Rev3_Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the DARPA Generative Optogenetics (GO) Program – 1/14/2026

Yellow highlighting indicates new FAQs/Responses since the previous version of the FAQ

Contents

General Questions

FAQ: Our research is not geared specifically to meet the GO program goals. Is there an alternate solicitation that I can respond to?

Yes. DARPA/BTO has an office-wide solicitation (HR001126S0003) for this purpose. Responses are being collected through September 30, 2026.

FAQ: Is Dr. Pava available for a meeting to discuss our idea?

Due to scheduling limitations, and in the interest of fairness to all proposers, Dr. Pava will not be taking program related calls and meetings. The best way to receive feedback on an approach is through the submission of a proposal abstract prior to the deadline specified in the Program Solicitation (PS). The PS describes the program, including metrics, in detail. Similarly, the best way to receive feedback on a strategy to organize and manage the working groups supporting GO is through submission of a proposal abstract prior to the deadline specified in the Special Notice (DARPA-SN-26-27). Specific questions may be submitted by email to GO@darpa.mil. Proposers should be aware that submitted questions and answers may be published on an FAQ page, with revisions to remove proprietary information.

FAQ: What are the citizenship or clearance requirements for participation in the GO program, and can green card holders with pending naturalization applications be eligible? Can a non-US citizen/ green card holders participate as team members in Phase I?

The GO program does not explicitly require U.S. citizenship for participation; however, all participants must comply with applicable nondisclosure agreements, security regulations, export control laws, and other governing statutes. Green card holders may be eligible to participate, provided they meet these

requirements. Please read over https://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/communities/academia/fundamental-research and all of the links under Resources. The links will help identify what could be considered a likely risk or not. If there are no or only minor issues identified those can be mitigated for Phase 1 of the program. If there are larger concerns, then it may not be possible for an individual to perform or major mitigations could be needed. This process is the same for all individuals regardless of nationality. For Phase Two of the program DARPA will do an additional security review and weigh that against the unique abilities of personnel supporting the teams we fund. Depending on our review an individual may have no restriction for working on CUI, or they may need to be restricted from working on CUI. With other possible mitigation put in place, it is also possible that an individual may be limited to only the portions of CUI that their team is generating.

FAQ: Is it possible to have an international collaborator/partner, with DARPA's approval?

Yes. It is possible for a team to include an international sub-awardee; however, division of labor across the team should be structured to mitigate any identified security risks. In particular, all team members, regardless of their location, institutional affiliation, or nationality must comply with applicable non-disclosure agreements, security regulations, export control laws, and other governing statutes. Non-US citizens will have to submit DARPA-Form 60s or company information for foreign sub-awardees. The prime must provide a detailed description of why a US person or institution cannot be used instead. The description must include 1) a summary of the individual's resume, 2) what tasks they will perform, 3) what steps were taken, albeit unsuccessfully, to identify a US organization or person with similar skills, and 4) a security plan on how Non-US citizens and/or organizations will be limited to only the CUI information that is required for them to perform their duties. The organization or individual will not be authorized to access CUI unless approved by DARPA following the security evaluation.

Please refer to the response to the first FAQ in the "Security-Related Questions" section of this document regarding green card holders as many of the issues discussed there pertain to international sub-awardees. As noted in response to that question, DARPA will scrutinize security for individuals on teams moving forward to Phase 2 of the program based, considering the security plans teams provide in addition to their Concept Design Review in month 9. For international collaborators, the sub-awardee institution/organization in addition to individual team members from that institution/organization will be considered as part of the security risk assessment. Security plans and division of labor on a team that restricts access to CUI to US institutions will significantly limit the security risks for teams with international sub-awardees.

FAQ: Is it possible for an individual to participate in one of the GO working groups (DARPA-SN-26-27) if their organization is also proposing to the GO program solicitation (DARPA-PS-26-10), as long as the individual is not part of that proposal?

Pg 17 of the DARPA-SN-26-27 states: "To avoid organizational conflicts of interest on the GO program, institutions that submit proposals to both the special notice for the working groups and the program solicitation (i.e., as a technical performer) must provide DARPA with a clear mitigation plan to implement appropriate firewalls between the technical performer team and the team providing program-level support via the working group. If DARPA were to make awards to an organization submitting separate

proposals to act as both a technical performer and establish a working group, the same individual(s) cannot be included as named personnel on both awards."

