instructions under D.15. "Application Deadline and Method of Submission" section below.

D.3.   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.4.   Required Proposal Elements

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

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

All 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 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.6.   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.7.   Required Registration with SAMS Domestic

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

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

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

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

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

ECA places critically important 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 award recipient(s) will be responsible for issuing DS-2019 forms to participants in these programs.

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 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility" review criterion of this document for more information on how this will be reviewed as a part of any application. Please also refer to the "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility" section in the "Proposal Submission Instructions" document for specific suggestions on incorporating DEIA into the proposal.

Public Law 104-319 provides that "in carrying out programs of educational and cultural exchange in countries whose people do not fully enjoy freedom and democracy," ECA "shall take appropriate steps to provide opportunities for participation in such programs to human rights and democracy leaders of such countries."

Public Law 106 - 113 requires that the governments of the countries described above do not have inappropriate influence in the selection process. Proposals should reflect advancement of these goals in their program contents, to the full extent deemed feasible.

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

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

ECA created the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework to measure the performance of ECA programs. **The MODE Framework provides standard indicators and corresponding survey questions to ensure consistent measures across all ECA programs.**

More resources and guidance documents on the MODE Framework are available online at: https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/mode-framework-eca-applicants-and.

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

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

- E1.1.10: Percent of foreign participants who traveled to the United States for the first time during their program (core indicator)
- E1.1.12: Percent of foreign participants indicating a change in understanding of third-party countries' cultures and values (USSP Only)
- E1.1.13: Percent of foreign participants who are more likely to recommend the United States as a good place to study
- E1.1.17: Percent of foreign participants with more favorable opinions of the American People (core indicator)
- E1.1.18: Percent of foreign participants indicating an increase in understanding of United States culture and values (core indicator)
- E1.1.19: Percent of participants agreeing with statements in support of democratic values (core indicator)
- Objective 2: Increase the impact that participants and alumni have on their communities / countries
  - E2.0.01: Percent of foreign participants that volunteer in their host communities
  - E2.0.04: Number of hours that foreign participants spend volunteering in their host communities
  - o Sub-Objective 2.2: Foster participants' belief that civic engagement benefits communities/countries
    - E2.2.01: Percent of participants who have more confidence in their ability to have an impact in their home country (core indicator)
- Objective 3: Strengthen engagement among participants, alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions
  - E3.0.02: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of Americans (core indicator)
  - E3.0.04: Percent of foreign participants who report increasing their network of third country nationals (USSP Only)
  - E3.0.07: Percent of participants who identify as a Department of State program participant (core indicator)
- Objective 4: Strengthen personal, professional, and technical abilities and aptitudes of participants and beneficiaries
  - E4.0.03: Percent of participants reporting an increase in soft skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.05: Percent of participants who report an increase in technical skills as a result of their program participation
  - E4.0.09: Percent of participants reporting an increase in language skills as a result of their program participation (USTL Only)
  - o Sub-Objective 4.1: Participants engage in language, academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs
    - E4.1.01: Total number of participants (core indicator)
    - E4.1.02: Total number of program cohorts (core indicator)

- Objective 6: Increase Capacity of ECA partner institutions to achieve program strategic goals
  - o Sub-Objective 6.1: Increase capacity of implementing partners and educational institutions for the internationalization of programs
    - ▪ E6.1.02: Number of exchange participants from or hosted by Minority-Serving Institutions participating in ECA (both funded and private sector) exchanges (core indicator)
- Objective 8: Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs by leveraging the Bureau's resources, policy, and stakeholder relationships
    - ▪ E8.0.03: Response rate for participant surveys (core indicator)

Performance Monitoring Plans (PMP)
ECA recommends the use of a PMP to serve as the primary reference document for performance monitoring for this award. If used, the PMP is an important part of any proposal, as it outlines how the applicant plans to track progress towards the proposed program's goals and objectives through indicators and corresponding data collection questions. A PMP document that includes all MODE Framework indicators is a part of this solicitation's attachments.

Specific instructions on how to modify the PMP to be responsive to this solicitation are included in that document. While ECA recommends the applicant use the PMP format provided, this is not a requirement. If a PMP is not included in the proposal, applicants should provide similar information to that found in the suggested PMP format, in a presentation of your choice. A training on how to complete a PMP is available here: https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit/mode-framework-eca-applicants-and. Successful PMPs (or similar documentation) should include the following:

- Objectives. Programmatic objectives are statements of the condition(s) that state what the program is designed to achieve. Objectives are therefore bound by the resources and timeframe of the program and must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART; see the ECA Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Innovation (MELI) Unit's pages on the ECA website for more information: https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-evaluation-division/capacity-building). In addition to those outlined above, the applicant may propose other program objectives from the MODE Framework, the Functional Bureau Strategy (https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau), or other applicant-designed program-specific objectives.

- <u>Indicators</u>. Performance indicators are measures used to gauge progress toward programmatic objectives and sub-objectives. Indicators should be as specific as possible (following the SMART principles) and include any proposed disaggregations (meaning, breakdowns of the data by subgroups, such as gender or country; the PMP lists the demographic questions required to obtain the information necessary to report the disaggregations). Each indicator should also include a target number to be achieved. A target is a planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe.

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

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

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

Program Performance M&E Narrative
The applicant should include information within the program narrative section(s) of the proposal that outlines how the applicant intends to measure the indicators listed above. This will be separate from the PMP and should include but not be limited to:
- An overview of resources available to the applicant that outline the team structure and responsibilities surrounding performance monitoring.

