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# Functional Bureau Strategy

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**BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

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## 1. Executive Statement and Mission Statement

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA) mission is to design, implement, and oversee educational, cultural, and professional exchange programs and public engagement activities that increase mutual understanding, advance U.S. foreign policy and national security goals, and assist in developing peaceful relations among nations. ECA programs create robust networks among current and future global leaders, developing strong partners worldwide who understand democratic values and society.

ECA's bureau strategy draws upon the Secretary of State's foreign policy goals, the FY 2022-2026 State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP), White House Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG), and the Public Diplomacy Strategic Plan. ECA collaborates with other Department bureaus and stakeholders to identify global trends, select thematic priorities, and engage U.S. and foreign audiences. Through providing U.S. and foreign citizens a variety of exchange opportunities and cross-cultural engagement activities, we build the foundations of trust and mutual understanding essential to creating a secure and peaceful world, expanding knowledge imperative to tackling current and future global crises, and reinforcing democratic values in countering disinformation.

ECA implements impactful, data-driven programs with specific operational emphases. We encourage strong civil society institutions through increased volunteerism and civic engagement. We focus on emerging and established U.S. and foreign leaders, especially in underserved communities, to advance our goals, amplify the effects of our programs, and help reduce economic disparity. We promote English language learning as a gateway to educational and economic advancement, and a foundation for withstanding disinformation. We work with communities to preserve their cultural heritage, as well as program dynamic American expert speakers to engage foreign audiences on topics of strategic importance to the United States. ECA seeks to increase the number of inbound and outbound international exchanges to develop cultural, social, and economic ties between nations. Through expanded engagement with our alumni, we amplify the impact and reach of ECA's programs.

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ECA is committed to ensuring that our bureau and programs effectively advance U.S. foreign policy and reflect the diversity of the United States and global society. Although ECA quickly expanded virtual programming in response to COVID-19, screen fatigue and uncertain timelines for in-person program resumption require our continued innovation to sustain participant engagement. ECA ensures our programs are consistently evaluated for effectiveness of achieving foreign policy priorities, with expanded data analytics capabilities in the bureau providing more accurate bureau-wide reporting.

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## 2. Bureau Strategic Framework

**Bureau Goal 1:** Further U.S. foreign policy objectives, including the advancement of democratic principles and promoting mutual understanding, through people-to-people exchanges and public diplomacy engagement efforts.

- **Bureau Objective 1.1:** Reach new audiences with a focus on underrepresented and underserved individuals and institutions in the United States and abroad.
- **Bureau Objective 1.2:** Increase United States and foreign participants' understanding of shared democratic values, global challenges, and cultural diversity.
- **Bureau Objective 1.3:** Extend the impact of ECA's programs in communities by supporting a diverse range of U.S. and foreign participants and alumni.

**Bureau Goal 2:** Increase the professional skills of emerging and established U.S. and foreign leaders to address global challenges such as countering disinformation and mitigating climate change.

- **Bureau Objective 2.1:** Expand educational and professional development programs that build United States and foreign participants' job skills and ability to address global challenges.
- **Bureau Objective 2.2:** Increase access to credible, fact-based sources of information for individuals and communities targeted by disinformation.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Goal 3:** Build a forward-leaning ECA which is more resilient, effective, and diverse.

- **Bureau Cross-cutting Management Objective 3.1:** Enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) capabilities to ensure ECA attracts, trains, retains, and develops a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects the diversity of the United States.
- **Bureau Cross-cutting Management Objective 3.2:** Increase ECA's use of technology-enhanced and innovative programs through collaborative processes.

- **Bureau Cross-cutting Management Objective 3.3:** Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs through expanded monitoring and evaluation, data science, data management, IT resources for the workplace, and automation capabilities across the bureau.
- **Bureau Cross-cutting Management Objective 3.4:** Improve ECA's training, processes, and mechanisms to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of program participants.

### 3. Bureau Goals and Objectives

**Bureau Goal 1:** Further U.S. foreign policy objectives, including the advancement of democratic principles and promoting mutual understanding, through people-to-people exchanges and public diplomacy engagement efforts.

