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

July 20, 2017

Department of Homeland Security Science & Technology Directorate (DHS/S&T)
Cross-Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense (CBTS) Center of Excellence
Center Lead NOFO: DHS-16-ST-061-CBTS-LEAD
Center Partner NOFO: DHS-ST-061-CBTS-PARTNER

DHS Grants and Program Offices received the following questions regarding the above referenced Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs). Based on the NOFO published material, the following answers ensure that all interested applicants have the same information. The identity of the institution asking the question will not be provided. Questions have been edited to provide clarity.

Questions may be added in the weeks to come, with the most recent questions listed first.

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**Question #25: Are colleges eligible to apply to be a Center Partner?**

**Answer:**
Yes, Eligible Center Partners include accredited universities and colleges, commercial industry, and/or non-profit organizations. Only the Center of Excellence Lead must be an accredited U.S. university.

**Question #24: Are potential applicants required to submit biographical sketches for principal investigators who are not part of the leadership or staff of the Center?**

**Answer:**
Yes, according to the *Content and Form of Application Submission* section of the NOFO, specifically under the subheading *D. Research & Related: Senior/ Key Personnel Profile, "Applicants must complete a profile for all principal investigators as well as any other senior key personnel on the project."*

**Questions #23: Can non-profit organizations apply to the Partner NOFO?**

**Answer:**
Yes, accredited colleges and universities, commercial industry, and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply to the Partner NOFO. However, nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage

in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply. Language pertaining to eligibility requirements have been updated in the Partner NOFO to clarify this.

**Question #22:** The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) states, *"**DHS will accept only one application for Center Lead from any single university for review. Proposals must be submitted by an accredited U.S. institution of higher education that along with its chosen partners, has the ability and capacity to conduct the required research."*** For larger Universities that have different colleges or schools within the overarching system, i.e. School of Business, School of Public Health, etc., can each of these schools that maintain different DUNS numbers submit a unique application to the NOFO – Center Lead?

**Answer:**
The CBTS NOFO, under the *Eligibility Information* section, states that "DHS will only accept one application from a given University as the Lead Institution". DHS recommends Applicants coordinate between interested divisions or schools within the University system to submit one application to the Lead NOFO. Universities and eligible applicants may submit more than one application to the Partner NOFO. In addition to objective, novel science, managing a DHS Center of Excellence requires teaming, synced and efficient supporting business functions, flexibility, and innovative and relevant science and technology processes.

**Question #21: Does the proposed scope entail a need for better cybersecurity software as it pertains to operations at ports of entry or land borders?**

**Answer:**
Please refer to the NOFO for the thematic areas and specific research questions that are of interest. The proposed CBTS COE emphasizes the need to better detect, mitigate, prepare for, and respond to biological threats or hazards that DHS operational Components currently face and will presumably face in the future.

**Question #20: In the recently released DHS S&T 2018 Budget Overview Congressional Justification document, it notes that S&T plans to eliminate a current COE and two planned COEs, one of which is the Cross Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense COE. Should interested applicants still apply to this Notice of Funding Opportunity?**

**Answer:**
Ultimately, if a university does not apply to be a COE lead or partner, DHS cannot consider the institution under this announcement. Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 funding for any individual COE is uncertain, so there are risks for a university or institution either by expending resources on applying, or missing opportunities by not applying. DHS plans in accordance with the Office of University Programs overall budget line contained in the 2018 Congressional Justification, i.e., the President's Budget. DHS continues to evaluate how much each Center of Excellence should receive in order to address and support DHS missions and administration priorities. The Cross Border Threat Screening

and Supply Chain Defense COE NOFO addresses the Administration's top priority of border security. The final FY 2018 budget may change as the budget continues through the House and Senate appropriations processes and Conference committee. DHS will adjust FY 2018 COE budgets as more information becomes available.

**Question #19: Page 16 of the NOFO states, "Selected COE Directors and Research Theme leaders must spend 1-3 months in DHS operational environments early in the research life cycle to understand both the technical and business requirements of DHS Components." How should this be reflected in the proposed budget? Will this entail multiple trips to multiple locations or an extended stay in one? Will the Center be responsible for covering housing costs from its own budget?**

**Answer:**
Potential applicants should include the estimated costs associated with traveling to locations in the budget submitted in the NOFO application. DHS recommends that potential applicants should also strategically become familiar with what location(s) and Components would be most relevant to the research that the University submits within the NOFO application. Understanding the technical and business requirements of DHS Components is essential for successful project implementation and during the research/technology transition process.

