SBIR/STTR Topic Searching

Once you determine that SBIR and STTR may be worth pursuing, your biggest challenge becomes identifying solicitations and topics that may fit your technology or core technical competencies. Each of the 12 SBIR agencies across 11 federal government departments publishes one or more solicitations per year identifying specific problems that they need solved or broader areas of research interest. However, in identifying topics that you think you may be able to successfully compete for, be forewarned. If it is not a good strategic fit, an SBIR award can actually slow your progress toward your business goals.

SBIR.gov is a 1-stop resource site for the SBIR and STTR programs where you can search for solicitations and topics. Typing the address in your web browser and clicking it will take you to the homepage of this site, which is sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA is the coordinating and policy agency for the programs. You will see a dialogue box in the center of the homepage where you can begin searching current open or soon to open opportunities. Type in terms that you, your colleagues and hopefully government researchers use to identify the area you are interested in.

When you click "Search," you will be taken to a page with a list of any topics that the search engine thinks may be a fit including their release date and proposal submission deadline. By clicking a topic title, you will be taken to a page where you can access a description of that topic and click a link to a page where you can download that agency's solicitation.

Two of the most visible ways in which agencies' SBIR programs are different are in their number and scheduling of solicitations over the course of the year. Consequently, at any given point in time like today, only a portion of the year's solicitations are open. If your don't find a fit, don't despair. In the column on the left side of the screen you will see the heading "Funding Topics." If you click the menu item "Closed," the search engine will convert your "Open" search to a search of closed solicitations, which will indicate whether one or more of the SBIR agencies have been interested in your topic in the past.

Past interest is often a predictor of future agency interest. If an agency has been interested in your topic in the recent past, they may be interested in it again in the near future. If you identify a closed topic the may have been a fit, you can estimate when that agency's next solicitation is likely to be released. You can make a note to come back to the site in that timeframe to look for a new solicitation from that agency under open solicitations and conduct a new search. Ignore "Future" topic searches, which at best will generate incomplete results.

You can access a list of current solicitations by running your cursor over the menu bar across the top of the SBIR.gov homepage. When you scroll over the "Funding" menu item, you will see a dropdown menu. The top heading is "Solicitation Listing" followed by 3 subheadings. If you click on the "Open" subheading, you will be taken to a list of open or soon to be open solicitations. By clicking on a solicitation, you will be taken to a page from which you can download it. Ignore the "Future" subheading, which is at best an incomplete list. The "Closed" solicitations subheading will allow you to access agencies' past closed solicitations and enable you to estimate when their next solicitations are likely to be released and accessible under the "Open" subheading.

The second heading under "Funding" is "Topics," which is a second starting point for conducting "Open," "Future," and "Closed" topic searches.

If you find an open topic that you think may be a fit, the next step, depending on the agency and the time left before the proposal submission deadline, may be to reach out to the designated topic contact. You want to try to determine the fit between the agency's interests and your project. You can schedule a conversation with NJSBDC's Technology Commercialization Consultant Randy Harmon by sending him an E-mail message at rgharmon@njsbdc.com, in order to discuss potential approaches for moving forward.