

Q&A from Vannevar Bush Faculty Fellowship webinars

Q: Is there any age limit for the fellowship?

A: No.

Q: Can the budget include capital equipment?

A: Yes, with a justification based on the scope of the work.

Q: What is the format and content of the white paper?

A: Refer to Section IV.B. 1.-4. of the FOA (pages 13-15) for required format and content instructions.

Q: Where do you submit the white papers?

A: The White Papers and Supporting Documentation must be submitted to AcquTrak (<https://acqutrak.noblis.org/ApplyNSSEFF>). Note that you must register two days earlier for access to this site. (Refer to Section IV.B. 1.-4. of the FOA (pages 13-15)).

Q: Are there limits on the number of white papers from a University?

A: No, there are no limits to the number of white papers from any particular university. However, each individual investigator can only submit one white paper.

Q: Does the white paper need to emphasize existing connections to DoD Labs?

A: No. Existing connections to DoD Labs are not important.

Q: Should the topic need to be of interest to at least one particular DoD Program Manger?

A: No, this is not required.

Q: Can collaborators be funded through a subcontract of this grant?

A: Yes. However, this is a single PI award. If there are sub-awardees or collaborators, you must explain how the proposed team fits the single PI structure.

Q: What is the distribution of awards among different subject areas?

A: There is no preset distribution for each topic. We are looking for the best proposals.

Q: Do you look for a balance between application and theory in proposals?

A: The spirit of this program is to fund basic ambitious “blue sky” research without any specific applications in mind.

Q: Should the proposal tie the basic science question to DoD interest or application?

A: Yes, we do ask for a discussion of anticipated DoD benefit. The program seeks unclassified basic scientific and engineering research that could be the foundation for future revolutionary new capabilities for DoD.

Q: How important is the educational plan/ mentorship/ teaching?

A: It is important. One of the objectives of the program is to educate and train student and post-doctoral researchers for the defense workforce. We look for a proposal which is outstanding in all of our objectives.

Q: Will the slides be sent to each participant?

A: The slides will be posted on the Vannevar Bush Faculty Fellowship website http://www.acq.osd.mil/rd/basic_research/program_info/vbff.html.

Q: Can we pick two topics areas for multidisciplinary research?

A: No. An investigator must choose only one of the topic areas given. If necessary, choose the topic "Other fields of research with high potential".

Q: Will the proposals be judged mostly based on science or also substantially on PhD mentoring and collaborations with DOD?

A: Scientific and technical merit is important. The program is oriented towards bold and ambitious "blue sky" research that may lead to extraordinary outcomes such as revolutionizing entire disciplines, creating entirely new fields, or disrupting accepted theories and perspectives. However, we look for a proposal which is outstanding in all of our objectives.

Q: Can you tell us anything about the evaluation criteria for the white papers?

A: Subject to funding availability, white papers and proposals deemed to be basic research will be evaluated under the following criteria:

- Scientific and technical merits of the proposed research;
- The principal investigator's qualifications, ability to perform the proposed work, and the overall management approach;
- Relevance of the proposed research to the DoD and to its NSSEFF program; and
- The reasonableness of proposed costs.

Q: How many white papers do you typically get each year?

A: We have had a low of 138 and a high of 678 white papers.

Q: Is there a preference for PIs at any particular career stage?

A: Faculty with tenure and full-time research staff with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to conduct the proposed research as the principal investigator (PI) are invited to submit an application. Applicants should have a record of substantial scientific contributions. This is not a program for junior faculty.

Q: Can we run an idea by a program officer before submitting a white paper?

A: We will be happy to provide answers if you have particular questions with respect to the FOA and the program itself. However, it will not be appropriate for us to comment technically on your research ideas. Your white paper will be reviewed by subject matter experts in DoD. We remind you that the proposed project should be "blue sky" and "basic research" in nature.

Q: Does the program include intelligence agencies?

A: The VBFF program is sponsored by the Basic Research Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Research and Engineering) and only supports basic research with open results. There need not be a particular application although any DoD agency may be interested in these results.

Q: How do you define Engineering Biology?

A: Engineering Biology is defined on Pages 6-7 of the FOA. It is meant to imply a very general synthetic biology approach at any scale, the molecular, the organismal, microbiology, and the mammalian level.

Q: Please explain eligibility for faculty and staff.

A: Faculty with tenure and full-time research staff with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to conduct the proposed research as the principal investigator (PI) are invited to submit an application. Applicants should have a record of substantial scientific contributions. Tenure track faculty must have tenure at the time of the application. Research faculty members must have adequate resources to perform the research they propose. Please see the FOA.

Q: Do we need a commitment letter from the Chancellor of the University?

A: In the current competition we do not require a letter of intent or a nomination letter from the university's administration.

Q: What do you mean by basic research?

A: As defined by the DoD, basic research is systematic study directed toward greater knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and of observable facts without specific applications towards processes or products in mind.

Q: Does the research have to be non-human?

A: Human subject research is allowed with proper documentation and approval from an Institutional Review Board. Please see the FOA.

Q: What is meant by other research fields with high potential?

A: Proposed research in areas of relevance to DoD will be considered as long as there is a transformative science problem to be investigated and whose solution may open new ways of thinking about the phenomena that are being studied.

Q: Three letters of recommendation are required with full proposals. From whom should these come?

A: These are confidential references and you should ask individuals who you think are appropriate.

Q: Should we focus on one topic or multiple topics or disciplines?

A: You may only select one Technical Category when registering on the AcquiTrak website. Your approach may draw from multiple disciplines to solve a basic research problem.

Q: Can collaborators be part of the proposed research effort?

A: The NSSEFF (Vannevar Bush) program is a single PI program. While collaborations are encouraged, co-PIs are not permitted. Collaboration may be achieved at the PI's institution or via a subaward, and the lead investigator must direct the work. If there is such collaboration envisioned, the PI must explain how the proposed team fits the single PI structure.

Q: Are institutions with an active NSSEFF award eligible to submit an application in the same topic area, but from a different principal investigator?

A: Yes.

Q: If someone works in two separate disciplines can they suggest two topics?

A: No. A PI may only select one Technical Category when registering on the AcquiTrak website and a PI may submit only one white paper in response to the FOA.