

Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation

RFIP-ACT-SACT-26-72

**Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander
Transformation Norfolk Virginia**



REQUEST FOR INNOVATIVE PARTICIPATION (RFIP)

RFIP-ACT-SACT-26-72

Innovation Challenge 2026-2:

PERSISTENT AIRFIELD DENIAL

This document contains a Request for Innovative Participation (RFIP) Call for collaboration regarding the Innovation Challenge 2026-2 (iChall26-2) 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.

General Information	
RFIP No.	RFIP-ACT-SACT 26-72
Project Title	Innovation Challenge 2026-2: PERSISTENT AIRFIELD DENIAL
Deadline for submission	20 July 2026, 5PM Eastern Time (Norfolk, VA, USA)
Initial Selection (Finalists) Announcement	August 11, 2026
Pitch Day	Date – to be confirmed: September 3, 2026 Location – to be confirmed: Warsaw, POLAND
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	hqsact.contracting@nato.int
Technical Point of Contact	Innovation-Challenges@innovationhub-act.org

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, JATEC (Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre) and participants regarding solutions¹. 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 2026-2 (iChall26-2). 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 iChall26-2 Pitch Day (see General Information for projected date and location). 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 iChall26-2 winners.

- I.2. **Dates.** The event and timelines of iChall26-2 are described in Section III. The dates are specified in the General Information on page 2. 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 will 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 iChall26-2. The costs for responding to this RFIP and participating in the iChall26-2 will 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 iChall26-2 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).

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

SECTION III - DESCRIPTION OF THE iChall26-2

III.1. **Organizer.** The HQ SACT is the main organizer of the iChall26-2.

III.2. **Planned activities.** The iChall26-2 will consist of:

a) Initial Selection Phase. The initial selection announcement date is specified in the General Information on page 2. 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 iChall26-2 by 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 iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2. 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 iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2 among NATO bodies and the Member States. As such ensure that no proprietary information is included.

III.4. Expected input from participants. See Section IV.

III.5. Monetary Awards

HQ SACT will provide monetary awards aimed at identifying, maturing, and demonstrating operationally relevant innovative solutions. The monetary awards:

a) Will be limited to a maximum amount of up to 250,000€ for this Innovation Challenge;

b) Will be equally awarded to up to three winners;

c) Will be conditional with compliance with the requirements set in annex 2;

d) May be paid 10% of the apportioned award upon selection as the winner(s) on Pitch Day. For the remaining (90%), the monetary awards will be payable only upon completion of a subsequent demonstration of the winning solution during an HQ SACT event, experiment, trial, or other relevant activity. This will be subject to a separate agreement (contract) with the winner.

HQ SACT reserves the right to select winners without attributing monetary rewards, subject to available funding, potential application or use of the solution to NATO needs, and equal treatment of participants.

III.6. **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 NATO 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 or Ukraine, and whose beneficial owner(s) is also from a NATO nation or Ukraine. 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 iChall26-2, 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, with NATO entities 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 iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2 (and thus HQ SACT) will 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 iChall26-2 it is constituted that participants acknowledge and agree that the iChall26-2 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 will the HQ SACT or the iChall26-2 be liable for incidental, exemplary or punitive damages arising out of or in connection with the iChall26-2, participation, or the submission. If a participant has a dispute with any participant in the iChall26-2 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 iChall26-2, 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 iChall26-2. 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 will be submitted solely to the points of contact listed on page 2. Accordingly, questions will not contain proprietary and/or classified information.

No feedback or debriefs will be given to participants on the results of this Innovation Challenge.

ANNEX 1

A. BACKGROUND

Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) operational experience has firmly established that the ability of the adversary to project air power from secure rear-area airfields remains one of the most consequential asymmetries in the current conflict. Enemy tactical aviation, operating from bases beyond the reach of conventional Ukrainian strike assets, continues to conduct strikes using guided aerial bombs, cruise missiles, and stand-off munitions against friendly forces, critical infrastructure, and civilian population centres. Each sortie originates from an airfield. Every airfield is a node of vulnerability: if it can be persistently denied, the adversary's air campaign is fundamentally disrupted at source.

