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ALERT

Space Force Unleashes Project Apollo to Accelerate Private Sector Tech Development

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WHAT: The Space Force's Space Domain Awareness (SDA) Tools, Applications, & Processing (TAP) Lab is kicking off its inaugural Project Apollo cohort on October 26, 2023. Open to all domestic companies, Project Apollo will be "an intense collaborative tech accelerator" aimed at quickly converting cutting edge software prototypes into commercial products. Each cohort will last for three months, with the possibility of follow-on contracts with the Space Force and other government agencies. There will be up to four cohorts each year, each with a different project statement related to space domain awareness, threat warning and assessment, and space battle management. The inaugural cohort will focus on protecting satellites in geosynchronous orbit from adversaries' direct ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons.

WHY: The SDA TAP Lab recognizes the threats it faces as near-peer competitors, particularly China and Russia, further their efforts to militarize space. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) regularly relies on its partnerships with the private sector to address emerging threats. As relevant here, the Space Force has identified a need for nearly instantaneous detection of space launches around the globe and classification of space objects for inclusion into Operation C2 centers' semi-automated, real-time decision aids. The United States' adversaries are actively advancing their ASAT weapons' evasion techniques, putting further pressure on the Space Force to ramp up its capabilities or risk losing air superiority.

WHO: Project Apollo is open to domestic companies, research centers, and other industry experts. There is no restriction on the size of the business or organization. The ideal applicant's proposed technology has at least been validated in a lab and capable of

Practice Areas

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Government Contracts

being validated in a relevant industrial environment by the end of the three-month period.

The SDA TAP Lab anticipates choosing up to five companies per cohort. Companies with capabilities and ideas not particularly suited to addressing the current problem statement are encouraged to apply to future cohorts, which will likely focus on addressing threats from geosynchronous co-orbital ASATs, low earth orbit direct ascent ASATs, low earth orbit co-orbital ASATs, and offensive cyber operations.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR INDUSTRY: The U.S. Government – and particularly the DoD – has increasingly turned to alternative, more rapid means of integrating new technology solutions to the everchanging national security landscape. Similar to the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, the SDA TAP Lab is seeking to bypass the red tape associated with traditional procurement methods to quickly tap into the private sector's enhanced technological capabilities. And although program participants are not guaranteed funding or follow-on contracts at the end of their cohort, the stated objective of Project Apollo is to "stimulate investment in commercial capabilities, whether in the Space Force, DoD, or other government agency. Moreover, the participating companies will be offered mentorship opportunities and unique exposure to the innerworkings of the fledgling military branch.

As with other government partnerships involving technology transfers or investment, Project Apollo participants should be fully informed of any intellectual property and data rights they may be providing to the government. Companies should ensure they are comfortable with the level of government involvement in their business and product development prior to accepting any assistance – especially monetary assistance – from the government. As we have previously advised, failure to understand and follow federal intellectual property rules can inadvertently lead to the government obtaining greater rights than anticipated.

CONCLUSION: Space is quickly becoming the next frontier in national security, and the Space Force is amping up its partnership with the private sector to address growing threats. Interested companies and organizations can fill out an application here and monitor for future Project Apollo cohorts.