U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

June 14, 2023

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
Center of Excellence (COE) for Homeland Security in the Arctic (HSA)
Funding Opportunity # DHS-23-ST-061-ARCTIC

DHS received the following questions regarding the above referenced Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Based on the NOFO published material, the following answers ensure that all interested applicants have the same information. Questions have been edited to provide clarity. This FAQ will be updated as needed to address additional questions throughout the open application period.

Question #1: Do you anticipate standard overhead rates for the universities, or will DHS be looking for reduced rates?

Answer:
A cost match or a cost share is voluntary. However, the ability to extend the reach of DHS funds for research and education in support of its mission is an important consideration for DHS. In-kind contributions demonstrate a university's commitment to the COE and will be considered during the Site Visit Review as an "other factor." Please see NOFO Section E.2.I., "Phase 3: Site Visit Review" (page 65).

Applicants should follow instructions on Grants.gov for submitting the **SF424 (R & R) Application for Federal Assistance Form**. If you are requesting Indirect/Fringe Costs, please attach your indirect cost rate agreement, fringe benefit rate agreement, or a description of how fringe rates are calculated, using the "Add Attachments" button at the end of the SF424 form.

Question #2: What is meant by "dedicate substantial time and resources to OUP and DHS"?

Answer:
This speaks to the amount of time that the Center Lead's Management and Administration (M&A) Team, which requires dedicated staff, including a full-time Center Director, to support transition, communications, and program/project management, should expect to dedicate to working with the COE Program. The lead university for a DHS COE has significant M&A responsibilities such as coordination across the consortium and reporting requirements that may not be what you would typically expect in a federally funded financial assistance program. Please see NOFO Section A.9.b., "Priorities and Expectations for a COE" (page 5) and Attachment A: Terms and Conditions

for more information.

Question #3: On the SF424, do you want a budget for the entire time period, just the first year, or something in between?

Answer:
In the SF424, the budget for Block 15 - Total Estimated Project Funding should be prepared for one year in the amount of $4.6 million dollars. Please see NOFO Section D.10., "Content and Form of Application Submission," Item a. IV (page 51).

Question #4: Please confirm that there is a limit of one proposal which can be submitted for the management and administration section. Is a budget required to be submitted for this section?

Answer:
Yes, there is a limit of one proposal for Management and Administration, which would be part of the applicant's proposal to be the lead university for the DHS COE. This is an important element of the proposal and requires a budget and budget justification to support the proposed management and administration of the COE.

Question #5: What documents do we need to submit for the subawards listed in our budget?

Answer:
Subaward budgets are typically submitted as attachments. Budgets can be prepared in a format of the applicant's choice. The costs should clearly map to the cost categories in the SF-424, Research and Related Budget – Cumulative Budget (e.g., salaries and level of effort by calendar, academic or summer months; fringe benefits; travel; supplies; equipment; total direct costs; total indirect costs; and the indirect cost rate charge).

Question #6: Should each project be submitted with a 10-year budget spreadsheet?

Answer:
No. Project narratives for the proposed Research Program and Education and Workforce Development Program must include the "Total projected costs per year for two years and, if applicable, forecasted costs for up to five years." Please see NOFO Section A.9.h. (starting on page 23), "Application Project Narrative," Items II. "Research Program" and III. "Education and Workforce Development Program."

Question #7: How much detail will be needed in the budget and budget justification for expenses?

Answer:
Please complete the budget forms as part of the application on Grants.gov per the form instructions, to include the SF-424A, Research & Related Budget, and, as applicable, the R & R Subaward Budget Attachment(s) form.

The budget justification is provided as an attachment to the Research & Related Budget form in Section L (page 3). The budget justification narrative should clearly explain how the proposed budget is derived (e.g., how salaries were calculated, fringe, etc.).

Question #8: Is there a page limit for the budget justification?

Answer:
There is no page limit for the budget justification. The budget justification is not included in the Center narrative page limit. Please see NOFO Section A.9.h, "Application Project Narrative," (page 23).

Question #9: What is the link for the webinar recording?

Answer:
The webinar is not posted due to technical difficulties. We do not have a timeframe for resolution.

All information presented during the webinar is contained in the NOFO, which provides all guidance and requirements for applicants. Additionally, we have posted the webinar briefing and this FAQ includes all questions that were asked during the webinar.

Question #10: Are tables and figures included in the font face and size requirement?

Answer:
Tables and figures must be legible without enlargement (i.e., "zooming in"); use of a different font type and size is permissible for tables and figures.

Question #11: NOFO Section A.9.h., Item III., "Education and Workforce Development Program" (on page 31) notes that letters of support for hosting interns can be included in other attachments. How do applicants submit other attachments?

Answer:
Other attachments can be submitted using the **Research & Related: Other Project Information** form on Grants.gov. **Item 12 of this form, "Other Attachments,"** provides a mechanism to submit other attachments. This is where applicants may include supplemental information as indicated in the NOFO.

