

## **Request for Innovation Fund Proposals**

*Supported by Fundación Banorte, Fundación Gruma, and the U.S. Department of State*

**Launch date:** November 21, 2019  
**Question/Answer Period:** 11/21/2019 – 2/15/2019. Submit: [100kstrongamericas.org/questions](http://100kstrongamericas.org/questions)  
**Closing Date/Time:** March 2, 2020

**Subject: Request for Proposals for the 2019 U.S.-Mexico Innovation Fund Competition for Economic & Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability for Inequality Reduction**

Dear Applicants,

Partners of the Americas (Partners) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS), in partnership with Fundación Banorte and Fundación Gruma, are pleased to announce a new Innovation Fund grant competition to create and strengthen higher education institutional partnerships between Mexico and the United States.

The *100,000 Strong in the Americas* Innovation Fund is the public-private sector collaboration between the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassies, Partners of the Americas, NAFSA, corporations, and foundations working together to support new higher education partnerships between the United States and the rest of the Western Hemisphere. The Innovation Fund is the central mechanism in this hemispheric-wide education initiative that inspires U.S. universities and colleges to partner with higher education institutions in Latin America to build bridges of connectivity, strengthen institutional capacity, increase student exchange and training programs and stimulate regional education cooperation throughout the Americas.

Since its inception in January 2014, the Innovation Fund has awarded 232 grants to teams of more than 477 universities and colleges in 25 countries and 49 U.S. states. Higher education institutions in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Chile are currently the top countries in the region to engage with the Innovation Fund in dynamic partnerships with U.S. universities and colleges.

Innovation Fund grant-winning institutions provide students with access to short-term exchange and training opportunities in the United States, Latin America, and Caribbean. Partnerships resulting from Innovation Fund grants provide students and faculty with more access to opportunities to gain technical and linguistic skills, work in teams, conduct research, solve real-world problems, and become better prepared for today's workforce. Currently, over 1,860 higher education institutions have joined the Innovation Network, including 1,000 universities and colleges in the United States.

For more information about current partner organizations that support the Innovation Fund and grant winning teams, please visit: [www.100kstrongamericas.org](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org).

**The 2019 U.S.-Mexico Innovation Fund Competition for Economic and Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability for Inequality Reduction** is supported through generous contributions from Fundación Banorte, Fundación Gruma and the U.S. Department of State. Fundación Banorte is a leading financial institution in Mexico with the best business diversification in its class. It offers a wide variety of products and services through its bank, brokerage house, pension and insurance companies, “Afore” (Retirement Fund Manager) and investment funds. Fundación Gruma is a global Mexican food company and a leader in the production of corn flour, tortillas and wraps worldwide, with its largest operation in the United States and an international reach that includes presence in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Oceania with 74 plants and facilities in 112 countries, through its "Maseca" and "Mission" global brands.

This Innovation Fund grant competition is designed to create and foster partnerships between higher education (HEIs) in **Mexico** and the **United States** that propose student academic exchange and training programs in the thematic areas of **Economic & Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability, with an emphasis on inequality reduction**. Special consideration will be given to proposals that focus on exchange programs that would benefit economically disadvantaged, underserved and/or racial/ethnic minority student populations. For a complete list of eligible academic areas, see “Section III: Description of Grant Opportunity”.

The intent of the 2019 U.S.-Mexico Innovation Fund Competition for Economic and Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability for Inequality Reduction is to award up to **ten (10) Innovation Fund Grants of \$25,000** to selected proposals, pending the final evaluation process.

The Department of State, Partners of the Americas, Fundación Banorte and Fundación Gruma reserve the right to fund any or none of the Innovation Fund grant proposals submitted for consideration. Please refer to the following for a complete statement of goals and expected results.

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## Section I: Strategic Partners

**Fundación Banorte** (Banorte) is a leading financial institution in Mexico with the best business diversification in its class. It offers a wide variety of products and services through its bank, brokerage house, pension and insurance companies, “Afore” (Retirement Fund Manager) and investment funds. In addition, Banorte is the second largest financial group in Mexico and the largest provider of loans to governments and the second largest bank in mortgage loans. “Afore XXI Banorte” is the largest retirement fund manager in the country and Banorte is the only Mexican commercial bank managed by a 100% Mexican board. Its decisions are made locally without the influence of a foreign parent company.

Banorte understands that it is their responsibility and priority to be an ally of higher education institutions in Mexico, in order to contribute to the professional development of young people who will be the future leaders of Mexico. For example, the financial group constantly tries to organize and share events that are useful for the university students’ future professional career. For over 3 years, Banorte has invited universities across the country to its main annual event, Foro Banorte. In total, more than 25,000 students have participated through streaming.

To be an ally of Mexico's growth, Banorte considers it very important to analyze, evaluate and implement the proposals of young people who are facing the main challenges in Mexico. Receiving innovative proposals from students about how inequality can be fought from the financial sector is crucial. It is necessary for the future of Mexico that higher education institutions provide university students with the necessary tools to investigate these fields of study and develop a broader vision. These skills often develop as a result of exchange with other universities and countries, where students learn how to work as an international team to propose solutions to present problems. Being able to help higher education institutions achieve this for their students is the reason why Banorte has chosen to support the Innovation Fund. For more information, visit <https://www.banorte.com/>.

