

Proposed Action and Preliminary Alternatives

Pursuant to DSHMRA, NOAA plans to prepare an EIS that evaluates the proposed issuance of an exploration license to TMC-USA to carry out seabed mining exploration activities within the Application B Area. See 30 U.S.C. 1419(d). This license, if issued, would be valid for a period of ten years and would be subject to terms, conditions, and restrictions that NOAA would propose to include in the license. The Applicant, under the proposed license and subject to applicable requirements, would operate vessels and autonomous vehicles, use sonars and cameras, collect photographs and geotechnical samples, collect biological samples, and collect sediment samples from the seafloor through the use of box corers and multi-corers.

NOAA will evaluate reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action, including a no action alternative. Under the no action alternative, NOAA would deny issuance of an exploration license to TMC-USA, and the proposed exploration plan described in TMC-USA application would not be authorized to proceed under DSHMRA.

In the draft EIS, NOAA is considering analyzing the following preliminary alternatives:

- Issuance of an exploration license with terms, conditions, and restrictions to TMC-USA to conduct the exploration activities and environmental mitigation and monitoring measures as proposed in TMC-USA's exploration plan.
- Issuance of an exploration license with terms, conditions, and restrictions to TMC-USA to conduct the exploration activities as proposed in TMC-USA's exploration plan, with additional and/or modified environmental mitigation and monitoring measures.
- Denial of the license (*i.e.*, no action).

NOAA welcomes comments on all preliminary alternatives as well as suggestions for additional alternatives.

Summary of Potential Impacts

NOAA expects that the primary environmental impacts from exploration activities will include those from vessel and vehicle operation, (*e.g.*, disturbance of fauna from human presence and activity), sonar use (*e.g.*, sound impacts on marine species), and sample recovery (*e.g.*, sediment disturbance from box corers). Potential effects include, but are not limited to, impacts on water quality, marine wildlife, the deep seabed, deep seabed habitat, and marine infrastructure. As appropriate, NOAA will coordinate with the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Environmental Protection Agency, applicable States, and others to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act; Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act; Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act; Clean Water Act; NHPA; and other applicable laws.

As part of its compliance with NHPA section 106 and its implementing regulations (36 CFR part 800), NOAA seeks comment and input from the public regarding the identification of historic properties within the Proposed Action's area of potential effects, the potential effects on those historic properties from the activities proposed by the Applicant, and any information that supports identification of historic properties under the NHPA. NOAA also solicits proposed measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects on historic properties.

Cooperating Agencies

NOAA has invited the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Departments of State, Energy, and the Interior to cooperate on this EIS. NOAA requests that additional parties that have an interest in cooperating on this EIS so indicate in their response to this Notice.

Scoping Process

NOAA will consider input provided by Federal and State agencies, Territories, Tribal Governments, local governments, private parties, the public, and any other interested parties during this scoping process in the preparation of the EIS. Publication of this notice initiates the public scoping process to solicit public and agency comment regarding the full spectrum of environmental issues and concerns relating to the scope and content of the EIS including:

- information, studies, and analyses of the human and marine resources that could be affected;
- the nature and extent of the potential significant impacts on those resources;
- a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed action; and
- mitigation and monitoring measures.

In accordance with DSHMRA, 30 U.S.C. 1419(d), NOAA anticipates that this decision making process will conclude within one year of the certification of TMC-USA's exploration application for the Application B Area.

Authority: 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*, 30 U.S.C. 1419(d).

Neil A. Jacobs,

*Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator,
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*

[FR Doc. 2026-16722 Filed 8-14-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-08-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Patent and Trademark Office

[Docket No. PTO-C-2026-0562]

Request for Comments on Community Outreach Office Locations in the Southwest States

AGENCY: United States Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO or Office) is seeking information to consider regarding the selection of locations for one or more community outreach offices (COOs) in the agency's Southwest Region, which comprises Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri.

DATES: To ensure consideration, written comments must be received by 5 p.m. ET on or before September 16, 2026, and should be submitted in accordance with the instructions in the **ADDRESSES** section. No public hearing will be held.

ADDRESSES: Comments must be submitted electronically to NewOffices@uspto.gov. Attachments will be accepted as MICROSOFT WORD® or ADOBE® PDF documents. To be considered, comments must be submitted to the email box. Information that the submitter does not desire to be publicly available, such as an address or phone number, should not be included in the comments.

