

Exploring SBIR Grants As An Inventor

By Shirley M. Nelson, MA, MPH

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant program is a viable source of funding for prototyping, and for the research and development of innovations that match with topics of interest to eleven federal agencies. These federal agencies periodically issue funding solicitations along with topics of interest for submitting grant proposals. The eleven federal agencies are listed below:

- 1) Department of Agriculture
- 2) Department of Commerce
- 3) Department of Defense
- 4) Department of Education
- 5) Department of Energy
- 6) Department of Health and Human Services
- 7) Department of Homeland Security
- 8) Department of Transportation
- 9) Environmental Protection Agency
- 10) National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- 11) National Science Foundation

Funding is awarded in a Phase I grant proposal for testing feasibility and proof of concept, which may include prototyping. Typically, the highest amount awarded for a SBIR Phase I grant proposal is \$150,000 for a funding period of no more than six months. If the Phase I project results show promise, the inventor is able to submit a Phase II grant proposal to research and develop the innovation in greater depth leading up to the point of commercialization. Typically, the highest amount awarded for a SBIR Phase II grant proposal is \$1,000,000 for a funding period of no more than two years.

The eleven federal agencies release their funding solicitations at different times and have different closing dates for the solicitations. Recently, the Small Business Administration, which coordinates the SBIR grant program, launched a new web site that lists the open solicitations (see link: <http://www.sbir.gov/solicitations>). For example, the Department of Health and Human Services has an open solicitation listed as “Omnibus Solicitation of the National Institutes of Health” with a close date of January 7, 2012. In clicking on this solicitation link, you will note that a list of 34 institutes and centers will be displayed. By clicking on the any of the 34 institutes/centers’ names, you will see their topics displayed. If a topic is of interest, you may click on the “+” sign next to it in order to explore it in detail. Many of the topics are very complex, but some are not as complex such as the topic to design/test a standing desk to prevent student obesity (e.g., click on link #25 “National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.”). Moreover, beyond traditional medicine, complementary and alternative medicine topics are also funded. Further, it is not necessary to be a M.D. or hold a Ph.D. to be awarded a SBIR grant.

When considering the SBIR grant program as a funding source, first think about the innovation you would like to commercialize and whether or not a federal agency may have an interest in it. Then, on a regular basis check the open solicitations page to see if that agency has opened a solicitation. If so, check the topics within the solicitation to see if there is a match with your innovation. In the event that you find a match, talk with the program officer for the topic to see if they may be interested in receiving a proposal from you. Lastly, seek a grant writer skilled in writing SBIR grant proposals to give you a competitive edge in winning a grant award.

About the Author: Shirley M. Nelson, MA, MPH, is the Managing Owner of Grant Strategies, LLC, based in Rochester, Minnesota www.grantstrategies.com. She works with clients nationwide in writing SBIR grants and other types of grants, as well.