U.S. DEPARTMENT of ENERGY | NATIONAL ENERGY TECHNOLOGY LABORATORY

GUIDE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS



October 2026

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) has operational responsibility of the DOE Unsolicited Proposal (USP) Program. All unsolicited proposals should be forwarded by email to the DOE USP team at DOEUSP@NETL.DOE.GOV, which will serve as the single point of contact for all DOE unsolicited proposals, abstracts, and correspondence.

Unsolicited proposals will not be accepted via U.S. Mail.

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) looks to the private sector to assist in the accomplishment of its mission (https://www.energy.gov/about-us) and program objectives. Organizations and individuals are encouraged to submit proposals that are relevant to DOE's research and development mission either in response to formal DOE solicitations and funding opportunity announcements or through self-generated unsolicited proposals (USPs).

This guide is directed towards helping individuals, businesses, or other organizations in submitting USPs for review and consideration. It offers an overview of the USP process and describes DOE policies and procedures related to the preparation, submission, and evaluation of a USP.

Competitive Announcements

In the solicited area, DOE program offices issue competitive solicitations and funding opportunity announcements (collectively "competitive announcements") to seek ideas from the public for research, development, or demonstration projects. Additionally, competitive announcements that may seek multiple projects under multiple topic areas are also issued by program offices. The predominance of DOE's funding for research, development or demonstration projects is awarded through competitive financial assistance funding opportunity announcements (FOAs).

You can access DOE competitive financial assistance opportunities at https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html. Additionally, competitive announcements for the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) can be accessed at http://www.netl.doe.gov/business/solicitations.

Unsolicited Proposals

It is the policy of the government to encourage the submission of new and innovative ideas in response to Broad Agency Announcements, Small Business Innovation Research topics, Small Business Technology Transfer Research topics, Program Research and Development Announcements, or any other government-initiated solicitation or program. When new and innovative ideas do not fall under topic areas publicized under those programs or techniques, the ideas may be submitted as USPs. The USP is another method used by DOE to fund research and development or other efforts supporting DOE's mission. A USP is an application for support of an idea, method, or approach that is submitted by individuals, businesses, and organizations solely on the offeror's initiative and not in response to a "formal" government competitive announcement. Funding of USPs is considered a noncompetitive action and DOE is under no obligation to fund a meritorious USP due to funding limitations or other program priorities.

There are a number of applicable regulations relating to criteria governing acceptance and funding of a USP, principally:

- Title 48 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter 1, Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), Subpart 15.6 - Unsolicited Proposals

- 2 CFR 910.126 Competition

Before You Apply

All organizations/individuals that want to submit a proposal to DOE must register with the System for Award Management (SAM) through https://sam.gov/content/home prior to submitting a USP.

Additionally, organizations/individuals that want to submit a USP to DOE must obtain a Unique Entity ID (UEI) number. Organizations/individuals can apply for a UEI at https://sam.gov/content/home.

PART 1 — SUBMITTING AN UNSOLICITED PROPOSAL

All USPs submitted for review and consideration must propose ideas or technologies that will contribute to DOE's mission objectives. Proposals received that include advertising material or commercial products or commercial service offers will not be considered by the DOE USP Program and will be immediately eliminated from further review.

DOE will not reimburse any efforts related to creation, submission, or negotiation of an unsolicited proposal. All unsolicited proposals must be submitted to DOEUSP@netl.doe.gov. Submissions will not be accepted by any other means.

Unsolicited Proposal

The USP is the document intended to persuade DOE technical staff and other qualified members of the scientific and engineering community who review the proposal that the project represents a worthwhile effort to consider funding. Each proposal should be self-contained and written with clarity and thoroughness.

In the USP, the offeror must present project objectives and the pertinence of the proposed work to DOE, the rationale of the approach, the methods to be pursued, the qualifications of the investigators and the institution, and the level of funding required to attain the objectives. Overall, the proposal should detail (1) how the proposal relates to DOE's mission, (2) how the proposed technology solution will benefit the DOE, and (3) what the offeror proposes to do and how the offeror proposes to do it.

