

**U.S. Department of State
U.S. Mission to Italy
Notice of Funding Opportunity**

The United States Mission to Italy announces an open competition for past participants (“alumni”) of U.S. government-funded and U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs to submit applications to the 2021 Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF 2021). We seek proposals from teams of at least two alumni that meet all program eligibility requirements below. Exchange alumni interested in participating in AEIF 2021 must submit proposals to italyalumni@state.gov by 02/28/2021.

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AEIF provides alumni of U.S.-sponsored and facilitated exchange programs with funding to expand on skills gained during their exchange experience to design and implement innovative solutions to global challenges facing their community. Since its inception in 2011, AEIF has funded nearly 500 alumni-led projects around the world through a competitive global competition.

The U.S. Mission to Italy will accept public service projects proposed and managed by teams of at least two (2) alumni from across Italy. The Mission will choose up to one proposal per Consular district as represented by the Embassy in Rome and the Consulates in Milan, Naples, and Florence to submit to the Department of State in Washington, DC, for further consideration. (see: **E. Review and Selection Process**.)

Competitive proposals will support the following goals:

- Countering disinformation
- Diversity and inclusion: targeting marginalized communities and promoting participatory democracy.
- Countering gender-based violence
- STEAM (Science Technology Engineering, Arts and Math)
- Innovation and design in sustainable development

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Announcement posted: 01/27/2021

Closing date for applications: 02/28/2021.

Funding type: Small grant awards

Decision date: no later than 03/20/2021.

Expected size of individual awards: Between \$10,000 and \$50,000.

Program Performance Period: Up to one year from grant award date

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants:

The following individuals are eligible to apply:

- Applicants must be alumni of a U.S. government-funded exchange program (<https://alumni.state.gov/list-exchange-programs>) or a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program (<https://j1visa.state.gov/>).
- Project teams must include at least two (2) alumni.
- U.S. citizens may not submit proposals, but U.S. citizen alumni may participate as team members on a project.
- Alumni teams may be comprised of alumni from different exchange programs and different countries.
- Applications must be submitted by exchange alumni. Not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions are not eligible to apply in the name of the organization but can serve as partners for implementing project activities.

2. Cost Sharing

Inclusion of cost share is not a requirement.

3. Grant Program Area:

All programs must include American content and/or a connection with American expert(s), organization(s), or institution(s). In connection to suggested themes, proposals may (but are not required) to incorporate a focus on social and/or women's entrepreneurship, and/or include a mentoring component. Alumni are encouraged to include in their proposals a counterpart, individual(s) or organization(s), met through their exchange program in the United States. Proposals that do not address the themes as outlined in the program objectives will be deemed ineligible. All project activities must take place outside of the United States and its territories.

4. Other Eligibility Requirements

If the grant will be processed with an individual, that individual is not required to have a DUNS number or be registered in SAM.gov. However, should the grant be processed with an organization that is a partner in the project, that organization must have a unique entity identifier (Data Universal Numbering System/DUNS number from Dun & Bradstreet), as well as a valid registration on www.SAM.gov. Organizations must have a commitment to equal opportunity employment practices and to non-discrimination practices with regard to beneficiaries, without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation.

Applicants are only allowed to submit **one** proposal.

D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application and budget templates are available at <http://it.usembassy.gov/it/alumni-engagement-innovation-fund-aeif-2021>

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

Applications and budgets must be submitted using the official AEIF 2021 proposal and budget forms.

Please follow all instructions below carefully. Proposals that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated requirements will be ineligible.

Please ensure:

- the proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity;
- the proposal addresses all questions in the official AEIF 2021 proposal form;
- all documents are submitted in English;
- the budget is in U.S. dollars and is submitted using the designated AEIF budget form;
- all pages are numbered.

