



February 23, 2021

Department of Homeland Security Science & Technology Directorate (DHS/S&T)
Engineering Secure Environments from Targeted Attacks (ESE) Center of Excellence

Center Lead NOFO: ST-21-ESE-001

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.

Question #1: Does DHS intend to release a Partner funding opportunity for this COE, as has been done in previous years?

Answer:

There are no plans to issue a separate partner funding opportunity for this Center. Interested applicants should consider submitting a Lead proposal or teaming with another institution intending to submit a Lead proposal as a partner in their submission. Refer to the ESE COE NOFO for qualifications for Lead applicants and its partners.

Question #2: Is this ESE COE a re-imagining or replacement of a current COE or something very different?

Answer: As directed by Congress, the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) works to maintain a network of ten Centers of Excellence (COEs). This portfolio of COEs comprises the coordinated, university-based system to enhance the Nation's homeland security. In order to ensure that the research funded is of high quality and relevant to DHS operations, each COE has a unique focus and a fixed period of performance. As all COE awards naturally come to closure, S&T supports the Department in maintaining flexibility with regards to understanding cutting edge technologies, science, and analyses by establishing new COEs. COE Funding Opportunities are developed to support the anticipated needs and strategic focus of the Department.

**Question #3: Who is eligible to submit a proposal for this funding opportunity?
Are DOE National Laboratories and Federally Funded Research and Development
Centers eligible to partner under this funding opportunity?**

Answer: There is a section in the NOFO regarding eligible entities (section C, page 37).

The Center Lead designation is restricted to an accredited institution of higher education in the United States, in accordance with 6 U.S.C. 188(b)(2)(A) which specifies: "The Secretary, acting through the Under Secretary for Science and Technology, shall designate a university-based center or several university-based centers for homeland security."

DHS will accept only one (1) 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. The applicant institution must be identified as the official lead for proposal submission and subsequent negotiations.

Center lead applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with industry, other academic institutions, including historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), and/or other MSIs; institutions in states that are part of the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR); public sector institutions, and non-profit organizations, including any organizations that meet the definition of nonprofit in OMB Circular A-122, relocated to 2 CFR Part 230. However, nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined Page 38 of 110 DHS-21-ST-061-ESE-001

in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply. The Center Lead institution will fund partnering institutions through sub-awards.

Center Lead institution partnerships with foreign institutions are permitted, but may require special justification and approval from DHS. The applicant can include team members who are non-U.S. citizens; however, the proposed Center Director must be a U.S. citizen eligible for a security clearance.

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 #4: Will the informational webinar presentation be made available to the public?

Answer: Yes. The slide deck will be posted to grants.gov and found in the related documents tab for the ST-ESE-21-001 funding opportunity.

Question #5: Are you asking for 10-year budgets to be submitted? The maximum budgets typically requested by agencies are 5-year maximums.

Answer: No. Section D-9 *Content and Form of Application Submission*, item a.-IV (Page 45) states “Block 15, Total Estimated Project Funding – this amount should correspond to your budget justification and the Budget form’s total for the requested budget period.” COE Budget periods run from July 1st through June 30 in a typically year, a COEs initial year could be shorter, depending on award date. The budget for Block 15 in the SF424 should be prepared for 1 year in the amount of \$3.65 million dollars.

The Application Project Narrative in section A-9-e (beginning on page 12) states that Project narratives under the Center’s *Research Program* must include “Total projected costs per year for two years and forecasted costs for up to five years” (page15) and the *Workforce and Professional Development Program* must include “Total projected costs per year for two years” for projects submitted under workforce and professional development projects (page 17).

Question #6: Can we include national or government labs as part of our team?

Answer: There is a section in the NOFO regarding eligible entities (section C, page 37).

“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.”

Question #7: Will the work be required to be export controlled or have extra security measures different than open research?

Answer: Refer to Appendix A: COE Cooperative Agreement Terms and Conditions (Beginning on Page 72). Article II contains DHS issued clauses to included export control and security measures.

