Quick Reference

Please note that you must read the full Call document for guidance before submitting your proposal.

Trustworthy Autonomous Systems Nodes - Outline

Call type: Invitation for outline proposals, followed by submission of full proposals by an invitation only.

Closing date: 16:00 20 February 2020

Funding Available: Up to £20.5 million available to support seven research Nodes. This funding is part of the Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF).

How to apply: This is a two-stage call with a mandatory outline stage, followed by an invited full proposal stage.

Assessment Process: Outline proposals will be considered by an expert panel. Invited full proposals will be assessed by postal peer review, followed by a panel interview.

Key Dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nodes Call live on Je-S</td>
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<td>Full proposal – Interview panel</td>
<td>Week commencing 24 August 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes start date</td>
<td>1 October 2020 (fixed start date)</td>
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Additional information: Please note that this is a call for nodes outline proposals only. Applicants who are successful at this stage will be invited to submit full proposals.

There is a separate call for the Hub (https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/calls/trustworthy-autonomous-systems-hub-
Please note that although some similarities exist between the call documents for the Hub and the Nodes (e.g. background and objectives of the programme), there are differences between the two in the expectations, requirements and assessment criteria. Applicants must read the relevant call document in full before submitting an application.

UKRI would like to emphasise that a highly multidisciplinary approach will be required to deliver the objectives of this investment and to address the research challenges in the TAS agenda. Multidisciplinary applications led by and involving any discipline that fits the scope of a given node, from across UKRI portfolio are encouraged.

Anticipating high interest in this call, UKRI will be holding a webinar on **Wednesday 8 January, 13:00 – 14:00**. This webinar will be an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions about the call and the TAS programme. Attendance of the webinar is not mandatory.

Please use the following link to register for the webinar:

https://ukri.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Iruo1v0kRwi7Fl1FRMpaKg

You may **submit questions** prior to the webinar using the following link; these will be answered during the webinar session together with any other questions asked on the day.

https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/TAS_Nodes_Webinar_Questions/

Due to the nature of this funding stream, there will be specific spending requirements, monitoring and evaluation. These aspects will be reflected as specific grant conditions.

**Contacts:**

- Please email AI.Robotics@epsrc.ukri.org for general enquiries.
- Dr Alex Shevchuk (Alex.Shevchuk@epsrc.ukri.org – 01793 44 4476)
- Dr Victoria Mico (Victoria.MicoEgea@epsrc.ukri.org – 01793 44 4562)
Trustworthy Autonomous Systems Nodes -
Outline

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Summary

UKRI is inviting outline proposals for the nodes, which are part of the UKRI Trustworthy Autonomous Systems programme. Up to £20.5 million (at 80% fEC) will be available to fund seven research nodes for 42 months, with a fixed start date on 1 October 2020. UKRI expects to fund seven research nodes, each focusing on one of the following research topics: trust, responsibility, resilience, security, functionality, verifiability and governance & regulation. It is anticipated that each node will be of approximately £3 million (UKRI contribution). Each node will be expected to collaborate broadly with other nodes, the Hub and the wider community. This programme will be funded through the Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF).
The **deadline for Nodes Outline submission is 16:00 20 February 2020.** Once submitted, the outlines will be considered at an Outline panel in April 2020. Successful outlines will be subsequently invited to provide full proposals, which will undergo postal peer review followed by an interview panel. The successful nodes will be required to start their activities on 1 October 2020.

**Background**

Autonomous systems are already being developed and deployed across industrial sectors in specific, controlled conditions, with little focus on trustworthiness. When autonomous systems are used in an uncontrolled environment, where there is a high level of interaction with people and a much larger number of variables, the resulting potential for unexpected and/or undesirable results is non-negligible. These unanticipated events could have a very significant negative impact on the acceptability and thus compromise widespread deployment of autonomous systems in the UK.

