

(U) SOLICITATION

For

Universities designated under the

National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity (NCAE-C)
which includes

***National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense,
National Centers of Academic Excellence - Cyber Research, and
National Centers of Academic Excellence - Cyber Operations***
(herein after referred to as NCAE-Cs)

NCAE-C-001-2026¹
CFDA # 12.905

*"Detecting and Countering Malicious use of Artificial Intelligence (AI);
Research activities focused on: Cyber Hacking, Cyber Analytics and Software
Assurance 2026; NCAE-C Regional Hubs; Regions Investing in the Next
Generation (RING) Artificial Intelligence (AI) Initiatives; NCAE-C Community
National Center; NCAE-C Candidates and Peer Review National Center"*

SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

SECTION I - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 GENERAL INFORMATION.** This solicitation sets forth guidelines for areas of interest in cybersecurity for academic institutions designated as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity (NCAE-C) and known as National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense, Research, and/or National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Operations (hereinafter referred to as NCAE-Cs). This solicitation is issued under Section 6.102(d) (2) of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), and under section 22.315 of the Department of War Grant and Agreement Regulations (DoWGARS), which provides for the competitive selection of proposals. Proposals submitted in response to this BAA that are selected for award are considered to be the result of competition in accordance with 10 U.S.C. 2361 and 32 C.F.R. Section 22.315 and 22.325. The National Security Agency / NCAE-C Program Management Office (NCAE-C PMO) is soliciting proposals for grants in the area of cybersecurity education from NCAE-Cs. Proposals using artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML) tools, innovative approaches, and employing input from a varied set of cyber education professionals are sought.
- 1.2.SCHEDULE.** Proposals shall be due no later than **10 April 2026**. It is expected that proposal evaluations and notifications will conclude no later than 60 days after the due date. Final award of grants can be expected in August of 2026.
- 1.3.ELIGIBILITY.** Academic institutions holding a current NCAE-C designation in good standing as defined in this section are eligible to submit a proposal. Performance on previous grant awards will be considered in awarding new grants. To be considered in good standing, the institution must meet the following qualifications:
- 1.3.1. NCAE-C designation is up to date, and in compliance with re-designation requirements;
 - 1.3.2. Current on all reporting requirements, to include annual reports and reports required by previously assigned DoW CSA, GenCyber, or other NCAE-C grant opportunities;
 - 1.3.3. Timely submission of invoices for previous grant awards;
 - 1.3.4. Attendance at required NCAE-C meetings and events per designation/re-designation criteria;
 - 1.3.5. Participation in NCAE-C activities, committees or working groups
 - 1.3.6. The NCAE-C PMO will only accept submissions from the designated NCAE-C program(s) at the institution. Interested parties outside of the designated program path(s) **must include the NCAE-C identified point of contact on campus either directly or indirectly**. Institutions holding multiple designations (CAE-CD, CAE-R, CAE-CO), may submit one proposal on behalf of those designated paths, but the identified NCAE-C point of contact for each of those programs must be included either directly or indirectly with the proposed project. An endorsement letter from the designated POC will suffice if the POC is not participating in the proposal.

1.4. MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN NATIONAL INVOLVEMENT ON GRANTS RESULTING FROM THIS SOLICITATION.

Individuals supported by a grant awarded as a result of this solicitation must be U.S. Citizens, or permanent residents admitted to the U.S. for permanent residence prior to award. It is the responsibility of the grantee to validate the citizenship of proposed individuals.

- 1.4.1. **Faculty:** Principal Investigators (PIs)/Co-PIs), Administration, Other Support Staff, research assistants, student workers, **anyone receiving a salary or otherwise benefiting financially from the grant must be a US Citizen or permanent residents admitted to the U.S. for permanent residence.**
- 1.4.2. Attendance to events/meetings/workshops/faculty development supported by this grant:
 - 1.4.2.1. Attendance to these events will be open to US Citizens or permanent residents who are members of a NCAE-C or the target audience of the grant (i.e., training for transition from military, or K-12 faculty members).
 - 1.4.2.2. If space allows, non-US Citizens may be admitted. However, they may not receive travel support, stipends, or any supporting materials beyond printed handouts (i.e. courseware provided to attendees in soft format).
 - 1.4.2.3. Presidents of NCAEs will be invited to attend an annual meeting with the DoW CIO and Commandant of NCU. Presidents of universities with grants are especially encouraged to attend this annual meeting or send an executive level representative in their stead.
- 1.4.3. The NCAE-C Grant Program Office advises grantees to be cautious of participating on a panel/board/paper committee/other event because of their grant work, where some of the members may be Foreign Nationals. The PI and/or other grant personnel should document any unusual requests for information or access to information from a Foreign National and provide this information to the PMO anytime the PI and/or other grant personnel receive unusual requests from foreign nationals. Grant personnel should take measures to safeguard intellectual property or information about critical technologies relevant to national security.

1.5. TRAVEL. **No foreign travel will be authorized.** Unless specified otherwise in a particular initiative, all proposal budgets should include, at a minimum, travel costs for grant PI to the following meetings and events for two years or for the specified length of the grant:

- 1.5.1. One meeting per year in the Baltimore/Washington area, two travel days and two meeting days.
- 1.5.2. Annual CAE-C Sponsored event/PI meeting; two travel days and two meeting days.
- 1.5.3. Annual Grants Initiatives Workshop; two travel days and two meeting days.
- 1.5.4. Annual Executive Leadership Forum (ELF): two travel days and three meeting days. Any proposed conferences or symposiums must be clearly outlined in the proposals. Conferences must be United States- based and must be related to the topic of the proposal. No foreign travel will be authorized.

