

DSEC W911NF-24-S-0003

Questions and Answers Summary

Reflects questions received as of 12 February 2024

General

Q1: Where can I view a recording of the Opportunity Day?

A1: The link to the Opportunity Day recording of the DSEC Funding Opportunity Announcement W911NF-24-S-0003, is posted on the Grants.gov synopsis tab. It can also be reached directly through the link -

<https://sainc.webex.com/sainc/ldr.php?RCID=9092ac57f0e5af4d67e1644bf4644094>. The recording is also posted and available on the Army Research Laboratory website at Defense Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Consortium (DSEC) Funding Opportunity – DEVCOM Army Research Laboratory.

Q2: Is there assistance or guidance available for first time grants.gov users?

A2: Support and resources are available at <https://www.grants.gov/support>

Q3: I was wondering if it would be possible to call someone and ask questions about our organization applying for DSEC. Is there a person we can ask questions to in a phone call.

A3: To ensure fair and open competition to all applicants, discussions with interested applicants is not allowed. All questions must be submitted in writing by February 12, 2024, no later than 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time (Section II.F., page 54). Questions should be directed to the Federal Awarding Agency Contacts listed on page 54 of the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).

Q4: Is there a way to engage with the prime once they are selected? Are there ways to plug into this important work without submitting the prime proposal?

A4: Yes. Shortly after award of DSEC cooperative agreement under the solicitation W911NF-24-S-0003, the government intends to list DSEC partners on the DoD STEM website at <https://dodstem.us/about/partners/>. Collaboration and communication across various stakeholders is encouraged; please email info@dodstem.us for more information about opportunities to connect.

Q5: Please provide the link as to where the questions will be posted on grants.gov.

A5: The link to the Questions and Answers Summary for the DSEC Funding Opportunity Announcement W911NF-24-S-0003 (this document) is posted on the Grants.gov related documents tab.

Consortium Membership

Q1: Can a new consortium member be added to the project after award?

A1: As stated in Section II.A.3. in the FOA, the Lead Organization should establish structure and guidance such that at the request of the Consortium and at the approval of the CMC and the government, additional Consortium Members may be added to or removed to advance DSEC efforts and improve alignment to emerging areas of interest or to address gaps within the Consortium (page 10). Additionally, the Articles of Collaboration (AOC) define the operational structure within the Consortium (page 11). The AOC should include an outline of how the consortium will bring in or exit partners throughout the cooperative agreement.

Q2: Given the large number of potential partners, can DoD speak to the level of cost detail required for submission from partner organizations / subawardees?

A2: Section II.D.2. outlines the budget elements that the Applicant is expected to include in the cost proposal of their application (Attachment 1, page 33). The cost proposal should contain estimates for the LO and Consortium Members that are detailed enough for meaningful evaluation.

Q3: Will the grant application require that the entity submitting the packet as the lead organization list every single partner organization that is going to be involved in the consortium?

A3: Yes, each participating organization and their involvement must be listed for proposal evaluation. As noted in Section II.E.1., applicants will be evaluated on the strength of their proposed management strategy, to include proposed Articles of Collaboration signed by each Consortium Management Committee (CMC) member, and management concepts and approaches to foster collaboration and communication among Consortium Members to include clearly defined roles for each Consortium Member (page 37). Section II.C. of the FOA explains that Applicants are expected to ensure clarity of each CMC Member's area(s) of responsibility and in providing flexibility when and where necessary, to efficiently achieve the goals in support of program priorities (page 30).

Q4: How many partners we can have? Any limit?

A4: The FOA does not provide a limit to the number of Consortium Members that can be part of a single consortium.

Q5: Please clarify if STEM education and outreach partners must be subawardees to the Lead Organization or if they can be subcontractors.

A5: The language captured within the FOA referring to "subawardees" is inclusive of subcontracts or subgrants (Section II.G.2.j., page 58, refers to Subawards, Subcontracts, and Subgrants interchangeably).

Q6: Please define “subawardees” as used in Section 1.1 of the sample draft Articles of Collaboration. Does “subawardees” in this context refer to STEM education and outreach partners?

