

2026-10-13 University-Based ITACs Informational Webinar Transcript

Christi Pezzone 0:21

Good afternoon, everybody. We're going to get started here in a couple of minutes. We are going to want everybody to come in from the lobby. So, we will get started in just a few.

All right, we're going to go ahead and get started. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to our Informational Webinar for the University-Based ITAC Opportunity. My name is Christi Pezzone. I am the Deputy Director here at EnergyWerx.

A couple of notes. No AI bots. They won't be allowed into the call. If we do find they've somehow slipped in, we're going to have to remove them from the call. That's just DOE's requirement. Next slide, please.

You can submit all your questions via Slido. This is an information session, so it will be time to address some questions after a briefing from the program office on the University-Based ITAC Opportunity. With the Slido information, you can either scan the QR code on your screen or go to slido.com and enter #UBIW1. And that should get you to the Slido. From there, you can see that there's already several questions that have been asked. If you want to take a scan through those and upvote any question that you might also have, that would be super helpful to us. Instead of asking a separate question, we would appreciate that. So if you could take some time to go through all those questions, that would be fantastic. And upvote any that you would like to hear an answer to.

We do have a lot of questions in there already, so we might not get through all of them today. As a reminder, today's session is being recorded and will be posted online after the session has wrapped up. The Q&A will also be posted as well once DOE has time to review it. So that'll probably be in about a week. And we will also answer any questions that we did not get today from this Slido. A few upcoming key dates, [applications close Friday, October 30th, 2026, at 3:00 PM Eastern](#)

Standard Time. If you have any application issues, please reach out to info@energywerx.org. We'll be posting that in the chat as well so you have that. If you have any questions about your application or any other questions that weren't asked here today and we don't answer once we have time to post the Q&A up, we are happy to get an answer for you. Next slide, please.

Moving on to the overview portion of the webinar, I will be turning it over to John Smegal from DOE's Office of Critical Minerals and Energy Innovation from the Analysis and Strategy Office. John, over to you.

Smegal, John 3:56

Okay, thank you very much, Christi. My name is John Smegel, and I oversee the University-Based ITAC program and have done so for the past 16 1/2 years. I want to try to give an update on the pending competition, the re-compete as it were, and try to answer as many questions as I can. I think just for the interest of time, some of the answers we'll get back to you on because we want to make sure we get through them all and then get through the entire presentation and then have an opportunity at the end for some questions that are burning on your mind only because I do have a hard stop at 3:00. So at that point, we will shut things down, but there will be plenty of opportunities for folks to submit questions, and we will be responding to all of them ultimately and posting them so that you can get them just by getting back onto the [Opportunity page](#). All right, so next slide.

Okay, I'm going to run through quite a very minimal overview of the program. I'm going to walk through the solicitation and the objectives and run through some of the requirements, eligibility requirements, expectations, and review criteria and then get through the very, very nitty gritty down at the granular level, the kinds of things that we're going to be expecting, pages to be submitted, sections to be submitted, attachments, all that sort of thing.

Again, all of these are laid out on the Submittable [application](#) page as well, but we'll just run through that one more time formally here for posterity's sake. And then at the end, wrap it up with some questions and answers. Okay. Next slide, please.

The ITAC, formerly known as the IACs, are located across the country. They provide assistance, that is the University-Based ITAC, provide assistance to small and medium-sized manufacturers help them save energy, reduce waste, improve productivity, strengthen their competitiveness. And while we're doing that, we're training a cadre of what we refer to as the next generation of energy engineers at these universities.

There are other components broadly defined to the ITAC program, which we are not talking about here. That would be what we used to refer to as the expansion ITAC. Now we refer to it as the career ITAC. That's much more of a workforce development, technician level training. This is just the University-Based ITAC. So all told, there's 80 plus or so current ITAC, including both ends of the program. But right now, we're talking about the traditional University-Based ones, the ones that have been around essentially for 50 years in various iterations. And they are the ones, if you look at the map, they're the ones with the dark black dots. That's where they're currently located. So, across from east to west and from north to south. All right, next slide.

The University-Based ITAC competition/selection, we have 36 current centers that are operating and they are running through to the end of their five-year period. We have historically recompeted the program every five years. The existing centers all have their end of period of performance on December 31st, 2026.

ASO, which is where I work, we're going to instead of use the traditional sort of NOFO, notice of funding opportunity or FOA, funding opportunity announcement approach, we're running through the PIA, the partnership intermediary agreement with EnergyWerx, to make selections in the interest of expediting the procurement process. It's a lot neater, cleaner, leaner. You'll see when we get into the discussion later, for those of you that have been around and gone through this process before, the documents required are much shorter. It's much quicker review time. As you all know, we're kind of doing this quickly. But we should be able to do so because of the many streamlined advantages that the partnership, the PIA agreement provides.

We're going to be selecting them in similar fashion to past, even though we're doing it through this new procurement mechanism. We're going to do it in the same way. It's A five-year period of performance. Five consecutive one-year periods, go and

ungo kind of circumstance. That's what we're going to be doing. And as a new given administration priority, we are having a new, let's call it a hybrid ITAC.

