

Frequently Asked Questions Research Announcement TRI-01: Joint TRI-University Projects

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Date	Author	Description
1.0	12/13/2019	EK	Created. Questions 1-24
1.1	12/19/2019	EK	Questions 25-28
1.2	1/22/2020	EK	Question 29
1.3	3/27/2020	EK	Questions 30-34
2.0	5/11/2020	EK	Questions 35-53
2.1	5/12/2020	EK	Revised Q2, Questions 54-55
2.2	5/15/2020	EK	Question 56
2.3	5/19/2020	EK	Question 57-60

1. Q: Who is responsible for the TRI University Research Program?
A: Eric Krotkov, Eric.Krotkov@tri.global
2. Q: When is the soonest that projects may start?
A: April 1, 2021.
3. Q: When will funding decisions be announced?
A: Approximately July 1, 2020.
4. Q: How does a university partner learn more about TRI research needs?
A: During the month of January, contact the TRI Researchers listed in Section 7 of TRI-RA-01 and discuss research topics directly with them.
5. Q: When are white papers due?
A: 3/31/2020.
6. Q: When are proposals due?
A: 5/29/2020.
7. Q: May one university subcontract to another university?
A: Yes, however the prime contractor may not charge overhead on subcontractors (double overhead is strongly discouraged).
8. Q: Principal Investigators (PIs) who are already doing the proposed research may have the required graduate students and staff on their team and may be ready to begin in Jan 2021. PIs that propose research that is new to their labs will need to recruit graduate students in February - April and would be able to start projects in September 2021. Can projects begin after January 2021?
A: Joint TRI-University projects will have periods of performance that start no earlier than January 1, 2021.
9. Q: Creating detailed binding budgets can be labor-intensive for university PIs and support staff. Can PIs submit white papers with non-binding cost estimates?
A: Yes.
10. Q: Can teams start a project later in the program, say January 2022?
A: Yes, subject to the availability of funding.
11. Q: Is TRI requesting white papers by invitation only based on TRI researcher input? Or can one propose ideas other than those submitted by TRI researchers?
A: Proposers may submit white papers based on the proposer's own initiative, and not exclusively based on TRI researcher input. Proposals aligned with TRI thrust areas are preferred, but in exceptional cases the program may consider topics with high potential despite not being strongly aligned.
12. Q: Does TRI expect that PIs who plan to submit white papers should discuss their projects with the identified TRI researchers?

A: Yes. Chances for selection and funding increase when a TRI researcher supports a research proposal.

13. Q: Does the Machine Assisted Cognition scope include search, memory, speech recognition, and/or natural language understanding?

A: No.

14. Q: How much funding is available?

A: Up to approximately \$5M/yr for joint projects.

15. Q: Section 4 (Awards) of TRI-RA-01 (Joint Research Projects) “anticipates a typical funding profile of approximately \$500,000/yr.” How did TRI arrive at this figure?

A: TRI estimated the cost as labor (2 PIs, 1 postdoc, 2 graduate students), travel, and equipment.

16. Q: How many joint projects does TRI expect to fund in this program?

A: Approximately ten (10) per year.

17. Q: Our research will require three (3) years to complete. Can we submit a proposal for a 3-year project?

A: In this case, the proposer must structure their proposal as a single base year, followed by an option for another year, followed by an option for a third year.

18. Q: How does the University Research Program handle intellectual property?

A: The Master Service Agreement between TRI and the university govern the handling of intellectual property.

19. Q: Must the base year and option year(s) be separately costed?

A: Yes.

20. Q: Section 5 (Application) requires that white papers and proposals identify the period of performance. Isn't the base period already set as 1/1/2021 – 12/31/2021?

A: Proposers must describe the schedule needed to perform the work, which must not start before 1/1/2021. Proposers may describe, for example, a base year starting 3/15/2021 and ending 3/14/2022.

21. Q: Section 5.3 (Format of White Paper) does not require budget or schedule information. Is this an accidental omission?

A: No. The intent is for white papers to address the proposed technical approach, and for proposals to describe how the proposer will conduct the proposed research.

22. Q: Will TRI allow funded projects to publish their work?

A: Yes. TRI expects and strongly encourages its university partners to publish their work. The Master Service Agreement describes the process to be followed to notify TRI about preparation of publications.

