



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

for FY25 U.S. Exchange Alumni & Capacity Building Program

Issuance Date: January 28, 2026
Closing Date: August 3, 2026
Closing Time: Midnight
Subject: Request for Applications (RFA) Career Connections Pittsburgh
Reference: Issued under International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) project and DOS Cooperative Agreement/Grant No. SECAGD25CA0039

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.

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 U.S. Exchange Alumni Program/IREX nor does it commit FY25 U.S. Exchange Alumni & Capacity Building Program/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 FY25 U.S. Exchange Alumni & Capacity Building Program/IREX activities.

Sincerely,

Silvija Stoljevska
Deputy Project Director, IREX

SCHEDULE A

SECTION I: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION:

The U.S. Exchange Alumni Network and Capacity Building Program (U.S. Exchange Alumni Program) offers a robust catalog of professional development opportunities for the 500,000-strong U.S. citizen exchange alumni community at every stage of their career trajectories. 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.

IREX is requesting applications from qualified organizations to implement in-person regional Career Connections Seminars. A component of the U.S. Exchange Alumni Program, Career Connections Seminars convene U.S. exchange alumni throughout the year for professional development and networking opportunities to learn to leverage their exchange experiences to demonstrate American leadership and innovation, including mobilizing the network in support of local economic growth.

Selection of Career Connection Seminar implementing organizations will be based on the organization's ability to implement a 1-day event for 50-60 attendees in one of the 2026 Career Connection seminar cities and corresponding themes specified below. We welcome applications from organizations that are deeply embedded in their city's economic and cultural hubs, with strong, active networks across local businesses, industries, and community leaders, and that have an interest in strengthening the U.S. Government-sponsored exchange alumni network.

Program Objectives:

The selected organizations will implement a dynamic, hands-on professional development seminar for approximately 50-60 attendees. Attendees will be alumni of U.S. Government-sponsored exchange programs, representing all career stages and a wide range of backgrounds and interests. The seminar will enable attendees to learn about regional industries, the business and employment environment, and new and emerging trends related to the specified seminar theme. It will also highlight local culture and facilitate valuable connections between exchange alumni and local leaders, businesses, and organizations.

Please see below the list of 2026 Career Connections cities, their proposed event dates, and brief tentative event summary. Final dates may be slightly adjusted depending on the availability of the selected organization, the U.S. Department of State, and IREX.

- **Career Connections Pittsburgh: From Steel to Startups (September 26, 2026)**
U.S. exchange alumni will explore Pittsburgh's evolution from steel to tech through targeted discussions, hands-on workshops, and site visits (for example, to advanced manufacturing and robotics hubs). Participants will deepen their understanding of innovation-driven career pathways, strengthen professional networks, and leave with actionable strategies to pursue opportunities in entrepreneurship.

Key Responsibilities and Activities:

The selected organization will be the primary lead for full planning and implementation of the Career Connections seminar. The selected organization will work closely with the U.S. Department of State and IREX to plan and implement the event. IREX will liaise closely with the selected organization and with the U.S. Department of State to ensure events meet program goals and protocols.

As part of the subaward, selected organizations will:

- Identify key personnel at the organization to serve as primary points of contact for the subaward. As needed, identify and train support staff/volunteers to assist in event preparations and implementation.
- Manage day-of event operations, such as confirming vendor arrivals, supervising room setup and technology checks, coordinating catering and signage placement, welcoming and directing participants, resolving on-site issues promptly, and ensuring all program elements stay on schedule.
- Propose an event agenda with session topics related to the event's theme and networking opportunities for event attendees.
- Create and implement an event run of show document from event set-up, event implementation, and event wrap-up.
- Identify relevant speakers and manage speaker invitations and speaker logistics.
- Engage local and state leaders to speak at the event, provide video remarks, and/or letters of support.
- Support the development of a robust local and regional media outreach plan to meet goal of engaging 50-60 alumni.
- Support vendor procurement for the event venue, hotel, catering, photographer, transportation, and other costs as they arise.
- Locally procure necessary event supplies. Supplies with event branding must be approved prior to printing.
- Submit award performance and financial reports to IREX.
- Communicate regularly with IREX during the planning process.

