

SBTDC Interview with NASA

Ujvari: What is the agency's overall mission?

NASA: The NASA Mission is "To understand and protect our home planet, To explore the universe and search for life, To inspire the next generation of explorers...as only NASA can."

Ujvari: What global scientific/industry sectors are of interest to the agency right now and what are expected to be popular topics in the pipeline?

NASA: The Topics and Subtopics of interest to NASA are listed in each year's solicitation. The 2003 solicitation can be reviewed at <http://sbir.gsfc.nasa.gov/SBIR/solicit.htm>. The 2004 solicitation will be at the same site after July 7th, 2004.

Ujvari: Does your agency mainly offer grants or contracts?

NASA: NASA SBIR/STTR awards are handled as contracts.

Ujvari: What is the 2004 budget for SBIR (and STTR if applicable)?

NASA: The NASA 2004 SBIR Budget is \$107.5M. The NASA 2004 STTR Budget is \$12.9M

Ujvari: How many awards were made in 2003?

NASA: The 2003 solicitation resulted in 310 Phase 1 SBIR awards and 45 Phase 1 STTR awards which were announced November 21, 2004.

Ujvari: What are the general win rates?

NASA: The win rates are generally about 12 percent for SBIR Phase 1 and 20 percent for STTR Phase 1. Win rates are roughly 40 percent for both programs in Phase 2.

Ujvari: How many awards are generally made per solicitation for a Phase 1 and Phase 2?

NASA: Recent awards for SBIR Phase 1 have resulted in 310 contracts; awards for SBIR Phase 2 have resulted in 145 contracts. Recent awards for STTR Phase 1 have resulted in 45 contracts; awards for STTR Phase 2 have resulted in 18 contracts.

Ujvari: Who reviews your contract proposal/grant application (agency staff – outside peer reviewers – combination)?

NASA: NASA technical experts review each of the SBIR and STTR proposals submitted each year. Phase 2 review includes external reviewers for commercial potential.

Ujvari: How are reviewers selected?

NASA: Reviewers are selected by the Topic and Subtopic Managers on the basis of their technical expertise. External reviewers in Phase 2 are experts in the commercialization process.

Ujvari: Are the review criteria "weighted?"

NASA: See Attachment A which includes the NASA evaluation criteria

Ujvari: How much “weight” is assigned to the credentials of the PI and his/her “team?”

NASA: See Attachment A which includes the NASA evaluation criteria and weightings

Ujvari: How much “weight” is assigned to the soundness and technical merit of the project?

NASA: See Attachment A which includes the NASA evaluation criteria and weightings

Ujvari: Does your agency require a “succinct Commercialization Plan” in your current Phase II solicitation?

NASA: Yes

Ujvari: Are there separate reviewers for the technical and commercialization sections of the applications for Phase I? For Phase II? If so, what are the backgrounds, generally, of the commercialization reviewers?

NASA: Phase 1, no. Phase 2, yes. Commercialization is reviewed by external experts on the commercialization process.

Ujvari: How much “weight” is assigned to commercialization?

NASA: See Attachment A which includes the NASA evaluation criteria and weightings

Ujvari: At what point are the reviewers of a proposal known to the applicant organization?

NASA: NASA does not reveal the names of reviewers to proposers.

Ujvari: How are debriefings requested?

NASA: NASA automatically provides a written debriefing to all proposers in Phase 1. The written debriefing includes the narrative review comments of the evaluators. Phase 2 debriefings are handled by administering centers upon request.

Ujvari: If provided – are debriefings oral or written?

NASA: Phase 1 debriefings are written. Phase 2 debriefings may be written or oral, as determined by the administering center.

Ujvari: What is the general period of time between proposal submission and announcement of selection or non-selection?

NASA: Selection is made and announced within three months of proposal receipt to allow for award of Phase 1 contracts within six months of the date of proposal receipt.

Ujvari: What is the general time gap between the time an award is chosen for funding and actual distribution of funding?

NASA: Selection is made and announced within three months of proposal receipt to allow for award of Phase 1 contracts within six months of the date of proposal receipt. Contracts are awarded within 60 days of selection. Distribution of funds may commence upon award of a contract.

