

Guidance for Communication with Federal SBIR/STTR Program Managers

As part of the Innovation Partnership's (IPart) SBIR/STTR assistance guidance, we always recommend that interested clients have interaction(s) directly with appropriate federal Program Managers(PM)/Topic Authors(TA), well in advance of starting to prepare their federal proposal submission. While introductions via email are the essential first step in this process, it is ideal to also have a live conversation (if possible) in order to have a dialogue and the ability to directly ask questions that may inform and greatly benefit your proposal development efforts. Below, we have put together some preparation tips for these important communications.

The NSF provides some specific guidance on interacting with their PMs to gain feedback on whether or not a proposed project is a good fit for the agency or topic area. We also believe this advice is applicable to your efforts in proposal preparation for any of the other 10 SBIR-participating federal agencies:

"...the best approach is to send an Executive Summary to the relevant NSF SBIR/STTR (or appropriate agency) Program Director and ask whether the project seems to meet the technical merit review criteria." ([NSFSBIR/STTR FAQs](#))

The Executive Summary should be no more than 1-2 pages (**We highly recommend keeping it to ONE PAGE.**) and succinctly, discuss the following information:

- Description of the company, when it was founded, its mission/function/purpose, and your team.
- The actual project/technology/innovation
- The market opportunity for the proposed project/innovation
- The value proposition for the proposed project/innovation
- The potential market or customers
- The competition (**NOTE: NEVER say you have NO competition! If you believe that your solution solves a problem/issue, which to the best of your knowledge, there is currently no solution for, in the marketplace – this means people are currently doing 'nothing' about this issue/problem – hence, NOTHING, IS your competition.**)

Other elements which are important to consider in your PM/TA discussion(s) to have prepared in advance and can assist in refining your Executive Summary are:

1. Noting what development "stage" your technology is at 'late stage' – i.e. in testing phase, prototyping, filing for patent, have provisional patent, patented and ready for testing, etc...
 - a. Be able to articulate what your 'secret sauce' is or why, what you are developing is 'innovative', IN ONE SENTENCE.
 - b. Discuss exactly what the money will be used for, for this project (if known at this juncture).....NOT for marketing, equipment or additional patent filings.

- c. Keep a narrow focus on expectations – Do not bite off more than can be accomplished with the small amount of money you will be requesting for a Phase 1.
 - d. Discuss where ABC IP fits into the ‘big picture’ ...what will it replace, how will it add to better health, improved outcomes, better results, is it cheaper, more efficient, more portable, disposable, fully recyclable, lighter weight, easier to use, etc.?????,**Be specific, focused and succinct.** Will you need to ‘push’ your product or will the market want to ‘pull’ it?
2. Mention that you have a commercialization plan in place that will focus on i.e. supplier sales, direct to consumer, sales, medical provider sales, licensing etc....and...
 - a. Be prepared to discuss ‘competition’ ...EVERYONE has competition
 - b. Do not give specifics on the potential market size...you do not know the size until (Phase 2 continued R&D) is done. (Production/distribution costs may be a factor, user adoption reluctance may be another.)
 3. (If you have commercial or industry-specific support) That you have commercial support and will provide ‘collaboration letter(s)’ or ‘letter(s) of interest with your application. They are your customers.
 4. That your new company is viable and will have the acumen, support and resources to commercialize your product.
 - a. You are registered on SAM.govyou will be on Grants.gov if a topic is given...
 - b. You will be using Quickbooks (or another recognized accounting package)to track SBIR/STTR accounting requirements (You should look into acquiring this.)
 - c. You have your corporate structure in place – registered, checking etc.
 - d. (If you need to, or if it is necessary) You are negotiating or have negotiated with your University and will have a licensing agreement in place at the time of your application. (These discussions can take some time – so describing where you are in the process of working with your university is important. Acknowledging that you know this is an important aspect of your project, and for your company, is far better than not addressing it at all.)
 5. If applicable, you should note that the University has agreed (or will agree) to act as SBIR/STTR research entity AND that they have the equipment/resources to do the work.
 - a. Be prepared to discuss the Resumes/Vitae of your team....do they have the credentials/experience – the ‘chops’ to execute on the project? Re team contributors credentialed in their field for the tasks they are going to perform on the project? Etc....

6. Similarly, you have been given (or will be given) the time to work as the PI during this grant. (i.e. All team members at the time of project award will be fulfilling the % of effort and have arranged to take leave from the university obligations. AGAIN – these discussions for yourself and your team members who might be primarily employed by a university – may take some time. You need to let the PM/TA know that you are aware of these issues and are addressing them.)
7. ASK....
 - a. Who might potential reviewers be?
 - b. Feedback if you `missed` anything that could help your application.
You may be surprised by what you hear!

The [IPart](#) is here to assist you with your federal SBIR/STTR proposal preparation efforts. Feel free to explore the information and resources on our website: InnovationPartnership.net. If you would like to have more conversations about our programs, you can contact the IPart Director, Kelly S. Wylam kelly@benfranklin.org (717) 948-4318.