

Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation

RFIP-ACT-SACT-26-38

**Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander  
Transformation Norfolk Virginia**



**REQUEST FOR INNOVATIVE PARTICIPATION (RFIP)**

**RFIP-ACT-SACT-26-38**

Innovation Challenge 2026-1:

Agentic AI for Cognitive Warfare

**AMENDMENT 1**

This document contains a Request for Innovative Participation (RFIP) Call for collaboration regarding the Innovation Challenge 2026-1 (iChall26-1) calling for solutions (applications, systems, tools, concepts etc.) that can support solution development for NATO. Participants wishing to respond to this RFIP should read this document carefully and follow the guidance for responding.

<b>General Information</b>	
RFIP No.	RFIP-ACT-SACT 26-38
Project Title	Innovation Challenge 2026-1: Agentic AI for Cognitive Warfare
Deadline for submission	<b>20 April 2026, 5PM Eastern Time (Norfolk, VA, USA)</b>
Contracting Office Address	NATO, HQ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (HQ SACT) Purchasing & Contracting Suite 100 7857 Blandy Rd, Norfolk, VA, 23511-2490
Contracting Points of Contact	<a href="mailto:hqsact.contracting@nato.int">hqsact.contracting@nato.int</a>
Technical Point of Contact	<a href="mailto:Innovation-Challenges@innovationhub-act.org">Innovation-Challenges@innovationhub-act.org</a>

## SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

- I.1. **Summary.** HQ SACT is issuing this Request for Innovative Participation (RFIP) announcement in order to facilitate collaboration between the HQ SACT, SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) and participants regarding solutions<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this RFIP is to request participants to submit solutions (either existing and/or under development) to the scenario presented within **Annex I** and so participate in the NATO Innovation Challenge 2026-1 (iChall26-1). All submissions must conform to this RFIP.

A Selection Committee composed of representatives from HQ SACT and other relevant experts invited by HQ SACT (the “reviewers”) will select up to **10 solutions** (hereinafter as “the Finalists”) amongst the responses submitted. The Finalists will participate in the iChall26-1 Pitch Day projected to be May 28, 2026, in Rennes, FRANCE. Participation in the Pitch Day is only open to in-person. During the Pitch Day, a Jury composed of representatives from HQ SACT and other relevant experts invited by HQ SACT (the “Jury Members”) will assess which of the 10 solutions best respond to the scenario presented in **Annex I** and select the iChall26-1 winners.

- I.2. **Dates.** The event and timelines of iChall26-1 are described in Section III. It will take place between 10 March and 28 May 2026, with the iChall26-1 Pitch Day taking place on-site on 28 May 2026. Details will be posted on the Innovation Challenge website (<https://innovationhub-act.org/what-we-do/events/innovation-challenge/>).
- I.3. **Disclaimer.** This is a Request for Innovative Participation (RFIP) **ONLY**. This RFIP does not constitute a current Request for Proposal (RFP) nor a commitment to issue a future RFP. The release of this RFIP shall not be construed as a commitment, nor an authorization to incur cost for which reimbursement will be required or sought after. Further, respondents are advised that HQ SACT will not pay for any information or administrative costs incurred in responding to this RFIP. HQ SACT will not pay any costs associated with participating in the iChall26-1. The costs for responding to this RFIP and participating in the iChall26-1 shall be borne solely by the responding party. Not responding to this RFIP does not preclude participation in any subsequent RFP if issued in the future.

## SECTION II - BACKGROUND

Since 2017 HQ SACT has conducted Innovation Challenges; these are informative and exploratory events focused mainly on the application of new technologies. The collaborative interaction sought for the iChall26-1 is focused on participants RFIP responses and willingness to share knowledge, expertise, and products/solutions with NATO and national representatives participating (see scenarios at Annex I).

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<sup>1</sup> In this RFIP, the term “solutions” refers to applications, tools, systems concepts or devices.