The traditional ITAC basically works with small, medium-sized manufacturers. The new hybrid is going to be working with mining and mineral processing operations. So, there's two tracks. One is the traditional manufacturer, and then track two is going to be working with mining and mineral processing operations. We're going to, as a general target guideline, we're looking at 10 to 20% of the selections we're going to be making will be falling into this track to assuming applications that warrant selection, but that's the goal. So, we're not going to essentially have the new varieties or overwhelm the traditional variety. At most, it's going to be 20%. And it could be somewhere, in between 10 and 20% of the overall selections are going to be on the track two, as opposed to track one, which are traditional centers. Okay, next slide.

Okay, eligibility. Always important. The first one is broadly defined. It applies to most applications under the partnership intermediary agreement. And that is effectively, you must be a domestic entity, clearly. You must be organized, chartered, incorporated, or otherwise formed somewhere within the United States, and you must have a majority domestic ownership and control. We're talking about universities here in this case, so it's not ownership so much, but we understand what we mean by that when it's applied in a university context. And you need to be in good standing for federal program participation, meaning you must not be on somebody's naughty person list for having had problems in the past or something like that. So those two entities are eligible to apply. And, they must be, as an entity, you must certify that you're not owned, controlled, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a government of a country at risk. I used to know all the countries at risk, I don't off the top of my head, but we can and we'll provide those specific countries listed in various documents. And in any event, we're talking about domestic operations, so that is, but it is a relevant criterion for eligibility. Okay, next slide.

This one is in addition, is one that we've traditionally used, so it is meaningful in the sense that it provides a certain level of consistency. We are looking at institutions of higher education. They must be colleges or universities. They have to have at least one of their four-year undergraduate engineering

programs accredited by ABET or equivalent, and they must be located, that is the applicant itself, has to be located within the engineering department that holds the accreditation, and they have to be physically located in the United States. That seems a little convoluted, but the point is essentially, to use a very bad analogy, the English department at a university that has an ABET accredited engineering program cannot apply for the ITAC program. It must be the actual applicant who has to be in the engineering department that has the accreditation. And similarly, if you're ABET accredited for something other than engineering, that also doesn't wash the engineering program has to be a better credit. All right, very, very central important eligibility requirements within this solicitation. Next slide, please.

As I referred to earlier, there's two tracks. The traditional, that's what I refer to them just for convenience, traditional ITAC is a university selected to operate. They're going to continue doing what they've been doing for the past 50 years, essentially, which is providing tech assistance to small and medium-sized manufacturers. They're operating, it's SIC codes 20 through 39. I inadvertently eliminated food manufacturing, which was not the intent, as well as wastewater treatment plants, because that's something we've been doing now for more than 10 years. They have gross annual sales below 250 million, fewer than 500 employees, and annual energy bills between 100K at 3.5 million.

The second track is a parallel. Its basic structure is consistent with the traditional variety meetings located in engineering and within the accredited department we're looking at. They provide technical assistance to small, medium-sized enterprises, not manufacturers anymore, located within SIC codes 10 through 14 and 32, which is mining, that's 10 through 14, and then mineral processing operations. The gross sales below 250 million, and then fewer than 500 employees. That's the general goal. And I will talk about some subtleties about this as we get further on, and there might be some questions on this as well. But these are the guidelines that we provide.

These are guidelines, they're not hard and fast, thou shalt not do. There is a certain amount of wiggle room in these things, but this is where we're targeting. And the reason being, essentially if folks are asking us, because we're in the business of providing tech assistance to smaller folks that actually need it and can't necessarily afford to pay for it. We're not in the business of providing technical assistance to

companies that could easily go ahead and procure their services by just guiding somebody to contract with. So that's part of the reason why we do this, is to essentially help the little guys, not the behemoth companies that are out there. We're trying to work with smaller entities, not big ones. All right, next slide.

Okay, so you'll see as we go through these next couple of slides, you'll see some strong consistency between these. There's 4 criteria that we're using to evaluate the project management approach, project team and past performance, teaching, training, workforce development, job quality, and that's consistent with, essentially the focus, the two-pronged focus of the ITAC, which is technical assistance on one side, and workforce development, i.e. engineers on the other side. So, it's important that we look at teaching, training, workforce development, and job quality functions. And then the last one is project resources, which is a broad category, defining looking at the financial resources, the commitment of the university, and subsequent and other ancillary entities that are going to be providing assistance.

These are the four things. The specific description there is, if you were to look on the website, this would be what you'd see. Looking at goals, objectives, responsibilities, looking at the use of tools, the proposed work plan, all the basic stuff that you need to do a good job, work plan milestones, looking at strategies to address potential risk, risk mitigation. We obviously clearly look at the qualifications of the proposed staff and faculty, their expertise in working with small, medium-sized manufacturers, and their ability to provide, you know, high-quality training to our students. Look at how we're going to be doing that training and the third criteria. And then again, I've touched on the resources tab as well. Now, next slide.

