

Informational Webinar – Questions and Answers  
Notice of Funding Opportunity  
Center of Excellence on New Mobility and Automated Vehicles

1. Q: Please clarify the eighty/twenty cost-share requirement.

A: The Federal cost share is based on the total eligible cost for the project. Applicants will submit the budget that they deem is necessary and appropriate to advance the goals of this project. The Federal share will be up to eighty percent of the budget, while the recipient cost share will be a minimum of twenty percent of the budget. Note that the Federal share is limited to funds available, which are \$1.5 million for the first year, with a total Federal share of \$7.5 million for five years anticipated, pending funds availability. The exact Federal share is dependent on a final budget that is proposed and approved.

2. Q: The NOFO indicates that two organizations must be included in addition to the applicant. Does this mean a minimum of three organizations must be identified for the proposed COE?

A: Yes. Each application must be submitted by one proposing organization with a minimum of two partners. Note that the proposing organization will be the award recipient, with the partners as sub-recipients (see [eCFR :: 2 CFR 200.331 -- Subrecipient and contractor determinations](#)). The award recipient will administer the award. Furthermore, the award recipient must meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the NOFO.

3. Q: So an application can be submitted by a university, with two private research entities, or one private research entity and another university as partners, or any other combination of eligible entities?

A: Correct in part. The proposing organization must meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Section C.1. of the NOFO. The partner organizations, which will be sub-recipients to the award, do not need to meet the eligibility requirements. However, as indicated in Section B.1. of the NOFO, the application should outline the associated roles and responsibilities of the partner organizations and how they will help the proposing organization fully cover the breadth of research topics that will be covered by the COE.

4. Q: Can a small business that is conducting work in the area of implementing autonomous driving apply?

A: A small business may be the proposing organization, as long as it meets the eligibility requirement of being a research entity. The National Science Foundation provides a definition of what constitutes research and development and outlines the differences between basic and applied research and experimental development (see <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/randdef/rd-definitions.pdf>). In order to meet the requirements of the COE, it is anticipated that the proposing organization conducts applied research.

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5. Q: Theoretically, is Ford Motor Company eligible, as they conduct research on automated vehicles?

A: The research division of a company such as Ford Motor Company would be considered a private research entity. They could either be the proposing organization or one of the partners in an application. The specific legislative language in 23 U.S. Code §503(c)(6)(D) states: “In establishing the Center of Excellence under subparagraph (B), the Secretary shall enter into appropriate partnerships with any institution of higher education (as defined in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)) or public or private research entity.” The FHWA has determined that this should be interpreted as broadly as possible to ensure the best possible selection of an awardee to meet the goals of the COE.

6. Q: For a mobility startup, which can be defined as a research institute involved in the production of something new, does it make sense to partner with universities or other research entities, and submit a combined application?

A: The FHWA cannot advise on developing partnerships for an application. The requirements are that an eligible entity, as outlined in Section C.1. of the NOFO will be the proposing organization and will identify a minimum of two partners, as required in Section B.1. of the NOFO. It is up to each proposing organization to evaluate what their strengths are, and how partners might make their application stronger.

7. Q: Is there any limit to the number of applications in which a university or other eligible entity can participate? Can different faculty at a single university partner with other universities in multiple applications? Are there any limits on different teams?

A: No, there are no limits. Eligible entities may submit as many applications as they want in any arrangement of proposing organization and partner. However, there will be only one award..

8. Q: Does that mean an organization can be the lead (proposing organization) for multiple applications, or can they only be the lead for one application, but be partners in other applications?

A: Eligible entities may submit as many applications as they want in any arrangement of lead and partner organizations. Different organizations may be named as partners in multiple applications. The requirement is that each application must be unique and individual, with a complete application package. There will only be one award. n.

9. Q: Will contracting only be with the prime (with the other two partners being sub-recipients to the prime) even if an FFRDC is one of the prime partners? Or will DOT contract directly with all 3+ team members?.

