

AFCP Freedom 250 Special Edition Application Guide 2026
Call for applications
Deadline: March 20, 2026

1. The U.S. Embassy to Romania is pleased to announce the start of the 2026 grants cycle for the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). The 2026 grant cycle celebrates 250 years of American independence. The year 2026 is also the 25th anniversary of the AFCP. **Applicants must submit full project applications by March 20, 2026.** Full implementation of this AFCP Freedom 250 special edition is subject to the availability of funds.

Application form template and all other necessary documents/forms (Budget worksheet, Application for Federal Assistance—Organizations (SF-424), Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A), Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B; only if applicant is not registered in SAM.gov), and, if applicable (received in the past U.S. federal funds), Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL).) should be requested at the following e-mail address: alexandrescui@state.gov

Applications should be sent in **high level proficiency English** at the following e-mail address: alexandrescui@state.gov

If applicants will not receive confirmation e-mails within 24 hours during work week, they should call the following phone number 0721 288 797, between 10 – 15 hrs. For any other questions, communication will be conducted only by e-mail, at the address mentioned above.

We do not provide any pre-consultation for **application-related questions that are already addressed in this document.**

IMPORTANT!! All documents must be sent as attachments to the email. Please **DO NOT** send .rar, zip., google docs, we transfer, or similar, as they will be blocked by the system.

Applicants must obtain formal agreement/approval with a national/regional/local cultural authority to conduct cultural heritage preservation activities.

Selected and non-selected organizations will be informed via e-mail about the results of this competition. Annual program results are typically announced in **July**. Please write your budget timeframe chapter accordingly.

Pending the availability of funds, awards will range from \$25,000 to \$250,000.

Eligible Countries: The AFCP Freedom 250 special edition is open to all countries with which the United States maintains diplomatic relations.

2. Funding Priorities: This Freedom 250 special edition of the AFCP honors the U.S. enduring commitment to freedom, democracy, and unity via cultural heritage stewardship. In the spirit of these values, priority projects should incorporate technical exchange between Americans and foreign counterparts and illuminate the rich historical and cultural ties between the United States and countries around the world. Projects that meet one or more of the following criteria will be prioritized:

a) Cultural objects or sites in other countries associated with, or frequently visited by notable Americans, such as homes, studios, or institutions. [Example: Conservation of the 19th-century Finca Vigía, the American writer Ernest Hemingway's house in Cuba (AFCP 2024)]

b) Cultural objects or sites in other countries developed, excavated, or otherwise brought to light by American archaeologists or other heritage professionals. [Example: Conservation of the 6th-century Rosalila Temple at the Maya site of Copan in Honduras (AFCP 2022), excavated by American archaeologists in the 1890s]

c) Cultural objects or sites in other countries associated with American history or American contributions to significant historical events, such as peace agreements, military memorials, and other commemorative sites. [Example: Preservation of the World War II battle site at Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, the first major engagement between U.S. and Axis forces in Africa (AFCP 2001)]

d) Cultural objects or sites in other countries associated with American innovations and leadership in the sciences, such as laboratories or observatories.

e) Cultural objects or sites in other countries highlighting the intellectual and philosophical roots of American institutions. [Example: Conservation of the Ishtar Gate and other structures at ancient Babylon in Iraq, site of the first example of codified law that paved the way for later legal systems, including America's (AFCP 2010)]

f) Cultural objects or sites in other countries associated with American-inspired independence movements that showcase the United States as an example for nations striving toward liberty and self-governance. [Example: Conservation of 19th- and 20th-century monuments in Colombia commemorating the 1819 Battle of Boyacá and Simón Bolívar—military leader, liberator, and admirer of American ideals of self-governance and popular sovereignty (AFCP 2019)]

g) Forms of traditional cultural expression such as music and dance that heavily influenced American art forms. [Example: Documentation of endangered musical traditions in Mali, which helped lay the foundations for American jazz and blues (AFCP 2011)]

h) Historical sites of significance to diaspora communities in the United States. [Example: Conservation of the 14th-century fortified Alma Vii church in Romania, a cultural touchstone for Americans of Transylvanian Saxon ancestry (AFCP 2019)]

