

DARPA SN-26-108

Convergence

Frequently Asked Questions

Please note that there will be additional opportunities to submit questions after the release of the Broad Agency Announcement (BAA).

A. Programmatic

- a. Q: How can the PoP and rapid demonstration in Phase I be reconciled with the regulatory approval timelines outlined by Fieldstone?

A: Fieldstone information is not the basis of the government timelines that will be provided in the BAA.

- b. Q: Will DARPA provide funding to small businesses to upgrade facilities and/or IT systems from Unclassified to CUI to Secret as sequences and microbes move from Tier 3 to Tier 0?

A: Further instruction will be provided in the BAA.

- c. Q: Can a proposal be submitted by a single entity or are consortia preferred?

A: The proposal should be submitted by a single entity that identifies the team members.

- d. Q: Can proposers include government/DoW service labs as a member of the performer team?

A: Government partners cannot be part of a proposing teams. UARCs and FFRDCs are welcome to partner, following any specifications provided by the BAA. Please see the BAA for further details.

- e. Q: Does a proposal need to be comprehensive to address all [Technical Areas] (TAs) in their proposal? And can a proposal be limited only to a single tier? Similarly: Q: If I submit a proposal as a prime offeror can I also be a subcontractor to another prime? In the same Tier? In a different Tier?

A: Proposal submission details will be provided in the BAA. It is anticipated that one team will only be allowed to be the Prime one Technical Area/Tier. Teams should also anticipate providing full responses to an individual Technical Area/Tier. Teams can propose to an individual Tier.

- f. Q: Can you clarify the anticipated relationship between Tiers and Task Areas?
- A. Tiers are the level of individual component and systems integration. Task Areas are the contractual tasks to be proposed to. Tier and Task Areas are numbered identically.
- g. Q: Are the Tiers expected to be sequential development or are they parallel activities?
- A. Tiers will run in parallel. More details on the specific milestones and metrics for each Tier will be provided in the BAA.
- h. Q: How will the Tier and single prime limitation influence proposal structure?
- A. Proposals will have to take into consideration that they will be working with teams that are not part of their own team. Successful approaches will be flexible to other possible approaches.
- i. Q: Are all Task Areas expected in a proposed solution?
- A. Further details will be provided in the BAA, it is anticipated that teams may propose to only a single TA/Tier.
- j. Q: Are you thinking small teams? Large teams? Focused teams?
- A. Proposal should respond with the team that they think best meets the goals of the Convergence program, DARPA will not dictate team size or composition. Utility of Team Members should be responsive to the quality of Technical Approach and Cost Reasonableness.
- k. Q: How many teams are you thinking of funding? More TA3 teams than TA1?
- A. DARPA will fund the amount of teams required to accomplish goals depending on what is proposed.

B. Technical

- a. Q: What level of specificity is required for threat detection? Yes/no detection? Explosive vs. controlled substance? Specific chemical e.g. TNT?
- A: Official metrics and milestones will be defined in the Broad Agency Announcement.
- b. Q: Will the performers be expected to supply the live agents for testing? Or will the government partners/IV&V provide?

A: Yes and if your team does not have that capability you will be expected to partner with a team that does.

- c. Q: Will the field test locations be chosen by DARPA or IV&V? Or should the proposer team identify them?

A: TA1 proposers should have testing sites identified, for performer led live agent testing. Government led live agent testing will be planned by the Convergence team. More details will be provided in the BAA.

- d. Q: Should proposers plan to test sensors in CWA/PBA simulants prior to live agent testing?

A: Proposals should include any tests the proposing team finds necessary to achieve the metrics and milestones that will be provided in the forthcoming BAA.

- e. Q: Are there any chassis/microbes that are out-of-scope or not allowed by the BAA? Similarly: Q: If someone proposes abiotic chemical sensors that recognize CWA's that could be dispersed by drones and detected – would that be in scope? Q: Are you only interested in microbes? Would fungi be okay? Synthetic cells? Cell-free systems?

A: The BAA will provide more specific details, the Convergence Program is interested in approaches that can meet program metrics and milestones. Novel approaches are not anticipated to be out of scope outright.

- f. Q: How many CWA/PBAs does a proposal need to develop a biosensor for?

A: Specifics will be provided in the BAA.

- g. Q: Will the BAA include a list of target chemicals? Similarly: Q: How specific will the target analytes be defined? Will responsive proposals be focused on a small number of known chemical agents or capable of reporting on large numbers of agents simultaneously or unknown chemical threats?

A: Yes, a priority of agents will be provided derived from extant threat lists.

- h. Q: What level of coordination is expected between tier 0/1 and tier 2/3 performers? How should that be portrayed in the proposal?

A: The BAA will provide specifics on the interactions between Tiers. Given the delivery timelines, completion of functional deliverables on schedule will be critical to performer success and proposal should have strong illustration of this as well as risk mitigations. It is anticipated that in Phase 1 information will flow between the Tiers in collaborative manner but there will be no contractual dependencies. In Phase 2, there will be an enforced requirement to integrate components from other Tiers.

- i. Q: What are the limits on HGT [horizontal gene transfer]? How will this be measured?

A: Proposals should include an understanding of regulatory requirements and testing and how to meet those standards. The BAA will include biocontainment measures.

- j. Q: Is use of a color camera detector a hard limit? Similarly: Q: Will visible spectrum outputs be prioritized?

A: It is anticipated that the BAA will include many detection instrumentations.

- k. Q: Are the responsive and early warning capabilities both required for a single solution? Or are these considered different focus areas?

A. This will depend on the selected Concept of Operations and this may vary. More details will be provided in the BAA.

C. Security

- a. Q: Will the BAA have a fully classified counterpart BAA?

A: It is likely that the BAA will have unclassified and CUI components. If a team would like to propose something at a higher classification, it is the responsibility of the proposer to provide the required Security Classification Guides. Proposers interested in access to all of the BAA should be prepared to handle information at the level they are proposing to work at.

- b. Q: If the integrated microbial biosensors is classified do you need a system to protect the physical genetic information when it is released into the environment?

A: In general, information on performance of the integrated biosensor system in the intended environment will be classified. More details will be provided in the Security Classification Guide that will be released with the Broad Agency Announcement.