A6: This is an example of what Articles of Collaboration submitted by the Applicant may include, and in this example “subawardees” in this context refers to STEM education and outreach partners. The Applicant should be mindful to adequately define terms contained within their submitted Articles of Collaboration. Synonymous terms leveraged within the FOA guidance are described in Section I.8. (page 5-6). Articles of Collaboration are further described in Section II.A.3. (page 11).

Q7: Is the definition of Consortium Members inclusive of all STEM education and outreach partners, as well as the organizations leading the management elements?

A7: Consortium Members are inclusive of all STEM education and outreach partners and the organizations leading the Fundamental Elements, to include the Lead Organization (Section I.8., page 5-6).

Q8: Is this opportunity solely for potential organizations who wish to be the LEAD ORGANIZATION (LO) for the consortium?

A8: As described in Section II.A.3., under Fundamental Element 1 (page 9-10), the Applicant is the Lead Organization. The application should detail the assembled team of organizations (Consortium Members) to manage and implement the Fundamental Elements described in the FOA. The application must address specific requirements that capture the technical management and oversight of the Consortium, to include but not limited to, the Cooperative Management Committee (CMC) and the Articles of Collaboration (AOC) (Section II.A.3., pages 10-11).

Q9: Can organizations who wish to be consortium members, supporting Element 5: Strategic STEM Initiatives, able to apply for this opportunity, and will be included in the consortium if awarded?

A9: This FOA is not structured to receive applications from organizations entering only as Consortium Members. Organizations wishing to participate as Consortium Members only must be included in an application submission from a Lead Organization. Interested organizations may consider reviewing the Opportunity Day webinar recording (<https://sainc.webex.com/sainc/ldr.php?RCID=9092ac57f0e5af4d67e1644bf4644094>), which captured dialog from some organizations and representatives interested in collaborating on proposals. See “Consortium Membership,” Q1 in this Q&A document for information on adding new Consortium members after award.

Q10: For a new proposal, will the existing partners continue as a part of DSEC? Can we build upon this and bring in additional partners?

A10: The Recipient will work collaboratively with Fundamental Element 5 to implement new, and/or strengthen existing DSEC partner collaborations and initiatives (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 5, page 22).

Q11: How much information about Consortium Members is needed at proposal time? Can we use the first year to ramp up the potential partners and support for ongoing efforts? Or do all of these organization and management initiatives expected to be fully organizational at the time of funding support?

A11: All applications received under this FOA will each be evaluated by how they address the requirements of the FOA (Section II.E., page 35). This includes how the Consortium and its Members meet the requirements of each Fundamental Element, management of the administration of recipient activities of the lifetime of the DSEC Cooperative Agreement, past performance, credentials, and cost. See “Consortium Membership,” Q1 in this Q&A document for information on adding new Consortium members after award.

Q12: If our organization is not selected for this effort, will there be additional efforts for us to move our ideas forward?

A12: Continue to visit Grants.gov for additional solicitation announcements. Particularly, please monitor the NDEP STEM Open Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO; HQ003423NFOEASD01) at <https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/345938>. Future opportunities will be made available via amendments to the main NFO listing. The Government is unable to provide anticipated dates of availability. Additionally, see “General,” Q4 in this Q&A document for information on engaging with DSEC once the Cooperative Agreement is awarded.

Fundamental Elements

Q1: Why do you advise that the Lead Organization (LO) not execute Fundamental Element 5?

A1: As outlined in Section II.A.3. (page 8-9), the LO, through Fundamental Element 1, leads the Consortium to ensure Fundamental Elements are focused on planning and executing programs in alignment with STEM priorities and goals as outlined in the DoD STEM Strategic Plan. All direct STEM education and outreach programming efforts fall under Fundamental Element 5 (Section II.B., page 23). To eliminate bias in the funding and evaluation of these STEM education and outreach program initiatives, it is strongly recommended that the LO does not provide direct STEM education and outreach programming under the Fundamental Element 5. However, the LO may serve in the administrative and oversight role of Fundamental Element 5.

Q2: If an organization is leading Fundamental Element 5, can this organization propose Strategic STEM Initiatives? Or the organization led Element 5 can only serve management function for Fundamental Element 5?