- **Bureau Goal 1 Description:** ECA's people-to-people exchanges and public diplomacy engagement efforts bolster democratic principles around the world by exposing participants to these principles and to strong, democratic civil society institutions. Through ECA outreach efforts to emerging and established foreign leaders, we demonstrate U.S. foreign policy in practical terms; participants can apply what they learn in their communities through personal and professional networks. Throughout our long history of assisting in the development of peaceful relations, ECA exchange program alumni encompass more than 75 Nobel Laureates and nearly 450 current and former heads of state and government.

**Bureau Objective 1.1:** Reach new audiences with a focus on underrepresented and underserved individuals and institutions in the United States and abroad.

- **Bureau Objective 1.1 Justification and Linkages:** ECA actively seeks participants from diverse backgrounds through recruitment at higher education institutions, community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and those who have not traditionally benefited from international exchange programs. ECA will also look to include geographically and socially isolated audiences and exchange participants. The increase in virtual and hybrid models has long made training and evaluation an ongoing Bureau priority. Academic and professional partnerships with foreign exchange participants bring international networks to American campuses and workplaces and expand the expertise of U.S. participants who go abroad. International students studying in the United States directly contribute to the U.S. economy through an influx of funds for tuition, housing, and related expenses. Nearly 70 percent of these costs are borne by the international students, their families, foreign governments, and/or other foreign entities. By expanding participation in additional training and support mechanisms for underrepresented U.S. institutions and communities in programs and activities, ECA answers the INSSG's and JSP Objective 3.2's call to address structures, policies, and practices that contribute to inequalities in educational access, outcomes, and beyond and advance equity, accessibility, and rights for all.



- **Bureau Objective 1.1 Risk Considerations:** External factors outside of ECA's control often affect the willingness of individuals to travel to the United States to participate in exchange programs, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased foreign competition, economic pressures, and perceptions of safety are factors that influence demand for international exchange and that are difficult to mitigate. Exchange participants often prefer to attend more well-known institutions and could reject opportunities in underserved institutions. Participants from underrepresented backgrounds may have economic and social pressures that prevent them from participating in exchanges, including a perceived fear of lack of acceptance or support in foreign communities. Limited internet access and personal devices for some target foreign audiences make expanding new programming models difficult. Virtual and hybrid encounters with public diplomacy program participants cannot take the place of in-person experience, especially in traditional cultures. ECA seeks to further uphold equal opportunity as a bedrock of American democratic values through expanded inclusion of underserved communities in our programs.

**Bureau Objective 1.2:** Increase United States and foreign participants' understanding of shared democratic values, global challenges, and cultural diversity.

- **Bureau Objective 1.2 Justification and Linkages:** ECA programs expose foreign participants to a plethora of American culture, knowledge, skills, and expertise. Through their participation, individuals are exposed to American values in communities and workplaces, and experience how these values influence decision-making processes. ECA collects data from participants and alumni to assess the effectiveness of the Bureau's programs, data that both program officers and senior management incorporate into program planning and goal setting. Objective 1.2 links to JSP goals 1, 2 and 3, as well as the 2021 INSSG: we must remain committed to defending the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life and we will reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world.

- **Bureau Objective 1.2 Risk Considerations:** Although ECA cannot eliminate the possibility of negative exchange program experiences, ECA helps to confront a world of rising nationalism and receding democracies by increasing understanding of shared democratic values. Through our programs and engagement activities, ECA expands our network of likeminded allies who can collaborate on solutions to combating threats aimed at democratic institutions.

**Bureau Objective 1.3:** Extend the impact of ECA's programs in communities by supporting a diverse range of U.S. and foreign participants and alumni.

- **Bureau Objective 1.3 Justification and Linkages:** Alumni amplify the reach of ECA programming when they bring new skills, perspectives, and projects to their home communities. Increased engagement and follow-on professional development programs afford them additional opportunities to serve as social multipliers and further disseminate skills and values learned. Through alumni networks, ECA increases the scope of its programs and furthers JSP Objective 1.5 of enhancing foreign publics' understanding of and support for the values and policies of the United States.
- **Bureau Objective 1.3 Risk Considerations:** Because alumni participation is voluntary, not all alumni take advantage of these opportunities. In addition, widespread recognition of/association with being an alumni of a U.S. government funded program can sometimes carry health and safety risks for certain program alumni. In order to mitigate that which would undermine the effectiveness of the U.S. government's investment or add to the perception that U.S. government exchange programs contribute to the problem of a foreign country's brain drain, ECA strongly advocates for exchange visitors to complete the two-year home-country physical presence requirement, if required.

