

**AGENCY:** ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

**TITLE:** Student Program for Environmental Excellence in Design (SPEED)

**ACTION:** Request for Applications (RFA)

**RFA:** EPA-OAR-OTAQ-15-02

**SUMMARY:** Formal Agency responses to questions regarding the subject RFA

**DATE:** January 20, 2015

**Topic: General**

***Q1: Should the proposal be geared primarily toward setting up the program for students to work with the EPA, or should it focus on potential research topics that these students would pursue?***

**A1:** Applications must include a narrative proposal for designing, developing, and managing the Student Program for Environmental Excellence in Design (SPEED) program, a program that would be managed by the recipient institution for the duration of the grant.

A key piece of the narrative proposal would be the identification of potential research topics for students to pursue under each of the three (3) components of the SPEED program. See Section I.B. of the RFA for details about each of the three components of the SPEED program.

It is important to note that EPA staff are limited to what type of discussions we can engage in regarding an applicant's potential application. Please refer to the RFA's guidance in Section IV.E. Below is the clause on pre-proposal assistance:

**Pre-proposal/Application Assistance and Communications**

In accordance with EPA's Assistance Agreement Competition Policy (EPA Order 5700.5A1), EPA staff will not meet with individual applicants to discuss draft proposals, provide informal comments on draft proposals, or provide advice to applicants on how to respond to ranking criteria. Applicants are responsible for the contents of their applications/proposals. However, consistent with the provisions in the announcement, EPA will respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the proposal, and requests for clarification about any of the language or provisions in the announcement.

Source:[http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation\\_provisions.htm#Preproposal Assistance](http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm#Preproposal_Assistance)

***Q2: What is the management and research role envisioned for the proposing institution?***

**A2:** In general, the recipient institution would design, develop, and manage the SPEED program. This would include establishing and managing the process for identifying and selecting graduate-level students to participate in the SPEED program. The recipient institution would also be responsible for identifying, developing, and managing undergraduate student team-based projects as well as identifying and recruiting the students who would participate in those projects. Similarly, the recipient institution would be responsible for identifying, developing, and managing graduate-level transportation-related policy projects and for identifying and recruiting students who would participate in those projects.

During the grant timeframe, the recipient institution would also be responsible for identifying and tracking progress on SPEED program performance measures. This would include regularly reporting SPEED program progress to the EPA.

Students that participate in the SPEED program would collaborate regularly with faculty at the recipient institution and with EPA staff at the National Vehicle and Fuel Emissions Laboratory (NVFEL) which is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

See Section II.E. regarding the definition of cooperative agreement that outlines the role the EPA project officer. Also, please review Section IV.C. for details on what needs to be in the application package in order to be considered for award.

***Q3: Is the EPA anticipating that the applicant pool for the SPEED program would be all graduate students from the SPEED program organizer's institution, or would they come from other institutions as well?***

**A3:** Applicants are not prohibited from proposing a SPEED program design that provides the opportunity for students to participate even if they are enrolled at another institution of higher learning. Please see Section III. for eligibility details.

As stated above, please review 'Pre-proposal/Application Assistance and Communications' at the following link:

[http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation\\_provisions.htm#Preproposal Assistance](http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm#Preproposal_Assistance)

***Q4: Is the EPA expecting all SPEED students to begin research at the same time, or more of a cyclical process, with new students starting on a regular (e.g., annual) basis? If the latter, what type of renewal process is expected for selecting the SPEED program organizer?***

**A4:** The SPEED RFA is intentionally designed to give prospective applicants the freedom to propose a program design that fits its curriculum. However, in order to be considered eligible for funding under this RFA, all substantive project-related work included in the proposal must be initiated within one (1) year of award. Also, the estimated project period for the subject award is no more than four (4) years from the date of award.

See Section III.C. for threshold eligibility criteria.

***Q5: What level of direct interaction is expected by the EPA and the senior major design projects?***

**A5:** The SPEED RFA specifies that participants from the recipient organization will be “required to communicate frequently” with the EPA and spend “extended periods of time on-site at the NVFEL” for their SPEED program research. See Section I.B. Scope of Work for details.

