

SBIR/STTR Client Assistance in Pennsylvania FAQs

(Last Updated 3/27/25)

1) Q – What is the Innovation Partnership (IPart)?

A – Information on the Innovation Partnership (IPart) can be found here:
<https://innovationpartnership.net>.

Innovation Partnership (IPart) is Pennsylvania's premiere, statewide, Small Business Innovation (SBIR), Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) and federal funding assistance program. It is an initiative of the [Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development \(PA DCED\)](#) combining the expertise of technology-based, economic development assistance organizations and institutions of higher education to counsel and support innovative businesses and entrepreneurs in their quest to secure federal grant funding to commercialize their innovations.

2) Q – Does my business need to be located in Pennsylvania to get SBIR/STTR assistance from the IPart?

A – **YES!** The IPart is a service to Pennsylvania-based, technology-focused businesses and entrepreneurs ONLY.

A majority of your business operations (51%) must be physically domiciled in Pennsylvania and have a Pennsylvania mailing address. This does not mandate that your business incorporation documents originate in Pennsylvania, but you must be [registered to conduct business in the Commonwealth](#). For guidance starting a business in PA, Visit:
<https://www.pa.gov/guides/starting-a-business/>

If you are an out of state business, and plan to physically relocate 51% or greater of your operations to a location in Pennsylvania, this must occur **PRIOR** to receiving any IPart services.

3) Q – What are the advantages of using the Innovation Partnership (IPart)?

A – **Experience & Knowledge** - Because the IPart is supported by long-standing and nationally recognized economic development service providers and institutions of higher education throughout Pennsylvania; IPart counselors and program managers bring a wealth of experience and institutional knowledge to bear when assisting clients with their business growth, development, commercialization, and capital investment needs. Most of our assistance professionals have worked within industries of innovation or assisting technology-focused businesses for a majority of their professional careers. IPart has a winning team to help your business succeed.

Sound Assistance Programs - IPart's **FREE** SBIR/STTR [Phase I & II Pre-Proposal technical review program](#) assists clients in laying down the foundation for the crafting of their final federal proposal and provides valuable, critical feedback from technical experts which can move a mediocre federal proposal submission to one that wins an award. IPart's funding programs such as our [MicroGrant/MicroVoucher](#) and [Travel & Training](#) can help defray some of the client's proposal development-related expenses. *(Described in greater detail later in the FAQs)*

4) Q – What does it cost to use the IPart Programs/Services?

A – IPart programs and services are **FREE** to small, innovative businesses primarily (51%) and physically located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We do not provide services to clients located outside of PA unless they are willing to relocate a majority of their operations to the state.

5) Q – Who should I contact if I am interested in applying for SBIR/STTR funding? How do I get started with this process?

A – Each IPart, Partner Organization has designated Program Managers or Counselors that work one-on-one with interested technology-focused clients to assess their readiness and preparedness to embark upon applying for federal funding opportunities to commercialize their innovation. IPart's Partner Organization staff can provide this assistance as well as other value-add business growth services and potentially investments, depending upon the organization and client's stage of business development.

A listing of IPart Partner contacts is located [HERE](#).

6) Q – There are a lot of contacts on the IPart contacts page; should I call anyone listed?

A – You should call a resource contact at an IPart Partner Organization that is located close to your physical location. Also, please take some time to explore the assistance and services offered by your local Partner Organizations, as these can be very helpful for your business.

7) Q – What if I am physically located in an area where there are multiple IPart Organizations? Which one should I call?

A – If you are a start-up business or early-stage entrepreneur, you should start by contacting the [Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#) which is closest to your physical location.

If you are an existing business it will depend upon the stage of business growth, the stage of development of your innovation(s) and potentially, your technology space. Please contact Kelly S. Wylam, IPart Director (717) 948-4318 kelly.wylam@benfranklin.org to assist you with determining which IPart Partner might be your best access and assistance point of contact.