A2: The Government recommends that the Consortium Member leading Fundamental Element 5 does not also provide Strategic STEM Initiatives programming, to eliminate any bias in recommending budget allocations for STEM education and outreach partners to the Lead

Organization and to the Government. The DSEC FOA language will be updated to reflect this (Section II.A.3., pages 8-9).

Q3: What is the relationship between Elements 4 and 5? Can an organization be in both?

A3: As outlined in Section II.A.3. (pages 19-20), Fundamental Element 4 leads DSEC regional hubs and ecosystems, which are regionally focused efforts which engage DSEC and other local stakeholders to address unique regional STEM education and workforce needs. Fundamental Element 5 leads STEM education and outreach programming through DSEC consortium members and programs (pages 20-22). A Consortium Member may have distinct roles and activities in Fundamental Element 4 and in Fundamental Element 5, but the Applicant is expected to outline how those roles and activities match the goals of Fundamental Elements 4 and 5, as outlined in the FOA.

Q4: In the FOA, Element 4 (Regional Hubs and Ecosystems) states that “The Recipient will evaluate the effectiveness of existing DSEC regional hubs (located in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area; Dayton, OH; San Diego, CA; and San Antonio, TX) and continue to support effective practices.” To what extent does the evaluation of the DSEC regional hubs fall under Element 2 (program evaluation) versus Element 4?

A4: The Applicant has the opportunity to examine current hub activities through available reporting at <https://dodstem.us/about/impact/>. Under the award, Element 4 will work with Element 2 to assist in evaluation efforts that examine the effectiveness of existing regional hubs (Section II.A.3, page 20). It is not intended that Element 4 should conduct a separate evaluation from Element 2. The DSEC FOA language will be updated to clarify this.

Regional Hubs

Q1: Under the CHIPS and Science Act, the Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration is forming Regional Innovation and Technology Hubs (Tech Hubs). Is there any connection? Is any collaboration planned or encouraged?

A1: There is no intended connection to the Regional Innovation and Tech Hubs, and the FOA solicitation does not require collaboration with these. STEM regional hubs and ecosystems are an evidence-based approach to STEM education, and this FOA seeks to solicit effective approaches to implementing regional hubs and ecosystems, as outlined in Section II.A.3, Fundamental Element 4 (page 19-20).

Q2: The current consortium has regional hubs. With the new consortium, are you looking for regional hubs at new locations, or can the new hubs be in the same region as existing one?

A2: As outlined in Section II.A.3, Fundamental Element 4 (page 19-20), the applicant is to determine the location of the regional hubs in their application. The applicant may enhance existing efforts and/or expand regional hubs to further strengthen collaborations with regional stakeholders from local education agencies, institutes of higher education, not-for-profit or community partners, and industry.

Q3: While the consortium in Element 5 focuses on training, what is the main objective of each hub?

A3: As outlined in Section II.A.3 (page 22), Fundamental Element 5 leads STEM education and outreach programming through DSEC consortium members and programs. The Applicant should consider a Consortium to be composed of like-minded organizations, such as partners from States, local governments, Indian tribes, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations or other partners in STEM, that align with the current DoD STEM Strategic Plan goals and objectives. The DSEC regional hubs, led through Fundamental Element 4, are regionally focused efforts which engages DSEC and other local stakeholders to address unique regional STEM education and workforce needs (page 20). The Recipient will work collaboratively with Fundamental Element 5 to implement new, and/or strengthen existing DSEC partner collaborations and initiatives within each regional hub under Fundamental Element 4.

Q4: Do you know of other entities putting together a proposal that we could connect with to propose being a regional hub within?

A4: The Government is not soliciting which institutions are putting together an application. The Opportunity Day webinar recording (<https://sainc.webex.com/sainc/ldr.php?RCID=9092ac57f0e5af4d67e1644bf4644094>) captured dialog from some organizations and representatives interested in collaborating on proposals.

Q5: The RFP says to evaluate and continue to support the current HUBs. Are we to work with them or propose new HUBs? If we are to work with them how do we include them in the budget?