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 3 fixed amount award subawards (one per city), in the amount of \$13,000 for each award. The expected duration of IREX's support or the period of performance is approximately 5 months total, starting 4 months prior to the event's start date and ending one month after the event's end date. The U.S. Exchange Alumni Program/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 projects objectives and principles
- Contain expected outcomes and results consistent with and linked to the projects objectives
- Applicant is not a debarred organization
- Received a U.S. government Unique Entity ID (UEI) from SAM.gov¹

Types of Eligible Subawardees:

Please see the types of eligible subawardees below. This list is not exhaustive. If your organization would like to confirm eligibility, please email Megan Armstrong at USexchangealumni@irex.org.

- U.S Non-Governmental Organizations (U.S. NGOs)
- International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)
- Community Based Organization (CBOs)
- Private Enterprises
- Professional Associations
- Universities

SECTION IV: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Any questions concerning this RFA should be submitted in writing not later than 5 days prior to the closing date shown above to Megan Armstrong, Senior Program Officer, USexchangealumni@irex.org. Applicants should retain for their records one copy of all enclosures which accompany their application.

The application must be received at the U.S. Exchange Alumni Program/IREX's 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 to the following address:

U.S. Exchange Alumni Program

Megan Armstrong, Senior Program Officer, IREX

USexchangealumni@irex.org, 202-942-9135

Application must be submitted in electronic form. The complete application packet must be submitted in the required format with the required attachments.

¹ While not a requirement for submission of an application under this RFA, all applicants selected for funding under this RFA must apply for and receive a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number prior to the signing of the subaward agreement.

- Application:
 - a. Unique Entity Identification (UEI) number (if available at the time of application)
 - b. Organizational background/capacity
 - i. Provide a brief history of the organization and a description of the organization's existing network to the area's economic and cultural hubs and regional leaders.
 - ii. Provide a description of how this event aligns with organization's own mission and goals, relevant prior experience administering events of this nature and size, and capacity to develop, manage, and implement this workshop in close partnership with the U.S. Department of State and IREX.
 - c. Budget 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. Please include any cost-share contributions.
 - i. The budget must include personnel costs, locally procured event supplies, printing costs, speaker honoraria (if anticipated), and entry fees for proposed event site visits.
 - ii. IREX will pay vendors directly for the following event-related services, separate from this grant: attendee hotel lodging, attendee travel costs to/from the event, event ground transportation costs to any site visits, meeting space, meeting audiovisual services, and event meals.
 - 1. The subawardee will be responsible for identifying prospective vendors and sharing quotes/proposals for services with IREX. IREX will review all quotes and enter into direct agreement with service providers.
 - iii. Applicants should include any proposed cost share in the budget. Cost share may include supply costs, entry fees for proposed event site visits, meeting space, and other event costs.
 - d. Sample Event Agenda: Submit a detailed sample agenda based on the themes specified under Project *Objectives* for each seminar location.
 - i. Day 1 should start in the afternoon and end in the evening, and day 2 should be a full day. The agenda should include registration, welcome/opening remarks, various session topics and formats, networking opportunities, and site visit(s) to local organizations, businesses, or initiatives befitting the event's theme.
 - ii. Include prospective speakers (e.g., keynote, panelists, breakout session leaders) and potential site visit locations. Proposed speakers/locations should reflect both individuals/institutions with

whom you already have established connections and those you could realistically secure through credible second- or third-level connections to local institutions.