You'll notice on track two, obviously the weighting and the titles are the same. So, it's not significantly different, but what you will see is we have substituted instead of SMMs, we're talking about mining mineral processing operations. So realistically speaking, that's the difference between track one and track two. Not surprising, so I'm not going to go into great depth. The discussion I just provided in terms of this two-prong nature of providing tech assistance to smaller enterprises in this case, instead of small manufacturers and training those next generation of mining and mineral processing engineers. It's the same theme, it's just reflected in slight differences in wording with respect to what comes after the dash that lays that out in

track two, we're talking about mining and mineral processing, whereas in track one, traditional, we're talking about manufacturing.

All right, so that's realistically laying out the criteria, but there is a strong degree and is obviously deliberate between the two tracks in terms of overall vision and approach, because the ITAC model, as demonstrated by 50 years of success, we believe is a strong model that can be adapted to address the mining and mineral processing. So, there'll be strong areas of consistency with some tweaks around the edges because we're talking about different recipients and different types of students, but ultimately, they're still engineers. Okay, next slide.

Now we're getting down to the nitty-gritty. **[Applications](#) are due October 30th, at 3:00 PM Eastern Time.** You need to submit the full [application](#) in Submittable, which is the site. There's a set of questions that you must answer first that go along with that, and then there's the actual application itself. The technical approach, the project narrative as we call it. We also want you to include one-page resumes for all the key staff, letters of commitment for folks that are providing cost share, or are there other entities that you feel would be relevant for letters of commitment, and a very streamlined budget in a standard format that is not nearly, for those of you who've gone through the processes of past applications, The budget workbook was multi, multi, multi tabs and a very, very detailed. This is a lot more streamlined and again, consistent with the overall approach to the PIA, which focuses on overall pictures, big pictures, and trying to make the process not so onerous on applicants.

And sometimes, the federal application process can be a bit daunting to folks, particularly those that are new to the process. And we want to eliminate some of those barriers and obstacles. And that's definitely one of the reasons why we strongly move towards the PIA, because we have found already, because we've done this now, numerous times with other entities, we get a much higher response rate and we get much larger group of applications for this and it really benefits most of the ultimate selections, although it makes it a little bit harder on the application reviewers because there's a lot more of them. But we find that the benefits of having this streamlined process far outweigh any of the additional burden that we face as reviewers. So, all right, next slide.

Okay, key timelines. October 13th, informational webinar. That's where we are today. The Opportunity was released not quite two weeks ago. **[Applications](#) due on October 30th, 2026, at 3:00 PM EST.** We are looking to make selections announced in December. I know that given the fact that there's Thanksgiving and Christmas in this period, that it's going to be murder on us. But rest assured, we'll figure it out because we all recognize that we are trying to get a new group of ITAC up and running as soon as possible after the old sunset. They all turned into pumpkins on December 31st, 2026. And we want to have the new group up as soon as possible. And that's why we're looking at January 2027 as being when the activities start up. And we'll do what we can to do with that. If that involves a lot of work on Thanksgiving week and Christmas week, well, we'll just deal with it. That's the situation we're in. So hopefully it'll all come out in the end. All right, and next slide.

Okay, so I'm going to pause for a second and I want to defer to the folks at EnergyWerx who are going to perhaps moderate the question-and-answer stuff and we'll move on from there. I tried to go through it as quickly as possible to leave as much time for questions. So hopefully that's okay with you, Christi.

Christi Pezzone 21:41

Yeah, that's perfect. Right now, we have 63 questions. So, we're going to try to get through as many of these as possible. We're going to give Grace a quick second to pull up the Slido. As a reminder, you should enter all your questions on slido.com using the code UBIW1 or use the link in the chat.

Smegal, John 21:44

Okay.

Christi Pezzone 22:02

I did want to point something out quickly after scanning through the questions. This is a firm fixed price agreement that you will have with EnergyWerx. Your agreement will not be with the Department of Energy. It will be with EnergyWerx directly, and it is a milestone based fixed price agreement. So, I know that there are some questions about direct costs and indirect costs. Everything is milestone based and there will be set reimbursement amounts probably quarterly, if I had to guess, to disperse the

funding. We are not concerned with direct and indirect costs. It's just one firm fixed price. You will get the funding in arrears after you have completed the milestone. So, Grace, I will turn it over to you.

Grace Zona 22:47

Thank you, Christi. We will start with the first question.

Previous iterations of the program expected 20 assessments per year. Does track one have a minimum or expected number of assessments per year? Would an applicant proposing 12 assessments per year still be considered fully competitive or would proposing fewer than 20 negatively affect the application?

Smegal, John 23:10

The short answer to that is we have a historical target that we try to get to. It is not a firm fixed number, so we say about 20. It typically involves a range because we recognize that there are differences in regions and differences in considerations, so we have a range. We aim for around 20, but it is not the case that proposing less than that would necessarily be a problem. If you proposed 3, it probably would be an issue because three is a lot less than 20. But no, it is not a firm fixed thou shalt. That's just a general target we've used.

