



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

for the Higher Education for Innovation and Growth Activity

Issuance Date: April 30, 2026

Closing Date: May 29, 2026 (30 days after issuance date)

Closing Time: 17:00 Amman, Jordan Time

Subject: Request for Applications (RFA), Number *IREX/HEIG/RFA/006/2026*
Higher Education for Innovation and Growth (HEIG) – **Industry Ecosystem Partner – Digital Growth & Security Cluster**

Reference: Issued under International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) project and DOS Cooperative Agreement/Grant No. 72027824CA00001

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.

This Request for Applications (RFA) seeks to mobilize one Industry Ecosystem Partner to serve as the cluster's end-to-end implementation partner. This Industry Ecosystem Partner (IEP) will assume responsibility for the full lifecycle of cluster operationalization—from HEI engagement and capacity assessment through to partnership facilitation, governance, and sustainability planning—while HEIG retains strategic oversight, quality assurance, and compliance functions.

Subject to the availability of funds, IREX expects to issue one 18-month award in this cycle up to a total ceiling of \$300,000 (212,700 JOD). The size of the individual award will be up to \$300,000 (212,700 JOD). IREX reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. 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-US 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 HEIG/IREX nor does it commit HEIG/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 HEIG/IREX activities.

Sincerely,

Dr. Abdallah Abdallah

Chief of Party

Higher Education for Innovation and Growth (HEIG)

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Full Term
DGS	Digital Growth & Security
DoS	U.S. Department of State
EOI	Expression of Interest

Abbreviation	Full Term
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEIG	Higher Education for Innovation and Growth
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEP	Industry Ecosystem Partner
IR1	Intermediate Result 1
IR2	Intermediate Result 2
IT	Information Technology
PIAP	Performance Improvement and Action Plan
PIF	Partnership Incubator Fund
RFA	Request for Applications
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise

SCHEDULE A

SECTION I: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Higher Education for Innovation and Growth Activity is a 5-year program funded by the United States' Department of State (DOS) and implemented by the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), headquartered in Washington, DC, USA. It additionally convenes the Business and Professional Women Association (BPWA), Integrated International, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in its implementing consortium. HEIG aims to activate higher education institutions (HEI) as key drivers of innovation and economic growth. The implementation timeline for HEIG is October 17, 2023 – October 16, 2028.

HEIG seeks to create an ecosystem where Jordanian HEIs provide quality, market-relevant, student-centered education, and foster innovation for economic growth through research-led partnerships with industry that bridge the gap between supply and demand.

Working within, between and beyond HEIs, HEIG will strengthen workforce and innovation ecosystems and activate HEIs as effective and trusted actors within them. The activity has three main pillars:

1. Establishing effective and sustainable platforms for collaboration among HEIs, the private sector, youth, community, and government stakeholders, through the establishment of a Partnership Incubator, a Partnership Incubator Fund (PIF), and a series of sector-focused Catalytic Collaboration Clusters.
2. Strengthening the performance of HEI's core functions (teaching and learning, research, engagement) in selected sectors through provision of material and technical assistance.
3. Supporting the development of a supportive and aligned policy environment that promotes HEI collaboration for innovation and growth.

The Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning framework designed for HEIG Activity is crafted to operate on a results-based approach emphasizing the importance of achieving and assessing outcomes. **Annex 2** highlights some of the key indicators that the HEIG program uses to track its performance.

THE CATALYTIC COLLABORATION CLUSTER: DIGITAL GROWTH & SECURITY

The Digital Growth & Security (DGS) sector has been approved as the third priority sector under HEIG's cluster strategy. The DGS sector encompasses a broad range of disciplines and sub-sectors, including cybersecurity, data analytics, software development, artificial intelligence, digital marketing, cloud computing, and IT infrastructure. As a cross-cutting enabler, the DGS sector has the potential to catalyze innovation and competitiveness across multiple vertical industries.

HEIG's approach to the DGS Cluster is anchored in the principle that digital capabilities serve as a **horizontal enabler** for Jordan's broader economic development agenda. Accordingly, the cluster model is designed to both strengthen the digital sector as a standalone growth engine and

to deploy digital solutions across priority vertical sectors where HEI–private sector collaboration can generate measurable workforce, research, and innovation outcomes.

