

HBCU & MSI WEBINAR Q&A

Question: How may I obtain a copy of the slides or view a recording of the briefing?

Answer: The slides, a document containing these questions, and a recording of the briefing are available on the competition webpage <https://www.transportation.gov/utc/current-competition>.

Question: For HBCUs and MSIs that do not have courses or departments devoted to ground transportation - which might be most of us - is there DOT awareness that partnering and submitting a Letter of Intent in less than 30 days is a huge challenge? Given more time for brainstorming, discussions, and crafting plans, this would be more achievable for many of us. I wonder why 30 days is the chosen timeframe.

Answer: As stated in the NOFO, July 1, 2022, is the requested date for Letters of Intent, but late letters will be accepted if received before the deadline for applications. US DOT requests Letters of Intent so that we may assemble the needed review panels in advance of the application due date, in the interest of moving the competition process along as swiftly as possible, but we understand that some applicants would benefit from more time so did not make the July 1 date a requirement.

Question: Can we have the contact information for Mr. Arlando Teller

Answer: Arlando Teller, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tribal Affairs with USDOT; cell: 202.770.9255; email: Arlando.teller@dot.gov

Question: Are multiple applications permitted from a lead institution to a single category (specifically Tier 1)?

Answer: The NOFO puts no limit on the number of applications a lead institution may submit. The UTC Program's statute, as noted in the NOFO, does limit the number of grants that may be awarded to any lead institution to one grant.

Question: Can unrecovered indirect costs be used as match?

Answer: Yes. Current UTC Program grants do allow that, as is stated on page 7 of those grants' General Provisions... document posted here:

<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/utc/350636/fast-act-generalprovisions-nov-2016-rev-july-2019-ver-14clean.pdf>. Similar language will appear in the update of that document for the new grants resulting from this competition.

Question: Aside from Budget and Cost share levels, what is the scope difference between a National and a Tier 1 center. It seems both must select one of the 7 areas and both must be of national significance.

Answer: The funding level, and in turn the number and types of activities that a center may conduct, is the primary distinction between the two. Because of that effect, some past Tier 1 UTCs have had a relatively more narrow focus than National UTCs (many of which have provided true national leadership in their research priority area) have tended to have, but a relatively narrower focus is not required.

Question: Is there any minimum requirement for MSIs/HBCUs/TCUs recipients as a lead?

Answer: If this question refers to a requirement for a certain level of funding, there is no such requirement. Or if this question is asking whether US DOT expects to award a certain number of grants to MSIs/HBCUs/TCUs as the lead institutions, there is no specific expectation of numbers.

Question: NOFO considers MSIs as schools which have more than 50% enrollment of minorities. Would this be replaced with Department of Education Title III or V eligibility?

Answer: The UTC Program's statute specifically states that definition of minority institution as the one that must be used in this competition. For that reason, another definition may not be substituted.

Question: Are Letters of Intent required for lead institutions only?

Question: For Letters of Intent, do we need to have all partner institutions listed in the letter or can we add an institution during the proposal development?

Answer: Page 15 of the NOFO lists the items that must be included in a Letter of Intent. Only the lead institution must be identified; Identification of partner institutions is not one of the required items.

Question: Can a center main topic be at the interface between two research focus areas?

Question: Can an institution work on one more than one Statutory Research Priority Area?

Answer: The NOFO requires that a primary research priority area be identified, and it is important that applicants understand that the identified primary priority will be the area against which an application is evaluated and rated by reviewers. Many current UTCs do work that touches on more than one research priority.

Question: Are curricula vitae for key staff required only for consortium member Principal Investigators, or for any key program staff as well, such as program managers?

Answer: Program managers could very well be considered key staff, so feel free to include them if that is the case for your proposed center.

Question: The NOFO requires one regional center focus "its efforts in the field of comprehensive transportation safety, congestion, connected vehicles, connected infrastructure, and autonomous vehicles, including the cybersecurity implications of technologies relating to connected vehicles, connected infrastructure, and autonomous vehicles." Is this objective to be stated in the Letter of Intent? The detailed language includes several of the statutory research priorities. Is an applicant supposed to state both a statutory research priority and also say they will be focusing their efforts "in the field of comprehensive transportation safety, congestion, connected vehicles, connected infrastructure, and autonomous vehicles, including the cybersecurity implications of technologies relating to connected vehicles, connected infrastructure, and autonomous vehicles."?

Answer: The NOFO does not require that the Letter of Intent indicate this aspect of a Regional UTC application, though you are welcome to do so. In the application, an applicant who is applying to be the "comprehensive transportation safety, congestion, [etc.]..." center should make that clear in the Written Response, and must also identify one of the statutory research priorities.

Question: Is it possible to get a copy of a past successful UTC application?

Answer: We do not share them ourselves, for the primary reason that we want applicants to be as innovative as possible within the structure of the NOFO's requirements. Another reason is that the requirements of each NOFO, including this one, that applications respond to are significantly different for each competition.

Question: I believe slide 31 has an error. It said 1-page abstract.

Question: I am sorry for missing the explanation about abstract. The abstract is limited within one page or 2 pages?

Answer: The abstract is limited to two pages. This is correctly stated in the NOFO on pages 16-18, and we apologize that the slide was incorrect. The posted presentation slides have been edited to show the correct number of pages for the abstract.

Question: Can you speak to the addition of the 5% of the overall budget for tech transfer and what activities that can included there?

Question: Should we consider travel/conferences as part of the minimum 5% for the tech transfer budget?

Question: How do we identify a budget item specifically for technology transfer?

Answer: The costs of any of the activities described in your application under Criterion Four: Technology Transfer and Collaboration may be included in that percentage. This could include the value of time spent by the center's staff working on those activities if it can be tracked separately. The costs of conferences including travel conducted for such technology transfer or commercialization purposes as sharing research results would be considered to be technology transfer; travel and other conference costs for events not related to technology transfer would not.

