Frequently Asked Questions

Answers are applicable to the DRAFT BAAs

Applicants are responsible for carefully reviewing the FINAL BAAs, as DTRA is providing this for informational purposes only.

The final BAAs posted to grants.gov are the only authoritative source of information.

Overarching Questions and Answers

Shall the interested investigators spontaneously communicate with each other to discuss the possible LRO/LRAO/participant?

Interested parties may begin working together at their discretion.

If it is already known that not all BAAs can be credibly funded, wouldn't it make more sense to strategically decrease the number of BAAs? This way, members of the academic community will be able to focus on developing stronger proposals for work that is actually fundable.

DTRA does not want to limit the participation from the community by artificially down-selecting to one or two BAAs. DTRA decided to proceed with the publication of three BAAs to allow maximum participation. However, tremendous effort will go into the down-select decision for Phase II Proposal invitations to balance the community involvement and the costs associated with preparing the full proposals.

Is there too much power vested in the LRO/LRAOs when it comes to hiring board members (fears of 'nepotism')?

The TMG will collaboratively lead the Consortium to avoid nepotism. In accordance with the BAAs, the TMG is made up of the CAM, the PM, the four RALs, the corresponding RA Government TPOCs, and other senior DTRA scientific personnel as deemed appropriate by the CAM. The TMG is responsible for the management and integration of the Alliance's efforts including programmatic, technical, reporting, financial, and administrative matters. In matters where a consensus cannot be reached amongst the TMG, the CAM will have final decision-making authority. The TMG makes recommendations that concern the membership of the Alliance, the definition of the tasks and goals of the participants, and the relative distribution of funding to the members and non-permanent subawardees.

Please reconsider the decision to go this Alliance route. Several deserving university PIs (especially the younger ones with stellar out of box ideas who are not well-established and without significant networked contacts) could well be left out because the lead University's PI decided to go elsewhere.

DTRA welcomes submissions that include opportunities for junior faculty and junior staff researchers, students, and post-doctoral research fellows to participate in a meaningful way. This concern is addressed in the evaluation criteria of the BAAs.

If a university is already leading a consortia, could they also lead a URA?

All constraints for the LROs are detailed in the individual BAAs. None contain language limiting LROs based on other consortia.

We are interested in submitting to more than one of the three University Research Alliances as the Lead Research Organization (LRO). Is this permitted by the program rules?

Nothing in the BAAs would preclude a single entity from applying as the LRO for more than one of the Alliances. The same applies to the other roles (e.g., LRAOs and non-permanent sub-awardees)—nothing in the BAAs would preclude an entity from seeking multiple LRAO roles or multiple non-permanent subawardee roles. As for programs rules, nothing currently exists that would prohibit such situations.

Would DTRA TPOCs/PMs be open for a face-face visit ahead of the BAA? Some like me who could not be present could benefit by swinging by on a separate trip to DC.

DTRA does not intend to provide additional opportunities for access to the PMs prior to or following the final BAA publication.

Does every Research Area or Focus Area have to be mapped to a specific PI or Institution?

The RAs require a lead (LRAO) and a Research Area Lead (RAL). Mapping between the FAs and specific institutions or PIs is not desirable. Said another way, the individual FAs do not require a research lead—the LRAO would serve to lead all the FAs within the RA. Moreover, the wire diagrams in the DRAFT BAAs should not be considered organizational in nature. DTRA is keenly interested in approaches that include a matrix of personnel from the LRO, LRAOs, and non-permanent subawardees across the RAs and FAs.

Can an investigator be a PI in different FAs across RAs?

Yes, an investigator can be matrixed across RAs and/or FAs. DTRA is keenly interested in approaches that include a matrix of personnel from the LRO, LRAOs, and non-permanent subawardees across the RAs and FAs.

Which research areas and focus areas should/must/can be included in the draft IPP (Initial Program Plan)?

The IPP must include proposed research in the FAs as detailed in each of the final BAAs The IPP may also include proposed research in any of the other research and focus areas outlined in the BAA, especially as inclusion may demonstrate specific capabilities for the Alliance. It is expected the IPP will be tied to the Project Narrative and overall scientific approach.

It can be challenging to fund graduate students with short term projects. How often are research projects supposed to change?

DTRA can foresee a wide range of research project timelines from short exploratory efforts to efforts that span the duration of the Alliance. There is no requirement that research efforts or directions change with every BPP; some efforts may end and others may continue in the following BPP. The intent is to phase in new efforts and phase out older efforts as dictated by both the science and DTRA priorities. Care should be taken to minimize the disruption of graduate student efforts.

Eligibility and Teaming Questions and Answers

Are the teams pre-determined?

DTRA has no preconceived ideas regarding the teams. The program is highly interested in out-of-the box, innovative ideas and teams with significant growth potential.

For an alliance based model, it would be much appreciated if DTRA would facilitate the actual "formation" of the alliance partnership between universities, labs and also to include HBCUs/MIs. Perhaps a bulletin board from DTRA common access to all in which we can exchange ideas and interest for joining into an alliance?