A5: See “Regional Hubs” Q2. Regarding the budget for Hubs, as outlined in Section II.D.2. (page 33), a cost proposal and narrative (Attachment 1) should be included, which should capture the costs of all efforts under the Consortium, to include Regional Hubs. Section II.E.1. (page 35) outlines how Applicants will be reviewed, including Factor 5 – Cost (page 40).

Consortium Activities

Q1: Is it best for the consortium to be regional?

A1: The Applicant is expected to include regional hubs in their proposed consortium (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 4, page 19-20). However, the anticipated impact of the solicited consortium is nationwide. STEM education and outreach programs (Consortium Members) executed under Fundamental Element 5 may have a national or regional reach (page 20-22).

Q2: I would like to confirm that including in the DSEC application graduate education activities in STEM is an allowable and encouraged activity. I ask because this would be beyond the K-16 activities that were in the DSEC example.

A2: Graduate education activities beyond K-16 are not restricted in the cooperative agreement, but this DSEC FOA is soliciting a consortium whose primary STEM education and outreach activities reach preK-12 students, their parents, and teachers (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 5, page 21).

Q3: To scale up activities, how much virtual approach can be used?

A3: The extent to which the consortium includes virtual STEM education and outreach activities is at the discretion of the Applicant and its proposed Consortium Members. This FOA is soliciting a consortium with a continuum of meaningful STEM learning experiences for students and educators (Section I, page 3). The Applicant is expected to outline how proposed Consortium Members and STEM education and outreach activities match this intent, to include virtual programming.

Q4: Is the goal for them to work for the DOD?

A4: It is not a requirement for student participants in DoD STEM programming to work for the DoD. This FOA solicits a consortium that develops STEM talent prepared to address the Nation's technology challenges, now and into the future (Section I, page 3). The DoD STEM mission is to inspire, cultivate, and develop exceptional STEM talent. Consortium education and outreach partners are also not required to work for the DoD.

Q5: Does the STEM focus need to equally focus on all of the STEM disciplines? Or can there be a stronger focus on an area such as healthcare?

A5: No, the STEM focus does not need to equally focus on all of the STEM disciplines. The Applicant should form a consortium of partners that bring in unique capabilities, and proven STEM experiences for students and educators (Section II.A.1., page 6). Expectations for STEM education and outreach activities are outlined in Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 5 (page 21).

Q6: Is the DoD interested in the impact of non-Scientists and Engineers who serve as mentors on DSEC participants?

A6: Yes; DoD is interested in the impact of non-DoD S&E mentors, as mentorship is a proven method of increasing student interest and attrition in STEM careers, thus developing STEM talent that can address the Nation's technology challenges, now and into the future (Section I, page 3).

Q7: Is the program aiming to train students in STEM, or is it to train students in STEM and encourage them to DOD careers?

A7: As noted in the FOA (Section II.A.1., page 6), in alignment to the Federal STEM Strategic Plan and the DoD STEM Strategic Plan, DSEC will aim to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers through activities that engage students and educators in meaningful STEM experiences; connect student and educator participants to the DoD science and technology mission; empower parents and legal guardians of student participants to be better informed of the

DoD STEM opportunities; serve military-connected students and those historically underrepresented in STEM; leverage the network of Consortium Members to broaden reach and impact; and to evolve approach based on data. The DoD STEM portfolio intends to strategically invest in programs that encourage students to pursue STEM education and career opportunities, and that will provide students with exposure to DoD research and career opportunities.

Q8: Key DoD influencers - veterans, ROTC, military academies, education offices/schools on military bases do not seem to be included by some (most?) of the partners, at least as reflected in the available annual report. Is a part of the oversight/organization to bridge these organizations and ensure that all partnering organizations are doing this, and enabling this?

A8: As outlined in Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 5 (page 20-22), the Applicant is to determine which organizations to include in the consortium, which may include partners from States, local governments, Indian tribes, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations or other partners in STEM, that align with the current DoD STEM Strategic Plan goals and objectives. This FOA aims to solicit a consortium that serves military-connected students and those historically underrepresented in STEM (Section II.A.1., page 6), and the Lead Organization should ensure that the Consortium Members and overall Consortium approach support this aim.

Q9: The call indicates programs for military dependents. I did not see any of this previously. Is this a new emphasis? How much support can be provided towards establishing programs for dependents in overseas locations? Is this flexible, or is there a limitation to spending in overseas locations?