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

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

D.11. Virtual Exchange Component
When changing political, health, environmental, or other similar circumstances require a suspension or halt of in-person activities and where ECA determines that a virtual alternative is appropriate and viable, award recipients should demonstrate the ability and capacity to transition from in-person to virtual exchanges. Proposals should demonstrate the organization's capacity to provide innovative options for virtual activities to substitute for in-person engagement for program participants. Organizations should consider how they will implement virtual exchange activities, given the potential limits to internet access from participants in some locations and while continuing to advance foreign policy objectives and achieve lasting benefits for U.S. citizens and international participants.

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

Virtual exchange components would be coordinated with and approved by the ECA program office and U.S. missions abroad on a project-by-project basis.

D.12.   Communications Guidance for ECA Recipients
All ECA Recipients must adhere to the requirements in ECA's Communications Guidance on the creation of program branding and attribution, websites, social media, and press.

D.13.   Budget Format
Applicants must submit SF-424A – "Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs" along with a comprehensive budget for the entire program. Budget requests may not exceed $1,375,000 to administer two programs or $1,000,000 to administer USSP or $375,000 to administer USTL. At the $1,000,000 level of funding, applicants are expected to budget for approximately eight (8) students for degree study. At the $375,000 level of funding, applicants are expected to budget for approximately three (3) students for degree study.

The number of participants that the organization proposes to sponsor should be clearly stated. There must be a summary budget, a detailed budget, and a budget narrative. Applicants should provide separate sub-budgets for each program component, phase, location, or activity to provide clarification.

D.13.a. Allowable costs for the program include the following:
1)Publicity, recruitment, selection, placement and communication with applicants and participants.
2) Travel for student participants between home and program location.
3) Tuition and fees, stipends for living costs, book allowances, and other necessary maintenance costs and expenses for the students.
4) Advising and monitoring of students.
5) Academic, diversity equity and inclusion considerations/accommodations, cultural support and enrichment activities.
6) Pre-return activities and evaluation.
7) Staff and administrative expenses to carry out the program activities.

Overhead costs should be as low as possible. Please refer to the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and formatting instructions.

D.14.   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.15. Application Deadline and Method of Submission
Application Deadline Date: Friday, June 2, 2023.
Method of Submission: Applications may only be submitted electronically through Grants.gov (https://www.grants.gov). Complete solicitation packages are available at Grants.gov in the "Search Grants" portion of the system.

D.16. 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.16.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.16.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.16.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.16.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. <u>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.</u>

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

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.17. Intergovernmental Review of Applications
Executive Order 12372 does not apply to this program.

E.   APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

E.1. Review Process
ECA 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 ECA 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 ECA's Grants Officer.

E.2. 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. **Ability to achieve program objectives:** The objectives should be reasonable, feasible, and flexible. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan.
2. **Support of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA):** Proposals should show substantive support of ECA's policy on Diversity. Proposals should demonstrate how DEIA will be achieved in the different aspects of program administration and program design, content and implementation, including individual participant recruitment, selection and placement. It is important that proposals have a clearly articulated DEIA plan and not simply express general support for the concept of DEIA. Proposals should demonstrate how DEIA 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.

3. **Institutional Capacity and Record/Ability:** Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program or project's goals. Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past ECA awards (grants or cooperative agreements) as determined by ECA's Grants Division. ECA will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.

4. **Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Proposals should include a fully developed performance M&E narrative and a PMP (or similar document) that includes the goals, objectives, and indicators used. Proposals will be evaluated for feasibility and alignment with the M&E section of this solicitation, including if: 1) M&E resources, monitoring mechanisms, and data analysis and reporting procedures are sufficiently detailed and realistic; 2) a realistic learning plan provides a strategy to review, understand, and incorporate M&E data into programmatic decisions and practices in conjunction with the Grant Officer/GOR; and 3) a PMP (or other document that includes similar information) is complete, clear, and well-organized. All submitted PMPs and M&E narrative sections will be reviewed to ensure the applicant has provided information on the minimum data required as per the solicitation.

5. **Cost-effectiveness/Cost-Sharing:** The overhead components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All costs should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions.

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:

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
All reports must be submitted in a timely manner.   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; quarterly or semi-annual reports shall be due 30 days after the reporting period. (Frequency of these reports will be determined by the Grants Officer and Program Officer.) The complete report and supporting documentation must be uploaded by the Recipient as a *Post Award Activity* under the corresponding record for this Cooperative Agreement/Grant in the U.S. Department of State's SAMS Domestic.

2.) The Federal Financial Report (FFR SF-425/SF-425a) must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Payment Management System (PMS). The electronic version of the FFR can be accessed at: http://www.dpm.psc.gov/. Once a financial report has been approved by the Department, the Recipient must upload the approved report to SAMS Domestic, in the same manner specified for the programmatic reports. Failure to comply with these reporting requirements may jeopardize the Recipient's eligibility for future Cooperative Agreements/Grants. In the event you are having difficulty uploading reports and the ILMS help desk is not providing sufficient assistance, please email ECA_SAMSDomestic@state.gov.

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

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

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

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 ECA as required. At a minimum, the data must include the following:

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 workdays prior to the official opening of the activity.

G. AGENCY CONTACTS

For questions about this announcement, contact: Anita Chan, U.S. Department of State, Office of Academic Exchange Programs, ECA/A/E/EAP**,** SA-5, 5th Floor, 2200 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037, 202-716-8798, ChanAX@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 monitoring and evaluation requirements as outlined in the NOFO.

Scott Weinhold   March 28, 2023
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State