8) Q – I am currently a researcher at a Pennsylvania university and looking to get SBIR/STTR funding to commercialize my innovation/IP. Who should I work with and where should I start?

A – If you are a researcher at a university, seeking to start a business, or commercialize your technology/innovation and are interested in pursuing SBIR/STTR or federal funding, **you should start by speaking with someone from your institution’s Technology Transfer Office**, to ensure that you have the ability to commercialize the IP you plan to develop and that all of your disclosures are up-to-date. You should also discuss with your university, your plans to start a business and the role you anticipate you will play in the SBIR/STTR project execution, as there are stringent federal rules regarding project team roles and employment status. If you are an employee of the university, you will need to clear your time allocation on the SBIR/STTR project with them to ensure you are complying with your employment agreement. *These discussions should occur well in advance of the federal proposal submission deadline you are striving to meet.*

9) Q – Will IPart staff assist clients in finding and SBIR/STTR topic match for their innovation?

A – Yes, we can. But, clients are expected to try to do some preliminary research on topic matches on their own, either prior to or while engaging with an IPart professional, as YOU, the innovator/technologist understand your technology space and keywords better than IPart staff. Instructions on conducting open or closed solicitation topic searches is conveniently located on the IPart website [HERE](#). Your IPart assistance professional can also help guide you through this search process.

10) Q – The SBIR/STTR submission deadline is 2 weeks away. Can Innovation Partnership (IPart) still help me?

A – Just like the federal agencies have established deadlines for their solicitations, so too, the IPart has established deadlines to use our programs. It is recommended that clients contact an IPart counselor 2-3 months PRIOR (at minimum) to a federal submission deadline to gain their assistance and guidance with many of the nuanced aspects of federal grant proposal preparation.

In order to receive a Pre-Proposal technical review through the IPart, it must be submitted in acceptable form, to the IPart Director, **4 Weeks Prior** to the federal submission deadline.

This means that the Pre-Proposal should be provided to the IPart counselor for editing/review/comments a minimum of a 1-2 weeks (6-5 weeks before the federal submission deadline) before the [IPart submission deadline](#). *(Greater detail on the IPart program process is provided in the program FAQs.)*

Assistance Programs FAQs
*MicroGrant/MicroVoucher (Phase I) and
Federal Marketing Assistance (FMA) – Phase II
& Travel & Training*

1) **Q – I received a MicroGrant/MicroVoucher/FMA Award a number of months ago but delayed my federal proposal submission. I now plan to submit the same proposal that the Investment Committee awarded. Can I still receive my award?**

A – Yes. You should inform your IPart contact/sponsor and the Director that you plan to delay your federal submission and provide us with the anticipated date you plan to submit. This date should be within a year of the Investment Committee's funding decision of award. Submissions seeking reimbursement a year past the date of the IC's funding decision will not be honored. You need to submit all of your IPart packet information (you received in your original award email) for reimbursement to receive your award. Please ensure you read all of the MicroGrant/MicroVoucher/FMA reimbursement instructions that were sent to you with the IPart's IC decision or request that your sponsor or the IPart Director resend these materials to you.

2) **Q – How long does it take to receive feedback (Technical Reviewer's Comments) on my Pre-Proposal through the IPart review process?**

A – The IPart Pre-Proposal Application Program (PPAP) for Technical Review combined with the Investment Committee's review for funding decision takes approximately 2-2.5 weeks. IPart requires that the PPA be "submitted" via email, in MS Word Format, to the IPart Director, **a minimum of 4 Weeks prior to the federal submission deadline** (*a slightly different schedule might be necessary for DoD-related submissions, due to their shorter timing from topic release to submission deadline.*) This 4-week buffer is necessary to afford you, the client, enough time to work with a Preferred Provider ([link on this page under MicroVoucher Program](#)) or grant-writing professional to prepare your final proposal for federal submission.

