# SBIR Proposal Writing Basics: Late Submissions to NIH, Advice to Any User of grants.gov Electronic Submission Process

Gail & Jim Greenwood, Greenwood Consulting Group, Inc.

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With the recent closure of the NIH SBIR/STTR grant deadline, it is time to remind you of two important things.

First, if you were unsuccessful in uploading your proposal to NIH, you may be able to get your proposal accepted after the deadline. Most SBIR/STTR agencies will not consider a proposal after the submission deadline, but there are a few situations in which NIH will. The request must be made within 1 week of the submission deadline. Check out NIH Policy NOT-OD-11-035 for details. Reasons why late a submission “may” be accepted include death or illness of the PI or close family member, natural disasters, or conflicting service time of the PI on an NIH peer review group. There also is a paragraph, newly added to the bottom of the policy, which addresses problems with grants.gov. It suggests that late submission may be tolerated if you experienced “system issues” with grants.gov. What’s a “system issue?” The official NIH definition is “technical problems with federal systems used for electronic submission of grant applications (e.g.,…grants.gov, eRACommons, SAM) that keep an applicant from successfully submitting their grant application on time.” Failure to register at grants.gov or SAM or eRACommons on time is not an acceptable reason. If you were not successful uploading your NIH proposal, and you think it might be attributable to one of the acceptable reasons, then we encourage you to submit a request for late submission. But beware that NIH will decide on a case-by-case basis which situations they will accept and those that they will not.

Second, based on what we heard from a lot of companies submitting their NIH proposals this round, grants.gov and SAM continue to perform poorly. This means that you should begin your submission to NIH, USDA and/or DOE’s SBIR/STTR programs well in advance of their deadlines. The federal government has taken some of the rough edges off of grants.gov, but it continues to be a problem. Some day we might be lucky enough to see a decently-functioning grants.gov electronic proposal submission process, and compatibility between SAM and grants.gov (but don’t bet on it—we think the large research universities and experienced researchers appreciate that the complexity and idiosyncrasies favor themselves to the detriment of smaller institutions and new investigators), but for now anyone who submits an SBIR/STTR proposal to NIH, USDA or DOE must cope with the shortcomings. Our advice remains what it has been for years: start the process early. If you are thinking about submitting to USDA, NIH or DOE this summer/fall, then get registered on SAM, grants.gov, and SBIR.gov now. Just the registration process with grants.gov can take 8 weeks! If you already are registered on SAM, realize you must renew annually and it can take several days to update once you do renew. And start uploading your proposal at least 5 days before the deadline so you have time to recover from the inevitable problems, indiscernible error messages, and things you’ve forgotten to include and attach to your proposal.