# SBIR Proposal Writing Basics: NSF Non-deadline, Extra Opportunities & Challenges in DOD FY19.2 Solicitation

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NSF

We’ve heard from a number of entrepreneurs who are working diligently to meet the June 13th deadline for National Science Foundation (NSF) Phase I proposals. We’ve been reminding those folks that NSF is not treating this as a hard deadline for Phase I proposals—per their first webinar after initiating their new Project Pitch requirement, NSF says you can submit your Phase I proposal anytime (except, oddly, between 5:01 pm and midnight on the 13th), and it will receive a timely review and consideration for funding. It is still unclear how NSF is going to do this, given their traditional approach to convening one review panel once per solicitation cycle to consider all proposals received for a given subtopic, but this is their intention. Therefore, you should not feel that you have to submit on or before 5 pm on June 13th. HOWEVER, we think it is very valuable to submit your mandatory, pre-proposal Project Pitch by the 13th, because NSF has said that, if they reject your Pitch, then you can’t revise and resubmit it until the next solicitation cycle. So, if you submit your Pitch by June 13th, and then it is rejected, you can submit a revision during the June 14-December 12th time frame. But if you don’t submit your Pitch until June 14th, and it is rejected, then you cannot revise and resubmit until after December 13th, which could put a serious delay in pursuit of your NSF Phase I proposal and project.

DOD

We reported recently on all the innovations occurring within the Dept of Defense’s SBIR/STTR programs. We wanted to highlight one that just popped up on our radar screen, and caution you about a problem with the current DOD FY19.2 solicitation.

First, the innovation: The Air Force (USAF) is leading the charge within DOD to make major, revolutionary and innovative changes to the SBIR program. This lead continues in the FY19.2 DOD solicitation, with USAF not only including a half-dozen topics in a separate Direct to Phase II (DTP2) solicitation, but making one of them an open DTP2 topic. Look at AF192-D001, titled “Direct to Phase II Open Topic: Open Call for Innovative Defense-Related Dual-Purpose Technologies/Solutions with a Clear Air Force Stakeholder Need.” Set at a maximum of $750k for a 12-month effort (+3 months for reporting), USAF is opening the door to ideas and technologies that fall outside of their typically specific and restrictive topics. USAF has had an open Phase I special topic for the past several solicitation cycles, but this one is for DTP2, which means it is for projects where technical feasibility has already been proven. If you are interested in such an opportunity with USAF, we strongly urge you to carefully review the topic description, because while this is an “open” topic to which you can submit any idea that you think USAF might benefit from, there are limits on what USAF wants to receive. For example, the solicitation stipulates that the proof of feasibility should not have come entirely from a prior Phase I project, and USAF wants to see things that already *“have demonstrated clear commercial value in the non-defense sector (i.e., through existing products/solutions) in order to see if they have similar Air Force applications.”*

We suspect there are many folks who would like to use this open topic to submit a partially developed idea, or one that is developed technically but not proven in the market place, but they will find that all the stipulated parameters will eliminate the idea from serious consideration for USAF DTP2 funding. And, unfortunately, USAF is very restrictive in terms of you talking with topic TPOC, making it more likely that Air Force will get Phase II proposals that they have to review and reject because the proposer could not get sufficient guidance from the TPOC in advance to avoid submitting unwanted proposals in the first place. This is a clear downside to this open DTP2 topic for both the USAF and applicants.

An additional issue with the current DOD solicitations: due to some unspecified technical issues, the DOD FY19.2 SBIR and FY19.B STTR solicitations were not released on the DOD SBIR/STTR website as they usually are. After about a 2-week delay from their scheduled release date, these solicitations appeared on the Fed Biz Ops website (fbo.gov) instead of the DOD website. This mitigation effort is imperfect; for example, revisions/updates/deletions made to topics during the pre-release period (which extends through May 30, 2019) are not appearing as they usually do. We also understand that there is no topic search capability, so you literally must download 17 different “chapters” to the FY19.2 SBIR solicitation from a zip file to see each component’s topic list and descriptions.

The inability to see revisions/updates/deletions to the current DOD topics suggests two actions will be important on your part. First, this is another reason to try to talk with the TPOC for a specific topic in which you are interested: in addition to the technical clarification questions you should be asking, you also should ask if there have been any changes to the topic since it was originally posted on the fbo.gov website. And second, when the topics become finalized on May 31st, you need to review the final version of any topic in which you are interested to see what changes may have occurred (or even if the entire topic was deleted).