

EcoCAR Innovation Challenge

RFP Q&A

-as of 11.17.25 -

RFP (page 26) that “student positions during summer terms will not count towards university cost-share requirement”, yet it also calls for Graduate Research Assistants or Graduate Teaching Assistants to be fully funded.

Q: Is the cost ineligibility applied to ~summer-only positions (like an REU site or summer undergraduate technician), or do we need to discount the summer months from our 12-month Graduate Research Assistant appointments in our budget tables?

A: GRAs are not expected to work through the summer, although allowable if the university has the support for a 12-month appointment. Extending the GRA through the summer would be considered “exceeding the minimum requirement” so it should be clearly called out in the proposal for evaluation purposes.

Q: Could we fully count our 9-month Graduate Teaching Assistantships appointments (which are incurred over 9 academic months, yet paid out over 12 so charges occur in the summer periods)?

A: Yes. As long as the GRA is fully funded to work just on EcoCAR for the 9 month academic year, it meets the spirit of the requirement. How the university distributes those funds is up to your discretion.

Q: Will the prize money be awarded to the individual team members (~personally), or will this prize money be awarded to our organization on behalf of the team member for use at our institution? All prize money is awarded to the University’s designated EcoCAR Innovation Challenge (EIC) team account to be used for the continuity of your EIC program.

A: If awarded to our organization, can you confirm if these funds are fully ~discretionary, or are they limited in their nature on costs to be supported? Prize money must be used specifically by your team for the EIC program but are otherwise discretionary.

Q: May the prize funding be used on a different unrelated research project, or on costs customarily unallowable with federal funding (such as administrative staff support, if chosen)? Or, should the prize funding be directed back towards the EcoCAR challenge, in a way best fitting per the team’s consensus?

A: The prize money is restricted to be used for the EcoCAR Innovation Challenge team, although otherwise discretionary. The prize money will be paid by the American Society for Engineering Education with 100% industry funds. No federal funding is used so it is not subject to federal funding reporting requirements or restrictions.

Q: Should the prize funding implementation be annotated in our “budget tables” to be submitted with this application, or is it ~offline from the project costs?

A: It does not need to be in the budget table for the application, unless you want to clearly call it out as ‘projected prize money’

Q: On the advisor videos, we get one slide. I assume it's OK to have animations as we talk to also show text as long as its one slide. After all, it could be up to three minutes.

This question could also apply to other slide areas.

A: The requirement: Dynamic slide content, such as animations, may be included in PowerPoint slides. However, proposers should bear in mind that the proposals will be reviewed as standalone files without a presenter to guide the timing/sequence of animations or other dynamic slide content. Proposers should therefore prepare slides such that a single click in presentation mode will trigger any/all multimedia or dynamic content (such as animations) contained within the slide. All dynamic or multimedia content are subject to the audio/video time limits communicated in Table 16.

Q: There is a discrepancy between the section titles in Table 16 (section D-2.1, page 26) and the titles used in some sections, namely:

D-2.3 (Lead Faculty Advisors – it is “Faculty Support” in Table 16)

D-2.4 (Additional Faculty, Mentors, SMEs, and Staff – it is “Additional Faculty & Staff Support” in Table 16)

D-2.5 (Funding Commitments and Budgeting – it is “Team Funding & Budgeting” in Table 16)

A: The wording in Table 16 was abridged to clean up the table. The titles you use for the sections are relatively inconsequential - you could pick either version and it would be fine. But if you need direction, the best guidance is to use the names from the section headers.

Q: In Sections 2 (Lead Faculty Advisors) and 3 (Additional Faculty, etc.) there is a slide limit of 1 per individual.

For Section 2, a table and a video are required (video optional for Section 3 individuals).

Please confirm how the reviewers will view the videos.

Specifically, can we expect that the reviewers will be viewing the video in full-screen when it is playing. We are concerned about readability issues if a table and a video have to be crammed into one slide.

A: Dynamic slide content, such as animations, may be included in PowerPoint slides. However, proposers should bear in mind that the proposals will be reviewed as standalone files without a presenter to guide the timing/sequence of animations or other dynamic slide content. Reviewers will review PowerPoint proposals in presentation mode. Proposers should therefore prepare slides such that a single click in presentation mode will trigger any/all multimedia or dynamic content (such as animations) contained within the slide. All dynamic or multimedia content are subject to the audio/video time limits communicated in Table 16.