For society to use and benefit from autonomous systems, people need to trust them. This means that the autonomous systems need to function as expected for their purpose, and they need to be designed and tested to ensure that they work consistently and safely and that they are appropriately developed within a legal, ethical and social context. Trust will only be enabled through technical advances conducted in specific societal circumstances.

To ensure that autonomous systems can be trusted, and ultimately adopted by society, fully integrated advances in **both technical, and social sciences and humanities research** are needed. For example, research in logic, autonomy and intelligence and engineering (robotics & vehicles) is needed, but these technical developments must be carried out in the context of fundamental social sciences and humanities research across psychology, sociology, economics, ethics, philosophy, law, political science, international studies, innovation management and science and technology studies. The engagement of multiple disciplines in this endeavour, alongside regulators and the public, is key to ensuring that autonomous systems are developed to be used in real-world situations.

The UK has significant strengths in computing and autonomous systems, and there is a strong track record of collaboration between these fields and researchers in the social sciences and humanities. UKRI has a number of key activities in the landscape, including (but not limited to) investments made within the Digital Economy Programme, UKRI ISCF in Robotics in Extreme Environments, and networks in ‘Validation and Verification of Autonomous Systems’ and ‘Robotics and Autonomous Systems’. However, the apparent lack of a coherent community or truly recognised authority in trustworthy autonomous systems has been identified as a barrier to the UK successfully developing, deploying, and adopting autonomous systems.

In this Context, UKRI is investing £33m in Trustworthy Autonomous Systems through the Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF). The Trustworthy Autonomous Systems (TAS) programme aims to bring together the research communities and key stakeholders to drive forward cross-disciplinary fundamental research to ensure that autonomous systems are safe, reliable, resilient, ethical and trusted.
This investment has the following objectives:

a) **Coordination and collaboration** - To build a coherent, interconnected and multidisciplinary UK research community around the theme of Trustworthy Autonomous Systems, bringing together pre-existing activities and a diverse range of stakeholders.

b) **Creativity and multidisciplinarity** - To invest at scale in world-leading creative and adventurous fundamental research into the technical, social and ethical challenges surrounding Trustworthy Autonomous Systems, drawing on diverse approaches from across disciplines.

c) **Advocacy and engagement** - To establish a UK focal point for active engagement with the autonomous system's agenda and enable engagement with key stakeholders including wider academia regulators, policymakers, industry, businesses, Non-Governmental Organisations and the public.

These objectives of the programme will be delivered through two discrete but interdependent components, a single **Hub** and multiple research **nodes**:

- A central **Hub** to build and lead a world-leading multidisciplinary research community. The Hub will lead on both the **coordination** and **advocacy & engagement** objectives, building an interconnected research community, and proactively engaging across stakeholders. The Hub (either virtual or physical) is intended to be a single point of engagement for different stakeholders (e.g. industry, businesses, professional bodies, government), help drive culture change and integration of trustworthiness across autonomous systems research, as well as undertaking public engagement activities. It is anticipated that the Hub will also conduct highly multidisciplinary research into cross-node issues and have a key role in delivering pump-prime funding for community-building activities and to support new ideas, creative research directions, and applications of this research in real-world, user-driven contexts. The call for the Hub outlines is published here: https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/calls/trustworthy-autonomous-systems-hub-outline-call/

- Multiple **research nodes** to undertake fundamental, creative and multidisciplinary research in a number of areas of current un-met need. The nodes will be separate entities connected to the Hub and they are expected to address a research challenge in depth. Each node will be expected to collaborate broadly with other nodes, the Hub and the wider community.