Also, and this is very important, this is the way the program has always worked. When we get a new center, because they must spend time bringing students on, getting things up to speed, getting everybody organized, there's some training involved. We acknowledge that year one is a different story from the remaining. So even if we recognize what we're trying to get towards, and I'm going to throw it out there, but again, it's not a hard "thou shalt not get less than" that kind of thing. If we're trying to get to 20, the first year we're not going to get there. So, we're going to have a number that's much lower than that. And that would be worked out through the negotiation process one way.

We're working with EnergyWerx setting it up, getting your SOPO in place. So, we get a number that's much more reasonable and allows you to feasibly have several months of getting up to speed time. So, we recognize that that's different for the first year. Next question.

Grace Zona 24:46

Perfect. Thank you, John.

How will funding be disbursed under the B2B agreement? Will payments be tied to specific milestones/deliverables? If so, will payment amounts for specific deliverables be standardized across Track 1 centers or negotiated individually?

Smegal, John 25:04

The answer there is subject to some nuances. They'll be fairly standardized realistically. I can imagine maybe a couple circumstances where you might have a little bit of variation, but our intent is to try to standardize them across all the track one centers.

Grace Zona 25:26

Thank you.

is the \$375k/year/track a strict requirement per year or just an average of \$375k/year across the 5 years?

Smegal, John 25:38

I think the \$375K is very much like the 20 number. It's a number that we use from budgeting standpoints to establish how much money we have, expect to spend overall, given our congressional appropriation, because that's another thing. The ITAC program is congressionally on an annual basis appropriate. We work with what resources we have.

Historically, because in my opinion, of the excellent work that we've been doing for 50 years, we've had a lot of support. And so, we tend to get stable funding. But I think we're looking at that's our target per year. And it could vary a little bit, but that's our target per year across each of the five years.

Grace Zona 26:30

Perfect, thank you.

"coordination, leveraging and building upon existing DOE and state programs" is encouraged. How is this coordination expressed without Letters of Support? This coordination is support not warranting a Letter of Collaboration.

Smegal, John 26:48

The letter of support, in my opinion, is the same thing as the letters that we're asking for, letters of commitment. That would be my reading on that question. So, it would be demonstrated and expressed through the submission of those one-page letters. Admittedly, they're going to have to be brief because they're one page, but that's how that would be demonstrated.

Grace Zona 27:19

Thank you.

Does the \$375K/year have to be spent each year or is rollover allowed?

Christi Pezzone 27:29

This goes back to it being a firm fixed price award that's milestone based. So, you'll get paid as you complete the milestones. So, we don't, we're not really concerned if there's rollover or not. If there's additional funding left, then it should be used for the program, but we will not be auditing to make sure that all of the funding was spent in the year in which it was sent over to each facility.

Grace Zona 28:03

Thank you.

If an institution applies for both Tracks, is it possible for them to be awarded either Track 1 or Track 2 but not both? Or will one decision be made regarding their entire application?

Smegal, John 28:13

Very good question. And the answer is yes, they cannot get one, they can get the other, or they can get both. But if they apply for both, they are not judged as a group. They must get both or none.

Even if you submit for both, you can be selected for track one, track two, or track one and two. But it is not a requirement that if you submit for one and two, that you must be either given or not given both tracks. So yes, individually or group is fine.

Grace Zona 28:47

Thank you.

What is the basis of the 20% cost share? Is that 20% of the proposed federal outlays, or 20% of the total award amount (federal + cost share)?

Smegal, John 28:58

Historically, the ITAC program has had a 20% cost share. I mean, this goes back before certainly has been in my entire tenure and I believe it predates that. So, 20% is what we've always liked.

Grace Zona 29:20

What is the number of assessments expected of centers per year and per track?

Smegal, John 29:26

Well, we talked about it earlier. Again, from a planning standpoint, for established or existing centers that happen to be reselected because there's no guarantee. Incumbency doesn't guarantee selection. They would somewhere be in the range in that in the right around 20 for track one. For track 2, the answer is less than that, simply because we recognize that there are likely to be higher costs associated with those assessments because of just geography. I can't give you an exact number. It's going to be a range, but it'll be less than 20 on an annual basis.

And then back to my initial caveat that I talked about early on, for brand new centers that are getting up to speed. So basically, all the track two, because they're going to be brand new centers in track 2 and track one, new centers, the expectations are going to be lower for that first year. So, they're going to have to literally build up their center of their existence, hiring students, getting things in place. It's going to take them time to do that. And that'll take away from the amount of time they have during a particular year to do assessments. So that first year, the number is going to be lower. And that will be negotiated through EnergyWerx.

Grace Zona 30:39

Thank you, John.

Can faculty effort, existing lab facilities, equipment usage, and innovation

center resources count toward the 20% cost share? What documentation is required?