See NOFO Section D.10.e., Item VI., "**Other Attachments (Item 12)"** (page 54), "Use this to attach the documents listed under Other Submission Requirements (i.e., Consolidated List of Partners and Principal Investigator(s), Consolidated List of Projects, Letter of Support from University Leadership) or if you need another place to electronically attach portions of your application."

For technical assistance with Grants.gov, please contact:
Grants.gov Contact Center at support@grants.gov or Phone Number: 1-800-518-4726

Hours of operation are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The contact center is closed on federal holidays.

Question #11: Are Government Universities, DOE National Laboratories and/or Federally Funded Research and Development Centers eligible for this funding opportunity?

Answer:

Please refer to section C.1., "Eligible Applicants" (starting on page 44) for information on eligibility for lead and partner institutions. Section C.1. states that:

"FFRDCs or laboratories funded by federal agencies may not apply. FFRDC employees may cooperate or collaborate with eligible applicants within the limits imposed by applicable legislation, regulations, and DHS policies. FFRDC employees are not eligible to serve in a principal leadership role on a grant or cooperative agreement and may not receive salaries or in other ways augment their agency's appropriations through awards made by this program. National laboratory employees may participate in planning, conducting, and analyzing the research directed by the COE principal investigator, but may not direct projects on behalf of the applicant organization or principal investigator. The principal investigator's institution, organization, or governance may provide funds through its assistance agreement with DHS to an FFRDC for project-specific, non-federal research personnel, supplies, equipment, facilities, data, and other expenses directly related to the research.

Federal agencies may not apply. Federal employees are not eligible to serve in a principal leadership role on a grant or cooperative agreement and may not receive salaries or in other ways augment their agency's appropriations through awards made by this program. Nonetheless, federal employees may interact substantively with awardees in the form of cooperation. Cooperation involves consulting on the planning, management, and coordination of COE activities, sharing or comparing samples, equipment, facilities, data, models, or other support during the conduct of the research in which the interaction is substantial and requires the award of a cooperative agreement, rather than a grant. Substantial involvement occurs when the collaboration or cooperation of a federal employee or facility is necessary to achieving the overall goals of the research supported by a cooperative agreement."

Question #12: Are all partners in a DHS Center of Excellence subject to the DHS COE Terms and Conditions?

Answer:
Yes. The DHS FY23 Standard Terms and Conditions and the FY23 DHS COE Terms and Conditions (see Appendix A) flow down to subrecipients unless an award term or condition specifically indicates otherwise. By submitting an application, applicants recognize that they will be subject to the requirements of this NOFO, the DHS Standard Terms and Conditions, and the terms and conditions specific to this award (see Appendix A), should they receive an award.

Question #13: Is there is a specific format required for the PI/Co-PI Biographical Sketches?

Answer:
The NOFO does not require any specific format for the PI/Co-PI Biographical Sketches. They may not exceed two pages. The NOFO does require that bios/CVs include information demonstrating PI qualifications to conduct the proposed work:

Section A.9.h.II, "Research Program" (on page 26): "(a) Applicants must include the following in their research program overview: ... "Demonstrate that the Center and principal investigators have a high level of expertise in the areas in which they propose research. This includes providing a comprehensive bibliography of a principal investigator's own and others relevant publications. Omitting these supporting documents may result in DHS dismissing a proposal without review. Applicants should provide a bibliography under "Bibliography & References Cited."

Section D.10., "Content and Form of Application Submission," item e. (on page 52): "Applicants must complete a profile for the principal investigator(s) as well as other Senior Key Personnel identified for the project. Provide biographical a sketch for each senior/key person that include education and research activities and accomplishments and each individual's role in the proposed project. Each biographical sketch may not exceed two pages."

Section E.2.I, Evaluation Criteria for "Phase 1: Scientific Quality Review (External Review)" (on page 63):

"Qualifications of Personnel and Suitability of Facilities (20%)

- Does the research team have the qualifications – credentials, expertise, and experience – to carry out the proposed research?
- Are the facilities suitable for the proposed research? If so, does the applicant demonstrate a commitment from facility owners to allow researchers to use necessary facilities? Are the facilities currently approved for the work being proposed?
- Does the research proposal demonstrate that the researchers possess a sufficient amount of understanding of regulatory requirements, market conditions, and legal constraints necessary to execute the proposed work?"

Question #14: For the project narratives, please clarify if applicants are able to list an additional 'major aspect' or are proposals restricted to only address the 'three major aspects' listed in the second paragraph of Section A.9.b, "Priorities and Expectations for a COE," (on page 5; NOFO Sections B.b.2, "Research Program;" B.b.3, "Education and Workforce Development Program;" and B.4, "Management and Administration")?

Answer:
The NOFO language does not preclude applicants from including additional information beyond what is required to be addressed.

