

PROGRAM SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DoD)

APEX Accelerator Program – Special Announcement

Announcement Type: Special Announcement

Anticipated Funding Purpose: Business and Commerce

Key Dates: The question-and-answer period for this special announcement is 8 March 2024 until 5:00PM Eastern Time, 9 May 2024. Submit questions via email to: monica.k.wideman.civ@army.mil. Answers will be posted to this announcement by 5:00PM Eastern Time, 16 May 2024.

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Date Issued: 8 March 2024

I. Program Description

A. Background:

The Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP) was established by section 1241 of the Department of Defense (DoD) Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1985 (Public Law 98-525) to expand the number of businesses capable of participating in government contracts. Under this announcement, the Department of Defense will award cost sharing cooperative agreements to eligible program participants who will establish or maintain APEX Accelerators. The APEX Accelerators serve as a resource for businesses to obtain information and training related to contracting opportunities with DoD, other federal agencies, state and local governments and with government prime contractors. Procurement professionals at the APEX Accelerators provide critical assistance to businesses seeking to participate in government contracts and most of the assistance they provide is free.

B. Program Description/Objective:

Award recipients must establish and maintain an APEX Accelerator with physical location(s) to serve as a resource for large and small businesses to obtain procurement technical assistance. Procurement technical assistance means professional, specialized assistance provided to clients that enables them to identify potential contractual opportunities and obtain or perform under contracts, innovation and technology grants, and other DoD-funded instruments, with DoD, other Federal agencies, State and/or local governments, and with Federal, State and/or local government contractors. Clients may include any business pursuing or performing these types of contracts or subcontracts at any tier. As used in this part, the terms “State” and “local government” have the meanings provided in 10 U.S.C. 4951. Innovation and technology grants refer to awards issued pursuant to the Small Business Innovation Research and/or Small Business Technology Transfer programs. You must collaborate with DoD and other Federal agencies and work cooperatively with them to accomplish the work under this award.

II. Federal Award Information

We expect to award 95 new cost sharing cooperative agreements with 5 one-year period of performance, totaling an estimated \$750K to \$1.5M; however, we are not obligated to make any awards and reserve the right to revise or cancel this special announcement.

The period of performance will begin around 01 April 2025 and conclude around 31 March 2026 for the first year. Applicants may include subrecipients/subawards in their application and may propose direct and indirect costs.

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The Federal funding limitations are listed below:

\$750,000 in the case of an entity that operates an APEX Accelerator providing less than statewide coverage;

\$1,500,000 in the case of an entity that operates an APEX Accelerator providing statewide

coverage;

\$1,000,000 in the case of an entity that operates an APEX Accelerator wholly within more than one service area of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This means an APEX Accelerator that provides procurement technical assistance to all the federally recognized Indian tribes or Alaska Native entities in one of the BIA regions and at least half of the tribes or Alaska Native entities in a second BIA region; or

\$450,000 in the case of an entity that operates an APEX Accelerator wholly within one service area of the BIA. This means an APEX Accelerator that provides procurement technical assistance to federally recognized Indian tribes and/or Alaska Native entities but does not meet the standard for an entity that operates an APEX Accelerator wholly within more than one service area of the BIA as described above.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Only those entities listed in this section are eligible to apply. Individuals are not eligible.

Disclosures of current and pending support made in this application may render an applicant ineligible for funding. Prior to award and throughout the period of performance, DoD may continue to request updated continuing and pending support information, which will be reviewed and may result in discontinuation of funding.

Religious organizations are entitled to compete on equal footing with secular organizations for Federal financial assistance as described in E.O. 13798, "Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty."

States. State means a State of the United States, the District of Columbia, a territory or possession of the United States, an agency or instrumentality of a State, and a multi-State, regional, or interstate entity having governmental duties and powers (refer to 10 U.S.C. 4951(4)).

Local governments. Local government means a unit of government in a State, a local public authority, a special district, an intrastate district, a council of governments, a sponsor group representative organization, an interstate entity, or another instrumentality of a local government (refer to 10 U.S.C. 4951(4)).

