

FAQs - Sovereign Defense Cloud for High-Performance Computing

Last updated July 20, 2026

Will the SDC replace the HPCMP's 5 DSRCs?

No, SDC nodes are not envisioned to replace the 5 DSRCs.

What GOV-owned HPC or AI systems should the proposed solution include as GFE?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission any GFE necessary to achieve the solution presented. The tech challenge and the HPCMP Strategic Plan do not mandate the inclusion of specific, existing Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) as the foundation for the Sovereign Defense Cloud (SDC). The overarching vision for the SDC is a modernized, contractor-furnished ecosystem.

Should the proposed solution purchase and install any on-premises systems?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented. The SDC is envisioned as a hybrid cloud model integrating both commercial cloud and on-premises resources, which would include advanced architecture and large-scale AI/HPC systems.

What classifications and caveats should the proposed solution include?

The submitted solution must support or allow consideration of support at all classification levels, including Unclassified, Secret, and Top Secret, along with caveats such as Special Access Program (SAP), Special Access Required (SAR), and Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI).

Should the proposed solution support user-developed foundational AI models and agentic workflows?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented.

How much compute, memory, and storage should the proposed solution accommodate?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission how much compute, memory, and storage their solution can accommodate. Information regarding current HPCMP capacity can be obtained at hpc.mil.

What missions should the proposed solution anticipate?

HPCMP enables Research and Development (R&D), Test and Evaluation (T&E), digital engineering, sustainment, and operations.

How many SDC users does the GOV anticipate? How are they geographically distributed?

Specific quantities and geographical regions cannot be provided at this time. It is anticipated SDC users will directly map to the Department of War's operational realities across a range of geographies and long-term modernization goals.

Will all SDC users possess a common access card (CAC)?

Respondents should not constrain their proposed solutions by assuming a Common Access Card (CAC) is the sole or primary mechanism for user authentication.

What are the prerequisites to becoming an SDC user?

The exact, finalized prerequisites for becoming a Sovereign Defense Cloud (SDC) user remain undefined at this stage.

Does the SDC pIE need to preserve any HPCMP pIE functions, or will it be a greenfield endeavor?

No and it is not a complete greenfield endeavor.

What technical complexity levels must the required "concierge support services" include?

The support must include Level 3. The SDC will provide access to Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) with deep domain expertise in areas like advanced computing, AI/ML, and grand-scale problem-solving, which constitutes expert user assistance.

What funding ceiling does the GOV anticipate?

The tech challenge states that current funding is unavailable. It is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented.

How should offerors treat commercial cloud consumption costs during Phase 2?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented.

How many SDC awardees does the GOV anticipate?

The tech challenge explicitly maintains maximum flexibility, noting that the Government may make one integrated award, multiple awards per focus area, or choose to make no awards at all.

When is this going to be awarded?

The award date for this effort is unknown at this time.

Will the government allow pages of the proposal to be in landscape format to accommodate graphics, tables, and charts?

No. The Government requires all pages to remain in standard portrait orientation. Strict adherence to standard formatting ensures submissions are comparable and equitable during the evaluation process.

Will the government permit the use of a smaller font size for graphics, charts, and tables?

No. The Government will not permit the use of a smaller font size for any section of the proposal, including graphics, charts, and tables. Enforcing a uniform font size across all standard formatting ensures submissions are comparable and prevents the circumvention of space constraints.

Can the government provide additional details on the number or scope of classification level environments to operate across?

No. The Government will not provide additional details regarding the classification environments at this time. Offerors must base their proposals on the requirements as currently stated in the solicitation. Evaluating all vendors against this standard baseline ensures submissions are comparable.

Can the government confirm that cover page, table of contents, acronyms list, tables, and diagrams are not counted towards the 5-page limit?

The cover page, table of contents, and acronym list are not counted towards the 5-page limit. However, all tables and diagrams will be counted towards the 5-page limit. Enforcing this page limit on all substantive content and standard formatting ensures submissions are comparable.

Can the Government clarify how it intends to execute Phase IV (Implementation & Scaling) from a contractual standpoint? Specifically, should offerors expect Phase IV to be a separate contractual action as either under a FAR or OTA authorities contractual instrument?

No. The strategy for future phases has not been finalized and remains at the Government's discretion. Offerors must base their submissions solely on the requirements and phases explicitly detailed in the current solicitation document.

Can the Government clarify what scope of work the ROM should cover for the solution brief? Specifically, should the ROM estimate include only anticipated Phase II prototype development efforts, or should expected activities for Phases III (Demonstration) and IV (Implementation & Scaling) also be incorporated?