If submission of comments to NewOffices@uspto.gov is not feasible due to a lack of access to a computer and/or the internet, please contact the USPTO using the contact information below for special instructions regarding how to submit comments by mail or by hand delivery, based on the public's ability to obtain access to USPTO facilities at the time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Chris Shipp, Chief of Staff, Office of the Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO, at 571-272-8600.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

Enabled by the 2011 Leahy-Smith America Invents Act (AIA), Public Law 112–29, the USPTO currently has regional offices (ROs) in Detroit, Michigan; San Jose, California (Silicon Valley); Dallas, Texas; and Alexandria, Virginia. The purposes of the regional offices, as originally defined in the AIA and amended by the Unleashing American Innovators Act of 2022 (UAIA), Public Law 117–328, 103 (2022), which was signed into law as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 on December 29, 2022, are to:

- Better connect patent filers and innovators with the Office, including by increasing outreach activities to individual innovators, small businesses, veterans, low-income populations, students, rural populations, and any geographic group of innovators that the Director may determine to be underrepresented in patent filings;
- Enhance patent examiner and administrative patent judge retention, including patent examiners and administrative patent judges from economically, geographically, and demographically diverse backgrounds;
- Improve recruitment of patent examiners;
- Decrease the number of patent applications waiting for examination; and
- Improve the quality of patent examination.

The USPTO has been focused on outreach and impact and is working on ways to better introduce, support, and assist those who may be new to the innovation ecosystem, enabling the involvement and participation of more individuals.

In addition to regional offices, the UAIA requires the USPTO to establish at least four COOs within five years from enactment of the Act (*i.e.*, no later than December 29, 2027). The purposes of the COOs are to:

- Further achieve the purposes described above for the ROs;
- Partner with local community organizations, institutions of higher education, research institutions, and businesses to create community-based programs that provide education regarding the patent system and promote the career benefits of innovation and entrepreneurship; and
- Educate prospective inventors, including individual inventors, small businesses, veterans, low-income populations, students, rural populations, and any geographic group of innovators that the Director may determine to be underrepresented in patent filings, about all public and

private resources available to potential patent applicants, including the patent pro bono programs.

The Northern New England Community Outreach Office was established in January 2025 in Durham, New Hampshire. The Mountain West Community Outreach Office located in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Northwest Frontier Community Outreach Office located in Bozeman, Montana, were established in February 2026. In July 2026, the USPTO announced two new COOs for the agency's Southeast Region, with one in Atlanta, Georgia, and another in Huntsville, Alabama.

The USPTO is seeking information to consider regarding the selection of locations for one or more COOs in Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri.

The USPTO will use quantitative metrics and criteria to evaluate and assess the location selection for future COOs. The Office intends to consider the following classes of data (D) at a minimum:

- *D1*: Robust research activity and graduate level programs of study in areas which lead to innovations, IP, and IP-intensive companies/industries;
- *D2*: Availability and concentration of existing commercialization and business development resources (Innovation Ecosystem); and
- *D3*: Ability to support all inventors, as set forth in UAIA, Sec. 104(b)(3).

The USPTO welcomes input from all stakeholders on any matter that they believe is relevant to the overall planning and design or site selection of the USPTO COOs that will serve Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri. Commenters are encouraged to address any or all of the statutory considerations listed in the UAIA and summarized above, any other considerations they believe the USPTO should consider, and the questions listed below.

To be considered, comments must be submitted to NewOffices@uspto.gov. Please cite any public data that relates to or supports your responses. If data is available but nonpublic, describe such data to the extent permissible.

II. Planning and Design Considerations of New Community Outreach Offices

With the addition of COOs to the agency's footprint, the USPTO envisions the joint mission of the COOs to be the cultivation and expansion of a vibrant innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem supported by intellectual property across the United States. To accomplish this mission, the offices will conduct broad stakeholder engagement with innovators ranging from individual

inventors to multinational business entities; establish and leverage partnerships and relationships to scale the USPTO's work; incentivize regional innovation and entrepreneurship, especially in key emerging areas (*e.g.* artificial intelligence, quantum, and distributed ledger); and promote full participation by innovators and entrepreneurs of all backgrounds, including in rural areas and from our armed services, to support U.S. innovation and job creation.

III. Specific Questions for Comment

The USPTO invites responses to the following questions:

Community Outreach Offices

1. Considering the envisioned mission described above, what essential services—including outreach, education, and customer service—should a COO provide to achieve the statutory purposes?

a. Should the services identified be delivered in person? Why or why not?

b. Should the services identified be delivered virtually? Why or why not?

2. What types of organizations should the COO seek to establish relationships and collaborations with to better leverage and scale its services?

3. Would there be a benefit for a COO to be co-located with other public sector entities/services (*e.g.* universities)?

a. If so, please describe the added value of having a shared location.

b. Which public sector entities/services would you suggest for the shared location(s)?

c. If not, please describe the benefit of having a unique location for a COO.

General Comments Regarding New Community Outreach Offices

4. What unique services should the COOs individually provide, and how should the full range of services complement each other?

5. Considering the potential classes of data listed in Part I above, what additional key indicators or data would support COO site selection?