Smegal, John 30:51

I'm going to have to take this one offline because I think there's some subtle points there. There's not a cost share expert, but there's general guidance, which I think we've provided to some of the written comments that there's some federal rules or, you know, 20 CFR or something like that, that layout cost share acceptance. But I'm not going to answer this one right now because again, I'm going to have to go ahead and dig in and provide specific aspects of cost share so we can provide a more detailed and accurate answer to this question.

Grace Zona 31:22

Perfect. Thank you.

Can the university support the 20% cost share in terms of faculty time and materials?

Smegal, John 31:31

Similar to the last one, you know, providing a detail. But I will say this, that historically, faculty time in-kind, in-kind benefits or in-kind costs have been used in the past as a cost share. So yes, the answer is that it's very likely that that would be a way in which many universities would demonstrate cost shares through faculty time and materials. But with a specific detailed answer, I will make sure we provide that based on a little bit more looking at the fine print in all the documents that govern cost share.

Grace Zona 32:10

Perfect. Thank you.

Are you expecting to renew for most of the current 36 active centers?

Smegal, John 32:17

We don't have expectations about that. The only thing that dictates whether you're selected or not is realistically the quality of the application. So, the incumbency, as I alluded to earlier, it's an existing thing, but it is no guarantee. Every time we've done

the re-compete, there are centers that are existing centers that are not selected. And every time we've done the re-compete, there are new centers that enter the frame. That's just the way it is.

Grace Zona 32:42

Thank you.

Are non-cost share letters reviewed? (i.e. letters of support that include non-monetary support to the proposed centers)

Smegal, John 32:53

I think that's fine. I can't recall off the top whether we had a specific limit on the number of letters of support. I think we just said they all had to be one page and but I don't recall whether we had a limitation on the number of letters that could just like resumes. I don't think we said you can only submit certain number of resumes, so the answer is if you feel that you have a letter of support that does not involve cost share and you think it enhances your application, then submit it. It is not a question of permit or not permit or review or not review if you submit them.

Grace Zona 33:36

Perfect.

It appears that if an entity wants to submit for two tracks that there is only one set of documents that should be compiled, however it appears that there are two different portals for submitting (one per track). If an entity wants to submit for both tracks should they be submitting twice or once?

Smegal, John 33:40

Okay, good question. And this is basically the way that the thing is structured. The idea was to not make everyone, because there would be some, if an entity was submitting for both tracks, there would be some common resources that might not be doing elaborated to have essentially A 10-page application and then another 10-page application, we set 15 for the total. But then what we realize is, since there are two submission portals, you're going to submit one proposal that covers track one and track two, and you're going to submit it twice. It's going to go into both. And we'll just review it once, but because we have no other way around it, we have to submit the portal or submit the same application twice.

Sorry, if I had been thinking a little bit better, I could have figured out a way, but that's just that's what we're having.

Grace Zona 34:46

Perfect. Thank you, John. **Previous calls reserved \$25,000/yr towards faculty and student research awards, is that still the case?**

Smegal, John 34:55

TBD on this one. I personally love that whole research award things. And I will say that the research awards are much more amenable with this fixed cost approach. We all had to struggle with it before when we had optional funding. It's very complicated. So, yeah, that's all I would say. TBD.

Ultimately, I mean, to add a little bit more, the specifics would be would be worked through in in negotiations with EnergyWerx.

Grace Zona 35:36

Perfect, thank you. **If an educational institution is interested in both Track 1 and 2, does the combined package with the extended length require a single budget or two budgets? If it is a single budget, is the maximum funded amount 2x\$375,000 or \$750,000 per year?**

Smegal, John 35:56

The answer is yes, single budget as they submit twice. And the answer is yes, 2 times \$375K, so \$750K would be the total.

Grace Zona 36:07

Thank you. **Are postdoctoral researchers eligible to receive salary support under a Track 1 award? If so, are there any restrictions on the roles or activities that may be supported (e.g., conducting assessments, supervising students, research, or program administration)?**

Smegal, John 36:19

That's also one I'm going to have to figure that one out online, because I know that the existing program has plenty of graduate students that are involved. I don't know

if we have postdocs, but I must do a little research, but I can't answer that question off the top of my head either. Historically, we have about 75% of the students who are undergraduate and 25% are graduates. That may vary at this situation based on, you know, for track two, I don't know if there's a different mix that exists and that's not required that they be 75, 25. Certain centers have a higher percentage of graduate students than undergraduate. It's kind of up to personal preference, but I will look into the postgraduate question and try to provide an answer specifically on Slido.

Grace Zona 37:18

Thank you.

Grace Zona 37:32

Does DOE require 20% of Total Project costs or 20% of Total Direct Costs?

Smegal, John 37:39

As was alluded to earlier, not relevant. It's just the total cost because there's no distinction between direct cost and project cost in this thing. It's the firm fixed price deliverable-based contract.