A: To clarify, the award is not a contract, but rather award of Federal financial assistance in the form of a cooperative agreement. There will be one recipient, who will be the proposing

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organization from the selected application. Other partners, including the two mandatory partners, will be designated as sub-recipients or contractors if they meet the definition in 2 CFR 200.331 (see [eCFR :: 2 CFR 200.331 -- Subrecipient and contractor determinations](#)).

10. Q: Will the research topics covered by the COE be specified by FHWA or proposed by the Center researchers

A: The latter. The COE will be responsible for developing the research plan and outlining the intended research projects for each year. The FHWA anticipates that the COE will use the Steering Committee, identified in Task 2 of the Statement of Work (Section A.5. of the NOFO) to help the COE shape a research plan and select projects that are responsive to the responsibilities and roles of the COE. However, the COE is ultimately responsible for developing the long-term research plan and proposing projects to be funded in a given year.

11. Q: Can proposals include letters of support from organizations not engaged directly as budgeted partners?

A: Letters of commitment from partner organizations and other sub-recipients should be included in Volume 2, Budget Application, of the Application Package. Additional letters of commitment from organizations that are not formal partners or sub-recipients may be included in Volume 2 to demonstrate the capability of the proposing organization to form and lead multidisciplinary teams (see Section E., Application Review Information of the NOFO). Note that Volume 2 is not included in the ten-thousand-word limit for the application.

12. Q: If you have three or more partners, are you looking to have everything focused on one geographic center, the one geographical area?

A: No. The Center of Excellence is intended to be able to meet the requirements of the legislation which appear to be national in scope.

13. Q: Might the Partners or Steering Committee members bring additional dollars beyond the minimum cost share?

A: Yes. While there is a minimum cost share of 20 percent, there is no maximum amount of non-federal funds that may be used.

14. Q: Is it appropriate to identify Steering Committee members in an application?

A: There is no requirement to identify Steering Committee members in the application. Note that establishment of the Steering Committee is Task 2 in the Statement of Work (Section A.5 of the NOFO). As one of the first responsibilities of the recipient, it is not anticipated that Steering Committee members would be identified prior to award.

15. Q: Did I understand you to say that additional cost sharing beyond the required 20 percent will be an advantage?

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A: Providing cost share above the required minimum of 20 percent is not necessarily an advantage, but will be taken into consideration. As indicated on page 23 of the NOFO (Section E, Application Review Information), “Additional cost sharing will be considered beneficial to break ties among applications with equivalent ratings after evaluation against all other factors.” The government will first evaluate applications against two criteria, Merit and Cost, and then consider additional cost sharing if two or more applications are similarly rated.

16. Q: Is it appropriate to suggest individuals who would be good to consider for the Steering Committee

A: Absolutely. Once an award is made the government anticipates that the lead organization will initiate the process to establish the Steering Committee. The only limitation is that FHWA will serve as the chair of the Steering Committee. The government will not select Steering Committee members, but rather will work with the awardee in a collaborative manner to identify potential members. The awardee has the responsibility to lead that activity of identifying potential members, and to approach those individuals to be on the Steering Committee. The intent is to first establish a COE that has the breadth of expertise and knowledge to be able to fulfill the legislatively mandated requirements of this new center of excellence, and second to have the COE establish a Steering Committee that complements the expertise of the lead and partner organizations to help bring new information to them and to help them manage the quality of the products that are developed.

17. Q: Can you clarify FHWA role in the Steering Committee? In one area the NOFO states FHWA will chair the SC, but another section says it might not.

A: As identified in Task 2 of the Statement of Work (Section A.5 of the NOFO), the FHWA will chair the Steering Committee. However, the government reserves the right to determine the extent of participation under Task 3 of the Statement of Work.

18. Q: Is there knowledge or information on who from FHWA or what department within FHWA will be the primary contact for the CoE?

A: Please see the section of FHWA Point of Contact on page 1 of the NOFO.

19. Q: Is there guidance or assumptions around the percentage of funding FHWA would like to see going to admin, vs direct research, vs outreach/tool development?