3. Funding Areas: The AFCP Freedom 250 special edition supports the preservation of archaeological sites, historic buildings and monuments, museum collections, and forms of traditional cultural expression, such as indigenous languages and crafts. Appropriate project activities may include:

a) Anastylis: Reassembling a site using its original parts.

b) Conservation: Addressing damage or deterioration to an object or site.

c) Consolidation: Connecting or reconnecting elements of an object or site.

d) Documentation: Recording the condition and important features of an object, site, or tradition in analog or digital format.

e) Inventory: Listing objects, sites, or traditions by location, feature, age, or other unifying characteristics.

f) Preventive Conservation: Addressing conditions that threaten or damage a site, object, collection, or tradition.

g) Restoration: Replacing missing elements to recreate the original appearance of an object or site, usually appropriate for fine arts, decorative arts, and historic buildings.

h) Stabilization: Reducing the physical disturbance of an object or site.

4. Sites and Objects Having a Religious Connection: The Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution permits the government to include religious objects and sites within a program under certain conditions. For example, an item with a religious connection (including a place of worship) may be the subject of a cultural

preservation if the item derives its primary significance from and is nominated solely based on architectural, artistic, historical, or other cultural (not religious) criteria.

5. Eligible Project Implementers: Eligible project implementers are defined as reputable and accountable **non-commercial** entities that demonstrate they have the capacity to manage projects to preserve cultural heritage. Eligible implementers may include non-governmental organizations, museums, educational institutions, ministries of culture, or similar institutions and organizations, including U.S.-based educational institutions and organizations subject to Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code. The AFCP will not award grants to individuals, commercial entities, or past award recipients that have not fulfilled the objectives or reporting requirements of previous awards.

Unlike many exchange programs in the State Department, the AFCP program does not/not actively recruit or require U.S. participation in AFCP-supported projects overseas. However, AFCP implementing Romanian partners can make contracts with U.S. citizens and U.S.-based companies and organizations for goods and services needed to complete their projects. This is especially true when they need expertise or supplies that are not/not available in their own country or region. U.S.-based NGOs, museums, universities, and similar institutions can get AFCP support for projects to preserve cultural heritage overseas. However, the AFCP does not/not support independent U.S. projects abroad. U.S.-based entities must show that they are working closely with the national cultural authority in the host country.

Projects that do not have a formal agreement/approval with a national/regional/local cultural authority to conduct cultural heritage preservation activities will not be considered.

6. Application Requirements (Deadline: March 20, 2026):

Content and Form of Application Submission: Please follow all instructions below carefully. Applications that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated requirements will be deemed ineligible.

From the Implementer:

a) Project Description: Provide a project summary in a highly professional level of English and clearly describe the goals of the project. Explain the outputs and outcomes the project will produce to achieve each goal and the activities that will

generate these outputs and outcomes. Do this for both primary goals (such as restoring a part of a monument) and secondary goals (such as improving economic opportunities). Successful applications describe a clear, logical pathway from activities to goals, including the necessary steps in between. Unsuccessful applications state broad goals but omit details on how they will be achieved. In addition to the description, applicants may include a list, table, or Gantt chart of activities in chronological order, along with major outputs and outcomes and target dates for achieving them.

b) Key Personnel: Names, titles, roles and experience/qualifications of key personnel involved in the project.

c) Statement of Importance: Highlight the historical, architectural, artistic, or cultural (non-religious) values of the cultural heritage.

d) Freedom 250 Statement: Describe how the cultural heritage relates to one or more of the AFCP Freedom 250 funding priorities (paragraph 2).

e) Project Maintenance Plan: Outline the steps or measures that the applicant will take to maintain the site, object, or collection in good condition after the AFCP-supported project is complete; or, in the case of forms of traditional cultural expression, preserve and disseminate the documentation, knowledge, or skills gained from the project.