A node will focus on **one** of the following research topics: trust, responsibility, resilience, security, functionality, verifiability and governance & regulation. It is anticipated that each of these research topics will be tackled by a multidisciplinary team. The nodes will be expected **NOT** to focus on sectorial application, but instead to take a cross-cutting multidisciplinary approach to deliver fundamental research. Building on this fundamental research, application-oriented research may be undertaken in partnership with stakeholders and users of research, to demonstrate how the outcomes of the fundamental research might be exploited in real-world and sector-specific contexts.
In preparation for the UKRI SPF funded TAS programme and to facilitate interactions and collaborations between interested parties, UKRI held a Town Hall meeting event in London on 18 October 2019 as described on https://epsrc.ukri.org/newsevents/events/ukri-trustworthy-autonomous-systems-programme-town-hall-meeting/. The presentation used on the day and other relevant document have been published after the event alongside the Hub call document and are available here: https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/calls/trustworthy-autonomous-systems-hub-outline-call/

Anticipating high interest in this call, UKRI will be holding a webinar on **Wednesday 8 January, 13:00 – 14:00**. This webinar will be an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions about the call and the TAS programme. Attendance of the webinar is not mandatory.

Please use the following link to register for the webinar: https://ukri.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Iruo1v0kRwi7Fl1FRMpaKg

You may submit questions prior to the webinar using the following link; these will be answered during the webinar session together with any other questions asked on the day.
https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/TAS_Nodes_Webinar_Questions/

Note that attendance to the webinar is not mandatory and is not a pre-requisite for being eligible to this call. Similarly, attendance to the Town Hall meeting held in October was not a pre-requisite for eligibility for this call, and attendance does not guarantee subsequent funding.
Scope of the call – Research Nodes for the TAS programme

This call document is seeking outline applications for the **research nodes only (outline stage)**.

UKRI expects to fund seven research nodes. These nodes will undertake fundamental, creative, multi- and interdisciplinary research in a number of areas of current unmet need. Each node will be expected to address a defined research challenge in-depth, focusing on **one** of the following: trust, responsibility, resilience, security, functionality, verifiability and governance & regulation.

The nodes will be expected not to focus on specific sectorial applications, but instead take a cross-cutting multidisciplinary approach to deliver fundamental research. It is anticipated that nodes may need to use a variety of use-cases to explore the impact and applicability of this fundamental research. Furthermore, application-oriented research may be undertaken in partnership with stakeholders and users of research to demonstrate how the outcomes of the fundamental research might be exploited in real-world and sector-specific contexts. For each node topic, it will be up to the applicants to set out the approach, research and team required to address the topic effectively.

It is anticipated that each node will be multidisciplinary, including investigators from across the UKRI portfolio as appropriate. Each node may be multidisciplinary to a different extent depending on the challenges posed by the topic. Applicants for node investments will be expected to articulate the key challenges they intend to address within a given topic and to put together an appropriate multidisciplinary team to tackle these challenges.

The nodes will be expected to work closely with the Hub to deliver the objectives of the programme. Similarly, the nodes will be required to complement each other and the Hub, undertaking research into cross-node issues in a coordinated and collaborative manner, avoiding duplication and maximising the benefits of the programme. In addition, the nodes will have access to funds distributed via a competitive process by the Hub to pump-prime new opportunities. These funds may be used to (but not limited to):

- Undertake risky research within, between and beyond the nodes.
• Build new collaborations, nationally or internationally.
• Explore new research directions, particularly to address gaps identified.
• Tackle barriers to interdisciplinary working.
• Engage with stakeholders and users of the research to conduct application-oriented research, building on from the fundamental research undertaken.
• Conduct activities to demonstrate how the outcomes of the fundamental research undertaken in the nodes might be exploited in real-world applications.

Expectations of the Nodes
It is anticipated that the research nodes will deliver primarily against the creativity and multidisciplinarity objective of the TAS programme by:

• Designing and undertaking a creative and multidisciplinary research programme focused on one of the seven key topics (research nodes: trust, responsibility, resilience, security, functionality, verifiability and governance & regulation), seeking to significantly advance one of these areas through a combination of fundamental and challenge-driven research.
• Building an appropriate multidisciplinary team and mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships appropriate for tackling one of the key research topics. It is expected that the level of multidisciplinarity will differ between nodes depending on the nature of the topic. Leadership of each node can derive from any relevant UKRI disciplinary area.
• Collaborating widely with other research nodes, the broader community and with key stakeholders in the UK and internationally to maximise synergies and complementarities between the research funded through this programme and other activities.
• Engaging closely with the Hub to build a UK community in Trustworthy Autonomous Systems and to collaboratively deliver the objectives of the investment.
• Addressing new and emerging research opportunities through maximising the flexibility of their research programme and potentially by accessing the pump prime funds managed by the Hub.

