

W911NF-18-S-0005-FY2022

SOURCES SOUGHT NOTICE

REQUEST FOR WHITE PAPERS

BAA TOPIC A-8.b.4: DEVELOPING NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS FOR THE
FUTURE FORCE

“Communication Skills for Mid-Level and Senior NCOs”

INTRODUCTION

Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) W911NF-18-S-0005 was publicized on FedBizOpps and [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) on 1 May 2018. This Sources Sought Notice calls for White Paper submissions in reference to the BAA Topic A-8.b.4: DEVELOPING NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS FOR THE FUTURE FORCE. The United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) Broad Agency announcement W911NF-18-S-0005, issued under the provisions of paragraph 6.102(d)(2) of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, provides for the competitive selection of basic and applied research and that part of development not related to the development of a specific system or hardware procurement. A Proposal submitted in response to this BAA and selected for award is considered to be the result of full and open competition and in full compliance with the provisions of Public Law 98-369, “The Competition in Contracting Act of 1984,” and subsequent amendments. Funding of research and development (R&D) within ARI areas of interest will be determined by funding constraints and priorities set during each budget cycle. Any award related to the submission of a White Paper and subsequent Proposal requested by this Notice is subject to funds availability and priorities. ARI may choose not to select any new award due to unavailability of funds or other factors.

The sequence of steps leading to an award is:

- 1) Request for White Paper initiated by ARI through this Sources Sought Notice
- 2) Submission of a timely White Paper **no more than five pages in length** to the POC for the U.S. Army Contracting Command, wilveria.a.sanders.civ@army.mil, and copy furnish (CC) the ARI Technical Point of Contact (TPOC), larry.w.golba.civ@army.mil.
- 3) Written or telephonic feedback provided to the Offeror regarding the White Paper’s scientific merit and potential contributions to the Army mission as per established criteria presented in Part III
- 4) If the White Paper merits it, a request of a formal proposal initiated by ARI
- 5) Submission of a timely, formal proposal
- 6) Evaluation of the formal proposal as per established criteria presented in Part III
- 7) Award for selected proposal based on availability of funds or other factors

This sequence allows earliest determination of the potential for funding and minimizes the labor and cost associated with submission of a full proposal that has minimal probability of being selected for funding. Note that an interested Offeror **must** submit a White Paper electronically in order to be eligible to submit a formal proposal under this Notice. This Notice requires that a White Paper be submitted electronically no later than **22 August 2022, 5:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time**. See Part V, Deadlines, for additional details. BAA W911NF-18-S-0005 allows several potential instrument types (e.g., contract, grant, cooperative agreement) to result from a successful proposal. For this Notice, the intention of the Government is to award a contract.

THOSE SUBMITTING A WHITE PAPER/PROPOSAL ARE CAUTIONED THAT ONLY A GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING OR GRANTS OFFICER CAN OBLIGATE THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH AWARD OF A LEGAL INSTRUMENT INVOLVING EXPENDITURE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS.

This Sources Sought Notice for a Requested White Paper consists of seven parts as follows:

- Part I: Research and Development Interests of the Requested White Paper
- Part II: Preparation and Submission
- Part III: Evaluation Criteria
- Part IV: Feedback
- Part V: Deadlines
- Part VI: Inquiries
- Part VII: References

ACC (APG) RTP Agency Point of Contact:

The POC for the US Army Contracting Command (Aberdeen Proving Ground) Research Triangle Park Division is: Ms. Wilveria Sanders, (919) 549-4328, wilveria.a.sanders.civ@army.mil.

ARI Agency Point of Contact:

The ARI POC for technical matters for this White Paper topic is: Dr. Larry Golba, (254) 392-8438, larry.w.golba.civ@army.mil.

I. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS OF THE REQUESTED WHITE PAPER:

The United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences is the Army's lead agency for the conduct of research, development, and analyses for the improvement of Army readiness and performance via research advances and applications of the behavioral and social sciences that address personnel, organization, training, and leader development issues. ARI contracts with educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and private industry for research and development (R&D) in different areas, including the areas specifically identified in Paragraph 8 of W911NF-18-S-0005. Efforts funded under this White Paper request will only include Applied Research and/or Advanced Technology Development.

Applied Research provides a systematic expansion and application of knowledge to design and develop useful strategies, techniques, methods, tests, or measures that provide the means to meet a recognized and specific Army need. Applied Research precedes system specific technology investigations or development, but it should have a high potential to transition into the Advanced Technology Development (ATD) Program.