PG 22 of DARPA-PS-26-10 states: "To avoid organizational conflicts of interest on the GO program, institutions that submit proposals to both the solicitation for the working groups and this program solicitation (i.e., as a technical performer) must provide DARPA with a clear mitigation plan to implement appropriate firewalls between the technical performer team and the team providing program-level support via the working group. In the event that DARPA were to make awards to an organization submitting separate proposals to act as both a technical performer and establish a working group, the same individual(s) cannot be included as named personnel on both awards."

It will take at least a few months from now for the awards to be made to organizations responsible for orchestrating the working groups. It is likely, but not certain, that awards for technical performers will be made before then. Therefore, organizations responsible for populating the working groups will likely know which organizations are part of the technical performer teams. The clauses from the two solicitations quoted above are clear that organizations submitting proposals in response to both solicitations cannot include the same individuals and the organization must provide a clear plan to mitigate potential conflicts of interest (COIs) should awards be made for both proposals.

However, your question appears to pertain to a circumstance where an individual from an organization that is a GO technical performer wishes to participate as a member of a GO working group managed by another organization. If organization A, which was awarded to manage a working group, wants to recruit Professor X from organization B, which was awarded to be a technical performer, to be a member of the working group, then two things have to be true for Professor X to act as a member of the working group:

1. While they are affiliated with organization B, Professor X is not a member (named or unnamed on the award) of the technical team at organization B performing on the award for GO (I.e., award made to organization B in response to DARPA-PS-26-10).
2. Organization A, which was awarded to manage the working group in response to DARPA-SN-26-27, worked with Professor X and organization B to develop a COI mitigation plan and obtained DARPA's approval for this plan.

Program Solicitation – Technical (DARPA-26-10)

Technical Questions

FAQ: What is a NAC?

A Nucleic Acid Compiler (NAC) is a term derived by DARPA to describe a protein complex designed to be expressed in living cells, capable of synthesizing DNA or RNA sequences directly in response to optical signals. The NAC operates template-free, integrating optogenetic control, substrate binding, and enzymatic activity to enable precise, programmable genetic information transfer within cells. This innovative system represents a foundational capability for massless genetic programming, allowing unprecedented control over cellular behavior and functionality.

FAQ: What are the expected applications of GO technology?

During the program, GO technology is not focused on any specific direct use case or a particular nucleic acid sequence. Instead, the metrics are designed to evaluate broad capabilities that could support a wide range of potential applications. DARPA is interested in demonstrating the ability to synthesize complex nucleic acid sequences, such as those with high GC content, which are typically challenging to produce using current methods. In Phase 2, DARPA may provide test sequences that are more difficult to synthesize to assess the full potential of performer NACs and their ability to meet program metrics. This approach ensures the development of a versatile platform capable of addressing diverse future applications.

FAQ: Is the primary purpose of the NAC being developed under the GO program intended for clinical applications?

No, the NAC developed through the GO program is not specifically focused on clinical applications. The primary goal of the program is to develop a proof-of-concept technology capable of template-free nucleic acid synthesis within living cells, with broad potential applications across various fields, including research, manufacturing, and biotechnology. As per the Program Solicitation for GO, neither Human Subjects Research nor Animal Subjects Research are in scope for the program.

FAQ: What factors should be considered when selecting a cell chassis for the NAC in the GO program?

DARPA does not have a cell chassis preference for the proposed NAC design; however, the choice of approach must be justified both scientifically and in terms of its potential for technology transition or clinical translation use cases. Proposals should provide a clear rationale for the selected cell chassis, considering factors such as, ability of the cell line to express the NAC to support template-free nucleic acid synthesis and its suitability for optical signal transduction. If multiple cell lines are proposed, the submission must explain their relevance and how they will contribute to de-risking the development of the NAC. Note, that embryonic stem cells (ESCs) are explicitly prohibited, and proposals involving ESCs will be deemed out of scope.

FAQ: To what extent is the biological demonstration of the NAC's capabilities weighted in the proposal evaluation? Specifically, would a team benefit from including a "power user" to validate the NAC's ability to drive complex cellular reprogramming or other advanced biological applications during Phase 1?

The program prioritizes the NAC's capability to write DNA/RNA accurately, rather than biological demonstrations or advanced applications such as tissue development or complex cellular reprogramming. Inclusion of a "power user" to validate advanced biological applications is not required. Biological demonstrations, including tissue development or cellular reprogramming, are not within the scope of Phase 1 or the overall program objectives. Instead, the focus of the program is on achieving technical milestones related to the NAC's synthesis capabilities.

FAQ: Does the program scope include the use of generative models to design the genetic payloads (e.g., gene circuits) written by the NAC to achieve specific cellular states? Additionally, how does the program address the connection between engineering the NAC and developing the biological "software" to program cells?