Private nonprofit organizations. Private nonprofit organization means an entity which is exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code, and no part of its earnings inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual, and no substantial part of its activities is carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation or participating in any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office (refer to 10 U.S.C. 4951(1)(C)).

Economic enterprises. Economic enterprise means any Indian-owned (as defined by the Secretary of the Interior) commercial, industrial, or business activity established or organized for

profit purposes or for nonprofit purposes. Provided, that such Indian ownership constitutes not less than 51 percent of the enterprise (refer to 10 U.S.C. 4951(1)(D)).

Tribal organizations. Tribal organization means the recognized governing body of any Indian tribe; any legally established organization of Indians which is controlled, sanctioned, or chartered by such governing body, or which is democratically elected by the adult members of the Indian community to be served by such organization and which includes the maximum participation of Indians in all phases of its activities. Provided, that in any case where a cooperative agreement is made to an organization to perform services benefiting more than one Indian tribe, the approval of each such Indian tribe shall be a prerequisite to the making of such cooperative agreement (refer to 10 U.S.C. 4951(1)(D)).

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost sharing requirements. All awards we make as a result of this announcement require you to provide cost sharing, without which your application is ineligible for an award. Allowable contributions towards cost sharing requirements are discussed in the “Financial and Program Management” part of the APEX General Terms and Conditions. You are required to submit documentation to verify that you have the necessary commitments to meet cost sharing requirements and, if applicable, that your proposed service area is a distressed area.

Cost share ratio. Our share of cost is limited to no more than 65 percent unless you provide procurement technical assistance in a distressed area, in which case our share is limited to no more than 85 percent. You are required to share the cost of operating your PTAC and match our funds accordingly. In accordance with 48 USC 1469a, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are entitled by statute to waiver of cost matching funds up to \$199,999.

Distressed area. Distressed area means an area of local government (i.e., usually a city or county) that has a per capita income of 80 percent or less of that State’s average or an unemployment rate that is one percent greater than the national average for the most recent 24-month period for which statistics are available. In addition, Reservations listed in BIA regions are distressed areas.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Submission Date and Time:

DoD will accept applications at a future date through a Notice of Funding Opportunity on Grants.gov. The submission deadline will be October 2024. Read the instructions in <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/grantors/grantor-standard-language.html> about registering to apply for DoD funds.

B. Application Procedures and Requirements

Organizations must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), active System for Award Management (SAM) registration, and Grants.gov account to apply for grants and other assistance awards.

Please see <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/grantors/grantor-standard-language.html> for details on how to go through this process.

C. Component Specific Requirements

Note- The component specific requirements listed below are not all inclusive and subject to revision. Additional attachments may be included in the Notice of Funding Opportunity when published at a future date. Attachment 7, 12, and 15 are provided in this special notice for comment as they are the primary discriminators in the competition.

- Attachment 7: Program Execution Strategy.
 - Describe how you will comply with the “Program Requirements” section of the APEX Accelerator Award Specific Terms and Conditions. Include all information necessary for us to conduct an evaluation of your application. Ensure the below information is specifically addressed in the description.
 1. Background on the individual program
 2. Discussion on service area/demographics and facilities, trends in the service area
 3. Personnel Qualifications: experience and education
 4. Discussion on how you will reach your goals using various types of outreach and technical assistance.
 5. Describe the process of technical assistance/counseling.
 - If you intend to earn program income, e.g. charge clients a fee for any services rendered or advertising/sponsorship, include a discussion concerning the amount of fees to be charged, how this income will be used to further program objectives, and assert your understanding that you’re required to report the gross program income on the SF 270 and SF 425. If you are proposing to utilize Program Income as part of the applicant cost share, provide a narrative detailing how you will ensure compliance with, the Award Specific Terms and Conditions percent cap on the value of program income that may be applied as the cost match.
 - For new programs, include an implementation plan including targets for significant implementation milestones such as the hiring of personnel, the execution of subawards and the opening of APEX Accelerator facilities. Identify targets for milestones as the number of calendar days elapsed following the start date of the proposed period of performance. You are encouraged to propose and adhere to the most expeditious implementation plan possible, which we may regard more favorably when evaluating your application.

