IPart Pre-Proposal Application (PPA) Tips for Success

The Funding/Investment Committees of the IPart developed the following general suggestions to increase the likelihood of receiving program funding and gaining greater benefit from the Pre-Proposal Preparation Application Program (PPAP) and evaluation process.

1. READ THE QUESTIONS CAREFULLY!

The Funding/Investment Committees have observed that the application questions are often not answered. That is, the information offered does not directly address what has been requested. It's worth spending a little extra 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. *90%+ of developing a WINNING SBIR/STTR proposal is READING & FOLLOWING THE AGENCY'S SOLICITATION INSTRUCTIONS*.

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 or current, 'state-of-the-art'. 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. The review panel will include subject matter experts in your field, so it is safe to assume a fundamental understanding of your industry.

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. 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/Processes to Be Developed:

   While this may seem like an obvious point, both the review panel and the Investment Committee are often left without a clear picture of the resulting end product of the project. Your proposed work needs to lead to something concrete. If not fully in the Phase I, described and noted it will arrive at this stage at the end of Phase II completion, or some other point in a definable future.

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 (primary, secondary, tertiary…etc.) with a significant problem for which this product potentially offers a reasonable solution.   Solving of 'pain points'.

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? Please remember that if your potential customers are currently satisfied with 'DOING NOTHING' to address a perceived problem – what you are solving might NOT actually BE a PROBLEM and/or in this instance, 'DOING NOTHING' is your competition, What are their available alternatives from other sources, and what is known to be in the works?

3. Be Concise!

You must strike a balance between describing your proposal concept well enough to support an IPart 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. The default spaces provided on the application should be sufficient to include enough key information for a reader skilled in your technology or experienced in your commercial market to grasp your intention.

4. Know That Your Intellectual Property (IP) is Protected.

All parties involved in the review and decision process are bound to treat your information confidentially. Consequently, the IPart 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 IP not only wastes this opportunity, but also casts doubt as to whether your project offers genuine technical innovation.

The federal review of SBIR/STTR grant applications 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 IPart, our Partners and elsewhere. The IPart welcomes repeat applications when the shortcomings in earlier proposal concepts have been addressed.

If your IPart Phase I PPA Concept has received a Technical Review and funding decision/feedback from our Investment Committee (IC), indicating a decline of award, we will typically afford you the opportunity to address the Technical Reviewers' and IC's concerns by revising your IPart PPA and resubmitting it to the IC for re-review and reconsideration of funding. Please not this will typically delay your planned federal submission to a later deadline date.

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.