- e. Work-plan: Using the template provided by IREX, submit a work-plan to demonstrate what steps will your organization will take to design and plan the event.
- f. Key personnel: A list of all staff members who will be contributing to the event, with one CV for each named staff member.
- g. Past Performance References and Contacts: A list of names and contact information for two past performance references.
 - i. This could include an individual/organization that your organization has previously collaborated with on an event or initiative.

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**
 - a. Demonstrated strong connections with local businesses, organizations, and public/private sector leaders suitable for speaking engagements and other collaborative opportunities
 - b. Demonstrated organizational experience in meeting the key responsibilities and activities outlined in the above section
 - c. Relevancy of key personnel's experience
- **Technical Approach and Program Design: 30 points**
 - a. Quality and feasibility of proposed event activities and sample agenda
 - b. Quality and feasibility of workplan
- **Cost Effectiveness: 30 points**
 - a. Realistic and well-justified budget aligned with program objectives

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. Applicants that were not successful can expect a letter explaining the reason for their unsuccessful 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. Types of reporting will include the following:

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

Issuance of the final installment of subaward funds is contingent upon U.S. Exchange Alumni Program receipt and acceptance of Final Reports.

SECTION VII - OTHER INFORMATION

Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award or commitment on the part of IREX, nor does it commit U.S. Exchange Alumni Program/ 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>)

PUBLIC NOTICE
REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)
for FY25 U.S. Exchange Alumni & Capacity Building Program

Issuance Date: January 28, 2026

Closing Date: May 8, 2026

I. SUMMARY:

The U.S. Exchange Alumni Network and Capacity Building Program (U.S. Exchange Alumni Program) offers a robust catalog of professional development opportunities for the 500,000-strong U.S. citizen exchange alumni community at every stage of their career trajectories. 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.

II. PURPOSE:

This RFA is seeking applications from qualified organizations to implement in-person regional Career Connections Seminars. A component of the U.S. Exchange Alumni Program, Career Connections Seminars convene U.S. exchange alumni throughout the year for professional development and networking opportunities to learn to leverage their exchange experiences to demonstrate American leadership and innovation, including mobilizing the network in support of local economic growth.

III. LOCATION OF ACTIVITIES:

The geographic focus under consideration includes the following cities for regional activities:

- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

IV. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

The selected organizations will support U.S. citizen exchange alumni in learning more about the regional business industries and local culture and will facilitate valuable connections between exchange alumni and local leaders, businesses, and organizations. Please see below the list of pre-selected Career Connections cities, their proposed event dates, and brief event summary.

- **Career Connections Pittsburgh: From Steel to Startups (September 25-26, 2026)**
U.S. exchange alumni will explore Pittsburgh's evolution from steel to tech through targeted discussions, hands-on workshops, and site visits (for example, to advanced manufacturing and robotics hubs). Participants will deepen their understanding of innovation-driven career pathways, strengthen professional networks, and leave with actionable strategies to pursue opportunities in entrepreneurship.

V. APPLICANTS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

Selection of Career Connection Seminar implementing organizations will be based on the organization's ability to implement a 1-day event for 50-60 attendees in one of the selected 2026 cities. We welcome applications from organizations that are deeply embedded in their

city's economic and cultural hubs, with strong, active networks across local businesses, industries, and community leaders, and that have an interest in strengthening the U.S. Government-sponsored exchange alumni network.

VI. Cost share Requirements:

While cost share is not required, the U.S. Exchange Alumni Program/IREX encourages applicants to include any proposed cost-share in the budget.

VII. Award Information

Subject to the availability of funds, IREX expects to award 1 subaward. The total amount available is \$13,000 per subaward. The expected duration of IREX's support or the period of performance is approximately 5 months total, starting 4 months prior to the event's start date and ending one month after the event's end date.

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.

VIII. CONTACT INFORMATION:

Please contact the following to receive the Request for Application and the application packet:

Megan Armstrong, Senior Program Officer, U.S. Exchange Alumni Program, IREX

1350 I St NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005

USexchangealumni@irex.org, 202-942-9135