



## Funding Opportunity: DOD Releases New FOA for the Minerva Research Initiative

*Lewis-Burke Associates LLC – May 6, 2021*

The Department of Defense (DOD) released a new funding opportunity announcement (FOA) for its signature university-led social science research program, the Minerva Research Initiative (Minerva). Minerva seeks to fund top-quality social science research that provides DOD with a better understanding of the factors influencing the geopolitical environment in which it operates. As the FOA highlights, the Minerva program seeks to support DOD's "intellectual capital in the social sciences and improve its ability to address future challenges and build bridges between the Department and the social science community."

Minerva's 2021 topics of interest reflect the new national security priorities of the Biden Administration, including issues highlighted in the Administration's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance such as the impact of climate change as well as disinformation and online influence. This also represents a shift away from the competition's previous focus on great power competition under the Trump Administration. This year's solicitation will focus on nine topic areas covering a broad range of priority countries, regions, and disciplines. Complete details of each topic area are in the full FOA. The nine topic areas are:

- ***Social Implications of Environmental Change:*** "This topic seeks to explore the multifaceted social implications of environmental change. The focus here is not on questions of if climate change causes conflict, but rather how stresses to various earth systems—such as climate change, land-system change, freshwater and ocean stress, etc.—impact social behavior, governance, fragility, and stability, and vice versa."
- ***Resource Competition, Social Cohesion, and Strategic Climate Resilience:*** "Climate and environmental change is a defining global challenge with significant potential to reshape future security and stability, including but not limited to mass migration, fragility, infectious disease, water scarcity, famine, energy challenges, as well as new opportunities. As such, it presents both global systemic risk to local and national social structures and a broader threat of societal rupture instigated by both slow- and rapid-onset climate events and shifts in the types and availability of critical resources."
- ***Security Risks in Ungoverned, Semi-Governed, and Differently-Governed Spaces:*** "This topic aims to support research to understand topical areas related to quantifying and describing vulnerabilities to sociopolitical instabilities in physically and virtually contested spaces that lack strong governance infrastructures and to understand the dynamics of great power and other levels of competition in influencing these spaces."
- ***Analysis of Foreign Influence Operations in Cross-Cultural Perspective:*** "The topic seeks multidisciplinary theoretically innovative approaches from disciplines such as anthropology, cross-cultural sociology, political science, political economy, and cross-cultural social psychology, working in collaboration with computer and information sciences to develop a social science-forward approach to the development of social theory and the creation of new techniques

needed to carry out a systemic analysis of social influence in online and offline cross-cultural milieus, cyber-social dynamics, narrative, and in languages other than English.”

- **Community Studies on Online and Offline Influence:** “This topic is interested in the contemporary nature of “local” community—including traditional and “modern” conceptions—and what binds it across different cultural milieus—both rural and urban—and the cyber-social influence carried out online and offline.”
- **Computational Social Science Research on Difficult-to-Access Environments:** “For computational social science to reach it’s potential in helping address real-world problems, new collaborative public-private arrangements, data infrastructures, and university organizational challenges must be addressed, alongside measured consideration of the social, ethical, and legal factors across societies with different cultural, ethical, and institutional norms. Of particular interest for this topic is the use of computational social science to enhance research understandings of difficult-to-access environments—ranging from enduring conflicts to societies that broadly restrict researcher access—where qualitative work can be more difficult.”
- **Social and Cultural Implications of Artificial Intelligence:** “This topic seeks to support research that uncovers and elucidates the role of cultural and social practices on the technological lifecycle and ultimately, whether and how AI and AI-enhanced capabilities affect end-user populations who may not be the technology’s anticipated consumer base.”
- **Humans and Outer Space:** “This topic seeks innovative, multidisciplinary research to inform preparations for future space travel and human expansion across the solar system with particular interest in research that considers the multilayered, multidimensional requirements for successful short- and long-term missions.”
- **Management and Information in the Defense Environment:** “This topic seeks to explore how management and information science can contribute to understanding organizational structures and the challenges to and opportunities in efforts to modernize DoD management, scientific, and bureaucratic processes and ecosystems.” This emphasis on management and information science under the Minerva program is new and was mandated by Congress in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)*.

The Basic Research Office, within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, coordinates Minerva and will make final funding decisions (with input from the Services). DOD will consider both individual awards as well as team proposals for this iteration of Minerva. Team proposals must name one Principal Investigator as the primary point of contact and designate one institution as the administrative lead for working with DOD. Team proposals should describe the relationship between participating institutions and each’s respective role.

**Due Dates:** DOD strongly encourages researchers interested in Minerva to submit white papers for evaluation prior to preparing a full proposal. White papers must be submitted via email to [osd.minerva@mail.mil](mailto:osd.minerva@mail.mil) no later than **June 23, 2021 at 3:00 PM ET**. Proposers are also encouraged to contact the appropriate point-of-contact (POC) for their topic of interest at least two weeks before the white paper deadline to discuss their ideas before submitting. The relevant POC for each area is listed in the full FOA. Full proposals must be submitted no later than **September 29, 2021 at 3:00 PM ET**.

**Award Information:** A total of \$15 million is available this competition. DOD plans to fund between 10 to 12 awards averaging between \$150,000 and \$1 million per year for a period of three to five years. Previous Minerva awards have averaged approximately \$440,000 per year.

**Eligibility:** This Minerva competition is open to all sources from academia, including U.S. universities, DOD institutions of higher education, and foreign universities. DOD encourages submissions from Historically Black Colleges and Universities/Minority-Serving Institutions but will not specifically set aside funds for these entities.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The complete FOA and additional information regarding the 2021 topics are available at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) under solicitation number “WHS-AD-FOA-21-01.”
- Complete background on Minerva, including information on previous awardees, is available at <http://minerva.defense.gov/>.