**Fundación Gruma** (Gruma) is a global Mexican food company and a leader in the production of corn flour, tortillas and wraps worldwide, with its largest operation in the United States and an international reach that includes presence in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Oceania with 74 plants and facilities in 112 countries, through its "Maseca" and "Mission" global brands. Thanks to innovation and the use of new technologies, it has expanded its portfolio of products and services to adapt to the different lifestyles, cultures and needs of its customers and consumers in all countries where it is present.

Currently, we live in a world where malnutrition, food security, hunger and sustainable agriculture have not yet been fully solved. As a food company that operates globally, Gruma is fully engaged in finding solutions to these issues. Encouraging research and international collaboration on these subjects of study, should be a priority of higher education institutions because the world needs innovative proposals to address these problems. In order to face the nutrition and alimentation problems facing the world, Gruma must understand the vision that university students are developing about how companies should adapt their products and services as part of the solution to these issues.

The global situation requires that sustainable agriculture techniques must be found and applied by food companies. Gruma considers it a priority to collaborate with higher education institutions so that university students are able to propose innovative solutions and techniques to address these problems. For more information, visit <https://www.gruma.com/>.

## Section II: Eligibility Information

Higher education institutions located and legally registered in Mexico and the United States are eligible to apply for the 2019 U.S.-Mexico Innovation Fund Competition for Economic and Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability for Inequality Reduction.

This Innovation Fund competition seeks to receive applications from a diversity of HEIs. Eligible institutions for this grant competition include four-year and shorter-term degree-issuing institutions, such as universities (public and private), colleges, community colleges, technical/vocational schools, and other post-secondary institutions with credit-bearing programs; and large, small, rural, and urban institutions. The intention of selecting from these categories is to ensure representation of the broadest diversity of institutional profiles, so that successful innovations have the greatest possibility of replication across the institutions and ultimately reaching the overall goal of the *100,000 Strong in the Americas* Innovation Fund.

**Proposals must include a partnership between at least one higher education institution in the U.S. and one higher education institution in Mexico.** Proposals may involve new institutional partnerships or build on existing partnerships, but in all cases, should demonstrate strong institutional support and should focus on creating sustainable exchange programs among the partnering institutions.

In order to increase the diversity of participating institutions, the Review Committee reserves the right to give preference to institutions that have not previously received Innovation Fund grants. However, all HEIs (including previous grant winners) are encouraged to apply.

## Section III: Description of Grant Opportunity

### A. Purpose of this Innovation Fund Grant Competition

The purpose of the 2019 U.S.-Mexico Innovation Fund Competition for Economic and Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability for Inequality Reduction is to provide more opportunities for higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United States and Mexico to work together to provide new student exchange and training programs in the following academic themes. Proposed programs must focus on addressing inequality reduction.

- **Agricultural Sustainability**
  - Nutrition Sciences
  - Soil/Plant Sciences
  - Agricultural Engineering

- Agricultural Economics
- Agronomy
- Environmental Sciences; Ecosystem Science/Management
- Sustainable Cropping/Food Systems
  - Indigenous Agricultural Practices
  - Urban Food Systems
- Food Security Networks
- Protected Agriculture
- Agroecology
- Green Energy
- **Financial/Economic Inclusion**
  - Business Administration/Management
  - Fostering Financial Inclusion in:
    - International Finance
    - Corporate Finance
    - Public Finance
    - Investments
    - Microfinance
    - Financial Services
    - Financial Policy
    - Rural Savings/Loans
    - Financial Education/Literacy
  - Social Infrastructure
  - Data Engineering for Financial inclusion
  - Economics: Behavioral, Managerial for Financial Inclusion
  - Entrepreneurship for Financial Inclusion
  - Rural Enterprise Development

Special consideration will be given to proposals that focus on exchange programs that would benefit economically disadvantaged, underserved and/or racial/ethnic minority student populations.

Proposed activities, including program design and planning, should take place beginning in September 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021; however, grant proposals may include information on activities that have occurred prior to this period that would provide the background and to demonstrate efforts in laying the groundwork for the proposed program, as well as activities beyond these dates in order to demonstrate continuation of the program beyond the grant period. Short-term and long-term programs are eligible. **Students must receive some level of credit from their home institution.**

Applicants should focus on presenting innovative ideas, practices, or models that will integrate increased flow in both directions by increasing outbound opportunities for their students and/or inbound opportunities for international students; and expanding the capacity of the partnering

institutions to send students or host international students. Applicants may propose to provide small scholarships to students in order to have an impact on their study abroad decisions, or incorporate variations on traditional study abroad models, such as student and faculty engagement through service learning or integrating field-based activities with classroom course work.