The ARI ATD Program includes the development of technologies, components, or prototypes that can be tested in field experiments and/or simulated environments. Projects in this category have a direct relevance to identified military needs. These projects should demonstrate the general military utility or cost reduction potential of technology in the areas of personnel selection, assignment, and retention; training strategies and techniques; leader education and development; performance measurement; and team and inter-organizational mission effectiveness. These projects should be focused on a more direct operational benefit and if successful, the technology should be available for transition.

WHITE PAPER TOPIC: Communication Skills for Mid-Level and Senior NCOs

According to ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*, communication as a competency does far more than simply transmit information (p. 5-14). Effective communication creates a shared understanding and situational awareness among and between leaders and Soldiers. For that reason, the ability to succinctly communicate information in a clear manner is an important skill for all leaders to learn. The importance of effective communication cannot be overstated. Leaders cannot lead, supervise, counsel, coach, mentor, or build teams without effective communication skills (p. 5-15).

Effective communication skills are particularly important for the Army's noncommissioned officers (NCO). Known as the "backbone of the Army," the NCO Corps plays a critical role in leading, training, and taking care of Soldiers. In fact, the impact of NCOs on Soldier and unit readiness is so vast that – according to TC 7-22.7, *The Noncommissioned Officer Guide* – the quality of the NCO Corps is thought, in large part, to determine the overall quality of the Army (p. 2-4). Across an NCO's career, as they transition from direct leadership to operational and strategic leadership positions, their communication skillset will likely include verbal (public speaking & military briefings) and written (English and grammar) communication, active listening, facilitation, negotiations, social media, digital communications, and media engagement.

Over the past several years, ARI has been conducting research to support the development of key communication skills in junior NCOs (e.g., Orvis et al., 2019; Sanders, 2018; Sanders et al., 2020a, 2020b) – the Army's first line leaders. Research is now needed to support the development of communication skills in mid-level and senior NCOs (sergeant first class – sergeant major) as they transition from direct leadership positions into operational and strategic duty positions. Mid-level and senior NCOs need to be able to demonstrate basic communication skills to role-model and train subordinate NCOs "two levels down." They need to set a culture of effective communication within the organization. They also need to influence, advocate, and provide guidance while navigating power differentials within command teams.

The primary goal of this research is to identify the communication skills mid-level and senior NCOs need to be effective leaders, identify where training needs exist, and develop and conduct formative evaluations of "proof of concept" development methods and assessments. White papers should address the Offeror's approach following research questions/requirements:

1. What interpersonal communication skills are needed for successful NCO leadership at platoon, company, battalion, and brigade levels?
2. What are the communication skills that are currently being taught to mid-level and senior NCOs in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains, and where are there gaps in communication skills training?
3. What are the best science-based methods to assess and develop the communication skills needed by mid-level and senior NCOs, and where would those assessments and training be most

effectively administered (e.g., institutional, operational, or self-development domains (or a combination thereof))?

This research supports Part B (Train) of Line of Effort 2 of the *Army People Strategy* (2019), which emphasizes “the development and implementation of new tools, methods, and processes to enhance individual talents for the benefit of the Army and the individual” and “investment in the development of Army leaders and supervisors who will provide purpose, motivation, and direction to meet our MDO-capable force objectives by 2035.” The research proposed in this new requirement request will identify the communication skills and develop proofs of concept that will enhance the leadership talents of mid-level and senior NCOs, and identify the best methods to train and assess those skills.

The award will be approximately a 36-month period of performance. The Base Period will be 7 months. Option Period #1 will be 12 months. Option Period #2 will be 12 months. Option Period #3 will be 5 months. The combined budget for Base and Option Periods shall not exceed \$700,000.

The Army Contracting Command- Aberdeen Proving Ground, RTP Division has the authority to award a variety of instruments, to include contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. The ACC (APG) RTP Division reserves the right to use the type of instrument most appropriate for the effort proposed.

II. PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF A WHITE PAPER:

Preparation of White Paper

A White Paper should focus on describing details of the proposed research for both the base and option approach, including how it is innovative and how it could substantially advance the state of the science. Army relevance and potential impact should also be described, as well as an estimate of total cost for both the base and option approach. White Papers should present the effort in sufficient detail to allow evaluation of the concept's technical merit and its potential contributions to the Army mission.