Section A.9.h., "Application Project Narrative," outlines requirements, and maximum page counts, for the Project Narrative portion of the application package. "The Center narrative is limited to 69 single-spaced pages with 12-point font, Times New Roman, and one-inch margins. For applicants who have previously led a DHS S&T COE, the Center narrative is limited to 75 pages to include a summary of their past performance as a DHS COE (if applicable). Pages in excess of the page limitations will not be reviewed. This page limit is inclusive of tables, charts, illustrations with captions, etc.[not included in the Center Narrative 65-page limit are the budget and investigators' credentials, past performance, or appendix.] The below section outlines specific requirements, and maximum page counts, for the Project Narrative portion of the application package.

I. Strategic Approach (3 pages)
II. Research Program (35 pages)
III. Education and Workforce Development Program (12 pages)
IV. Management and Administration (19 pages)
    a. Leadership (5 pages)
    b. Communications and Outreach (3 pages)
    c. Transition (8 pages)
    d. Program and Project Evaluation (3 pages)
V. Past Performance (6 pages) (Only applicants who have previously led a DHS S&T COE)"

Question #15: Is every publication that each PI and Co-PI has that does not fit within the 2-

page limit of the PI and Co-PI Biographical Sketch required to be listed in the Bibliography document, which is limited to 5 pages, or are only the publications that are most relevant to this project in the 2-page limited Biographical Sketches to be included? Is the Bibliography a separate document from the References Cited document for the Project Narrative?

Answer:
The biographical sketches for Key Personnel are separate documents from the research program overview Bibliography & References document. Both are required.

NOFO Section D.10.d., "**Research & Related: Senior/Key Personnel Profile**," (on page 52) states that "applicants must complete a profile for the principal investigator(s) as well as other Senior Key Personnel identified for the project. Provide a biographical sketch for each senior/key person that include education and research activities and accomplishments and each individual's role in the proposed project. Each biographical sketch may not exceed two pages." These biographical sketches are submitted using the **Research & Related Senior/Key Person Profile** form.

A.9.h., "**Application Project Narrative**," (on page 26) states that, as part of the research program overview, applicants should "demonstrate that the Center and principal investigators have a high level of expertise in the areas in which they propose research. This includes providing a comprehensive bibliography of a principal investigator's own and others relevant publications. Omitting these supporting documents may result in DHS dismissing a proposal without review. Applicants should provide a bibliography under "Bibliography & References Cited." This is referring to the research program overview Bibliography & References document, which is further discussed in Section D.10.e., Item IV., "**Bibliography & References Cited (Item 9)**."

D.10.e., Item IV., "**Bibliography & References Cited (Item 9)**," (on page 53) states that "the bibliography and/or references section is limited to 5 single-spaced pages with 12-point font, Times New Roman, and one-inch margins." The research program overview Bibliography & References document is submitted using the **Research and Related: Other Project Information** form, Item 9.

Any additional information that the applicant would like to submit that does not fit within the required page limits could be included as an appendix to the application or submitted as an "Other Attachment" through the **Research & Related: Other Project Information** form. Item 12 of this form provides a mechanism to submit other attachments.

See NOFO Section D.10.e., Item VI., "**Other Attachments (Item 12)**" (on page 54), "Use this to attach the documents listed under Other Submission Requirements (i.e., Consolidated List of Partners and Principal Investigator(s), Consolidated List of Projects, Letter of Support from University Leadership) or if you need another place to electronically attach portions of your application."

Question #16: Is the information requested in NOFO Section D.10.e., Item VI., "Project Summary/Abstract," and the Project Summary Abstract form on Grants.gov meant to show the same information?

Answer:
As long as a Project Summary/Abstract is submitted in accordance with NOFO Section D.10.e., Item II., "**Project Summary/Abstract (Item 7)**" (on page 53), the **Project Summary Abstract** form on Grants.gov is not required.

Question #17: There is both a "Facilities & Other Resources" attachment tab and an "Equipment" tab within the Research & Related: Other Project Information form on Grants.gov. NOFO Section D.10.e., Item V., combines these in the heading "Facilities and Equipment (Items 10 and 11)." Are applicants to provide one document with the heading "Facilities and Equipment" or should two separate documents be submitted, one with the heading "Facilities and Other Resources" and one with the heading "Equipment."

Answer:
Applicants should submit these items as two separate documents. Both are submitted using the **Research & Related: Other Project Information** form. The "Facilities & Other Resources" document should be submitted using item 10 on the form. The "Equipment" document should be submitted using item 11 on the form.

Question #18: Should the Budget Justification document follow the format contained in the Budget Information, Non-Construction Programs (SF424A-V1.1) form on Grants.gov or should it follow the format prescribed in Appendix A: Terms and Conditions Section 3.a.V.?

Answer:
Follow the instructions provided in NOFO Sections D.10.a., Item IV., "**Block 15, Total Estimated Project Funding**" (on page 52), and D.10.b., "**Budget Information, Non-Construction Programs (SF424A-V1.1)**," (on page 52), and the instruction contained in the **SF424 (R & R)** and **Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)** forms for providing budget information. The Terms and Conditions go into effect after award.