HR001117S0002

Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: 11/18/2016

GENERAL INFORMATION

Q: My research is not geared specifically to meet the Insect Allies program goals. Is there an alternate solicitation that I can respond to?

A: Yes. DARPA/BTO has an office-wide solicitation (DARPA-BAA-16-33) for this purpose. Responses are being collected through April 28, 2017.

Q: Is Dr. Bextine available for a call to discuss our proposed approach?

A: The best way to receive feedback on an approach is through the submission of a proposal abstract prior to the deadline specified in the BAA. The BAA describes the program, including metrics, in detail. If you have specific questions, please submit them by email to InsectAllies@darpa.mil. Please be aware that your question and its answer may be published on this FAQ page, after the question has been revised to remove proprietary information.

Q: Will the Proposers Day slides be posted online?

A: Yes, information relayed during the Proposers Day will be made available on the BTO section of the DARPA Opportunities page: http://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/opportunities.

Q: Do I need to submit an abstract? What is the advantage of submitting an abstract? Does my abstract need to match the full proposal submitted?

A: Abstracts are strongly encouraged, but not required, to submit a full proposal. DARPA will provide written and/or verbal feedback for each abstract submitted. DARPA will provide feedback regarding technical approach, and will highlight components for proposers where additional information or clarification should be provided to meet the requirements of the BAA and vision of the program. Feedback will also be provided to encourage or discourage submission of a full proposal to the Insect Allies solicitation based on alignment with the program vision and technical innovation. Finally, DARPA understands that final proposals and team make-up may vary somewhat from initial abstracts as content of teams and concepts proposed matures during preparation of the proposals.

Q: Does DARPA also consider Insect Allies as a possible weapon to disrupt agriculture in enemy countries?

A: No.

Q: This funding 'opportunity' looks like a very structured contract that will be established between DARPA and investigator. Why not find a company to work with, since DARPA basically knows what it wants? Why is this a competition?

A: DARPA has identified a problem and a generalized platform to address the problem, and recognizes that there may be many possible solutions. DARPA is soliciting ideas from the best and the brightest from all researchers, including public and private sector.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Q: Will DARPA facilitate application for permits for shipping/experimentation if necessary?

A: No, the application for permits is left to the performer teams. Furthermore, proposers must demonstrate compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

Q: Does DARPA plan to engage with relevant experts on the public acceptance of the program and the science that comes out of it?

A: DARPA designed Insect Allies as a fundamental research program. Performers will be encouraged to publish their research findings. Additionally, the DARPA Program Manager will work closely with the DARPA Public Affairs Office, regulatory agencies, and outside experts to ensure that potential ethical, legal, and societal implications of the work are taken into consideration as research advances. However, DARPA is focused on scientific innovation. Determinations of science policy and potential applications of DARPA-funded research are made by policy-making organizations within the U.S. Government.

Q: How will the program assess safety of the genetic controls/"safety switches" at large scale?

A: Proposers must assess and provide data on the level of off-target effects and the effectiveness of the conditional lethals and controls within a biologically safe and contained facility. There will be no environmental release outside of these facilities, and thus assessing safety outside these controlled facilities is not in the scope of this program.

Q: Are plants that are designed to accept specific transgenes in the scope of the Program?

A: As long as the plant design is not explicitly prohibited in the BAA and a rationale can be provided then such plants are within scope.

Q: Is genetic modification of vector symbionts within the scope of the program?

A: Yes, genetic modification of vector symbionts is within the scope of the program.

Q: What amount of freedom by proposers is there with regard to plants? Please expand on the description of plants, whether agronomic, forestry, or aquatic, and the environment.

A: There is no preference for specific plant systems. More specific information regarding requirements of the plant system are laid out in the BAA.

Q: Are there particular geographic regions of preference?

A: No. There is no preference for geographic region.

PROPOSALS

Q: Do proposals have to cover the entire four years?

A: Yes, proposals must cover the full four years as set forth in the BAA. The three phases of the program are 12, 18 and 18 months in duration, respectively.

Q: Where should proposal abstracts be submitted? And will late submissions be accepted?

A: Proposal abstracts should be submitted by October 6, 2016 at https://baa.darpa.mil. Late abstract submissions will not be accepted. Abstracts are strongly encouraged and will receive feedback, but are not required for consideration for funding under the program. Therefore, proposers may still apply with full proposals without submitting an abstract.

TECHNICAL

Q: Is CRISPR/Cas9 the only gene editing technology DARPA is interested in?

A: No. DARPA is interested in any innovative approach.

Q: Is it necessary that the genes responsible for the desired phenotype be genomically integrated?

A: The BAA does not specify genomic integration. Proposers must demonstrate the stability of the trait-expressing mechanism as described in the BAA.

Q: For the plant technical area, is gene editing and the use of a specific editing technology (e.g., CRISPR/Cas9) a requirement of the program, or are approaches that achieve desired phenotype without gene editing acceptable?

A: There is no requirement to use gene editing or any specific editor to achieve plant phenotype.

Q: Does the trait need to be reversible?

A: No. We are not opposed to reversibility, but it is not a requirement of the BAA.

Q: Is there concern over long-lasting modifications in the plants?

A: No. Research funded by the Insect Allies program will be restricted to work in secure and contained environments, and is intended to demonstrate a technological proof of concept. Thus, the study of potential long-lasting effects of modifications is outside the scope of the program.

Q: Are there any preferences in terms of vector dispersal? Any desirable methods?

A: No. There are no preferences for methods of dispersal.

Q: Is there an expectation or requirement for genetic modification of the vector?

A: No. There is no specific requirement for genetic modification of the vector; however, conditional lethals are a part of TA2 and genetic modification may be used to accomplish that goal.

Q: Will other plant-associated viruses, such as mycoviruses, transmitted by insects be accepted as the viral vector? If the virus can be engineered to be able to deliver the genes to the plant, even if it was a mycovirus-based system, will the proposal be considered?

A: Yes.