



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)
For the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative Fellowship Program

Issuance Date: 05/30/2025
Closing Date: 06/30/2025 (30 days after issuance date)
Closing Time: Midnight
Subject: Request for Applications (RFA) FY24 YLAI Fellowship Program
Reference: Issued under International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) project and DOS Cooperative Agreement/Grant No. SECAGD22CA0073

This Request for Applications outlines the information required from the applicant for the development and submission of a proposal for consideration. The potential applicant is expected to review, understand, and conform with specifications contained in this RFA. Failure to do so will be at the applicant's own risk.

All reasonable, allocable, and allowable expenses, both direct and indirect, which are related to the subaward program and are in accordance with applicable cost standards (usually [2 CFR 200 Subpart E](#) Cost Principles), may be charged under the subaward.

For non-U.S. organizations the [Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions](#) and [2 CFR 200](#) Subpart A through E apply.

This RFA is being issued and consists of this cover letter, Schedule A, and Annexes.

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of IREX nor does it commit IREX to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. The application is submitted at the risk of the applicant. All preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Thank you for your interest in the YLAI Fellowship Program activities.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Fox
Project Director, Young Leaders of Americas Initiative
IREX

SCHEDULE A

SECTION I: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION:

[The Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative](#) (YLA) is the U.S. Department of State's flagship program to advance economic prosperity in the Western Hemisphere. This premier Fellowship program supports emerging business leaders and entrepreneurs from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada. The YLA Fellowship is funded by U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and implemented by IREX.

IREX is requesting applications to serve as a Cohort Ambassador for the 2026 YLA Fellowship. Cohort Ambassadors are organizations representing up to 18 cities across the United States. These partners play a critical role in facilitating cohesive groups and fostering cross-cultural understanding through local cultural and professional engagements. Selection of Cohort Ambassadors will be based on their ability to support a cohort of 14 Fellows for the 2026 Fellowship. Centers for citizen diplomacy, innovation centers, university departments, and accelerators have successfully served as Cohort Ambassadors. We welcome applications from organizations that demonstrate both a strong network across their city's business sectors and the ability to create meaningful experiences of local U.S. culture and entrepreneurship.

Through their participation, Cohort Ambassadors create and strengthen business community ties, increase their partner network's visibility, gain recognition from the U.S. Department of State, and connect with the YLA network of more than 1,750 Fellows and 55,000+ network members. To complement and support this role, IREX will also offer a new, competitive role for a U.S. Network Builder. This role will work with the YLA Team at IREX and selected Cohort Ambassadors, as applicable, to increase visibility with events and capacity-building to mutually reinforce benefits for YLA and Cohort Ambassador networks across U.S. cities.

Program Objectives:

Cohort Ambassadors will support Fellows in maximizing their impact within host communities and facilitate valuable connections between Fellows and U.S. networks by:

- **Facilitating Fellow Connection to Regional Networks and Economic Engagement**
Cohort Ambassadors will provide access to regional networks of business and social entrepreneurial leaders through professional placement recruitment efforts. Through strategic relationship-building, they will enhance Fellows' and partners' collaborative engagement and foster long-term collaboration.
- **Fostering YLA Fellows' Leadership and Professional Development**
Cohort Ambassadors will design activities that give Fellows meaningful opportunities for skill-building, mentorship, and leadership development through immersive professional and cultural experiences. This partnership also aims to create valuable networking opportunities for U.S.

partners, allowing them to expand their global reach, strengthen business community connections, and gain insights from international entrepreneurs, all while building lasting collaborations.

- **Enhancing YLAI Fellows' Community Engagement**

Cohort Ambassadors will create a supportive environment for community engagement through comprehensive city orientations, cultural immersion activities, and regular networking events. This includes organizing local meet-and-greets, facilitating introductions to community leaders, arranging cultural site visits, and continuously communicating with IREX to ensure a supportive Fellowship experience throughout the fellowship period. The goal is to ensure Fellows feel connected to their host communities while maximizing opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

- **Engaging in Program Planning and Professional Development**

Cohort Ambassadors will actively participate in program planning activities with IREX, such as sourcing values-aligned placement organizations and drafting an immersive agenda for Fellow activities. They will also engage in ongoing professional development through regular trainings, workshops, and collaborative learning sessions with the broader network of Cohort Ambassadors, ensuring the delivery of high-quality activities and strengthening the overall YLAI community. The new, external role of the U.S. Network Builder may also engage with Cohort Ambassadors to increase the YLAI Fellowship's visibility across U.S. cities.