1.6. **PROPOSAL.** Concise proposals addressing the University's plan are requested. Proposals must focus on the institution's commitment to the activity in the proposal, faculty and staff qualifications, and impact of the project. It is not necessary to describe the state of cybersecurity, workforce or cybersecurity education in the United States. Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with guidance provided in Attachment A, Proposal Preparation Instructions.

1.7. **AWARD TYPES, FUNDING and GRANTS MANAGEMENT.**

1.7.1. Unless otherwise noted under each initiative listed in Section 2.2:

1.7.1.1. Awards made as a result of this solicitation will be in the form of a Grant with a period of performance based on Figure 2.

1.7.1.2. Unless otherwise indicated, applicants are instructed to include a proposal for an optional third year including description of the additional year project and budget. Options are not automatic. Options will be exercised based on success of the project and subject to availability of funding.

1.7.1.3. Awards made as a result of this solicitation will include a Termination for Convenience clause that permits a unilateral termination of an award if it's no longer in the agency's interest, no longer advances program goals, or in the national interest.

1.7.2. Initiatives described in this solicitation will result in a single award made to coalitions of NCAE-C schools with one NCAE institution taking the lead and sub-awarding according to assigned responsibilities to other NCAE coalition members.

1.7.2.1. For the purposes of this proposal, a coalition is a group of schools organized under the leadership of one institution for the purposes of accomplishing a solicited initiative. The lead institution will make sub-award to other coalition members. No awards or sub- awards may be made to a non-NCAE institution.

1.7.2.2. The lead institution will be responsible to the NCAE-C Program Office for performance of all coalition partners. The proposal must be a consolidated representation of all the participating partner's contributions. Individual partner proposals will not be accepted in a combined package.

1.7.2.3. Each coalition is expected to reflect the National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity program and Community in both practice and branding, and must reflect the core values of the program (see page one of Designation requirements).

1.7.2.4. The coalition lead institution must demonstrate in the proposal that the institution possesses grants management capability through a designated grants office or grants officer and can successfully manage a coalition. This includes but is not limited to: internal financial systems, invoicing through the Maryland Procurement Office portal, identified travel processing for non-employee travelers, as well as identified salary payment processes for non-employees. Lead institutions are expected to make sub-awards and implement the initiative within 45 days of final grants approval.

- 1.7.3. Applicants currently managing active NCAE-C program grants should carefully consider current commitment levels before investing in a proposal to lead another initiative under this proposal. Any proposals submitted in this situation should clearly state how taking on this responsibility will not impact other or previous commitments.
- 1.7.4. **IMPORTANT:** NCAE-C POCs are reminded that management of any grants awarded in response to this solicitation is the responsibility of the POC, the institution's grants management business office, and institutional leadership. NCAE-C grants are awarded to the institution (not the proposal faculty lead).
- 1.7.4.1. The institution, the business office and the faculty lead are all responsible to ensure reports and invoices are submitted as required by DoW regulation. These requirements are clearly communicated in this solicitation and in the final grant awards. In cases where a faculty member other than the designated POC submits for the grant (in coordination with the POC) that individual is held equally responsible for these business actions.
- 1.7.4.2. Fiscal responsibility, both in preparing and executing any resulting budgets, is also required. Failure to meet invoicing, reporting, and budget execution responsibilities and deadlines without intervention from the PMO will adversely affect a designated institution's eligibility for other funding opportunities, such as subsequent grant offers, eligibility for exercising grant options, scholarships, or travel support.
- Invoices must be submitted within 30 business days of incurring expenses. Budget accounting/inventory should be submitted semi-annually to the NCAE program office.
 - Institutions in receipt of a grant **that do not submit invoices and reports as required may not be eligible to receive an option year.** Offering institutions should review reporting and invoicing requirements carefully, and ensure all personnel involved in managing a grant understand and are prepared to comply prior to investing the time and expense of preparing a proposal. This applies to both the lead institution that is responsible to the PMO, and to the sub-awardees.
 - Institutions requesting a no cost extension to the grant Period of Performance must demonstrate good faith effort to both complete the objectives of the grant and must have submitted all required invoicing and reporting on time and must have executed at least 65% of the original award to be eligible. Eligibility does not guarantee an extension will be granted. The process for requesting a no cost period of performance extension will be issued to grantees through the Grant Manager Handbook and the Program Director's Guide.
 - Institutions experiencing invoice processing problems with intermediary organizations should report those difficulties to the PMO as early as possible.

- The PMO reserves the right to modify or curtail grant funds in response to late or inadequate submission of reports and budgets.

1.7.4.3. The PMO is accountable to Congress, and other supporting organizations, to ensure that institutions are properly stewarding grant awards and accomplishing stated deliverables. Repeated return of large amounts of grant funding at the end of the period of performance and/or failure to perform work (i.e. complete deliverables) reflects on an institution's ability to manage federal grant awards and is taken into consideration for future grant awards:

Issue	Consequence
Failure to submit required reports, including NCAE-C program, NCAE-C grants, DoW CySP and GenCyber	3 point deduction for each delinquent report on the next grant proposal evaluation.
Failure to invoice/Outstanding grant funding	5 point deduction for each grant that has not invoiced for at least 50% or more by the mid-point of the original period of performance
Amount of funding returned on closed grants	3 point deduction for return of more than 5% but less than 10%
	5 point deduction for more than 10% but less than 15%
	7 point deduction for more than 15% but less than 20%
	10 point deduction for more than 20% but less than 25%
	Automatic ineligibility for one year for any amount over 25% or \$300,000, whichever is less

Figure 1. Consequences for failure to report, invoice, or returning funds

1.8. DELIVERABLES AND METRICS. Deliverables must be clearly identified. Metrics are important to determine return on investment and to assist in making decisions on grants management.