Question #8: Do you have suggestions for matchmaking for partners? For example, my institution would not be a lead, but we are interested in participating with another team. How might we find a good match?

Answer: As described on page Page 37 - Eligible Applicants, Center lead applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with industry, other academic institutions, including historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), and/or other MSIs; institutions in states that are part of the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR); public sector institutions, and non-profit organizations, including any organizations that meet the definition of nonprofit in OMB Circular A-122, relocated to 2 CFR Part 230. 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. The Center Lead institution will fund partnering institutions through sub-awards.

Therefore, applicants are encouraged to 1) review the existing Centers of Excellence to get a general sense of how previously centers have structure their consortia with diverse multi-disciplinary teams. 2) Applicants and potential partners are encouraged to network and participate in relevant communities of interest to the thematic areas addressed in this funding opportunity to find good matches.

Question #9: How does DHS differ from DTRA or DARPA?

Answer: DTRA and DARPA are agencies within the Department of Defense, overseen by the Secretary of Defense. DHS is a federal department, overseen by the Secretary of Homeland Security. Both Departments have unique missions and authorities as directed by law. The Department of Homeland Security tends to focus on civilian missions.

Question #10: Does DHS fund clinical testing of new trauma therapeutics?

Answer: Projects proposals that respond to the research questions within this funding opportunity and correspond to the ESE thematic areas will be considered. Applicants are encouraged to refer to Section A-9-f (page 27) for Research and Workforce Development Themes, Topics, and Questions and Section E (Pages 48-66) for evaluation methodology and criteria.

Question #11: Are full subaward budget submissions required?

Answer: DHS expects projected subcontract costs from the proposed projects in the Research and the Workforce Development Programs, as indicated in Section 9-e-II and 9-e-III (pages 15 & 18) of this NOFO to be incorporated into the Center's overarching budget. DHS acknowledges that this initial budget may change as indicated on page 37 and 66.

“DHS reserves the right to select or not select research and/or workforce development projects submitted in response to the Center Lead to create the research and education portfolio for the new Center. DHS awards the cooperative agreement to the Center Lead. Projects selected by DHS become part of the Center portfolio and are funded through the cooperative agreement with the Center Lead institution. The Center Lead is responsible for administering funding to all DHS-selected projects within the Center's portfolio.

Note: The first year of funding may be less due to startup delays; however, applicants should submit proposals for the full amount.”

Section F: Federal Award Administration Information

1. Notice of Award

Customarily, applicants are notified about evaluation decisions within six months of the application closing date. A summary statement of the scientific review by the peer panel will be provided to each applicant with an award or declination letter. DHS also requires successful applicants to provide responses to comments or suggestions offered by the peer reviewers and revise and resubmit their proposal accordingly. Successful applicants may also be requested to submit a revised budget. DHS will contact the applicant to obtain these materials. Before or after

an award, applicants may be required to provide additional quality assurance documentation. A cooperative agreement award will be executed by a DHS Grants Officer authorized to obligate DHS funding. The successful applicant will receive the award and cover letter by e-mail. The successful applicant will have the option to request an original by mail.

After award and subject to agreement from the DHS Program Manager, the selected Center Lead will hold a work plan development workshop with homeland security practitioners to refine the originally proposed work selected as part of this funding opportunity. Project proposals will receive an initial year of funding once DHS has approved a project work plan. Additional funding beyond the first year will depend upon performance and availability of funds. DHS expects this workshop to occur within 60 days of the award.

Question #12: Is the past performance requirement only requested from institutions apply as a COE Lead that previous Lead a COE or would past performance be required if one of Center's included partners previously lead a COE?

Answer: Only institutions who were designated as Lead for a COE previously and are submitting as a Center Lead for this opportunity need to complete the Section VIII - Past Performance of Application Project Narrative.

Question #13: Do you have any format guidance on the required lists (of partners and PIs and of Projects)?

Answer: Requirements and suggested page counts for the Project Narrative portion of the application package can be found in Section A-9-e. The Center narrative is limited to 64 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 71 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.