## SECTION III - DESCRIPTION OF THE iChall26-1

- III.1. **Organizer.** The HQ SACT is the main organizer of the iChall26-1.
- III.2. **Planned activities.** The iChall26-1 will consist of:
- a) Initial Selection Phase. The initial selection will be announced 05 May 2026. The Finalists will be contacted directly via email by the project coordinator in charge of the challenge and will be invited to present their solution in person on the Pitch Day. If limited participation is received for the iChall26-1 by 20 April 2026, 5PM Eastern Time (Norfolk, VA) (the deadline for submission), HQ SACT reserves the right to cancel the Innovation Challenge.
  - b) Final selection phase. On the *Pitch Day*, the winners of the iChall26-1 will be selected by the Jury Members and announced as part of the *Pitch Day* program.
- III.3. **Communication.** HQ SACT safeguards its right to publicly communicate and release, at its discretion, the results and products of iChall26-1. Thus, it is the Participants' exclusive responsibility to ensure that the information provided in response to this RFIP (participant's composition, abstracts, supporting materials, and, if selected for Pitch Day, the presentations) is releasable to the public. Participation in iChall26-1 entails irrevocable consent for HQ SACT to publicize, namely but not exclusively, the participant's name, State of headquarters' location, industry and organizational affiliation and proposed solution's key aspects. Furthermore, by submitting a response to this RFIP, participants hereby acknowledge and agree to the sharing of all information and documentation concerning their participation in iChall26-1 among NATO bodies and the Member States.
- III.4. **Expected input from participants.** See Section IV.
- III.5. **Expected benefits.** Through this collaboration, HQ SACT offers participants an opportunity to gain awareness about the particularities of NATO's innovation challenges. It will be an opportunity to engage with SHAPE and other participants within a framework of a community of interest focused on the development of innovative solutions based on new technologies in support of the NATO Innovation Process.

## SECTION IV - PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

- IV.1. **Intent.** The intent of this RFIP is to call for formal collaboration in order to present solutions based on new technologies that can support the improvement of the NATO Innovation process. These solutions should be applicable in a federated information environment and should be interoperable by design. Additionally, they should be intuitive, requiring none or very limited training at the end-user level. Solutions are sought at different levels of development, from the "advanced concept development stage" through "customizable applications" available on commercial off-the-shelf. Solutions should address the challenge described in the scenario presented in Annex I.
- IV.2. **Eligibility.** This RFIP is open to any organization officially registered with relevant government authority(ies), headquartered in a NATO nation, and whose beneficial owner(s) is also from a NATO nation. By participating in this RFIP, the Participant officially certifies meeting all eligibility requirements.

- IV.3. **Responses to the RFIP.** The responses to this RFIP must be submitted through the webform <https://innovationhub-act.org/what-we-do/events/innovation-challenge/>.

The requested document (e.g. a maximum 2 pages Concept Paper) to be attached with the submission are defined in Annex I. The Selection Committee will select the Finalists based on this submission and the eventual files attached.

**NOTE:** all information provided in response to this RFIP must be releasable to the public.

- IV.4. **Evaluation of Solutions and Selection Process.** The Selection Committee will be convened to analyse and evaluate the responses to the RFIP according to criteria defined in annex I, and will select which submissions will be presented/demonstrated during the Pitch Day.

- a) Priority. The Selection Committee retains the right to prioritize the answers to RFIP based on the relevance and diversity of the solutions, on the proposed demonstration method, and the complexity of the challenges addressed. Additionally, ensuring a balanced representation across sectors will be part of the prioritization process.
- b) Evaluation sharing. In accordance with HQ SACT's right to publicly communicate and release, to its discretion, the results and products of iChall26-1, HQ SACT reserves the right to share the evaluation and ranking of the participant's solutions, as decided by the Selection Committee or the Jury, according to the terms of the present RFIP, within NATO bodies and with NATO nations.