THE CATALYST UNIVERSITY MODEL

A distinctive feature of the DGS Cluster design is the integration of a Catalyst University model from the earliest stages of implementation. Under this model, a designated Catalyst University—selected by the IEP based on demonstrated excellence in digital skills delivery, established infrastructure, and strong private sector engagement—will serve as a peer-to-peer capacity builder for two selected beneficiary universities to establish youth upskilling programs at the beneficiary universities that will be sustained after the duration of the project as Youth Development Hubs in their areas. Please see Annex 3 for the Catalyst University profile and expected role.

The IEP is expected to include a named university as a subawardee for the Catalyst University role and integrate the Catalyst University into the implementation approach from day one, ensuring that the Catalyst University’s budgeted engagement is embedded in the cluster’s governance structure, capacity-building strategy, and sustainability plan.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this RFA is to invite industry ecosystem actor applicants to develop proposals to assume comprehensive responsibility for the operationalization and implementation of the Digital Growth and Security (DGS) Cluster, inclusive of the Catalyst University partnership described above and in Annex 3, as a subaward, and suggested names of two additional beneficiary Higher Education Institutions, and in line with HEIG Activity objectives:

HEI Engagement, Selection, and Catalyst University Integration

- Design and administer a transparent and merit-based selection approach to identify a Catalyst University and propose two beneficiary Higher Education Institutions for participation in the DGS Cluster. While the IEP should apply with a documented Catalyst University partner, the two beneficiary Higher Education Institutions should be proposed as part of the partnership and subsequently validated and confirmed by HEIG based on defined selection criteria
- Apply selection criteria aligned with HEIG’s institutional readiness and sector relevance standards, including the Catalyst University profile requirements outlined in Annex 3.
- Ensure geographic diversity in beneficiary university selection, with a minimum of one public university in the South of Jordan.
- Integrate the Catalyst University into the cluster’s operating model from inception, establishing clear roles, deliverables, timelines, and accountability mechanisms for peer-to-peer capacity-building engagement.
- Conduct outreach and mobilization activities to ensure a diverse and qualified applicant pool, including engagement with both public and private universities.
- Lead implementation oversight for the Catalyst University subaward, coordinating activities and monitoring progress to ensure alignment with program objectives and

compliance with IREX and U.S. Department of State (DOS) requirements. Institutional Capacity Assessment and Strengthening

- Support, through the Catalyst University, the capacity assessments of selected HEIs under the leadership of HEIG's IR1 team (**mandatory IR1 oversight**).
- Participate in the development of the Performance Improvement Action Plans (PIAPs) of the beneficiary universities to address institutional gaps related to DGS sector needs.
- Coordinate with the Catalyst University and HEIG team to design and deliver targeted capacity-building interventions, at the Training of Trainers level in areas such as curriculum modernization, faculty development, lab and training infrastructure establishment, and industry-relevant certification pathways. The Catalyst University will be responsible for technical assistance only. HEIG will be responsible for any material assistance identified in the PIAP.
- Ensure the Catalyst University delivers against agreed milestones, including students at each beneficiary university and the achievement of employment outcomes for program graduates.

Cluster Governance and Operations

- Establish and manage the DGS Cluster governance structure, including working groups, advisory committees, and member engagement mechanisms.
- Integrate the Catalyst University into the governance framework as a key technical partner with defined roles in capacity building, knowledge exchange, and quality assurance.
- Develop and implement a structured annual cluster engagement cycle comprising 5–7 meetings, with clearly defined milestones, deliverables, and reporting requirements to ensure consistency and accountability. These sessions should serve as a platform for knowledge sharing, collaboratively identifying partnership challenges and opportunities, and facilitating targeted matchmaking among relevant stakeholders. The cycle may also include complementary workshops, roundtables, and networking engagements designed to foster collaboration, strengthen linkages, and drive actionable outcomes across the cluster.
- Facilitate regular cluster convenings, knowledge-sharing events, and sector dialogue sessions.
- Serve as the primary coordination hub between HEIs, private sector entities, government stakeholders, and HEIG.
- Develop a cluster value proposition.
- Establishing cluster brand visibility.

Private Sector Engagement and Active Participation

- Identify, recruit, and maintain active engagement with a minimum of **30 private sector enterprises** in the DGS sector through the convening of 5-7 cluster meetings per year. Expected target attendance of 20 private sector members per meeting.
- Ensure private sector members are actively contributing to cluster work, demonstrated by participation in at least 2 working groups or co-design activities per year, provision of technical input or data, and/or involvement in defined joint initiatives.