Question #14: The NOFO indicates allowance for letters of support but seems to indicate only one from the lead. Can we include LOS from others (such as subawardees, Industry and National Labs)? Are there limits to such letters?

Answer: Section III of the Applicant Project Narrative, Workforce and Professional Development Program notes that letters of support from organizations agreeing to host interns for workforce and professional development projects may be included in the appendix of the application (See page 18 of the NOFO). Letter of support from others (such as subawardees, Industry and National Labs) may also be included in section VI (Other Attachments) in the application (Reference page 47).

Question #15: If Industry Partners are willing to become members, can we include membership commitments (actual dollars) in the LOS as cost share?

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. Identification of university in-kind contributions may result in a higher rating in DHS's overall proposal review to the extent that the contribution is found to be of value. Similarly, if Industry Partners wish to commit support to a Center, this will also be considered by DHS.

Question #16: Can we fund international collaborators, as subawardees and/or consultants?

Answer: Yes, U.S. based institutions of higher learning can include international collaborators as subawards and/or consultants. Reference Section C-1 Eligible Applicants (Page 38).

“Center Lead institution partnerships with foreign institutions are permitted, but may require special justification and approval from DHS. The applicant can include team members who are non-U.S. citizens; however, the proposed Center Director must be a U.S. citizen eligible for a security clearance.”

Note: DHS evaluates lead applicants on their ability to secure and lead multidisciplinary teams, which could include international partners, as indicated in evaluation criteria A, Leadership and Project Management, in the site visit and past performance reviews of applicants, pages 59 and 61 in this funding opportunity.

Question #17 Would it be possible for DHS to collect and make a list of interested schools who are not necessarily equipped to be COE leads, but are actively looking to participate in this program as a partner university and vice versa, to help universities identify potential partnerships?

Answer: At this time DHS has not collected a list of interested parties and cannot make that list available to the community. S&T has taken note of this suggestion and may incorporate this request in future COE solicitations.

Question #18: Can DHS provide a list of attendees, their affiliation, and emails for those that in attendance in the Informational Webinar?

Answer: No. DHS S&T did not require, nor compiled a list of participants from the informational webinar for the ESE Centers of Excellence Funding Opportunity.

Question #19: Are government universities considered federal agencies, (e.g. Naval Post Graduate University)? If government universities are not currently authorized to apply, can this be reconsidered?

Answer: Government Universities are considered federal agencies and are not eligible to apply to this funding opportunity. Federal employees employed at or attending a government university may interact substantively with awardees in the form of cooperation. Reference section C-1 (Page 38) of this NOFO.

Section C-1

“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 #20: Is it acceptable to propose two faculty Center Directors (co-Leads) for the COE? Any downsides or benefits you see vs naming one?

Answer: Please refer to Section 9-e-IV (Page 18) for guidance on Leadership structuring. Please note that DHS will only make one award for the ESE COE, co-leads from two different universities would not be acceptable.

“DHS will accept only one (1) 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. The applicant institution must be identified as the official lead for proposal submission and subsequent negotiations.” Section - C (Page 37)

Also note that *“The Center must appoint or hire either a full-time Director or Executive Director. OUP’s experience has shown that part-time Directors have difficulty managing all of the demands placed on a COE, as well as their other duties. The Center Director should expect to work closely with the DHS Program Manager and have an effective and dynamic working relationship with DHS. Center Directors are ultimately responsible for managing all Center activities and ensuring they are productive. Center Directors must be U.S. citizens who are eligible for a government security clearance.”* Two halftime co-Leads would not satisfy the full-time Director criteria.

Should a Lead institution propose co-leads, a successful proposal will indicate the value each of these Directors brings to the Center, highlighting any differences in their duties or areas of responsibility. E.g. Scientific vs Management Director

Question #21: How much of the Leadership staff should be identified and named in the proposal? For example, is it required or desired to have the Center Executive Director and other leadership staff identified or in place for the proposal? Are interim Staff acceptable until the COE is awarded?

