![BTI Institute — Borders · Trade · Immigration — A Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence] ![UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON]

BTI Institute Request for Proposal

RFP 19-01

UPDATE: Submission Window Dates (due by 5 p.m. CST): **The Application Deadline has been extended to Friday, May 10th at 5 p.m. CST.**

Note: If you are unable to make the above deadline, you may submit your idea as a White Paper. Please contact bti@uh.edu for White Paper template and instructions.

Prosperity and Security in Central America

A. Introduction

The Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center of Excellence led by the University of Houston, conducts and transitions research, develops innovative solutions, and provides education that enhances the nation's ability to secure the borders, facilitate legitimate trade and travel, and ensure the integrity of the immigration system.

Proposals responding to this request must address and advance basic scientific understanding of one of the big challenges that are of key importance to BTI Institutes' primary customers, namely the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency and associated subcomponents — U.S. Border Patrol, Air and Marine Operations, Office of Field Operations, and Office of Trade. CBP, a component of DHS, generated the research questions presented in this request through the DHS Science and Technology Office of University Programs.

B. Program Description

This solicitation invites proposals that address research questions related to the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America. The Conference is a multi-country event focused on ways to expand cooperation to address the key economic, security, and governance issues facing the region. The last conference was held on October 11-12, 2018 and included representatives from the United States, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador as well as others. Full details can be found here: https://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2018/286596.htm

Projects should take an interdisciplinary approach and focus on the development of innovative methodologies and technologies, or on approaches for data analysis, and be clear about how the proposed research can provide new insights and enable addressing problems that could not previously be addressed. The program seeks proposals that emphasize integrated socio-economic systems that include explicit analysis of the processes and dynamics among the economic, social, political, or behavioral components of such systems.

Specific Areas of Interest

The BTI Institute customers participating in RFP 19-01 have provided research themes and areas of interest that are captured in the following specific research questions:

1) How can Northern Triangle countries leverage e-commerce to promote local economic development and employment creation?
2) What are the primary obstacles to economic development and employment creation in the Northern triangle?

3) What concrete steps can United States Government (USG) take to promote productive private-sector investment and employment creation in the Northern Triangle?
4) What concrete steps can USG take to ensure that private-sector investment in the Northern Triangle creates employment opportunities that represent attractive alternatives to emigration?
5) What concrete steps can USG and private sector take to support development of internal best practices or productive policies within the Northern Triangle?
6) Where and how has private sector investment been successful at creating employment opportunities in the developing world?
7) How do current immigration policies in the Northern Triangle and surrounding region influence lawful and illegal migration flows? What improvements could be made to regional immigration policies to better manage regional migration flows? (Same question for labor flows and for humanitarian flows.)
8) What analysis can be performed on missing infrastructure that impedes productive investment and employment creation in the Northern Triangle?

C. Award Information

Applicants may propose projects with a duration of up to 12 months. Projects typically receive DHS funding in the range of $175,000 per year. Up to five proposals may be awarded, based on available funds.

D. Eligibility Information

Who may submit proposals:

Applications can be 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 BTI.
- For-Profit organizations intending to apply may not include profit margins in their cost.

Who may serve as PI:

Typically, university faculty, qualified subject matter experts, and staff of institutions listed above are eligible to serve as PIs. However, 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.

BTI is subject to the Terms and Conditions of DHS. These Terms and Conditions, and all policies and requirements within, will flow down to all sub-awards or sub-contracts for investigators who conduct research under the sponsorship of the BTI cooperative agreement. Terms and Conditions are available upon request.

Limit on the number of proposals per organization:

There are no restrictions or limits

Limit on the number of proposals per PI or Co-PI:

One

E. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

Proposal Requirements

Proposals that are collaborative and focused on the big challenges presented by BTI customers are highly encouraged. All research conducted through the BTI Institute is intended to have publicly releasable results. Accordingly, no research under this award should involve, use, or generate sensitive information, including personally identifiable information, and/or classified information.

Proposal Preparation Instructions

All applications must be submitted through the BTI Institute's portal at https://uh-bti.smapply.io/. The online application and documents to be submitted contain specific instructions (e.g., page limit, text size, font type, and charts). Please read each document and template thoroughly for instructions.

Once you access the above URL and fill in the contact information, the system will send you a link via email to activate your account. Once activated, sign in to your account for the first time and click the blue "View Award" button to access the RFP. Click on "Apply Now" and follow the instructions to complete the application form and upload your documents.

The online application portion will include the following fillable forms:
1. Project Summary
   - Project Information
   - Questions Being Addressed
   - Principal Investigator Information
   - Research Abstract
   - Disciplines of Reviewers
2. Compliance Assurance
   - Data owned by third party
   - Human Subjects Research Assurance
   - ITAR/Export Controls

Additionally, the below documents will need to be uploaded as part of the application. All documents should use typeface Arial at a font size of 11 points or larger and single-spaced text with one-inch margins in all directions. Proposals that do not adhere to these instructions or are incomplete will **NOT** be reviewed. The following documents must be included in the application package:

- Work Plan (Template)
- Budget (Template)
- Budget Justification (Template)
- Biosketch - NSF (Template)
- Institutional Cover Letter (OPTIONAL - *A cover letter that is signed by the Authorized Organizational Representative of the submitting organization.*)

- Support Letters (OPTIONAL - *Letters of support and institutional commitment should provide reviewers with evidence that the PIs have access to appropriate resources, and, if needed, to subject matter experts, to carry out the research project.*)
- Third Party Data Support Letter (REQUIRED IF DEALING WITH THIRD PARTY DATA – *a letter from the data owner acknowledging your authorized use of the data and the timeframe in which the data will be available.*)

BTI Institute reserves the right to amend the method of submission before the RFP closing.