- Beyond participation in cluster meetings, the CLO shall conduct targeted demand-mapping activities — including one-on-one consultations, site visits, and industry roundtables — to systematically identify private sector needs, challenges, and partnership-ready opportunities twice a year. Each demand-mapping cycle should yield at least 2–3 actionable partnership leads that enter the brokerage pipeline.
- Build and sustain a cluster network of at least **50 active organizations** (including HEIs, private sector firms, government entities, and civil society organizations) who regularly contribute to cluster initiatives. Expected attendance at 4 cluster meetings per year.
- Facilitate consistent participation through meetings, working groups, events, and collaborative projects. Members should send a representative to attend 80% of meetings and participate in at least one working group, event or collaborative project.

Partnership Facilitation and Pipeline Development

- Actively broker partnerships between HEIs (including the Catalyst University and beneficiary universities) and private sector companies in the DGS space.
- Develop a structured pipeline of partnership opportunities that can be channeled toward consideration by HEIG’s Partnership Incubator Fund (PIF) or equivalent funding mechanisms.
- Prepare Partnership Briefs that articulate mutual value propositions, scopes of work, cost-sharing arrangements, and expected outcomes. See Annex 4 for details on Partnership Briefs.
- Ensure strong and sustained private sector participation, including U.S. companies where feasible.

Digital Matchmaking and Knowledge Exchange

- Deploy and manage digital tools and platforms for HEI–private sector matchmaking, opportunity posting, and collaboration tracking.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and technology transfer activities between cluster members, leveraging the Catalyst University’s existing platforms and infrastructure where appropriate.
- Document and disseminate best practices, case studies, and lessons learned from cluster activities.

Sustainability and Exit Planning

- Develop and begin implementing a cluster sustainability plan that ensures continuity of HEI–private sector engagement beyond the HEIG project lifecycle.
- Ensure the Catalyst University’s capacity-building model is institutionalized within beneficiary universities such that gains are self-sustaining.
- Explore revenue-generation models, institutional embedding strategies, and policy-level advocacy to sustain cluster functions.

HEIG Oversight and Quality Assurance

While the IEP will assume day-to-day implementation leadership, HEIG will retain strategic oversight, monitoring, and quality assurance functions across all scope areas:

- **IR1 Technical Oversight:** Mandatory involvement in HEI capacity assessments, PIAP development and review, and institutional strengthening interventions. The HEIG IR1 team will also provide quality assurance over the Catalyst University's institutional capacity strengthening activities to ensure alignment with HEIG standards and accreditation reform objectives.
- **IR2 Strategic Guidance:** Active coordination on cluster governance design, Catalyst University integration, partnership brokerage strategy, PIF solicitation design, and sustainability planning.
- **Grants and Contracts Compliance:** All funding disbursements, sub-awards (including any award to the Catalyst University to engage them as a fee-based implementer and service provider), and procurement actions will remain subject to HEIG and DoS regulations, policies, and approval processes.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** The IEP will report to HEIG on a regular basis, with performance measured against agreed milestones, indicators, and deliverables—including Catalyst University performance metrics.

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 **one (1) cost reimbursable subaward up to \$300,000**. The total amount available is \$300,000. The expected duration of IREX's support or the period of performance is a maximum of 18 months. HEIG/IREX reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

Applicants who are able to achieve results and impact under this RFA will have the potential to apply for follow-on funding, especially for activities led by the Catalyst University, to build upon those successes in future years. The required criteria for consideration of the renewal are: (1) availability of funds, (2) satisfactory progress towards meeting the award objectives, (3) submission of required reports, and (4) compliance with the terms and conditions of the award. The most competitive grants will clearly explain how funding received under this grant will lead to follow-on activities beyond the life of the grant, and while follow-on funding is not guaranteed, the most competitive applications will consider how funding under this grant will evolve into future work.

SECTION III: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Interested organizations must meet the following minimum eligibility 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 in Jordan and working in compliance with all applicable local laws. An applicant can show proof of effort to secure registration.
- Be operational in Jordan for at least 2 years.

