

CBTS Call for Proposals

Training for Customs and Border Protection Frontline Personnel

A. Project Overview

To provide capabilities for securing our Nation's supply chain against threats and hazards without compromising the pace and operational structures of commercial enterprises, the Texas A&M University System formed the Cross-Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense (CBTS) Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) Office of University Programs (OUP). Critical training is needed to help ensure DHS' Customs and Border Protection (CBP) frontline personnel are protected as they safeguard the U.S. at and between ports of entry from infectious diseases and biological threats.

This solicitation invites white paper proposals to make recommendations for four training products outlined in Section B. White papers may address more than one topic (i.e., you do not need to write a whitepaper for each topic). Please note that each product listed below represents the development of a single training curriculum, and respondents should identify for which area/distinct product they propose to develop training. Proposed projects should achieve measurable results in a 12-month period or less. Understanding that the time available to CBP frontline personnel to receive training is extremely limited, proposed training products must be succinct (able to be delivered in a short course less than five days in length) and flexible (able to be either integrated into basic training or delivered as field-based training). All training products must incorporate a train-the-trainer component, as content will be transitioned to CBP upon completion. Expected steps for the development process must include the following tasks:

- Work with CBTS staff, DHS Project Champion and/or CBP working group to establish basic training product outline and to collect relevant case studies
- Curriculum development into master presentation(s), student handouts and instructor manual(s)
- Live-audience pilot delivery (virtual or face-to-face)
- Curriculum modification based on post-pilot feedback
- Virtual or face-to-face Train-the-Trainer session
- Hand-off of training to CBP Office of Training and Development

Customer engagement and understanding of operational component needs are key to successful projects. COE leadership and management personnel will engage with DHS customers and sponsors early on and throughout the process, and will be the conduit for project performers to ensure training is aligning with sponsor expectations.

For all details on submission requirements, please refer to the CBTS website, which contains the call, templates and a proposal guide at <https://cbts.tamu.edu/proposals>. The deadline for

submission is Friday, November 5, 2021 at noon Central time. Please send white papers via email to CBTS@ag.tamu.edu

B. Training Products:

1. Biosecurity at the Borders training

Background: This proposed new or supplemental curriculum should identify **emerging** biological threats across a broad range of transmission threats and transmission possibilities. This could include threats to water resources and aquaculture since bioterrorism covers threats to food and agriculture resources. Also, it should cover plant, animal, and marine sources of toxins which can also be used as bioweapons. This curriculum should include COVID-19, but should not be specific for that pathogen. Use COVID-19 as a case example of the gravity of impact of entry (accidental/intentional) of foreign biological agents, and relate this to animals and plants. In addition, at least 10 new biological threats of a pandemic proportion have been identified as threats in the near future.

Additional suggestions on format/structure:

- Determine hazards associated with biological materials, commerce or personnel crossing borders.
- Preferred format would incorporate scenarios that build on skills the CBP personnel have learned from Interview, Baggage, Rapiscan, and Trade Labs. The objective would be to identify and process a biological sample encountered in passenger baggage and express consignment.
- Scenarios should be written based on actual AG-bio encounters from the field.

2. CBP Worker Safety at the Borders training

Background: Develop new or improved training that addresses the constantly emerging worker safety gaps to CBP Agriculture Specialists (CBPAS) at POE from humans, animals, plants, insects, pests, infectious materials and merchandise. Incorporate case studies of real-life encounters in the field (people carrying materials, scorpions, snakes, fire ants, etc.) This area of threat is highly dynamic. Address these new threats through a process of prevention, detection and response using tools common to most DHS related agencies, including proper PPE use.

Additional suggestions on format/structure:

- Improve CBPAS questioning techniques to ask the proper question and elicit the right response determine traveler's behavior for better threat/risk assessment.

