

**Federal Marketing Assistance (FMA) Program  
SBIR/STTR Phase II Assistance  
*Tips for Success***

Please review the following “tips” BEFORE and THROUGHOUT your development of the FMA application. While following this information will not guarantee that your project is funded, you will get a much stronger review and have a stronger likelihood of success.

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**1. Read the questions carefully**

Spend a little time considering what is being asked before you begin writing; make sure you're supplying relevant information, rather than something else you'd rather write about.

**2. Be clear in your application when describing the following items:**

**a. The technology to be exploited**

It is critical to differentiate your proposed technology from that which has been done before. The only way to do so successfully is to be specific about what makes your technology, or use of an existing technology, unique or innovative. It is safe to assume a fundamental understanding of your industry or markets on the part of reviewers.

**b. The project team**

The ideal project team is well rounded. A technically credible investigator strengthens the application (and the resulting proposal). When needed, additional technical support can be obtained through a university (academic) subcontractor or through a consultant or partners. Often, a need for greater technical support is evident when an application lacks sufficient detail to adequately address item a (above). Conversely, a project team light on commercial experience raises doubts about the likelihood of an ensuing product ever reaching its intended market.

**c. The potential product to be developed**

Your proposed work needs to lead to something concrete and sellable into a defined market. Blanket statements of a problem (pollution from internal combustion engines) are not as strong as statements of a market (soot reduction system allowing off-road diesel equipment manufacturers to meet pollution standards in 2007).

**d. The end users**

Often a "pure technologist" will be convinced that everyone will desire the technology as much as he/she does. However, don't make such assumptions. Show the review panel who can benefit from your technology; identify one or more categories of users with a significant problem for which this product potentially offers a reasonable solution.

Keep in mind that it is not always the case that the end user pays directly for the use of the potential product. Often, a producer or service provider sells their output to a third party who further packages it or adds additional value and sells the combined offering.

#### **e. The competitive landscape**

How are your potential users' needs currently being met? What are their available alternatives from other sources, and what is known to be in the works? Remember that doing nothing is a common alternative.

### **3. Be concise**

You must strike a balance between describing your proposal concept well enough to support an Innovation Partnership evaluation, and being brief. The application form is designed to cut to the heart of your planned proposal without demanding a lot of extra supporting information. It is not necessary to elaborate in great detail.

### **4. Know that your intellectual property is protected**

All parties involved in the review and decision process are bound to treat your information confidentially. Consequently, the Innovation Partnership evaluation provides a rare opportunity to obtain meaningful, objective feedback on your proposal concept from subject matter experts in your field. Omitting essential elements when describing your plans for the sake of protecting your intellectual property not only wastes this opportunity, but also casts doubt as to whether your project offers genuine technical innovation.

The federal review of proposals is also performed by reviewers bound by confidentiality agreements with the various funding agencies. If you are uncomfortable disclosing enough information to permit an objective assessment of your technology development plans, federal funding may not be an appropriate option for you.

### **5. Be coachable**

The most beneficial outcome from this evaluation process is not the financial assistance that may result, but the impartial, constructive feedback extended. The best way to succeed in the world of technology commercialization is to seize every opportunity to learn from those who have experience and insight. Applicants who become defensive when confronted with weaknesses in their plans are usually sentencing themselves to the difficult path of learning the hard way. For those brave enough to face their own blind spots, there is a wealth of assistance available through the Innovation Partnership and elsewhere. The Innovation Partnership welcomes repeat applications when the shortcomings in earlier proposal concepts have been addressed.

By keeping each of the previous suggestions in mind during the evaluation process, you'll be able to communicate the pertinent details of your project, obtain frank, constructive feedback from experts, and use the entire experience to strengthen your proposal—and your chances for funding success.