- Meet the program’s technical objectives and principles.
- Contain expected outcomes and results consistent with and linked to the program’s objectives.
- Applicant is not a debarred organization.
- Must demonstrate financial and operational capacity to manage funds.
- Received a U.S. government Unique Entity ID (UEI) from SAM.gov or receive a UEI prior to the expected start date of the subaward, if selected.*

Additional technical requirements include:

#	Criterion	Requirement
1	Organizational Type	Industry association, technology consortium, digital innovation hub, or equivalent private-sector-led entity operating in Jordan’s digital economy ecosystem.
2	Legal Registration	Must be legally registered in Jordan.
3	Sector Expertise	Demonstrated track record of at least 5 years working in the digital economy, ICT, cybersecurity, or related fields in Jordan.
4	Private Sector Network	Established and active relationships with a critical mass of private sector companies in the DGS space, including SMEs, startups, and larger technology firms.
5	HEI Engagement Experience	Prior experience facilitating collaboration between higher education institutions and the private sector, including workforce development, applied research, internships, or innovation partnerships.
6	Catalyst University Integration Capacity	Demonstrated ability to coordinate with and manage university-level partners within a structured implementation framework, including oversight of deliverables, milestone tracking, and quality assurance.

7	Organizational Capacity	Sufficient institutional infrastructure, staffing, and management systems to deliver the scope of work described in Section 2.
8	Financial Standing	Sound financial management capacity and ability to comply with DoS regulations and reporting requirements.

Preferred Qualifications:

- Experience managing donor-funded programs or sub-awards under similar international development organizations.
- Existing digital platforms or tools that could be leveraged for matchmaking and knowledge exchange.
- Demonstrated success in sustainability and revenue-generation models for industry cluster or consortium activities.
- Active engagement in national policy dialogue on digital economy, higher education reform, or workforce development.
- Prior experience working with university-led capacity-building or peer-to-peer knowledge transfer models.

***IMPORTANT:** Any applicant selected for funding under this RFA must apply for and receive a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number prior to the signing of a subaward agreement with HEIG. While not a requirement for submission of an application under this RFA, HEIG encourages all interested organizations to begin the UEI application as early as possible as this represents a U.S. Government requirement for award funding. Though the registration process is free, it is important to note that it might take some time, and potential applicants are invited to apply as soon as possible.

The UEI Number process can be initiated at: <https://login.gov/>

HEIG may provide guidance to the applicant selected for funding in obtaining their UEI Number but is unable to directly intervene in UEI application processes.

Types of Eligible Subawardees:

- Private Enterprises: Jordanian enterprises and US enterprises registered and operating in Jordan.
- Non-U.S. Nongovernment Organizations (Non-U.S. NGOs).
- Community Based Organization (CBOs).
- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).
- Professional Associations.

Partnership Requirements:

Each proposal must include:

- At least one private sector partner; and
- At least one Jordanian HEI as a Catalyst University
- At least two suggested beneficiary HEIs.

Additional partners are encouraged.

Allowable Expenses:

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.

The following types/examples of direct expenses are considered allowable under this RFA;

1. Supplies and Materials: Costs associated with purchasing necessary supplies or materials required for project implementation.
2. Equipment: Costs associated with purchasing or leasing necessary equipment required for project implementation. Any single equipment item costing over 5,000 USD will require an additional approval process.
3. Services: Costs associated with purchasing necessary services from individuals or suppliers, vendors, contractors that are required for project implementation such as leasing, training, events, legal advice, technical assistance, or consulting.
4. Personnel Costs: Salaries, wages, and benefits for project staff directly involved in implementing the fund activities. These staff may be already contracted by project partners or may be duly hired to conduct project activities. Values must be in line with the job market, and contracts and payments will be audited.
5. Subawards Costs associated with carrying out part project activities including expected budget costs for the Catalyst University.
6. Any other duly justified expenses allowable by United States Department of State (DoS).

NICRA & De-Minimis Indirect Rate:

If applicants do not have an approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), a de minimis indirect rate of 15% may be applied on all "Modified Total Direct Costs ([MTDC](#)).” This rate must be used to pay for organizational indirect operating costs. Therefore, no organizational operating costs will be directly billed to this subaward.

Pre-award costs are not allowable and will not be reimbursed. All costs related to the development, drafting, and submission of applications in response to this RFA are the sole responsibility of the applicant.