No. The ROM estimate should not incorporate anticipated costs or activities for Phase III (Demonstration) or Phase IV (Implementation & Scaling). The ROM must strictly cover only the Phase II prototype development efforts as defined in the current solicitation.

The evaluation criteria for Feasibility references 'operational viability.' To ensure alignment with HPCMP objectives, will the Government please clarify the specific operational factors (e.g., environmental scaling, user adoption, change management) that evaluators will consider under this criterion?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate their solution to include all requirements necessary to achieve the solution submitted.

What mechanisms, evaluation criteria, or oversight processes will the government use to assess, verify, and ensure that solutions comply with requirements for open standards, modular system design, and interoperability across platforms and agencies?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate their solution to include all requirements necessary to achieve the solution submitted.

Can the government provide a clear definition of the expected scale of operations along with the projected workload requirements?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented.

Are there defined performance targets, service-level agreements (SLAs), or other measurable benchmarks that solutions will be expected to meet?

Not at this time.

Outside current resource management processes, will there be any additional constraints (e.g., limiting access to cloud service catalog) that will need to be applied to the SDC?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate their solution to include all requirements necessary to achieve the solution submitted.

To what extent does the Government intend to standardize the underlying HPCMP and DSRC environments (e.g., middleware stacks, schedulers, storage architectures, identity systems, policies), and how should offerors account for varying levels of standardization when assessing performance, integration complexity, and overall cost?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate their solution to include all requirements necessary to achieve the solution submitted.

Can the Government clarify which APIs, data formats, workload schedulers, and orchestration frameworks are currently required or in operational use within HPCMP/DSRC environments? Understanding these mandated or legacy components (e.g., Kubernetes, OpenStack, SLURM, PBS) will help ensure prototype designs are interoperable with existing systems.

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented.

Please confirm the prototype is unclassified? If no, please explain.

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate their solution to include all requirements necessary to achieve the solution submitted.

Can the Government clarify which on premises HPCMP/DSRC resources will be available to support Phase II prototype activities, including the expected technical environment, cybersecurity requirements/enclaves, and the level of operational support provided to offerors from the HPCMP experts?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission any GFE necessary to achieve the solution presented. The tech challenge and the HPCMP Strategic Plan do not mandate the inclusion of specific, existing Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) as the foundation for the Sovereign Defense Cloud (SDC). The overarching vision for the SDC is a modernized, contractor-furnished ecosystem.

Can the Government clarify the technical environment and integration boundaries that will be provided for Phase II prototype development? Specifically, which HPCMP/DSRC infrastructure components (compute, storage, and networking), workload schedulers, and identity management systems will be accessible to offerors, and will the prototype environment operate in isolation from production networks, data, and cybersecurity policies?

The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate their solution to include all requirements necessary to achieve the solution submitted. Information regarding current HPCMP capacity can be obtained at hpc.mil.

Will the government provide representative capacity requirements for pricing estimates?

No, the Government will not be providing specific capacity requirements. The Government is seeking innovative solutions from industry; therefore, it is the discretion of the offeror to articulate in their submission all requirements necessary to achieve the solution presented. Offerors are expected to define the compute, memory, and storage their solution can accommodate. For context on our current capabilities, information can be obtained at hpc.mil.

Where will the prototype solution be hosted? Can it be hosted at the Contractor's facility?

The solicitation allows for flexibility in the hosting of the prototype. The Government's vision is for a "modernized, contractor-furnished ecosystem." It is at the offeror's discretion to propose the hosting solution, including any necessary Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) or the use of a contractor facility, that best supports the innovative solution they are presenting.

Will remote access be allowed during the prototype?

Given the emphasis on "innovative solutions from industry," offerors should articulate their proposed access methods and associated security protocols in their submission. The Government will evaluate the feasibility and security of the proposed approach.

May a single offeror submit more than one response to the Tech Challenge? For example, if an offeror has two distinct solutions addressing different focus areas, should these be combined into a single 5-page submission, or may the offeror submit separate responses for each solution?

Yes.

The Vendor Lock-In Prevention focus area emphasizes open standards such as OpenStack, Kubernetes, and OpenAPI. Will the Government similarly favor HPC and AI data-fabric infrastructure built on industry-standard Ethernet networking, including architectures aligned to the Ultra Ethernet Consortium (UEC) 1.0 specification and Remote Direct Memory Access (RDMA) over standard Ethernet, in place of proprietary interconnects? Will a storage and data-fabric design that connects to existing standard Ethernet fabrics be viewed favorably under the Vendor Lock-In Prevention and Scalability criteria?

