

January 2009



eNewsletter

Welcome to the *Maryland Minority Research and Development Initiative (MMRDI) eNewsletter* sent to you courtesy of TEDCO and its partners in this Initiative. Each issue promises to bring timely and relevant resources to aid in your SBIR submission process. And now, you can review past issues by visiting our [publications archive](#).

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I. If at First You Don't Succeed...

Responding to Rejection: What to do when your SBIR/STTR proposal is rejected?

For those of you who have been working on your proposal submissions with us since the inception of MMRDI in 2007, you are likely to begin receiving the results of your first attempts. If you've won an award, Congratulations! Please let us know so that we can publish your accomplishments in our newsletter. If you didn't win, you shouldn't be

discouraged: only 1 in 9 applications win funding, and winning on the first try is very rare.

Rejection of your *proposal* doesn't have to mean "the end of the road". Your *technology* may actually be of value to the government. But, if you disqualified yourself by falling into one of the "traps" that are built into the application process, you would never know it. You must be knowledgeable of all the application details in order to keep your application out of the "reject" pile. Here are just four of the dozens of reasons that qualified applicants and technologies typically fail:

1. Applicants assume that last year's application procedures will apply to this year's proposal.

The federal agencies are constantly changing their application procedures. If you neither fostered a relationship with the federal SBIR program managers, nor attended our training workshops, nor made use of our SBIR-Toolkit™ software, you likely missed something. Using a winning application from a previous cycle as a template is not advised. A single formatting change between solicitation cycles could disqualify your otherwise perfect application on the grounds of non-compliance.

2. Candidates failed to differentiate or appreciate the real differences between SBIR Phases.

Each SBIR Phase has a particular objective. In Phase I you need to demonstrate the *feasibility* of an *innovative* concept that answers the federal agencies' solicitation requests. In Phase II you refine, evaluate, and test the concept. In Phase III, you commercialize the technology and generate sales. If you propose to build a prototype during Phase I, you have proposed a Phase II task for the feasibility and "proof of concept" stage. Unless the prototype is necessary for determining the feasibility of the technology, you have failed to demonstrate understanding of the objective of the initial Phase I award.

3. Applicants failed to bring reviewers to the needed level of confidence in their technology, or failed to differentiate their offerings from the competition.

Although entrepreneurs and researchers are reluctant to do this, you must write your proposal with sufficient detail such that a reviewer could practice your art and accomplish the research him or herself after reading your

application. There are intellectual property safeguards built into the application procedure. And, you can take simple steps to safeguard your work (such as marking the pages as confidential and proprietary) if you are concerned about sharing your trade secrets. Providing vague information will almost always get your application rejected.

4. Applicants develop their proposals as though they are *only* requesting research funding.

SBIR & STTR are set-asides of R&D funds for another purpose altogether: economic development. If you can not demonstrate your acumen as both a researcher and an entrepreneur, you are unlikely to win an award.

Once you receive a rejection letter, schedule a debriefing with the agency that reviewed your proposal. Most feedback takes place by correspondence, but if you are able to request an in-person meeting, you should take advantage of the opportunity. When you convene in person, **do not use the meeting to explain what the reviewers should have grasped from your application.** Rather, listen closely to learn how your ideas were received and ask for recommendations on how your proposal can be improved. Make it clear that you plan to apply again in the next cycle. With this information in mind, rewrite your proposal and resubmit it to the same agency, or another one that has a related need/solicitation. Remember: different agencies have different application formats, and each year's application process is different.

If you haven't done so already, make an appointment with MMRDI staff to go over your proposal in tandem with the SBIR Resource Center Toolkits. This is the fastest way for you to see if you conveyed the objective of your SBIR proposal throughout all of the sections of your application. The next SBIR toolkit orientation will be held on February 3, 2008 at the Prince Georges County Economic Development Corporation. Again, the objective of the MMRDI program is to improve your chances of winning above 1 in 9. Do yourself a favor, and give us a call.

II. Spotlight on Success – YOUR COMPANY HERE!

We have been spotlighting MMRDI client companies who have recently received either industry awards for their achievements, or won competitive SBIR or STTR grants. Keep forwarding us your successes so that we can honor your accomplishments and celebrate your good fortune with the rest of the MMRDI and economic development community.

III. SBIR Tip of the Month – Start by Building a Relationship

You would seldom win a government contract, if you never met with the particular agency's contracting personnel. So why expect the SBIR process to be any different? While SBIR grants are awarded through a well-documented and competitive process, there is great intrinsic value in speaking to the program and technical managers of the target agency prior to submitting your application. First, speaking to the personnel responsible for a specific solicitation provides an opportunity to learn in greater detail what the agency is really looking for and why the topic is relevant to the agency's current mission. It's not that the agency is trying to "hide" anything; rather there is only so much information that can be put into a written proposal request.

A second benefit to seeking an audience with the SBIR managers and technical personnel is that they can give you valuable feedback on the match (or lack thereof) between what you are proposing as a potential technological solution and their need as described in the solicitation. Likewise, the SBIR personnel can direct you to other SBIR solicitations relevant to your work that you may not have considered. SBIR funds represent only 2% of the Federal R&D budget. With the resources at their disposal, SBIR program managers can direct you to other funding programs within their agency that may offer comparable contract or grant awards for similar types of research.

IV. *Pass It On!* Upcoming MMRDI Related Events

- ***Alternative Funding Sources Portfolio Meeting***
Date: Wednesday, January 21, 2009
Time: 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Location: Sheraton Columbia Town Center Hotel; 10207 Wincopin Circle
Columbia, MD 21044
Contact: Robbie Melton
Phone: 410-715-4164
RSVP: rsvp@marylandtedco.org, by January 16th
Cost: By invitation only. Free for MMRDI and TEDCO portfolio companies

- ***Orientation to the SBIR Resource Center Tool KitsSM***
Date: February 3, 2009
Time: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Location: Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation
1100 Mercantile Lane, STE 115-A
Largo, MD 20774
Contact: Ajay Gupta
Phone: 240-731-0756
Email: agupta@gsecurity.com
Cost: Free

- ***Technology Based Business: Ideas to Products***
Date: Wednesdays, February 4-25th, 2009 (4 sessions)

Time: 6:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.
Location: Montgomery College, Rockville Campus
51 Mannakee Street; Rockville, MD 20850
Contact: Karen Ambrose
Phone: 240-567-2592
Email: karen.ambrose@montgomerycollege.edu
Registration: <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/wdce/bits/technology.html>
Cost: \$194 MD residents.

V. Open SBIR/STTR Solicitation

Department of Commerce – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Open: Now

Close: January 14, 2009

Department of Commerce – National Institute for Standards and Technology

Open: New

Close: January 22, 2009

Department of Defense

Open: Now

Close: January 14, 2009

Department of Education

Open: Now

Close: January 21, 2009

Department of Health and Human Services – PHS/NIH (contracts)

Open: January 24, 2009

Close: Multiple Closing Dates

National Science Foundation (STTR)

Open: Now

Close: February 25, 2009

The opening and closing dates are subject to change. Please contact Jacqueline Du Bois at 410-715-4176 or jdubois@marylandtedco.org for updated information.

NOTE: Should you choose to not receive this monthly *eNewsletter*, please send an email to cjohnson@marylandtedco.org.

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