

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION (NASA)
HEADQUARTERS
RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY MISSION DIRECTORATE
300 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20546-0001

NASA EARLY CAREER INITIATIVE (ECI)
FY 2028 SOLICITATION

Solicitation Issued: November 9, 2026
Center Proposals Due to RTMD: March 18, 2027 (5PM ET)

Engaging NASA early career researchers with world class partners to develop the innovative leaders and technologies of the future.

Key Information

The Early Career Initiative (ECI) provides the opportunity for NASA's early career workforce to propose and develop innovative aerospace technology projects, engage with leading industry, academic and other government partners, and develop the skills required to manage and transition transformative concepts into future NASA missions.

Eligibility: NASA early career civil servants (typically defined as within the first 10 years of an individual's career in support of the NASA mission – see Section 3.0) are eligible to serve as ECI Principal Investigators or early career team members. Early career on-site contractors are not eligible to lead or submit ECI proposals but may participate as ECI team members. As an FFRDC, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory is not eligible to submit proposals but may participate as team members.

Significant Updates for FY28:

- Update to guidance on the early career project manager role (section 3.1.2 Early Career Project Managers)
- Overview chart is now requested as a separate document (section 4.2.10 Overview Chart)
- Updates to evaluation criteria (section 5.2 Evaluation Criteria)
- Updated RTMD organization structure and technical points of contact (Appendix B)
- Added FY28 Areas of Special Interest (Appendix C)

Key Dates:

- Call for Proposals Released: November 9, 2026
- Proposer's Virtual Forum:[1] December 7, 2026,1:00-3:00PM ET (virtual)
- Additional Q&A Sessions: January 11, 2027, 1:00-2:00PM ET (virtual); February 8, 2027, 1:00-2:00PM ET (virtual)
- Proposals Due: March 18, 2027, 5:00PM ET
- Selection Notification: May 14, 2027 (Target)
- Project Start Date: October 1, 2027

Proposal Submission and Review Process: Proposal content shall conform to the guidance provided in this solicitation. Proposals shall be submitted to the Center Chief Technologist or other designated ECI Center Point of Contact (POC) per the process established at each Center. For FY 2028, no more than two (2) proposals may be

[1] Forum and Q&A sessions will be held via Teams meetings; links are provided in this document. Please reach out to the ECI Program Office if you experience trouble accessing these links. Presentations, any recordings and FAQ can be found here: FY28 ECI Solicitation Supplemental Documents

submitted by each lead Center to RTMD for review; however, Centers may partner on multiple proposals without restriction.

Starting Technology Readiness Level (TRL): Typically ≤ TRL 3 at the start of award, but later development stages may be considered.[2]

Award Details:

- Award Duration: Two years
- Maximum Award Amount: $2M ($1M per year)
- Expected Number of FY28 Awards: Up to 7 awards, pending budget availability

Selection Official: Final ECI award selections will be made by the RTMD Innovation Program Office Director or designee.

RTMD Points of Contact:

Mr. John Nelson
NASA NIAC/CIF/ECI Portfolio Manager
Research and Technology Mission Directorate
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[2] Technology Readiness Levels - NASA

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NASA Early Career Initiative

1.0 Introduction

Engaging the brightest minds from government, industry, and academia, the NASA Research and Technology Mission Directorate (RTMD) conducts research and development of technology solutions to address the Nation's toughest aerospace challenges. RTMD is committed to ensuring that Center skills are developed and maintained in critical technology areas consistent with established Center roles. Central to this commitment is the development of NASA's early career workforce through the competitively funded Early Career Initiative (ECI). ECI projects provide an opportunity for NASA early career professionals to engage with leading industry, academic, and other government partners to develop new aerospace capabilities, while gaining the skills needed to manage and transition these advanced technologies into future NASA missions.

Technologies proposed to this solicitation must map to one or more of the NASA Technology Taxonomy Areas (Appendix A: NASA Technology Taxonomy Areas) and should address one or more Agency technology gap or need. **Proposers are strongly encouraged to consult with the appropriate technical points of contact listed in the Appendices, in addition to subject matter experts and stakeholders across the mission directorates regarding state-of-the-art, on-going activities and investments, and evolving strategic needs in their respective technology areas to ensure the proposed technology development is of interest and is not duplicative of existing projects.**

2.0 Funding and Award Information

For FY28, ECI anticipates awarding up to seven (7) new awards to begin October 1, 2027, pending availability of program funds. Selected projects will each receive up to $1M annually to cover labor, procurement, and travel costs each year, for a period of up to 2 years. FY28 ECI selection notifications are targeted for May 14, 2027. Pending availability of funds, selected projects will receive up to $100,000 seed funding in FY27 made available to projects soon after selection. Any seed funding provided in FY27 will be ***in addition to*** funds for project execution (up to $1M annually for the two-year period of performance). Seed funding shall be used only to:

(a) Support the development and/or award of external partner agreements prior to full project start on October 1, 2027. NOTE: Partner period-of-performance shall not start before October 1, 2027.

