# SBIR Proposal Writing Basics: Consider USDA--& 2 Reminders

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We want to encourage you to consider submitting a version of your proposal to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) SBIR program. Yes, we realize that it is one of the smaller SBIR awarding agencies (both in terms of number and size of awards), but USDA offers you several advantages.

First, as a granting agency, USDA has very broad topics into which you should fit your project. This is in contrast to contracting agencies that have narrow topics with specific requirements as to what they want from you (and, in some cases, how they want you to do it). Therefore, USDA offers you considerable freedom in terms of what you propose to them.

Second, USDA has a unique feature in that their SBIR budget follows the interests of small businesses. If 70% of SBIR proposals are submitted on one of USDA’s broad topics, then 70% of the agency’s SBIR budget that funding cycle will be dedicated to that topic. This is in contrast to agencies that have a fixed budget per topic, which can reduce your chances of award if you are just one of many companies submitting proposals on a particular topic.

Third, USDA has interests that are probably broader than what you think they care about. For example, homeland security is one of their interests, as is rural economic development.

Fourth, we think USDA presents a good opportunity for innovations that might not fit any other agency’s SBIR or STTR program—if there is an important rural or small town America twist or application. USDA is interested in more than farming and ranching, and cares about the challenges unique to living in smaller communities or rural areas.

The downsides? We’ve already mentioned that USDA is a smaller agency, so fewer and smaller awards will be made. Your proposal must be submitted via the ungawdly grants.gov electronic submission system. And they don’t have an STTR program, so you will have to fit your project within the parameters of the SBIR program if you are going to submit to them.

So, again, we recommend you consider USDA as one of the agencies to which you will send your SBIR proposal. We emphasize “one of the agencies” to remind you that you can submit similar or related SBIR/STTR Phase 1 proposals to multiple agencies. So, if you find a perfect, narrow topic that fits your innovation at one of the contracting agencies, we encourage you to consider submitting a version of that proposal to USDA if it fits within one of Agriculture’s broad topics and is relevant to farming, ranching, forestry, or living in rural America. (You are cautioned, as always, to avoid accepting duplicate awards from multiple agencies).

Now for those 2 reminders:

Reminder #1: If you are submitting an SBIR or STTR Phase 1 proposal to the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) for its October 14, 2014 deadline, then remember that you MUST submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) by Sept 2nd. If you do not submit the LOI, you will not be allowed to submit your proposal. And DOE’s requirements for the LOI are not trivial—it is basically a miniature version of the proposal, and requires you to register on DOE’s PAM system to upload it.

Reminder #2: Dept. of Defense (DOD) released its latest Phase 1 SBIR and STTR solicitations on August 21st. You have only 30 days from that release date to find a topic of interest to you, and strike up a dialog with the topic author or technical point of contact (TPOC) to get answers to the questions that inevitably are not answered in the brief topic description. The only way to get your questions answered after that is to use the online SITIS system, which means your questions and DOD’s answers will be posted for the whole world (i.e., your competitors) to see.