23. Q: What does TRI mean by the word “joint” in the phrase “joint projects”?

A: TRI expects funded projects to be an active collaboration between the university teams and TRI researchers. The TRI researchers will contribute their technical expertise, help direct the work to meet TRI needs, and facilitate tech transfer to TRI.

24. Q: Can a university partner with a company?

A: If necessary, a university may use individual subject matter experts at a relatively low level of effort, however, subcontracting to companies (large or small) is not in the spirit of this solicitation.

// ADDED FOR VERSION 1.1

25. Q: Can a Big 3 member share the research announcement and related information with their current TRI liaisons?

A: Yes.

26. Q: Can a university who received the research announcement share the announcement with colleagues at that university?

A: Yes.

27. Q: Is there a limit to the number of white papers that a PI may submit?

A: No.

28. Q: If capital equipment (equipment costing more than \$5K) is purchased for the research on this grant using grant funds (if it is awarded), does that equipment need to be returned to the funder once the grant period has ended?

A: The future legal agreement between TRI and the university will govern the disposition of purchased equipment. The TRI Researcher input to the TRI Legal team will be that the university should keep any equipment purchased with grant funds.

// ADDED FOR VERSION 1.2

29. Q: Will the invitation for white paper submission be issued to the University researchers? Or only to the 53 TRI listed topics (and the TRI contacts)?

A: In February, after we figure out what white papers to request, we will put a document on the TRI University Research Website listing the invited white papers, including names of the university PI and co-PIs, names of the TRI co-PIs, and title. We will send out an email to all interested parties pointing them to the document.

// ADDED FOR VERSION 1.3

30. Q: My university PI is taking funding from another company for work similar to what we are proposing for the TRI university research program. They are concerned about a potential conflict of interest. What are TRI's guidelines for this situation?

A: From a contracting point of view, the main point is that the statement of work for the TRI-funded and other company-funded efforts should differ in some clear and significant way. From an IP point of view, there should be patents that are co-owned by TRI and NOT co-owned by the other company. There should be papers that are co-authored by TRI and NOT co-authored by the other company.

31. Q: Can there be multiple university co-PIs?

A: Yes. One of them must be designated the lead PI. List this person as the University PI.

32. Q: For the cover page of the white papers, what is the 'proposer team'?

A: The proposer team consists of the University co-PIs (not including the PI).

33. Q: Is it acceptable to add a figure to the cover page?

A: The cover page should consist only of required cover page items. Figures should be added to the one-pager or, if necessary, to supplementary material.

34. Q: Should we add reference pages to the one-page white paper, or should the one-page white paper include references?

A: References are not required, although if you consider them vital you may add them. If the references do not fit within the one-page limit, you may submit them as supplementary materials.

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35. Q: Do we need a period of performance for our white papers?

A: No. The PoP is significant for the proposals and not for the white papers.

36. Q: Should the approach and objective be written separately, or can we write sub-aims with measure objectives for each?

A: Yes, you may format your white paper in this manner as long as the approach and objectives are clearly defined.

37. Q: What is the "Master Service Agreement"? (esp. for new universities, e.g., TTIC)

A: It is an industry-sponsored research agreement between TRI and the performing university. You can think of it as a contract. Typically, the sponsored research office at the university would sign it.

38. Q: Period of performance: cost, work, and milestones for 1 or 3 years?

A: Section 4 of the research announcement TRI-RA-01 shows the structure of the awards: Base Year, Option Year 1, Option Year 2. The cost proposal should follow that structure, with a proposed cost for each proposed year. The technical proposal should also follow that structure, with proposed work and milestones for each proposed year.

39. Q: Is it OK for universities to ask for computing equipment (typically gpus, cluster nodes)?

A: Yes, we are not aware of any restriction that would prevent computing equipment.

40. Q: Cost breakdown for multi-university: should it be split by university?

A: The sponsored research office at each university should provide information for that university. The cost proposal should aggregate the subtotals for each university into a total for the proposed project.

41. Q: Is it OK if a PhD student / PostDoc is funded by multiple sources?

A: Yes, this is acceptable.

42. Q: In the case of a "Big 3 + Pool" collaboration, is there a reason TRI would prefer the "Big 3" U as primary?

A: If it provided a financial benefit compared to the alternative, then yes.

43. Q: Is 0% salary OK?

A: Yes. As long the investigator makes a definite commitment to perform their proposed role on the project.

