DPA26BZ05-DV020
Universal Cell Culture Platform for Rapid Establishment of Species-Agnostic Cell Lines and Autonomous Culture Operations
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
August 27, 2026

1. For DPA26BZ05-DV020 Direct-to-Phase-II eligibility, the DoW CSO states that the proposing SBC and/or principal investigator must have "substantially performed" the work submitted in the feasibility documentation. For multi-person biological R&D, may qualifying prior work include work for which the proposed PI had substantial scientific and technical responsibility—such as experimental design, protocol development, direction of execution, analysis, and interpretation—while other members of the research team performed portions of the laboratory execution?
   A: The Phase 1 qualifying work should have in aggregate been performed by the proposing team, preference will be given to teams who have performed prior work as a team.

2. If the proposed PI substantially performed qualifying prior work while employed by another organization, may that documented work be used to satisfy the Component 1 DP2 feasibility requirement, provided the individual serves as PI for the proposed effort, meets the SBIR primary-employment requirement at award and during performance, and the proposing SBC owns or licenses the IP necessary to conduct the proposed Phase-II work?
   A: Yes as long as all of these criteria are met.

3. For Component 1, is "non-model species" determined at the organism level, or may an organism used as a research model in another context qualify when it lacks an established, reproducible cell-line/iPSC baseline relevant to this topic?
   A: Non-model species is determined at the organism level.

4. For Component 1 DP2 feasibility, what constitutes sufficient prior "establishment and/or maintenance of viable cell lines" for each of the required two non-model species? Must the prior evidence demonstrate a continuous or serially passaged line for a minimum number of passages or duration, or may a viable characterized primary culture maintained for a defined period satisfy the feasibility requirement?
   A: Established cell lines are desired, but evidence of establishment of primary cell cultures will be considered.

5. Is the Phase-II target of >20 passages with demonstrated genomic stability intended only as a Phase-II performance metric, rather than as a threshold for the prior feasibility demonstration?

A: This is a Phase 2 performance metric.

6. For Component 1 feasibility, will DARPA credit work substantially performed by the proposal's named principal investigator at a prior institution, where that work is peer-reviewed and the PI will be primarily employed by the small business at time of award?
   A: Phase 1 qualifying work should have in aggregate been performed by the proposing team, preference will be given to teams who have performed prior work as a team.

7. Must each of the four Phase II species be uncharacterized in the published literature, or is it sufficient that they are new to the proposer's prior feasibility work and platform?
   A: Work must be performed on non-model species.

8. For the species-coverage metric, does "more than two taxonomic classes" require class-level representation among the four new species specifically — and may established reference species used for platform validation count toward the species or class totals?
   A: Work must be performed on non-model species of different classes of organisms defined at the taxonomic level, reference species will not count towards this total.

9. For Component 3, is a single established non-model, germline-relevant cell system sufficient for the in-vitro biocontrol demonstration?
   A: Yes

10. Can you please confirm that the submission format should be a 20-page white paper and 15-slide deck for this topic?
    A: Yes

11. The topic specifies <90 days to a validated cell line/iPSC where feasible, while separately requiring >20 passages with demonstrated genomic stability and the equivalent of at least five generations maintained in all demonstrated species. Could you clarify whether the intended interpretation is:
    A. the validated line and >20-passage genomic-stability demonstration must both be completed within the <90-day time-to-protocol interval; or
    B. a validated protocol/cell line must be established within <90 days, while the >20-passage genomic-stability evidence may continue to accumulate subsequently and be completed by the later Phase II demonstration milestone?

A: The intended interpretation is B. The initial protocol must be established within 90 days. The 20 passages is not time limited.