# SBIR Proposal Writing Basics: Tips on Your Phase I Proposal to Dept. of Defense

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Your Phase I SBIR or STTR proposal is due soon at the Dept. of Defense, so thought we’d offer some tips based on mistakes we see frequently in DOD submissions.

1. Shoot for the revised deadline. Hopefully you know by now that the SBIR FY15.1 and STTR FY15.A deadlines have been pushed back to 6 am EST on February 25, 2015. This is one week later than the originally established deadline, because of a problem in the DOD system a few weeks ago. Remember, whatever you have in the DOD system at that time on that date will be uploaded as your proposal (there is no “submit” button or process).
2. Make sure to include the online Company Commercialization Report as Volume #4. The DOD proposal requires 4 “volumes.” One is the cover page, one is the technical proposal, one is the budget and the other is called the “Company Commercialization Report” (CCR). Don’t confuse the CCR with Section 6 of the Technical report, titled “Commercialization Strategy,” which is discussed below. To complete the CCR, you must go online to report the commercialization outcomes of all of your Phase II awards. It doesn’t matter if you have never submitted an SBIR/STTR proposal to DOD, or received an award—you must go online to fill out this report. It is a mandatory portion of the DOD proposal. Don’t worry—lack of prior SBIR/STTR experience does not count against you.
3. Orient the Commercialization Strategy section to the DOD requesting component. In addition to the aforementioned CCR, you also must include a Commercialization Strategy discussion as Section 6 of the technical volume #2 of your DOD proposal. The instructions say “approximately one page,” but we recommend that you shoot for 2 pages to help demonstrate how important commercialization is to your company. In this section, dedicate at least 75% of the text on the application of your innovation to whatever component (i.e., Navy, Army, DARPA, etc) is funding the topic to which you are responding. A common mistake is to make this Section 6 very brief, and/or talk about non-DOD commercialization (or talk about how you are going to give it to a DOD component other than the one that’s paying you).
4. Include the work plan outline required by USAF. The Air Force has a unique requirement in the Technical Proposal in Volume 2: at the start of Section 3 of the technical proposal, you are to include an outline of the work plan. That outline is to follow the specific format given on page 3 of the FY15.1 USAF SBIR solicitation.
5. Include the mandatory option. Most of the DOD components participating in the FY15.1 SBIR solicitation require that you include an option in your proposal. Don’t let the word “option” fool you—this is R-E-Q-U-I-R-E-D. The term “option” refers to the DOD’s ability to exercise it if they want. To lessen the funding gap between the Phase I “base” project and Phase II, the DOD may ask you to do the work you specified in the “option.” Note this also means that you MUST prove the feasibility of your solution to the DOD need in the initial “base” project, and not in the “option” effort.

Good luck as you put the finishing touches on your DOD Phase I proposals!