(b) Cover labor and travel costs for participation in training classes specifically for the ECI Program. Training classes for ECI will be offered through the NASA Academy of Program, Project, and Engineering Leadership (APPEL). APPEL classes are offered at no cost (i.e. "tuition free") to selected projects.

Restrictions on number of proposals submitted per Center	No more than two (2) proposals may be submitted by each lead Center; however, Centers may partner on multiple proposals without restriction.
Anticipated number of FY28 Awards	RTMD anticipates making up to seven (7) new awards to start on October 1, 2027, pending available ECI Program budget and proposed costs.
Project duration	Awards will be funded for a period of up to 24 months.
Funding	Projects will receive a maximum of $1M per year to include labor, procurement, and travel (maximum life cycle cost of $2M over 2 years). Up to $100k project seed funding will be provided soon after award to: (a) initiate external partnership agreements prior to full project start on October 1; and (b) participate in training classes specifically for ECI.
Training	The ECI Program has partnered with NASA HQ APPEL Knowledge Services to provide a series of training courses.

2.1 Deliverables and Reporting Requirements

ECI Principal Investigators (PIs) are required to meet the following program deliverables:

- Attend a virtual half-day ECI Orientation meeting, to be held in July 2027 (Target).
- Manage their project's TechPort page. PIs will be given access to their project's TechPort page. It is expected that the PI will enter and curate their page with the assistance of the ECI and TechPort staff.
- Submit monthly quad charts following a program-defined template. The quad charts will detail recent project accomplishments, upcoming significant events, and issues and concerns, and will be used to inform RTMD monthly program reviews. The first monthly quad chart will be due in November 2027.
- Participate in a virtual half-day status review with ECI Program personnel approximately six (6) months after project start.
- Attend an annual project review. All ECI PIs are required to participate in the annual review, to be held at NASA HQ in Washington, D.C. The annual project review will serve as a continuation review for first year projects, specifically to evaluate overall performance during the prior year and ensure adequate progress toward meeting project goals and objectives. The annual review will serve as a final review for projects completing their second year. This 2-day meeting will occur in September each year. PI attendance and participation in the review is expected to be in-person for both full days of the review. Additional team members are welcome, but not required, to attend.
- Produce and deliver a Project Closeout Video. The anticipated short Project Closeout Video will: (a) briefly recap the project, team members, external partners, and technical objectives; (b) briefly discuss major achievements and findings; (c) address major project challenges encountered during execution and how these were overcome; (d) describe key lessons learned; (e) discuss project and technology transition/infusion/transfer opportunities for continued development; and (f) optionally provide any statements on the

experiences provided and enabled through the ECI Program. The Project Closeout Video shall be delivered in MPEG4 or similar format suitable for playback on a standard NASA issued computer. Videos should not contain any proprietary or Controlled Unclassified Information and should be suitable for public release. Project Closeout Videos may be used by NASA RTMD and/or Centers for project advocacy, outreach, and communications. Project Closeout Videos shall be submitted to the ECI Program Office within 60 days of project completion. While not required or expected, presentation of preliminary versions of Project Closeout Videos at the ECI Annual Project Review would be welcomed.

- A final written report is required within 60 days of project completion. The final report will generally follow a program-defined template and should be suitable for public release. ECI project final reports should be submitted by the PI and approved in STRIVES prior to delivery to the ECI Program Office. Any information that is substantive to the final report but not suitable for public release can be submitted to the ECI Program Office as a non-public "Appendix" to the final report. The non-public Appendix shall be submitted as a separate file and contain document markings as appropriate. The report will detail project goals and objectives, anticipated benefits to NASA, major accomplishments and findings, and plans for advancing the technology beyond ECI. Additionally, each PI is expected to update their project's TechPort page with any updates at closeout such as, but not limited to, inclusion of the final report, the closeout video, any transitions or follow-on funding, etc.

In addition to required meetings, informal tag ups between the PIs and RTMD ECI Program Office staff will occur as needed (typically at two-week intervals) to assess progress and address issues that may be encountered during the performance of the project.