Question: There are some areas of emphasis highlighted in the National Roadway Safety Strategy that may generally fall under some of the NOFO candidate topic areas, but are not a one-to-one match for the NOFO. We are thus not clear regarding the enthusiasm at the institutional end for pursuing some of these topics. Welcome your comments on this.

Question: Can you please expand a bit on what is meant by "Candidate Technologies/Tools for Consideration"?

Answer: As noted on page 20 of the NOFO, the listed topics are for consideration, but "US DOT is looking for, and encouraging applicants to propose, new breakthrough ideas. Innovations, and transformative research topics...". Not all possible topics were listed in the NOFO, purposefully because innovative, transformative thinking is encouraged throughout the document.

Question: Can the match for HBCUs/MSI be waived off?

Answer: The matching-fund requirements for the UTC Program are statutory, so US DOT has no authority to waive the requirement. The UTC grant requires that the full match is provided, but it does not speak to whether all members of the consortium contribute the same amount toward that match; it is up to the proposed center to determine such issues as whether each member of the consortium is expected to provide the same amount of match.

Question: Could you please talk about the requirements of the center director such as the titles (e.g., full/associate/assistant professors, research professors)? Thank you!

Answer: The NOFO does not require that the proposed center director have any particular status; pages 29-30 of the NOFO discuss what the center director is expected to do and notes that there must be a single director who is affiliated with the grantee/lead institution.

Question: What is a reasonable way to find a potential UTC partner group? I work at a HBCU that doesn't have a resource to lead a center at a national or regional level?

Answer: Reaching out to other university researchers that you may know from participation in organizations such as the Transportation Research Board (TRB) or other associations related to your professional field is one way to make these connections. You may be able to use TRB's TRID database of transportation research to identify researchers doing work in your area.

Question: What are typical in-kind matching funds that have been used?

Answer: Current UTCs receive match from a variety of sources, including their universities, a state or regional agency, private industry, and the philanthropic sector. Sometimes match is provided in cash, and in-kind match (for example, the value of staff time for an individual working on the grant but not paid with Federal funds, or the value of donated equipment) is also acceptable on UTC Program grants.

Question: For the budget to be included in the appendix, is it for the first year only or five years?

Answer: As noted on page 31 and Attachment A of the NOFO, the budget should be for the first year of the grant.

Question: If the LOI is submitted, can it be modified before the deadline?

Answer: As noted on page 15 of the NOFO, the only item required to be included in a Letter of Intent that cannot be changed in the submitted application is the statutory research priority area. If you need to change your research priority area, we recommend submitting a replacement Letter of Intent and asking to have your first Letter withdrawn.

Question: Is there any chance that an application for one level of UTC can be awarded at another level? For example, an application for a national UTC is awarded as a regional? I'm not talking about situations where an institution submits multiple applications.

Answer: No. Your application will only be considered for the one type of UTC your application identifies.

Question: If chosen to lead one grant, can we participate in other grant but this time not as the lead? (specifically, as Tier 1)

Answer: As noted on page 14 of the NOFO, there are no restrictions on the numbers or types of UTCs of which an institution may be a non-lead consortium member.

Question: Since only certain minority groups are counted in MSI designations for the purposes of this competition, does the enrollment information provided for HBCUs/MIs need to be broken down into the specific minority groups to confirm compliance with the definition?

Answer: The information you provide needs to show that the institution meets the definition, so it is likely that you would want to break down the numbers provided so compliance with the definition is made clear.

Question: We saw formerly funded national UTCs with only three participating institutions. Considering each institution usually has a limited area of expertise, would that cause an equity problem?

Answer: Please resubmit your question to UTCgrants@dot.gov with additional details so we can better understand this question.

Question: Is any priority given to existing UTC centers that are applying for renewing?

Answer: No.

Question: Is there an official source where we can find a list of minority serving institutions?

Answer: We are not aware of any such list, and as the definition for minority institution that the UTC Program is required to use is based on enrollment, an institution's status may change over time which would make a list problematic.

Question: When do you expect the RDT Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026 to come out and where can we find it?

Answer: Information about that is now posted on the competition webpage <https://www.transportation.gov/utc/current-competition>.

Question: I am concerned that there are assumptions built into the grant that are geared toward institutional items not present at HBCUs/MSIs/TCUs. I hear the desire for equity outcomes, yet there does not seem to be a clear understanding that there is not equity in the structures at HBCUs/MSIs/TCUs versus PWIs.

Answer: Please resubmit your question to UTCgrants@dot.gov with additional details so we can better understand this question.

Question: We would certainly be interested in talking to HBCUs etc., looking to participate in a center.

Answer: Unfortunately, we are unable to provide any guidance on it since it is up to the proposing teams to formulate and design the collaboration among the members of the respective teams. You can locate the HBCUs currently involved in the program by visiting the UTC website (<https://www.transportation.gov/utc/fast-act-centers-and-grantees>) or view the list of HBCUs at <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>.

Question: There will probably be a need for mentoring on the aspects of cost sharing for HBCUs and MSIs. This could be a major challenge for UTC proposals. Can a webinar be organized to address this?

Answer: We appreciate the suggestion but cannot host such a webinar due to resource capacity constraints.

Question: There are some institutes with full-time researchers who do not have any education roles, getting funded by UTC. Would that sacrifice education roles?

Answer: An application for a UTC grant needs to demonstrate how the proposed center will accomplish all three of a center's objectives, as stated on page 5 of the NOFO, by describing relevant activities in response to all of the evaluation criteria. The involvement of some full-time researchers could be a part of an applicant's approach toward fulfilling the goals.