- IV.5. **Terms applicable to this RFIP:** The participants agree that HQ SACT may without any limitation or further compensation use the participant's name as well as voice and/or likeness of its representative(s) in any and all media for the purpose of advertising and promoting the HQ SACT Innovation Challenge, and any associated programs. Furthermore, the participant(s) grants HQ SACT and the iChall26-1 the right to take photographs and videos of the submission in connection with the challenge and grants the right to HQ SACT to use and publish the photographs and videos with or without the participant's name for any lawful purpose including but not limited to publicity, illustration, advertising, and internet/social media content. Additionally, the participant(s) agree that the iChall26-1 and thus HQ SACT may demonstrate the operation and functionality of the submission (but may not modify or publicize the source code) in connection with advertising and promoting the iChall26-1 and subsequent events organized by HQ SACT.

- a) Representation and Warranties. The participant(s) represents and warrants that:
  - (i) the participant(s) is the original author of the submitted contributions;
  - (ii) the participant(s) acknowledges that the submission will not infringe on any third party's copyright, patent, trademark, trade secret, right of publicity or property or any other right;
  - (iii) the submission is not the subject of any actual or threatened litigation or claim;
  - (iv) the submission will not be obscene, offensive, libelous, pornographic, threatening, abusive, or otherwise objectionable; and

- (v) the submission will not contain any content that is illegal, would constitute or encourage a criminal offense, or would otherwise give rise to liability or violate any law.
  - b) The participants agree to grant to HQ SACT a non-exclusive license to use the submission as necessary to conduct the iChall26-1 and for internal evaluation purposes by HQ SACT regarding:
    - (i) any Intellectual Property incorporated into the submission;
    - (ii) Intellectual Property that is needed to operate or use the submission;
    - (iii) Intellectual Property covering other materials or inventions that are incorporated into the submission.
  - c) Furthermore, participants acknowledge and agree that the submission is submitted in a non-confidential basis. The iChall26-1 (and thus HQ SACT) shall have no obligation to prevent the disclosure, including publication of information or content on the internet, or otherwise treat as confidential such submission.
  - d) By responding to this RFIP and participating in the iChall26-1 it is constituted that participants acknowledge and agree that the iChall26-1 will receive many entries and submissions in connection with this RFIP. As such other participants' entries and submissions may be similar or identical in theme, idea, format, or other respects to the submission. By responding to this RFIP the participants waive any future claims against HQ SACT relating to such similarities or asserting that any compensation is due in connection with the submission.
  - e) Limitation of Liability: In no event shall the HQ SACT or the iChall26-1 be liable for incidental, exemplary or punitive damages arising out of or in connection with the iChall26-1, participation, or the submission. If a participant has a dispute with any participant in the iChall26-1 or any other third party, the participants release HQ SACT from any and all claims, demands and damages, (actual and consequential) of every kind and nature arising out of or in any way connected with such disputes.
  - f) Release and Indemnification: By responding to this RFIP and participating in the iChall26-1, participants agree, on behalf of that participant and the heirs, executors and administrators, to release and hold harmless HQ SACT from any claim, liability, damage, litigation, illness, injury or death that may occur, directly or indirectly, whether caused by negligence or not, from participating in the iChall26-1. This includes any entry (submission) submitted by the participants.
- IV.6. **Communication and Follow-on.** The answers to RFIP should be submitted through the event webform <https://innovationhub-act.org/what-we-do/events/innovation-challenge/>. Post-submission, RFIP respondents may be contacted to provide additional information on their proposals/response.
- IV.7. **Questions.** All questions of a technical nature about this RFIP announcement shall be submitted solely to the points of contact listed on page 2. Accordingly, questions shall not contain proprietary and/or classified information.