44. Q: How precise should the definition / commitments of performance metrics be?

A: As precise as reasonably possible. This will vary widely from project to project. Most of the effort should go into formulating milestones for the year ahead, rather than two or three years ahead.

45. Q: With multiple TRI researchers officially on the project, is the TRI involvement / work planned expected to be 20% FTE (sum of TRI's) or 20% per TRI researcher, or flexible on a case by case basis?

A: The time commitment may vary from person to person. TRI researchers need approval for the proposed effort, whatever fraction that is, from their manager.

46. Q: Does the budget correlate to the number of PIs in the project?

A: In general, the cost proposal should include all the labor and materials needed to perform the proposed work. If the project requires multiple PIs, then the cost proposal should include them all.

47. Q: Are there guidelines to estimate the cost to build your own hardware?

A: TRI does not have guidelines to offer. The experience with the actual costs of similar projects may be the best guide in this situation.

48. Q: For projects from the University of Michigan: We have been given a proposal deadline by administrators of May 22nd, and the official TRI website defines a proposal deadline of May 29th – Which is correct?

A: May 22nd is an internal deadline to allow administrative review by University of Michigan. TRI's proposal deadline remains May 29th.

49. Q: University 1 uses a Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC) overhead rate with regard to subcontracts, in that subcontracts issued to a subcontractor incur overhead at Uni. 1 on the first \$25k of the subcontract amount only, and this is to cover the costs of administering the subcontract. The balance of the subcontract above the first \$25k does not incur overhead at Uni. 1, but does incur overhead at the subcontract organization, per their own overhead policy. So, there is some overlap in overhead charges, but only on the first \$25k, per our MTDC policy. How shall we proceed?

A: Please prepare the cost proposal using MTDC.

50. Q: Is overhead allowed?

A: Yes, overhead is allowed. Please use the audited and approved overhead rates you customarily use.

51. Q: Is domestic and international travel allowed?

A: Yes, if necessary.

52. Q: What is the earliest date the project can start?

A: April 1st, 2021.

53. Q: Are Students / Postdocs, travel, equipment, summer salary for PI, and summer undergraduate funding allowable budget items?

A: Yes, all of these items are allowable.

// ADDED FOR VERSION 2.1

54. Q: If a multi-university project is approved, will the subcontractor be funded through the prime university?

A: The subcontract university should prepare their portion of the cost proposal and submit it to the prime university. The prime university will collect all costs and prepare the budget for the whole project using MTDC. The costs incurred by the subcontractor will come from the subcontractor total, and the costs incurred by the prime university will come from the prime university's total.

55. Q: Should the budget be done on a yearly basis?

A: Yes, the budget should be broken down year by year.

// ADDED FOR VERSION 2.2

56. Q: Can you confirm what should be in the travel budget for each year?

A: There will be three (3) annual meetings: For the purposes of preparing the cost proposal, assume the following:

- A PI meeting in San Francisco, California on Tuesday – Thursday of the first week of April
- A site visit meeting at the university in September or October with 10 Toyota personnel
- A Review meeting in Atlanta, Georgia on Tuesday – Thursday of the second week of January

Note that this assumption is for costing purposes, and that the locations of the PI meeting and the Review meeting are subject to change.

For Stanford proposals, no travel will be required for the PI meeting. Similarly, for Georgia Tech, no travel will be required for the Review meeting.

// ADDED FOR VERSION 2.3

57. Q: Are applicants allowed to change their title for the proposal phrase?

A: Yes, as long as the PI and the TRI Co-I concur.

58. Q: How are performance and technical milestones used?

A: PI teams will use the milestones to plan the work and track their progress. TRI will use the milestones to track and evaluate the progress.

59. Q: Do you need University-Level sign off by the May 29th deadline?

A: No, that would happen during the award process, which will begin around July 1st, 2020.

60. Q: How should multi-university proposals be handled so that the sponsored project offices of each university are able to evaluate the proposal?

A: We have made a change to address this in section 5.4.4 of TRI-RA-01. The cost breakdown should be prepared by the business office that typically prepares detailed budgets for the University Principal Investigator. That business office may be situated in the department or the college or the university. That business office may be the sponsored research office, but that is not required. Once we have completed the proposal selection process, we will require official cost proposals from the sponsored research offices.