1.8.1. Grant proposals must clearly define measurable deliverables found in Section 2.2 that will be delivered **quarterly and at the conclusion** of the grant.

1.8.1.1. Grants producing curriculum must include a provision to submit final products to the Cybersecurity Labs and Resource Knowledge-base (CLARK) repository.

1.8.1.2. Proposals not addressing curriculum must include discussion of how the grant will contribute to the NCAE-C program, and how final grant products will be shared with the Community.

1.8.2. NCAE-C grants require quarterly reports; quarterly grant reports should include metrics and demonstrate evidence of completing or plan to complete all identified deliverables. It is anticipated the PMO will issue reporting templates for grantees that receive an award.

SECTION II - FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTIONS

2.1. GRANTS AWARD. The NCAE-C PMO will award grants for initiatives with deliverables listed in Figure 2 below to individual designated institutions or coalitions as indicated. All grant awards and future award of options are contingent upon availability of funds.

2.1.1. Proposals must reflect actual anticipated costs and must be justified. Amounts above the maximum listed below will be accepted **IF** there is sufficient justification based on reasonable costs and the nature of the proposal if in the best interest of the government.

2.1.2. The PMO is judicious in the management of funds and awards grants based on the greatest estimated return on investment. Grantees returning exceptionally large amounts at the end of the grant period due to inflated proposal estimates will be penalized (reduction in points on future proposal evaluations) from future offerings IAW paragraph 1.7.4.3.

Figure 2. Estimated amounts for Initiatives; amounts should be used as a guide, not a budget target.

Para	Title	Individual Institution or Coalition Model	Period of Performance	Maximum ²	Option Year Maximum*
2.2.1	Artificial Intelligence & Cybersecurity Curriculum	Coalition	2 Years	\$500K	\$250K
2.2.2	Artificial Intelligence & Cybersecurity Solutions	Individual or Coalition	2 Years	\$750K	\$350K
2.2.3	Research Grants	Individual or Coalition	2 Years	\$500K	\$250K
2.2.4	Regional Hubs	Coalition	2 Years	\$1.5M	\$750K
2.2.5	Regions Investing in the next Generation Artificial Intelligence	Individual or Coalition	2 Years	\$1M	\$500K
2.2.6	NCAE-C Community National Center	Coalition	1 Year	\$5M	\$750K
2.2.7	NCAE-C Candidates and Peer Review National Center	Coalition	1 Year	\$2.5M	\$750K

² See paragraph 2.1.1.; proposals may exceed maximum amounts listed in Figure 1 with adequate justification. "K" = 1,000; "M" = 1,000,000

* Subject to availability of funding.

2.2. INITIATIVES WITH DELIVERABLES:

2.2.1 Establish Cyber AI K-12 Curriculum. The PMO seeks a coalition to address improving K-12 cybersecurity education with a focus in AI literacy, AI in cybersecurity and long-term cybersecurity workforce development requirements. The grant will be awarded to a lead institution, and funding to partners will be sub-awards from the lead institution.

2.2.1.1 The objective is to provide program development and implementation assistance to the local K-12 education system to establish cyber AI education programs that equip students with essential AI skills and competencies across learning paths.

- 2.2.1.2 The coalition will collaborate with the CLARK/CAE Directory to assist in identifying curriculum currently available. All new curriculum material developed under this grant will be provided to the CLARK library.
- 2.2.1.3 The coalition will work with local K-12 education systems and appropriate educators to define curriculum requirements and identify what education programs or resources that must be developed (i.e. identify gaps), an associated timeline for meeting the identified needs, and if any additional requirements that may need to be addressed in other ways. Examples of additional requirements are below, but not limited to:
- Infrastructure and technological needs
 - Parental and Community Engagement
 - Career guidance and pathway planning
- 2.2.1.4 Manage development of new curriculum to address gaps identified in 2.2.1.3. At a minimum develop curricular materials for foundational AI literacy and AI in cybersecurity to the degree necessary to augment curriculum already developed or in development.

The coalition should plan to produce curriculum to teach AI literacy and AI in cybersecurity at the K-12 education level. Curriculum may be developed by members of the coalition or may be sub-awarded to other technical experts.

- 2.2.1.5 Deliverables for the development of all curriculum under this grant should include, but not be limited to, the following set of instructional materials.
- Exercises and assignments
 - Assessment Tools
 - Instructor's Guide
 - Lesson Plans
- 2.2.1.6 In the event the Government exercises the option year (dependent on success in years 1 and 2 and availability of funding) the option year will focus on developing long-term solutions in AI literacy and AI in cybersecurity, specifically those that develop a nationwide K-12 cyber AI education solution.
- 2.2.2 **Detecting and Countering Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence.** Individual grants will be awarded to designated NCAE-C institutions and/or partnerships of multiple designated institutions based on below requirements. In the case of partnerships, the grant will be awarded to a lead institution, and funding to partners will be sub-awards.
- 2.2.2.1 The primary objective is to research and develop solutions to detect and counter the use of malicious artificial intelligence.
- 2.2.2.2 The secondary objective is to strengthen the cyber education community's capability to understand malicious uses of AI, and malicious attacks against AI, to build US capacity to protect and defend critical systems.
- 2.2.2.3 An awarded option year (dependent on success in years 1 and 2 and subject to availability of funding) will focus on developing long-term solutions, specifically those that develop a Secure AI solution.