The program does not explicitly include the use of generative models to design genetic payloads (e.g., gene circuits), performers may choose to incorporate such tools to inform their approach, provided they align with the program's goals of demonstrating the NAC's synthesis capability.

The connection between engineering the NAC and developing the biological "software" to program cells is addressed by ensuring that the genetic sequences synthesized by the NAC integrate with the cell's natural machinery for transcription and translation. The design of specific cellular state programming is outside the direct scope of the program, which prioritizes the technical development and demonstration of the NAC's core capabilities.

FAQ: What are the target latency metrics for the NAC, and do the program's technical goals support applications requiring precise spatiotemporal control, such as rapid genetic "write" speeds to influence specific cellular processes like cell cycle phases?

The program does not define latency metrics for specific biological applications, such as interrupting cell cycle phases. The program's Phase 2 milestones include a synthesis rate of 1 second per base for sequences of 3 kb in length with a capability to sequentially program two different sequences with less than 1 Hr of downtime between finishing the first sequence and starting the second sequence (i.e., resetting the NAC between sequence A and sequence B). These metrics are designed to enable high temporal precision, which could potentially support applications requiring spatiotemporal control; however, specific biological demonstrations, such as influencing cell cycle phases, are outside the direct scope of the program.

FAQ: What is the best way for a researcher with a high-impact application or use case to connect with a Prime team participating in the GO program to contribute as a "Validator" or collaborator?

The GO program encourages collaboration and engagement between researchers. The best mechanism for connecting with a team is through the DARPA-sponsored Proposer's Workshop, which will be held January 7th, 2026 in Washington, DC and the GO Program Workshops held during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the program. These workshops are designed to foster collaboration, identify talent, and address technical challenges. Researchers will be able to submit research abstracts for consideration to attend these workshops, where they can present their ideas and engage with program teams.

FAQ: Is AI-guided sequence design aligned with this program's interest?

Yes, the GO program encourages leveraging computational tools, including AI-driven approaches, to optimize the design and integration of molecular components. AI tools can complement empirical methods and rational design strategies, to help performers address technical challenges to meet program metrics.

FAQ: How is "*in vivo*" defined within the context of the GO program? Is demonstration organoid on a chip within scope of the program?

As per the GO Program Solicitation, *in vivo* demonstrations of the NAC are defined as experiments that show functionality of the NAC (i.e., transducing information contained in an optical signal into a desired nucleic acid sequence) inside of a living cell. Demonstrations need not be in tissues such as an organoid, but this is not prohibited by the program. More complicated demonstrations such as these should be justified because they carry more risk, but they may also be highly relevant to particular applications of the technology that a team wishes to pursue. However, animal subjects research and human subjects research are explicitly out-of-scope for GO.

FAQ: Clarify the terms in vitro and in vivo in the context of the program?

In the context of GO:

> ***in vivo* = inside a living cell**. Living cells that are in culture (liquid, plated, etc) are considered *in vivo* for the purposes of GO. *In vivo* demonstrations that are required for the last two milestones in Phase 2, must be performed in living cells. Of course, read-out of sequences produced by a NAC expressed in a living cell will probably require lysis of the cell to sequence the NAC's output, but NAC expression, optical programming and synthesis of the nucleic acid sequence must occur *in vivo*.
>
> ***in vitro* = cell-free or non-living system**. Constituents of cell-free systems can be derived from living cells, but for the purposes of GO, functional demonstrations of a NAC or its component domains/subunits outside an intact cellular environment are considered *in vitro*.

When considering experimental design, keep in mind that, as per the Program Solicitation, *the program does not include human subjects research (HSR) or animal subjects research (ASR)*.

FAQ: Is DARPA interested in demonstrating NAC function at the level of whole cells or sub-cellular domains?

This will be up to individual proposing teams, but additional complexity of demonstrations at the sub-cellular level could bring additional technical risks in terms of experiments needed to prove sub-cellular restriction (i.e., higher resolution spatial addressability than whole cells) of NAC-based genetic programming. Thus, proposals taking this approach should justify why these risks are necessary versus demonstrating NAC-based programming at the resolution of whole, individual cells. Most of these risks would be incurred in Phase 2 of the program, and they will need to be discussed as part of the Concept Design Review when Phase 1 performers will present their finalized Phase 2 plan to DARPA. However, proposals in response to the GO Program Solicitation should discuss whether their NAC design will be appropriate for whole-cell programming if a team's ultimate goal is for sub-cellular specificity. Of note, development of novel, exotic optical systems is out of scope for GO, so any demonstrations at higher spatial resolutions than whole cells will need to be performed with commercial off-the-shelf optical components/systems.