Grace Zona 37:41

Perfect, thank you. **If a single lead university applies to and is selected for both Track 1 and Track 2, will each track be considered a separate ITAC for purposes of the \$375,000-per-center annual funding limit, allowing a combined maximum federal allocation of \$750,000 per year?**

Smegal, John 38:08

The answer is yes. It's \$750K, \$375K per, \$750K total.

Grace Zona 38:16

Thank you.

Would letters from state economic development offices, manufacturing associations, and industry partners be considered if they commit to specific outreach, industry recruitment, workforce development, or coordination activities without requesting project funding?

Smegal, John 38:33

Again, this kind of echoes a similar comment or a question earlier. If you feel it helps your application, submit it. We didn't put any specific restrictions on the letters of commitment and what their content was. We assumed that many would involve or most would involve some sort of cost share, but it is not required. That is just letters of commitment. That's it's up to you to interpret how you want that.

Grace Zona 39:00

Thank you.

Does DOE consider geographic proximity to existing ITAC centers when evaluating new applications? For example, could a university in South Florida establish a new center even though another university in the same region already operates an ITAC?

Smegal, John 39:16

We only consider regional because we're trying to cover the entire country, but this is a clean slate. Again, existing centers are back at square one. So, there's no penalty for someone applying for what is an existing center because essentially as of December 31st, 2026, there are no existing centers. And if you were just to look at the map, there are centers that are disparate and there are centers that are close. A lot of it depends on the quality application and the, let's call it the industrial demographics. If there's a lot of manufacturers in the area, we've historically been able to justify two strong centers operating in relatively close proximity. There are examples right now that if you looked at the existing map, that happens. I have no reason to believe it wouldn't necessarily apply to the hybrid that is track two. But again, we'll see. It's all about the quality of applications. Not necessarily whether they're near each other.

Grace Zona 40:27

Must the center director hold tenure?

Smegal, John 40:30

We look at tenure track or professors of practice is what the rules that we use. It's not necessarily a tenured professor, but you have to be a professor of practice or tenure

track kind of situation. But no, you do not have to have tenure to be the center director.

Grace Zona 40:48

We have lined up assessments beyond our contract number, shall we schedule them after the program is renewed?

Smegal, John 40:54

I think that's not entirely relevant question. I'm not going to answer that one here because basically what it is a presumption that an existing center is going to be re-selected. So, if you're confident you're going to get selected, you could go ahead and do that, but it's not going to be a guarantee that you're going to be selected.

Grace Zona 41:24

Sounds good. **Is Track 2 intended to include oil and gas extraction facilities (SIC 13)? Or should these be excluded to maintain a focus on mining and mineral processing?**

Smegal, John 41:30

Good question. I think that I will provide a more detailed answer to this question as I consider it, but I think the intent clearly is to focus on mining mineral processing, not essentially oil and gas, but maybe there's some oil and gas extraction that involves mining.

So, let's just call it the intent is to be mining mineral processing, not oil and gas extraction, but we'll provide a formal official answer to this question going forward.

Grace Zona 42:11

Perfect.

The budget spreadsheet doesn't have cells for cost share. Is there a required upload like the DOE budget justification (such as OMB Control Number: 1910-5162) in this stage of the application? If not does that follow selection, with the details of where 20% is coming from later?

Smegal, John 42:33

We've revised this budget spreadsheet since this question has been submitted. It's got a row and subsequent rows that could be added if you really want to in your demonstration of cost share if you need to.

The budget spreadsheet is again streamlined and simplified, and it allows you if you wanted to add a few extra rows to somehow differentiate your sources of cost share. That's fine, but you could just have one row that just has cost share and it's at the bottom of the revised spreadsheet. So, it is there now.

Grace Zona 43:02

Thank you.

What is the funding mechanism for DOE FFRDC/National Laboratories as a partner?

Smegal, John 43:12

Historically, the way it works with the PIA is they can't be prime selectees under a PIA, but they can be sub-selectees, but the funding doesn't go through the PIA. We fund the labs, and this is a common occurrence, but we fund the lab separately, not through the PIA. The amount that would be funded if they were a sub-recipient would be counted against the overall award amount. So, if you had as a partner some national lab and they were doing something for you, whatever amount that was designated for them in the budget would be removed from the \$375K total, and then that would be counted. It would be an overall reduction in that. But it does happen. It's unusual, but it does theoretically happen. It is, I believe, allowed under that circumstance where, because I don't believe the PIA is allowed to send money to a national lab, it has to be done through a different mechanism.

Mahmoud, Mustafa 44:13

Yep. And I would just add that if a lab is a partner, potentially a self-recipient, that the amount that they can receive through that award or that selection is capped at 10% of the award amount. So, 10% of the \$375K, theoretically.

Smegal, John 44:27

Yeah.

Thank you, Moose, for that clarification, because I did not know.

Grace Zona 44:37

Thank you.

Would the new program be compatible with a no-cost extension of the current program for an existing center? Could this be worked out in negotiations?

Smegal, John 44:49

This is going to be a clean slate circumstance. We're just starting brand new. So, because the PIA and a cooperative agreement are two separate animals, there's no need to be harmonizing.