DTRA will not facilitate formation of teams.

Is there any mechanism for the web attendees to mingle with the three topics for possible teaming up/collaboration? Will there be a research capability database established for web attendees to facilitate this?

DTRA will not provide additional opportunities to facilitate teaming.

Is it possible to have a consortium, vice an individual organization, as a sub-awardee to an LRO? Or to have a framework as part of an alliance whereby participation would be solicited from another consortium?

Eligible entities are detailed in each of the three BAAs. Should a consortia meet those criteria and be interested in partnering with a LRO to submit a proposal, there is nothing in the BAAs that would prohibit it. With respect to the framework, that may be proposed.

Can the LRAOs be changed over the lifetime of the Alliance?

DTRA does not anticipate that a planned change of the LRAOs would result in a successful Alliance given that the LRO and the LRAOs are intended to provide the stability and strategic framework for accomplishing the goals and objectives of the Alliance. However, circumstances may arise that may necessitate the change of a LRAO. Such instances will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Can the structure of a team change?

The LRO and LRAOs of an Alliance are intended to be consistent for the duration of the Alliance. Alliances will also include non-permanent subawardees which may change over time based on the IPP and the BPP.

I am not a U.S. citizen but have an approved petition to become a permanent resident. At present, would I be able to submit a proposal as a PI to the above call? Would I be able to participate as a Co-PI to the above?

In accordance with the BAA, performance under any CA awarded is not currently limited to individuals designated as U.S. Persons; however, individual participation could be limited in the future based on DoD policy changes. Please review the final BAA carefully for eligibility requirements.

Are non-US students able to participate in the research?

There are no limitations in the BAAs on the citizenship of potential performers.

The BAA suggests an optimal number of institutions for the Alliance. Is this a firm requirement? And who counts as institution for determining this number?

In order to maximize the effectiveness and optimize funding levels, the DRAFT BAAs detailed a range of expected Alliance participants. This is what the PMs believed to be an optimal number of institutions for the Alliance. However, this is not a firm number, and the final BAAs may contain updates to the language. Applicants should include the number of institutions that best fit their approach and technical roadmap.

Further, the detailed number of participants in the DRAFT BAAs was intended as a steady state number of funded institutions, but DTRA understands that over the lifetime of the Alliance the number of institutions may be more or less. The number is not intended to limit the total number of participating organizations over the life time of the Alliance and is not cumulative, i.e. it is not a running total of all participants.

In instances where the language remains in the final BAAs, the LRO, the LRAOs, and the non-permanent subawardees should be included in the count, but any unfunded institutions/collaborators should not be included.

Will DTRA combine or rearrange proposed Alliance teams at the preproposal or full proposal stage?

DTRA understands the importance of individual and institutional relationships to the success of the Alliance and does not intend to combine or rearrange proposed Alliance teams. DTRA may offer feedback on the pre-proposal concerning strengths and weaknesses of proposed teams, but addressing those comments will be at the discretion of the applicants.

Is there a suggested level of funding for LRAOs or sub-awardees?

Applicants should take care to consult the BAA(s), as some may detail funding levels. All funding levels should be consistent with research and other duties at a given organization and be in line with the IPP and BPPs.

Can the institutions/PIs change between the pre-proposal and the full proposal?

Changes or additions in PIs and/or organizations between the pre-proposal and full proposal are at the discretion of the applicants(s). Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose sufficiently complete, well-balanced Alliance teams in the pre-proposal. DTRA will provide written feedback to all applicants invited to submit full proposals; changes or additions of PIs and/or organizations in full proposal submissions that address weaknesses identified by DTRA in the pre-proposal are encouraged.

Proposals can be submitted as LRAO only, not as subawardees, right?

Individual proposals for LRAOs and subawardees will not be considered responsive to the BAAs. Only teams consisting of an LRO, LRAOs, and non-permanent subawardees would be considered responsive.

Will FFRDC's be eligible to perform and receive funding under the three BAA's listed below (HDTRA1-19-S-0002, HDTRA1-19-S-0003, and HDTRA1-19-S-0004) when they are announced?

Each of the three BAAs contain specific eligibility criteria. All interested parties should take care to review the final versions of the BAA(s) carefully to ensure eligibility requirements are fully understood.

Are the DOE/NNSA labs eligible for participation in the MSEE and IIRM BAAs?

In accordance with the eligibility criteria of the BAAs, they may be one of the non-permanent subawardees. As stated in the previous response, all interested parties should review the final versions of the BAA(s) to ensure eligibility requirements are fully understood.

Under eligibility information in the DRAFT BAA, section 3.3, the list of subawardees starts with "U.S. institutions of higher education, DoD-Degree Granting Colleges and Universities." May we presume that the service academies (USNA, USMA, & USAFA) are eligible as either U.S. institutions of higher education or DoD-Degree Granting Colleges and Universities?