A White Paper must be limited to five (5) pages plus the cover page and an addendum in which the Offeror must include a biographical sketch (up to 300 words per individual) of all key personnel (i.e., Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators) who will perform the research, highlighting their qualifications and experience as discussed below. All files and forms must be compiled into a single PDF file or MS Word document before submitting. Reviewers will be advised that they are only to review the cover page and up to five pages plus the addendum. Any pages submitted in excess of the five (5) page limit will not be reviewed or evaluated.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION FOR A WHITE PAPERS:

1. Technical Approach: A detailed discussion of the effort's scientific research objectives, approach, relationship to similar research, level of effort, and estimated total cost; include the nature and extent of the anticipated results, and if known, the manner in which the work will contribute to the accomplishment of the Army's mission related to this request and how this would be demonstrated.
2. Requests for Government Support: The type of support, if any that the Offeror requests of the Government (such as facilities, equipment, demonstration sites, test ranges, software, personnel or materials) shall be identified as Government Furnished Equipment (GFE), Government Furnished Information (GFI), Government Furnished Property (GFP), or Government Furnished Data (GFD). Offeror shall indicate any Government coordination that may be required for obtaining equipment or facilities necessary to perform any simulations or exercises that would demonstrate the proposed capability.

3. Key Personnel Biographical Information: As an addendum to the White Paper, the Offeror must include a biographical sketch (up to 300 words per individual) of all key personnel (i.e., Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators) who will perform the research, highlighting their qualifications and experience.

RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS ON WHITE PAPERS:

1. The Offeror must identify any proprietary data the Offeror intends to be used only by the Government. The Offeror must also identify any technical data or computer software contained in the White Paper that is to be treated by the Government as limited rights or restricted rights respectively. In the absence of such identification, the Government will assume to have unlimited rights to all technical data or computer software presented in the White Paper. Records or data bearing a restrictive legend may be included in the White Paper, but must be clearly marked. It is the intent of the Army to treat all White Papers as procurement sensitive information before the award and to disclose their contents only to Government employees or designated support contractors for the purpose of procurement related activities only. Classified, sensitive, or critical information on technologies should not be included in a White Paper.
2. An Offeror is cautioned that portions of White Papers may be subject to release under terms of the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552, as amended.

Submission of White Paper

White Papers must be submitted by e-mail to the POC for the U.S. Army Contracting Command, wilveria.a.sanders.civ@army.mil, and cc'd to the ARI Point of Contact (POC), larry.w.golba.civ@army.mil, in electronic MS Word document format or PDF file format. Cite “ARI BAA W911NF-18-S-0005Y, Communication Skills for Mid-Level and Senior NCOs” in the e-mail subject line.

III. EVALUATION CRITERIA:

A White Papers and full Proposals received in response to this request will be evaluated by the ARI designated point of contact identified in this request using the following factors/criteria:

1. Overall scientific and/or technical merits of the proposed research: The Offeror must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the research problem and articulate a clear approach to addressing the research objectives. The proposed approach must be based on feasible and realistic scientific methods and provide the Government with a high level of confidence of successful completion within proposed timeline.
2. Potential contributions of the effort to the U.S. Army Research Institute’s mission: In addition to showing how the proposed research aligns with the solicited topic, the Offeror must also specify how the proposed research will contribute to or advance the current U.S. Army Research Institute’s behavioral and social science research mission.
3. The Offeror’s capabilities, related experience, facilities, techniques or unique combination of these which are integral factors for achieving the proposed research objectives: the Offeror must demonstrate relevant organizational capabilities [e.g., experience, facilities, techniques] beyond individual capability to ensure the proposed research objectives can be achieved by the organization as a whole.

4. The qualifications, capabilities, and experience of the proposed Principal Investigator and other key personnel who are critical to the achievement of the proposed research objectives: The Offeror must demonstrate that the key personnel have the education and experience necessary to successfully complete the research objectives. Personnel capabilities need to be aligned with the expertise needed to achieve the required research objectives.

5. The Offeror's record of past performance: Past performance information obtained from the Offeror's White Paper, centralized past performance databases, and other sources will be used to evaluate past performance on projects of similar size, scope, and complexity to determine timely compliance with Government specifications. For an Offeror with no relevant past performance, the Government may take into account information regarding the past performance of predecessor companies, subcontractors, or proposed personnel that will perform key aspects of the proposed research.

6. Realism, affordability, and appropriateness of proposed costs: The Offeror must demonstrate that the proposed costs are appropriate given the suggested research approach. The Government will also evaluate the proposed costs in relation to the scope of the research objectives and the U.S. Army Research Institute's budget.

7. Current and/or future relationship or interface with ongoing activities in academia and/or industry: The Offeror must demonstrate how the research findings and/or products could inform current or future scientific research, impact industry, and/or meet Army needs and goals.

The request for a proposal will be made based on the overall evaluation of a White Paper using the seven criteria listed above. The overall scientific and/or technical merit of the proposed approach will be weighted more strongly than all of the other factors combined. A request for proposal may not necessarily be made to the lowest proposed price. During the evaluation of White Papers, ARI's POC for technical matters may request a discussion with an Offeror, but discussions are not guaranteed nor required for competition and award purposes. ARI's POC for technical matters reserves the right to evaluate a White Paper and request a proposal without discussions. The Offeror's initial submission should contain the Offeror's best terms from a technical and price standpoint. Once a full proposal has been requested, all communications must go through the POC for the U.S. Army Contracting Command.