The following documents are required:

1. Mandatory application forms

- a. SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations) or SF-424-I (Application for Federal Assistance --individuals)
at <http://it.usembassy.gov/it/alumni-engagement-innovation-fund-aeif-2021>
- b. SF424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs)
at <http://it.usembassy.gov/it/alumni-engagement-innovation-fund-aeif-2021>
- c. SF424B (Assurances for Non-Construction programs)
at <http://it.usembassy.gov/it/alumni-engagement-innovation-fund-aeif-2021>

- 2. Proposal:** The proposal should contain enough information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the alumni team wants to do. Proposals include the following:

Proposal Summary: Short narrative that outlines the proposed project, including project objectives and anticipated impact.

Project Team Information: There must be at least two alumni team members for a project to be considered. Along with the name and contact information, describe the role each team member will have in the project and their experience, qualifications, and ability to carry out that role. Indicate what proportion of their time will be used in support of the project.

Problem Statement: Clear, concise and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed and how the proposed project addresses the problem.

Project Goals and Objectives: The “goals” describe what the project is intended to achieve. How will the project impact the community and what changes (in people, institutions, attitudes, or practices) will you see? The “objectives” refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be achievable and measurable.

Local Project Partners: List partners who will support your project. Please note if you have an existing relationship with your partner organization(s) or individual(s) and describe their role in the project. If you do not have an existing relationship, explain how you anticipate establishing a partnership with the organization(s).

Project Methods, Design, and Timeline: A description of how the project is expected to work to solve the stated problem and achieve the goal. This should include description of your direct and indirect beneficiaries. The proposed timeline for the project activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan: The Monitoring and Evaluation component of the proposal will outline in detail how the proposal’s activities will advance the goals and objectives (listed above). A strong proposal will include:

- Any outcomes the grantee expects to result from their program. Outcomes could include: change in knowledge, awareness, and attitudes; improved quality of services; increased capacity at a school, group; etc. Proposals should also include how the grantee will know those outcomes are achieved (surveys, interviews, observations, etc.)
- For example: If the program expects that a teacher-training program will improve the skills of a teacher, a proposal may explain the skills the teacher would gain and plan to perform a survey before the program and a survey following the program that would show increased understanding due to the program.

- A plan to include the grantee’s reflection of how their program contributed to the program’s goals. As applicable, a strong final report would include success stories, behaviors changed, lessons learned, and results obtained.

Sustainability: Explain how you plan to continue the program beyond the grant period, or the availability of other resources, if applicable.

Communication Plan: Explain how you will promote your project. Include social media, websites, print news, or other forms of media you intend to use to share information about your project to beneficiaries and the public. Communications should include AEIF 2021 and U.S. Mission branding. These include training materials, materials for recipients or materials to communicate or promote with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity under an agreement. Note: Exceptions to the branding requirement are allowable under certain conditions. If an applicant is notified that their award has been chosen for funding, the Grants Officer will determine, in consultation with the applicant, if an exception is applicable especially in the case where branding would adversely affect the safety and security of the beneficiaries.

- 3. Budget Justification Narrative:** Applicants must submit a detailed budget and budget narrative justification utilizing the template provided. Line item expenditures should be listed in the greatest possible detail. Budgets shall be submitted in U.S. dollars and final grant agreements will be conducted in U.S. dollars.

Budget Restrictions: AEIF 2021 does not support the following activities or costs, and the selection committee will deem applications involving any of these activities or costs ineligible:

- Airfare to/from the United States and its territories
- Activities that take place in the United States and its territories
- Staff salaries, office space, and overhead/operational expenses
- Large items of durable equipment or construction programs
- Alcohol, excessive meals, refreshments, or entertainment
- Academic or scientific research
- Charitable or development activities
- Provision of direct social services to a population
- Individual scholarships
- Social travel/visits
- Gifts or prizes
- Duplication of existing programs
- Institutional development of an organization
- Venture capital, for-profit endeavors, or charging a fee for participation in project

- Support for specific religious activities
- Fund-raising campaigns
- Support or opposition of partisan political activity or lobbying for specific legislation

E. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Evaluation Criteria: The U.S. Embassy and Consulate Public Affairs Sections will use the criteria outlined below to evaluate all applications. Each of Mission Italy’s four posts may choose one proposal from their region to submit to the Department of State in Washington, DC, where proposals will be reviewed by a Selection Committee made up of regional and exchange program experts. Panelists will use the criteria below to review and evaluate applications.