2.2.3 Research Focus

- 2.2.3.1 Individual grants will be awarded to designated NCAE-C institutions and/or partnerships of multiple designated institutions based on below requirements. In the case of partnerships, the grant will be awarded to a lead institution, and funding to partners will be sub-awards. These will be two-year awards; options must complement the original research and add a new dimension to the project and are subject to the availability of funding.
- 2.2.3.2 **Student Involvement.** Cyber student involvement is highly encouraged, and proposals for applied research including students are encouraged. Proposals must include description of any curriculum or benefits to students resulting from this research project.
- 2.2.3.3 **Priority Award.** The PMO will prioritize funding research activities that focus on: Cyber Hacking, Cyber Analytics, and Software Assurance.

2.2.4 NCAE-C Economic Assessment National Center

- 2.2.4.1. The PMO seeks a coalition of NCAE-C designated institutions to create the Economic Assessment National Center along with six regional hubs across the United States to gather regional data. The regional hubs will serve as a critical link between NCAE-C institutions, communities of practice and Government Agencies.
- 2.2.4.2. The Coalition lead will serve as a Economic Assessment National Center while working with six regional hubs across the United States to gather regional data. The regional hubs will serve as a critical link between NCAE-C institutions, communities of practice, and Government Agencies. Each regional hub will have a lead (sub-award).
- 2.2.4.3. The primary objective is to enhance connectivity, optimize operations, and ensure long-term sustainability between participating institutions, the National Security Agency's (NSA) Program Management Office (PMO), and the Department of War's (DoW) Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) – Cyber Academic Engagement Office (CAEO).
- 2.2.4.4. Deliverables for the national center and/or regional hubs under this grant should include, but not be limited to:
 - Development and creation of a Performance Measurement Framework in order to collect and measure success and continuously improve the NCAE-C program, which includes key metrics along with a strategic and implementation plan.
 - Identify and appoint regional hubs point of contact and leads
 - National Center will host one in person meeting annually with the regional hub leads
 - Regional hubs will host an in person regional NCAE-C meeting for their region on a yearly basis. This meeting will serve as a platform for coordination in the region as well as an NCAE-C designation ceremony.
- 2.2.4.5. An awarded option year (assuming success in years 1 and 2 and subject to availability of funding) will focus on developing long-term solutions, specifically those that further enhance the collaboration of the CAE community, NSA PMO, and CAEO.

2.2.5. Regional Investing in the Next Generation (RING) Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The PMO seeks to continue and expand the Regional Investing in the Next Generation (RING) course with the addition of a new course that has curriculum centered on artificial intelligence (AI). This effort will be a coalition of NCAE-C institutions with the grant awarded to the lead institution and funding to partners will be sub-awards.

2.2.5.1. The primary objective is to deliver a one-year course with a minimum of 150 content hours suitable for instruction at the high school level in AI topics to include Mathematics, Programming, and emerging technologies in AI.

2.2.5.2. The coalition will use the existing RING curriculum as a basis for the creation of the RING AI course and will incorporate the CAE AI Knowledge Units (KUs) in the course development. The coalition will also continually collaborate with the CAE community throughout the development and deployment of the course.

2.2.5.3. Deliverables for the development of all course curriculum under this grant should include, but not be limited to, the following set of instructional materials.

- Exercises and assignments
- Assessments
- Instructional guides
- Lesson Plans
- Interactive demos and lab activities
- Instructional slides (instructor and student version)

2.2.5.4. An awarded option year (dependent on success in years 1 and 2 and subject to availability of funding) will focus on developing long-term solutions, specifically those that add additional lessons on different AI topics and address the future requirements of cybersecurity AI secondary education.

2.2.6. NCAE-C Community National Center

The CAE Community National Center (CNC) will spearhead collaboration among designated institutions and provide administrative support. This CNC is vital for bolstering the Department of War (DoW) cyber workforce by fostering excellence in cyber education and aligning academic programs with the DoW Cyber Workforce Framework (DCWF). The grant recipient will support the entire NCAE-C network, sub-awarding funds to participating institutions. Only the lead institution submits the proposal.

2.2.6.1. The proposal must:

- Define each sub-awarded institution's role, including associated costs.
- Highlight any unique experience that qualifies each institution to participate, particularly experience aligning curricula with the DCWF and addressing critical DoW cyber requirements.

2.2.6.2. The lead institution, serving as the CNC, must have at least eight (8) years of experience in the NCAE-C program. It must demonstrate sufficient staffing and institutional support to fulfill its role and ensure adequate financial management for sub-awards to partners. The CNC's leadership is crucial for ensuring the

program effectively contributes to the DoW's ability to recruit, train, and retain a highly skilled cyber workforce.

2.2.6.3. The CAE CNC will:

- a. **Establish and manage CAE-C Communities of Practice (CoP)** for each designation. CoPs will actively engage with the DoW and Cyber Academic Engagement Office (CAEO) to update designation criteria to align to the DCWF, assist with identification of mentors/advisors/reviewers, and advance the program. The CNC may continue with current CoP leads or subaward to new CoP leads to allow for maximum participation from the entire NCAE-C community.

