

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the May, 15, 2026 Dear Colleague Letter

In response to questions FES has received from the community about [DE-FOA-0003600](#) and the May 15, 2026 [Dear Colleagues Letter](#), please see the following Frequently Asked Questions document.

Comments given below are for clarification purposes only. [DE-FOA-0003600](#) is the governing document upon which these answers are based. Guidance from Congress supersedes that. Second to that is the [Dear Colleague Letter](#). If those documents are not clear, we aim to provide additional guidance below.

Q: What are the technical requirements?

A: Per the NOFO and the Dear Colleague Letter, no requirements have been issued. This will be an open, peer-reviewed competition.

Q: Is there an indicative range of neutron wall loading, flux, or irradiation volume considered most relevant for this activity?

A: No specifications were included in the letter or the NOFO; DOE will not be publishing specifications separately for this call.

Q: Regarding the overall emphasis of the initiative, what balance does FES envision between plasma physics and neutron source optimization studies, versus broader engineering integration studies, including fuel-cycle integration, plant-level considerations, and assessment of whether critical technological challenges can be credibly addressed?

A: These are elements that could be taken into consideration in developing a competitive proposal, but DOE has not specified these in the call, so proposers may choose to balance these as appropriate.

Q: Must the proposed VNS be scalable to net gain?

A: We have not specified this in the NOFO or the dear colleague letter. This will be an open competition so your proposal can include information on what you feel is the most important for assessment of your concept.

Q: We are also interested in understanding whether DOE envisions these studies mainly as precursors to a future centralized national VNS capability, or whether more distributed and modular approaches are likewise of interest.

A: Nothing has been specified in the NOFO or the dear colleague letter, so the general advice holds that you should propose the type of facility that you feel would best meet National needs and explain how your solution meets those.

Q: Would concepts with substantial dual-use capability (e.g. fusion materials testing combined with isotope irradiation infrastructure) still be considered responsive, provided that fusion nuclear science remains the primary mission?

A: We have not conveyed any preference in the NOFO or the dear colleague letter, so you are free to propose what you feel is the most important for assessment of your concept.

Does FES envision this effort primarily as: an early-stage conceptual design activity, a systems integration and feasibility assessment effort, a pathway toward future U.S. fusion nuclear science infrastructure, or some combination of these?

We have not specified anything in the NOFO or the dear colleague letter, other than to say that this is an open competition and you are free to include what you feel is the most important for assessment of your concept.

Does FES expect applications primarily at the level of conceptual design studies, or are more detailed engineering and licensing development plans encouraged?

This was not specified by the NOFO or the dear colleague letter. Your proposal should outline aspects that are most important to assessment of your concept.

A fission-based neutron source can fulfill a sub-set of VNS requirements and is aligned with the DOE FES FS&T roadmap. However, the letter specifically calls out ‘VNS based on the next generation of fusion concepts’ and ‘provide DT fusion neutron flux’. Can you confirm that testing in fission reactors is outside of the scope of the request?

The text in the letter reflects the Congressional language that is foundational to this focused topic.

How strongly is the review expected to prioritize near-term deployability and construction realism versus ultimate neutron performance?

This will be an open competition, so the preference will be dictated by the most competitive proposals that come in.

What’s the maximum number of pages?

This is given in NOFO 3600 under Fusion Nuclear Science on page 76. For awards <\$1M, 10 pages, and for awards >\$1M, 20 pages.

We intend to submit a proposal to the FES "Dear Colleagues" request for VNS studies. Do the required appendices count toward the overall 15-20 page limit?

No. As stated in the NOFO, the page limit applies only to the narrative.

Do you prefer lab-led proposals, or company-led proposals?

As noted in the Dear Colleague letter, there is no preference.

Must applicants leverage DOE infrastructure or lab infrastructure to be competitive?

To be eligible, no. We have no requirements for laboratory participation. You are free to compose your team and the resources however you feel will give you the greatest competitive advantage.

The Dear Colleague letter encourages leveraging DOE laboratory infrastructure. For relatively modest-budget proposals in this call, would FES view advisory, collaborative, or infrastructure-leveraging participation by National Laboratories favorably, even if the laboratories are not major funded subawardees?

Proposing teams are free to recruit their teams as they see fit. This may or may not include partnering with DOE national laboratories. The NOFO or the dear colleague letter make no requirements as to team composition.

In cases where an international fusion company has a U.S.-incorporated subsidiary, is there any preference regarding participation through the U.S. entity versus the non-U.S. parent organization?

Per the dear colleague letter, DOE anticipates funding U.S. entities working toward a U.S. facility.

Is there a limit on the number of proposals a lab can be a partner on?

DOE is imposing no limit.

Grants.gov asks for more than PAMS. Should I still submit the items requested by grants.gov?

Applications will be reviewed and there will be a competition. Please include in your PAMS submittal:

- The project narrative
- Appendix 1: Bibliography and References Cited
- Appendix 2: Facilities and Other Resources
- Appendix 3: Equipment
- Appendix 4: Data Management and Sharing Plan
- Appendix 5: Current and Pending Support (because there is no Senior/Key Person Form)
- Appendix 6: Biosketches (because there is no Senior/Key Person Form)

As stated in the NOFO, please use the interagency forms in SciENCv. PAMS will guide you carefully through the process.

For teams involving international fusion companies that are actively developing VNS-related concepts and technologies in Europe, does FES view such participation as responsive and appropriate within this initiative?

As stated in the dear colleague letter, FES envisions teams led by domestic entities, though the presence of non-domestic team members will not impact the evaluation of an application.

As we are based in [foreign country] are there any practical limitations or preferred structures regarding participation of non-U.S. entities? As collaborators or subawardees?

As stated in the dear colleague letter, FES envisions teams led by domestic entities, though the presence of non-domestic team members will not impact the evaluation of an application.

If a lab is leading, how do they apply?

As noted in the dear colleague letter, FES PM Jeff Stehr will invite the national lab applications in PAMS. Non lab entities should submit through grants.gov.

The NOFO references a due date of July 15th, and the Dear Colleague Letter references a due date of June 30th. Which due date should I work to for this opportunity?

VNS proposals are due on June 30 at 11:59 PM ET.