A USP may be accepted by DOE if it:

- Demonstrates a unique and innovative concept, or demonstrates a unique capability or service of the submitter not otherwise available to the government through competition or from another source;

- Does not fall within the scope of a recent, current or pending competitive announcement;
- Is independently originated by the offeror without government supervision; and
- Can be adequately funded by the applicable program office.

Part 4 of this guide lists various DOE program offices, with a brief description of each. This list is not all inclusive, and a review of all DOE program offices can be found by accessing https://www.energy.gov/offices. Further insight into general areas of current and anticipated research needs can be gained by following the progress of related work at the websites identified under each of the DOE programs.

Who May Submit

DOE will consider abstracts or USPs submitted by any individual or organization, if the proposal follows the guidelines discussed in the previous section. This guide is prepared for the benefit of all prospective offerors, and the guidelines are presented as general instructions/information. If the format is not suitable for a particular proposal, it can be modified to fit the circumstances.

When to Submit

There are no specific dates for the submission of USPs. However, because a comprehensive review is required before a project can be funded, proposals should be submitted as early as possible, usually six months in advance of the desired project start date. Once a proposal is received via email by the USP Team, an acknowledgment of the submission will be sent to the offeror. If an offeror wishes to withdraw a submission from consideration, they should promptly notify DOE by sending an e-mail to **DOEUSP@NETL.DOE.GOV.**

Where to Submit

The DOE Unsolicited Proposal Office is the central point for the receipt, distribution, and tracking of DOE USPs. Proposals received are acknowledged and assigned a DOE-USP identification (tracking) number. The number appears in the emailed acknowledgment letter and should be referenced in all subsequent communications pertaining to the proposal. All submissions must be sent to:

DOE Unsolicited Proposal Office

Email: DOEUSP@NETL.DOE.GOV

Proposals submitted via any other means will not be accepted nor considered.

What to Submit

There is no required format for USPs submissions; however, all submissions should cover the points discussed in this guide. USPs should be signed by an authorized official of the proposing organization or by the offeror if submitted by an individual.

Elaborate proposals or presentations are not desired, and the proposal must not exceed 25 pages, excluding appendices. If submissions exceed the maximum page length, evaluators will review only the stated number of pages and disregard any additional pages. Each offeror should review the submission to ensure that all data necessary for critical evaluation is included. Correspondence required as a result of the omission of essential items will delay the proposal's processing. The following is a list of essential items that a USP should contain.

Cover Page

A sample cover page format has been included in Appendix A.

Basic Information

1. Name and address of submitter

2. Proposal submission date

3. Type of organization (profit, nonprofit, educational, small business, woman-owned, socially and economically disadvantaged, or other similar classifications)

4. Proposed starting date and estimated period of performance

5. Proposal validity period (minimum of six months from date of submission)

6. Names and telephone numbers of the offeror's primary business and technical contacts for evaluation or negotiation purposes

7. Signature of the person authorized to contractually represent the individual or organization

8. List of other federal, state, or local government agencies or private organizations that have received the proposal and/or are funding the proposed effort

9. Statement that the proposal may, or may not, be subjected to external review (See "Limited Use of Data")

10. Statement that the proposal does or does not contain proprietary information

    If you choose to include proprietary information in your proposal, the title page must be marked with the following legend:

"USE AND DISCLOSURE OF DATA"

This proposal includes data that shall not be disclosed outside the government and shall not be duplicated, used, or disclosed-in whole or in part-for any purpose other than to evaluate this proposal. However, if a contract is awarded to this offeror as a result of or in connection with the submission of these data, the government shall have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the resulting contract. This restriction does not limit the government's right to use information contained in these pages if they are obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained in *[insert page numbers]*.

The offeror must also mark each page of data it wishes to restrict with the following legend:

Use or disclosure of data contained on this page is subject to the restriction on the title page of this proposal.

