



September 2005 SBIR Newsletter

Important seminar slated

An SBIR/STTR workshop will take place at North Carolina State University's Centennial Campus on Tuesday morning, September 20, 2005 from 8:00 to 10:00AM.

This workshop will take place in the College of Textiles, Convocation Room on Centennial Campus. Mary Beth Thomas, technology counselor with The University of North Carolina's Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC), will present an introduction to the SBIR/STTR programs — services that the SBTDC provides to those looking to submit proposals, as well as sources of additional program information. Dr. Sally Nerlove, SBIR program manager with the National Science Foundation will present various SBIR/STTR-related initiatives within NSF. Successful SBIR awardees will also present the lessons they learned. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet with speakers as well as counselors from the SBTDC both during and after the workshop.

There is no charge for admission, but registration is strongly suggested as space is limited. Registration can be conducted online at <http://www.sbtcd.org/events/sbir/workshops2005/>. Also available at this site are an agenda and directions.

NIH Conference presentations available

Presentations from the event are located at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/SBIRConf2005/presentations.htm>

NIH moving to electronic submission

NIH SBIR/STTR grant applicants soon will be expected to submit applications online through the government-wide Grants.gov portal. Grant applicants must first complete a registration process. Organizations are strongly encouraged to register with Grants.gov now to ensure that they are ready to take advantage of the electronic submission process, which is expected to take effect for the Dec. 1, 2005, submission date. For more information, visit http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/sbirsttr_news.htm

from <http://www.SSTI.org>

NIH SBIR/STTR contract opportunities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will be soliciting proposals from small business concerns for contract awards under the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program. The SBIR program, in part, emphasizes increased private-sector commercialization of technology developed through federal R&D and

seeks to increase small business participation in federal R&D. Proposals will be due Nov. 4, 2005. More information, including a full list of research topics, is available at: <http://www2.eps.gov/spg/HHS/NIH/NHLBI/PHS%2D2006%2D1/listing.html>

from <http://www.SSTI.org>

SBIR proposal writing basics: If at first you don't succeed...

By Gail & Jim Greenwood, Greenwood Consulting Group, Inc.

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Ideally, the first Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal that you submit will be funded. The reality, however, is that these are very competitive programs, and with odds of about one out of every six Phase I SBIR proposals being funded, chances are you will get a "Dear John" reply the first time you submit.

So assuming you are one of the many crestfallen proposers who got a rejection notice, what do you do?

First, resist the temptation to write-off SBIR/STTR as dumb governmental programs in which only the most politically-connected companies can win. Also resist the temptation to tell the agency that they are unworthy of your great ideas. And especially resist the temptation to tell your Congresspersons how dishonest/inept/blind/high carb the agency is. It's time, instead, for a long walk, a good glass of wine, and maybe join a rugby team to vent your frustrations constructively.

Second, seek a debriefing. This is feedback from the agency on your proposal, ideally telling you exactly what you did well and what you did poorly (in the eyes of the reviewers). Some agencies send you this feedback automatically after winners have been announced, while others require that you request a debriefing. When you read the debriefing comments, you likely again will be angry and will want to write-off the SBIR/STTR programs, write a scathing letter to the agency, and call your Congressperson to "set straight" the agency. Once again, resist these evil temptations.

Third, look at the silver lining in the comments of the debriefing. Sure, they failed to see the great ideas you were proposing, but WHY didn't they see them? Isn't there a chance you didn't express them well enough, or that those ideas were buried in a bunch of gobbledygook? They didn't think your project was innovative enough — again, is it possible that you failed to make a compelling case for the ingenuity that is so obvious to you (you've had this idea stewing in your brain for years) but not so obvious to a harried reviewer trying to plow through a stack of proposals in a short time period? The debriefing, therefore, represents a learning opportunity — a chance to improve your proposal-writing skills so that next time...

Speaking of next time, some agencies allow you to resubmit an unfunded SBIR/STTR Phase I proposal. If the agency to which you applied allows a resubmittal, and if the debriefing indicates the reviewers didn't think your idea was crazy, and if you still want to pursue this project (can you say "persistence?"), then consider resubmitting the proposal.