## RFIP-ACT-SACT-26-38

### ANNEX 1

#### A. BACKGROUND

NATO adversaries increasingly operate in the cognitive domain by attempting to influence how people think, decide, and act. They study human behaviour and decision-making patterns and use this understanding to shape opinions, introduce doubt, and steer public discussion in ways that support their objectives. These efforts often target cognitive processes, including emotional responses, cognitive biases, and reliance on mental shortcuts, to spread misleading narratives and create confusion.

Adversaries combine physical actions with communication campaigns to influence public perception around conflicts and security support efforts. Messaging, narratives, and rhetoric are often synchronised with visible military activity to amplify psychological and cognitive impact.

Advanced Agentic AI systems will help the NATO Alliance gain and maintain cognitive advantage by improving cognitive engagement through better understanding audiences, adapting communication approaches, and delivering effective messaging across different contexts.

This challenge focuses on developing tools that build narrative, psychological and decision enhancement to achieve cognitive advantage over the adversary in times of crisis and conflict. The objective is to enhance message clarity, relevance, and cognitive impact against an adversary audience, ensuring key target audiences are deterred and disrupted.

#### B. CHALLENGE

##### B.1. Aim:

To demonstrate how Agentic AI can contribute to key cognitive warfare effects, against adversary audiences, during times of heightened crisis and conflict.

##### B.2. Outcomes:

An Agentic AI based solutions that can contribute to the following effects:

- Weaken NATO's Adversaries' military strength and disrupt support networks.
- Damage the credibility and authority of NATO's Adversaries' senior leadership.
- Slow decisions and complicate the rollout of NATO's Adversaries' communication efforts.
- Fragment internal unity and erode confidence in NATO's Adversaries.
- Impair Adversaries' effectiveness in reaching and influencing their target audiences.
- Create false perceptions of NATO's plans and operational intent.

##### B.3. Target Audiences:

- Adversary's defence and security apparatus.
- Adversary's military commanders.

##### B.4. Problem Statement:

Applicants will present an agentic AI tool that integrates advanced machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), behavioural analytics, and influence strategies.

The tool should possess capabilities to autonomously identify target audiences, craft personalised messaging, and adapt strategies in real time based on feedback and changing societal contexts, all while staying aligned with NATO's principles and ensuring legitimacy is always maintained.

Ideally the solution would have a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 5-7; with the possibility of immediate Minimum Viable Product (MVP) delivery preferred (under 3 months).

## **B.5. Scope**

**In General:** The Agentic AI Tool should have the following characteristics:

- i. **Enhanced support to Decision-Making:** Show the AI Tool analysing available data, identifying issues, and making actionable recommendations.
- ii. **Problem Solve:** Allow the AI Tool to address a complex, multi-step task or find creative solutions under constraints for creating and managing channels of delivery, formulating effective messaging, and amplifying communication efforts.
- iii. **Supports Strategic Communication** by:
  - o Increasing tempo without sacrificing structure
  - o Reducing analyst and coordination overload
  - o Expanding planning option space
  - o Creating persistent situational awareness
  - o Enabling continuous adaptation
- iv. **Human-led judgment:** Importantly, it should be framed as: Human-led judgment + AI-enabled scale and synthesis not autonomous influence decision-making.
- v. **Learn and Adapt:** Incorporate unforeseen variables or novel situations during the demonstration to showcase the AI adjusting on the fly.

**In Detail:** The Agentic AI Tool must contribute to the following stages of the strategic communications and information operations work cycle:

- i. **Understanding (sense-making & situational awareness).** This phase is about building a shared picture of the information environment. Instead of analysts manually scanning dozens of feeds, the agent continuously builds a structured situational overview and flags changes.

The focus is to demonstrate how Agentic AI can:

- o Aggregate open-source information streams
- o Summarize narratives and discourse trends
- o Detect sentiment shifts and emerging themes
- o Map stakeholder positions and influence networks
- o Highlight inconsistencies or information gaps

Outcome: Faster, broader situational awareness — humans interpret meaning and intent.

- ii. **Planning (course of action development).** Planning requires connecting objectives to messaging and actions. The tool operates like a planning assistant that expands option space — not a decision-maker.

