

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

**Last Updated: 3/4/2026**

Updates are **bolded/highlighted/underlined** below

A. Programmatic

1. Q: What would be the process for companies that don't have an IACUC committee?
  - o 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?
  - o 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.
  - o 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?

- o 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?
- o 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?
- o 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](mailto: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)?
- o 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.

**8. Q: Are international partners allowed as team members or subcontractors?**

- o **A: As stated in DARPA-PS-26-17, “Non-U.S. organizations and/or individuals may participate to the extent that such participants comply with any necessary nondisclosure agreements, security regulations, export control laws, and other governing statutes applicable under the circumstances.”**

**9. Q: Our team is drafting our abstracts for TA1 and TA3, which we understand can each be 5 pages long and submitted in a single package for our team. Is this a correct assumption? Are the section limits minimum lengths as opposed to maximum lengths? Is it okay that one section can be longer or shorter than those limits as long as the overall abstract does not exceed 5 pages?**

- **A: In accordance with the program solicitation, “each TA shall not exceed (5) pages.” Therefore, 5 pages for each TA is acceptable. Please note that the title page and references do not count toward the 5-page limit, but the section descriptions only amount to 3.5 pages:**
  - 1. Technical Understanding (no more than 1 page)**
  - 2. Technical Challenges (no more than 1 page)**
  - 3. Technical Ability (no more than 1 page)**
  - 4. Estimated cost (no more than 1/2 page)**
- **The remaining space should be used to describe your proposed solution.**

**10. Q: The time for abstract submission is 5pm on March 9th in 4.1.f and 12:00 in the “Program Solicitation Overview Information”. Which is correct?**

- **All due dates are at 12:00 pm U.S. Eastern daylight time. Abstracts and oral proposal packages (if invited) MUST be submitted via DARPA’s BAA Portal (<https://baa.darpa.mil>).**

**11. Q: If we put in a joint proposal for two TA's, might DARPA choose to support one but not the other?**

- **A: Yes. DARPA reserves the right to fully select, partially select, or not select the proposal for funding.**

## 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).

**2. Q: Is there also an open call to submit an application to fund a project developing genetic control also for NWS?**

- **A: This solicitation provides opportunities for NWS efforts in TA3 for modeling only.**

### Technical Area 1: BTS

3. 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?

- o 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.

**4. Q: The RFP [Program Solicitation] notes that TA3 should expand from a field trial, to local, country, continent, and global areas. The goal is not to eradicate a species from the planet, just an island (or in case of NWSW[NWS], the continent). How do you envision these spatial scales for the BTS on Guam?**

- o **A: According to the Program Solicitation “Performers will identify data sets that support the outcomes of dispersal of non-native species with and without GDT.” Modeling should focus on the relevant geographic range of native BTS, as well as suitable geographic range for potential invasion.**

**5. Q: As long as we provide very strong justification the use of this invasive lizard, would the use of this lizard be considered within scope?**

- o **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. 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.**

#### Technical Area 2: Cell Culture

6. 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.

- o 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

7. 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?

- o 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.

**8. Q: Table 1 for TA3 Phase 2 says: "Using organismal, cell culture, and field trial data, integrate models and refine predictions of NWS gene drives at scale in the environment." This doesn't mention BTS - can BTS be the only target of TA3 Phase 2?**

**o A: No, TA3 Phase 1 and 2 should address both BTS and NWS with available data.**

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?

o 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.

**Should you have any further questions regarding the GUARDIAN program, please consult the Program Solicitation. Direct any further inquiries to [GuardianProgram@darpa.mil](mailto:GuardianProgram@darpa.mil).**