

FAQs – Autonomous Surface Craft

Last updated October 7, 2026

I understand that this particular opportunity is specifically requesting an autonomous surface craft. Before ruling it out, I wanted to confirm whether there would be any value in submitting a solution, or if submissions are strictly limited to surface vessels.

This is limited to surface vessels.

Is it intended that this funding will develop an autonomy capability that can be utilized across multiple USV platforms? Our USV/UUV hybrid craft requires significant investment to mature its autonomy. However, a significant proportion of the work would not translate readily to other vehicles because of the unusual control characteristics of our craft. The work would be innovative, novel research and development, so the question is around how much breadth of application the government expects in the work product.

No. The intent is not to develop autonomy.

Would the Government consider a solution that enables single operator control of multiple ASVs where the proposed solution provides that multi-platform control layer but relies on the platforms for the autonomous navigation? In other words, could we propose an interoperable, platform-agnostic capability the enables higher-level C2 by one operator for a multi-platform mission including waypoints, targets, etc., but does not itself implement the platform-level navigation?

This is not of interest.

We have an autonomous vehicle that can operate partially submerged, akin in some ways to a macro-sub. So, not a conventional USV. Would such a vehicle be considered non-responsive?

The craft is suitable. It is recommended to respond to the project announcement and submit a solution for consideration.

Is this solicitation strictly intended for COTS solutions? I.e., an existing commercially available vehicle to be modified under the program.

It is recommended to respond to the project announcement and submit a solution for consideration.

If we submit, our emphasis will be on the suitability of our autonomous vehicle for very shallow and cluttered waterways. Is the extent to which a vehicle's attributes are well suited shallow and inland waterways of high significance? Or, data fusion, navigation, autonomous decision-making, etc. of greater significance?

It is recommended to respond to the project announcement and submit a solution for consideration.

Are there any technical performance requirements for the USV platform - i.e. endurance/range, payload capacity, environment (ex. sea state), etc.?

No.

Is the objective to develop a routing + navigation capability that can be deployed on multiple USV platforms (either independently- or third-party-developed), or is this for a single USV platform with the routing + navigation capability?

No. The objective is to get access to a USV that can ingest routing during the mission.

Are there specific mission sets (ex. logistics, ISR, etc.) that the USV platform is performing/supporting (and for that mission-set, has required re-routing and navigation capabilities)?

Logistics is the primary use case, but the craft might be re-routed using autonomous routing methods.

Under Prototype Project ERDC-2026-138, will the government provide a Government-Furnished Vessel (GFV) hull/test platform for Phase 3 littoral integration and hydrodynamic field trials, or should offerors budget for a commercial-off-the-shelf surrogate test craft within Phase 2/3 milestones?

Entirely COTS hull from the offeror.

If the vendor can achieve all the desired objectives in a shorter time period than 36 months, can the submission Period of Performance reflect less than the full 36 months?

Yes.

The solicitation requires operation in complex littoral, shallow-water, surf-zone, and inland riverine environments and identifies logistics as the primary use case. Would ERDC place value on a surface craft capable of transiting through the surf zone and continuing the logistics mission over land or clearing itself from shallows (such as sand bars), or should offerors focus exclusively on waterborne operation?

Exclusively on waterborne, but if their craft can do multiple missions they should submit. The multi-domain mission won't give them a leg-up or work against them.

The FAQ states that the platform should be an “entirely COTS hull from the offeror.” Does ERDC require an existing commercially sold production vessel, or would an existing and previously demonstrated prototype/DoD platform with a mature hull design be considered responsive? If so, what is the required TRL to “qualify” as “COTS”?

The solicitation is clear under “REQUIREMENTS #4.”

Given that the FAQ states that the intent is not to develop autonomy, what minimum existing autonomy capabilities are expected of the offered craft at the time of submission (e.g., waypoint navigation, obstacle avoidance, COLREGS, autonomous mission execution)?

Requirement #1 is adequate explanation.

Does ERDC have an existing routing/C2 architecture, message format, API, or Government-developed routing capability that the selected craft will be required to interface with, or is development of the interface between Government/offboard routing inputs and the vessel autonomy system expected under the project?

Requirement #1 is adequate explanation.

Is the intent to leverage ATAK/JAUS for information dissemination to operators and autonomous systems or are proprietary or other open standards responsive?

The Government will provide any translators needed for the selected craft to interface with.

Are there preferential communication systems for C2 uplink, specifically radio platforms or frequencies, or modalities (acoustic, optical)?

All

Does operational environment support info need to be delivered just in time for system arrival or to pre-load the systems prior to/during initial deployment?

Both

Is the in-transit re-routing meant to be at the teleoperation level by remote human pilots or amended autonomy objectives/path solutions either from a human or autonomous controller?

Both

Are these route changes depending on any specific off board sensors or is there a requirement for some situational awareness provided by the autonomous systems?

Depends on mission. Can be on/off-board sensors. There is no requirement listed for on-board sensing.

Does ERDC anticipate that the selected offeror will deliver/transfer the USV to ERDC, provide the platform to ERDC for the duration of the project, or retain ownership and provide the vessel, operators, engineering support, and integration support during Government testing and exercises?

The offeror will participate in demonstrations and exercises. The number will depend upon the yearly contract price and program objectives.

Is the selected craft intended to represent or serve as a surrogate for a specific existing or future Army watercraft/logistics platform, or is ERDC primarily interested in a representative experimental platform for developing and evaluating autonomous routing methods across littoral and inland environments?

The latter.

Although the FAQ states that there are no technical performance requirements for payload capacity or vessel size, does ERDC have a preferred general class or scale of logistics craft?

No.

May an offeror submit more than one distinct platform solution for consideration, or does ERDC prefer a single solution from each offeror? If multiple solutions are permitted, should they be submitted as separate white papers?

Multiple crafts can be submitted via different white papers.

We're an early stage company that builds and operates small autonomous vehicles for coastal and inland waters. For Requirement 4, what qualifies as documented prior operational demonstration, testing, or evaluation? Would testing or operations with non-DoW federal agencies, state or local agencies, or commercial customers satisfy it, or must the evidence come from DoW or national security users? If we lack prior DoW testing, would a white paper still be considered?

Yes, the white paper will still be considered.

Please confirm whether we can propose multiple solutions.

Yes. Multiple solutions may be proposed.

Could the Government confirm that the deliverable is a USV, delivered within 36 months, which will then be owned and operated by the Government capable of all Section C technical requirements; or are we offering a Contractor-Owned Contractor-Operated vehicle service used for Government testing over the 36-month period of performance?

No. The craft will be owned and operated by the proposer. The government will use it as needed (number to be negotiated) to demonstrate autonomous routing.