2026 Gateways to Blue Skies Competition
Q&A Session #2 Summary Document
January 27, 2026; 3:30 – 4:30 PM ET

Questions Received on the Call

1. **For the W9, do we need a single form completed by the university, or one per participant?**
   We require one single W9 form to be filled out by the *university*.

2. **Is there a preferred, expected, or required way to cite industrial experts that give us information/feedback?**
   There is not a specific citation format that we require; we just ask that it's consistent. We suggest looking up different citation and formatting styles such as AIAA, APA to see how to cite information from an industrial expert received in-person or via e-mail.

3. **In the Guidelines, it says a strong proposal will make a compelling argument convincing judges of a concept's feasibility and viability…can you address the dichotomy between the expected results mentioned in the Guidelines and the last Q&A where it was said not to have results?**
   Teams are exploring a systems-level concept, so it's not expected that the teams have done experiments or have data from an end product or process they've made. We do, however, expect teams to be able to address how their concept will work at a technical level and integration level.

4. **Someone mentioned judges asking teams questions about their proposals when discussing the use of AI. Would this occur during the initial judging stage?**
   This could occur in either stage of judging. You will receive general written feedback at both stages, but we're hopeful that students will be prepared – especially at the finalist level in Phase 2 – to answer questions about AI or other technologies that apply to their concept.

5. **Historically, which method (figures vs. text) of delivering information to the reader has had a better effect? Do we want this "sales pitch" to aim closer to a written novel with lots of text, or more like a PowerPoint with mostly charts and graphs?**

How teams present their information is up to them to determine. Since teams only have 5-7 pages in the first proposal, they must make they have enough text to explain everything they need to. Using a chart or graphic here or there throughout the proposal can be a great way to convey large amounts of information in a condensed format if it makes sense for your concept, but there's no requirement to do so.

6. **What is a quality that will stand out when writing a proposal? I want to encourage my team to not just do what is expected but what would actually make an impact.**
It's important to make sure the proposal is easily understandable. We do have subject matter experts from all over in our judging panel, but no one is a subject matter expert in everything. When writing your proposal, consider that if you make it to the finalist stage, you will be speaking to a varied audience. We suggest not using buzzwords and making sure that you explain any acronyms or very technical terms.

Proposals that stand out will also clearly demonstrate that the team has done their research and made appropriate assumptions about how their solution could impact aviation maintenance in terms of efficiency, safety, and/or cost.

7. **Our institution does not have a grant office and may not be able to complete the W-9 vendor form. What is the recommended way to proceed to remain compliant within the competition. Is there any alternative form?**
All US-based institutions are required to have an IRS W9 form to provide vendors. Prize funding cannot be processed without it. It's just a matter of tracking down the correct department within the university that can provide that information to you. Start by asking your faculty advisor for support in obtaining this form from your university (checking with your university's accounting or procurement office is a great first step). If you absolutely cannot locate someone to provide you with this form or need help with this process, you can email us at blueskies@nianet.org, and we will try to help from our end. However, teams must submit a W9 Form from the university at the time of their proposal submission to be deemed compliant.

8. **Does the proposal have to be about new technology that's not yet implemented, or is it better for it to be an enhancement of a current technology?**
There are many different approaches teams can take to address to address the competition theme. Whether you decide to use a technology no one has ever heard of or improve an existing technology, both are valid approaches.

9. **I cannot find the signature section for the Participation Agreement? Do we need to create one?**
The Faculty Attestation Form requires your advisor's signature to confirm that they have both reviewed the proposal and agree that the full team will comply with the Participation Agreement. By signing the Faculty Attestation Form, the advisor is effectively signing the

Participation Agreement on behalf of the entire team; individual team members are not required to sign separately. The proposal submission form also asks teams to confirm that all members have read and agree to the GBS Participation Agreement.