**Question #18: Page 19 of the NOFO states, "Provide a comprehensive bibliography of their own and others relevant publications.... Applicants should provide a bibliography under 'Other Attachments.'" However, on page 49 a Bibliography & References Cited item is required as Item 9 of the "Research & Related Other Project Information" section. Is there a difference between the two?**

**Answer:**
For every group of related projects proposed, applicants must provide a comprehensive bibliography of their own and others relevant publications. Omitting these supporting documents may result in DHS dismissing a proposal without review. The reference of a bibliography on page 19 and page 49 are the same, page 49 emphasizes the suggested page formatting. Please submit your bibliography (item 9) entitled "Bibliography & References". Please note that this section is limited to 5 pages, single-spaced, with 12 point Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins.

**Question #17: Our University is interested in applying to as a Partner to this NOFO. Is there a site to find out what Universities are interested in applying as potential Leads to better assist us in how to contact them for possible teaming?**

**Answer:**
DHS does not maintain a list of potential applicants. We encourage you to reach out through your academic networks to gage other Universities' interest and strategic fit. Universities that are interested in partnering with the Lead University can apply to the Partner NOFO for evaluation by DHS as a potential partner that will be paired with a Lead institution.

**Questions #16: Can National Lab staff researchers, who are not designated as**

**federal research personnel, be listed as senior personnel and receive funding from this opportunity? Or does DHS consider National Lab staff researchers federal research personnel, and therefore unable to receive funding from this opportunity?**

**Answer:**
Yes, National Lab staff researchers are Federal research personnel. As stated in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, 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.

**Questions #15: The NOFO emphasizes biological threats; however, in the webinar chemical threats seemed to be given equal weight. Should the proposed Center give equal weight to the two or are biothreats the primary concern?**

**Answer:**
DHS will evaluate potential applicants based on the criteria listed in the "Application Criteria" of the NOFO as it pertains to the five research thematic sections listed under the Research Topics section of the NOFO. Please review the research questions under this section in the NOFO for insights into the types of disciplines necessary to address the research questions.

**Question #14: Can two universities in different states apply as co-leads?**

**Answer:**
The DHS COEs are led by an accredited U.S. based academic institution, with research partners from the commercial sector, national laboratories, and state and local consortia that work closely with each other and with DHS Offices and Components. DHS will select qualified individual projects from applications received for either the Center Lead NOFO or the Center Partner NOFO, regardless of the institution that is awarded as lead institution. DHS has awarded Center Co-leads in the past; however, DHS may select a single institution to lead the Center.

**Question #13: Does DHS S&T have a directory for service consulting firms that specialize in providing consultation services to potential applicants to this NOFO with tasks such as the application process and/or commercialization support? If so, how would a consulting company be incorporated into this directory?**

**Answer:**
DHS does not currently maintain a directory of service consulting firms for potential applicants. DHS S&T encourages applicants to utilize existing university resources, consulting firms, or other partners to any supplement knowledge gaps.

**Question #12: How does Veteran owned businesses partner with potential COE Lead Institutions?**

**Answer:**
Interested businesses should apply to the Partner Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). DHS encourages interested parties to form new partnerships or leverage

existing partnerships that you party may have to successfully address the capability gaps described in the NOFO. DHS will select qualified individual projects from applications received for either the Center Lead NOFO or the Center Partner NOFO, regardless of the institution that is awarded as lead institution.

**Question #11: Can a Lead Applicant team up with a small business?**

**Answer:**
Yes. DHS encourages interested parties to form new partnerships or leverage existing partnerships that your organization may have to successfully address the capability gaps described in the NOFO. The skill sets required to make a COE successful are more extensive than research expertise alone. COEs need to have the ability and commitment to communicate frequently with a variety of actors from federal staff, to attorneys, to university administrators, to the private sector.

COE partners may include other academic institutions, commercial industry, DHS Components, Department of Energy National Laboratories and other Federally-Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs), other federal agencies that have homeland security-relevant missions, state/local/tribal governments, non-profits, and first responder organizations.

DHS will select qualified individual projects from applications received for either the Center Lead NOFO or the Center Partner NOFO, regardless of the institution that is awarded as lead institution. Interested businesses should apply to the Partner Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). DHS may select qualified individual projects from applications received for either the Center Lead NOFO or the Center Partner NOFO, regardless of the institution that is awarded as lead institution.