Any unsolicited proposal marked with a legend different from that provided above will be returned to the offeror and not be considered because it is impracticable for the government to comply with any other legend. The proposal will be considered if it is resubmitted with the proper legend.

Body of USP

Business and Financial Information

1. A cost estimate for the proposed effort sufficiently detailed by element of cost to permit a meaningful evaluation (where a cost-sharing arrangement is proposed, the offeror's share should be separately identified and similarly detailed)

2. A descriptive brochure if available of the offeror's organization, if applicable

3. A brief description of the offeror's facilities

Technical Information

1. A concise title and abstract of approximately 500 words should be included that describes the proposed research. The abstract should be informative to other researchers in the same field, but in language that can be understood by a layperson. The offeror should consider that the abstract is the reviewer's introduction to the proposed research.

2. The body of the proposal should contain a statement of the work with sufficient technical detail to permit a meaningful evaluation. It should include the phase-by-phase procedures to be followed, the objectives and expected significance the method of approach and extent of the effort employed, the nature and extent of the anticipated results, the manner in which the work will help to support accomplishment of DOE's mission, the relation of

the project both to the present state of knowledge in the field and to comparable work in progress elsewhere, and a bibliography of pertinent literature. References authored by the proposer are particularly important when the proposal involves basic or applied research. Outline the general plan of approach. Adequately describe experimental methods and procedures. The statement of work will heavily influence the appraisal of the technical merit of the proposed project. It is understood that carefully detailed plans may require modification during the project.

3. Describe available facilities and major items of equipment especially adapted or suited to the proposed project. If all or any part of the project is to be performed away from the offeror's facility, this should be explained in full.

4. Include names of key project personnel, including the principal investigator or project leader, along with brief biographical information on each that clearly show the investigator's experience and expertise in the technical area(s) of the proposal.

Limited Use of Proposal Data

It is the policy of DOE that all government and non-government personnel handling unsolicited proposals shall exercise extreme care to ensure that the proposal information is not duplicated, used, or disclosed in whole or in part for any purpose other than to evaluate the proposal, without written permission of the offeror. If the proposal is funded, DOE will take greater rights in the proposal data.

In some instances, the proposal may be subject to evaluation by government personnel outside DOE and/or by leading scientists or preeminent experts outside the government. In such instances, a written agreement will be obtained from any non-government evaluator that the evaluator will not disclose information in the proposal outside the government.

If a proposal under consideration expressly states that only government evaluation is authorized, and DOE believes that evaluation outside the government is necessary to determine the technical merit of the proposal, the offeror may be advised that DOE will be unable to give full consideration to the proposal unless the offeror consents in writing to having the proposal evaluated outside the government.

If a proposal contains proprietary data, it must be marked in accordance with the procedure as above.

DOE will obtain unlimited rights, including the right to distribute to the public, in technical data and copyrighted material submitted in an unsolicited proposal if it is subsequently selected for, and provided in, a resulting contract or financial assistance award. Unlimited rights apply to technical data and copyrighted material contained in the proposal unless the offeror marks those portions that the offeror asserts are "proprietary data" or specifies those portions that are not directly related to or used in the contract work.

The government normally also retains unlimited rights in technical data produced under DOE awards resulting from a USP, including the right to distribute to the public. Policies governing technical data and copyrights are detailed in 48 CFR 927.4.

Classified Research and Security Considerations

Most proposals submitted to DOE are unclassified (i.e., in terms of national security). Unsolicited proposals are expected to be unclassified. If it is not feasible to submit an unclassified proposal, and classified data or information needs to be included or used, the proposal must be classified in accordance with its content. Additionally, if during the evaluation of a USP it is found that the work will involve a classified topic, any resulting contractual arrangement will take this into account, and the offeror will be required to comply with applicable government security regulations. Appropriate classification guidance will be provided.