A9: For information on the emphasis of the incumbent consortium, please review the DSEC Annual Program Review reports and annual program evaluation data chapters, available online at <https://dodstem.us/about/impact/> (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 2, page 15). Supporting programs internationally are allowable as direct costs (Section II.G.2.e., page 57).

Q10: Is there a goal to train/interest students in areas of the future? We see robotics, but we do not see areas like quantum computing, AI, etc. - areas that are absolutely vital to national security.

A10: The Government is soliciting a consortium that is aligned with the DoD STEM mission to “inspire, cultivate, and develop exceptional STEM talent through a continuum of opportunities to enrich our current and future Department of Defense workforce poised to tackle evolving defense technological challenges” (Section I, page 4). Applicants may assemble Consortium Members that provide proven and meaningful STEM learning experiences that directly or indirectly align with the DoD Critical Technology Areas (<https://www.cto.mil/usdre-strat-vision-critical-tech-areas/>), as well as the other STEM Education and Outreach Activities topic areas listed in the FOA (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 5, page 22).

Q11: What type of timeframe will be provided for a new organization to come up to speed?

A11: The estimated start of the Period of Performance is August 1, 2024 (Section I.7., page 5). Additionally, as part of the application, applicants submit an initial program plan (IPP) for the

base period of the DSEC COA (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 1, page 11). The IPP for the base period should provide a detailed description of how the Recipient and its Consortium Members plan to execute the first two years of the DSEC COA. The IPP will also include a ten-year roadmap which describes the ten-year plan to be accomplished by the Consortium.

Q12: In terms of the measurement of outcomes, it is not clear what measurements have been used in the past. It seems like it is participant numbers from the DSEC Annual Report. We wonder about rigorous designs that use randomized control trials? Data collection measures used previously? What tracking has been done in the past? What linkages are provided between participation, interests, family participation, and opportunities, as well as student incentives and why and how to capital on the opportunities offered by ROTC and other programs for financial aid and career choices?

A12: All reporting from the incumbent consortium is available online at <https://dodstem.us/about/impact/>, which includes DSEC Annual Program Review reports and annual program evaluation data chapters (Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 2, page 15). As outlined in Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 2 executes and enhances DSEC evaluation efforts through documenting activities and outputs, as well as near-, mid-, and long-term outcomes through annual evaluations of STEM programs (pages 14-17). The Applicant is expected to address the evaluation requirements outlined for Fundamental Element 2 and may enhance existing evaluation efforts as aligned to the priorities outlined in the FOA.

Budget and Funding

Q1: Can you receive this award if you already have DoD Funding? Can they be related as long as the differences are explained in the application?

A1: If your organization receives DoD funding, you are still eligible to apply to this DSEC FOA. As outlined in Section II.F.2., this announcement requires disclosure of all current and pending support for all covered individuals. Covered individuals are those who are listed as key personnel on proposals, including but not restricted to, the principal investigator or co-principal investigator (page 50). Yes, if an applicant is already receiving funding on a similar award, it should describe how there will be no duplication of effort if they are selected for the DSEC Cooperative Agreement.

Q2: If you do not have a federally approved fringe benefit agreement in place, are you still eligible to apply?

A2: Yes, you are eligible to apply if you do not have a federally approved fringe benefit agreement in place. Cooperative agreements are governed by 2 CFR part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.” If the applicant does not have approved rate agreements, the applicant should include details on how they arrived at the proposed rates, as well as all other applicable information. The Government may ask clarification questions in the application review process.

Q3: Is there any Cost Share or Matching Fund Requirements?

A3: As noted in Section I.9. (page 6), cost share or matching is not required for this FOA.

Q4: Will the organizations selected to receive an award have to enter into a Partnership Intermediary Agreement (PIA) to receive the funds or will they be administered directly?

A4: The DSEC FOA funds are administered through a cooperative agreement (Section I.8., page 5). A PIA is a separate type of funding agreement; there is no PIA associated with this FOA.

Q5: Is there a sample of a salary schedule that is typically used for personnel as we receive budgets?