FAQ: For the first RO1 Month 9 advancement milestone, can the 4 optogenetic domains be expressed in different cell strains, individually purified, and individually assayed for co-activation by the non-cognate wavelengths?

Yes, this approach would be acceptable as long as it demonstrates that the optogenetic domains respond to their specific wavelengths without co-activation by non-cognate wavelengths. The assays must clearly show minimal overlap (≤ 1% co-activation) in activation across the distinct wavelengths to meet the milestone requirements. However, if using completely different cell taxonomies, proposers must provide a clear scientific and technical justification for this approach. Additionally, proposals must include a detailed plan to demonstrate that the optogenetic domains can ultimately be expressed and function within a single cell strain, ensuring alignment with the program's in vivo integration goals.

FAQ: The optogenetic milestone of ≤ 1% co-activation, does this have to be when domains are measured independently?

No, the optogenetic milestone of ≤ 1% co-activation does not require domains to be measured independently with minimal co-activation (≤ 1%) across the distinct optogenetic domains. The milestone can be achieved within the context of a functional output, provided the system demonstrates that optical signals can reliably direct nucleotide incorporation. Proposers must provide clear evidence and justification that their approach meets this threshold, whether domains are measured independently or as part of an integrated system.

FAQ: For the first RO1 Month 9 advancement milestone, must the 4 optogenetic domains be linked to functional outputs, or are light-induced conformational rearrangements sufficient to evaluate co-activation?

For the first RO1 Month 9 milestone, it is required that at least one optogenetic domain is linked to a polymerase function to demonstrate its ability to regulate nucleotide incorporation and provide a clear pathway for integration into the overall NAC design. The remaining optogenetic domains do not need to be directly linked to a functional polymerase at this stage. Light-induced conformational rearrangements are sufficient to evaluate co-activation, provided they demonstrate distinct wavelength-specific responses with minimal overlap (≤ 1% co-activation). However, proposers must provide a clear justification and plan for how these conformational rearrangements will be integrated into the NAC design to ensure functionality in later stages. Ideally, each optogenetic domain should regulate polymerase activity to achieve precise nucleotide incorporation, and this should be considered in the overall development strategy.

FAQ: Any flexibility for approaches using modified NTPs if they can be readily taken up by cell systems?

The proposed NAC design cannot require any exogenous substrates beyond H, C, N, O, S, and P-containing molecules typically included in media or produced by the cell. However, modified NTPs may be used if they are produced by the cell itself through metabolic engineering and are not provided externally via the media. While synthesis of nucleic acid sequences built from non-canonical bases is permissible, these sequences must be converted into canonical DNA/RNA for transcription or translation by the host cell's existing enzymes.

Proposals taking this approach must include a clear plan for engineering the cell to produce the required modified NTPs and demonstrate the feasibility of transliteration mechanisms to ensure compatibility with the host cell's natural machinery. Of note, this metabolic engineering need not be accomplished in Phase 1, but if it is known that metabolic engineering will be required to achieve *in vivo* demonstrations, particularly the final milestone in Phase 2, then it is highly advised that OPPs include any Phase 1 tasks needed to de-risk this metabolic engineering. In this case, proposers are encouraged to include additional metrics to assess the outcome of these de-risking tasks by the month 9 Concept Design Review. If no additional de-risking tasks are required in Phase 1, then some minimal discussion of why they are not required should be included in the OPP. Inclusion of de-risking tasks for this purpose is not sufficient justification to increase the budget beyond $1.7M (RO1) or $1.99M (RO1+RO2).

FAQ: Base composition must be controlled by massless transfer of information but can polymerases initiation and termination be controlled by other means, such as chemical synthesis?

Yes, polymerase initiation and termination can be controlled by other means, such as chemical synthesis, as long as the approach supports uniform initiation, termination, and synchronization across the system.

FAQ: Are drug-inducible promoters allowed for expression of NAC or for expression of any other crucial component?

Drugs are chemicals. See above answer.

FAQ: Can the NAC involve exogenous or non-natural molecules as a part of the photoreceptor (e.g., the chromophore)? Do applicants need to demonstrate a pathway to synthesize these molecules within the same living cell?

