

ADVANCE CONTRACT AWARD NOTICE (ACAN)

1. INTRODUCTION

An ACAN is a public notice indicating to the supplier community that a department or agency intends to award a contract for goods, services or construction to a pre-identified supplier, thereby allowing other suppliers to signal their interest in bidding, by submitting a statement of capabilities. If no supplier submits a statement of capabilities that meets the requirements set out in the ACAN, on or before the closing date stated in the ACAN, the contracting officer may then proceed with the award to the pre-identified supplier.

The **Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)** has a requirement to streamline administrative risk validation process implemented in accordance with the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships. The objective is to create efficiencies while increasing rigour in this decision-making process to improve Alliance grant program service standards.

The purpose of this Advance Contract Award Notice (ACAN) is to signal the government's intention to award a contract for these services to **U15 – Group of Canadian Research Universities (U15)**.

Before awarding a contract, however, the government would like to provide other suppliers with the opportunity to demonstrate that they are capable of satisfying the requirements set out in this Notice, by submitting a statement of capabilities during the 15 calendar day posting period.

If other potential suppliers submit a statement of capabilities during the 15 calendar day posting period that meet the requirements set out in the ACAN, the government will proceed to a full tendering process on either the government's electronic tendering service or through traditional means, in order to award the contract. If no other supplier submits, on or before the closing date, a statement of capabilities meeting the requirements set out in the ACAN, a contract will be awarded to the pre-selected supplier.

2. DEFINITION OF SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

The SecureScholar.ca database subscription will provide access to a web application that will enable NSERC to increase efficiency and rigour in the evaluation of research projects according to Canada's National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships (the Guidelines). The database will allow NSERC to find and retrieve open-source intelligence curated from multiple sources specifically tailored to address the "Know Your Research" questions on the Guidelines' Risk Assessment Form. The database's source documents will be easily accessible to support NSERC's decision-making process. It will streamline NSERC's administrative risk validation assessment process to significantly improve service standards.

3. BACKGROUND

The National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships (the Guidelines) integrates national security considerations into the development, evaluation, and funding of research partnerships. The Guidelines better position researchers, research organizations and Government funders to undertake consistent, risk-targeted due diligence of potential risks to research security.

In accordance with the Guidelines, all Alliance grant applications involving a private-sector partner organization must include a completed Risk Assessment Form. As part of the review process, NSERC conducts an administrative risk validation using open-source due diligence methods to ensure Risk Assessment Forms are sufficiently completed.

NSERC currently does not have an efficient method to determine which grant applications have potential security risks due to the subject matter of the research. NSERC must manually compare each proposed research project against several lists to determine its potential sensitivity (e.g., alignment with Canada's

sensitive technologies list, critical infrastructure, critical minerals lists) on a case by case basis. Due to time and resource constraints, many additional sources of information (e.g., patent, publishing databases) that are not fit for the purpose of research security risk assessment cannot be sustainably considered.

Access to a database of open-source intelligence that is curated and continuously updated by analysts with extensive knowledge of the Canadian federal research security policy environment and extensive knowledge of the Canadian post-secondary research environment will increase the efficiency and rigour of NSERC's administrative risk validation process while simultaneously ensuring outputs have legitimacy with key stakeholders in post-secondary institution administrations.

4. CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF STATEMENT OF CAPABILITIES

Any interested supplier must demonstrate by way of a statement of capabilities that it meets the following requirements:

- Ability to evaluate research projects according to the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships "Know Your Research" questions. Website link: [SecureScholar.ca](https://www.securescholar.ca)
- Ability to retrieve open-source intelligence curated from multiple sources specifically tailored to address the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnership's "Know Your Research" questions.
- Experience in developing resources pertaining to the following subject matter; The National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships; research security.
- Extensive** experience in overseeing strategic Canadian policy development and communication processes pertaining to the following subject matter; The National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships; research security.
- Strong credibility and existing relationships with the post-secondary research community; including the Government of Canada – Universities Working Group.

****Extensive experience** is defined as a minimum of 4 years of experience within the last 7 years, one of which was obtained within the last year

5. APPLICABILITY OF TRADE AGREEMENTS

This procurement is subject to the following trade agreements:

Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA), the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement, the Canada-Columbia Free Trade Agreement and the Canada-Chili Free Trade Agreement, Canada-Panama Free Trade Agreement and Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement.

6. JUSTIFICATION FOR PRE-IDENTIFIED SUPPLIER

Under the section: 10.2.4 Exception (d) of the Government Contracts Regulations:

Only one person or firm capable of performing the contract.

Only one firm is capable of ensuring that future needs for the efficient and rigorous evaluation of research projects according to the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships can be met. This is the only database currently available that has been specifically tailored for the evaluation of research projects according to the Know Your Research questions of the Risk Assessment Form. Furthermore, this database is curated and continuously updated by experts with extensive knowledge of the Canadian federal research security policy environment and extensive knowledge of the post-secondary research environment.

The U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities (U15) is a not-for-profit organization that fosters the development and delivery of long-term, sustainable higher education and research policy, in Canada and around the world. The U15 has played a key role at the intersection of the federal government and post-secondary institutions for more than five years. They were coauthors of "Mitigating economic and/or geopolitical risks in sensitive research projects" guide which is a key resource to support for researchers and institutions with completing the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships Risk Assessment Form.

7. GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS REGULATIONS EXCEPTIONS

Section 6 d) of the Government Contracts Regulations and contains four exceptions that permit the contracting authority to set-aside the requirements to solicit bids. The one that applies to this requirement is:

a) only one person or firm is capable of performing the contract.

8. PERIOD OF PROPOSED CONTRACT

Proposed period:	Three (3) years
Estimated start date:	March 31, 2023
Estimated end date:	March 31, 2026

9. ESTIMATED VALUE OF THE PROPOSED CONTRACT

The estimated value of the contract is \$150,000.00 excluding GST.

10. PROPOSED SERVICE PROVIDER

U15 – Group of Canadian Research Universities

360 Albert Street, Suite 1425
Ottawa, ON K1R 7X7

11. SUBMISSION OF STATEMENT OF CAPABILITIES BY SUPPLIERS

Suppliers who consider themselves fully qualified and available to meet the specified requirements may submit a statement of capabilities in writing to the Contracting Authority identified in this Notice on or before the closing date of this Notice. The statement of capabilities must clearly demonstrate how the supplier meets the advertised requirements.

12. CLOSING DATE OF SUBMISSION OF STATEMENTS OF CAPABILITIES

March 16, 2023, at 2PM EST

13. INQUIRIES AND SUBMISSION OF STATEMENTS OF CAPABILITIES

Inquiries and statements of capabilities are to be directed to:

Lisa Lacasse
Senior Procurement Advisor
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
Telephone: 343-571-9622
Email: Tenders@nserc-crsng.gc.ca