- CAE-R (Research): Conduct DoW-relevant research presentations which may include poster sessions or tech talks which culminate in a CAE-C Symposium presentation and publication. Focus on research areas that address critical DoW cyber challenges. Meet annually at the CAE Community Symposium.
- CAE-CO (Cyber Operations): Identify and implement capacity building and program expansion projects to grow programs and increase the number of CAE-CO schools, with a focus on aligning curricula with DoW cyber operational needs and the DoW DCWF. Meet annually at the CAE Community Symposium.
- CAE-CD (Cyber Defense): Foster collaboration, share best practices, and advance cyber education, with an emphasis on DoW cyber defense strategies and technologies. Meet annually at the CAE Community Symposium.

- b. **Planning and Management of CAE-C Annual Meetings and Seminars (FY2027).**

The CAE Community, in close coordination with the DoW and CAEO, will:

- Annual Calendar: Manage and publish the CAE-C Program annual calendar in collaboration with the DoW and CAEO, highlighting key events and deadlines.
- Annual CAE Symposium: Plan and execute the annual CAE Symposium with a participant capacity of 600, held at a NCAE-C designated institution campus facility or government-owned and operated facility (if possible). The Symposium must be live or hybrid, assuming conditions permit large group meetings. The agenda, developed in coordination with the DoW and CAEO, should include: a designation ceremony, time for CoPs to meet and present, agenda time for DoW and other Federal Government Partners, and include time or space for additional community programs such as DoW Cyber Service Academy (DoW CSA), GenCyber; and any other topics/programs supporting the NCAE-C community. It is estimated that the event will be 4-days but may

expand to 5-days if additional programs/projects need time and space.

- Job Fair: Collaborate with the National Cyber Training and Education Center (NCyTE) for a virtual annual job fair in early September.
- Virtual Regional Seminars: The CAE Community will plan and execute virtual regional seminars. Dates and topics will be determined in collaboration with the DoW and CAEO. The Community must identify a focus subject for each event, avoiding duplication and emphasizing alignment with regional DoW cyber priorities and workforce demands. Planning must specifically address target audience and participation across regions, utilizing online platforms and tools to maximize accessibility and engagement.

c. **Centralized travel reimbursements.**

The Community must manage travel reimbursements to Principals for authorized travel to NCAE-C-sponsored meetings, seminars, and training. Each designated institution may request a subsidy of \$750 to a traveler attending the CAE Community Symposium. Subsidies are limited to one per institution designation per year; if an institution holds multiple designations, and the assigned Principal is different for each designation, they may each receive the stipend. Principals who cannot attend an event may designate their stipend to a replacement attendee in writing to the CNC. The Community will apply a procedure to ensure stipend recipients have participated in the complete scheduled agenda; late arrivals, early departures and absence from agenda sessions will nullify eligibility for the travel reimbursement.

d. **NCAE-C Knowledge Unit Updates.**

The Community must maintain a mechanism to allow designated institutions to make recommendations to the CAEO on the alignment of NCAE-C Knowledge Unit content, definitions, and requirements to the DCWF. This may be a wiki maintained by a sub-award institution or may be included in the Community website. The CNC must collaborate with the DCWF Team within the DoW CIO to identify recommendations, concerns, or suggestions.

e. **Branding and publishing.**

- Standardized branding and style guide: The Community will work with the CAEO to update the NCAE-C branding and style guide at the beginning of each fiscal year. NLT January each year, the CAEO must publish the style guide to all designated NCAE-C institutions.
- NCAE-C Communications: The Community must collaborate with the CAEO on any planned press releases or other marketing activities.
- Graphics and Publication: The Community CNC must host CAEO publications on the Community website.

- Annual Yearbook: The Community must publish online an annual yearbook providing information on all NCAE-C designated institutions.
- f. **XP Cyber (formerly the NICE Challenge):**
Work with owners and developers of XP Cyber to align to the DCWF. The CNC make the tool available to designated academic institutions.
- g. **Web pages and Webinars.**
The CAE Community must maintain web pages in support of Community members and programs. The CAE CNC must collaborate with the Candidates National Center to ensure any data exports required for website population or other needs from the NCAE-C Application and Program Management Tool work in concert with CAE Community website. The Community will also maintain licenses permitting virtual webinars with capacity to accommodate all Community members, and to host events requiring virtual exhibits and multiple speakers.
- h. **Oversight of NCAE Competitions**
Continue support of the NCAE Cyber Games. Select a NCAE Competitions Resource Director to manage the NCAE Cyber Games. The Competitions Resource Director will:
 - Evaluate the competitions roadmap and identify options to align the competition to DCWF work roles. This document should clarify the value of competitions for student competency development, offer a guide to the various competitions recommended for NCAE-C programs, and student skill levels required for each.
 - Maintain a CAE framework for tracking student participation in various competitions.
 - Recommend associated badges or other micro credentials that attest the student's achievements and competencies in both competitions and other experiences.
 - Collaborate with the CAE Community to make the Cyber Games platform available outside of competition time and propose new pilot projects.
 - Execute the NCAE Cyber Games competition program annually in collaboration with regional partners. The NCAE Cyber Games should conclude annually with a national competition in the final quarter of the academic year.
 - Partner with the DoW CSA to promote the scholarship.
 - Cost estimates: Use the prevailing General Services Administration or Institution per diem rates for meals, incidentals, lodging and airfare.
 - Provide opportunities to promote pathways to DoW internships and scholarship programs as well as DoW cyber jobs.
 - An annual NCAE Competitions Recognition Program for the top

three teams competing (students and one team representative/faculty member).