We encourage grant proposals that include effective practices and address topics discussed from *100,000 Strong in the Americas* Innovation Fund workshops and the [Latin American Forum at NAFSA](#). Topics include accreditation and credit transfer, community engagement, entrepreneurship, diversity and inclusion, inter-departmental collaboration, language training and support, public-private sector engagement, safety and security, student recruitment, technical skills development/training, and technology development, among others.

Applicant institutions should highlight in their proposals how this initial, incentive grant from the Innovation Fund would set into motion additional future plans and resources from the partnering institutions to continue to expand student exchange programs between Mexico and the United States beyond the Innovation Fund grant period.

## **B. Expected Results**

Higher education institutions that are successful in implementing Innovation Fund grants will:

- Promote and implement new student exchange and/or training opportunities for students in the U.S. and Mexico;
- Increase the number of students studying between the U.S. and Mexico;
- Create/strengthen strategic partnerships through international mobility between HEIs in the U.S. and Mexico, above what would have taken place if the grant did not exist;
- Demonstrate increased awareness of the barriers to student exchange opportunities; and
- Engage and collaborate with the Innovation Fund in sharing the lessons learned from the implementation.

## **Section IV: Award Information**

### **A. Estimate of Funds Available**

The intent of the 2019 U.S.-Mexico Innovation Fund Competition for Economic and Financial Inclusion and Agricultural Sustainability for Inequality Reduction is to award up to ten (10) Innovation Fund grants of \$25,000 to selected proposals, pending final evaluation. Partners of the Americas, Department of State, Fundación Banorte and Fundación Gruma reserve the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted.

### **B. Notification of Award Recipients**

Winning institutions will be notified no later than May 31, 2020. The list of grant recipients will be published on [www.100kstrongamericas.org](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org).



## C. Period of Performance

Following the notification, Partners will inform recipients of the next steps to formalizing and receiving the award. The period of performance will be from September 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021, with the possibility of an extension following an analysis of the program at the time of the request.

## D. Award Responsibilities

### 1. Innovation Fund Staff

The Innovation Fund staff, based in Washington, D.C., will be involved in the following areas:

- Technical support of grant activities and oversight of award contract terms;
- Review of the recipient's progress reports;
- Approval of changes in budget, program activities, personnel, and extension in period of performance;
- Request for additional information on program and student/faculty engagement;
- Facilitation of communications between awardees and U.S. Embassies; and
- Outreach regarding sharing of lessons learned from program implementation and participation at visibility events and conferences.

### 2. Award Recipients

Grant recipients will be responsible for sharing up-to-date information with the Innovation Fund staff on the program activities through required reports provided by Partners that will focus on:

- Progress on project goals and objectives, including the development of the program and student and faculty travel activities;
- Successes, challenges, and lessons learned in program implementation and evaluation;
- Testimonials on how the grant benefits/impacts students and institutions; and
- Program expenditures and cost-sharing.

## Section V: Application and Submission

### A. Proposal Application Format

Applications must not exceed a total of 25 pages and must utilize 12-pt Times New Roman font, single-spaced, typed in standard 8 ½" x 11" paper with one-inch margins, and each page numbered consecutively. Keep in mind the page limitations for each section of the proposal application as listed below. Any additional pages that exceed the page limitations will not be reviewed by the Review Committee.

- Cover Page (1 page)
- Table of Contents (1 page)
- Technical Narrative (10 pages max)



- Budget (3 pages max)
- Annexes (10 pages max)

A detailed description of the application format and requirements, including the evaluation criteria, can be found at [www.100kstrongamericas.org/app-format/](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org/app-format/).

## B. Online Submission Process

Proposals must be submitted online through the Application Form found on the *100,000 Strong in the Americas* website ([www.100kstrongamericas.org/grants](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org/grants)) by the deadline indicated on the cover page of this RFP. Applications that are received late or are incomplete will not be considered in the review process. No applications will be accepted via email unless otherwise instructed by Partners of the Americas. **Applications may only be submitted in English.**

Note: Prospective applicant institutions seeking information or clarification about this competition should complete the online form at [www.100kstrongamericas.org/questions](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org/questions). For a comprehensive list of questions received from applicants of previous grant competitions, please visit [www.100kstrongamericas.org/100k-competition-faqs](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org/100k-competition-faqs).

## Section VI: Anticipated Timeline

ACTIVITY	TIME PERIOD*
Launch of Grant Competition	November 21, 2019
Deadline to Submit Proposals – Competition Closes	March 2, 2020
Proposal Evaluation Process	March 3 – May 31, 2020
Notification of Status of Proposal	By May 31, 2020
Award of Grant Funds to Winners	June 1 – August 31, 2020
Period of Performance for Grantees	September 1, 2020 – August 31, 2021

*\*Dates are subject to change.*

## Section VII: Innovation Fund Contacts

Questions concerning this solicitation must be sent via [www.100kstrongamericas.org/questions](http://www.100kstrongamericas.org/questions) prior to the deadline mentioned on the cover letter of this document. **No phone calls.**



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of the AMERICAS



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