A5: A sample of salary schedule is not provided. Section II.D.2. outlines the budget elements that the Applicant is expected to include in the cost portion of their application (page 33). Section II.G.2. details the costs and details of various budget elements that should be captured, to include direct labor (Section II.G.2.a., page 55).

Q6: How should we provide a budget for the first 2 years only when submitting the proposal?

A6: Applicants are encouraged to review the estimated funding over the period of performance by option years (Table 1, Section II.B., page 23) and use this as a guide for developing their proposed budget. As outlined in Section II.D.2. (page 33), a cost proposal and narrative should be included as Attachment 1 and should be sufficiently detailed for meaningful evaluation. It is recommended that Applicants provide relevant cost proposal and narratives to address how the proposed budget operates within and across ALL option periods.

Q7: Sec. D.2. ATTACHMENT 1. Attach the Cost Proposal and narrative, page 32, states: "Subaward - A cost proposal, as detailed as the Applicant's cost proposal, will be required to be submitted by each proposed sub-recipient." Due to the business sensitive nature of the cost proposal data, indirect rates, etc., can a Sub-awardee submit its cost proposal detail under sealed package or electronically directly to the DoD and not through the Applicant? If yes, what mail to location or electronic site shall the sub-awardee use for this purpose? Will Applicant's and Sub-awardee's Cost proposal be considered responsive to the FOA requirements if Sub-awardee cost proposal submitted on Grants.gov contains only top-line cost, and with the Sub-awardee's cost proposal detail submitted directly to the DoD as above?

A7: Any contents to be considered for review, including all cost proposal details, must be captured in the application submission as described within the FOA. However, in the event that proposed subawardees submitted a sanitized cost proposal, the prime applicant should include as much detail as possible in their cost proposal submission, with a statement that unsanitized proposals from subawardees are available upon request during the review process.

Q8: In terms of budget, we are unclear in terms of available funds for oversight, management, etc. Can you please provide some more scope on this for us?

A8: Additional guidance on a funding structure that supports oversight, management, etc. is not provided. Section II.B. (page 23) provides estimated annual funding over the period of performance and notes that at least 75% of funding allocation should fund the Fundamental Element 5, with the total funding allocation for Fundamental Elements 1-4 being no more than 25%. Section II.D.2. outlines the budget elements that the Applicant is expected to include in the cost portion of their application (page 33) and Section II.G.2. details the costs and details of various budget elements that should be captured.

Allowable Costs

Q1: Would there be any restrictions on this grant (and if justified) to purchase a 1.2 million dollar piece of equipment?

A1: As noted in Section II.D. (page 33), direct costs may include any proposed items of equipment. Equipment and facilities generally must be furnished by the recipient (justifications must be provided when Government funding for such items is sought). Include a brief description of the applicant's procurement method to be used (competition, engineering estimate, market research, etc.). See also Section II.G.2.c. (page 56) regarding permanent equipment (defined as any article or tangible nonexpendable property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit).

Q2: Are student stipends allowable for internships?

A2: Yes, student stipends for internships are allowable as direct costs (Section II.G.2.e., page 57).

Incumbent Consortium / Cooperative Agreement

Q1: Are you looking to essentially replicate the existing DSEC model for broader engagement, or is this call for proposals looking for something different?

A1: As outlined in Section I (page 3), this FOA is soliciting a consortium with a continuum of meaningful STEM learning experiences for students and educators, and the award decision will be determined using the criteria outlined in Section II.E. (page 35). The Applicant may decide whether their proposed consortium reflects the incumbent consortium or is a complementary model that meets the requirements of this FOA.

Q2: If there is already a DSEC in my city, does this pretty much disqualify an application from us?

A2: The incumbent DSEC consortium has regional hubs in four locations, as outlined in Section II.A.3., Fundamental Element 4 (page 20). Other DSEC strategic STEM initiatives are to be executed via Fundamental Element 5 (Section II.A.3., page 22), on national and regional scales. If there are incumbent DSEC STEM education and outreach activities in your region, you are still eligible to apply to this DSEC FOA.

Q3: Have there been any regulatory changes since the previous collaborative agreement that would have to be incorporated into the new agreement?

A3: The FOA reflects all regulatory changes since the previous cooperative agreement.