Key Cohort Ambassador Responsibilities and Activities:

1. **Attend Virtual Cohort Ambassador Kickoff**

Cohort Ambassadors will attend a virtual kickoff workshop in late August, bringing together the complete cohort of Cohort Ambassadors to launch their vital role in the YLAI program. The workshop will provide an overview of key responsibilities, previews strategic improvements, and initiates the community-building aspect that is central to the program's success. Through interactive elements and group discussions, Cohort Ambassadors will begin forming collaborative relationships that will enhance knowledge-sharing throughout the Fellowship year.

2. **Identify and Introduce Fellowship Placement Organizations**

Cohort Ambassadors will work with the YLAI Team at IREX to secure high-quality, customized professional placements for YLAI Fellows. While IREX maintains primary responsibility for matching Fellows with U.S. organizations—including vetting, preparation, and ongoing support—Cohort Ambassadors actively identify and onboard potential Fellowship Placement Organizations. The recruitment effort is equally shared, with IREX and Cohort Ambassadors each responsible for securing 50% of placements. Cohort Ambassadors help build lasting relationships with Fellowship Placement Organizations to foster a sustainable, collaborative YLAI partner network. As available, Cohort Ambassadors may engage with new U.S. Network Builder in the

shared objective of building a values-aligned network in your city.

3. Participate in In-Person Cohort Ambassador Orientation

The Cohort Ambassador Orientation is a two-day, in-person event that enhances participants' knowledge and ensures their success in the role. IREX facilitates interactive sessions focusing on knowledge sharing, peer networking, community building, and goal setting. The orientation provides training to help Cohort Ambassadors create meaningful, inclusive, and culturally sensitive experiences for Fellows while strengthening the professional placement process. While scheduled to take place in Washington, DC, the event may be conducted virtually depending on funding and other circumstances. IREX will fund travel and accommodation in Washington, DC for one representative from each Cohort Ambassador organization.

4. Host Virtual Pre-Arrival Meet-and-Greet Session

Cohort Ambassadors will participate in the virtual pre-arrival orientation to host a community-building meet-and-greet with their cohort of Fellows. During this session, Cohort Ambassadors should provide a brief introduction to their organization and city, along with an overview of planned activities.

5. Coordinate Fellows' Airport Arrival and Transportation

Cohort Ambassadors will greet Fellows at the airport and coordinate transportation to their housing accommodations. IREX will arrange flights to arrive in morning and afternoon groups. Though arrival times vary by city, Fellows assigned to the same location will arrive as a group. Cohort Ambassadors will maintain close communication with IREX to confirm Fellows' safe arrival at both the host city and their accommodations.

6. Facilitate a City Cultural Orientation

Cohort Ambassadors will welcome Fellows to their city with an in-depth introduction to their organization, team, city, and agenda. Orientation activities should include:

- a. Logistics: Local transportation options, locations of emergency and medical facilities, personal safety guidelines, and recommended grocery stores and restaurants.
- b. Culture: At least one unique and engaging cultural activity to help Fellows feel welcome and learn about their host city.
- c. Peer networking: Facilitate connection activities that help YLAI Fellows build relationships and develop group cohesion. Fellowship Placement Organizations are encouraged to participate.

While an extensive welcome booklet isn't required, we recommend providing a one-page guide with key safety resources, health information, and support contacts.

7. Conduct Four Professional Development Friday Sessions

Prior to the Fellowship, Cohort Ambassadors will submit draft agendas outlining their planned cultural and entrepreneurial activities for IREX review and feedback. The four-week in-person fellowship reserves each Friday for Cohort Ambassador activities, which is designed to be

interactive and educational. Activities may include site visits to local businesses or government offices, networking events, cohort community-building activities, volunteer opportunities, guest lectures, holiday celebrations, family dinners, and other applied learning and cultural exchange experiences. During the first two Friday sessions, Cohort Ambassadors must dedicate at least two hours to help Fellows prepare for the Solution Pitch Competition through pitch workshops and practice sessions.

8. Host Kickoff and Closing City Networking Events

Cohort Ambassadors will organize and host two substantive networking events during the Fellowship. The first event will coincide with the city cultural orientation, serving as a kickoff celebration that brings together Fellows with the broader city network, including Fellowship Placement Organizations, local entrepreneurs, and community leaders. The second networking event will take place on the final Friday of the Fellowship, providing Fellows an opportunity to showcase their accomplishments, strengthen established connections, and celebrate the conclusion of their in-person YLAI experience with their host community.

