DARPA-PS-26-17
GUARDIAN (Genetic Utilization for Advanced Regulation and Defense of Indigenous and Native species)
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Last Updated: 2/19/2026

A. Programmatic

1. Q: What would be the process for companies that don't have an IACUC committee?
    - A: This is not a common situation, however, you would need to hire an external IACUC review committee. Sometimes performers also use Contract Research Organizations (CROs) to perform animal research. CROs will have their own IACUCs. Teaming arrangements could be leveraged as well.
2. Q: Can a university partner work with multiple teams?
    - A: Each proposal should stand alone with its teaming arrangement. A University with different researchers on different proposals that are non-overlapping would each be considered on their own merits. Proposers who are on multiple teams should be cognizant of the distribution of the level of effort across multiple awards and will be required to ensure that DARPA is only charged once for any potential duplicate efforts.
3. Q: The information session highlighted the priority of targeting brown tree snakes but suggested that other eukaryotic organisms may be applicable to the solicitation. Given our work on wheat stem sawfly, we are interested in understanding if proposals targeting other high-impact eukaryotic pests will be considered competitive for funding under GUARDIAN.
    - A: This depends on the selected Technical Area. In accordance with the Program Solicitation, in Technical Area 1, page 10, performers may propose an alternative snake model organism, but they must provide a strong justification for its gestation time and relevance to BTS. They must also provide a plan to work specifically with BTS within the program timeline to meet program metrics and milestones. In Technical Area 2, page 7, GUARDIAN is most interested in K-selected vertebrate invasive species whose development timeline is incompatible with testing GDT in vivo as a solution for eradication.

4. Q: The information session indicated that development and deployment of gene drive technologies would be in 12 months, whereas the draft solicitation says that the development and deployment would be in two 18-month phases (i.e., totaling 36 months). Could you clarify if the timeline aims for completion in 12 or 36 months?
    - A: In accordance with the program solicitation, The GUARDIAN program is 36-month effort and will be executed over Phase 1 (18-month) and Phase 2 (18-month), with the exception of Technical Area 2 which only has a single 18-month phase.
5. Q: The solicitation for abstracts has 3 'options'-- is it necessary to comprise a team accomplishing all three objectives or only to accomplish one of the three options? Is there priority to teams accomplishing one or all of the options?
    - A: In accordance with the Program Solicitation, page 6, Proposers may propose to individual or multiple options (Technical Areas), but the option(s) must be proposed for both phases. For example, if proposers elect to respond to Technical Areas 1 and 3 in Phase 1, then they must also respond to Technical Areas 1 and 3 in Phase 2. Note that Technical Area 2 only has a single 18-month phase.
6. Q: Would DARPA be able to recommend performers, laboratories, or technical groups with relevant experience in compact biomedical imaging, robotic-assisted micro-manipulation, or precision field-deployable devices who might be suitable partners for early-stage prototyping?
    - A: Specific content, communications, networking, and team formation are the sole responsibility of the proposer team. Teaming profiles and lightning talks were distributed to Industry Day registrants and are available upon request via email to GuardianProgram@darpa.mil.
7. Q: For GUARDIAN, is identifying such a partner expected at the time of the initial abstract submission, or—if alignment is strong—can an appropriate partner be added later in the project (for example, as a subcontractor or collaborator)?
    - A: DARPA understands that final concepts and team make-up may change from the abstract phase to the oral presentation (if invited) as the technical approach is solidified, however, please note that technical ability (as defined on section 4.3 of the program solicitation) is one of the evaluation criteria for proposal abstract.

B. Technical

1. Q: Are viral vector/particles excluded?
    - A. Assuming this is referring to a gene delivery mechanism, they are not prescribed in the Program Solicitation. If the question is about viruses as a means of transmission, for Technical Area 1 - Viruses may be considered in scope if transmission occurs only through direct contact between individual BTS, is confined specifically to BTS species, and is not latent in the environment. For Technical Area 2- Non-Mendelian inheritance may include the use of viruses, parasites, species specific drives (such as the murine meiotic drive), and/or homing drives (such as those using CRISPR-Cas systems) (GUARDIAN Program Solicitation page 7).

Technical Area 1: BTS

2. Q: Our group is in the process of developing a plan for Option 1 and is reviewing the draft program solicitation posted on January 26th. In addition to the BTS and another Colubrid snake, we feel that is also essential that we also work with the invasive brown anole lizard. As long as we provide very strong justification for the use of this invasive lizard, would the use of this lizard be considered within scope?
    - A: In accordance with the Program Solicitation, page 10, performers may propose an alternative snake model organism, but they must provide a strong justification for its gestation time and relevance to BTS.

Technical Area 2: Cell Culture

3. Q: DARPA aims to generate a multi-generational cell culture system to effectively model GD in BTS, thereby cutting down the generation time. The relevant tissues for a homing drive are the germline cells. Do we know if these tissues/cells are present/mature at the embryo stages in snakes? This seems like a very difficult task on organisms where reproduction is not well understood.
    - A: There are many gaps in our knowledge of BTS reproduction, and the reproduction of snakes in general. The intention is for GUARDIAN to fill these information gaps in a much more efficient manner than is currently possible today. DARPA seeks highly innovative ideas in this space to accelerate advancements in the state-of-the science

Technical Area 3: Modeling

4. Q: How does Option [Technical Area] 3 plan to handle uncertainty propagation from weather forcing into invasive species spread predictions, and will robustness under environmental variability be an explicit evaluation criterion?
    - A: GUARDIAN seeks comprehensive models that accurately predict both invasive species behavior as well as the GDT used to combat them in the environment. We are asking Proposers to include any/all classes of models that will support the development of this framework.

C. Public Affairs

1. Q: How does the GUARDIAN program plan to address the social, ethical, and stakeholder engagement challenges associated with gene drive deployment, including ensuring societal acceptability, managing public and regulatory communications, and addressing Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications (ELSI)? Will the program provide dedicated social science expertise and resources to support these efforts, or is there an expectation for teams to incorporate in-house stakeholder engagement strategies as part of their proposal submissions? Additionally, how will the program coordinate with existing stakeholder engagement initiatives, such as those within the USGS BTS Management Team, and ensure a unified DARPA message in public and regulatory engagement?
    - A: The GUARDIAN program recognizes the critical importance of addressing social, ethical, and stakeholder engagement challenges associated with gene drive deployment. Proposals should address the requirements of the Program Solicitation. GUARDIAN seeks to develop GDT that will be ready for field trials and will have passed regulatory review. These reviews will require ELSI (Ethical Legal and Societal Implications) considerations that are intended to be a close collaboration between Performers, DARPA, and any transition partners to ensure all necessary data is collected, and ELSI and regulatory considerations have been addressed. GUARDIAN encourages teams to include in-house stakeholder engagement strategies within their proposals to complement these efforts. Teams are expected to work closely with the DARPA team, including DARPA Public Affairs, to align their approaches into the program's unified messaging, ensuring consistency in public and regulatory engagement.