f) Implementer Public Outreach Plan: Describe, as appropriate and in close coordination with the U.S. embassy, how the implementing partner will build awareness, engage communities and stakeholders, and promote U.S. branding of the project. Awareness-building activities typically include social media posts, ribbon-cutting events, and news stories. Community and stakeholder engagement activities may include community-led or community-produced workshops, short videos, documentary films, oral histories, storytelling or interpretive exhibits, and educational or enrichment events tailored for specific audiences, such as young people. Successful applications feature strong and innovative public outreach activities.

g) Data and Information Access Plan: Applicants must outline how they will share, as appropriate, raw data or processed information, such as publications, generated from the project with the public and the U.S. Embassy.

Innovative ideas are welcomed on how applicants intend to use mobile and online technologies to promote cultural heritage preservation projects locally and to share

compelling project-related content with both targeted and broad audiences, such as through virtual exhibitions or immersive presentations.

h) Detailed Project Budget: Provide a detailed project budget that lists all costs in separate categories (personnel, fringe benefits, travel [including per diem], equipment, supplies, contractual, other direct costs, indirect costs) and indicates funds from other sources.

i) Budget Narrative: Explain how the costs were estimated (quantity x unit cost, annual salary x percentage of time spent on project, etc.) and any large budget line items.

j) Resumes or CVs: Provide resumes or CVs of the proposed project director and other key personnel. The Resumes/CVs must not/not be inserted in the Word/PDF application form or in the body of the e-mail. The Resumes/CVs must be sent separately, attached to an e-mail.

k) Support Letters: If applicable, letters of support from project partners describing the roles and responsibilities of each partner, in English or with English translation, in a comprehensible version.

l) Proof of Official Permission: Official permission letters, if required for project activities, in English or with English translation, in a comprehensible version.

m) Relevant Supporting Documentation: Provide relevant supporting documentation, as applicable, such as historic structure reports, restoration plans and studies, conservation needs assessments and recommendations, architectural and engineering records, etc., compiled in preparation for the proposed project, in English or with English translation, in a comprehensible version.

n) Visual or Audiovisual Documentation: Provide a minimum of five high-quality digital images (JPEGs or PNGs) **not larger than 3 MB** or audiovisual files that convey the nature and condition of the heritage and show the urgency or need for the proposed project (e.g., collapsing walls, extensive water damage).

The JPGs or PNGs must not/not be inserted in the Word/PDF application form or in the body of the e-mail. The JPGs or PNGs must be sent separately, attached to an e-mail.

o) NICRA: For potential U.S. partners of Romanian applicants, if any: If applicable, provide the latest Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) as a PDF file.

p) Mandatory Application Forms (SF-424): Include Application for Federal Assistance—Organizations (SF-424), Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A), Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B; only if applicant is not registered in SAM.gov), and, if applicable (receiving in the past U.S. federal funds), Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL).

7. Cost Sharing and Other Forms of Cost Participation: There is no minimum or maximum percentage of cost participation required. When an implementing partner offers cost sharing, it is understood and agreed that the partner must provide the amount of cost sharing as stipulated in the budget of the application and later included in an approved agreement. The implementing partner will be responsible for tracking and reporting on any cost share or outside funding. Cost sharing may be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs.

8. Ineligible Activities and Unallowable Costs: The AFCP Freedom 250 special edition does not support the following activities or costs, and applications requesting support for any of these activities or costs will be considered ineligible:

a) Privately or Commercially Owned Property: Preservation or purchase of privately or commercially owned cultural objects, collections, or real property, including those whose transfer from private or commercial to public ownership is envisioned, planned, or in process but not complete at the time of application.

Cultural sites and objects owned by a private trust are considered private property and are thus not eligible for support through the AFCP program.

Even though many cultures have long traditions of families owning cultural heritage, that heritage is still privately owned and can't get support from the AFCP program. This rule applies even if the privately owned heritage is accessible or available to the public.