Current workarounds: manned strike aviation, ground-based long-range fires (MLRS, ballistic missiles), and conventional single-unit loitering munitions have demonstrated limited effectiveness against defended airfield targets. They lack the mass-effect, persistence, and EW (Electronic Warfare)-resilience required to simultaneously suppress airfield infrastructure across multiple aim points in a contested environment. The battlefield logic is clear: point-defence and reactive interception of individual weapons must be complemented by persistent denial at source.

B. CHALLENGE

B.1. Aim:

To identify, accelerate, and validate solutions that deliver persistent denial of enemy airfield operations. This can be achieved through enabling autonomous or operator-directed engagement of aircraft, runways, fuel and munitions storage, and ground support infrastructure.

B.2. Outcomes:

Solutions that can contribute to the following effects:

- Identify innovative solutions capable of persistently denying enemy airfield operations, regardless of technology approach.
- Evaluate solutions against defined effect-based criteria covering performance, autonomy, integration, logistics, resilience, risk, and cost.
- Select up to ten finalists to demonstrate performance against defined thresholds and operational parameters.
- Deliver a ranked recommendations package and a follow-on test and fielding plan with an immediate adoption horizon of zero to three months for Minimum Viable Product (MVP) expansion.

B.3. Target Audiences:

- Adversary's defence and security apparatus.

B.4. Scope

The challenge is technology-agnostic. Solutions may employ any combination of technologies and system architectures provided they demonstrably deliver the required operational effect. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Uncrewed aerial systems of any configuration or range class
- Autonomous or semi-autonomous munitions and loitering systems
- Swarming and mass-effect approaches
- Alternative delivery mechanisms beyond conventional aerial platforms
- Hybrid solutions combining multiple technologies

All solutions must be capable of operating in GPS-denied and EW-contested environments, across all weather conditions and seasons, and must demonstrate a credible path to rapid fielding.

B.5. Out of Scope

- Fixed ground-based or static infrastructure denial solutions without a demonstrable autonomous engagement capability.
- Solutions that cannot demonstrate EW resilience and autonomous fallback in GPS-denied conditions.
- Systems requiring fielding timelines exceeding twelve months from finals.
- Solutions dependent on continuous operator input without autonomous fallback capability.

B.6. Mandatory Technical and Operational Parameters for submissions

Primary Effect: Persistent denial of enemy airfield operations.

This is achieved through enabling autonomous or operator-directed engagement of aircraft, runways, fuel and munitions storage, and ground support infrastructure, such that the adversary cannot sustainably conduct air operations from targeted airfields.

Achieving this effect requires solutions that can:

- Reach and engage targets at operationally relevant ranges, including deep in contested airspace
- Sustain engagement capability over time – not merely a single-use strike
- Operate without continuous human control in EW-contested and GPS-denied environments
- Deliver sufficient mass and precision to suppress multiple aim points across an airfield simultaneously
- Operate in all weather conditions, day and night, across all seasons

General Constraints

- All-weather (fog, heavy rain or snow), all-season (winter and summer) combat operation.
- Full autonomous operation in GPS-denied and EW-contested environments with graceful degradation and no single point of comms failure.
- Minimal training burden: solutions must be operable by military-grade operators; AI-assisted target acquisition reduces reliance on expert judgement.

- Rapid software modification and continuous AI model update capability where appropriate.
- Technology Readiness Level (TRL) at finals: 5–7; immediate MVP delivery preferred (under six weeks).
- Optional integration with existing situational awareness and battle management systems.
- Logistical supportability at brigade level and below for consumables and maintenance.

B.7. Submission requirements for participants

Participants are expected to submit in 1 PDF document the following:

- 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** (max 10 minutes, provided as a link and not as a video file) of the product in relevant operational conditions,
- v. **Declaration of Eligibility** showing the company’s proof of national business registration.

Submission’s that surpass the above indicated page limits will be disqualified.