Authorized Geographic Code:

The Authorized Geographic Code for the procurement of goods and services is **937**. Geographic Code 937 authorizes procurement from the United States, the cooperating country, and "low-income" and "lower-middle income" economies.

SECTION IV: APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Schedule of Events:

The following schedule applies to this RFA but may change in accordance with IREX's needs or unforeseen circumstances. Changes in this timeline will be announced as a formal modification to the RFA.

LINE	TIME	DATE	STEP
A	14:00 – 15:00	May 11, 2026	Information session, which will be recorded, to provide additional details about Digital Growth and Security Cluster RFA and to offer prospective applicants the opportunity to ask questions related to this RFA. Join via the link below: Microsoft Teams meeting Join: https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/299451048205478?p=sc8WTaWSN9fC8CEo8X Meeting ID: 299 451 048 205 478 Passcode: n67Q9jA7
B	17:00, Jordan time	May 18, 2026	Deadline for requesting clarifications from IREX. Questions must be submitted via email to grants.heig@irex.org .
C	17:00, Jordan time	May 21, 2026	Estimated date for issuance of any clarifications by IREX. All questions will be answered in one document inclusive of a link to view the information session recording and shared with all applicants.
D	17:00, Jordan time	May 29, 2026	Deadline for submission of applications. Applications must be submitted via email to grants.heig@irex.org .

IREX HEIG will conduct an information session to provide additional details about the Digital Growth and Security Cluster RFA and to offer prospective applicants the opportunity to ask questions related to this RFA.

The session will be held online via Microsoft Teams on **May 11, 2026**, from **14:00 – 15:00 (Jordan time)**.

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/299451048205478?p=sc8WTaWSN9fC8CEo8X>

Meeting ID: 299 451 048 205 478

Passcode: n67Q9jA7

Interested applicants are encouraged to attend.

Any further questions concerning this RFA should be submitted in writing not later than **May 18, 2026**, to grants.heig@irex.org. Applicants should retain for their records one copy of all enclosures which accompany their application.

The application must be received at the HEIG/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: grants.heig@irex.org

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

A. Application Form – Attachment I

1. **Cover Letter** (maximum 1 page): Signed by an authorized representative, expressing interest and confirming eligibility.
2. **Organizational Profile** (maximum 3 pages): Overview of the organization and the proposed Catalyst University, including mission, governance, key achievements, and relevance to the DGS sector.
3. **Capability Statement** (maximum 5 pages): Narrative demonstrating the organization's capacity to deliver the scope described in Section 2, including:
 - Relevant experience in sector cluster management, HEI engagement, and/or private sector partnership facilitation.
 - Description of existing private sector network in the DGS space.
 - Previous experience working with HEIs in Jordan.
 - Proposed approach to integrating a Catalyst University into the cluster implementation from inception.
 - Relevant experience of the Catalyst University (please see the expected profile and role in Annex 3).
 - Description of any digital tools, platforms, or systems currently operated.
 - Approach to sustainability and long-term institutional embedding.
4. **Key Personnel** (maximum 2 pages): Brief CVs or bios of up to 3 key personnel who would lead implementation as the IEP and at the Catalyst University.
5. **References** (maximum 1 page): Contact details for at least 2 institutional references from organizations that can speak to the applicant's relevant experience.

B. Budget Template – Attachment II

C. Letters of support from key stakeholders and partners

D. Organizational registration documents

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.
 - None of the funds awarded under this RFA may be made available for subawards, direct financial support, or otherwise used to provide any payment or transfer to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Late Applications:

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:

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.

Criterion	Weight	Key Considerations
Sector Expertise and Track Record	20%	Depth and relevance of experience in Jordan’s digital economy ecosystem
Private Sector Network and Reach	15%	Breadth and quality of industry relationships; ability to mobilize the market
HEI Engagement and Catalyst University Integration	15%	Demonstrated ability to bridge academia and industry; credible approach to integrating and managing the Catalyst University model
Organizational Capacity and Readiness – IEP and Catalyst University	30%	IEP: Institutional infrastructure, team quality, management systems.

		Catalyst University: Prior experience in upskilling programs, Institutional systems and infrastructure, team quality, peer HEI capacity strengthening methodology and approach
Sustainability Vision	10%	Credibility and feasibility of long-term sustainability approach, including institutionalization of Catalyst University gains
Cost Effectiveness	10%	Reasonableness of budget - costs are reasonable, allowable, and allocable. Overall cost effectiveness of the proposal.

