



Citizen Diplomacy
Action Fund
**Grant Writing
Guide**



Exchange Alumni
CONNECT | EMPOWER | INSPIRE



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Overview

This booklet is designed to guide U.S. exchange alumni through the process of developing a competitive proposal for the Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund Small Grants Program (CDAF), offering practical advice, examples, and best practices at each stage of project design. While the guidance is tailored to CDAF requirements and themes, the core skills explored here are fundamental to successful small-grant writing in general.

The CDAF small grants competition, a component of the U.S. Exchange Alumni Network and Capacity Building Program, offers competitive grants of up to \$10,000 for teams of U.S. government-sponsored exchange alumni to design and implement projects that address shared local or global challenges while advancing U.S. foreign policy priorities. By applying the knowledge and skills gained through their exchange experiences, alumni lead initiatives that strengthen American communities, foster international collaboration, and amplify the long-term impact of U.S. exchange programs. Projects are implemented over a six-month period and align with one or two of CDAF's priority themes.

The U.S. Exchange Alumni Program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. government and supported in its implementation by IREX.

Project Statement

In this section, you'll discover how to craft a robust project statement that articulates a clear and solvable problem. You'll also learn how to develop your solution directly from that identified need.

Specific Challenge

Focus on a clearly defined issue that affects U.S. and global communities and that your project can realistically address within the grant budget and timeline. Explain who is affected, why the challenge matters now, how it connects to citizen diplomacy and exchange alumni engagement, and why you are best positioned to address this problem.

Example: As communities prepare for the United States' 250th anniversary, many local artists and cultural organizations lack the skills and networks needed to benefit from increased cultural tourism and related economic opportunities.

Methodology

Explain how you will implement the project. Outline your key activities, approach, who will be involved, and why. Show a clear connection between the challenge and your proposed actions. Your methodology should be realistic, feasible, and achievable within the proposed timeline and budget.

Example: Over six months, the project will equip entrepreneurs with training and coaching from exchange alumni to design cultural experiences tied to America's 250th, using a mix of in-person and virtual sessions to maximize reach and manage costs.

Project Statement

(continued)

Project Goals and Outcomes

Define what success looks like. State your overall project goals and the specific outcomes you expect to achieve during the project period. Outcomes should be concrete and measurable. Explain how you will track or demonstrate results through what metrics. (More information on the next page!)

Example: By the end of the project, participating artists and small businesses will have developed market-ready cultural offerings and pricing tools that enable them to generate new revenue from commemorative events and tourism.

Project Impact Beyond Grant

Describe the broader value of your project beyond the grant period. Focus on potential longer-term benefits for U.S. citizens, communities, and exchange alumni networks. Think: how can this project continue to grow after your team's involvement ends?

Example: Training materials and templates will be available nationwide, and the partner organization will incorporate the alumni-led accelerator model into its ongoing programming, extending the project's impact beyond the grant period.

Project Goals and Outcomes

Your project goal and outcomes are the backbone of your project. These drive your project statement, workplan, budget, and how you will eventually measure success.



A project goal describes the broad, but specific purpose of your project. It explains what you want to improve, strengthen, or address as a result of your work. Goals are usually high-level and focus on the problem or need your project responds to.

Project outcomes describe the specific, observable results that will happen because of your activities. Outcomes explain what participants will learn, do, or gain during the project period and how you will know your project was successful.

Example: Increase access to practical English-language skills that support economic opportunity for adults in a U.S. community.

Example: 40 participants will complete a short English-language workshop series and demonstrate improved confidence using English in workplace or professional settings.

Pro Tip: Focus on Feasibility!

Goals and outcomes should match what can reasonably and feasibly be accomplished within the grant timeline and budget.

S.M.A.R.T. Goals

SMART goals in grant writing are clear, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives that define expected outcomes and demonstrate a project's impact beyond the project's implementation period, helping proposals stay focused, funder-aligned, and competitive.

S

Specific: Clearly state what will be done, who is involved, and where, ensuring anyone reading it understands the purpose.

M

Measurable: Include metrics (percentages, numbers) to track progress and success.

A

Achievable: Ensure the goals are realistic given your budget, timeline, and resources.

R

Realistic: Align with the funder's priorities and your organization's mission.

T

Time-bound: Set a strict deadline or timeframe for completion.

Risk Mitigation

This section of the grant writing guide explains how to think about and address risk in a CDAF project proposal. Risk mitigation does not require predicting every possible challenge. Instead, it demonstrates that you have thought realistically about implementation and have reasonable plans in place to adapt if things do not go as expected. The goal is to show sound planning and contingency preparations, not to present a risk-free project.



Identify potential challenges that could affect your project's timeline, participation, budget, or outcomes.



Avoid vague risks, unlikely scenarios, or backup plans that you cannot realistically carry out with your timeline and budget.



Consider participant recruitment challenges, partner availability, scheduling constraints, budget limitations, technology or access barriers, or changes in local context that affect in-person activities.



Do not attempt to catalogue every possible risk; instead, demonstrate judgement and understanding of your project country and context.



Focus on outcomes. Even if how you deliver the project changes, your backup plans should be guided by achieving the same core outcomes.

Example: If participant travel becomes limited, the project will shift planned in-person workshops to virtual sessions, using the same alumni facilitators and curriculum to ensure continuity of learning

Assemble Your Team

All CDAF projects must include two team leaders, both U.S. exchange alumni, with one serving as the U.S. citizen primary applicant. Team members are optional and support the project throughout implementation, while individual collaborators are optional and provide limited, short-term expertise without holding leadership roles.

Team Leader 1

U.S. Citizen, U.S. Exchange Alumnus

This individual will serve as the primary applicant for the CDAF and will be the sole recipient of the funds disbursed upon award. They will ultimately be accountable for the outcomes and expenditures related to the grant.

Team Leader 2

US. **OR** International Citizen, U.S. Exchange Alumnus

This individual serves as an equal team leader in application design and implementation. They should have a significant influence on the program and experience with the project country or subject.

Team Member(s)

U.S. **OR** International Citizen(s), U.S. Exchange Alumnus/i

Projects may have several team members. Team member(s) will support the project design and implementation and be involved throughout the project.

Also Consider...

Individual Collaborator

You may bring on an individual collaborator to provide supplemental technical expertise or specialized project implementation support. They do not have to be an exchange alumni.

Partner Organization

Partner Organizations provide support to the project; for example, through sharing knowledge, networks, or other resources.

Impact Stories

Looking for inspiration? The examples below show how CDAF projects turn strong ideas into real, lasting impact for U.S. communities and exchange alumni networks.

By connecting early-career professionals, educators, and tech leaders, CDAF strengthened peace-driven innovation and expanded access to AI education and career opportunities.

CDAF team trained 52 English teachers through interactive, real-world instruction while building lasting networks and positive connections with the United States.

In 2025, a CDAF team used interactive learning, technology and a communicative teaching approach. to teach business and English classes.

Debate camp strengthened English fluency, civic reasoning, and long-term engagement.





Contact Us



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<https://bit.ly/4qWz4Rw>