A: No. The government anticipates that the COE will determine the appropriate distribution based on the research agenda.

20. Q: Can proposals include letters of support from organizations not engaged directly as budgeted partners?

A: Yes. See Q11 above.

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21. Q: Does FHWA envision the COE to function more like a UTC (competitive research proposals – focused primarily on a limited group of partners), or more like a research center (internal research, bringing in others as needed), or something else (competitive research proposals open to anyone)?

A: 23 U.S. Code §503(c)(6)(B) states, in part: “the Secretary shall establish a Center of Excellence to collect, conduct, and fund research on the impacts of new mobility and highly automated vehicles on land use, urban design, transportation, real estate, equity, and municipal budgets.” The government anticipates that the COE will select a variety of mechanisms to fulfill this requirement.

22. Q: Can you please describe the process in which COE resources or products would be transferred to a subsequent center awardee? How would this apply to existing resources (e.g. databases, clearinghouses) that organizations may have already developed and bring to support the COE or augment during COE work?

A: The general requirements for Public Access and Data Rights to deliverables under the cooperative agreement may be found under General Clauses in Section F of the NOFO. Task 5 of the Statement of Work provides details on forming, operating, and transferring the products of the COE, including but not limited to data, analyses, white papers, research reports, presentations, videos, and photographs, through a public-facing clearinghouse. The recipient has responsibility to identify pre-existing materials that are not covered by this requirement in order to ensure an appropriate transfer to a subsequent awardee.

23. Q: Is the inclusion of HBCUs or minority-serving institutions considered as part of proposal evaluation?

A: No. The evaluation criteria are Merit and Cost, as outlined on page 23, Section E – Application Review Information.

24. Q: My organization, Urban Institute, is considering joining an institution of higher education applicant as a partnering organization. We are a 501c3 non-profit organization. We wanted to confirm with you that 501c3 non-profit organizations are allowed to join applications as partnering organizations. We were not clear about this based on the language on page 14 of the NOFO.

A: The proposing (or lead) organization must meet the requirements for eligible applicants. Partnering organizations and other sub-recipients are not required to meet those requirements. As such, a 501c3 non-profit organization may be a partner organization or sub-recipient.

25. Q: Page 37 of the NOFO contains “Section H – Other Information.” Is there content that should be included in this section in addition to the Section H content provided on page 30?

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A: Thank you for identifying this issue. Section H is intentionally blank, as the government does not have other information to provide at this time.

26. Q: There are two limitations for the technical application: word limit (10,000 words) and page limit (25 pages). Should we adhere to both restrictions?

A: The Technical Application will be limited to 10,000 words. There is no page limit for the application. Resumes, which are not included in the word limit, shall not exceed 2 pages each.

27. Q: Are industry companies eligible as partner organizations? Can they contribute in the form of matching funds?

A: The proposing (or lead) organization must meet the requirements for eligible applicants. Partnering organizations and other sub-recipients are not required to meet those requirements. As such, industry companies may be a partner organization or sub-recipient, and may contribute in the form of matching funds.

28. Q: For the funding budget, can we allocate funds for future potential collaborations outlined in Task 4 of the NOFO? Are there any funding limitations on this budget plan, such as sub awards to future potential projects selected through Task 4?

A: Yes, the government anticipates that the COE will allocate funds for both internal and external research. There is not requirement on how many of the research projects re conducted internally versus externally.

29. Q: What types of funding matches are eligible? For instance, can student tuition be considered an eligible funding match?