B.8. Pitch Day recommendations

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

- Demonstrating the 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 the solution (e.g., architecture, integration capability, deployment model).

B.9. Initial Selection Criteria

Finalists for the Pitch Day will be selected according to the below criteria and scales.

Solutions will be evaluated on how effectively they deliver the desired operational effect – persistent denial of enemy airfield operations – based on the criteria mentioned in Compliance and Scoring Criteria Matrices.

The evaluation will be done in two steps. First, solutions will be evaluated against the Compliance Matrix to be assessed as Compliant/Non-Compliant. Second, solutions evaluated as Compliant will be evaluated against the Scoring Criteria Matrix to assess the final score that the submission obtains.

A score of “0” or “NOT-COMPLIANT” in any of the criteria categories will result in the bidder’s proposal as being “Technically Non-Compliant” unless otherwise specified.

Compliance Matrix

ITEM	COMPLIANT / NON- COMPLIANT	Page, Paragraph and Line Number Reference where Bidder meets criteria.
Participant is headquartered in a NATO nation or Ukraine and all personnel supporting this contract must be citizens of a NATO member nation or Ukraine. If individuals have dual citizenship that includes a non-NATO nation, their citizenship must be provided. The Participant will be legally authorized to operate in NATO member nations at the time of the bidding.		
The submission complies with the format, content and page limits detailed in B7.		
Full autonomous operation in GPS-denied and EW-contested environments and no single point of comms failure.		
All-weather (fog, heavy rain or snow), all-season (winter and summer) combat operation.		
The Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of the solution is above 5.		
The range of the solution is above 150km.		

Scoring Criteria Matrix for Initial Selection

Criterion	Key Evaluation Dimensions	Evaluation Criteria weight, %
Performance and Coverage	Longer range and reach into contested airspace; persistence of denial effect over time; better reliability under operational conditions; all-weather capability.	40%
Cost and Feasibility	Lower development and operational cost; faster production timeline; higher level of technology maturity (TRL); scalability of production to operational quantities.	35 %
Autonomy and Control	Higher level of automation in target acquisition, engagement, and navigation; effectiveness of human oversight mechanisms; quantity and quality of fail-safes and abort capability; cybersecurity robustness of command links.	25%

B.10. Scoring

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

Scoring Scale

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

A score of 0 will determine disqualification of the submission

B.11. Pitch Day Scoring Criteria

Similarly to the process used for the Initial Selection, finalist's solutions will be evaluated on Pitch Day based on how effectively they deliver the desired operational effect – persistent denial of

enemy airfield operations – by application of the criteria indicated in the Scoring Criteria Matrix and Scoring Scale below.

Scoring Criteria Matrix

Criterion	Key Evaluation Dimensions	Evaluation Criteria values,%
Performance and Coverage	Longer range and reach into contested airspace; persistence of denial effect over time; better reliability under operational conditions; all-weather capability.	25%
Autonomy and Control	Higher level of automation in target acquisition, engagement, and navigation; effectiveness of human oversight mechanisms; quantity and quality of fail-safes and abort capability; cybersecurity robustness of command links.	20%
Integration and Interoperability	Compatibility with existing Ukrainian and NATO systems; efficiency of data sharing and situational awareness integration; better ability to coordinate with other assets.	5 %
Logistics and Sustainment	Efficiency of maintenance requirements; lower supply chain complexity; lower personnel burden (i.e., number of people needed to operate the solution); lower lifecycle costs and faster replenishment timelines at brigade level.	10%
Resilience and Robustness	Higher redundancy in navigation and communications; more reliable ability to operate under EW disruption and GPS denial; faster recovery from component failure; more graceful degradation.	15%
Risk and Broader Impacts	Lesser potential for unintended effects; escalation considerations; better legal and ethical framework alignment; fewer external and second-order impacts.	5 %
Cost and Feasibility	Lower development and operational cost; faster production timeline; higher level of technology maturity (TRL); scalability of production to operational quantities.	20 %

Scoring Scale – Pitch Day

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