6. What other factors should the USPTO consider when planning for the new COOs?

Location of New Community Outreach Offices

Given the statutory purposes and considerations of COOs, as discussed in Part I, and the planning and design considerations identified in Part II:

7. Which location is ideal for one or more community outreach offices (COOs) in Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri.

8. What else should the USPTO consider when determining the ideal

locations for new Community Outreach Offices?

While the Office welcomes and values all comments from the public in response to this request, the comments submitted do not commit the Office to any further actions related to the comments, and the Office may not respond to any or every submitted comment. The Office nonetheless will consider all written submissions.

Any and all decisions made regarding the future locations of the COOs will be consistent with the criteria outlined in the UAIA and the goals and mission of the USPTO.

John A. Squires,

Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

[FR Doc. 2026-16744 Filed 8-14-26; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Defense Acquisition Regulations System

[Docket Number DARS-2026-0364; OMB Control Number 0704-0332]

Information Collection Requirement; Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS), DoD Mentor-Protégé Program

AGENCY: Defense Acquisition Regulations System; Department of Defense (DoD).

ACTION: Notice and request for comments regarding a proposed extension of an approved information collection requirement.

SUMMARY: In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, DoD announces the proposed extension of a public information collection requirement and seeks public comment on the provisions thereof. DoD invites comments on: whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of DoD, including whether the information will have practical utility; the accuracy of DoD's estimate of the burden of the proposed information collection; ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and ways to minimize the burden of the information collection on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has approved this information collection for use under Control Number 0704-0332 through November 30, 2026.

DoD proposes that OMB approve an extension of the information collection requirement, to expire three years after the approval date.

DATES: DoD will consider all comments received by October 16, 2026.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by OMB Control Number 0704-0332, using either of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* <https://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

- *Email:* osd.dfars@mail.mil. Include OMB Control Number 0704-0332 in the subject line of the message.

Comments received generally will be posted without change to <https://www.regulations.gov>, including any personal information provided.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joy Dishaw, at 703-509-3255.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title and OMB Number: Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) Appendix I, Mentor-Protégé Program; OMB Control Number 0704-0332.

Affected Public: Businesses or other for-profit and not-for-profit institutions.

Respondent's Obligation: Required to obtain or retain benefits.

Frequency: On occasion.

Number of Respondents: 96.

Responses per Respondent: 1.9, approximately.

Annual Responses: 180.

Average Burden per Response: 2.33 hours, approximately.

Annual Burden Hours: 420.

Needs and Uses: Section 831 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 1991 (Pub. L. 101-510) required DoD to establish the DoD Pilot Mentor-Protégé Program. Section 856 of the NDAA for FY 2023 transferred section 831 of the NDAA for FY 1991 to 10 U.S.C. 4902 and authorized the DoD Mentor-Protégé Program (the "Program") on a permanent basis. Congress requires DoD to collect certain information from program participants in section 861, paragraph (b)(2), of Public Law 114-92. Thus, the need for this information collection is to comply with existing laws.

DoD has incorporated these information collection requirements into the DFARS in Appendix I, section I-112. Program participants agree to comply with these information collection requirements when they execute their mentor-protégé agreements, receiving the program's benefits in consideration.

This information is necessary to ensure that participants are fulfilling

their obligations under the mentor-protégé agreements and furthering the purpose of the Mentor-Protégé Program as required by section 18(d)(7) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 637(d)(7)). In accordance with 10 U.S.C. 4902, DoD uses the information to decide whether to approve continuation of the agreement. In addition, the information is necessary for program managers to direct developmental assistance to the most appropriate small business concerns and to ensure the program meets the Congressionally-mandated goal of enhancing the defense industrial base.

Kimberly R. Ziegler,

Editor/Publisher, Defense Acquisition Regulations System.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Docket Nos. CP26-530-000; CP26-533-000]

Venture Global CP2 LNG, LLC, Venture Global CP Express, LLC; Notice of Scoping Period Requesting Comments on Environmental Issues for the Proposed CP2 LNG Expansion Project, and Notice of Public Scoping Sessions

The staff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC or Commission) will prepare an environmental document that will discuss the environmental effects of the CP2 LNG Expansion Project involving construction and operation of facilities by Venture Global CP2 LNG, LLC and Venture Global CP Express, LLC (Applicants) in Cameron Parish, Louisiana and Jasper County, Texas. The Commission will use this environmental document in its decision-making process to determine whether the project is in the public interest.

This notice announces the opening of the scoping process the Commission will use to gather input from the public and interested agencies regarding the project. As part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process, the Commission takes into account concerns the public may have about proposals and the environmental effects that could result from its action whenever it considers the issuance of an authorization. This gathering of public input is referred to as "scoping." The main goal of the scoping process is to focus the analysis