Details on the evaluation criteria mentioned in the table above include:

a. Sector Expertise and Track Record

- ✓ Proven sector expertise and depth experience in Jordan’s digital economy ecosystem.
- ✓ Demonstrated ability to coordinate with and manage university-level partners within a structured implementation framework, including oversight of deliverables, milestone tracking, and quality assurance.
- ✓ Active engagement in national policy dialogue on digital economy, higher education reform, or workforce development.

b. Private Sector Network and Reach

- ✓ Proven capability of established and active relationships with a critical mass of private sector companies in the DGS space, including SMEs, startups, and larger technology firms.

c. HEI Engagement and Catalyst University Integration

- ✓ Prior experience facilitating collaboration between higher education institutions and the private sector, including workforce development, applied research, internships, or innovation partnerships.
- ✓ Prior experience working with university-led capacity-building or peer-to-peer knowledge transfer models is preferred.

d. Organizational Capacity and Readiness – IEP and Catalyst University

- ✓ IEP:
 - Organizational structure and capabilities clearly presented (Institutional infrastructure, team quality, management systems, etc.).
 - Past performance in relevant projects in terms of complexity.
 - Relevant staff skills to the proposed project documented by submission of staff bios or CVs.

- Experience in the geographical region.
- Written accounting and procurement procedures.
- Capacity to adhere to DOS financial guidelines.
- Relevance to HEIG Performance Indicators (the extent to which the application aligns with the specified indicators and demonstrates a clear understanding of their importance), highlighted in Annex 2.
- Target Setting: The appropriateness and feasibility of the proposed targets for each indicator.
- ✓ Catalyst University:
 - Demonstrated experience in delivering successful youth upskilling programs in digital and soft skills, with measurable outcomes (e.g., employability, partnerships).
 - Established collaborations with private sector and key stakeholders, with the ability to link youth to opportunities.
 - Proven ability to design and deliver market-relevant, competency-based training using modern, learner-centered approaches.
 - Demonstrated capacity to embed programs within university systems and ensure long-term sustainability.
 - Ability to mentor and support other institutions through structured capacity development, coaching, and technical assistance to transfer experience in establishing and implementing sustained youth upskilling program at the beneficiary universities.
 - Availability of qualified teams, adequate facilities, digital tools, and strong administrative and financial systems.
 - Proposed methodology and approach for peer HEIs capacity strengthening, including educators upskilling, students upskilling, university-based regulations, systems, frameworks and practices, use of innovative, technology-enabled approaches and transferable models to beneficiary universities, and approaches to fulfill the Catalyst University role as explained in Annex 3.

e. Sustainability Vision

- ✓ Credibility and feasibility of long-term sustainability approach, including institutionalization of Catalyst University gains.
- ✓ Demonstrated success in sustainability and revenue-generation models for industry cluster or consortium activities.

f. Cost Effectiveness

- ✓ Reasonableness of budget - costs are reasonable, allowable, and allocable.

- ✓ Level of cost-share and co-investment from partners (a minimum of 30% cost-share required). Cost-share may be financial or in-kind and may include:
 - Cash contributions toward research, training, or equipment;
 - Staff time (technical, supervisory, academic);
 - Use of facilities, labs, land, or equipment;
 - Paid internships or trainee stipends;
 - Materials or prototyping inputs;
 - Market testing or commercialization costs.
- ✓ Overall cost effectiveness of the proposal.

HEIG reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from respondents, and to invite shortlisted organizations for informational interviews or presentations.

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.
- Financial reports will be submitted according to a schedule described in the subaward agreements. The types of financial reports, as well as the schedule of reporting, will depend on the type of subaward, length of the project, and amount of funding. In addition, the subawardee is required to submit a detailed Final Financial Report.