- For NCAE Cyber Games, assume travel to the Washington, D.C. area for one coach and up to ten individuals per team for two days of travel and two days.

i. **Cybersecurity Labs and Resource Knowledge-base (CLARK).**

Provide support and funding to maintain CLARK as a free and open cybersecurity curricula platform.

j. Provide key metrics on CAE community activities to the CAEO data team.

2.2.7. **NCAE-C Candidates and Peer Review National Center**

Two designated NCAE-C institutions will partner to manage intake of new academic institutions into the NCAE-C program and re-designation of institutions already participating in the program. The Candidates National Center will function as the lead in this partnership and will provide sub-award to the Peer Review National Center.

The Candidates National Center is responsible for assisting applicants in preparing for designation. The institution taking on this role must have extensive knowledge and experience in the NCAE-C program designation requirements with a minimum of eight (8) years of experience in the program, experience managing mentoring and advisory programs supporting collegiate cybersecurity education programs at both Community College and University levels and must have institutional support and capability to manage funding of coalition activities and grants sub-awards.

The Candidates National Center (CNC) will:

- 2.2.7.1. Tool Maintenance: Collaborate with the CAEO and other CNCs to maintain the current tool. Ensure NCAE-C Application and Program Management Tool can work in concert with CAE Community website to allow for seamless exports of data for website population and other data usage.
- 2.2.7.2. Intake: Collaborate with the CAEO to establish processes and rubrics to intake new Academic Validation and Designation applications and Re-designation applications.
- 2.2.7.3. Application Checklist: Manage evaluation and program development plans for all academic institutions that provided an Application Checklist.
- 2.2.7.4. Advisor/Mentor Assignment: Assign an advisor or mentor for each applicant based on established processes.
- 2.2.7.5. Workshops: Provide virtual application workshops for academic institutions pursuing designation/re-designation. Workshops may be pre-recorded and offered on-demand online.
- 2.2.7.6. Program Development Plan: Establish a timeline for each applicant's program development plan, and work with mentors to ensure submission of the application within the established timeline.
- 2.2.7.7. DCWF Partnership: Partner with the CAEO and the DCWF Team to align KUs and CAE designation requirements to DoW cyber workforce requirements.

- 2.2.7.8 Peer Review CNC Partnership: Identify a designated NCAE-C institution to function as the Peer Review CNC.
- a. Collaborate with the Peer Review CNC to ensure mentors and reviewers participate in the same training and there is no conflict of interest as mentor, pre-submission reviewer, or peer reviewer for the same school.
 - b. Collaborate with the Peer Review CNC to establish an application submission and review schedule.
 - c. Provide a pre-submission review of all applications, including re-designations.
 - d. Endorse each applicant's readiness for designation to initiate the application process.
- 2.2.7.9 Provide key metrics on designations to the PMO and CAEO data team.

The Peer Review National Center

The Peer Review National Center is responsible for establishing and managing the CAE-C application process and will:

- 2.2.7.10 Collaborate with the CNC to ensure reviewers do not mentor, advise, or conduct pre-submission review for the eligible Candidate.
- 2.2.7.11 Annual Application Cycle: Collaborate with the Candidates Program CNC to establish annual application cycles. The application cycles must clearly communicate to Candidate institutions the expected application due dates, authorized processing timeline, and designation dates. Notification to Candidates will allow generous preparation time, and Candidates will acknowledge assigned cycles.
- 2.2.7.12 Review the Applicant Checklist and collaborate with the Candidates Program CNC to assign an applicant to the appropriate phase of the Candidates Program.
- 2.2.7.13 Peer Reviewers: Maintain a cadre of CAE-C Principals and experienced partners to function as peer reviewers.
- 2.2.7.14 Training: Collaborate with the Candidates Program CNCs to ensure mentors, reviewers, and pre-submission reviewers receive the same training.
- 2.2.7.15 Review Committees: Collaborate with the CAEO, NCAE-C Program Office and the Candidates Program CNC to establish review committees according to the annual application cycle requirements.
- 2.2.7.16 Application Review Rubric: Work with a team of experienced faculty to define an application review rubric to provide structure to the review process and reviewer's application adjudication.
- 2.2.7.17 Provide key metrics on designations to the PMO and CAEO data team.

SECTION III - GRANT SUBMISSION INFORMATION

3.1. **SELECTION PROCESS.** Upon submission, the NCAE-C Grant Program Office will review to ensure completeness of packages and eligibility according to paragraph 1.3. Proposals arriving without the following items will be immediately disqualified:

- 3.1.1. Correct forms and/or required documentation

- 3.1.2. Registration in the ARC and SAM prior to submission. Proof of these registrations must be included in the proposals. Screen shots of the registration are an acceptable form of proof.
- 3.1.3. The NCAE-C designated POC (as listed in the CAE Tool nsa-ncae.com/login) is included in the submission. This can be done as a letter of support, as the PI, or as a team member identified on the budget.

Proposals meeting eligibility requirements and 3.1.1 – 3.1.3 above, will be evaluated first by a panel of NSA professionals (Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)) further known as the NCAE-C Grants Board and then by the PMO office for compliance.