The focus is to demonstrate how Agentic AI can:

- Generate multiple communication approaches aligned to objectives
- Identify likely audience reactions
- Stress-test assumptions
- Build draft timelines and decision trees

Outcome: More robust plans and faster iteration.

- iii. **Coordination (synchronization across actors).** Information operations often involve many teams, channels, and approvals. The tool should be a workflow integrator that reduces friction and prevents misalignment.

The focus is to demonstrate how Agentic AI can:

- Track task dependencies and deadlines
- Maintain shared messaging frameworks
- Flag conflicts in timing or tone
- Automate status reporting
- Ensure version consistency

Outcome: Smoother execution and fewer coordination failures.

- iv. **Delivery (execution & adaptation).** During execution humans will retain editorial authority, but the tool must accelerate production and adaptation.

The focus is to demonstrate how Agentic AI can:

- Draft channel-specific materials
- Tailor messaging for audience segments
- Monitor live engagement signals
- Suggest timing adjustments
- Detect narrative drift

Outcome: Faster, more responsive delivery.

- v. **Assessment (feedback & learning).** Assessment is where strategy improves. Instead of static reporting, the tool must facilitate a continuous learning loop.

The focus is to demonstrate how Agentic AI can:

- Aggregate performance metrics
- Identify patterns across campaigns
- Compare outcomes to objectives
- Generate after-action summaries
- Recommend adjustments

Outcome: Evidence-driven refinement.

**Critical guardrails:** Because this domain touches public trust and ethics:

- Human oversight is essential
- Transparency standards matter
- Bias monitoring is required
- Clear authority boundaries must exist

The Agentic AI tool should support analysis and coordination, not replace accountable decision-makers.

Each solution must be able to demonstrate compliance with NATO's Principles of Responsible Use for AI: Lawfulness, Responsibility and Accountability, Explainability and Traceability, Reliability, Governability and Bias Mitigation, as per the NATO AI policy PO(2024)0199 (<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/summary-of-natos-revised-artificial-intelligence-ai-strategy>)

## **B.6. Out of Scope**

Solutions requiring fielding timelines exceeding 12 months after the Pitch Day.

## **B.7. Mandatory Technical and Operational Parameters for submissions**

Agentic systems should operate adaptively across cognitive, cyber, and informational domains with limited human oversight, enabling faster decision cycles and enhanced influence operations.

Submissions should showcase how innovations and technology can address to the following parameters:

- i. User Interface
  - Effectiveness to understand messaging requirements, process information, analyse scenarios.
- ii. Information Environment Visualization
  - Scrape social media to gather, aggregate and analyse sentiment data.
  - Geospatially displays the sentiment of different regions.
  - Disseminates facts, suggestions, or feedback in clear and understandable formats suitable for its audience.
- iii. Automation and Planning
  - Operates independently within predefined boundaries, carrying out complex tasks without constant human input.
  - Can initiate actions based on goals or objectives provided during configuration.
- iv. Sentiment Effect
  - This challenge will focus on adversarial sentiment effect.
  - Execute on desired outcomes and make context-aware decisions.
- v. Feedback
  - Adapt to new information and dynamically adjust its strategies to achieve desired outcomes.

## B.8. Submission requirements for participants

Participants are expected to submit:

- i. **Concept paper** (max 2 pages) outlining the proposed solution including any prior use cases or organizations currently using the tools and a description of any training requirements for use. Describe how the solution would be used in a realistic scenario.
- ii. **Technical summary** (max 2 pages) describing the requirements to operate the tool to include performance parameters, technical system requirements, and maintenance/software requirements.
- iii. **Preliminary cost estimate** (max 2 pages) for services provided over time at scale with a roadmap for production and implementation of the tool.
- iv. **Video** demonstration of the product in relevant operational conditions.