Issuance of the final installment of subaward funds is contingent upon Higher Education for Innovation and Growth receipt and acceptance of Final Financial and Final Program 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 HEIG/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>) : <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Final-FY26-Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-for-Federal-Awards-FINAL-HRC1259439-Accessible-2.6.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>)

Annex 2: Relevant HEIG Performance Indicators

Indicator Name	Indicator Definition	Link to HEIG Indicators
Number of New Employability Pathways Created for Specific Skill Sets	<p>This indicator tracks the number of new employability pathways specifically designed to develop targeted skill sets that are in demand by the local job market. These pathways should be created in collaboration with external partners such as businesses, industry associations, or governmental bodies.</p> <p>To be counted, the educational programs, training courses, or skills development initiatives should focus on specific skills identified as high demand in the local job market. Each pathway must involve the collaboration of at least one external partner</p>	A.P.1
Number of Innovations Created with Support from HEIG Assistance	<p>This indicator tracks the number of new innovations (e.g., methods, technologies, solutions) developed with HEIG support. These innovations should be created through collaborative efforts involving higher education institutions (HEIs) and external partners such as businesses, government agencies, or NGOs.</p> <p>To be counted, new innovations should be designed and developed with the involvement of external partners. And these innovations should address specific needs or challenges and have the potential for adoption by public or private sector entities.</p>	A.P.4.
Amount of Private Investment Attracted	<p>This indicator measures the total amount of private sector funds invested in projects supported by HEIG funding. It includes both cash and in-kind contributions.</p>	A.P.5
Amount Increase in New Investments in HEIs	<p>This indicator tracks the increase in new private or other non-USG investments directed towards higher education institutions to support innovation pathways. It measures the absolute increase in investment amounts over a specific period.</p>	2.3.2
Number of Learners Who Receive Market	<p>This indicator counts the number of learners who satisfactorily participate in educational activities specifically designed to equip them with competencies and expertise that directly align with the demands and requirements of the current job market or industry</p>	1.3.2

<p>Needed Skills Training</p>	<p>needs. These learners participate in training sessions or educational programs or initiatives developed and delivered by the consortium or supported partners that focus on developing practical skills, knowledge, and proficiencies sought after by employers or industries operating within Jordan's economic sectors identified as high-growth or in demand. This indicator measures the number of learners benefiting from skill-building initiatives aimed at addressing workforce gaps and enhancing employability by tailoring education to the demands of the labor market. Educational initiatives can include curricular or extra-curricular courses or initiatives (such as design challenges, internships or mentorship programs) that have a skill building component and defined intended learning outcomes.</p>	
<p>Number of Faculty Members, Administrative Staff, or Learners Participating in Research and/or Innovation Capacity-Building Programs or Initiatives</p>	<p>This indicator measures the number of individuals engaged in structured activities aimed at enhancing their abilities, skills, and competencies in conducting research or fostering innovation.</p> <p>This indicator refers to faculty members, administrative staff, or learners who actively participate in programs specifically designed to develop their personal, or their institutions' research or innovation capacities.</p>	<p>1.3.3</p>

Annex 3: Catalyst University Profile and Role

Catalyst University Profile:

- Demonstrated track record in developing and delivering high-quality upskilling programs in digital fields
- Established digital skills infrastructure and platforms (e.g., sandboxes, labs, accelerators, innovation hubs).
- Strong graduate employment outcomes and market relevance of academic programs
- Proven experience delivering applied projects in partnership with the private sector.

Catalyst University Role: The Catalyst University will build the capacity of two selected beneficiary public universities within a 2-year engagement, including:

- Recommendations and best practices for establishing training facilities and digital infrastructure at participating universities.
- Provide trainings to upskill educators, trainers, and faculty in market-relevant digital competencies.
- Supporting universities to obtain strong employment outcomes for program graduates, including job placement and internship pathways through developing and institutionalizing relevant regulations and processes.
- Strengthening links between participating universities and the private sector.
- Ensuring the model is sustainable and institutionalized within participating universities beyond the engagement period.

Catalyst University Incentives: In return, the Catalyst University benefits from:

- Validation of impact: Credible recognition of the university's contributions and demonstrated success in capacity building.
- National visibility: Strong public positioning and recognition for playing a leadership role in Jordan's higher education and innovation ecosystem.
- Demonstrated knowledge transfer: Tangible proof that the university can successfully transfer expertise, systems, and best practices to peer institutions.
- Paid service-provider role: The Catalyst University is engaged as a subawarded implementer and service provider, responsible for designing and delivering a viable, resourced capacity-strengthening plan with clear activities, staffing, and budget.