3.0 Eligibility

This ECI call is open to NASA civil servants who satisfy the requirements of an early career professional: cumulatively within the first 10 years of an individual's career in support of the NASA mission not including any leave(s) of absence(s) for personal or family medical or care reason(s). Alternative Center definitions of an early career employee must be confirmed with the NASA Portfolio Manager to ensure equal opportunities exist across all Centers. Early career civil servants at any of the NASA Field Centers may serve as Principal Investigators or participate as early career team members. Employees of the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory are not eligible to serve as Principal Investigators or to submit proposals in response to this call but may participate as project team members. Similarly, on-site contractors are not eligible to lead or submit ECI proposals but may participate as project team members.

3.1 Team Members

3.1.1 Early Career Principal Investigators

ECI projects are led by PIs, who must be NASA early career civil servants at the time of award. Only one PI is allowed per project; co-PIs are not allowed. PIs are encouraged to commit full time to the project over the two-year lifecycle; a minimum time allocation of 75% is required.

3.1.2 Early Career Project Managers

While not required, the ECI Program Office strongly encourages the inclusion of early career Project Managers (PMs) to assist the PI with project execution. Prior ECI projects have found an

early career PM at least at a 50%-time commitment to be beneficial for successful project execution. If you choose not to include an early career PM on your team, or if you choose to propose an early career PM at less than a 50%-time commitment, such decisions must be justified in the proposal.

3.1.3 Core Early Career Team Members

The ECI program provides an opportunity for NASA early career professionals to participate in high-visibility technology development projects. Core ECI team members should be chosen for their relevant skills and the opportunities for career development offered by their role on the ECI project. Early career personnel at other NASA Centers and JPL, as well as early career on-site contractors, may participate as core team members. While there is no limit on the number of core team members allowed, early career team members must commit a minimum of 25%-time to ensure a reasonable level of team interaction and project participation. In addition, early career team member time commitments should be commensurate with their project roles and career development goals. Team members participating at less than 25%-time may be listed as contributors but will not be considered part of the core team. ECI teams seeking to find expertise or team members from other NASA Centers and/or JPL should coordinate with their Center Chief Technologist or other designated ECI Center POC for assistance.

3.1.4 Senior Team Members

While the goal of the ECI program is to foster the development of NASA early career civil servants, it is recognized that ECI projects may benefit from the participation of more experienced personnel. The funded participation of more senior career civil servants and on-site contractor personnel from any NASA Center or JPL is allowed; however, NASA early career civil servants should constitute a significant majority of the team and fill key project leadership and technology development roles.

3.1.5 Project Mentors

Each project must include one or more experienced NASA mentor(s) to guide and support the early career team on technology development, project management, and professional development elements of the project. For example, a team may wish to engage both an experienced project manager who can help provide context between standard NASA practices and the selected program management approach, and a senior scientist or engineer who can provide guidance on technical aspects of the project.

3.1.6 External Partners

Each ECI project must engage with a highly qualified external partner that brings an element of technical, management or programmatic experience or innovation to the project. **The participation of the external partner must be an integral part of the project.** Multiple external partners are allowed, but their roles must be substantive and clearly justified. The external partner cannot be another NASA Center or JPL, but as previously noted, proposers are welcome to team with other Centers or JPL in addition to the external partner(s).

Funding for an external partner must be included in the proposed ECI budget, and procurement funds for the partner organization will be distributed by HQ to the selected NASA Centers for award. Partner organization costs are expected to range between 25% to 45% of the total ECI budget,

commensurate with the proposed partner roles. Cost sharing with external partners is encouraged but is not required.

Proposers are encouraged to engage with their Center procurement office during the proposal process to understand external partner selection requirements and determine an appropriate funding mechanism. ECI encourages innovative and agile management approaches, which could also include non-traditional acquisition approaches to engaging partners including, but not limited to: SBIR Phase III and Post-Phase II awards[3], and crowdsourcing[4]. Proposers are encouraged to ensure that sufficient time is available to establish a contract, grant, or other funding agreement in their schedule. Establishing grants or contracts with entities outside of NASA can be a time-consuming process, often taking several months to complete once an ECI award is made. Proposers are strongly encouraged to discuss procurement requirements and processes during proposal preparation to better estimate the time it will take to engage with and fund an external partner. These estimates should be built into your project schedule and should be part of any preliminary discussions with your external partner(s). See Section 4.2.6 External Partnerships for additional information.

3.1.7 Foreign Entities

Foreign entities cannot serve as external partners; however, participation by a foreign organization is permitted on a no-exchange-of-funds basis, subject to NASA's policy on foreign participation. The participation of a foreign entity will require approval by the NASA Partnership Office prior to the generation of an Agreement (e.g., Space Act Agreement, Interagency Agreement), If foreign participation is anticipated, please ensure sufficient time in the project schedule for agreement negotiation and approval.