Cohort Ambassador Timeline

Below is a timeline of required activities for selected Cohort Ambassadors:

Date	Activity	Location	Details
Late August 2025	Cohort Ambassador Kickoff	Virtual	Cohort Ambassadors will participate in a virtual kickoff workshop that provides program overview, strategic planning, and community-building opportunities through interactive discussions that foster collaborative relationships for the Fellowship year.
September 2025 – February 2026	Fellowship Placement Process	Virtual	Cohort Ambassadors collaborate with IREX to secure professional placements for Fellows, with each party responsible for identifying and onboarding 50% of Fellowship Placement Organizations while building lasting relationships that foster a sustainable YLAI partner network.
November 2025	Participate in an in-person Cohort Ambassador Orientation	Washington, DC	One Cohort Ambassador staff member participates in a two-day, in-person Cohort Ambassador Orientation in Washington, DC.
Mid-April 2026	Facilitate a virtual <i>City Meet and Greet</i>	Virtual	Cohort Ambassadors will help welcome Fellows to the program by leading a virtual <i>City Cohort Meet & Greet</i>

	for their city cohort		session. IREX staff will support the session and coordinate logistics as needed.
Thursday, April 23, 2026	Facilitate an airport pick-up for Fellows arriving on the same day and time	Your city	Cohort Ambassadors welcome Fellows at the airport, transport to housing and aid in housing check-in. Conduct review of Fellow housing amenities upon check-in.
Friday, April 24, 2026	City Cultural Orientation & City Network Kickoff Event	Your city	Cohort Ambassadors welcome Fellows to the city and introduce them to its unique local culture. As part of the City Cultural Orientation, Cohort Ambassadors conduct a kickoff networking event for local YLAI Fellowship Placement Organizations to foster community and demonstrate the value of being part of the YLAI Community.
Friday, May 1, 2026	First Friday Session	Your city	Note: This session includes about 2 hours dedicated to Solution Pitch Competition preparation.
Friday, May 8, 2026	Second Friday Session	Your city	Note: This session includes about 2 hours dedicated to Solution Pitch Competition preparation.
Friday, May 15, 2026	Third Friday Session	Your city	
Friday, May 22, 2026	Fourth Friday Session & City Networking Sendoff Event	Your city	As part of the fourth Friday's session, Cohort Ambassadors conduct a sendoff city networking event, providing Fellows an opportunity to showcase their accomplishments, strengthen established connections, and celebrate the conclusion of their in-person YLAI experience with their host community.
Sunday, May 24, 2026	<i>YLAI Fellows depart your city and fly to Washington, DC</i>		
May 25 - 26, 2026	Closing Forum	Washington, DC	Cohort Ambassadors will not be required to attend Closing Forum and IREX does not anticipate providing funding to sponsor their travel or accommodations.
Wednesday, May 27, 2026	<i>YLAI Fellows depart the United States</i>		

USG Regulations

[Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions](#) and [2 CFR 200](#) Unified Administrative Requirements Subpart A through E apply.

SECTION II: AWARD INFORMATION:

Subject to the availability of funds, IREX expects to award 18 fixed amount award subawards, in the amount of \$28,000 for each subaward. The expected duration of IREX's support or the period of performance is 08/15/2025 - 06/30/2026. IREX reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

SECTION III: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION:

The applicant/application must meet the following requirements:

- Be officially registered and working in compliance with all applicable civil and fiscal regulations, including, but not limited to pertinent local laws and status.
- Be officially registered as a legal entity and working in compliance with all applicable local laws. An applicant can show proof of effort to secure registration.
- Meet the project's objectives and principles.
- Contain expected outcomes and results consistent with and linked to the project's objectives.
- Applicant is not a debarred organization.
- Received a U.S. government Unique Entity ID (UEI) from SAM.gov.

Types of Eligible Subawardees:

- U.S Non-Governmental Organizations (U.S. NGOs)
- Non-US Nongovernment Organizations (Non-US NGOs)
- Community Based Organization (CBOs)
- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
- Private Enterprises
- Professional Associations
- Universities
- Individuals leading a group

SECTION IV: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Any questions concerning this RFA should be submitted in writing not later than 7 days prior to the closing date shown above to Sadie Traylor, Program Officer, straylor@irex.org.

Applicants should retain for their records one copy of all enclosures which accompany their application. The application must be received at the YLAI Fellowship Program email indicated below no later than the closing date listed on the front page of this RFA. Pre-award costs are not allowable and will not be reimbursed. An application and modifications thereof shall be submitted in electronic format and/or hard copy to the following address:

YLAI Fellowship Program
Sadie Traylor, Program Officer, IREX
1350 I St NW, Suite #1100, Washington, DC 20005
straylor@irex.org; 202-372-0845

Application:

Please submit your complete application packet in PDF format with the required attachments:

Application Narrative, inclusive of the following:

1. **Unique Entity ID number**
2. **Organizational background:** Please detail your organization's background as it relates to the YLAI Cohort Ambassador role. Include your experience with DOS-sponsored programs and your work advancing global entrepreneurship in your local city (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced).
3. **Program description:** Please detail your organization's strengths in meeting the YLAI Cohort Ambassador roles and responsibilities while advancing program goals in your local city (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced).
4. **Beneficiaries, outcomes and expected impact:** Please detail your organization's local network by:
 - a. Providing a sample list of at least 15 local entrepreneurial networks that you plan to engage with as prospective partners during the Fellowship placement process
 - b. Indicating whether you have worked with these networks previously. Describe the nature of your engagement and explain how you would strengthen these local network relationships as a YLAI Cohort Ambassador.