Yes, exogenous, non-natural chromophores can be included in the design of a NAC, and it may not be necessary to synthesize them within a living cell, if the chromophores act as part of a mechanism to synchronize activation/deactivation of a population of NACs in a living cell. The PS states (pg. 20):

> *The resulting system (i.e., the cell engineered to express the NAC) does not require any exogenous substrates (e.g., engineered, non-canonical nucleotides) beyond H, C, N, O, S and P containing molecules that are typically included in standard broth or media. However, cell lines may be engineered to synthesize substrates for the NAC, if these are not produced by the cell's native metabolism. Abstracts must state any metabolic engineering requirements, and OPPs must detail these strategies.*

Since the chromophore (i.e., light-responsive small molecule that is bound by optogenetic protein domain) isn't necessarily a substrate – unlike nucleotides – these may be permissible amendments to media. Refer to previous FAQ above "can polymerases initiation and termination be controlled by other means, such as chemical synthesis?"

If the presence/absence of the chromophore is included as part of a synchronization mechanism, then the metabolic engineering to synthesize the chromophores may not be necessary. However, abstracts should be clear about the intended use of non-natural chromophores and whether they would be added to media as part of a synchronization mechanism. Abstracts should also be clear about whether the molecules are

already known/characterized or if significant effort in Phase 1 would be devoted to synthesis and characterization. OPPs should expand on this and go further to provide evidence that they can be taken up by cells, and/or if there is no evidence for specific molecules, then the OPP should provide a clear set of experiments for Phase 1 to de-risk whether cellular uptake is possible and efficient.

FAQ: For inputs to the system, we are running low on available light spectrum and although we are examining multiplexing strategies we wanted to know if electro-, sono-, or magneto-genetic (non-chemical) inputs would be considered in scope?

Electro-, sono-, or magneto-genetic (non-chemical) inputs may be considered in scope, but only as accessory signals to add control features (e.g., limiting the number of bases added at once), but not for encoding the nucleic acid sequence. The program solicitation explicitly states that the resulting NAC must function inside a living cell to synthesize nucleic acid sequences with light (i.e., an optical signal) as the sole source of information encoding the sequence.

Proposals incorporating non-optical inputs for accessory control must provide a clear explanation of how these mechanisms will not be prohibitively complicated to implement in designing or operating the NAC. Abstracts should include a high-level justification for the use of such inputs, the OPPs must elaborate on the technical risks, mitigation strategies, and how these inputs will complement the optical signal-based approach without compromising the synthesis rate metrics or overall system functionality.

FAQ: Is there a preference for proposals addressing RNA vs DNA or single-stranded (ssDNA) vs double-stranded (dsDNA) synthesis?

There is no preference for RNA over DNA solutions or for ssDNA over dsDNA synthesis. Proposals will be evaluated based on feasibility, innovation, and alignment with the program's goals. Proposers must clearly justify their choice to focus on one or both chemistries (RNA/DNA) and their approach to single-stranded or double-stranded synthesis, demonstrating how their design meets program metrics, including synthesis length, accuracy, and functionality within a living cell. Regardless of the chosen approach, proposals must include a clear strategy to ensure that the synthesized nucleic acid sequence can be translated into functional protein by the host cell's natural machinery, aligning with the program's objective to modulate cellular function effectively.

Proposals that aim to create NAC variants that synthesis different nucleic acid molecules are not explicitly out of scope, but proposing teams are advised to focus their development strategy and/or have ***very*** clear plans to rapidly down-select their strategy to focus on a particular chemistry/class of nucleic acid molecule. For instance, this may be reasonable in the context of an approach for technical risk mitigation, but that approach should be spelled out with hard decision points at fixed milestones within Phase 1. Proposals for research that is unfocused in this respect have a high likelihood of assuming excessive risk from attempting too many parallel lines of effort that will be difficult or impossible to integrate.

FAQ: At what stage would production of a functional protein be required?

While a strategy to achieve translation is required, the program metrics do not mandate the production of a functional protein by the end of the program. However, the Program Solicitation is explicit that nucleic

acids produced by the NAC should discernably alter cellular function. Thus, plans to demonstrate expression of simple protein reporters (e.g., GFP, luciferase, β-Galactosidase, etc) are acceptable and strongly preferred over plans to translate protein that lacks any function. Proposals that include plans to alter complex aspects of cellular function (e.g., cellular metabolism, motility, differentiation, etc) are welcome, but this added complexity is not required for the purposes of GO.

FAQ: The BAA mentions that advanced optical innovation is out of scope. Is *any* amount of optics innovation allowable, if sufficient justification is made?

Refining an existing optical system to address the specific requirements of the NAC may be permissible, provided sufficient scientific and technical justification is included.

FAQ: For expression of the NAC in mammalian cells, can the DNA encoding the NAC be introduced into the cell using standard transfection or lentiviral transduction methods, or is it necessary to create a stable cell line (DNA encoding NAC integrated into genome) to demonstrate the functionality of NAC inside a living cell?