4.0 Proposal Submission Information

4.1 Proposal Submittal

Proposals must follow the requirements defined below and must be submitted by the Principal Investigator to their Center Chief Technologist or other designated ECI Center POC according to the procedures outlined at their respective NASA Centers. Center Chief Technologists or ECI Center POC may submit no more than two (2) Center-led ECI proposals in PDF format together with the corresponding project proposal videos and overview chart by the established submission date. **Proposals, videos and overview charts should be submitted to the RTMD ECI Program Office by the Center Chief Technologist or ECI Center POC through the Box filesharing system. Links will be provided to the CCT's and ECI POCs prior to the deadline.** Paper copies of proposals will not be accepted.

4.2 Proposal Requirements

The ECI proposal should include the following information in the order listed. Page limits are defined for 8.5"x11" paper. Reviewers will not consider any content exceeding the page limits specified in the table below. Font style should be standard (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman), and font size should be 12-point for proposal text, and no less than 10-point for figure captions.

[3] https://www.sbir.gov/awards

[4] https://www.nasa.gov/prizes-challenges-and-crowdsourcing/

Line spacing should be no less than single-spaced, and margins should be reasonable (i.e., 1" or greater). Single column or double column page format is acceptable. Proposal appendices are not permitted and will not be reviewed.

Solicitation Section	***Proposal Section***	***Maximum Page Length***
4.2.1	Cover Sheet	1 page
4.2.2	Table of Contents	As needed
4.2.3	Technology Description and Impact	5 pages
4.2.4	Work Plan and Management Approach	5 pages
4.2.5	Team Roles and Workforce Development	As needed; ½ page per team member
4.2.6	External Partnerships	Up to 2 pages per external partner
4.2.7	References and Citations	Optional (Not counted in page limit)
4.2.8	Budget Data and Justification	As needed
4.2.9	Letters of Commitment	As needed
4.2.10	Overview Chart (submitted separately)	1 page (landscape format; see template)
4.2.11	Proposal Video (submitted separately)	N/A (4-minute max duration)

Additional information regarding the content for each proposal section is provided below.

4.2.1 Cover Sheet

The proposal should include a cover sheet that clearly identifies the project title; the Principal Investigator, with contact information; the submitting NASA Center; and a list of project team members, with their affiliated NASA Centers, and external partner organization(s).

4.2.2 Table of Contents

A Table of Contents helps reviewers find specific proposal content. One page is preferred, but additional pages are permitted if needed.

4.2.3 Technology Description and Impact

Provide a compelling case for developing the proposed technology including the technical challenges or gaps being addressed; a description of the proposed solution; comparison with the state of the art; technical goals and objectives to be met during the project; and the potential impact it will have on future missions if successfully developed. Metrics or key performance parameters should be identified for major technology components, subsystems, or systems to demonstrate how technology advancement will be measured and how the proposed technology meets potential user/mission requirements. The proposal must identify which NASA Technology Taxonomy Area the proposed technology primarily addresses, the Center skills to be developed and maintained consistent with Center roles, and the starting and anticipated ending Technology Readiness Level(s). As previously noted, proposers are encouraged to consult with the appropriate technical

points of contact, provided in Appendix B, or other Agency subject matter experts regarding the need for and applicability of the proposed technology.

4.2.4 Work Plan and Management Approach

Include a well-defined work plan that addresses how the project will meet each identified technical objective. The work plan must define the analytical and/or experimental tasks to be accomplished, and the facilities to be used. For test facilities outside the immediate control of the proposer or proposing organization, a letter of commitment from the facility owner stating that the facility will be available for use in the time frame proposed must be included with the proposal. The work plan should include a schedule of the key tasks, reviews, and milestones to be achieved over the course of the project. If applicable, a Systems Requirement Review should be included early in the project to ensure that functional and performance requirements will satisfy the proposed technical objectives. Proposers are encouraged to consider inclusion of an appropriate amount of funded schedule reserve to reduce risk to project completion by the end of the two-year period of performance.

NASA is always seeking to improve the methods used to manage advanced technology development projects. Innovative and agile management approaches, such as those used in industry or other organizations and agencies, may be better suited for the management of the proposed ECI project. As such, proposers are not restricted to the tailored use of NPR 7120.8 or 7120.5 and may consider nontraditional management or acquisition approaches. Proposals must clearly describe the planned management approach, and state why it is appropriate for the proposed activity. Team training on project management, beyond ECI/APPEL-provided training, may be included as part of the ECI work plan and covered as part of the proposed ECI budget.