If you decide to resubmit, there are several important considerations:

1. What are the agency's requirements and limitations on resubmittals? Many, for example, require that you include a page summarizing the changes you have made to the original proposal, and that you mark on the cover page (or elsewhere) that this is a resubmittal.
2. What legitimate comments did the reviewers make that require you to alter the original proposal? Every debriefing we've seen has had legitimate points that the proposer should address. You need to identify these; respond with changes in your team, strategy, work plan, etc.; and then convey the changes within the revised proposal. This conveyance means both summarizing the changes in the aforementioned one-page summary of revisions as well as usually making significant changes to one or more portions of the text.
3. What reviewers' comments were perhaps "off mark" in terms of being inaccurate, unfair, or ignoring something you said in the proposal? These require a little more tact — no, we didn't say "attack," we said TACT, meaning you need to be very diplomatic about your response. If the comment seems to indicate the reviewer did not see something that was in the original proposal, this is your opportunity to reference the original proposal and embellish a bit on the point (since it is obviously important to the reviewer, it deserves a little embellishment). If you disagree with a comment, then you again diplomatically state your case (and perhaps add additional evidence to support it), and hope it is not a "deal killer" in terms of the resubmittal's reviewer deciding no way, no how, will s/he fund someone with your point of view. But again, practice diplomacy, because as soon as your resubmittal points out the shortcomings of the reviewers' intellect or the appearance of his/her mother, you might as well tear your proposal in half to save reviewers the effort.
4. What portions of the proposal need to be updated? You'd be amazed how many resubmitted proposal we review that still have support letters from 2002, don't reflect recent changes in technology or world events, or fail to indicate additional work you've done in this area.

Remember, SBIR/STTR grants are very competitive programs, and no one wins all the time. The differences between SBIR/STTR winners and losers, though, are that the winners learn from their mistakes, they resubmit when appropriate, and they apply what they learn to future proposals.

NC SBIR Success Story

Sandbox Learning Company receives Phase I SBIR grant to improve lives of autistic children

The Sandbox Learning Company (<http://www.sandbox-learning.com/>) was awarded its first Phase I SBIR grant to develop and research a prototype of a video game to help children with autism learn skills for independence. The grant was awarded by the National Institutes of Mental Health in response to the PA: Innovative Technologies for Enhancing Function for Individuals with Disabilities. Sandbox's principal investigator, Amy Maguire, and project manager Desiree McClimon, feel the support of the local SBTDC and grant community was critical in receiving this funding.

The Sandbox Learning Company, a women-owned business in Winston-Salem, NC, was founded by Desiree and Amy while they were MBA candidates at Wake Forest University. The company currently publishes online stories for teaching young children safety and social skills.

The SBIR grant will provide resources for developing and researching a new product line for the company, video games.

According to the Autism Society of America, annual costs associated with autism are estimated to be \$90 billion and are expected to rise to \$200 billion in the next ten years. A substantial part of these costs are due to adults lacking skills for independence. The proposed video game focuses on teaching community-based skills to help individuals with autism develop skills necessary for independence. The knowledge gained from this research also could be applied to a wide range of additional skills. Since this video game could greatly improve the lives of many people, the company plans to file for Phase II funds and bring the game through to Phase III commercialization.

To prepare for the grant, the founders attended SBTDC speaker sessions and the national SBIR conference in Bethesda, MD. These programs helped determine the direction for the grant, provide an overview of the SBIR/STTR program, and guide the founders through the application process. John Uvari, the SBTDC's SBIR specialist, was extremely helpful in reviewing the proposal and responding to questions.

"The mentoring received through contacts provided by John has been invaluable," says Amy. The co-founders had the opportunity to speak with a number of grant recipients who gave wonderful feedback about key elements for submitting a grant. Most notably, Phil Scheffer of Vortant Technologies in Asheville, NC, "has been a true mentor and friend through each step of the process, and he continues to guide us through the maze of federal regulations and paperwork," adds Desiree.

As recent awardees, the founders are thankful to the community for their support and highly recommend that anyone interested in applying for grants take advantage of the SBTDC programs including speakers, proposal review, and networking opportunities. "The grant application process can be daunting, but learning from others' experiences can increase your chances for success," says Amy.

For More Information Contact:

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DTIC, the Defense Technical Information Center

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“We're from the government, and we're here to help!”

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