Entities such as USNA, AFIT, etc. would be considered DoD-Degree Granting Colleges and Universities.

Are university affiliated non-profit research institutes eligible to participate in the URA program?

Each of the three BAAs contain specific eligibility criteria. All interested parties should take care to review the final versions of the BAA(s) carefully to ensure eligibility requirements are fully understood.

Are UARCs eligible to participate in the URA program?

Each of the three BAAs contain specific eligibility criteria. All interested parties should take care to review the final versions of the BAA(s) carefully to ensure eligibility requirements are fully understood.

DTRA encourages HBCU/MI participation. Does MI refer to Minority Institutions or Minority Serving Institutions?

DTRA refers to 10 U.S.C. § 2362(e) for the definition of a covered educational institution.

Subawardee Questions and Answers

Who is allowed to be a subawardee?

The eligibility criteria for the non-permanent subawardees are detailed in each of the BAAs.

Are the subawardees considered on an annual basis or on an award cycle basis?

All research will be assessed as part of the IPP and BPP process, including that conducted by the non-permanent subawardees. Depending on the research priorities set for each BPP, the level of effort across the Alliance may change, including that portion that is conducted by non-permanent subawardees.

As a LRAO, will the four FAs have to be in the same university or can be formed from other universities? Are these other universities counted as non-permanent members and will receive support via subaward?

The number and variety of organizations required to meet the requirements for each RA is up to the applicant. The LRAOs and all other non-permanent Alliance participants will be subawardees to the LRO.

Can the LRO/LRAOs decide on subawardees? What about subawardee swaps?

Through the IPP/BPP process and the TMG, research necessitating non-permanent subawardee involvement will be approved. This will include both the scope of the effort, funding, and the timeline.

Applicants may propose a process for finding and selecting non-permanent subawardees to carry out the work.

How will the participation of non-permanent Alliance members be determined? Who will determine the duration of their participation?

The IPP/BPP will detail the scope of work for the Alliance and will highlight where additional expertise is required. Applicants may propose a process for identifying and approving appropriate expertise; however, DTRA anticipates that the TMG will be heavily involved. Duration of non-permanent subawardee involvement will be dependent on continued need as defined in the IPP/BPP.

Can a single entity be a subawardee in different proposals?

Nothing in the BAAs would prohibit multiple teams from proposing the same non-permanent subawardee.

Workforce and Collaboration Questions and Answers

What is the anticipated level of DTRA involvement, particularly DTRA TPOC involvement, in the University Alliance?

The DTRA TPOCs are key members of the Consortium and will be closely involved in the scientific and technical direction of the Consortium. The TPOCs may or may not be directly involved in the Alliance research and analysis.

Who is responsible for funding DTRA involvement in the Consortium?

Costs for government employee involvement, including time, travel, etc., will be covered directly by DTRA. The Alliance should not propose any funding for these costs.

The BAA mentions Alliance staff and student rotations. What is the expected level of rotations?

While DTRA believes that the number is non-zero, there is no expected or suggested level of staff and student rotations. Rotations should be meaningful, relevant, and tied to the larger Collaboration and Workforce Development effort.

Funding Questions and Answers

The overall budget of $5M/y for a single award would make it quite challenging to have 10+ partners being served from a single university. Usually, at universities I am familiar with, the subcontracting OH per award is charged at the 25% of the sub award (with slight variations such as only on the first $50K or so). This further means 25% less for the actual R&D. Could not DTRA directly subcontract to each university as it does presently?

While DTRA could continue to provide assistance awards to individual universities, DTRA is moving away from that practice to an Alliance model with a single Lead Research Organization (LRO). DTRA will not consider models beyond what is detailed in the BAAs.

Is there a maximum acceptable percentage that may be dedicated to administrative oversight and management of the proposed Alliance?

DTRA will not provide an expected level of effort or dollar amount to applicants; however, DTRA understands that there will be an administrative component to the proposed budgets.

There can be significant administrative costs associated with being a LRO. Can these costs be included in the proposed budget?

DTRA acknowledges that this business model has higher administrative costs, particularly for the LRO. Reasonable administrative costs should be included in the proposed budget and substantiated in the supporting documents.

It can be a challenge for universities to send funds to DOE Labs, DoD Labs, and DoD Schools. Is DTRA funding these institutions directly to work with the Alliances or would DTRA consider sending funding directly?

As currently drafted, all funding must go through the LRO.

Review Process Questions and Answers

Who will be reviewing the submissions?

DTRA will not disclose the review team, individual reviewer scores, or individual reviewer comments. Applicants will receive a summary review in the form of a synopsis.

Are there any circumstances under which publications would be held up by DTRA?

No. The intent is for the research to be unrestricted unclassified fundamental research.

How much weight will be given to cost sharing in the proposal evaluation?

Cost sharing is permitted, but not required. Cost sharing is not explicitly part of the evaluation criteria. To be considered in the evaluation, cost sharing would have to enhance other aspects of the proposal that are part of the evaluation criteria.