PART 2 — REVIEW AND EVALUATION

Initial Review

DOE technical personnel will review USPs to determine if the proposal is related to DOE's mission; meets the requirements found at FAR 15.603(c); contains sufficient technical and cost information; has overall scientific, technical, or socioeconomic merit; has been authorized by a representative authorized to contractually obligate the offeror; and properly complies with any data disclosure restrictions found in FAR 15.609. USPs not found to be aligned with DOE's mission or not meeting the requirements found at FAR 15.603(c) will be immediately rejected and not receive further evaluation.

If the USP contains the information required, it will be processed for further evaluation, and any missing information may be requested by the program office from the offeror so that the proposal may be comprehensively reviewed and evaluated.

It is the policy of DOE to evaluate each submission fairly, objectively, and expeditiously. Where practicable, DOE will keep offerors advised as decisions are made. A proposal may be a potential candidate for support by more than one DOE program office. The cognizant receiving office is familiar with the various DOE offices and tries to ensure that each proposal is sent to all potentially interested program offices.

Evaluation

The principal elements considered in evaluating a USP are:

1. Unique and innovative methods, approaches, or concepts demonstrated by the proposal

2. Overall scientific/technical or socioeconomic merit of the proposed activity

3. Potential contribution of the effort to the DOE's specific mission

4. The offeror's capabilities, related experience, facilities, techniques, or unique combinations of these that are essential for achieving the proposal objectives

5. The qualifications, capabilities, and experience of the proposed principal investigator, team leader, or key personnel who are critical in achieving the proposal objectives

6. The realism of the proposed costs

7. The availability of funding to support the proposed project and its relative merit compared to others that could be supported with the same funds

Unsolicited Proposals may be accepted upon a determination by the responsible DOE official or designee that support (award of a contract, financial assistance award or other arrangement authorized by law) to the offeror is justified because the proposal was submitted on the offeror's own initiative (not addressing a previously published agency requirement).The proposal must explore a method, approach, or an idea or to carry out a project in support of DOE's mission that (a) demonstrates a unique and innovative concept, or demonstrates a unique capability of the offeror to provide the particular technical effort proposed, (b) offers a concept or services not otherwise available to the government; and (c) does not duplicate or resemble the substance of a pending competitive acquisition or competitive notice of funding opportunity.

A favorable comprehensive evaluation of a USP is not, in itself, sufficient justification for executing a noncompetitive award with the offeror. The USP shall not be accepted if its substance (a) is available to the government without restriction from another source, (b) closely resembles that of a pending competitive solicitation, (c) does not relate to the activity's mission, or (d) does not demonstrate an innovative and unique method, approach or concept [FAR 15.607 (a)].

Further, DOE is under no obligation to make an award, even if the technical evaluation is favorable, due to other program priorities or funding limitations.

The offeror will be notified if DOE decides that the proposal will not be supported. Copies of USPs that have been declined will not normally be returned except upon the written request of the principals involved. Offerors are not entitled to formal debriefings under the USP program because the program is considered a "non-competitive process," and therefore rejection of a USP is not considered as "being excluded from the competitive range or otherwise excluded from the competition." Offerors are not entitled to challenge the decision by DOE to reject a USP. All decisions regarding rejection of a USP are final.

If DOE decides to support the USP, the offeror will be advised and may be asked to submit additional details and revised budgets or confirm proposal goals. The next section (Part 3 – Award Considerations) discusses pertinent information the offeror should review and consider

prior to doing business with DOE. Plans for getting the project underway may be firmed up at this time, but no real commitment of funds may be made until a formal award action is completed by a DOE contracting officer.

An offeror may propose activities that are also of interest to other agencies. Interagency proposal evaluation may be initiated with the prior written approval of the offeror. If found acceptable, an offeror may enter into a separate contract/grant or jointly fund the program with another agency having a collateral interest.

PART 3 — AWARD CONSIDERATIONS

Any award resulting from the submission of a USP will be subject to considerations outlined below. The following list of considerations is not all inclusive, and additional considerations may be required depending on the DOE program office funding the award, the type of award instrument used, and more.