The Government is focused on preventing vendor lock-in through the use of open standards and modular system designs. While the Government will not dictate specific technologies, a solution that effectively utilizes industry standards to promote interoperability and prevent proprietary entanglement will be viewed favorably under the corresponding evaluation criteria. It is the offeror's responsibility to articulate how their proposed architecture, regardless of the specific interconnect, achieves the Government's goals.

Will the Government accept a disaggregated data architecture in which the high-performance data tier runs on commodity or Government-furnished industry-standard servers, separating metadata services from data nodes, rather than a single proprietary appliance?

The Government is seeking innovative, modernized solutions. The Government is open to considering any architecture, including disaggregated models, provided the offeror can demonstrate its feasibility, scalability, and cost-effectiveness. The overarching vision is for a contractor-furnished ecosystem, but you may articulate any GFE necessary to achieve the solution you present.

Under the Secure Data Fabric and Vendor Lock-In Prevention criteria, will the evaluation reward access through standard protocols (for example NFS, SMB, S3, and parallel NFS) and demonstrated data portability that allows the Government to migrate data to an alternative platform without reformatting or rehydration?

Solutions will be evaluated against the criteria outlined in the solicitation, which include Secure Data Fabric and Vendor Lock-In Prevention. Demonstrating robust data portability and access through standard protocols would directly address these key criteria.

For the Secure Data Fabric focus area, does the Government expect automated data discovery, classification, tagging, and labeling (data-centric security and data security posture

management) as part of the solution, and across which classification levels and enclaves should a Phase II prototype be scoped?

The Government expects a secure data fabric, but the specific implementation of features like automated data management is left to the innovation of the offeror. Regarding classification levels, the Government will not provide additional details at this time. Offerors must base their proposals on the requirements as stated in the solicitation to ensure a comparable and equitable evaluation.

Are the eight additional evaluation criteria (Innovation, Feasibility, Scalability, Vendor Lock-In Prevention, Commercial Readiness, Cost Efficiency, Impact, Utility) weighted or considered equally? If weighted, can the Government indicate the relative emphasis?

The solicitation document is the authoritative source for evaluation criteria. The Government has not provided a specific weighting for the criteria; all are considered important for a comprehensive evaluation

The announcement invites solutions addressing one or more focus areas. How will the Government integrate multiple partial-scope awards into a single SDC architecture, and is a full-stack solution across all six focus areas preferred over focused submissions?

The Government has not finalized its strategy for how potential awards will be integrated. Offerors are invited to propose solutions that address one or more focus areas. The onus is on the offeror to present a compelling solution, whether it is focused or full-stack.

Will the Government accept submissions in which a VAR or FSI is the prime offeror and submitter, with original equipment manufacturer (OEM) technology providers contributing components of the solution?

Current Environment and Interoperability.

Can the Government share the current data-plane baseline (parallel file system, network interconnect, compute and GPU footprint, and workload scheduler) to scope interoperability, or indicate the process to request this information under appropriate handling? Must a Phase II prototype interoperate with the existing Portal to the Information Environment (PIE) and the current workload scheduler?

The Government will not provide a detailed technical baseline. As stated previously, information regarding current HPCMP capacity can be found at hpc.mil. For the prototype phase, it is up to the offeror to define the technical environment and integration boundaries for their proposed solution. Interoperability requirements, if any, will be specified by the Government at a later date.

Given that funding is not currently available, what is the anticipated path and timeline to Phase II prototype funding, and how will the Government re-engage solution briefs retained in the electronic library for up to three years when funds become available?

The official award date and funding timeline for this effort have not been finalized. The evaluation process is ongoing.

Should the Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) cover the Phase II prototype only, or the full multi-phase effort through implementation and scaling?

Yes. As explicitly stated in the provided documentation, the ROM must strictly cover only the Phase II prototype development efforts. Any costs or activities for subsequent phases will be requested by the Government at a later date.

What are the criteria and expected timing for moving from a Step 1 solution brief to a Step 2 RFP or solution pitch, and is participation in a solution pitch mandatory for selection?

The Government has not finalized the strategy or timeline for future phases or steps in the acquisition process.

Does the Government anticipate awarding under FAR Part 12, 13, or 15, or as an Other Transaction under 10 U.S.C. 4022, and how will technical data and intellectual property rights for commercial items be treated in the resultant award?