**Question #10: Do the 3 Partner awards have to be set aside (taken out of) the $3.5 million budget. That is, should a Lead proposal reserve around $750,000 for the 3 Partner awards?**

**Answer:**
Not necessarily. DHS may allocate up to $250,000 of the $3.5 million per year for the first two years to each selected Partner applicant (up to $750,000), subject to availability of funds. The Center Lead is responsible for administering funding to all DHS-selected projects within the Center's portfolio.

**Question #9: Will cost sharing be a review factor for Partner applications and if so, how much will these be weighted?**

**Answer:**
For more information regarding cost share or match please see section C "Eligibility Information" specifically the Cost Share or Match section.

**Question #8: Can a partner apply for a workforce development or professional development project rather than research?**

**Answer:**
Yes, please specify in your proposal submission that you are applying for a workforce or

professional development project rather than research. It is important to understand how related training is currently being offered in the market. DHS defines workforce development as the formal training for the next-generation of workforce whereas professional development training refers to how to efforts that support the continued development of existing professionals.

**Question #7: Is it advantageous for partner projects to have existing commercial partners in place, and also to have commercial investment as an in-kind match?**

**Answer:**
Please review the evaluation criteria to assess how DHS will evaluate applications. Applicants should have an understanding of how to translate research to practice including licensing, the ability to work with transition partners, and an understanding of federal acquisition. COEs should include experts in finance, project management, education, training, outreach and marketing, intellectual property management, technology development, and technology transfer.

For more information on cost share/match, please refer to the eligibility criteria section of the NOFO, specifically section C "Eligibility Information". 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. Identification of university in-kind contributions will result in a higher rating in DHS's overall proposal review.

**Question #6: Can a single institution be lead on more than one DHS COE; either from previously funded Center, or 2 from current call?**

**Answer:**
Universities that are currently the lead of a COE may apply, but the Departments within that university already leading a COE may not. For information on eligibility and evaluation criteria, please see Section E of the NOFO, section I. under "Application Evaluation Criteria." The DHS Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate will conduct a "Past Performance Review" for applications where the same department at a lead university has previously led a DHS Center of Excellence, (i.e., prior COE leads).

**Question#5: Are site visits required for partners or only COE lead?**

**Answer:**
The site visit review will only be conducted at the top three COE Lead Institution candidates. Per the Lead NOFO, "*The site visit is for proposals that have made it to the third and final review phase. The site visit review team will examine the results of the external and internal reviews and determine the extent to which the applicant's proposal and any site visit materials address the following criteria. Reviewers will rate applications using numerical ratings of 1 to 5 (poor to excellent) and apply the percentage-weighting factor as indicated for a final rating.*"

**Question #4: The CBTS NOFO focuses on biologicals, chemicals, and counterfeit goods. Is the detection of drugs within the scope of this center?**

**Answer:**
Please read the NOFO carefully for the thematic areas and specific research questions that are of interest to DHS.

**Question #3: The CBTS NOFO focuses on biologicals, chemicals, and counterfeit goods. How does this fit among the existing centers?**

**Answer:**
Please read the NOFO carefully for the thematic areas and specific research questions that are of interest. You can review information on the topics of existing COEs on: https://www.hsuniversityprograms.org/ . The scope of this Center is intended to compliment the projects that are currently being conducted at existing Centers.

**Question #2: Is a University that is currently a DHS Center of Excellence eligible to respond to the CBTS Notice of Funding Opportunity?**

**Answer:**
Universities that are currently the lead of a COE may apply, but the Departments within that university already leading a COE may not. For information on eligibility and evaluation criteria, please see Section E of the NOFO, section I. under "Application Evaluation Criteria." DHS component Science and Technology (S&T) will conduct a "Past Performance Review" for applications where the same department at a lead university has previously led a DHS Center of Excellence, (i.e., prior COE leads).

**Question #1: How can I access the Webinar? Is registration required prior to attending?**

**Answer:**
DHS will conduct an informational webinar for interested applicants on March 29, 2017 at 3:00pm [EDT]. During the call, DHS will discuss the NOFO and provide an opportunity for interested applicants to ask questions. The webinar may be accessed by phone (Dial: 800-369-3109, Passcode: 2157929) and computer (https://go.hsuniversityprograms.org/?GOKNrT3d). The webinar will be recorded and posted on www.grants.gov for future reference.