If the White Paper evaluation results in the request and submission of a full proposal, the proposal will be evaluated by a panel of scientific peers using the same factors/criteria as those listed above under Evaluation Criteria. A request for a full proposal does not guarantee an award. The decision to award will be based on feedback from the panel, considerations presented by ARI's POC for technical matters identified in this document, and other factors like budgetary constraints. ARI may choose not to select any award due to unavailability of funds or other factors.

IV. FEEDBACK:

Written or telephonic feedback will be provided to the Offeror regarding the White Paper's scientific merit and potential contributions to the Army mission. If the Government decides to request a full proposal, a written request will be sent to the Offeror. The Written Request will, at a minimum, invite a full proposal. The request may also include feedback intended to improve the proposal's potential for award.

V. DEADLINES:

Electronic versions of the White Paper must be received by the POC for the U.S. Army Contracting Command and the ARI POC, with e-mail subject line “**ARI BAA W911NF-18-S-0005Y, Communication Skills for Mid-Level and Senior NCOs**” by e-mail no later than **5:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time on 22 August 2022.** Any extension to the White Paper submission deadline will be posted to FedBizOpps as an amendment to this Notice. Note that a timely White Paper received under this Notice will be evaluated and considered for proposal requests throughout the period beginning **22 August 2022, and ending 22 November 2022.** **An extension of this timeline may be granted based on the number of White Papers submitted or other factors out of the control of the designated point of contact reviewing the White Papers. An Offeror will be notified by email if the White Paper evaluation timeline is extended beyond 22 November 2022.**

Instructions for the submission of a full Proposal will be provided by the U.S. Army Contracting Command to an Offeror invited to submit based on the evaluation of their White Paper.

An Offeror is responsible for submitting an electronic White Paper or full proposal so as to be received and accepted at the Government site indicated in this Notice no later than the date and time specified above. When sending electronic files, an Offeror shall account for potential delays in file transfer from the originator’s computer to the Government website/computer server. An Offeror is encouraged to submit their response early to avoid potential file transfer delays due to high demand or problems encountered in the course of submission.

An Offeror should receive confirmation of delivery at the Government site, not just successful relay from the Offeror’s system. Acceptable evidence to establish the time of receipt at the Government site includes documentary and electronic evidence of receipt maintained by the Government site. All submissions shall be submitted before the deadline identified above in order to be considered – no exceptions.

If an emergency or unanticipated event interrupts normal Government processes so that a White Paper or full proposal cannot be received at the site designated for receipt by the date and time specified above, then the date and time specified for receipt will be deemed to be extended to the same day and time specified in this Notice on the first work day on which normal Government processes resume.

An Offeror agrees to hold the terms of their White Paper and any subsequent proposal valid for 180 calendar days from the date of submission.

VI. INQUIRIES:

ACC (APG) RTP Agency Point of Contact (Contractual Questions)

The POC for the US Army Contracting Command (Aberdeen Proving Ground) Research Triangle Park Division is: Ms. Wilveria Sanders, (919) 549-4328, wilveria.a.sanders.civ@army.mil.

ARI Agency Point of Contact (Technical Questions)

The ARI POC for technical matters for this White Paper topic is: Dr. Larry Golba, (254) 392-8438, larry.w.golba.civ@army.mil.

VII. REFERENCES:

Department of the Army (2019). *Army leadership and the profession (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22)*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army.

- Department of the Army (2019). *The Army People Strategy*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army. <https://people.army.mil/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-2020-Army-People-Strategy-Final.pdf>
- Department of the Army (2020). *The noncommissioned officer guide (Training Circular 7-22.7)*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army.
- Orvis, K. L., Kay, K. M., Shenberger-Trujillo, J., Ratwani, K. A., & Sanders, A. D. (2019). *Communication skills development for noncommissioned officers (NCOs)* [Paper presentation]. Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation, and Education Conference (I/ITSEC). AD1093050
- Sanders, A. D. (2018). *Assessment of interpersonal communication and counseling skills: Perspectives from NCOs (ARI Research Report 2022)*. Fort Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.
- Sanders, A. D., Orvis, K. L., Shenberger-Trujillo, J., Kay, K. M., Nargi, B., Bailey, L. (2020a). *Digital noncommissioned officer (NCO) writing guide (ARI Research Product 2020-04)*. Fort Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences
- Sanders, A. D., Orvis, K. L., Shenberger-Trujillo, J., Kay, K. M., Nargi, B., & Bailey, L. (2020b). *The leader notes tool (ARI Research Product 2021-03)*. Fort Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.