- Attachment 12: Attach a budget breakdown in Microsoft Excel format, that shows the individual line items of cost that constitute the higher-level budget that you included in the SF 424A. You must use the Microsoft Excel template available on the Notice of Funding Opportunity posting on Grants.gov, which provides an example of the information that we need in this attachment. Ensure that it is clear how you calculated the total amount of indirect costs (F&A) included in your budget. Use additional pages to show indirect cost calculations if necessary. Program Income rolled over into the proposed award from the prior year annual award must be included in the budget.
 - A budget breakdown must be provided for each subaward greater than 20% of the total program cost. The subaward budget breakdown can be provided with a separate excel template, or as a new tab on the applicant's budget breakdown worksheet. The total program cost for each subaward must match the line item for the subaward found in the Contractual section of the Applicant's budget breakdown.
- Attachment 15: Past Performance
 - Applicants shall provide information on recent and relevant contracts and assistance awards. Applicants shall submit no more than five (5) recent and relevant contracts and assistance awards. Applicants shall submit only those recent and relevant contracts and assistance awards for identical or similar efforts to the program requirements as stated in the APEX Accelerator Terms and Conditions. These may include Federal, state, and local Government efforts. "Recent" includes performance that has occurred within five (5) years of the date of the posting of this funding opportunity. "Relevant past performance" is defined as past performance that demonstrates support for the Procurement Technical Assistance Program or any other similar activities performed in support of improving Defense Industrial Base or Government Industrial Base Readiness.
 - Contract Information: The applicant shall complete a Relevant Past Performance Information form, template available on grants.gov as NFO attachment 15, for a minimum of one (1) and no more than five (5) contracts for the Offeror. To be considered relevant, the applicant must demonstrate for each proposed contract or assistance instrument that it performed a minimum of 33% of the dollar value of the agreement.
 - The Applicant shall forward the Past Performance Questionnaire forms, NFO Attachment 15a, directly to the Government Point of contact identified in the Relevant Experience Form. The Government requests the Government Point of contact return the Past Performance Questionnaire forms prior to close of the NFO closing date directly to Army Contracting Command – Aberdeen Proving Ground (ACC-APG) via e-mailing the Agreements Officer identified on the cover page of this NFO.
 - The Applicant shall indicate if it has no past performance, and, if applicable, shall clearly state this.
 - The Government reserves the right, but is not obligated, to contact references provided by

the offeror. The Government may also decide to contact references other than those provided by the Offeror including sources outside the Government.

V. Application Review Information

A. Selection Criteria

Evaluation factors. We will use the factors below to evaluate your application. We will make awards to the applicants whose applications we determine to be the best value, cost and other factors considered. The past performance factor is more important than Program Execution and Cost. The factors of Program Execution and Cost are of equal importance.

- i. Past Performance
- ii. Program Execution
- iii. Cost.

Description of evaluation factors.

i. Past Performance.

- 1) The Government will evaluate the Applicant's record of recent and relevant past performance to ascertain the probability of successfully performing the Program Requirements.
- 2) Absent any recent and relevant past performance history or when the performance record is so sparse that no meaningful confidence assessment rating can be reasonably assigned, the Applicant will be assigned an "unknown confidence rating" and its proposal will not be evaluated either favorably or unfavorably on past performance. If the Applicant provides reference information that is not relevant and current as stated in section IV G, the Applicant will receive an "Unknown Confidence" past performance rating for those contracts or assistance instruments.
- 3) The Past Performance Factor considers each Applicant's demonstrated recent and relevant record of performance in supplying products and services related to the program requirements as stated in the APEX Accelerator Terms and Conditions.
 - Relevancy: The first aspect of the past performance evaluation is to determine how relevant a recent effort accomplished by the Offeror is to the effort to be acquired through the Notice of Funding opportunity. Relevancy is not separately rated; however, the following criteria will be used to establish what is relevant which shall include similarity of

service/support and complexity.

Past Performance Relevancy Ratings	
Rating	Definition
Very Relevant	Present/past performance effort involved essentially the same scope and magnitude of effort and complexities this NFO requires.
Relevant	Present/past performance effort involved similar scope and magnitude of effort and complexities this NFO requires.
Somewhat Relevant	Present/past performance effort involved some of the scope and magnitude of effort and complexities this NFO requires.
Not Relevant	Present/past performance effort involved little or none of the scope and magnitude of effort and complexities this NFO requires.