Attachments & Annexes:

1. **Budget Template and Budget Narrative:** Using the template provided by IREX, submit a simple, major line-item budget estimate detailing all costs associated with the sub-award. The **Budget Template** can be found [here](#) and the **Budget Narrative** can be found [here](#).
2. **Sample Agenda:** Using the template provided by IREX, submit a detailed sample agenda describing proposed activities for your city cohorts. The Sample Agenda Template can be found [here](#).
3. **Staff List:** A list of all staff members who will be contributing to the Cohort Ambassador role or engaging with YLAI Fellows, with CV for each staff member.
4. **Past Performance References and Contacts:** A list of names and contact information for at least three past performance references.

All selected Cohort Ambassadors will be asked to submit a Due Diligence questionnaire. For applicants' awareness, the recently updated template can be found [here](#).

Restrictions:

- Subaward funds provided under the terms of this RFA shall not be used to procure goods or services from suppliers that may be identified on the USG consolidated list of debarred, suspended or ineligible contractors at <http://www.sam.gov/>.
- Any purchases or activities deemed unnecessary to successfully complete the activity, including any subawardee headquarters' expenses that are not directly linked to the implementation of the proposed project.
- Previous obligations and/or bad debts.

- Fines and /or penalties.
- Other costs unallowable as referenced [2 CFR 200 Subpart E](#) Cost Principles.

Late Application:

Late applications are marked as “late” and are ineligible for review or award; however, IREX reserves the right to accept and include late applications in the review and award process when it is considered within the best interest of IREX to do so and if applications that were received on time have not been opened and reviewed. Applications that are submitted late or incomplete run the risk of **not** being considered for review.

SECTION V: APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION:

The application will be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria set out below. To the extent necessary (if an award is not made based on initial applications), negotiations may be conducted with each applicant whose application, after discussion and negotiation, has a reasonable chance of being selected for an award.

Evaluation Criteria:

Organizational Capacity and Network: 40 points

- Demonstrated experience in international and/or entrepreneurship program management (20 Points)
- Demonstrated strong connections with local businesses and organizations suitable for professional placements and other collaborative opportunities (20 Points)

Technical Approach and Program Design: 30 points

- Quality and feasibility of proposed program activities and sample agenda (10 Points)
- Strategy for fostering meaningful professional networking connections (10 Points)
- Innovative approaches to supporting Fellows' professional and skill development (10 Points)

Past Performance: 20 points

- Track record of successful program management and ability to provide personalized support (10 Points)
- Previous experience with DOS-sponsored or similar international programs (5 Points)
- Quality of past performance references (5 Points)

Cost Effectiveness: 10 points

- Realistic and well-justified budget aligned with program objectives (10 Points)

Section VI: AWARD AND ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

The recommendation or selection of an application in accordance with established procedures does not guarantee an award. All applicants must demonstrate that they possess, or have the ability to obtain, the

necessary management competence to practice mutually agreed upon methods of accountability for funds and other assets provided.

A successful applicant can expect to receive an Award Letter, signed by the program. The award letter will be addressed to the organization's point of contact as stated in the application.

Following the Award Letter, final negotiations will take place before the signing of a subaward agreement.

Reporting Procedures:

A description of reporting requirements will be included in the Subaward Agreement. The types of reporting required, along with the schedule of reporting, will depend on the subaward agreement and project duration. Reporting forms will be provided to subaward recipients. Issuance of the final installment of subaward funds is contingent upon YLAI Fellowship Program receipt and acceptance of the Final Program Report. Types of reporting will include the following:

- Program reports to be submitted during project implementation according to a schedule described in the subaward agreement. These reports will include a description of progress made during the period, challenges in project implementation, actions taken to overcome them, and activities planned for the next period.
- Final program report to describe how the project objectives and goals were reached, results of the project, and challenges and solutions during implementation.

SECTION VII - OTHER INFORMATION

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of IREX, nor does it commit IREX to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application.

IREX reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. Further, IREX reserves the right to make no awards as a result of this RFA.

Annex 1: Standard Terms and Conditions

- U.S. Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions (<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-for-Federal-Awards-10.1.24-15.pdf>)
- 2 CFR 200 Uniformed Administrative Requirements Subpart A-through E ([eCFR :: 2 CFR Part 200 Subpart E -- Cost Principles](#)).
- 2 CFR 600 The Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-600>)
- 2 CFR 601 Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-601>)