The Government will not provide clarification regarding the specific contractual instrument at this time. That decision remains at the Government's discretion.

Does the five-page limit include figures, diagrams, and any cover page? Is the one page allocated for acronyms, abbreviations, and symbols counted within the five pages or in addition to them?

The cover page, table of contents, and acronym list do not count toward the 5-page limit. However, all figures, tables, and diagrams are counted within the 5-page limit. This ensures all substantive content is evaluated under the same constraints.

Does the five-page limit on solution briefs apply per Key Focus Area? or is it the maximum document size regardless of the number of Key Focus Areas addressed?

The five-page limit on solution briefs is the maximum document size regardless of the number of Key Focus Areas addressed. It does not apply "per Key Focus Area."

The Government's intent is to receive highly concise, high-impact concepts. Offerors should strategically focus their solution briefs on their core strengths, even if that means addressing only a subset of the Key Focus Areas, rather than diluting the quality of their submission to fit all focus areas into the strict five-page maximum.

As part of “rethinking foundational elements such as data storage, processing...”, is the Government open to solutions that propose additional hardware components?

Yes. The Government is open to solutions that propose additional or novel hardware components as part of rethinking the SDC's foundational elements. Because the SDC is envisioned as a hybrid-cloud model integrating both on-premises resources and commercial cloud hyperscalers, the introduction of specialized hardware (e.g., advanced AI accelerators, neuromorphic processors, high-performance storage fabrics, or low-SWaP edge devices) is acceptable, provided it strictly aligns with Modular Open Systems Approach (MOSA) standards and prevents vendor lock-in.

What does success look like five years after deployment? Is the primary objective reducing operational burden, increasing compute utilization, accelerating research, enabling AI workloads, creating a seamless user experience, or some combination of these?

Five years after deployment, the SDC will have reestablished the DoW's dominance in advanced computing, creating a "globally dominant advanced computing and software capability that unleashes American innovation and radically advances warfighting technology." The ultimate measure of success is the ability to deter and win future conflicts by maintaining technological superiority. Success is not a choice between these objectives; it is the successful integration of all of them. The seamless user experience and reduced operational burden are the means to accelerate research and enable AI, which in turn delivers the technological superiority the DoW requires to meet its mission.

What are the largest pain points with today's HPCMP environment that this effort is intended to address?

Today's HPCMP environment is severely constrained by delays in provisioning secure systems, fragmented legacy workflows, and a rigid inability to scale or securely "cloud burst" during crisis events. The Sovereign Defense Cloud aims to resolve these critical pain points by delivering a unified, pre-accredited, and infinitely scalable hybrid cloud utility. This shift eliminates legacy administrative bottlenecks and empowers warfighters with immediate, on-demand computational power.

Does the Government envision Kubernetes/container orchestration as a foundational component of the Sovereign Defense Cloud, or are alternative orchestration models equally acceptable?

While the Government views Kubernetes and containerization as the prevailing industry standard for modern, cloud-native application deployment, alternative orchestration models are acceptable. The Government does not mandate a specific commercial product or platform. Instead, any proposed solution will be evaluated on its ability to satisfy the performance-based requirements of the Sovereign Defense Cloud (SDC) while strictly adhering to Modular Open Systems Architecture (MOSA) and Zero Trust design principles.

Are there preferred open standards or interoperability frameworks that offerors should align with?

Yes. The Government strictly mandates adherence to a Modular Open Systems Approach (MOSA). Offerors must utilize non-proprietary, widely adopted commercial and government standards to ensure seamless interoperability, maximize data portability, and prevent vendor lock-in across the hybrid cloud ecosystem.

When referring to AI-powered orchestration, which use cases are considered the highest priority (e.g., job scheduling, resource optimization, predictive maintenance, user assistance, automated workflow generation, or security monitoring)?

The Government is interested in the full spectrum of AI-powered orchestration capabilities outlined in the inquiry. No single use case is currently designated as the exclusive highest priority. Rather, the Government seeks a balanced, holistic approach where these capabilities are integrated dynamically, and we encourage offerors to propose phased implementation strategies based on technological maturity, feasibility, and operational impact.

To what extent does the Government envision Generative AI interacting directly with end users versus serving primarily as an administrative automation capability?

The Government envisions a dual-use role for Generative AI within the Sovereign Defense Cloud and does not currently prioritize one application over the other. The ideal solution will be architected with the flexibility to support both user-facing interface enhancements (e.g., interactive assistance) and backend administrative automation (e.g., system orchestration), allowing the Government to scale and adapt these capabilities based on evolving operational requirements, trust, and security policies.

