

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Headquarters

Washington, DC 20546-0001



August 19, 2010

Reply to Attn of: Office of the Chief Technologist

TO: Distribution

FROM: Chief Technologist

SUBJECT: Center Innovation Fund

This is to make you aware of and solicit your comments about an exciting new opportunity for the NASA Centers to stimulate creativity and build technical capability that is part of the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 budget request. The Early Stage Innovation Division of the Office of the Chief Technologist (OCT) plans to distribute the Center Innovation Fund (CIF) among the NASA Centers as seed funding for Center management of new technologies, innovations, and creative ideas. The President's request for this program is \$50M inclusive of unified labor allocation. Our preliminary plan is to allocate the FY 2011 funds to each Center based upon a combination of two components: 1) a fixed baseline amount, distributed equally across all ten Centers, and 2) a weighted allocation proportional to the Center's Aerospace Technology (AST) workforce. This funding would allow Centers to support low Technology Readiness Level innovative technology initiatives that leverage local talents, build new technology capabilities, and foster business partnerships. It is envisioned that the most promising ideas that emerge from the CIF would compete subsequently for funding from other OCT Space Technology Programs or other NASA Programs.

By placing management of these funds at the Centers, OCT intends to stimulate and encourage creativity and innovation within the NASA Centers. CIF efforts must be focused on a significant new technology or innovation. Within each Center, awards should be made competitively based on technical merit, feasibility, relevance and value to NASA, capability and strength of the team, the potential for leveraging of partner resources, and the potential contribution to significant National needs. Where appropriate, Centers are encouraged to leverage CIF funds through technology development partnerships. Partners may include other NASA Centers, private-sector firms (both large and small), academia, other Government agencies, and National laboratories.

In managing this activity, each Center will be requested to conduct an internal competition to select and fund promising ideas. Through the CIF Program, Center Directors will have discretion over:

- (1) The number of projects awarded,
- (2) The funding distribution among the projects,
- (3) The particular form of the competition and selection process, and
- (4) Technical and programmatic oversight.

It is anticipated that the Center Chief Technologists will manage this process. Collaboration among Centers in making joint awards is encouraged, but not required. A report from each Center will be required at the end of each FY. These reports must describe the creative and innovative qualities for each activity, the progress achieved, and whether the effort was successful.

The annual Center Innovation Reports will be reviewed and scored by OCT on the basis of the creativity and innovation presented within each Center's investment portfolio. Innovative efforts with high risk-high payoff are encouraged and OCT scoring will be independent of the success/failure ratio of the Center efforts. Additional metrics used by OCT in this scoring will include technical merit, feasibility, progress achieved, relevance and value to NASA, the potential contribution to significant National needs, and the potential for follow-on funding. Center portfolio scores will be used by OCT to guide the CIF funding distribution in subsequent years.

We welcome any questions you may have about this proposed program, and suggestions for making the CIF as effective as possible. We are excited about this potential new activity and look forward to building a successful program with you. Feel free to contact Dr. Minoo Dastoor at [Minoo.N.Dastoor@nasa.gov](mailto:Minoo.N.Dastoor@nasa.gov) with your feedback or for further information about this program.



Robert D. Braun, Ph.D.

Enclosure

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