Q: Would a team need to purchase an inverter and electric motor in order to compete? What happens if we can't raise enough external support to purchase those?

A: While powertrain components are a critical aspect of the EcoCAR Innovation Challenge, universities are not required to purchase an electric drivetrain to compete. Historically, the EcoCAR program has been successful in establishing partnerships with industry companies who donate components (like an electric drivetrain) for EcoCAR team use. Many EcoCAR schools have also found success in securing local partners to donate components to preserve cash resources. Some schools choose to purchase their own components, which enables a broader array of component options.

Q: Much of our equipment is a bit undersized. Is it normal for universities to collaborate with ANL or other universities for testing? What would be the best way for us to move forward?

A: Securing abundant access to no-cost or low-cost facilities nearby the university is a competitive advantage for an EcoCAR school. However, many schools find this challenging. It is common for EcoCAR teams to develop partnerships to secure the facilities and equipment needed to complete vehicle testing or component testing. Universities should reference Appendix E of the EcoCAR RFP for recommendations on pursuing vehicle testing facilities.

Q: Are EcoCAR universities required to test their motor systems on an electric dynamometer?

A: No. High-power motor dynamometers, power supplies or other component testing assets can be valuable to EcoCAR teams, but they are not required to apply. EcoCAR teams will not be required to complete high-power component-level testing before integrating components on-vehicle.

Q: GRAs: what is the minimum and what would be competitive (in terms of university matching funding)

A: A minimum is 4 fully funded GRAs. If school are able to secure more funding for more GRAs they will be more competitive.

Q: Will facilities count as "cost share"?

A: The \$75k cost share requirement listed in the RFP is really focused on funded student positions. That said, facilities are an important part of the proposal process so bringing to bear more & better facilities for EcoCAR team use will make for a more competitive proposal

Q: How much university-provided travel funding should we expect to budget for?

A: The RFP states universities should expect to contribute 30%-40% above EcoCAR-provided travel funding. That estimate is based on estimates from the current AVTC series. The variability in university-provided travel funding is largely driven by team choices (how many extra students to send, how many students to a room, etc.).

Q: How much "additional cash support annually" is enough to cover operational expenses and field a competitive proposal?

A: Team operational expenses depend on a variety of factors, including component donations provided by EcoCAR or team sponsors. There is no target or requirement for additional cash support, but more cash support will make for a more competitive proposal

Q: We are working on forming a Faculty Advisor Board for the team. How important will this be?

A: A faculty advisory board can be useful, but the most important factor is having strong commitments from a team of Lead Faculty advisors.

Q: Can professional editing/voice over services be utilized in proposal?

A: While universities are permitted to use professional-grade equipment or leverage professionals to assist with producing or editing video or audio for the proposal, this practice is discouraged (production quality is not a competitive element per Section D-2.1).

The audio/video elements of the proposal were crafted to be achievable by students and faculty using widely available resources (computer, phone, webcam, MS Teams, MS PowerPoint).

RFP Section D-2.1 states: the production quality of audio or video included in proposals **will not** be a competitive factor in the evaluation process. Universities should ensure recordings are clear, intelligible, and free from distractions. Poor audio or video quality that prevents reviewers from understanding the contents of the recording may negatively impact the evaluation.

Q: Is the one month paid summer salary support (page 27 of the revised RFP) understood per project year or only one time for the full duration of the project?

A: The one month paid summer salary support is annual.

Q: Are there additional guidelines for the format of the PowerPoint presentations (such as font size)?

A: Refer to the PowerPoint Guide, which will be released after the information webinar on November 6.

Q: If teams apply for both tracks, how does the selection process work?

A: Universities may apply to both vehicle tracks and are encouraged to do so. Applying to both vehicle tracks may increase the chances of a university being selected into the program. However, any given university will only be approved to compete in one vehicle track (not both). If a team elects to apply to both vehicle tracks, they must submit two proposals (one for each vehicle track). Each proposal must be tailored to the requirements of the given vehicle track. Proposers may re-use content in both proposals (where applicable), but each proposal must be standalone. When uploading proposal materials, applicants who are applying to both tracks will be **required** to express a preference for one of the vehicle tracks. Reference Section D-1.2 for more details.