4.2.5 Team Roles and Workforce Development

For the Principal Investigator and each team member, provide a brief description of the member's area of expertise, their team role and key responsibilities, their time allocated to the project (as a fraction of FTE or WYE) and expectations/goals for professional development based on their assigned role. Keep in mind that projects are expected to align with the Agency strategic workforce guidance to develop or maintain critical technology areas consistent with Center roles, as defined in NASA Policy Directive 1000.3F, Chapter 6, Section 6.2. Clearly identify which team members are early career and by what definition. For more senior team members, provide a description of their project role, relevant experience, and fraction of time allocated to the project. For NASA mentors, provide a brief description of their experience and engagement plan (e.g., frequency, type of engagement) to provide technical, management, or workforce development guidance to the team. Information on external organization personnel should be included under the External Partnerships section of the proposal (see Section 4.2.6).

For FY28, the ECI Program intends to continue its partnership with NASA APPEL Knowledge Services to offer a series of project leadership and team training courses. Training classes will be personally curated to suit individual training needs. Course offerings will be dependent upon existing or scheduled APPEL courses. The intent is that ECI PIs and PMs (as applicable) take training classes during the intervening time between project selection and project start, or early in the project execution phase, so that knowledge learned can be applied throughout ECI project execution.

4.2.6 External Partnerships

Each project must include a highly qualified external partner that will add technical or programmatic experience to the project. Partners may include but are not limited to academic institutions, commercial entities, and other government agencies; other NASA Centers and JPL are not considered external partners but may team on proposals. Foreign entities are not considered external partners but may participate in projects on a no-exchange-of-funds basis (see Section 3.1.7 Foreign Entities). Only one external partner is required, but proposals may include additional external partners as needed. Contributed in-kind or matching funds from partner organizations is encouraged but not required.

For each external partner, identify and describe the role of the external partner organization and the key personnel that will participate in the project. Describe the capabilities of the external partner organization(s) and the reason for their selection. Describe the relevant management or technical experience of the partner personnel participating in the project. Define whether any of the external personnel are considered early career. If applicable, describe the relevant partner facilities to be used during the project.

It is recognized that discussions with external partners may be limited prior to the award of the ECI project. For each planned partnership, proposers should identify the planned procurement mechanism (i.e., grant, contract, etc.) and the status of potential partnership(s) commitments at the time of proposal submission. Proposers are strongly encouraged to discuss requirements for external partnership funding and realistic periods of performance with their respective Center procurement offices.

Pending availability of program funds, ECI will provide awarded FY28 projects with up to $100k additional funding in FY27 to initiate external partnership agreements. These funds will be made available to the projects as soon as possible after selection. Proposers are encouraged to discuss funding mechanisms with their Center procurement offices to evaluate how these funds could be used to facilitate partnership agreements in anticipation of a full project start on October 1, 2027.

4.2.7 References and Citations

References and citations are optional. If included, reference and citation formats should correspond to accepted publication practices used by professional societies such as the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, American Physical Society, IEEE, etc.

4.2.8 Budget Data and Justification

The proposal budget should follow the template provided in Appendix E. The proposal should include justifications for each major element of the project budget. The budget should only include information relevant to the project execution phase (up to $1M annually for the two-year period of performance). Do not include project seed funding (up to $100k) that may be provided prior to project start.

4.2.9 Letters of Commitment

Letters of commitment are required from the direct managers of each early career and senior civil servant and on-site contractor team member. The letter must include an acknowledgement regarding the availability and commitment of the employee for the time specified in the proposal.

Managers with more than one direct employee participating in the proposed project may submit a single letter of commitment covering employees from the same organization.

NASA Mentors are required to submit a letter of commitment acknowledging their role on the project and their anticipated time commitment. A letter from the mentor's direct supervisor is not required.

If the project includes the use of facilities or resources outside the immediate control of the ECI PI or their organization, a letter is required from the providing organization stating their commitment to provide the requested resources.

A signed letter of commitment is required from an authorized official for each external partner organization participating or expected to participate in the project. The letter must include an acknowledgement of the work to be performed, the period of performance, and the anticipated cost for the partner's participation.[5] To the extent known at the time of proposal submission, the letter should identify the individuals assigned to work on the project and a statement acknowledging their availability. The letter should also acknowledge the use of any partner facilities and state their availability to the project for the period specified in the proposal.