Preference is for stably expressing the NAC cells because this will be a more compelling demonstration (i.e., a cell line than can be genetically programmed with optical signals). Minimum requirement for the milestones where NAC function is demonstrated in vivo would be to implement via transfection protocol (e.g., lipid-based, viral vector, etc) to introduce NAC genes, followed by optical programming to express a different gene(s).

Contracting and Submission Related Questions

FAQ: Are Proposal Abstract submissions required?

Yes – as stated in DARPA-PS-26-10, “proposers must submit an abstract(s) in response to this solicitation to be considered for participation in the GO program. Proposers will not be invited to submit an OPP, provide an oral presentation, or be included in any further progression of the program without participating in the abstract phase of the solicitation.”

FAQ: How many subcontractors can be included in a team, and what is DARPA's expectation for the lead organization?

DARPA does not impose restrictions on the number of subcontractors that can be included in a team. However, the lead organization is expected to have a substantial technical role in the program and must demonstrate the capability to execute a significant portion of the work for at least one of the program’s key technical challenges. While subcontractors can provide complementary expertise, the lead organization must house the core expertise required to address the program’s objectives and cannot act solely as a program manager with minimal or ancillary technical contributions. DARPA seeks teams where the prime contractor plays a substantial technical role in addressing the program’s objectives, ensuring that the core expertise required for success is housed within the prime organization.

FAQ: Are there Seedlings or YFA associated with GO?

No, not at this time. However, DARPA is constantly releasing announcements for new funding opportunities, so please continue to check the DARPA website and SAM.gov for any future related announcements.

FAQ: It looks like we can request $1.7M for RO1 and $1.99M for RO1 AND RO2 in Phase 1. How much can we request for Phase 2?

After submitting abstracts, a subset of proposing teams will be invited to submit an Oral Presentation Package (OPP), which will include a Task Description Document (TDD) and cost spreadsheet (see attachment to the GO Program Solicitation) as part of the OPP. More details about the complete contents of the OPP, including a template TDD, will be provided upon abstract submission. However, the tasks included in the TDD and the costs provided in the cost spreadsheet should ONLY be for Phase 1. Awards made in response to the GO Program Solicitation will not include scope for Phase 2 initially. *Scope (tasks and costs aligned to those tasks) will be negotiated separately during and after the Concept Design Review in month 9 of Phase 1.* Please refer to the program timeline in the Program Solicitation.

Costs for Phase 1 are fixed, so if a team bids to RO1 and they are selected, the value of their OT-Prototype award will be $1.7M. If a team bids to both RO1 and RO2 then the value of their OT-Prototype award will be $1.99M. No awards will be made to RO2 alone.

FAQ: We want to include only RO1 in Phase 1, and both RO1 and RO2 in Phase 2. Is this possible?

It is *extremely* unlikely that a team will be allowed to perform on RO2 in Phase 2 without performing on RO2 in Phase 1. A team will have no data to justify their performance on RO2 in Phase 2 without performing on RO2 in Phase 1. The only conceivable path where this *might* be possible is if two Phase 1 teams determine to merge together, where one team as an RO1 only performer and the other was an RO1+RO2 performer. Responses to the Program Solicitation should not include this as a "plan" for Phase 2 work on RO2, when they have not performed on RO2 in Phase 1, because this will be impossible to predict as the composition of Phase 1 teams has not been determined.

FAQ: Are academic institutions eligible to be the prime or a sub of an application?

Yes, academic institutions are eligible to participate as either the prime or a sub in the GO program. Similarly, non-academic institutions (e.g., non-profits, small business, or large businesses) are eligible to participate as either the prime or sub to academic institutions.

FAQ: Is there a limitation on the number of teams a PI/co-I or an academic institution be on? Are there restrictions on roles or overlapping efforts when participating in multiple applications?

Individuals or organizations can participate in more than one application, but individuals may not participate as the PI on more than funded team on GO. In contrast, an organization may submit multiple applications as a prime, provided the same individual is not PI. For instance, a University may submit multiple applications provided they have different PIs.

PIs may act as a Co-I or sub on another proposal. *Critically, efforts involving the same personnel/organizations performing across multiple awards must be distinct and cannot overlap.* If an institution or individual is involved in multiple teams, the work performed must be unique to each team and cannot overlap. All proposers must ensure that their participation does not create organizational conflicts of interest (OCI) or compromise their ability to meet program requirements. It is the responsibility of the institution or individual to ensure compliance with all program guidelines, including submitting OCI mitigation plans if necessary.

FAQ: We would like to be able to propose an IV&V solution. Is this something that we can present directly to the GO program as an unsolicited white paper, or does It have to be a direct proposal submission within the GO proposal deadlines?