Q4: Is the current cooperative agreement LO or incumbent eligible to apply?

A4: Yes, the current cooperative agreement LO or incumbent is eligible to apply. Education and outreach partners within the incumbent consortium are also eligible to apply.

Q5: Who is the Incumbent Consortium?

A5: As listed in the FOA in Section II.G., this effort is currently being performed under Agreement Number W911NF1920007 (page 55). The current Recipient is Research Triangle Institute, RTI International, 3040 Cornwallis Road, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-0155. Information on the Incumbent Consortium, including its STEM education and outreach partners, is available at <https://dodstem.us/about/partners/>.

Q6: Does the incumbent consortium have a natural advantage if they choose to apply?

A6: No, the incumbent consortium does not have a natural advantage if they choose to apply. The incumbent must competitively address all of the requirements set forth under this FOA. All applications received under this FOA will each be evaluated by a review panel in how they address the requirements of the FOA (Section II.E.2., page 41).

Q7: Would we be competing with the existing DSEC for this funding?

A7: The government will not know who will submit applications in advance.

Q8: Is there baseline data from DSEC 1.0, e.g., student, educator data, participant or completion etc?

A8: DSEC Annual Program Review reports and annual program evaluation data chapters are online at <https://dodstem.us/about/impact/>. (Section II.A.3, Fundamental Element 2, page 15)

Application Contents

Q1: May the Applicant provide Appendices for review in addition to the chapters outlined in the FOA on Page 31? Will the content of these Appendices be evaluated? For example, may the proposed Articles of Collaboration (signed by each Consortium Management Committee member) be placed in an Appendix to Chapter 2 rather than as part of the Chapter itself?

A1: . Appendices to Chapters are allowable to the extent of the page limit provided for each chapter. As an example, Chapter 2 has a page limit of 10 pages, only the first 10 will be evaluated, if an Applicant's Chapter 2 with its appendices are 15 pages total, only the first 10 pages will be evaluated and the remaining 5 pages will be removed from the application packet

and will not be evaluated. The FOA language has changed with its Amendment 01 for the requirement of the Articles of Collaboration and corresponding signatures from each CMC member to be submitted as Attachment 5 to the application. The AOC Attachment is not subject to Chapter page counts and will be evaluated to the extent stated in the Evaluation Criteria.

Q2: The sample Articles of Collaboration provided indicates that each Consortium Member must sign. At several points, the Funding Opportunity Announcement indicates that the Lead Organization must submit copies of the Articles signed by Consortium Management Committee (CMC) members. Please confirm the Lead Organization's responsibilities for collecting signed copies of the Articles from Consortium Participants who are NOT CMC members at the time of application.

A2: At the time of application, the Applicant is not required to have signed copies of the Articles of Collaboration from Consortium Members that are not CMC members (Section II.A.3., pages 10-11). The Articles of Collaboration provided is an *example*, and references signatures by all Consortium Members. The Applicant should be mindful to adequately define terms contained within their submitted Articles of Collaboration. Synonymous terms leveraged within the FOA guidance are described in Section I.8. (page 5). Articles of Collaboration are further described in Section II.A.3. (page 11).

Q3: May applicants include a Proposal Cover and Table of Contents at the beginning of the Project Narrative that will not count against the page allocation?

A3: Yes, applicants may include a proposal cover and table of contents that will not count against the page allocation.

Q4: If an applicant is sharing any potential Organizational Conflicts of Interest (OCI), where should the mitigation plan be included? Other Attachments?

A4: Yes, potential OCI and mitigation plans should be included in Other Attachments (described in Section II.D.2., page 34).

Q5: Are past performance questionnaires mandatory for all three references, or can applicants substitute Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARs) in lieu of the questionnaires if they are available?

A5: As outlined in Section II.E.1 (page 37), the Applicant should include three references that can verify and validate its ability to successfully perform the requirements in the FOA, to include contact information and the corresponding project/contract/grant/agreement name and number. The government will use this information to obtain relevant documentation in the form of Past Performance Questionnaires, interviews, CPARS, and other sources to assess the quality of the Applicant's past performance.

Q6: Could the Government please furnish a template for the past performance questionnaire?