A: [Title 2 Code of Federal Regulations Part 200.306](#) describes the requirements for cost sharing. Paragraph (b) of this part states that:

“For all Federal awards, any shared costs or matching funds and all contributions, including cash and third-party in-kind contributions, must be accepted as part of the non-Federal entity's cost sharing or matching when such contributions meet all of the following criteria:

- (1) Are verifiable from the non-Federal entity's records;
- (2) Are not included as contributions for any other Federal award;
- (3) Are necessary and reasonable for accomplishment of project or program objectives;
- (4) Are allowable under [subpart E of this part](#);
- (5) Are not paid by the Federal Government under another Federal award, except where the Federal statute authorizing a program specifically provides that Federal funds made available for such program can be applied to matching or cost sharing requirements of other Federal programs;
- (6) Are provided for in the approved budget when required by the Federal awarding agency; and

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(7) Conform to other provisions of this part, as applicable.”

That portion of the student tuition that is “necessary and reasonable for accomplishment of the project” would be acceptable as cost share, provided all of the other criteria are met.

30. Q: Is it possible for a new partner to join the COE at a later stage? How should we budget for such activities?

A: Yes, a new partner may join the COE at a later stage. This will not impact the amount of Federal funding available, nor will it change the minimum cost share requirement of 20 percent.

31. Q: The NOFO states that "the Recipient shall define a research agenda" and per Task 4 description, it is not known a priori, who will be conducting the research, how should one prepare the budget? Page 20 of NOFO states that the minimum information required for contractors/sub-recipients which includes “cost details for that portion of work”. If the team has multiple partners, does the proposal budget need to fix the specific subcontract budgets for all partners throughout all five years? Or in the budget can we provide details for the prime and include all the subcontractors as an estimated one-line item for now? And will the details be decided in the course of the COE with input from the steering committee and FHWA?

A: The proposal budget does not need to fix the specific subcontract budgets for all partners throughout the five years. Line-item estimates for the recipient, partners, and other sub-recipients are appropriate for the application. Tracking and reporting actual work performed and costs are the responsibility of the recipient (see Task 1.2 of the Statement of Work). The Steering Committee will be responsible for evaluating the research progress, monitoring the quality of products, ensuring that the COE activities align with the requirements of the cooperative agreement, and collaborating with the recipient in defining a research agenda. The recipient, however, has discretion in determining how to best accomplish the goals outlined in the research agenda, including decisions on whether to perform work in-house or externally.

32. Q: Would the team be required or encouraged to propose individuals or organizations as candidates for the Steering Committees (SC) in the proposal? Or would it be better to not mention any particular names in the proposal but rather to decide the SC during conducting the grant (e.g., when performing Task 2)?

A: Please see Q14 and Q16, above.

33. Q: Would it be possible to share from which pool and how the proposal reviewers will be selected?

A: No.

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34. Q: Could FHWA expand on the goal of impacts on “system-level efficiencies”?
- A: Section A.4 of the NOFO describes the goal of the COE to “...seek to develop an understanding of how new mobility and automated vehicles may impact the evolving transportation system when deployed at scale.” It is anticipated that increased market penetration and geographic scale of new forms of mobility, and increasing automation of the transportation system, will impact many if not all aspects of the surface transportation system. Understanding the interaction of these impacts at the system level will be important for public agencies in developing policies on future land use and urban design, and for industry to identify potential future markets.
35. Q: Given that an initial task is to develop a research agenda, is FHWA looking for ideas for specific research projects or a primarily approach to developing and carrying out the research agenda?
- A: As identified in Task 3 of the Statement of Work, the five-year research agenda should identify research gaps and outline the topic areas the COE will address. Based on that effort, at least two research projects will be initiated in the first year of the COE. Additional research projects will be initiated in the following years, based on updates to the research agenda and available funds.
36. Q: Does FHWA want proposers to suggest names for the steering committee?
- A: Please see Q14 and Q16, above.
37. Q: Is FHWA prioritizing minority-serving institutions in the selection process? If so, how are MSIs defined?
- A: No. This opportunity is a full and open competition.
38. Q: Would participation by institutions or individual researchers on more than one proposal in response to this NOFO be viewed as acceptable?
- A: Please see Q7 and Q8, above.
39. Q: Is this strictly for the ground transportation sector?
- A: Yes, the COE is expected to focus on New Mobility and Automated Vehicles for ground transportation.