DARPA is not currently soliciting IV&V support for GO, and currently, there are no plans to solicit for IV&V support for the program. However, DARPA is soliciting for three different working groups to support commercialization of technologies emerging from GO and policy recommendations to address biosecurity and regulatory challenges posed by these technologies. More information about this opportunity can be found in the DARPA Special Notice (SN) DARPA-SN-26-27 here. Depending on the nature of the support an organization is interested in providing, there may be alignment with the Special Notice soliciting for working group support to GO; however, this support cannot be characterized as IV&V.

FAQ: At what point in the process should we identify the commercialization and biosecurity partners?

The commercialization lead must be identified at the start of the program and cannot be the main PI but maybe a Co-PI. This individual should be named in the oral presentation package and will act as the primary liaison with the Independent Commercialization and Consulting Group (ICCG).

There is no requirement to identify a biosecurity partner/point-person. While the program includes a dedicated Biosecurity Working Group (BSWG), it is not expected that interaction with the BSWG will necessitate a level of effort requiring dedicated/named personnel. However, performer teams must designate a Project Security lead who interact with the DARPA Program Security Representative (PSR). There are clear milestones in Phase 1 to develop a security plan that will be fully implemented early in Phase 2 to address CUI. The Project Security lead should be identified at the start of the program and cannot be the main PI, but they may be a Co-I.

FAQ: Who is authorized to submit an abstract to the DARPA-SN-26-27? Would it be the PI or the Office of Research?

Either the PI or the Office of Research may submit the abstract. Ultimately, it is up to your organization (i.e., your policy) to manage who submits your response to this funding opportunity. However, DARPA would prefer all relevant parties at your organization be CC'd on the submission. This coordination will ensure all parties are aware that an abstract has been submitted, and it will also allow DARPA to respond to all relevant parties with an email confirmation of receipt. Please Send Abstracts to GO@darpa.mil by January 16, 2026 5:00 PM (ET). Files containing Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) must be encrypted when sending over the Internet.

FAQ: Can a Co-PI or Co-I also be a project manager (PM)?

No. Neither a PI, a Co-PI, or a Co-I can act in this role. As per the solicitation (DARPA-PS-26-10; pg. 19): "All teams are required to include a dedicated PM, and this person should be named in the OPP."

FAQ: What is the eligibility to become Co-PI, according to DARPA, in general, and also in terms of designation in the organization that they work at, lab space, personnel working under them etc? What should be the official designation of the person who has provided the vision and/or built the team? Eligibility requirements for Co-I?

Co-PIs should be tenure track faculty (or the equivalent in an industry setting). They should be affiliated with the same organization (the prime). A Co-PI is appropriate only when two (2) individuals will lead with a combined effort. A proposal with Co-PIs would need to be very specific about how division of PI responsibilities will be beneficial to the effort and how the team will address risks associated with integrating technology between divisions of the effort overseen by each Co-PI. The PI (or Co-PIs) should be person(s) who have provided the technical vision and made substantial contributions toward building the team.

It is expected that, in the process of developing the technical vision, other individuals will make substantial contributions, and these individuals may be listed as named personnel on abstracts and OPPs. In particular, they may be included as "technical leads" associated with groupings of tasks for which they bear chief responsibility. Alternatively, the term "Co-I" could apply in this case. Typically, Co-Is are faculty members with their own research group at an academic institution or an equivalent role in non-academic industry settings. Often, Co-Is are the principle TPOC at a subawardee's organization. A "Technical Lead" (e.g., modelling lead, optogenetics lead, etc – specific titles should be appropriate to your proposal) may or may not be faculty, but they should not be in a training or temporary position (e.g., post-doc, student, intern, etc). That being said, proposing teams are encouraged to name all individuals making key contributions, including trainees, to the proposed work at the time of OPP submission.

FAQ: Is it the PI for the project or the person leading the scientific research?

The PI should be the Technical Point of Contact (TPOC). The PI (Principal Investigator) should be the person leading the scientific research. The Project Manager (PM) should not be the PI. The PM should be another member of the team that will ensure timely and complete submission of deliverables, coordinate meetings amongst the various team members, and generally ensure that the project is operating on time and within budget. The PM may be listed as another point of contact, but they are not the TPOC.

Security-Related Questions

FAQ: How do the new developments in Generative Optogenetics change hybrid biosecurity and cybersecurity risks and their national security implications?