Patents, Data, and Copyrights

Domestic small business and nonprofit organizations generally have the right to elect to retain the title to inventions they make in the performance of DOE funding agreements (grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements) for experimental, developmental, or research work unless DOE determines that exceptional circumstances require a different disposition of rights [Bayh-Dole Act, 35 USC 200 et seq.].

On June 07, 2021, DOE approved a DETERMINATION OF EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES (DEC) UNDER THE BAYH-DOLE ACT TO FURTHER PROMOTE DOMESTIC MANUFACTURE OF DOE SCIENCE AND ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES. In accordance with this DEC, all awards, including sub-awards, to domestic small businesses and nonprofit organizations shall include a U.S. Competitiveness provision. A copy of all DOE DECs, including this DEC, can be found at https://www.energy.gov/gc/determination-exceptional-circumstances-decs.

Organizations that are not domestic small business or nonprofit organizations are subject to DOE's statutory patent policy under Section 152 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended and Section 9 of the Federal Non-Nuclear Energy Research and Development Act of 1974. Under this policy, the title to inventions conceived or first actually reduced to practice in the course of or under a contract, grant, or cooperative agreement with DOE vests in the government, and the contractor receives a royalty-free, nonexclusive, revocable license for use of such inventions. The contractor or grantee may request greater rights to inventions under DOE's waiver procedures; such requests are governed by DOE's waiver procedures set forth in 10 CFR 784. Offerors intending to make such requests should submit them to the contracting officer as soon as possible prior to award or within thirty days thereafter.

Reports

Offerors submitting USPs should be aware that if selected for funding, reports will be required to be delivered to the DOE. A schedule of reports will be arranged at time of award.

The selection of appropriate reports, their frequency, and the amount of detail required will vary based on factors such as the program objectives, amount of funding, and type of instrument awarded. DOE program managers have been instructed to use discretion in report selection to keep administrative burdens to a minimum. Usually, an annual progress report is sufficient for fundamental research. Reporting for applied research and development will vary as just described. In any event, a final report will be required.

Acquisition and Financial Assistance Awards

A USP may, if accepted, result in an acquisition (contract) or a financial assistance (grant or cooperative agreement) award. A contract is used when the principal purpose of the work is the acquisition of an item or service for the direct benefit or use of the government. A financial assistance award is used if the principal purpose of the work is to benefit the awardee. A grant would be awarded when no substantial involvement is expected between DOE and the offeror (now referred to as a recipient) during performance, while a cooperative agreement is used when substantial involvement between the DOE and the recipient is expected. The decision to award an acquisition or a financial assistance agreement will be made by the program office funding the effort.

Cost Sharing or Cost Participation

The decision as to whether an acquisition or financial assistance agreement will include either a cost-sharing or cost-participation requirement, respectively, is made by DOE on a case-by-case basis. However, subsequent phases of those programs, which provide the recipient (and/or sub-recipients) with present or future economic benefits through commercialization, will require some form of cost sharing or cost participation.

Accounting System Requirements:

Should a proposal be selected for negotiation toward award, the offeror must have an accounting system that meets government standards for recording and collecting costs. For an offeror with no prior government awards, a government audit may be required to verify that its accounting system is acceptable. The award may contain an article that prohibits reimbursement until the system is deemed acceptable.

PART 4 – Research Areas

Science and Innovation Program Offices

Some of the various DOE science and innovation program offices that consider unsolicited proposals and their respective areas of responsibility are discussed below. This list is not all inclusive, and a review of all DOE Energy Program Offices can be found by accessing the additional links at the end of this section.

Hydrocarbons and Geothermal Energy Office (HGEO)
Through applied innovation and U.S. energy leadership, HGEO develops and advances breakthrough technologies that lower costs and power American prosperity, freedom, and human flourishing. By leveraging America's hydrocarbon and geothermal resources, HGEO works to enhance reliable baseload power, strengthen grid reliability, and improve long-term energy security for communities nationwide. HGEO areas of focus include Coal, Oil & Gas, Geothermal, Strategic Petroleum Reserve, and Natural Gas Regulation.