<p>Relevance to Application Theme</p>
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<p>The proposal provides sufficient information on how the activities will support the theme(s) of the competition. The narrative explains any relevant local context the D.C. Selection Committee may not be aware of in relation to this project. Proposed project ideas must be public diplomacy in nature (i.e. not development or military).</p>

<p>Purpose and Summary, Description, and Implementation Plan</p>

<p>When developing the purpose, summary, description, and implementation plan, applicants should aim to make all descriptions clear, concise, and compelling. Reviewers will judge the proposals based on the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the community where it is undertaken. Does the project address an important gap of understanding or need? If the aim of the project is achieved, how will existing knowledge or practice be improved? What audience do the applicants hope to reach with this project? How many will participate? How will they be selected?</p>

<p>Degree of Alumni Involvement</p>
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<p>Projects must include the involvement of at least two (2) exchange alumni. They may be the project team leaders or collaborate directly with PAS in formulating the project. More than two alumni may comprise the team, however, the minimum is two. As the team leaders, the alumni must be closely involved in project planning, implementation, etc. Applicants should ensure that the proposal includes the following information for each alumni team member: first name, last name, e-mail address, exchange program, country of citizenship, and roles and responsibilities.</p>

<p>Participation and Support from Local Partners</p>

<p>The proposal demonstrates buy-in and support from the community where the project will take place. Local partner involvement is a strong sign that there is community support and that the project will engage a broad array of experts, such as subject matter experts, community centers, academic institutions, businesses, local/national government, non-governmental organizations, American Spaces, etc.</p>
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Evaluation and Impact of the Project

A monitoring & evaluation (M&E) plan is pivotal to project implementation and important tracking progress towards the project’s objectives and goals. An M&E plan should consider the data needed to effectively monitor progress toward specific outputs and outcomes as well as how that data collection will be accomplished. Well-crafted indicators should be used to understand a program’s progress toward the desired results. An M&E plan should be reviewed for the following:

- Completion
- Applicability and logic of objectives and indicators
- Clear approach to monitoring
- Adherence to SMART criteria
- Feasibility of baselines and targets
- Data quality plan
- Capacity to implement plan

Sustainability

Have the applicants considered how the project will continue to have positive impact after the end of the project?

Communication, Media, and Outreach Plan

The project should include a clear plan and timeline for how and when the team will share information about the project. It is important to ensure that the U.S. Embassy gets recognition throughout the process, as circumstances permit.

Budget and Budget Narrative

The budget and narrative justification are sufficiently detailed. Costs are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results. The budget is realistic, accounting for all necessary expenses to achieve proposed activities. The results and proposed outcomes justify the total cost of the project. Budget items are reasonable, allowable, and allocable.

Disclaimer: This notice is subject to availability of funding. U.S. Mission to Italy does not guarantee availability of funding by receiving applications under this announcement. Only successful applicants will be contacted.

F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

The grant award will be written, signed, awarded, and administered by the Grants Officer. The assistance award agreement is the authorizing document and it will be provided to the recipient for review and signature by email. The recipient may only start incurring program expenses beginning on the start date shown on the grant award document signed by the Grants Officer.

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the discretion of the Department of State.

NOFO: AEIF 2021

Issuance of this NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

Payment Method: Payments will be made in at least two installments, as needed to carry out the program activities.

Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify how often these reports must be submitted.

G. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACTS

Questions about the grant application process should be directed to: Raissa Brighi at italyalumni@state.gov.

Questions and Answers or FAQ will be posted on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/USAItalyAlumni> or you may contact our alumni coordinators at (email address).