This is an excellent question and one that DARPA intends to explore via the Biosecurity Working Group (BSWG) that will act as a program-wide resource for GO. As per the Program Solicitation for GO, DARPA plans to release a separate solicitation in the near future for organizations to establish and manage three

working groups focused on commercialization of GO technologies, regulatory issues surrounding potential applications of GO technologies, and biosecurity.

Proposer's Workshop

FAQ: Is attendance at the Proposer's Workshop required to submit an abstract in response to the GO Program Solicitation? If the PI cannot attend the workshop, will it hurt the chances of being selected by DARPA?

No. There is no requirement to attend the Proposer's Workshop. However, attendance and presentation of a poster and lightning round talk are strongly encouraged because DARPA is hosting this event to create a venue for organizations interested in responding to the solicitation to form a competitive team.

If a likely PI or CO-I cannot attend, they are most welcome to send a representative (e.g., researcher, scientist, engineer, BD person, etc.) from their organization to attend in their place. These representatives are still strongly encouraged to give a lightning talk and present a poster at the Workshop.

FAQ: What is expected in the content of posters and lightning talks? I am uncomfortable revealing key aspects of my proprietary technology or my specific approach to GO.

First of all, presentation of both lightning round slides and posters is strongly encouraged because this will afford participants an opportunity to showcase their technical competencies and ideas in a venue designed for team formation. It is expected that very few organizations will possess all of the technical abilities in-house that are necessary to be successful on GO. However, it is entirely up to the discretion of individuals and their affiliated organizations to determine the appropriate amount of detail presented in posters or lightning talks. Consequently, lightning talk and poster presenters should gauge what information they need to share to project their technical competencies and how they might fit into/support a team in response to the GO funding opportunity. Similarly, they should determine what information they feel is appropriate to share with respect to teammates they are seeking. DARPA is not the primary audience for lightning round or poster content at the Proposer's Workshop, and DARPA will not consider any of this content when reviewing abstracts submitted in response to the Program Solicitation.

FAQ: Can individual attendees propose their technology and find potential teammates at the DARPA GO program workshop?

Yes, individuals can attend and are highly encouraged to present their technology/expertise at the GO Proposers Workshop. The workshop is designed as an opportunity for researchers in the community to connect with potential teammates. The aim of the workshop is to foster collaboration and facilitate discussions among participants. DARPA is encouraging all attendees to present their talents or ideas in-order to create new teaming opportunities to strengthen proposals and technical approaches. Attendees should actively engage in the workshop to build connections and identify complementary expertise for their projects.

FAQ: I am unable to attend the workshop in person. Can I still submit a Teaming Profile if we don't register/attend?

Yes. Please adhere to the format in Special Notice and email directly to GO@darpa.mil. We will circulate your teaming profile with all registrants for the Proposer's Workshop and anyone else who submits a Teaming Profile. Please be sure to include your contact information on the Teaming Profile you submit, so interested recipients of the profile can reach you.

FAQ: Was the proposer's day recorded? Can I obtain a copy of the recording?

No. The Proposer's Workshop was not recorded. However, on the GO program webpage (https://www.darpa.mil/research/programs/go) you can find:

1. A video of PM remarks about the program. There are both short (~2 min; very top of page) and long (>30 min) videos on the webpage.
2. A video from Program Security Officer and GO program security.
3. A video from Contracting Officer on submitting a complete cost proposal.
4. An FAQ document (the one you are reading) covering questions asked at the Proposer's Workshop and those submitted to this inbox (GO@darpa.mil). This document is being updated constantly as new questions are received via the inbox, so it is a good idea to periodically reload the GO program webpage and pull down the latest version of the FAQ to see if there are any updates.

Special Notice – Working Group (DARPA-SN-26-27)

FAQ: As an individual, I am interested in participating as a subject matter expert on a working group (Regulatory, Biosecurity, or Commercial); however, I am not interested in submitting a proposal for the management of a working group. Is there a mechanism for an individual to indicate my interest in participation in a working group?

Email GO@darpa.mil with your contact information and the group of interest. Once awards are announced DARPA will share your information with the organization receiving the award for the working group of interest. Note, that it will likely be a few months before any awards are made to working group lead organizations.

FAQ: Can FFRDCs, UARCs, or other US Government entities such as National Labs submit proposals in response to DARPA-SN-26-27 for support the working groups on GO?

No. DARPA SN 26-27 is attached to the BTO Office BAA (HR001126S0003), and therefore, the terms of the underlying BAA pertain to the special notice for GO working groups unless otherwise noted in the SN. In this case, the BTO Office BAA is clear (pg. 10):

Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDC), University Affiliated Research Centers (UARCs), and Government Entities to include National Laboratories are not eligible to propose to this solicitation.