Grace Zona 45:05

Is there a SOPO expected in the proposal, though there is no mention in the solicitation?

Smegal, John 45:11

Not A SOPO formally, but essentially an approach kind of thing. But no, the SOPO is a document that's going to be established through negotiations after selections are made.

Grace Zona 45:22

The University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown is a regional campus of the University of Pittsburgh and operates its own ABET-accredited four-year engineering programs. Can an ITAC be located at the UPJ and operated through its ME program, with the University of Pittsburgh serving as the legal applicant?

Smegal, John 45:44

I'm going to defer to this one. I think the answer is realistically the applicant must be in the accredited department. But I'm not going to provide an official answer to this one because I must probably talk to our attorneys about this. TBD kind of the answer.

Grace Zona 46:09

Is there any limitations on the number of co-PIs from the lead organization?

Smegal, John 46:15

No formal limits.

Historically, there's been one center director and then assistant directors. I will say that.

Grace Zona 46:27

Perfect. **We have relationships with local and state utilities and local trade orgs. Should we submit Letters of Collaboration for each of these even if they do not cost share?**

Smegal, John 46:37

Back to my previous answer, if you feel it helps your proposal and the quality and its desirability, submit them. There is no requirement that says the only letter of commitment must be related to cost share. Simply, it's not in the not in the solicitation.

Grace Zona 46:53

Thank you.

Does Track 2 need to meet the 150 mile radius requirement? Can the mining company be located well beyond the 150 mile radius requirement?

Smegal, John 46:57

No. The short answer is no. And realistically, I'm sorry, I should let you read that because it's probably a requirement that you read the whole question. So I'll be quiet.

Grace Zona 47:10

No worries.

If two organizations plan to partner on both Tracks 1 and 2, is it possible for a combined proposal submission to be submitted where one organization is the lead of Track 1 and the other organization is the lead of Track 2? Or would this require two separate proposal submissions?

Smegal, John 47:27

Organizations? I didn't envision having two universities apply separately, but certainly two different, you know, essentially engineering programs within the same university could submit. But I'm also going to defer on this. I'm going to have to talk to our attorney because within the existing program, we have sub recipients and some of the sub recipients are other universities.

If you look at, for example, Tennessee Tech is a current center, and they have Memphis as a satellite center. They've done that for geographic coverage. They can cover Tennessee, a big, long state. It's a lot easier to cover both sides of the state when you've got it separated like that. And there are several universities and then current ITAC program that has satellite centers. But in that case, the satellite is a sub-recipient, not some kind of joint we're submitting.

So, in that case, it's one proposal with a sub-recipient. But again, before I provide a definitive answer on this, I'm going to have to talk to the GC folks, but I think the answer is likely to be you wouldn't have different entities submitting. You'd have one lead entity and then a subrecipient if you're going to do one doing track one and one doing track two.

Grace Zona 48:46

Thank you.

Is the 500-employee and \$250M test for Track 2 applied per plant site or per company?

Smegal, John 48:56

These limits, if you want to call them that, that we provide, it's much more relevant for the traditional track that is track one than it is for track two. That's the first statement. And that's largely because track one recipients are eligible because they're small, medium-sized manufacturers to apply for the implementation grants. which are aimed at small, medium-size manufacturers. And the language associated with the grants is much more ironclad. You cannot apply for the grants if you don't meet the targets that are spelled out in legislation.

The operating principle by which the ITAC govern themselves is using these numbers, these limits, but we've always had the ability when we wanted to, based on

other priorities, or if an opportunity afforded a great learning opportunity for the students to provide an exception. But we can do the same thing here for the exception in terms of whether it's by company or by site. The idea, I think, initially was for it to be by site, not by company.

But given track 2 and that's brand new, we may have some exception possibilities. But in that case, it really isn't that big of a problem to provide the exception because realistically, track 2, as far as I know, aren't going to be eligible for the implementation grants anyways, because they're not manufacturers, they're mining.

Except for mineral processing would be manufacturer, because they're in SIC code 32, but mining operations are not manufacturers, so they couldn't, so there were a little bit squishier on the on the language for the 250 and the 500 employees, so, by definition allowed exceptions, so these are not rules, they're principles, and we try to keep it. And that gets back to the fact that we're trying to help the small guys, not the big guys, but we'll see. But ideally, the focus is supposed to be on little ones, not big ones.

Grace Zona 50:59

Thank you.

Will this be considered a sub-award from EnergyWerx to the recipient with DOE as the prime sponsor?

Christi Pezzone 51:13

Your contract will be directly with EnergyWerx. It's not a subcontract to our contract. It's a direct business to business agreement with EnergyWerx.

Grace Zona 51:25

Thank you.

Do references count toward the 10/15 pages limit or are they excluded as the cover page?

Smegal, John 51:32

I never really thought about that. Let me answer that subsequently. I was hoping you

wouldn't have too many references, but I guess that is relevant. So, if they're footnotes, I think they would count as the pages. I'm not going to provide an official answer on that one unless until I think about it.