Are autonomous decision-making capabilities desired, or should AI remain advisory with human approval?

Consistent with DoD Directive 3000.09 (Autonomy in Weapon Systems) and broader DoD AI policy, the Government requires a human-in-the-loop paradigm. AI capabilities within the SDC must primarily serve an advisory role, providing high-fidelity recommendations to human decision-makers. However, architectures should remain flexible enough to support bounded, autonomous decision-making for low-risk, non-lethal administrative automation (e.g., dynamic

resource scaling, automated patch deployment, and network threat isolation), provided clear operational parameters and manual overrides are established.

Will proposed solutions need to support classified and unclassified environments using identical architectures, or will separate implementations be acceptable?

The Government is open to evaluating all architectural approaches. Both a unified, identical architecture spanning unclassified and classified security domains, and separate, specialized implementations tailored to specific classification levels, are fully acceptable. The primary objective is to ensure absolute data separation, strict compliance with multi-level security standards, and seamless interoperability, regardless of the underlying structural model.

Does the Government anticipate burst capability into commercial cloud providers during periods of peak demand, or is the primary objective workload portability rather than elastic scaling?

The Government views both elastic "burst" scaling and workload portability as crucial, non-competing, and highly integrated requirements for the Sovereign Defense Cloud. A successful solution should demonstrate a hybrid cloud architecture capable of performing dynamic, real-time workload bursting during peak demands, built upon a foundation of absolute workload portability that prevents vendor lock-in.

Are there commercial cloud providers currently within scope, or should proposed architectures remain completely cloud-agnostic?

While the Sovereign Defense Cloud must eventually operate across major Department of War (DoW) authorized commercial cloud environments (such as JWCC and other IL5/IL6/TS-accredited hyperscalers), the Government strongly emphasizes that proposed architectures must remain completely cloud-agnostic. The primary objective is to maintain strategic flexibility and prevent proprietary vendor lock-in.

What are the biggest sources of user friction in the current HPCMP Portal to the Information Environment (PIE)?

User friction primarily stems from administrative delays, highly manual workflows, and fragmented user interfaces. These legacy bottlenecks collectively delay project timelines, increase operational overhead, and isolate computational resources from the researchers who need them.

Does the Government envision a single unified portal across all HPC resources, or role-specific interfaces tailored to different user communities?

The Government is open to all innovative design paradigms and does not restrict proposed solutions to either a single, flat portal or completely separate interfaces. The optimal SDC

solution likely leverages a hybrid design: a single, unified portal framework that serves as the universal gateway to all SDC and HPC resources, utilizing dynamic, role-specific dashboards and views tailored to the distinct workflows of different user communities.

Are there existing scheduling, identity, workflow, or monitoring systems that offerors should assume will remain in place and integrate with?

Offerors should avoid proposing entirely proprietary, siloed identity or monitoring solutions. Instead, focus on how your platform acts as a secure, modernized layer that orchestrates and enhances these legacy enterprise systems to deliver an agile, unified hybrid-cloud experience.

How much emphasis will be placed on integrating with legacy HPC infrastructure versus enabling future modernization?

While the SDC must maintain robust interoperability with existing HPCMP legacy assets to preserve ongoing research, the primary emphasis is heavily weighted toward enabling future modernization. Legacy integration is viewed as a necessary transition phase, whereas future modernization is the strategic core of the SDC initiative.

Among innovation, technical maturity, user experience, cost, and implementation risk, which factors will most strongly differentiate highly rated submissions?

All five factors are critical to a comprehensive evaluation.

Is the Government more interested in novel commercial technologies or proven commercial technologies applied in innovative ways?

The Government is primarily interested in proven commercial technologies applied in innovative ways to solve the DoW's unique challenges. While the SDC must support cutting-edge capabilities, the high-consequence nature of national security missions requires a foundation of high technical maturity and low implementation risk. Offerors should focus on how they will orchestrate and adapt established, enterprise-grade commercial cloud and AI technologies to meet strict DoD security (IL5/IL6/TS), scalability, and multi-tenant requirements.

Does the Government envision an incremental migration from today's environment, or is a more comprehensive transformation the desired end state?

The Government desires a comprehensive transformation as the ultimate end state, executed through a highly structured, incremental migration. The SDC is intended to modernize the Department of War (DoW)'s computational capabilities, eliminating legacy bottlenecks and introducing elastic hybrid-cloud scaling. However, to preserve continuity for active national security missions, this transformation must be delivered in phased, low risk increments rather than a single cutover.