Proposal Due Date and Time

UPDATE: Proposals must be submitted through the BTI Institute's online portal by 10 MAY 2019 at 5 p.m. CST.

BTI Point of Contact

To promote fairness and avoid conflicts of interest, please use only the email address bti@uh.edu to communicate with the BTI Institute on matters relating to this RFP before its due date. Please do not contact members of the BTI Institute leadership directly.

F. Review Process and Selection Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by subject-matter experts from the academic/research community and the Department of Homeland Security. There will be an opportunity in the application process to input keywords and disciplines to identify appropriate expert reviewers. The keywords and disciplines that are used to categorize research projects are listed here.

Proposers and reviewers should pay special attention to the following **merit review principles**: all funded projects a) should be of the highest quality and have the potential to advance knowledge and understanding within a specific field, b) should focus on addressing one of the big challenges that are important to BTI Institutes' primary customers, and c) should provide appropriate metrics for assessing progress and achievement of research goals.

Projects will be scored, ranked, and forwarded to DHS for final approval. Two main evaluation criteria will be used to score proposals, namely **scientific merit** and **relevance** to the DHS mission.

Scientific Merit Review

Reviewers will rate proposals based on the following criteria, posed as questions, using numerical values from 1 to 5 (poor to excellent) and the indicated weights to compute an overall score.

1. Innovation and Impact (20%)
    - Is the proposed project original, e.g., does it challenge current research, or seek to shift paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, inter-disciplinary approaches, or new methodologies?
    - Is the proposed research a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts and methodologies that advance knowledge and understanding within a field?
    - Does this research have the potential to generate influential publications in the scientific community or lead to new discoveries or areas of investigation?
2. Goals, Objectives, and Methodology (20%)
    - Are the research goals clear and based on sound theory?
    - Are the methods proposed clearly stated and appropriate for testing the hypotheses?
    - Are the data generation or collection approaches appropriate for the research methods?

- Is the approach or methodology technically sound, incorporating inter-disciplinary expertise when appropriate, including a demonstrated understanding of the critical technology or engineering challenges required for achieving the project goals?
3. Qualifications of Personnel and Research Environment (20%)
   - Does the investigative team have the breadth of qualifications — credentials and experience — to conduct and complete the proposed research?
   - Does the investigative team have prior experience in similar efforts and do they clearly demonstrate an ability to deliver products that meet the proposed technical performance within the proposed budget and schedule?
   - Is there sufficient access to resources in support of the proposed research?

4. Project Management and Transition Plan (20%)
   - Are the research tasks clearly defined with a sufficient amount of detail?
   - Is the project timeline accurate? Could the tasks be completed in the proposed timeframe?
   - Are the potential research deliverables and users of the research well described?
   - Are the performance metrics measurable? Can the project success and the impact of the deliverables be quantified?
   - Does the proposal demonstrate the implementation of an appropriate knowledge transfer process (e.g., models from case studies to other areas, patents) from academic to government end-users and other DHS customers?
5. Cooperative Linkages (10%)
   - Does the application show partnerships or cooperative initiatives with other institutions or organizations?
   - Does the application demonstrate a viable plan for developing substantial and continuing linkages with the Homeland Security Enterprise?
6. Cost (10%)
   - Is the proposed research and/or education cost appropriate and reasonable?

Relevance Review

Reviewers will rate proposals based on the following criteria, posed as questions, using numerical values from 1 to 5 (poor to excellent) and the indicated weights to compute an overall score.

1. Mission Relevance (75%)
   - Does the proposed project address one or more of the research questions?
   - Does the proposed project complement — and not duplicate — existing research and development programs sponsored by DHS or others?
   - Are the potential research deliverables and users of the research output well described?

2. Communicating/Transitioning Results (25%)
   - Does the applicant have a track record of effectively communicating or successfully transitioning research results to appropriate stakeholders?
   - Will the research team be able to deploy a technology and/or solution(s) that can be transitioned effectively to the user community either through commercialization of the technology, open source distribution, or through other means?
   - Does the proposal demonstrate the implementation of an appropriate knowledge transfer process (e.g., models from case studies to other areas, patents) from academic to government end-users and other DHS customers?

G. Award Process

Selected researchers will be notified by the BTI Institute and asked to refine and produce work plans for final approval by DHS. DHS may request further modifications before completing final approval of the project.

H. Project Management

DHS will assign a project Champion to those projects selected to assist with mission alignment. The manager of Research and Development and the Research Committee will assist and assess the project through monthly reporting requirements and quarterly reviews.

I.   Frequently Asked Questions
As we receive questions, we will post the responses here as an FAQ. Please submit all questions to bti@uh.edu.