A6: Based on the past performance examples in the proposal and the POCs for those examples, the Government will initiate and obtain Past Performance Questionnaires as part of the

evaluation process. Applicants are not expected to provide Past Performance Questionnaires as part of their proposal.

Q7: May applicants attach resumes in the “Research and Related Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded) [V4.0]” form on Grants.Gov or must they be included in Chapter 4 – Credentials? If they must be included in Chapter 4 – Credentials, do they count towards the 10 pages allocated?

A7: Resume attachments are part of Chapter 4 and are included in the 20-page limit (Section II.D.2., page 33). The page limit on Chapter 4 will be updated from 10 pages to 20 and this update will be reflected in the FOA language.

Q8: I have the example of the AOC in the FOA. Is there a sample of a shortened agreement that we have the Consortium members sign?

A8: The provided Articles of Collaboration is only an example. The Applicant must provide proposed Articles of Collaboration that define the operation structure within the Consortium as Attachment 5 to the application. For proposal purposes, Consortium members may provide signed memorandums stating they will abide by the terms of the proposed AOC, which may be included as part of Attachment 5. The selected Awardee will be required to provide a final AOC signed by all Consortium members at the time of award.

Q9: Is a single insurance policy required to cover all members of the consortium, or may consortium members use their own insurance policies to cover participating students in the event of accidental death, accidental dismemberment, and medical expense benefits for participants or survivors of participants? Can this insurance be provided by the subrecipients for their own student participants or must all insurance be covered by the prime organization (even if the prime organization does not have student participants)?

A9: As outlined in Section II.A.3. (page 12), the Recipient is required to carry an insurance policy to cover all student participants. As appropriate and available, the Recipient may leverage existing insurance policies from Consortium Members as well. This approach must be adequately described and captured within the Technical Plan, Management Plan, Articles of Collaboration, and/or Cost Proposal and Narrative.

Q10: Where in the application package is the signed articles of collaboration included? Can the Articles of Collaboration be referenced in Chapter 2 of the project narrative with the full copy of the Articles of Collaboration attached as a separate attachment under the Attachments form on Grants.gov since the sample Articles of Collaboration are 10 pages themselves?

A10: The Articles of Collaboration and corresponding signatures from each CMC member should be included as Attachment 5 (Section II.D.2. page 34). The FOA language will be updated to reflect this. For proposal purposes, Consortium members may provide signed memorandums stating they will abide by the terms of the proposed AOC, which may be included as part of Attachment 5. The selected Awardee will be required to provide a final AOC signed by all Consortium members at the time of award.

Q11: Are there particular qualifications in the DSEC lead PI/lead organization that you are looking for, that we may have missed in reading and listening to the information on this initiative? Are there specific criteria that you may be looking for in this initiative?

A11: All qualifications and criteria are listed in the FOA and supplemental documentation. All applications received under this FOA will each be evaluated by a review panel in how they address the requirements of the FOA (Section II.E.2., page 41).

FOA Updates

Q1: Please provide additional details on the requirement that a monthly performance and cost report must include "...a listing of students added to the program, departing from the program, and continuing in the program as of the report date (Pages 50-51)," Does the Applicant need to collect and report to the Government on the identifiable information of every student engaged in STEM education and outreach programming? Does this requirement apply to educators?

A1: The Applicant does not need to collect and report to the Government identifiable information of students and teachers in the STEM education and outreach programming. However, the Applicant is expected to capture participant data in aggregate form under Fundamental Element 2 as described in Section II.A.3. (page 14). The guidance on tracking individual students does not apply to the DSEC FOA and the DSEC FOA will be updated to reflect this.

Q2: Please provide additional details on the "candidate review meeting" (Page 51). How does this apply to the Defense STEM Education Consortium (DSEC) project?

A2: The candidate review meeting does not apply to the DSEC FOA, and the DSEC FOA will be updated to reflect this.

Q3: Please provide additional details on the requirements for Section 3, Sub-Section D on Page 51. Which tenure, research dates, and advisors are being referenced?

A3: Tenure, research dates, and advisors referenced here does not apply to the DSEC FOA, and the DSEC FOA will be updated to reflect this.