For information on HGEO, including current and historic funding opportunities, please visit https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/hydrocarbons-and-geothermal-energy-office

Office of Critical Minerals and Energy Innovation (CMEI)
CMEI is advancing America's critical minerals supply chains and accelerating next-generation energy technologies to strengthen our nation's energy security and power our future. CMEI areas of focus include Critical Minerals, Materials and Manufacturing; Energy Tech; Innovation, Affordability, & Consumer Choice; and Clean Energy Demonstrations.

For more information on CMEI, including current and historic funding opportunities, please visit https://www.energy.gov/cmei/office-critical-minerals-and-energy-innovation

Office of Nuclear Energy (NE)
NE works to advance nuclear energy science and technology to meet the nation's energy, environmental, and economic needs. NE areas of focus include Advanced Reactors, Commercial Reactors, Nuclear Fuel Cycle, and Partnerships.

For more information on NE, please visit https://www.energy.gov/ne/office-nuclear-energy

Office of Science (OS)
OS supports the nation's best minds, using the world's best facilities, to keep America at the forefront of discovery. OS focus areas include Accelerator R&D and Production, Advanced Scientific Computing Research, Basic Energy Sciences, Biological and Environmental Research, Fusion Energy Sciences, High Energy Physics, Isotope R&D and Production, Nuclear Physics, and Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists.

For more information on OS, including current open funding opportunities, please visit https://www.energy.gov/science/office-science.

Office of Electricity (OE)

OE leads DOE efforts to modernize, strengthen, and expand the nation's electric power system.

A secure, reliable, and resilient power grid is foundational to national security, economic prosperity, and the daily lives of all Americans.

In collaboration with public and private stakeholders, industry partners, and national laboratories, OE develops transformative technologies, drives system resilience, and ensures rapid recovery from physical, climatic, and cyber disruptions. Through strategic research, development, and deployment, OE advances innovative grid solutions to integrate diverse, clean energy resources and provide dependable, affordable power to every community.

More details about OE and its various programs can be found at:
https://www.energy.gov/oe/office-electricity

Additional Resources:

DOE Energy Program Offices: https://www.energy.gov/energy-program-offices

DOE National Laboratories: https://www.energy.gov/national-laboratories

DOE National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) Centers of Excellence:
https://netl.doe.gov/centers-of-excellence

APPENDIX A
UNSOLICITED PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

Proposal Receipt Date: _____ USP # _____
(internal use)

DOE Amount Requested: $ _____

Taxpayer Identification No.:_____ Proposed Cost Share: $_____

Congressional District No.:_____ Total Project Value $:_____

Organization Name: _____

Doing Business As (DBA), if applicable:
_____

Division:
_____

Street Address:
_____

City/State/Zip + 4:
_____

Email Address:
_____

Business Contact/Phone/FAX/Email:_____

Principal Investigator/Phone/FAX/Email:_____

Major Team Member/Subcontractor (if applicable):
_____

Proposal Title:
_____

Proposed Project Duration _____ months
Proposal Valid Through _____ (6 months is recommended)

Organization Type _____	Support Type _____	Socio-Economics Type _____
1-Educational	1-Development	1-Disadvantaged Business
2-Foreign	2-Institutional Support	2-Small Business
3-Government	3-Interdisciplinary	3-Women Owned
4-Hospital	4-Research	
5-Indian	5-Training	
6-Individual	6-Other	
7-Non-Profit		
8-Profit		

The proposal **does** ____ **does not** _____ contain proprietary information. (Check one)

This proposal **may** ____ **may not** _____ be subjected to external review. (Check one)

Name of other federal, state, local agencies, or parties receiving the proposal or funding the proposed effort:

_____

Signature of person authorized to represent
and contractually obligate the offeror: _____