Annex 4: Partnership Briefs Structure

- **Partnership Title and Track** – Working title and identification as Track 1 (transactional, 3–8 months) or Track 2 (strategic, 12–24 months).
- **Private Sector Need / Problem Statement** – The specific industry challenge, gap, or market opportunity that the partnership will address, based on demand-mapping activities.
- **HEI Name, Role, and Contribution** – The role of the Higher Education Institution, such as:
 - Faculty expertise and relevant departments, labs, or research groups.
 - Use of laboratories, infrastructure, or equipment.
 - Student engagement (capstone projects, internships, thesis research, or work placements).
 - Curriculum or training development (if applicable).
 - Quality assurance, documentation, or technical oversight.
- **Private Sector Name, Role, and Contribution** – The role of the private sector partner, including:
 - Industry challenge definition and market context.
 - Co-investment (cash or in-kind contributions such as materials, data, equipment, or staff time).
 - Technical input, standards, and regulatory considerations.
 - Plan for applying results (e.g., product development, hiring, manufacturing, or scaling).
 - Commercialization or market access pathway, if relevant.
- **Mutual Value Proposition** – Clear benefits for both partners. The brief should demonstrate a two-way partnership, where the HEI contributes knowledge and talent while the private sector provides real market engagement and application opportunities.
- **Scope of Work and Deliverables** – Key activities and outputs with timelines.
- **Timeline and Milestones** – Milestone schedule linking deliverables to key dates and disbursement points.
- **Budget Summary** – High-level budget table showing:
 - Total partnership cost;
 - Funding requested; and
 - Private sector contribution.
- **Alignment with Cluster Priorities** – Explanation of how the partnership supports cluster priorities (e.g., innovation-to-market pipelines, biosimilars development, workforce readiness, regulatory strengthening, or medical device development).

PUBLIC NOTICE
REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)
for the Higher Education for Innovation and Growth Activity

Issuance Date: April 30, 2026

Closing Date: May 29, 2026, 17:00 Amman, Jordan Time

I. SUMMARY:

The Higher Education for Innovation and Growth Activity (HEIG) is a 5-year program funded by the United States Department of State (DOS) and implemented by the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX). The Higher Education for Innovation and Growth project seeks to create an ecosystem where Jordanian HEIs provide quality, market-relevant, student-centered education, and foster innovation for economic growth through partnerships with industry that bridge the gap between supply and demand.

Working within, between and beyond HEIs, HEIG will strengthen workforce and innovation ecosystems and activate HEIs as effective and trusted actors within them.

II. PURPOSE:

This RFA is seeking industry ecosystem actor applicants to develop proposals to assume comprehensive responsibility for the operationalization and implementation of the Digital Growth and Security (DGS) Cluster, inclusive of:

- The Catalyst University partnership described above and in Annex 3, as a subaward; and
- Suggested names of two additional beneficiary Higher Education Institutions.

III. LOCATION OF ACTIVITIES:

The geographic focus under consideration includes the following countries for regional activities:
Jordan.

IV. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

- Establishing effective and sustainable platforms for collaboration among HEIs, the private sector, youth, community, and government stakeholders, through the establishment of a Partnership Incubator, a Partnership Incubator Fund (PIF), and a series of sector-focused Catalytic Collaboration Clusters.
- Strengthening the performance of HEI's core functions (teaching and learning, research, engagement) in selected sectors through provision of material and technical assistance.
- Supporting the development of a supportive and aligned policy environment that promotes HEI collaboration for innovation and growth.

V. APPLICANTS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

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 in Jordan and working in compliance with all applicable local laws. An applicant can show proof of effort to secure registration.
- Be operational in Jordan for at least 2 years.
- Meet the program's technical objectives and principles.
- Contain expected outcomes and results consistent with and linked to the program's objectives.
- Applicant is not a debarred organization.
- Must demonstrate financial and operational capacity to manage funds.
- Received a U.S. government Unique Entity ID (UEI) from SAM.gov or receive a UEI prior to the expected start date of the subaward, if selected (see more information in the RFA).

VI. Award Information

Subject to the availability of funds, IREX expects to award one (1) cost reimbursable subaward up to \$300,000. The total amount available is \$300,000. The expected duration of IREX's support or the period of performance is a maximum of 18 months. Applicants who are able to achieve results and impact under this RFA will have the potential to apply for follow-on funding, especially for activities led by the Catalyst University, to build upon those successes in future years.

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.

VII. CONTACT INFORMATION:

Please send an electronic version of your application packet to grants.heig@irex.org .