- Quality Assessment: Assess the quality of the Applicant's past performance on those recent efforts that were determined relevant by determining how well the contractor performed on the contracts and assistance instruments. Documented results from Past Performance Questionnaires, interviews, CPARS, and other sources form the support and basis for this assessment.
- Past Performance Confidence Assessment. The final step is for the team to arrive at a single consensus past performance assessment for the Applicant, selecting the most appropriate rating from the chart below. This rating considers the assessed quality of the relevant/recent efforts gathered, and correlates to the appropriate rating from the chart below. Applicants must receive a rating of "Neutral Confidence", "Satisfactory Confidence", or "Substantial Confidence" to be eligible for contract award.

Past Performance Relevancy Ratings	
Rating	Definition
Substantial Confidence	Based on the applicant's recent/relevant performance record, the Government has a high expectation that the offeror will successfully perform the required effort.
Satisfactory Confidence	Based on the applicant's recent/relevant performance record, the Government has a reasonable expectation that the offeror will successfully perform the required effort.

Past Performance Relevancy Ratings	
Rating	Definition
Neutral Confidence	No recent/relevant performance record is available, or the applicant's performance record is so sparse that no meaningful confidence assessment rating can be reasonably assigned. The offeror may not be evaluated favorably or unfavorably on the factor of past performance.
Limited Confidence	Based on the applicant's recent/relevant performance record, the Government has a low expectation that the offeror will successfully perform the required effort
No Confidence	Based on the applicant's recent/relevant performance record, the Government has no expectation that the offeror will be able to successfully perform the required effort.

ii. Program Execution

- 1) Personnel. We will evaluate your application to determine which of your proposed personnel meet Program Requirements of the Award Specific Terms and Conditions. Our evaluation will consider qualifications, including relevant experience and education, as well as the availability of the proposed personnel.
- 2) Facilities. We will evaluate your application to ascertain the degree to which the facilities you propose meet Program Requirements. We will also consider the availability of your facilities.
- 3) Program understanding. We will evaluate your understanding of program requirements. We will not consider a simple statement of understanding or repeat of program requirements to demonstrate your understanding.

We will evaluate the soundness of your approach to implementing a program pursuant to program requirements. In addition, your application must demonstrate credibility, realism, and logic in providing procurement technical assistance to businesses and the required deliverables to us under a cooperative agreement.

- 4) Program management. We will evaluate how you intend to manage and coordinate the effort under a cooperative agreement, including planning, assigning responsibility, controlling personnel, controlling utilization of resources, tracking deliverables, monitoring performance and obtaining feedback from your clients. Our evaluation will also consider your proposed performance goals, your procedures for monitoring and controlling costs; your procedures for identifying problems, resolving them and ensuring that they do not reoccur; any proposed subrecipients and/or subcontractors and the degree to which you will

use them; and your Program Implementation Plan, if applicable.

5) The Government will consider assigning findings as stated below.

- **Strength:** is an aspect of an application that has merit or exceeds program requirements in a way that will be advantageous to the Government during performance.
- **Weakness:** means a flaw in the application that increases the risk of unsuccessful performance.
- **Significant Weakness:** means a flaw in the application that significantly increases the risk of unsuccessful performance.

Each element in the Program Execution Factor will be rated as follows:

High Confidence	The Government has high confidence that the Applicant understands the program requirements, possesses the ability to staff the requirement in a feasible and realistic way and will be successful in performing the cooperative agreement.
Satisfactory Confidence	The Government has satisfactory confidence that the Applicant understands the program requirements, possesses the ability to staff the requirement in a feasible and realistic way, and will be successful in performing the Cooperative Agreement.
Low Confidence	The Government has low confidence that the Applicant understands the program requirements, possesses the ability to staff the requirement in a feasible and realistic way, and will be successful in performing the cooperative agreement.

ii. Cost

- 1) We will consider the proposed cost to us for the period of performance in conjunction with the other non-cost factors to determine best value. If your proposed costs appear unrealistic, you are cautioned that we may infer a lack of understanding of program requirements, increased risk of performance or your lack of credibility.
- 2) **Cost sharing contributions.** We will evaluate the nature and type of commitments you propose to satisfy cooperative agreement cost sharing requirements. We will consider the degree to which your commitments will contribute to the success of your proposed program, the significance of the commitments that you have made and whether those commitments demonstrate that you have taken a meaningful interest in the success of your proposed program.