- 3.1.4. Once all reviews are completed, the NCAE-C Grant Program Office will notify successful grant recipients. No costs may be incurred unless and until the grantee receives a fully executed grant from the cognizant MPO Grant Officer.

3.2. **EVALUATION CRITERIA.** Proposals will be evaluated against the following criteria:

- 3.2.1. **Eligibility** - The proposal, the lead institution, and all coalition members meet the eligibility requirements listed in paragraph 1.3.
- 3.2.2. **Sound & Reasonable Methodology** - Institution demonstrates a sound method for achieving the stated goals. A timeline of activities is included as appropriate.
- 3.2.3. **Quality and Experience** - Proposals must clearly state the qualifications of the applicant and the proposed team members to fulfill the objectives of the solicitation, and certifies each participant's professional commitments allow time to perform on the grant. Coalition proposals clearly specify the role of each participant, and the lead institution provides evidence of grant management expertise.
- 3.2.4. **Deliverables** - Proposal clearly specifies plans for required deliverables, and those plans meet the required deliverables of the solicitation. The proposal acknowledges the deliverable will be provided to the NCAE-C Program Office and will be made available to the NCAE-C community as appropriate.
- 3.2.5. **Solicitation Objectives** - The proposal includes detailed description of how the proposal meets the objectives of the solicitation.
- 3.2.6. **Identified Partners** - Institutions provide contact information for project partners and clearly delineates each partner's responsibilities.
- 3.2.7. **Cost** - Institution describes reasonable costs in proportion to the scope of the proposal with appropriate supporting documentation on proposed costs for the Grant Officer to determine the cost proposed is fair and reasonable. Appropriate pricing support documentation includes but is not limited to vendor quotes, itemized receipts, payroll data, other pricing data, and substantiation of proposed indirect rates to justify the proposed costs. Absence of appropriate pricing support may deem a proposal ineligible for award.
- 3.2.8. **Project Innovation** - In cases where the solicitation specifically asks for innovative solutions, the proposal describes how this project demonstrates new ideas and/or introduces improved methods.
- 3.2.9. **Clarity** - The solicitation clearly accounts for all solicitation requirements.

- 3.2.10 **Indirect Cost Cap on Assistance Awards** – As of 14 May 2025, the DoW is implementing policies of the Indirect Rate Cap Memo regarding a 15% indirect cost cap on assistance agreements. The policies of the rate cap implementation memo will be applicable for the entirety of the award if there is a court decision permitting application of these policies.

3.3. **AWARDS** - Refer to section 1.7. above

3.4. **REPORTING**

- The awardee is required to deliver **quarterly** reports from date of award.
- The awardee is required to deliver a **final report** no later than 60 days after completion of the grant.
- If the grant is awarded an option year and/or a no-cost extension (or both), status report(s) will continue to be due quarterly (determined by the award date).
- Barring any proprietary information, the reports may be published on an internal government database to share among those doing similar work.
- Awardees will also be required to **quarterly** submit a SF-425 (Federal Financial Report) which can be found at www.grants.gov.
- Within 60 days of completion of the grant, final invoices, final reports and final SF-425 will be due.
- Awardees may be required to submit DD-882, Report of Inventions and Subcontracts <http://www.onr.navy.mil/Contracts-Grants/manage-grant/grants-forms-download.aspx>
- It is anticipated that the PMO will issue reporting templates for awardees to use to submit their reports.
- In addition to what was identified in your proposal, you agree to provide any outcomes to the NCAE-C Program Offices, DoW (Agencies and Components), and US Government Agencies/Components.

3.5. **OTHER ITEMS**

- To be eligible for an award, an organization must submit a certificate of Assurance for Non-Construction Programs and be constantly in compliance.
- As indicated in Executive Order 12549, "...Executive departments and agencies shall participate in a government wide system for non-procurement debarment and suspension. A person who is debarred or suspended shall be excluded from Federal financial and non-financial assistance benefits under Federal programs and activities. Debarment or suspension of a participant in a program by one agency shall have a government wide effect."
- The NCAE-C Program Office strongly discourages proposals that include the use of human subjects. Should the applicant believe that the proposed project would necessitate the use of human subjects the applicant must follow DoW and NSA rules and policies, and gain approval for the proposal from the institution's duly constituted Institutional Review Board (IRB). The use of human subjects is required to be

coordinated through the funding entity prior to the grantee performing any human subject research activities funded by the grant. Once coordinated, human subject research, prior to occurring, shall adhere to DoDI 3216.02, NSA/CSS Policy 10-10, and any requirement imposed by the NSA/CSS Human Protections Administrator, including review by an applicable Institutional Review Board (IRB), the IRB's determination and, post-IRB determination, Human Research Protections Official review by the grantor.

- Grants and Cooperative Agreements - As defined in the DOW Grants and Agreements Regulations, DoW 3210.6-R, a grant is "A legal instrument which, consistent with 31 U.S.C. 6304, is used to enter into a relationship:
 - Of which the principal purpose is to transfer a thing of value to the recipient to carry out a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by a law of the United States, rather than to acquire property or services of the Department of War' direct benefit or use.
 - In which substantial involvement is not expected between the Department
 - The Government is not obligated to make any award as a result of this solicitation.
 - The Government may elect to issue a unilateral award to apparent successful grantees as a result of this solicitation.
- Institutions are prohibited from contacting the NCAE-C Program Office, or other offices related to this solicitation to discuss project ideas, ask for advice on their idea, or to ask for previous examples. Any institution found contacting a Program Office employee (either in the office or after-hours) will automatically be disqualified from this grant solicitation.
- Participating organizations must fully comply with applicable Executive Orders (EO) to include EO 14151 "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Program and Preferencing", EO 14168 "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government, and EO 14332 "Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking".