4.2.10 Overview Chart

The proposal must include an overview chart, submitted as a separate document, that summarizes the proposed technology development, potential benefits, team members, management approach, and budget. The chart should follow the template described in Appendix D. The chart should be considered a stand-alone item, providing a high-level overview of the project that can be readily understood and referenced by reviewers. The chart should not contain any sensitive, confidential, or proprietary information.

4.2.11 Proposal Video

Each proposal submission must include a short video in addition to the written components. **The intent of the proposal video is to allow the proposing team to introduce themselves and their project in an engaging manner to a general (non-expert) audience.** The video must be no more than four (4) minutes in length, in MPEG4 or similar format, suitable for playback on a standard NASA issued computer. Audio/video production quality will not be evaluated in the proposal evaluation process, and webcam or mobile device video quality is sufficient. Project team presentations – in "lightning talk" style – recorded in Microsoft Teams are acceptable.

The video should include the following content (in any order):

- Introduction of the team members, their affiliation, and role on the project, and identify the role of the external partner(s). It is encouraged but not required for every core team member to participate in the video.
- Identification of the technology being developed, the gap(s) it addresses, and the benefits if successful.
- Brief overview of the technology development approach, including the key tasks to be accomplished.

[5] Procurements for external partner funding may take several months to complete; please schedule accordingly.

The videos will be reviewed by the proposal review panel and may be used by the proposing Center or the Research and Technology Mission Directorate for additional outreach and communication activities, with the PI's approval. The videos should not contain any proprietary information not suitable for public release.

4.3 NASA Flight Opportunities Program

Projects proposing to fly a payload as part of the ECI project or as a follow-on activity are encouraged to contact the NASA Flight Opportunities Program during proposal development. The Flight Opportunities Program maintains an IDIQ (Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity) contract with several U.S. suborbital providers for reusable suborbital launch vehicles, sounding rockets, parabolic flight aircraft, and high-altitude balloon flights. These suborbital testing capabilities may be used for subsystem level testing, technology risk reduction, or other project requirements. Pending available funding, the Flight Opportunities Program may pay the cost for contracted flight-testing; additional funding for flight test preparation, suborbital test hardware, and post flight analysis may also be considered. Projects are encouraged to engage with the Flight Opportunities Program early in the proposal development process to understand current capabilities and requirements. Please visit the NASA Flight Opportunities Program home page for more information at: https://www.nasa.gov/directorates/spacetech/flightopportunities/index.html

5.0 RTMD Review and Selection Process

5.1 Proposal Review and Selection

Proposals will initially be checked for compliance with the requirements listed in Section 4.2. Proposals deemed non-compliant will not be eligible for award. Proposals that pass compliance screening will be reviewed by the RTMD Portfolio Manager and a minimum of three additional non-advocate reviewers, which may include members of the ECI Program Office, representatives from RTMD or other Mission Directorates, and other Agency subject matter experts. The reviewers will score each proposal based on the criteria outlined in Section 5.2, and an average panel score for each proposal will be determined. Based on the review panel inputs and other programmatic considerations, the ECI Program Office will prepare a prioritized recommendation for the RTMD Selection Official. The Selection Official will make a final selection of the ECI awards, based on the non-advocate reviews, Program Office recommendations, and considerations of portfolio balance. Proposers will be notified of selection or non-selection by the ECI Portfolio Manager once such communication is authorized by the RTMD Selection Official.

5.2 Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will use the following evaluation criteria to score the ECI proposals:

Evaluation Criteria	Weighting
1. Technology Description and Impact	**25%**
a) Does the proposal identify a significant gap or need in NASA capabilities that the technology will address?	
b) Does the proposal clearly define the technology innovation or advancement and its relation to meeting identified Agency needs?	
c) Does the proposal provide clearly defined benefits to NASA and/or the national aerospace community if the technology is successfully developed?	
d) Is there a credible path beyond the ECI Program to advance or infuse the technology within or external to NASA?	
2. Work Plan and Management Approach	**25%**
a) Does the work plan demonstrate an understanding of the major technology development challenges and identify specific tasks to address these challenges?	
b) Does the work plan include a well-defined and feasible schedule of key project milestones and deliverables, tied to the technology development tasks?	
c) Does the work plan lead to a clearly defined technology advancement at the end of the two-year project? Is the end goal of the project realistic and achievable?	
d) Does the proposal clearly describe the project management approach and justify the choice of this approach?	
e) Does the proposal define the role of the external partner(s), describe the partner capabilities, and justify their participation in the project?	
3. Team and Workforce Development	**20%**
a) Does the proposal clearly define team roles, with early career personnel filling key technical and management positions consistent with the requirements in the solicitation?	
b) Does the team bring a diverse set of skills and capabilities to the project, and are individual skills appropriate for the assigned roles?	
c) Does the project provide sufficient opportunities for early career professionals to develop or maintain their skills, knowledge, and abilities through direct involvement with technical and/or management project activities, consistent with Center roles?	
d) Do the NASA mentors have the required technical or project management experience to guide the early career team members? Are the planned mentor-team interactions well defined?	