Q: With strong new focus on AI and entrepreneurship, is the competition expecting 1-2 additional faculty advisors to be required?

A: Per Section C-2, each university is required to assign at least two faculty as Lead Advisors for the EcoCAR team. Additional faculty are *optional* but can be a valuable asset for the university's EcoCAR team if leveraged appropriately (and will therefore be a competitive element of the Team Selection process). Although not a stated requirement, faculty support in computer science, AI/ML would be highly encouraged and beneficial to the team particularly aligned to their vehicle track and the team's selected innovation focus areas. See Section D-2.4 for guidance on proposals for additional Faculty, mentors, SMEs, and support staff

Q: Can universities submit audio/video files or include YouTube links as a backup for embedded media files?

A: Audio or video elements must be embedded directly in the PowerPoint file and must be playable without external downloads. As a **backup** (in case of audio/video playback errors), proposers may post proposal videos to YouTube and include links to those videos in the proposal file (in the body of the slide or the notes section). Please be advised, this is a backup

and **NOT** a replacement for embedding media in the PowerPoint proposal. Proposers should **NOT** upload standalone audio or video files.

Q: Are applicant universities required to waive indirect costs and overhead fees for support receive from EcoCAR sponsors?

A: It is not mandatory that Universities waive indirect costs (IDC).

Q: Can indirect costs (IDC) or IDC cost recovery be counted toward cost share requirements?

A: No, IDC and IDC cost recovery cannot be counted toward the cost share requirement (reference Table 15 in Section C-1.1).

Q: What sections of the RFP can we reference to strengthen our request for an IDC waiver?

A: RFP sections that reference Overhead: C-1, D-3.2.1

Q: According to Section A-6.2.2, EcoCAR student leads must be graduate students. Our institution is primarily undergraduate engineering. Does that mean we don't qualify?

A: Per Table 10 (Section A-6.2.2), each university must support a Student Leadership Team that includes no fewer than four fully-funded graduate students, although substituting graduate students with undergraduates may be approved as an exception on a case-by-case basis. These four graduate students are a critical enabler to the success of the program, providing expertise, continuity and leadership for the team. Universities that are unable to meet these requirements should consider partnering with another educational institution that can provide graduate student leadership

Q: We plan to provide the required matching for faculty support, student stipends, travel, equipment, and seed funding partly through the university and partly through an external sponsor. Is this allowed?

A: Multi-year funding commitments from the university are essential for a team's long term success in the EcoCAR program. Therefore, securing institutional commitments from universities will be a point of emphasis for the EcoCAR team selection process. University proposals must include a letter of support from senior university official (such as a Dean) that clearly outlines the resources committed over four years, and when they will be available for EcoCAR team use. University-provided resources may come from any university source (engineering departments, college of engineering, endowment, etc.). However, if the university is unable to provide 100% of the required support, the proposal should provide a firm commitment from alternate sources described in a signed commitment letter(s). If a team is unable to provide 100% of the minimum funding requirement through the university or an alternate source, they will be at a distinct disadvantage in the proposal process but may still apply. However, the most competitive proposals will include firm commitments guaranteeing resources for the full four-year program.

Q: Do you plan to engage community colleges and vocational schools this cycle?

A: For this next AVTC cycle we are narrowing eligibility to institutions that can meet a specific set of technical, safety, and resource requirements on day one. Teams will work with road-legal, high-voltage, heavily instrumented vehicles and prototype components along with a

heavy curriculum load across upper-division and graduate courses and will need sustained access to specialized labs.

While two-year institutions won't serve as primary competing teams in this cycle, we encourage selected universities to partner with local educational institutions that will enable them to meet their program goals and objectives (e.g., co-developed subsystems, fabrication, testing support, or data curation). These collaborations can create transfer and internship pipelines for students and are encouraged, however, sponsor IP will not be permissible to share outside of students on the official rosters of selected teams.