Submission's excerpts, referenced information or annexes that surpass the above indicated page limits will not be considered to be included in the submissions, and thus will not be the object of consideration or evaluation by the Selection Committee.

## B.9. Pitch Day recommendations

For finalists selected to present on Pitch Day, it is recommended that you demonstrate and substantiate your capabilities. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Demonstrating your solution and its results in a test or simulated environment,
- Providing evidence of real-world applications, pilots, or deployments,
- Sharing performance metrics, benchmarks, or evaluation results that validate the effectiveness of your solution,
- Presenting case studies, customer testimonials, or partner references where applicable,
- Demonstrating the technical readiness and scalability of your solution (e.g., architecture, integration capability, deployment model).

## B.10. Initial Selection Criteria

Finalists for the Pitch Day will be selected according to the below criteria and scales. The criteria are linked to the solution's mandatory parameters.

- i. Situational Understanding & Analysis.

Goal: Does the tool meaningfully improve awareness of the information environment?

For example, but not limited to:

- Breadth of data ingestion
- Signal vs noise filtering
- Narrative/theme detection
- Stakeholder mapping capability
- Context retention over time
- Analyst interpretability

**Scoring lens** - Does this reduce analyst workload while improving insight quality?

ii. Planning & Decision Support.

Goal: Does it expand and stress-test planning options?

For example, but not limited to:

- Objective-to-action translation
- Scenario generation
- Assumption testing
- Risk identification
- Alignment with strategic intent
- Transparency of reasoning

**Scoring lens** - Does this improve decision confidence without obscuring accountability?

iii. Coordination & Workflow Integration.

Goal: Does it improve synchronization across teams?

For example, but not limited to:

- Task orchestration capability
- Version/message consistency
- Cross-channel visibility
- Integration with existing tools
- Auditability

**Scoring lens** - Does it reduce friction and coordination failure?

iv. Delivery Support.

Goal: Does it accelerate communication execution without degrading quality?

For example, but not limited to:

- Multi-channel content adaptation
- Audience tailoring accuracy
- Tone/message consistency
- Responsiveness to feedback
- Human approval controls

**Scoring lens** - Does it increase tempo while preserving trust and intent?

v. Assessment & Learning.

Goal: Does it support continuous improvement?

For example, but not limited to:

- Metric aggregation clarity
- Outcome attribution
- Pattern detection
- After-action reporting
- Recommendation usefulness

**Scoring lens** - Does it turn activity into actionable learning?

vi. Human Control & Transparency.

Goal: Can humans understand, govern, and override the system?

For example, but not limited to:

- Explainability of outputs
- Editable reasoning chains
- Approval checkpoints
- Role-based permissions
- Intervention mechanisms

**Scoring lens** - Does it keep humans decisively in control?

vii. Reliability & Safety.

Goal: Does it behave predictably under pressure?

For example, but not limited to:

- Error rates
- Stability under load
- Failure transparency
- Bias detection
- Safeguard enforcement

**Scoring lens** - Can this be trusted in a high-stakes context?

### B.11. Scoring

A score ranging from 0 point to 5 points will be attributed regarding each of the selection criteria, depending on how well the participant demonstrates, in its submission, that the proposed solution satisfies the criteria. The following scale will be applied to evaluate, based on the Committee's members best judgments. The final score will result from harmonization and averaging the scores provided by the Committee's members.

Level of demonstration of quality and compliance with criteria	Score attributed
Very well and thoroughly demonstrated	5
Well demonstrated	4
Satisfactorily demonstrated	3
Acceptably demonstrated	2
Not all elements of the criteria demonstrated	1
No quality and compliance demonstrated	0

### B.12. Weight for each criteria in the final grade

- Situational Understanding & Analysis: 20%
- Planning & Decision Support: 20%
- Coordination & Workflow Integration: 15%
- Delivery Support: 15%
- Assessment & Learning: 10%
- Human Control & Transparency: 10%
- Reliability & Safety: 10%