UKRI would like to emphasise that a highly multidisciplinary approach will be required to deliver the objectives of this investment and to address the research challenges in the TAS agenda. However, it is recognised that the level of multidisciplinarity required to address the challenges may be different depending on the challenges posed by the topic. Applicants to node investments will be expected to articulate the key challenges they intend to address within a given topic and to configure an appropriate team (more or less multi- or interdisciplinary, as appropriate) to address these challenges.
Funding available

Up to £20.5 million in total (approximately £3 million per research Node) will be available to support seven research Nodes, each focusing on one of the following aspects: trust, responsibility, resilience, security, functionality, verifiability and governance & regulation. The duration of the nodes will be 42 months, and they will have a fixed start date of 1 October 2020.

Please note that due to the nature of this funding, additional requirements on spending profile, reporting, monitoring and evaluation as well as the extension will apply. This will be reflected in specific grant conditions, and those funded (Hub and Nodes) will need to comply with them. Full details on these additional grant conditions will be published in the Nodes full proposal call document. In particular, note that grant extensions will only be considered under exceptional circumstances (in line with the Equality Act 2010) and will require UK Research and Innovation agreement on a case-by-case basis. The Research Organisation remains responsible for compliance with the terms of the Equality Act 2010, including any subsequent amendments introduced while work is in progress, and for ensuring that the expectations set out in the UK Research and Innovation statement of expectations for equality and diversity are met.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The long-term strength of the UK research base depends on harnessing all the available talent. EPSRC expects that equality and diversity is embedded at all levels and in all aspects of research practice and funding policy. We are committed to supporting the research community, offering a range of flexible options which allow applicants to design a package that fits their research goals, career and personal circumstances. This includes career breaks, support for people with caring responsibilities, flexible working and alternative working patterns. With this in mind, we welcome applications from academics who job share, have a part-time contract, or need flexible working arrangements.

Peer review is central to EPSRC funding decisions, we require expert advice and robust decision-making processes for all EPSRC funding initiatives. We are committed to ensuring that fairness is fully reflected in all our funding processes by advancing policy which supports equality, diversity and inclusion. Please see our Equality and Diversity webpages https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/equalitydiversity/ for further information.

Guidance on Journal-based metrics

As part of our commitment to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; https://sfdora.org/read/), UKRI reviewers and panel members are advised not to use journal-based metrics, such as journal impact factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an investigator’s contributions, or to make funding decisions.

The content of a paper is more important than publication metrics, or the identity of the journal, in which it was published, especially for early-stage researchers. Reviewers and panel members are encouraged to consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets, software, inventions, patents,
preprints, other commercial activities, etc.) in addition to research publications. We advise our peer reviewers and panel members to consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

**Equipment**

Equipment over £10,000 in value (inc. VAT) is not available through this call. Smaller items of equipment (individually under £10,000) should be in the Directly Incurred - Other Costs heading (at the full proposal stage).

For more information on equipment funding, please see: [https://epsrc.ukri.org/research/facilities/equipment/](https://epsrc.ukri.org/research/facilities/equipment/)

**Eligibility**

**Please note** that attendance to the webinar on 8 January is not mandatory and it is not a pre-requisite for being eligible to this call. Similarly, attendance to the Town Hall meeting held in October was not a pre-requisite for eligibility, and attendance does not guarantee subsequent funding.

Eligibility for this call, standard UKRI eligibility rules apply relating to the status of the organisation and the employment status of individuals applying. Investigators from **all disciplines supported by UKRI** are welcomed and encouraged to apply.