Answer: Please reference page 46, which specifies 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.”

Question #22: Do you have any guidance on content to include for external Letters of Support from partner universities, industry, etc? Are they free form at our discretion or should they follow a specific content template recommended by DHS? (Ref Q14)

Answer: Letters of Support, other than the required letter of support from the Lead applicant’s institution, are optional, of which DHS does not have a specific template or preference of format.

Question #22: How does DHS selection of individual projects work with respect to the total COE budget? If certain projects are not selected for funding, will DHS

work with the COE to select alternate projects or increase budgets of existing projects as long as the total budget remains at or under \$3.65M/year?

Answer: The S&T Office of University Programs will work with the Center to reallocate funds for research and workforce development projects that are not selected. Historically these funds have been redirected to: 1) supplement projects that were selected, but could be benefit from additional initial funding, 2) used to augment the Center's program management and support team, 3) to bolster communication, outreach and engagement sessions, or 4) to redirected into new projects not submitted by the COE lead that would enhance or strengthen the Center's portfolio.

Question #23: If a proposal is considering adding private sector companies that are headquartered in foreign countries but have offices in the United States, would they be allowed to participate as COE Partners? If so, are there any procedures that we need to comply with in regard to CAPO requirements during the proposal preparation stage?

Answer: Yes, international partnerships are allowable and COE Lead applicants are encouraged to propose partnerships that are exceptionally qualified and highly diversified. Please reference the following sections when including international partners:

- Page 38 C-1 Eligible Applicants
 - o "Center Lead institution partnerships with foreign institutions are permitted, but may require special justification and approval from DHS. The applicant can include team members who are non-U.S. citizens; however, the proposed Center Director must be a U.S. citizen eligible for a security clearance."
- Pages 46, Section 9-e-I "Other Project Information"
 - o "Includes information regarding use of human subjects, use of animal subjects, proprietary information, environmental impacts, historic place designation, and international collaborators."
- Page 77, Appendix A, Article I-A, 13 Foreign Participation Reporting Instructions
 - o The admittance of foreign detailees, scientists, and students into DHS sponsored/funded academic and other programs may result in continuous exposure of DHS information, personnel, IT systems, technologies, facilities, resources, and programs by non-U.S. citizens. In order to mitigate this potential security risk, DHS Management Policy 121-08 stipulates all foreign detailees, scientist, professors, principle investigators, and student nominees involved in long-term (greater than 30 days) DHS sponsored/funded academic or other DHS programs must submit a DHS Form 11055 to the DHS Office of Chief Security Officer. The Director/Principal Investigator is required to ensure all foreign investigators and students working on DHS sponsored/funded research or receiving tuition or travel support of any kind through this award, complete DHS Form 11055, to report all foreign national students/teaching assistants. Within the Form, Section I (Foreign National Information), Section II (Foreign National Information -Passport/Visa), and Section III (Foreign National Information (Employer Information) must be completed. Sponsor information will be completed internally at S&T.
Please save the completed Form and return to DHS S&T Security through email, DHSS&TCOE@hq.dhs.gov. Do Not Use the "Submit" button on the form. Form 11055 shall be submitted within 30 days of the end of the budget period for the upcoming annual workplan. For individual engagements with Foreign Nationals, Recipient will submit Form 11055 at least 30 days prior to the activity in which the foreign national participates. Please indicate your Center of Excellence affiliation and position title in the email.
- Pages 88-97, Appendix A, Article II-B through II-H

Question #24: Will DHS allow US DOT state planning and research funds (or other federal funds) to be applied to cost share?

Answer: No, DHS will not accept federal funds as cost share. Please refer to (Page 39), Cost Share or Match, of this NOFO and Uniform Guidance 2 CFR 200.29

“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 may result in a higher rating in DHS’s overall proposal review to the extent that the contribution is found to be of value.”

Uniform Guidance 2 CFR 200.29: Cost sharing or matching means the portion of the project not paid by Federal funds (unless otherwise authorized by federal statute).