

HUSTLE 2025-2 Problem Statement

Application Window: 9/24/25 – 11/7/25

In the Air Force, there is a focus on Command, Control Communication and Battle Management, or C3BM. Within the context of C3BM, there is a strong interest in exploring innovative ways to incorporate AI and leverage its capabilities. Specifically, this HUSTLE cohort will center on developing integrated solutions for Command and Control (C2) systems enhanced by artificial intelligence, supporting the Air Force's Battle Network needs through the C3BM program office. The Department of the Air Force's Battle Network represents a comprehensive system that coordinates all Air Force capabilities - from satellites and aircraft to IT systems and communications across major commands. The C3BM program office is responsible for creating and sustaining this network, ensuring all technologies integrate seamlessly and interoperate effectively. Currently, technologies exist across the spectrum but don't all "play nicely together," creating gaps in coordination and information flow.

Rather than require each startup to have the same focus area, we intend to downselect a diverse cohort with complementary skillsets that can address different facets of this problem set. Some of complementary skillsets we are hoping to have in the cohort may include:

- Artificially Intelligent Agentic Systems for Command and Control Operations
- Systems to assist humans in managing Artificially Intelligent Agentic Systems
- Network resiliency in contested environments (jammed environments where connectivity is not assumed)
- Data distribution in contested environments
- Interoperability, Integration and homogenization of disparate Artificially Intelligent Agentic Systems
- AI systems to increase the speed and accuracy of human decision making at scale

The technical focus encompasses two critical AI applications: using AI to enhance command and control operations for human operators and developing robust command and control mechanisms for increasingly autonomous AI systems. We would like to explore the art of the possible by looking at both of these scenarios: AI for Command and Control (AI assisting human operators in executing command and control) as well as Command and Control of AI (controlling autonomous systems). This approach creates a realistic pathway for diverse technology companies to contribute their core competencies while building the interoperability and integration capabilities that C3BM requires for next-generation battle management systems.

AI for Command and Control: We are looking for startups that can develop AI systems that assist human operators in making faster, more informed decisions. This includes AI that can process vast amounts of battlefield information, recommend courses of action, and help coordinate complex operations across multiple domains and timeframes. In a civilian context, this is the equivalent of developing systems to assist human operators in

streamlining business operations and business processes, enabling more efficient and cost-effective operations.

Command and Control of AI: As military systems become increasingly autonomous, there's a critical need for robust oversight mechanisms. We are looking for startups that can work on solutions for maintaining human control over AI systems, ensuring they operate within defined parameters, and managing the handoff between autonomous and human-controlled operations. In a civilian context, this is the equivalent of creating systems to manage, coordinate and control the artificially intelligent and autonomous systems that are deployed across the internal business units in an organization.

In this cohort, we are intentionally seeking companies with differing skill sets and focus areas. Some startups might excel at business process optimization (which translates to command and control operations), others at AI development, and still others at systems integration or communications protocols. This mirrors the real-world challenge C3BM faces - the need for diverse technological capabilities working together, not just AI expertise in isolation. A successful applicant to this HUSTLE cohort need not have the capability to cover every area of focus mentioned here; rather, we prefer startups that can excel in one specific area, allowing us to assemble a complementary cohort.