An outline of the IPart Pre-Proposal submission process follows:

- Client should be engaged and working with an IPart Program Manager/Counselor/Director a number of months (4-6 is ideal) prior to considering SBIR/STTR submission so they can benefit from the necessary business-related and logistical counseling important to preparing for both their IPart and federal submission.
- Client completes all necessary [federal registrations](#) in preparation for submitting a federal grant proposal (**Can take from 6-8 weeks to receive all of the registration approvals.**)
- Client receives the IPart, Word Pre-Proposal Template from their Program Manager/Counselor/Director for completion and review by IPart Program Manager/Counselor/Director.
- Client and IPart Program Manager/Counselor/Director ensures Pre-Proposal is in acceptable form for IPart submission.
- Client Pre-Proposal Application is vet to technical reviewers for their critical comments & feedback.

- Client receives Technical Review **(It takes about 1-1.5 weeks to receive the PPA Technical Review.)**
- Upon receipt of the Technical Review, IPart Director schedules a meeting of the Investment Committee to review the client Per-Proposal and Technical Review comments, provide another round of critical feedback and render a funding decision. **(Investment Committee should make its decision within 1 week of client having received the Technical Review.)**
- Client has a remaining 2 weeks to write, prepare, work with a Preferred Provider (if choosing to do so), and submit their final federal SBIR/STTR federal proposal.

3) Q – What federal registrations must be completed in preparation for submitting my SBIR/STTR proposal?

A – IPart has a resource 'guide' containing all the [federal registrations](#) (and links) that must be completed prior to submitting an SBIR/STTR proposal. Depending upon which federal agency you are submitting to – the registrations can take from 4-6 weeks to confirm.

Starting early with this registration process is imperative.

Also – you should **ALWAYS** double check the required registrations in the **ACTUAL SOLICITATION**, to ensure you have them all.

4) Q – What is the difference between a MicroGrant (MG), MicroVoucher (MV) and a Federal Marketing Assistance (FMA) award?

A – If awarded by the IPart Investment Committee, the differences in awards are as follows:

- **MicroGrant (MG)**– This award is for up to \$2,000 in cash (check) paid directly to the client/company to help defray the administrative time/cost expended to prepare their final federal proposal. This award decision is typically made by the IPart Investment Committee, when it feels the client has presented strong execution in their Pre-Proposal as noted by overall, positive Technical Reviewer comments and the Investment Committee members.
- **MicroVoucher (MV)** – This award is for up to \$5,000 (paid directly to a Preferred Provider/Grant-Writing Professional approved by the IPart), to defray all or a portion of their grant-writing assistance services. This award decision is typically made by the Investment Committee when it feels the Pre-Proposal execution and resulting federal proposal could be greatly enhanced by engaging a Preferred Provider or grant assistance professional. A more detailed explanation of the MV award/payment nuances are answered in other Questions.
- **Federal Marketing Assistance (FMA) Award** – This award is specifically designed for Phase II applicants. Please see the FMA Instructions for the specific use of proceeds. Award amount can range from \$5,000 to \$8,000 and is made directly to the client. The client can choose to work with a Preferred Provider/Grant Assistance Professional applying all or a portion of this award. The Payment for these services would come directly from the client and NOT the IPart (as with the MV).

5) **Q – I want to participate in a Phase 0 proposal assistance program for 1st time SBIR/STTR Applicants provided by the agency I am submitting a proposal to (i.e. NIH, DOE, DoD etc.). Can I also use the IPart Pre-Proposal Assistance Program (PPAP) for the same proposal submission?**

A – NO! IPart is funded by a federal SBA FAST grant, PA DCED, and our collaborative Partner Organizations. As a primarily grant-funded operation, IPart's budget is limited. Since the federal agencies' Phase 0 programs are duplicative of IPart's in their proposal development assistance. IPart can not provide a Pre-Proposal Technical Review (*which the IPart pays for on behalf of its clients*) to clients already receiving similar services directly from the federal agency they plan to submit a proposal to. If, however, a client would want to pay \$3k for use of IPart services AND use the federal Phase 0 assistance, we'd be more than happy to assist you through our process. Additionally, if a client does use IPart services, and receives a Technical Review and neglects to inform us they are also using the federal agency's Phase 0 assistance program, the client will be charged a \$3k fee for the IPart Technical Review.