Eligible organisations are Higher Education Institutes, Research Institutes and Research Organisations that can apply for funding from UKRI Research Councils. A list of eligible organisations to apply to UKRI is provided here: [https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/](https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/).

Certain Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs) are also eligible to apply. If PSREs wishing to apply have not previously applied for UKRI funding and are not currently designated Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status, they may be required to complete an eligibility form. To be eligible, PSREs will need to demonstrate research capacity and capability relevant to UKRI, as per the standard eligibility rules. PSRE applicants should contact UKRI at the earliest opportunity to discuss their interests in applying (Please email AI.Robotics@epsrc.ukri.org for general enquires).

Please ensure sufficient time to create Je-S accounts for Investigators who do not currently have one. Please for additional time as creating an Investigator account requires institutional approval.

For information on the eligibility of organisations and individuals to receive EPSRC funding, see the EPSRC Funding Guide: [https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/fundingguide/](https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/fundingguide/)
How to apply

A two-stage application process will be used in this call:

- **Stage 1: Outline proposal** for the Nodes must be submitted by 16:00 on 20 February 2020. Application details are provided below.

- **Stage 2: Invited full proposal**. The deadline for full proposal submission is 16:00 18 June 2020. Only invited full proposals will be accepted at this stage, and any unsolicited proposals will be rejected.

Stage 1: Submitting an Outline proposal

You should prepare and submit your proposal using the Research Councils’ Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) System (https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/).

Although multi-institutional bids are welcomed, only one Je-S application form should be submitted for a given outline proposal. It is the responsibility of the lead organisation to ensure that all of the documentation required is submitted with the proposal form. This will also be the case at the full proposal stage.

When adding a new proposal, you should select:

- Council ‘EPSRC’.
- Document type ‘Outline Proposal’.
- Scheme ‘Outline’.
- On the Project Details page, you should select the ‘Trustworthy Autonomous Systems Nodes - Outline’ call.

Your submission should contain the following two documents:

1. **Je-S application form**
2. **Outline Case for Support**

Please do not upload any other attachments, if submitted those will not be sent to the panel.

Guidance on the types of support that may be sought and advice on the completion of the research proposal forms are given on the EPSRC website (https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/), which should be consulted when preparing all proposals.

Note that clicking ‘submit document’ on your proposal form in Je-S initially submits the proposal to your host organisation’s administration and not to UKRI. Please ensure you allow sufficient time for your organisation’s submission process between submitting your proposal to them and the Call closing date. For the research nodes outlines, this will be **16:00 20 February 2020**.
**Guidance on writing an application**

Outline submissions must contain the following documents:

- **Je-S application form**
  Please note: budgets are not required at the outline stage and should only be submitted for full proposals. Therefore, applicants should enter £0 for any part of the Je-S form where costings are required. The titles of the successful node bids will be prefixed with ‘**UKRI Trustworthy Autonomous Systems Node in ...**’. However, applicants are not required to adhere to these guidelines at outline stage and may submit proposals with other titles.

- **Outline Case for Support (up to six sides of A4 in total)**

  Up to **6 sides** of A4 case of support covering the following:

  - How the proposed research aligns with the UKRI Trustworthy Autonomous Systems programme and its objectives, and deliver basic interdisciplinary research in relationship to one of the pre-defined node topics.
  
  - An outline and explanation of the proposed research programme, highlighting the multidisciplinary, creativity and novelty elements.
  
  - Planned approach to collaborative working across the TAS programme, including interactions with the Hub, other research nodes, and the broader community.
  
  - The applicant team track record, composition and multidisciplinary nature of the team, and how this influences the team’s ability to deliver the proposed research programme, as stipulated by the chosen research node.

Please note that on submission to EPSRC **all** non-PDF documents uploaded onto Je-S are converted to PDF, the use of non-standard fonts may result in errors or font conversion, which could affect the overall length of the document.