Grace Zona 51:57

Thank you.

Student certificate: what certificate must half of incoming students earn, and what does a student have to do to earn it (number of assessments, semesters)? How is "incoming student" defined?

Smegal, John 52:06

Okay, good questions, all of them. The certificate is a DOE credential. It's not defined by the university, and it's based largely on assessments and then an assessment of the director's evaluation of the student's performance relative to a set number of criteria. The folks in the traditional program know what those things are. They'll be very similar to the ones we develop for mining and mineral processing, but that's a DOE defined thing and that would be sorted out through negotiations. It's not a part of the proposal.

The reason why we have the certificate is realistically, it's a sort of a credential, a recognition, it's desirable, and many of the students, only maybe half of the ITAC students get the certificate because it's not easy. And there are a lot of people that try the ITAC program and say, oh, not for me. But many of them like it and do it, and they really excel at it, and we recognize that through the presentation of a certificate, and that's the idea of the certificates.

Grace Zona 53:15

Thank you.

Smegal, John 53:17

I think I answered this one earlier. Go ahead, read it.

Grace Zona 53:17

Are the Track One and Track Two student research projects optional components, as has been the case in prior phases of the ITAC program?

Smegal, John 53:28

I'm strongly leaning towards that at this point, but it would be worked out in negotiations, but I'm not opposed to submission of that kind of idea in the proposal.

Grace Zona 53:42

Thank you.

If a Track 1 applicant proposes 15 assessments/year rather than the historical target of 20, should the applicant also scale its requested funding below \$375,000/year, or could the full amount be justified based on the overall proposed scope and milestones?

Smegal, John 53:58

The latter.

Grace Zona 54:00

Thank you.

Will there be a TPO from DOE EnergyWerx for each recipient?

Smegal, John 54:07

There will be no TPOs.

Grace Zona 54:12

ITAC has always been a limited submission(one applicant per university and one application per PI). Is it the same this time as well?

Smegal, John 54:22

We didn't specify that. So I guess the answer is, it's not restricted like it was in the past. In practice, I doubt we would select 2 entities from the same university, but I don't think there's a reason why we couldn't accept multiple applications from the same university.



Grace Zona 54:47

Okay, thank you. And I will ask one more question, but we are just about at time.

Grace Zona 54:55

The total annual max award (\$375k) and target assessments (20) are the same as 5 years ago. Costs are higher. Is it the intent of DOE that centers will be expended to be significantly more cost efficient or being more cost share to complete the assessments than in the past?

Smegal, John 55:15

There's no implication on cost share to complete the assessments and the budget is higher than it was in the past. 20 is not a hard and fast rule anyways. It's sort of a target. But realistically, the budget we used to have was like \$325K, not \$375K. So yes, costs have gone up but so has the budget.

Grace Zona 55:33

Thank you. Do we have time for one more question or?

Smegal, John 55:35

Sure, not a problem.

Christi Pezzone 55:36

Yeah, go ahead.

Grace Zona 55:40

I'll stop after this one because there are some closing remarks for both parties. **How does DOE evaluate applications from universities that have not previously operated an ITAC compared with established ITAC centers? Is prior ITAC experience a significant consideration in the selection process?**

Smegal, John 55:46

I answered this question earlier. Incumbency is a fact, but it is no guarantee. So, we evaluate the applications based on the quality of the applications. There is no incumbency credit. It's based on if you put a good proposal together, it's a good proposal, irrespective of whether or not you've done this before.

Christi Pezzone 56:28

All right, thanks so much, John. I wanted to thank everybody for participating in the University-Based ITAC Opportunity informational webinar. We still have about 61 questions left, so we will be sending these over to John so that he can respond to them. We will have them uploaded to the website by sometime next week.

As a reminder, you can check out the [opportunity page](#). It's possible that the answers to some of your questions can be found there. Our e-mail address is also in the chat if you have any questions at info@energywerx.org. There are also links to join our ecosystem and to follow us on social media. After today, we will place the recording of today's webinar and the PowerPoint slides that were briefed on the website for review.

So, if you want to check it out, if you joined late or know somebody who's interested, send them over to our [opportunity page](#). Please remember that **all submissions are due no later than Friday, October 30th, 2026 at 3:00 PM**. Again, reach out to info@energywerx.org if you have any questions before the upcoming submission deadline. John, do you have any closing words?

Smegal, John 57:41

Well, I've got lots of questions to answer and that's great. I'm really pleased with the response. I think it speaks well towards the decision to go this route. I'm looking forward to the opportunities. I was a little bit leery of the whole mining mineral processing thing but based on some preliminary results that I've seen and based on my faith and how well the program works, I think it's going to work.

Honestly, it'll be a different kind of animal than the traditional centers, but I'm looking forward to overseeing the program for the next five years, mining and mineral processing as well as traditional manufacturing. So, I'm very anxious to get all the proposals and review what we've got and see what comes out. So, write good proposals, everybody, and I'll be happy to review them all.