Ujvari: Does your agency have a Fast Track or Quick Response offering? If so, please explain.

NASA: No specific fast track program exists; however, the NASA Electronic Handbooks facilitates timely awards.

Ujvari: What is your agency's dollar cap on phase 1 and phase 2 funding?

NASA: NASA currently awards SBIR Phase 1 contracts up to \$70,000, and Phase 2 contracts up to \$600,000. NASA currently awards STTR Phase 1 contracts up to \$100,000, and Phase 2 contracts up to \$600,000.

Ujvari: Does the agency provide any follow-on funding beyond the phase 2 or to carry on additional phase 2 work?

NASA: NASA does emphasize Phase 3 contracting through the program offices.

Ujvari: How is the applicant organization informed of selection or non-selection?

NASA: SBIR and STTR selections are posted on the NASA SBIR web site (<http://sbir.gsfc.nasa.gov/SBIR/SBIR.html>). Selected companies receive email notification of their selection.

Ujvari: If not selected, may applicant organization resubmit – Phase 1? - Phase 2?

NASA: Phase 1 proposals may be resubmitted if the proposal is applicable to the current solicitation.

Ujvari: Is a Phase 2 proposal to be submitted only by invitation?

NASA: No, all Phase 1 proposers are invited to submit a Phase 2 proposal.

Ujvari: Does a separate final report need to be submitted for Phase 1 and Phase 2?

NASA: Yes

Ujvari: Is your agency typically a consumer of the final commercial product? (While we tend to think of contract agencies as looking for deliverables, it might be helpful to know if an agency is a potential customer or can provide sole-source assistance to begin a product launch).

NASA: Yes: NASA develops Topics and Subtopics and selects Phase 1 and 2 proposals consistent with Agency mission and needs.

Attachment A

4. Method of Selection and Evaluation Criteria

All Phase I and II proposals will be evaluated and judged on a competitive basis. Proposals will be initially screened to determine responsiveness. Proposals passing this initial screening will be technically evaluated by engineers or scientists to determine the most promising technical and scientific approaches. Each proposal will be judged on its own merit. The Agency is under no obligation to fund any proposal or any specific number of proposals in a given topic. It also may elect to fund several or none of the proposed approaches to the same topic or subtopic.

4.1 Phase I Proposals

Proposals judged to be responsive to the administrative requirements of this Solicitation and having a reasonable potential of meeting a NASA need, as evidenced by the technical abstract included in the Proposal Summary (Form B), will be evaluated by evaluators with a knowledge of the subtopic area.

4.1.1 Evaluation Process. Proposals should provide all information needed for complete evaluation and evaluators are not expected to seek additional information. Evaluations will be performed by NASA scientists and engineers at the Centers identified in the Solicitation for each subtopic. Also, qualified experts outside of NASA (including industry, academia, and other Government agencies) may assist in performing evaluations as required to determine or verify the merit of a proposal. Offerors should not assume that evaluators are acquainted with the firm, key individuals, or with any experiments or other information. Any pertinent references or publications should be noted in Part 5 of the technical proposal.

4.1.2 Phase I Evaluation Criteria. NASA plans to select for award those proposals offering the best value to the Government and the Nation. NASA will give primary consideration to the scientific and technical merit and feasibility of the proposal and its benefit to NASA. Each proposal will be judged and scored on its own merits using the factors described below:

Factor 1. Scientific/Technical Merit Feasibility

The proposed R/R&D effort will be evaluated on whether it offers a clearly innovative and feasible technical approach to the described NASA problem area. Proposals must clearly demonstrate relevance to the subtopic. Specific objectives, approaches and plans for developing and verifying the innovation must demonstrate a clear understanding of the problem and the current state of the art. The degree of understanding and significance of the risks involved in the proposed innovation must be presented.

Factor 2. Experience, Qualifications and Facilities

The technical capabilities and experience of the PI or project manager, key personnel, staff, consultants and subcontractors, if any, are evaluated for consistency with the research effort and their degree of commitment and availability. The necessary instrumentation or facilities required must be shown to be adequate and any reliance on external sources, such as Government Furnished Equipment or Facilities, addressed (Section 5.15).