3.6. **SYSTEM OF AWARD MANAGEMENT (SAM)** - SAM is the primary Government repository for prospective federal awardee information and the centralized Government system for certain contracting, grants, and other assistance related processes. All contractors must be registered in the SAM to receive solicitations, awards, or payments. To register in the SAM, you may use any one of the following methods:

- Telephone: 1-866-606-8220;
- SAM Website: <https://www.acquisition.gov>. Processing time for registration of an application submitting an application may take up to five (5) business days.
- Should you need additional information, visit their home page at: <https://www.sam.gov>.

- 3.7. **ACQUISITION RESOURCE CENTER (ARC)** - Acquisition Resource Center (ARC) Business Registry means the primary Maryland Procurement Office (MPO) repository for contractor information required for the conduct of business with MPO. "Registered in the ARC Business Registry," means that all mandatory information is included in the ARC Business Registry. By submission of an offer, the applicant acknowledges the requirement that a prospective awardee must be registered in the ARC Business Registry prior to award, during performance, and through payment of any contract resulting from this solicitation. Lack of registration in the ARC Business Registry shall make an applicant ineligible for award.

MPO established a goal of registering all contractors in the ARC Business Registry to provide a market research tool and to facilitate communication between the MPO and the contractor community. Applicants that are not already registered in the ARC should apply for registration immediately upon receipt of this solicitation.

The applicant is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the data within the ARC, and of any liability resulting from the Government's reliance on inaccurate or incomplete data. The Contractor agrees to periodically update information when previously provided information changes.

To remain registered in the ARC Business Registry after the initial registration, the Contractor is required to confirm annually on or before the anniversary of the initial registration that the information is accurate and complete.

Applicants that are not already registered in the ARC Business Registry shall register via the internet at: <https://www.nsaarc.net/ELECTRONIC INVOICING>

ALL GRANTEES MUST OBTAIN A PKI CERTIFICATE: Per the Terms and Conditions incorporated into all grants, invoices must be submitted electronically through the Maryland Procurement Office (MPO) website. Invoice submission through the MPO website is **MANDATORY** for organizations that have grants with National Security Agency (NSA). Grantees must have a current PKI Certificate to utilize this function. Hardcopy invoices will not be accepted. Be advised that hardcopy invoices will be rejected unless otherwise approved by the Office of Contracting and Accounts Payable.

Access to the MPO website requires an External Certificate Authority/Interim External Certificate Authority (ECA/IECA) PKI Certificate. Information on purchasing an ECA/IECA Certificate, including its initial and annual cost, is available on the internet at: <https://iase.disa.mil/pki/eca> (must be a Medium Assurance Certificate).

The grantee shall contact the Electronic Commerce Office at (410) 854-5445 if they need additional information. After obtaining the ECA/IECA certificate, the grantee must contact the Electronic Commerce Office to obtain an account if one does not currently exist.

Steps for Obtaining a PKI and Instructions for Invoicing Electronically:

1. Obtain an ECA Medium Assurance Certificate through either ORC, Identrust, or DoW. Certificates come in three forms either software (browser based), token (preloaded USB device), or hardware (CAC card loaded). It is the grant awardee's preference what form of the ECA certificate that is chosen. Costs range from \$100 - \$300 (per year). This process normally takes one to one-and-a-half weeks to receive the certificate. Costs may be charged as a direct or indirect cost. No additional funds will be allocated to the grant as a result of this action.
2. Once the certificate is received, contact the MPO Help Desk to request an account.
3. Contact can be via email at dialogue@ec.ncsc.mil or phone at (410) 854-5445. It takes about 20-25 minutes to create the account.
4. You will receive a welcome email entitled "Welcome to the MPO Website" that includes the user ID, password, and instructions on getting started.
5. The MPO Help Desk can provide any detailed support needed for access and submission of electronic invoices through MPO.
6. Invoices **MUST** be submitted using Standard Form SF270 as 300 dpi black and white .TIF using Group IV compression or as 300 dpi black-and-white .PDF images. Invoices shall be legible, quality, un-skewed images. Invoices shall not contain smudges, markings, shading, writing, stamps, annotation, coffee rings, highlighted data, circling, or redacted data.

3.8. **DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION** - See the proposal preparation instructions for details on the submission of proposals. Institutionally approved, signed, completed proposals must be emailed on/before midnight on **10 April 2026**.

- The institution is responsible for electronically submitting the proposal to the NCAE-C Grants Program Office at the National Security Agency by the date and time specified. Institutions should use the NCAECgrants@nsa.gov; alias to submit the proposal. The NCAE-C Grants team will acknowledge receipt of the proposal within 48 hours of receipt of the application.

3.9. **LATE SUBMISSIONS** - Late submissions will not be accepted.

3.10. **INCOMPLETE PROPOSALS** - Proposals submitted in the wrong format, using wrong forms, or missing items will be deemed incomplete and may not be considered for an award.

3.11. **CONTACT INFORMATION**

The central points of contact for information regarding this solicitation is:

NCAE-C Grants Program Office

National Security Agency

9800 Savage Road (Attn: A28)

Fort George G. Meade, MD 20755-6810

Telephone: 410-854-6206

E-mail: NCAECgrants@nsa.gov