**Bureau Goal 2:** Increase the professional skills of emerging and established U.S. and foreign leaders to address global challenges such as countering disinformation and mitigating climate change.

- **Bureau Goal 2 Description:** As starkly demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the world needs leaders and subject matter experts to tackle current and future global crises. ECA programs allow U.S. and foreign leaders to exchange skills that enable them to mitigate crises, including climate change. By increasing participation of underrepresented communities, ECA can help to reduce economic disparities worldwide, which support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and opportunity for communities around the globe and strengthen U.S. and global resilience to economic, technological, environmental, and other systemic shocks as outlined in JSP Objectives 2.2 and 2.4.

ECA will work to counter disinformation threats through programs that develop critical thinking and media literacy skills and empower emerging and established leaders, and the networks they create. ECA programs offer a unique opportunity for individuals to see, hear, and speak for themselves. Through ECA public diplomacy engagements, participants will utilize critical thinking skills and be empowered to withstand and publicly call out disinformation.

**Bureau Objective 2.1:** Expand educational and professional development programs that build United States and foreign participants' job skills and ability to address global challenges.

- **Bureau Objective 2.1 Justification and Linkages:** ECA endeavors to bridge current skills gaps that are preventing workers from finding jobs, especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and information technology (IT) fields. Through providing professional skills development as a central part of many exchanges and public diplomacy programs, both U.S. citizen and foreign participants are equipped with new skills and future employment opportunities, thus supporting JSP Objective 2.1 to promote a global economy that creates opportunities for all Americans.
- **Bureau Objective 2.1 Risk Considerations:** Building job skills are not within ECA's core focus of strengthening people-to-people ties to advance foreign policy and may not be viewed as essential to successful programs. Some desired job skills development of foreign participants may not always align with foreign policy priorities. ECA will focus on-building the world's collective preparedness to prevent our economy from diminished capacity to withstand future global shocks.

**Bureau Objective 2.2:** Increase access to credible, fact-based sources of information for individuals and communities targeted by disinformation.

- **Bureau Objective 2.2 Justification and Linkages:** We must work with other countries and networks composed of ECA exchange alumni to combat new threats aimed at democracies worldwide, including disinformation. ECA can increase access to fact-based sources of information through English language programming, providing media literacy workshops to ECA program participants, and strengthen the capacities of emerging and established journalists and civil society leaders.

Exchanges and key public diplomacy initiatives promote the critical thinking that fosters fact-based narratives, build audience resilience to disinformation, empower civil society, create networks of like-minded emerging leaders, and deepen relationships with local leaders who can amplify U.S. government efforts to gain trust among key audiences.

ECA programs strengthen independent media and improve media literacy among vulnerable audiences by sharpening their judgment and analysis skills.

Objective 2.2 links to the 2021 INSSG “to protect the security of the American people” and to “join with like-minded allies and partners to revitalize democracy.” As outlined in JSP Objective 1.5, countering disinformation helps to enhance foreign publics’ understanding of and support for the values and policies of the United States.

- **Bureau Objective 2.2 Risk Considerations:** Audiences who have already been influenced by disinformation may distrust U.S. government sources of information which could impede ECA’s outreach efforts toward improving the ability to objectively evaluate information. Because disinformation can come from both internal and external sources, including within the United States, ECA’s efforts to counteract it is imperative to our national security. As disinformation campaigns seek to sow mistrust in democratic institutions and distort public opinion, ECA will work to counter disinformation threats through programs that develop critical thinking and information literacy skills to empower emerging and established leaders, and the networks they create.