Factor 3. Effectiveness of the Proposed Work Plan

The work plan will be reviewed for its comprehensiveness, effective use of available resources, cost management and proposed schedule for meeting the Phase I objectives. The methods planned to achieve each objective or task should be discussed in detail.

STTR: The clear delineation of the responsibilities of the SBC and RI for the success of the proposed cooperative R/R&D effort will be evaluated. The offeror must demonstrate the ability to

organize for effective conversion of intellectual property into products or services of value to NASA and the commercial marketplace.

Factor 4. Commercial Merit and Feasibility

The proposal will be evaluated for any potential commercial applications in the private sector or for use by the Federal Government, as evidenced by the SBC's record of commercializing SBIR or other research, the existence of second phase funding commitments from private sector or non-SBIR funding sources, the existence of third phase follow-on commitments for the subject of the research, and the presence of other indicators of the commercial potential of the innovation.

Scoring of Factors and Weighting: Factors 1, 2, and 3 will be scored numerically with Factor 1 worth 50 percent and Factors 2 and 3 each worth 25 percent. The sum of the scores for Factors 1, 2, and 3 will comprise the Technical Merit score. The score for Commercial Merit will be in the form of an adjectival rating (Excellent, Very Good, Average, Below Average, Poor). For Phase 1 proposals, Technical Merit carries more weight than Commercial Merit.

4.1.3 Selection. Each Center will make recommendations for award among those proposals that it evaluates and will rank those proposals recommended for award relative to all other recommended proposals at that Center. Center rankings will be forwarded to the Program Management Office for analysis and presented to the Source Selection Official and Strategic Enterprise Representatives. Final selection decisions will consider the Center rankings as well as overall NASA priorities, program balance and available funding. However, recommendations and relative rankings developed by the Centers do not guarantee selection for award. The Source Selection Official has the final authority for choosing the specific proposals for contract negotiation.

The list of selections will be posted on the NASA SBIR/STTR Homepage (<http://sbir.nasa.gov>). All firms will receive a formal notification letter. A Contracting Officer will negotiate an appropriate contract to be signed by both parties before work begins.

4.1.4 Allocation of Rights Agreement (STTR awards only). After being selected for Phase I contract negotiations, but before the contract starts, the offeror shall, if requested, provide to the Contracting Officer, a completed **Allocation of Rights Agreement (ARA)**, which has been signed by authorized representatives of the SBC, RI and subcontractors and consultants, as applicable. The ARA shall state the allocation of intellectual property rights with respect to the proposed STTR activity and planned follow-on research, development and/or commercialization.

4.2 Phase II Proposals

4.2.1 Evaluation Process. The Phase II evaluation process is similar to the Phase I process. NASA plans to select for award those proposals offering the best value to the Government and the Nation. Each proposal will be reviewed by NASA scientists and engineers and by qualified experts outside of NASA as needed. In addition, those proposals with high technical merit will be reviewed for commercial merit. NASA uses a peer review panel to evaluate commercial merit. Panel membership will include non-NASA personnel expert in business development and technology commercialization.

4.2.2 Evaluation Factors. The evaluation of Phase II proposals under this Solicitation will apply the following factors:

Factor 1. Scientific/Technical Merit and Feasibility

The proposed R/R&D effort will be evaluated on its innovativeness, originality, and potential technical value, including the degree to which Phase I objectives were met, the feasibility of the innovation, and whether the Phase I results indicate a Phase II project is appropriate.

Factor 2. Experience, Qualifications and Facilities

The technical capabilities and experience of the PI or project manager, key personnel, staff, consultants and subcontractors, if any, are evaluated for consistency with the research effort and their degree of commitment and availability. The necessary instrumentation or facilities required must be shown to be adequate and any reliance on external sources, such as Government Furnished Equipment or Facilities, addressed (Section 5.15).

Factor 3. Effectiveness of the Proposed Work Plan

The work plan will be reviewed for its comprehensiveness, effective use of available resources, cost management and proposed schedule for meeting the Phase I objectives. The methods planned to achieve each objective or task should be discussed in detail.