- Improve worker safety for CBPAS while reducing occupation related threats to the employee. This course identifies the gaps between agencies that leave the CBPAS at potential risk from emerging threat to health.
- The CBPAS will learn to identify and take immediate action to protect themselves and others, and to notify the proper agency or department when confronted with a potential threat to the worker environment.
- Additional Proposed Enabling Performance Objectives:
 - Learn to adapt response to level of threat based on inputs from CDC, FDA and USDA
 - The curriculum design process would involve an integrated review by potential overlapping agencies/departments and CBPAS input for specific content
 - Length also depends on the level of threat and specific proficiency needed for workers at the front-line.

3. CBP Agriculture Specialist Roles in Pandemics & Epidemics training

Background: Enhance learning related to the roles that CBPAS must play in the detection and notification to key agencies. Understand where updates and additional mission critical information on a Pandemic are located and how to assess impact to CBPAS.

Additional suggestions on format/structure:

- Improve awareness of potential cross-cutting threats from diseases which pose global threats to borders mediated from animal, human, insects or merchandise.
- Currently the US is involved in COVID-19 Prevention and Response; however, influenza is an overlapping threat to animals as well as humans shared by multiple agencies/departments.
- Updates on vaccination policy, personal protective gear, and other prevention measures are changing weekly as we learn more about this virus. It seems little of this information has been adapted specifically to address the needs of the CBPAS.
- Include situational awareness of DHS components (CWMD/PODS, FEMA) that lead coordination during epidemics/pandemics, as well as other agencies (FDA, USDA, CDC) with whom CBP engages, depending on whether disease has nexus to agriculture or public health concerns.

4. Agricultural Bioterrorism training

Background: The current course within the CBP Agriculture Specialist training academy appears limited in providing examples of emerging threats, their regulatory compliance requirements, and inter-agency (USDA/CDC/DHS/DOJ/FBI) actions in the event of an agricultural bioterrorism situation. It also fails to incorporate FDA-FSMA-related economically

motivated and/or intentional food adulteration rule exposure, which may impact bioterrorism events detection.

While the Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison (APTL) has written and disseminated a very broad and comprehensive directives, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and policies for how to handle biologicals and coordinate with the multiple agencies involved, what is needed is a training that breaks this SOP down into a digestible format, and reinforces the procedures with scenario-based exercises.

Alternatively, course could give case studies to force open discussion/teamwork exercise on how to go about recalling/applying bioterrorism law at simulated inspection/evaluation at border. This course can provide an overview of all other Federal agencies/departments (e.g., Defense, Commerce, State) that have direct foreign engagements in combatting agricultural/biological terrorism; as well as CBP and FDA's efforts in support of this mission.

Additional suggestions on format/structure:

- Provide an overview of the basic provisions of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002 and discuss the potential for acts of agricultural bioterrorism. The trainees will be provided with case studies for coordination between several federal agencies in the event of a bioterror attack. Enhance knowledge on federal laws/statutes dictating responses to agri-food bioterrorism evidence detection and appropriate responses by CBP personnel. Update knowledge through incorporation of FDA-FSMA-related training. Add additional training to ensure broad federal regulations knowledge on intentional adulteration events.
- Additional knowledge and command of federal laws and regulations surrounding bioterrorism and laws governing against and responses.

C. Submission Information

Two-Stage Award Process

In order to minimize the cost and effort for prospective offerors, this solicitation uses a *two-stage proposal process*.

Stage One: White Paper

The first stage begins with this open call for *white papers*. Individuals interested in addressing these training products should submit a white paper of **no more than five pages** (including tables, graphs, etc.) in PDF format. As noted above, you may propose more than one product in your whitepaper, as long as you do not go over page limit. Supplemental materials, such as key personnel bios, references cited, and a cover letter do not count against the five-page limit.

White Paper Templates are provided on the CBTS website. Each white paper should describe

the training product to developed, the objective, technical approach/methods, milestones and outputs, a bottom-line cost estimate inclusive of direct and indirects, and the composition of the team that will be carrying out the project. NOTE: please provide brief, two-page biosketches for the main performers; these biosketches will not count against overall page limit. A conflict of interest statement describing any financial or other interests of the research team that might bear on the proposed work should be included. White papers that do not address the research priorities listed in the RFP, that do not follow formatting or page limit requirements will be rejected. Proposals arriving after the submission deadline will not receive funding consideration.

