

DARPA Targets Animal-Based Viral Threats in Solicitation for PREEMPT Program

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On January 19, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (“DARPA”) issued a new solicitation in the form of a [broad agency announcement](#) for the Preventing Emerging Pathogenic Threats—or “PREEMPT”—program. The program will be managed by the DARPA [Biological Technologies Office](#), which generally supports activities that integrate biology, engineering, computer science, physical sciences, and mathematics.

The goal of the program is to support research and development relating to new tools, models, and technologies that are focused on preventing the transition of viral threats from animals to humans. In contrast to recent biodefense efforts that have largely been initiated in response to significant human outbreaks, such as in connection with Ebola, influenza, and Zika, the program targets animal-based viruses that have yet to become an active threat to humans. In addition, consistent with DARPA’s mission, the program targets animal-based viruses that have a potential to impact deployed U.S. military forces, particularly with respect to remote geographic areas associated with prevalent endemic and emerging diseases.

Solicitation Requirements

The solicitation requires offerors to address two related technical areas, including:

1. an assessment of the likelihood that a selected animal-based virus, or multiple related viruses, will jump to humans in a targeted geographic area; and
2. methods for suppressing the virus either in a typical animal host or a potential vector for transmission to humans, such as livestock or mosquitos.

The solicitation suggest that gene editing, antibodies, defective interfering particles, and vaccination may ultimately present viable solutions. However, the solicitation also strongly encourages offerors to identify novel approaches. In addition, the solicitation encourages offerors to pursue approaches that do not require individual treatment of animals and only activate in the presence of a targeted virus.

Offerors will need to demonstrate that they have the capacity to conduct field trials in a targeted geographic area, including with respect to necessary infrastructure and host-country approvals. In addition, offerors will need to provide a technology transition plan detailing expected efforts to transition a proposed solution to governmental, private, or non-profit partners. Consistent with the broad scope of contemplated activities, the solicitation encourages teaming among offerors.

Award Terms

Awards may ultimately take the form of procurement contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, or “other transaction authority” agreements. However, regardless of form, awards will likely have a 42-month period of performance with a 24-month base period and an 18-month option period.

Depending on the nature of proposed solutions, awardees may need to comply with [dual use research of concern](#) and [gain-of-function](#) policies during performance. In addition, DARPA expects that bioethical and biosafety issues will need to be continually monitored.

Data generated under each award may need to be shared between awardees or with the broader research community. As a result, the solicitation indicates that awardees will be expected during performance to make all generated data available to DARPA and may need to provide data to other awardees under appropriate data-sharing agreements.

Although the solicitation does not specifically identify DARPA’s expectations with respect to data rights, it indicates that DARPA may seek permission to share generated data with the public. Accordingly, to the extent that a standard data rights regime does not apply to a particular agreement, DARPA may expect to receive at least the equivalent of “[government purpose rights](#)” that are typically applied under procurement contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense.

Solicitation Schedule

The solicitation process is scheduled to be relatively brief. A [conference](#) for potential offerors is planned for January 30, and abstracts and full proposals are respectively due by February 13 and March 27.

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