For advice on writing proposals see: https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/howtoapply/preparing/

**Stage 2: Submitting a Full proposal (invited only)**

If successful at the outline stage, the full proposal application should be received by the deadline of **16:00 18 June 2020**.

The full proposal guidance and further details on the assessment process will be published on the EPSRC website.
Assessment

Assessment process

This call will use a three-stage assessment process.

Stage 1 - Outline proposal

There will be no postal peer review of outline proposals. Outline proposals will be considered by an independent multidisciplinary panel with the necessary expertise to assess the proposals against the criteria listed below. Successful outline proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Stage 2 – Invited full proposals

Invited full proposals will undergo postal peer review. Proposals that do not have sufficiently supportive reviews will be rejected at this stage. Full proposals with broadly supportive comments will progress to an interview panel stage, and the applicants will have the chance to respond to any comments made by the reviewers before the interview.

The full proposal guidance and further details on the assessment process will be published on the EPSRC website.

Stage 3 - Interview Panel

An interview stage will be held in order to select the final successful proposals. The Principal Investigator and up to two others identified on the proposal will be invited to attend the interview, and it is expected that at least one of the attendees will be from a collaborative institution. Full details of the interview process will be sent to candidates prior to the interviews.

Assessment criteria

Stage 1 – Outline proposal (assessed by an external panel)

Outline applications will be assessed against the following criteria (equally weighted):

- The originality, ambition, and relevance of the proposed research programme, and potential for this programme to deliver transformative interdisciplinary research on the topic of the chosen research node.

- Fit to the call and the objectives of the TAS investment of the proposed multidisciplinary research programme. Node proposals must clearly address one of the seven pre-defined research node topics: trust, responsibility, resilience, security, functionality, verifiability and governance & regulation.

- Validity and feasibility of the collaboration approach across the TAS programme (Hub and other nodes), the wider research community, non-academic stakeholders (industry, businesses, government, the third sector) and the public.
• The appropriateness of the applicant team to delivering the proposed programme for a given research node, including the disciplinary balance of the team.

Additional grant conditions (AGCs)
Grants will be subject to the standard UK Research and Innovation grant conditions. However, the nature of this funding will require additional grant conditions, such as expenditure, extensions, monitoring and evaluation. Additional grant conditions will be published in the nodes full proposal call document.

Moving forward
Successful outlines applications will be invited to submit a full proposal. The full proposal guidance and assessment process will be published on the EPSRC webpage.

If you are currently restricted under the Repeatedly Unsuccessful Applicants Policy, you may submit unlimited outlines, but you will only be able to submit one full proposal (as PI or CO-I) during the 12-month restricted period.

Key dates

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*UKRI aims to adhere to the key dates as published. However, there may be exceptions where the sift, prioritisation or interview meeting may have to change due to panel member availability.

Contacts
Requests for help and advice concerning the writing and costing of your proposal should be addressed to the Research Office within your institution.

If you have any requests about preparing and submitting your proposal using Je-S, please contact the Je-S helpdesk via JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org, +44 (0) 1793 44 4164, the Je-S Helpdesk opening hours: Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5.00pm
UK Time and Fridays 8.30am - 4.30 pm UK time (Excluding Bank Holidays and Other Holidays).

For any other call specific information:

- Please email AI.Robotics@epsrc.ukri.org for general enquires.
- Dr Alex Shevchuk (Alex.Shevchuk@epsrc.ukri.org – 01793 44 4476)
- Dr Victoria Mico (Victoria.MicoEgea@epsrc.ukri.org – 01793 44 4562)

Change log

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Je-S attachments Check List

Outline:

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<tr>
<th>Attachment Type</th>
<th>Maximum page length</th>
<th>Guidance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outline Case for Support</td>
<td>6 sides of A4</td>
<td>This document is mandatory Up to 6 sides of A4 to address the assessment criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Please ensure you adhere to the above attachment requirements when submitting your proposal. Any missing, over length or unnecessary attachments may result in your proposal being rejected.