B. Review and Selection Process:

Review of applications. We will review applications conforming to this announcement in accordance with the procedures in this section. We may provide you the opportunity to cure a flaw resulting from an irregularity in your application or may waive the flaw. We reserve the right to request any additional information we need to evaluate your application and your failure to provide the information in the time frame requested may result in rejection of your application.

Duplicate coverage. Duplicate coverage of service areas exists when the proposed service areas of two or more applicants overlap. We will decide on a case-by-case basis as to the acceptability of duplicate coverage.

Selection process. We contemplate that we will make one award; however, we may not make awards to all acceptable applicants. We will make award decisions to optimize the use of program funds while at the same time maximizing the availability of procurement technical assistance. We will make funding decisions on an agreement-by-agreement basis and in the best interest of the overall program. In making selections among otherwise acceptable applicants, we will generally give funding priority to those applicants that are operating established APEX Accelerators.

Applications that are not rejected by grants.gov or Army Contracting Command-Aberdeen Proving Ground's (ACC-APG) initial screening process will be evaluated by a team of merit reviewers on the basis of how well the applications meet the Technical Proposal criteria outlined within this Funding Opportunity. The reviewers may be ACC-APG or DoD OSBP employees or employees of other federal agencies. Applicants are therefore encouraged to design proposals that address the criteria listed above in a clear and concise manner.

The merit reviewers will utilize an adjectival rating structure to evaluate eligible applications. The merit reviewers shall measure each application against the requirements of the Funding Opportunity. These criteria and their respective weighting of each criterion are detailed in Section V.A.

The reviewers will determine whether the application, in consideration of each category, respective weighting and then taken in its entirety, should be rated as: 1) Highly Responsive; 2) Responsive; 3) Somewhat Responsive; or 4) Not Responsive.

- a. **Highly Responsive:** Applicant fully addresses all criteria aspects, convincingly demonstrates that it will meet the program requirements, and demonstrates no discernable weaknesses;
- b. **Responsive:** Applicant fully addresses all criteria aspects, demonstrates a likelihood of meeting the OSBP requirements, but may include minor weaknesses;
- c. **Somewhat Responsive:** Applicant addresses most criteria aspects and

demonstrates the ability to meet the OSBP performance requirements. However, the Application contains significant weaknesses and/or a number of minor weaknesses. These weaknesses may be addressed by recommending the award and including a specific programmatic or administrative post-award special term(s) and condition(s); or,

- d. **Not Responsive:** Applicant does not sufficiently address the criteria and the information presented indicates a strong likelihood of failure to meet OSBP' requirements.

The reviewers will submit their final evaluations to the Agreements Officer who will take the assessments, along with other information in the possession, and after careful consideration all information, shall draft individual funding determinations which will include: 1) not to fund the application; 2) fund the application but not at the level requested; or 3) fund the application at the level requested.

In making selections among otherwise acceptable applicants, we will generally give funding priority to those applicants that are operating established APEX Accelerators and have a successful performance record (refer to 10 U.S.C. 4954(d)).

On a case-by-case basis, we may request a pre-award credit report, audit, survey or other review to determine if you meet the standards in 32 CFR 22.415. We may delay an award decision until all necessary reviews are complete. Based on the results of a review, we may decide not to make an award, make an award subject to additional conditions or may delay an award until after any identified deficiencies are resolved. In addition to the technical/program review, the DoD does a budget review and a risk review as directed by 2 CFR 200.206, including a review of the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS). Applicants may review information in FAPIIS and comment on any information entered into that system. Comments made by applicants will be considered, in addition to other information in examining the applicants' integrity, business ethics, and record of performance. At the time of application, there is no additional material to be submitted for this review. However, there may be additional requests for clarification as these reviews progress.