While there is no requirement that all of the graduate-level research under this grant be conducted at the NVFEL, nearly 20% of the evaluation weighting for this grant is based on the strength of the applicant’s plan and approach for providing opportunities for participating students to spend extended periods of time performing research and analysis on-site at the NVFEL in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

***Q6: What are the benefits of being the SPEED program organizer vs. an institution merely participating in the SPEED program?***

**A6:** Applications that propose a SPEED program design that offers participation to students from other institutions of higher learning will remain eligible for award so long as other eligibility criteria are met. See Section III. of the RFA for eligibility information.

However, it is up to the prospective applicant to determine the costs and benefits of designing, developing, and managing a proposed SPEED program that includes qualified student candidates not enrolled at the recipient institution. Consideration should be given to the evaluation criteria that will be used to rate eligible entities whose applications meet the threshold criteria under Section III. of the RFA.

***Q7: May Graduate Research Transportation-Related Policy Project (Component 3) be addressed by including some policy aspects to the work done by graduate students who are working under Graduate-level Research Training and Support (Component 1)?***

**A7:** As long as the application meets the threshold eligibility criteria listed in Section III.C. of the RFA, the application will be considered for award. Specifically with regard to proposed SPEED program design, the application must comply with the features and

requirements listed in Section I.B. of the RFA, and must address the three (3) components described in the RFA as well.

If the applicant believes that a particular approach to SPEED program design is the best strategy for addressing the requirements stated in the RFA, then we recommend that it propose that programmatic design in its application.

**Topic: Graduate-level research and Training Support**

***Q1: Must all the graduate level research under this grant be conducted at the NVFEL? Or may some components of the research be conducted at the recipient's facility?***

**A1:** The EPA's NVFEL values and seeks to strengthen its collaborative relationship with educational institutions in addressing technological challenges in advanced engine and vehicle research. Thus, on-site collaboration between participants and the NVFEL is a critical element of the SPEED grant. This ensures that projects under this grant relate closely to emerging technologies and air quality policy issues in the transportation industry. It also enables the recipient to leverage NVFEL staff and facilities in building research capacity in air quality and automotive emissions research.

There is no requirement that all of the graduate-level research under this grant be conducted at the NVFEL. However, nearly 20% of the evaluation weighting for this grant is based on the strength of the applicant's plan and approach for providing opportunities for participating students to spend extended periods of time performing research and analysis on-site at the NVFEL in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

***Q2: If an applicant plans to conduct certain portions of the graduate-level research at its facility, how should the NVFEL portion of the commitment for these studies be addressed in the proposal?***

**A2:** Section IV.C. of the RFA provides information on what must be included in the application package. Specifically, Section IV.C.2.a: (Project Summary/Approach) directs applicants to provide a detailed description for how their proposed project would address the Graduate-level Research and Training Support component of the RFA. This description should include details of the proposed tasks to be undertaken for the graduate-level project, including where those tasks would be performed for proposed graduate-level research topics.

**Topic: Graduate Research Transportation-Related Policy Project**

***Q1: Do we need to contact the EPA's NVFEL and Transportation and Climate Division (TCD) at the Office of Transportation and Air Quality (OTAQ) before submitting a proposal, or if our proposal is selected, would OTAQ automatically work with the ideas as proposed in our application?***

**A1:** Applicants may not contact the EPA's NVFEL and/or TCD staff regarding any aspect of their application during the solicitation period. Any questions about the SPEED RFA must be communicated in writing via email to the Agency contact listed in Section VII. of the RFA. Questions and answers will be posted until the closing date of the RFA announcement, January 23, 2015 at 4:00pm EST.

The EPA will notify the successful applicant once a selection has been made. See Section VI. of the RFA for details. Once a selection has been made and the signed award notice has been provided to the selected applicant, the EPA will contact them to discuss the workplan and next steps for initiating project-related research.