4. Budget and Justification	**20%**
a) Is the requested budget adequately defined and appropriate for the proposed project?	
b) Are external partner costs reasonable and justified?	
5. Project Video	**10%**
a) Does the project video (i) introduce the team members and their roles; (ii) identify the proposed technology and the need for it; (iii) summarize the development approach, including the key tasks?	
b) Does the project video conform to the required time and video format (no more than 4 minutes, MPEG4 or similar format)?	
c) Does the project video clearly communicate the essence of the proposed technology project for a general audience?	

5.3 Proposal Debriefings

Proposers have the right to learn the major factor(s) that led to the acceptance or rejection of any proposal. Reviewer comments will be collated, edited for clarity, and provided to each proposer following notification. Proposers may also request a verbal debriefing from the ECI Program Office following receipt of the written reviewer comments.

6.0 Frequently Asked Questions

A Proposer's Virtual Briefing will be held via Microsoft Teams on December 7, 2026 from 1:00-3:00PM ET. The briefing will introduce the ECI Program and FY28 solicitation, followed by a question-and-answer session. Additional abbreviated Q&A sessions will occur via Teams on January 11, 2027 from 1:00-2:00PM ET and February 8, 2027 from 1:00-2:00PM ET.

Questions regarding this solicitation may also be emailed to the ECI Program Manager using the subject line *ECI Solicitation Question*. Responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be posted to the OneNASA ECI SharePoint site.

Points of Contact:

Mr. John Nelson
NASA NIAC/CIF/ECI Portfolio Manager
Research and Technology Mission Directorate
Email: john.c.nelson@nasa.gov

Dr. Phillip Williams
NASA NIAC/CIF/ECI Program Manager
Research and Technology Mission Directorate
Email: phillip.a.williams@nasa.gov

Appendix A: NASA Technology Taxonomy Areas

The NASA Technology Taxonomy provides a structure for articulating the technology development disciplines needed to enable NASA aerospace missions. The 2024 revision is comprised of 17 distinct technical discipline-based taxonomies (TX) that provide a breakdown structure for each technology area. The 2024 NASA Technology Taxonomy poster is here:

https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/nasa-technology-taxonomy-chart-portrait-teal-orange-accent-20240715-508tagged.pdf?emrc=4ab85b

Additional NASA Technology Taxonomy information is available at:

- https://www.nasa.gov/otps/2024-nasa-technology-taxonomy/
- https://techport.nasa.gov/taxonomy/8817
- https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/nasa-2024-technology-taxonomy-report-low-resolution-final-20240730-tagged.pdf?emrc=021157?emrc=021157

Appendix B: RTMD Organization Structure and Technical Points of Contact

The Early Career Initiative is housed within the Innovation Program Office (IPO) of the Advanced Research and Technology Division (ART) within the Research and Technology Mission Directorate (RTMD).



Advanced Research and Technology Division Technical Points of Contact

As in prior years, all prospective ECI proposers are strongly encouraged to discuss their planned technology submission with the appropriate subject matter experts. Advanced Research and Technology Division technical points of contact are available for consultation with proposers regarding the state-of-the-art, on-going activities and investments, and strategic needs in their respective areas of expertise. In addition, proposers are encouraged to consult other Agency subject matter experts and stakeholders as appropriate for their planned technology submission. These experts will help proposers ensure alignment with strategic priorities.

FY28 Early Career Initiative Solicitation Technical Points of Contact

Appendix C: FY28 Special Areas of Interest

The ECI program helps restore NASA's core competencies by building internal technical expertise, leadership, and innovation resilience. NASA Administrator's Workforce Directive (Feb. 6, 2026) calls for less contractor reliance, stronger in-house expertise, and greater civil servant leadership. ECI helps NASA achieve this vision.

Actions announced at NASA's "Ignition" event prioritize the Artemis program launch cadence, a robust U.S. presence in low Earth orbit (LEO), the creation of a Moon Base, breakthrough science, space nuclear power and propulsion, and investment in the NASA workforce to deliver on the agency's mission with urgency.