Factor 4. Commercial Potential. NASA will assess the proposed commercialization plan in terms of its credibility, objectivity, reasonableness of key assumptions and awareness of key risk areas and critical business vulnerabilities, as applicable to the following factors:

(1) Commercial potential of the technology: This includes assessment of (a) a well-defined commercial product or service; (b) a realistic target market niche; (c) a commercial product or service that has strong potential for uniquely meeting a well-defined need within the target market; and (d) a commitment of necessary financial, physical, and/or personnel resources.

(2) Commercial intent of the offeror: This includes assessing the commercial venture for (a) importance to the offeror's current business and strategic planning; (b) reliance on (or lack thereof) Government markets; and (c) adequacy of funding sources necessary to bring technology to identified market.

(3) Capability of the offeror to realize commercialization: This includes assessment of (a) the offeror's past success in bringing SBIR/STTR or other innovative technology to commercial application; (b) the offeror's business planning; (c) the likelihood that the offeror will be able to obtain the remaining necessary financial, technical, and personnel-related resources to bear; and (d) the current strength and continued financial viability of the offeror.

In applying these commercial criteria, NASA will assess proposal information in terms of credibility, objectivity, reasonableness of key assumptions, independent corroborating evidence, internal consistency, demonstrated awareness of key risk areas and critical business vulnerabilities, and other indicators of sound business analysis and judgment.

4.2.3 Evaluation and Selection. Factors 1, 2, and 3 will be scored numerically with Factor 1 worth 50 percent and Factors 2 and 3 each worth 25 percent. The sum of the scores for Factors 1, 2, and 3 will comprise the Technical Merit score. Proposals receiving numerical scores of 85 percent or higher will be evaluated and rated for their commercial potential using the criteria listed in Factor 4 and by applying the same adjectival ratings as set forth for Phase I proposals. Where technical evaluations are essentially equal in potential, cost to the Government may be considered in determining successful offerors. For Phase II proposals, commercial merit is a critical factor.

Each Center will make recommendations for award among those proposals that it evaluates and will rank those proposals recommended for award relative to all other recommended proposals at that Center. The Center Recommendation Report (which includes the Center analysis and ranking) will be forwarded to the Program Management Office for analysis and presented to the Source Selection Official and Strategic Enterprise Representatives. Final selection decisions will consider the Center rankings as well as overall NASA priorities, program balance and available funding, as well as any other evaluations or assessments (particularly pertaining to commercial potential) that may become available. However, recommendations and relative rankings developed by the Centers do not guarantee selection for award. The Source Selection Official has the final authority for choosing the specific proposals for contract negotiation.

Note: Companies with Prior NASA SBIR Awards

NASA has instituted a comprehensive commercialization survey/data gathering process for companies with prior NASA SBIR awards. Information received from SBIR companies completing the survey is kept confidential, and will not be made public except in broad aggregate, with no company-specific attribution.

Responding to the survey is strictly voluntary. However, the SBIR Source Selection Official does see the information contained within the survey as adding to the program's ability to use past performance in decision making.

If you have not completed a survey, or if you would like to update a previously submitted response, please go on line at <http://sbir.nasa.gov/SBIR/survey.html>.

4.3 Debriefing of Unsuccessful Offerors

After Phase I and Phase II selection decisions have been announced, debriefings for unsuccessful proposals will be available to the offeror's corporate official or designee via e-mail. Telephone requests for debriefings will not be accepted. Debriefings are not opportunities to reopen selection decisions. They are intended to acquaint the offeror with perceived strengths and weaknesses of the proposal and perhaps identify constructive future action by the offeror.

Debriefings will not disclose the identity of the proposal evaluators, nor provide proposal scores, rankings in the competition, the content of or comparisons with, other proposals.

4.3.1 Phase I Debriefings. For Phase I proposals, debriefings will be automatically e-mailed to the designated business official within 60 days. If you have not received your debriefing by this time, contact the SBIR/STTR Program Support Office at sbir@reisis.com.

4.3.2 Phase II Debriefings. To request debriefings on Phase II proposals, offerors must request via e-mail to the SBIR/STTR Program Support Office at sbir@reisis.com within 60 days after selection announcement. The offeror will be contacted by the appropriate Field Center for debriefing. Late requests will not be honored.