In the **budget estimate**, provide a high-level break-down of direct and indirect costs for your institution and any subawards. Proposed work should be for a 12-month period of performance.

Complete packages (white papers with budget estimate) will be evaluated by a panel of reviewers/subject matter experts and by a DHS panel for relevancy as described below (please see Evaluation Criteria). A minimum threshold for each score will be determined, and apparent successful offerors will be invited to Stage Two.

Stage Two: Workplan Development

If CBTS and DHS are interested in considering a project based on a selected white paper, CBTS will invite the authors to develop and submit a **full workplan** with a detailed **budget justification**. The elements and requirements of the complete workplan will be shared when the request is made. Full details of the call, CBTS Proposal Guide, and white paper templates may be found on the CBTS Website at <https://cbts.tamu.edu/proposals/>

Budget and period of performance

CBTS projects selected by DHS are funded using the CBTS cooperative agreement. Project funding is subject to availability of funds. Applicants may propose projects with a duration of up to 12 months. Award amount depends upon availability of funds.

Eligibility Information

Applications will be accepted from accredited U.S. higher education institutions, for-profit organizations, or an organization that meets the definition of non-profit in OMB Circular A-122, relocated to 2 CFR Part 230.

Exceptions

- Non-profit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply.
- Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) or laboratories funded by federal agencies are not eligible to apply. FFRDC employees may cooperate or collaborate with eligible applicants within the limits imposed by applicable legislation, regulations, and

policies, are not eligible to serve in a principal leadership role and may not receive salaries or in other ways augment their agency's appropriations through awards made by this program.

- Institution partnerships with foreign institutions are permitted but may require special justification and approval from CBTS and DHS.
- For-Profit organizations intending to apply may not include profit margins in their cost.
- CBTS is unable to fund Federal Government Agencies

Available Funding

CBTS projects are funded through the CBTS Cooperative Agreement. Project funding is subject to availability of funds. The CBTS is responsible for administering funding to all projects within the Center's portfolio. DHS may allocate up to \$125,000 (one year maximum) for each selected research project, with a total budget for all projects of \$500,000. CBTS is responsible for administering funding to all projects within its portfolio. For those proposals that are pursued further, sub-recipients will need to submit a detailed workplan to be subsequently approved, and agree to the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement between DHS and Texas A&M University (TAMU). CBTS is required to flow down all DHS – TAMU Cooperative Agreement Terms and Conditions with all sub-awardees. A copy of the Terms and Conditions is available upon request.

Evaluation Criteria

The review of white papers sent to CBTS will be conducted by a panel of reviewers who will generally use the following questions and weighted scoring to assess the merits of the proposed work. In addition to the narrative responses, reviewers will rate each of the four review elements on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the best/highest ranking). Reviewers will apply the percentage weighting factor as indicated below for an overall rating.

- 1. Addressing Stakeholder Requirements (Rating 1–5) (35%)** – Does the proposed training product offer new/innovative curricula (i.e., does the proposed project complement and not duplicate existing training programs sponsored by DHS)? Could the training audience include several members of the CBP frontline personnel, including Officers and Agriculture Specialists? Can the training be performed in under five days?
- 2. Proposed Approach/Methods (Rating 1–5) (35%)** – Are the project objectives clear and supported by appropriate tasks and subtasks? Has the team defined metrics or targets appropriate for the stated goals? Is the curriculum development process and the transfer of training materials clearly articulated? Are risks identified with proposed mitigation strategies?
- 3. Qualification of Personnel (Rating 1–5) (20%)** – Does the team have the breadth of qualifications to conduct and complete the proposed work? Does the team have prior expertise in similar areas?

- 4. Budget and Schedule (Rating 1–5) (10%)** – Are the costs appropriate and reasonable? Is the budget proportional to the work being performed and the resources used? Does the team demonstrate an ability to deliver products within the proposed budget and on schedule?

White papers that successfully meet the requirements of the evaluation criteria review process will be submitted to the CBTS DHS Program Manager and reviewed for relevance to the DHS mission and objectives. White papers identified as relevant will be ranked and considered for funding.