

Special Notice (SN)
DARPA Lift Challenge
DARPA-SN-25-109
October 23, 2025



Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
Tactical Technology Office (TTO)
675 North Randolph Street
Arlington, VA 22203-2114

**DARPA Lift Challenge
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Posting Date: October 23, 2025

Special Notice (SN) DARPA-SN-25-109: DARPA Lift Challenge

Date: Summer 2026

Location: The location will be posted on the DARPA Lift Challenge website

Classification: Unclassified

Registration Deadline: May 1, 2026, 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET)

Challenge and Registration Website: <https://www.darpa.mil/research/challenges/lift>

E-mail: DARPALiftChallenge@darpa.mil

Technical Point of Contact (POC): Phillip “Donna” Smith, TTO Program Manager

DARPA LIFT CHALLENGE:

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Tactical Technology Office (TTO) is sponsoring the DARPA Lift Challenge. This Special Notice provides information for potential participants interested in competing. The DARPA Lift Challenge will be held in the **Summer 2026**, at a location to be announced on the Challenge website noted above. Advance registration will be required.

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW:

The objective of the DARPA Lift Challenge is to significantly advance the capabilities of vertical lift unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) by achieving substantial improvements in payload-to-weight ratio. Current multirotor UAS provide simplicity, affordability, and ease of operation; however, their primary limitation is their low payload-to-weight ratio, which typically falls at 1:1 or less. This restriction significantly limits their ability to carry heavy payloads or operate for extended durations.

DARPA will address these shortcomings by incentivizing novel UAS designs capable of achieving a 4:1 payload-to-weight ratio. The DARPA Lift Challenge will award multiple prizes based on objective measures centered on overall payload weight, as well as subjective categories to recognize revolutionary designs.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION/IMPORTANT DATES:

- It is anticipated **REGISTRATION WILL OPEN on January 5, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. ET.**
- **REGISTRATION CLOSES on May 1, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. ET.**

Participants must register for the Challenge event through the registration website:

<https://www.darpa.mil/research/challenges/lift>

Due to space limitations at the anticipated location for the Challenge, participation will be limited to the first 200 registrants who meet the Challenge eligibility and qualification requirements, which will be included on the registration website at a later date.

“Registrants” means an individual registrant or a team. While there is no limit to the number of members on a team, attendance at the event will be limited to ten (10) representatives from each team.

NOTE: Before individuals transmit Personally Identifiable Information (PII) or other sensitive data to DARPA, it is recommended that they apply appropriate physical, administrative, and technical protocols to safeguard their privacy. DARPA will secure all received PII and sensitive personal data in a controlled environment and protect it from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure.

ELIGIBILITY AND SECURITY INFORMATION:

Registration and participation are limited to individuals who are U.S. citizens or U.S. permanent residents (Green Card holders), representing only U.S. entities (e.g., companies, academic institutions).

The DARPA Lift Challenge will be conducted at the Unclassified level.

All Challenge participants and individuals attending the Challenge events will be required to present a government issued photo identification when requested by the event site security staff.

To be eligible to win a cash prize, a team representing an entity (e.g., company or academic institution) must be incorporated and maintain a primary place of business (e.g., located) in the United States. An individual(s) participating singly or in a team not representing an entity, must be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States. The winner will be required to provide a U.S. taxpayer identification number (TIN) or a social security number to receive the cash prize. Information on how to obtain a TIN is available on the U.S. Internal Revenue Service website at www.IRS.gov.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The DARPA Lift Challenge Special Notice does not constitute a formal solicitation for proposals or abstracts. This announcement is issued solely for information purposes and is not a Request for Information (RFI). Since this is not an RFI, no submission against this notice is required or will be accepted by the Government.