The AFCP program does not support the preservation of cultural heritage that is privately owned, even if there is a promise to donate objects or sites. The property must be transferred before asking for AFCP funding to preserve it.

b) Natural Heritage: Preservation of natural heritage (physical, biological, and geological formations, paleontological collections, habitats of threatened species of

animals and plants, fossils, etc.) unless the natural heritage has a cultural heritage connection or dimension.

c) Human Remains: Preservation of hominid or human remains.

d) News Media: Preservation of news media (newspapers, newsreels, radio and TV programs, etc.).

e) Published Materials: Preservation of published materials available elsewhere (books, periodicals, etc.).

f) Mandated Educational Materials: Development of curricula or educational materials for required classroom use.

g) Archaeological Research: Archaeological excavations or exploratory surveys for research purposes.

h) Historical Research: Historical research, except in cases where the research is justifiable and integral to the success of the proposed project.

i) New Collections: Acquisition or creation of new objects or collections for new or existing museums.

j) New Construction: Construction of new buildings, building additions, or permanent coverings (over archaeological sites, for example).

k) New Works of Art: Commissions of new works of art or architecture for commemorative or economic development purposes.

l) New or Modern Adaptations: Creation of new or modern adaptation of existing traditional dances, songs, chants, musical compositions, plays, or other performances.

m) Conjectural Reconstructions: Creation of conjectural reconstructions of cultural objects or sites that no longer exist.

n) Relocation: Relocation of cultural sites from one physical location to another unless under imminent threat of irreversible damage or destruction.

- o) Removal: Removal of cultural objects or elements of cultural sites from the country for any reason.
- p) Digitization: Digitization of cultural objects or collections, unless part of a clearly defined conservation, documentation, or public diplomacy effort.
- q) Conservation Plans or Studies: Conservation plans or other studies, unless they are one component of a larger project to implement the results of those studies.
- r) Cash Reserves or Endowments: Cash reserves, endowments, or revolving funds (funds must be expended within the award period [up to five years] and may not be used to create an endowment or revolving fund).
- s) Fund-Raising Campaigns: Costs of fund-raising campaigns.
- t) Contingency Costs: Contingency, unforeseen, or miscellaneous costs.
- u) Pre-Award Costs: Costs of work performed prior to the announcement of the award.
- v) Project Cost Limits: Individual projects which cost less than US \$25,000 or more than \$250,000.
- w) Independent U.S. Projects: Independent U.S. projects overseas.

Full Application Scoring System:

- Rationale for Support, including Freedom 250 rationale (paragraph 2) (25 points max)
- Activities Description (including technical exchange) and Timeframe (20 points max)
- Importance of the cultural heritage site, object, or practice (10 points max)
- Project Maintenance Plan (5 points max)
- Implementer Public Outreach Plan (15 points max)
- Data and Information Access Plan (5 points max)
- Budget and Budget Narrative (10 points max)
- Supporting Materials (resumes, assessments, reports, images, etc.) (10 points max)

9. Award Announcement: Department of State will announce the results of the AFCP Freedom 250 special edition when application review and selection are

complete and the State Department's Fiscal Year 2026 funding levels are established.

10. SAM Registration: An applicant must be registered and active in the U.S. government's System for Award Management (SAM) prior to receiving U.S. federal assistance. The SAM registration process may take weeks, especially for non-U.S. applicants. SAM will assign a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) automatically to any entity registering or renewing its record in the system.

SAM.gov (System for Award Management) is the official U.S. Government system for entities interested in conducting business with the U.S. Government. SAM.gov combines several federal procurement systems, notably the Central Contractor Registry (CCR), the Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA), and the Excluded Parties List System (EPLS).

Registration in SAM is free: <https://sam.gov/>.

If a project is selected for an award and the registration is not completed, the award could be delayed until the next fiscal year, pending the availability of funding.

SAM registration must be renewed annually.