## 4. Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Goal

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Goal 3:** Build a forward-leaning ECA which is more resilient, effective, and diverse.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Goal 3 Description:** ECA believes that public diplomacy starts with people: those who participate in our programs and the networks they create, and those who develop, manage, and monitor these exchanges, networks, and public engagement activities. The Bureau constantly seeks greater diversity and inclusion in its programs and its staff so that our work truly represents the American people. We achieve this goal through more collaboration – both within the bureau and with other entities in the department. We achieve greater efficiency in the use of U.S. taxpayer funding with the full implementation of a data management system, Vision 21, and the bureau-wide monitoring framework, MODE. We are constantly seeking to improve the health and safety of traveling exchange participants, especially in times of global pandemics.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.1:** Enhance DEIA capabilities to ensure ECA attracts, trains, retains, and develops a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects the diversity of the United States.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.1 Justification and Linkages:** A diverse workforce brings the needed cross-cultural perspectives for developing and running exchange programs and public engagement that take full account of differences in socio-economic backgrounds. Objective 3.1 links to the 2021 INSSG's commitment to a federal workforce representative of the diversity of our country; to JSP Objective 4.1 on advancing equity in the workforce; and to Executive Order 14035.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.1 Risk Considerations:** Creating, managing, and evaluating exchange programs and public engagement requires specialized skills and educational background that may narrow the pool of qualified candidates. At the same time, the bureau must learn how to nurture diverse backgrounds and skillsets in workplace practices. ECA recognizes that without DEIA priorities better reflected within the bureau itself, we risk having a workforce that does not fully represent the diversity of our nation, equal opportunities for all, nor the democratic values we seek to enhance through our programs. To counter this, ECA established a DEIA Council and two full time positions dedicated to advancing DEIA internally.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.2:** Increase ECA's use of innovative programs through collaborative processes.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.2 Justification and Linkages:** Greater collaboration among program offices and with overseas posts and partner organizations can result in technology-enhanced programs with more foreign policy impact. ECA's commitment to innovation and retaining our technological edge aligns with the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance.
- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.2 Risk Considerations:** Without increased cooperation throughout the department, ECA risks undercutting the effectiveness of our programs or duplicating investments. If program participants are unaware that they are part of a U.S. government-sponsored program, this limits our efforts to engage program alumni as force multipliers. Through increased collaboration, ECA can reduce redundancies, ensure programs are aligned with department and regional policy priorities, and extend program impacts.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.3:** Enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECA programs through expanded monitoring and evaluation, data science, data management, IT resources for the workplace, and automation capabilities across the bureau.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.3 Justification and Linkages:** The demands of public diplomacy programming in a global pandemic environment and the opportunities technology presents for the hybrid workplace drive new IT resources and their thoughtful adoption in ECA. Bureau leadership, program offices, managers, and other ECA stakeholders require quickly produced and accurate analyses of exchange program and public engagement activities' reach and impact, often with a country, regional, or thematic focus. The MODE Framework and Vision 21 are designed to provide those real-time descriptions of ECA's programs in action. This objective is linked to the INSSG's commitment to an inclusive and dynamic economy through greater efficiencies and the JSP Objective 4.2: Modernize IT and leverage data to inform decision-making and support mission delivery.

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- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.3 Risk Considerations:** As the MODE Framework and Vision 21 rely on data provided by others, implementing partners, and ECA program teams respectively, the timeliness of the data is a risk as there is a lag between when the data are collected and when the data are reported. As these systems are used to track administrative and program performance, the delay means that ECA may need to make decisions based on recent – not real-time – data. In addition, both systems rely on the two units within ECA to provide the data. For the information to be more effective, more ECA staff should become familiar with how to access, view, and interpret the data from these systems. Acquiring new IT resources faces budget uncertainties as well as staff adoption and skilled use in a demanding program environment.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.4:** Improve ECA’s training, processes, and mechanisms to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of program participants.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.4 Justification and Linkages:** When traveling exchange programs and other ECA in-person programs proceed under special public health protocols, the participants need the best protection of their health, safety, and welfare that ECA and its partner agencies can provide. As the global pandemic demonstrated, conditions for safe travel and in-person programs can have infinite variations, so those responsible for this aspect need the best technical and training resources. ECA’s commitment to high federal workforce standards aligns with the INSSG.
- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 3.4 Risk Considerations:** With all the advance preparation and monitoring in place, health, safety, and welfare crises are a constant concern. Without sufficient training or protocols in place, program participants could be subject to adverse labor, living, health and/or safety conditions. To mitigate risks to program participants, ECA plans to submit a Final Rule in the Federal Register to provide more protections for Exchange Visitor Program participants.