Accordingly, in addition to alignment with Agency and Ignition priorities through the ECI Program's focus on early-career workforce, this ECI solicitation seeks proposals that address Agency priorities, across the NASA Technology Taxonomy spectrum, including technology areas consistent with Ignition priorities:

- Building Moon Base
- Establishing nuclear power in space
- Driving science and discovery
- Maintaining US presence in low earth orbit

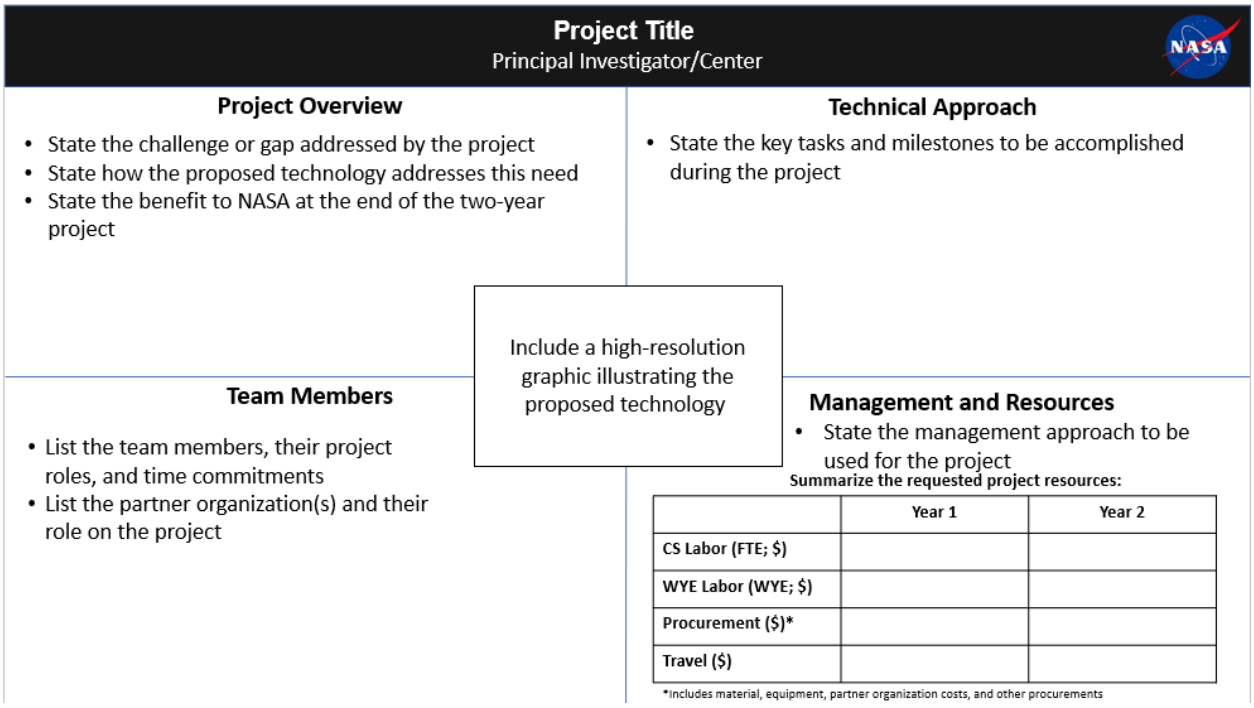
For more information on the Ignition priorities, refer to: https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/ignition.pdf?emrc=6ae261095cd82

Through these initiatives, NASA is strengthening its ability to deliver on the President's National Space Policy and ensure continued American superiority in space.

Appendix D: Proposal Overview Chart

An Overview Chart must be included with the proposal. Please use landscape formatting with a legible font size. The chart should not include sensitive or confidential information. The Overview Chart template can be found here.

The chart should include the following information:



While the chart format does not have to match this format exactly, please incorporate the major chart elements in the quadrants shown. The chart should serve as a stand-alone introduction to the key aspects of your proposal. The Overview Chart will be included in the review package for the Source Selection Official.

Appendix E: Budget Template

Note: this form should only include project costs beginning October 1, 2027. Do not include labor or procurement funds that may be awarded between project selection and full project start; those funds will be negotiated post-selection.

Constant FY Dollars ($)	**FY28**	**FY29**
Civil Service Labor FTEs		
On-Site Contractor WYEs (Direct)		
On-Site Contractor WYEs (Service Pool)		
Civil Service Labor/Benefits		
Civil Service Travel		
Direct Procurements		
On-Site Contractor Labor		
Materials		
Equipment		
Contracts		
Grants		
Misc. Other Direct Costs (ODC)		
Center Assessments		
Training		
Other		
Service Pool Cost (if applicable)		
Center Management & Operations (if applicable)		
Total Cost		

In a separate text section, please include a justification for each of the applicable budget elements listed above.