6) **Q – I want to pursue a FastTrack or Direct to Phase II submission. Will IPart provide assistance?**

A - IPart DOES NOT currently assist clients seeking to submit a FastTrack or Direct to Phase II proposals if the client has never successfully submitted and won PhI(s) or PhI & PhII awards previously. If a client has previously been awarded a PhI(s) or PhI & PhII awards, consideration **MAY** be given to assist with a FastTrack/Direct to PhII submission, but, only after one-on-one consultation with the IPart Director and a majority of agreement with the IPart Investment Committee.

7) **Q – How do I work with a Preferred Provider (PP)?**

A – IPart has developed a listing of expert, grant writing/editing assistance professionals for your convenience. We have prescreened all of their credentials, have their NDAs and Participant Agreements on file and are confident they will provide clients with exceptional grant assistance services. You should reach out to a few of the PPs on our list, well in advance of your federal submission deadline to discuss the PP's time availability to work with you as well as the types of and costs for services they can provide, whether or not they require a retainer fee and how they bill/invoice. IPart does not play a role in negotiating client and PP services or costs, terms or conditions and will never be a party to any of these client/PP agreements.

8) **Q – What if I want to work with a grant assistance professional who is not on the IPart's Preferred Provider List?**

A – If you are working with a grant assistance professional and/or have a relationship with an individual who has documented, prior, SBIR/STTR award success(es); you may make a request to the IPart Director to utilize this individual's grant assistance services. The individual's resume' or vitae' will need to be provided to the IPart Director, as well as the other completed, IPart forms for our files. The request to use a Preferred Provider, not on the IPart list should be made well in advance of submitting the IPart PPA for Technical

Review, such that the IPart Investment Committee can review and approve the individual to provide you with grant assistance services.

9) Q – What types of services do the Preferred Providers (PPs) offer?

A – Preferred Providers can offer a wide range of grant critiquing, editing and assistance services; anything from a final redline of a federal proposal to the full services of assisting in writing the proposal and submitting it on behalf of the applicant/client. The IPart strongly encourages clients to contact 2-3 PPs on our list to discuss their proposal assistance needs directly with them as well as what their fee-for-service structure entails. The IPart does not get involved with negotiating PP services or fees.

10) Q – My Preferred Provider is asking me to pay an up-front fee to retain them. What if I pay this fee and do not receive an IPart MV award?

A – The IPart has no control over the terms and conditions demanded by the Preferred Providers for their providing of services. It is our educated opinion, that your proposal, will most likely be greatly enhanced and have a greater chance of winning a federal award, if you choose to work with a Preferred Provider. That being said, it is your choice as to whether or not you feel you will be able and willing to pay for the Preferred Provider's services should you not be awarded an IPart MV.

11) Q – When will my Preferred Provider (PP) receive their payment check?

A – Ensuring that your Preferred Provider receives their payment in a timely fashion from the IPart is your responsibility. The sooner you send the appropriate MV materials to the IPart Director, the sooner we can process your request for payment. It should take up to 3 weeks, from the time IPart receives your documentation until your Preferred Provider receives their payment check.

*****Please Note: You should remind your Preferred Provider that the check they will be receiving to pay for their services provided to you will be from: the BFTP Corp. If the PP would like a timelier payment, they will need to complete a BFTP Corp. ACH form and return it to the IPart Exec. Dir. in a timely fashion.**

12) Q – When will I receive my MG payment?

A – Ensuring that you receive your MG payment in a timely fashion from the IPart is your responsibility. The sooner you send the appropriate MG materials to the IPart Executive Director, the sooner we can process your request for payment. It should take up to 3 weeks, from the time IPart receives your documentation until you receive your payment check.

*****Please Note: The check you will be receiving as your IPart MG award will be from: the BFTP Corp.**