

Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)

Informational Webinar June 17, 2020

Questions and Answers

Background:

EPA's SBIR Program supports small businesses to develop and commercialize innovative environmental technologies that support the Agency's mission of protecting human health and the environment. EPA is one of 11 Federal agencies that participates in this program. SBIR projects are funded in two phases, with Phase I being "proof of concept" and Phase II being "development and commercialization" of the technology. Commercialization of the technology is stressed in both phases.

EPA issues an annual solicitation for research proposals for specific topics. For Phase I, EPA awards firm-fixed-price contracts of up to \$100,000 for 6 months for "proof of concept" of the proposed technology. Companies who have received the Phase I can submit a proposal for a Phase II award of \$400,000 to further develop and commercialize the technology. Phase II contracts are limited to small businesses that have successfully completed their Phase I projects.

**Please note, that while this information is intended to be helpful in applying to the EPA SBIR program, the solicitation is the final word on all proposal submittal requirements.

General

Can we get a copy of today's presentation?

Yes. Today's presentation and questions & answers (Q&As) from the presentation will be posted on the EPA SBIR website at <https://www.epa.gov/sbir>.

Where can I get more information on EPA's SBIR Program?

Learn more about EPA's SBIR program through the SBIR website (<https://www.epa.gov/sbir>) and informational trifold (https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/sbir_trifold_updated_2020-508_v6_0.pdf).

What is the address to sign up for the EPA SBIR listserv?

Sign up for EPA's SBIR listserv at: <https://www.epa.gov/sbir/sbir-listserv> to get updates on the EPA SBIR solicitation, project highlights and other resources for small businesses.

Where can I get more information on the SBIR Program in general?

Learn more about the SBIR program at: www.sbir.gov.

Does the EPA also fund STTRs?

No, the EPA does not have a Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program. Only the 5 largest SBIR programs have STTRs.

(The STTR program is another program that requires the small business to formally collaborate with a research institution.)

Will there be another info webinar after the release?

No, there will not be another informational webinar once the solicitation is open. If you have further questions, please contact, April Richards, SBIR Program Manager, Richards.april@epa.gov

Eligibility

Who is eligible for the SBIR program?

For the purposes of SBIR, a small business must:

- Be for profit,
- Located in the U.S., and
- Have no more than 500 employees.

For more information on eligibility, please see: <https://www.sbir.gov/faqs/eligibility-requirements>.

Can nonprofits or academic institutions apply for SBIR?

Only small businesses are eligible for SBIR. Academic institutions and nonprofits could be a subcontractor to a small business on an SBIR award. Additionally, academic institutions could partner with a small business through the STTR Program (at one of the 5 agencies that have STTR).

When is eligibility determined?

Eligibility is determined at time of award, BUT to apply to EPA SBIR, a small business must have completed the 4 registrations listed below and described in the webinar slides.

- DUNS #
- SBA Company Registry
- SAM
- FedConnect

Topics

What are the solicitation topics for 2020-21?

The proposed topics for this year are listed below. The official solicitation will include more detailed topic descriptions. Given the EPA's modest budget, proposals should be responsive to this year's topics.

Clean and Safe Water

- Monitoring technologies for water reuse
- Treatment technologies for water reuse

Air Quality

- Air monitoring technology for ethylene oxide
- Air quality sensors for volatile organic compounds and odors
- Innovative technologies for radon mitigation in buildings

Land Revitalization

- Innovative technologies that destroy PFAS in soil, sediment, water and groundwater

Homeland Security

- Long-term disinfectant coatings

Sustainable Materials Management

- Preventing food waste

- Technologies that will improve the US recycling system
- New applications for industrial non-hazardous secondary materials and food processing byproducts
- Safe building deconstruction tools or safety equipment
- Building materials that improve energy efficiency and have reduced embodied impacts

Safer Chemicals

- New Approach Methodologies to reduce, refine or replace animal testing
- Cleaner manufacturing of coloration techniques

Will there be more information on the topics provided in the solicitation?

Yes, the solicitation will provide more detailed descriptions of the topics and typically a reference document to provide background on the topic.

In fitting the "specified topic areas", does that mean fitting the sub-topics listed in this presentation?

Yes. Proposals must fit the sub-topic, not the larger, broad topic areas.

Does EPA accept unsolicited proposals?

No, proposals should be responsive to the topics listed in the solicitation.

How much focus is put on any one topic? How many projects do you fund in each topic?

We plan to fund projects across all topic areas depending on how many (quality) proposals we receive in each topic area.

Do projects have to focus on U.S. Issues?

While only U.S. businesses are eligible for SBIR and work must be done in U.S., the application, impact, and market for the project can extend beyond the U.S.

Are there going to be individual Topic Area/Program Managers to contact to make sure our concept is on the right track?

The EPA SBIR Program has one Program Manager, April Richards. Please contact April if you have general questions regarding your concept (Richards.april@epa.gov).

Schedule

When will the solicitation open and close?

The solicitation is scheduled to open in late June and close 45 days later (but could be extended). Please check the solicitation for the official close date.

Do you anticipate opening another solicitation this year?

No, EPA only releases one solicitation per year. The next EPA SBIR Phase I solicitation will be released in 2021.

After we finished a Phase I, should we immediately apply for Phase II in the next window?

Yes. Phase I applicants must immediately apply for Phase II in the next window. We do not allow companies to re-submit to the next Phase II window and we do not do Direct-to-Phase II awards.

Funding Rates/Program History

What is the typical EPA funding rate for SBIR?

The Phase I funding rate has averaged approximately 25% over the last five years. For Phase II, the funding rate is approximately 40%.

How much are Phase I awards?

EPA provides up to \$100,000 for each Phase I award. This year, we intend to fund approximately 20 Phase I proposals.

Can you please provide a link to last year's funded proposals?

Yes, all previously funded projects are listed on our website at https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncer_abstracts/index.cfm/fuseaction/outlinks.sbir/.

Other Agencies/Opportunities

Could you please provide information on other SBIR Agencies that fund environmental technologies?

Information on all 11 SBIR agencies can be found at www.SBIR.gov.

Some other agencies that support environmental technologies include:

- National Science Foundation (NSF)
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS)
- Department of Energy (DOE)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Do the different agencies have different application processes?

Yes, each agency has their own application process. Please check the agency's solicitation for specifics on their application process.

Can you apply to more than one agency?

Yes, you can apply to more than one Agency. If you apply with the same project/technology, you can NOT get funded by more than one Agency for the same work. If you did apply to multiple agencies and were funded by one, you would withdraw your other proposals. You can also apply to different agencies with different projects and potentially be funded by both agencies.

Applying

Where can I find the actual solicitation?

Once released, the official solicitation will be posted on FedConnect. Instructions on how to locate the solicitation will be posted at www.epa.gov/sbir.

What is the link to register at FedConnect?

Register at FedConnect at: <https://www.fedconnect.net/FedConnect/Default.htm>.

Does EPA require a letter of intent or white paper?

No, letters of intent and white papers are not required for Phase I or Phase II.

What are the steps to apply?

Please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/sbir/how-apply-sbir-contract> to see all application and registration instructions.

Can a small business submit more than one application to this solicitation?

Yes, a small business can submit multiple applications.

Can a small business apply under two topics?

Yes, a small business can submit different proposals under different topic areas and potentially receive funding for multiple projects.

Can a small business apply and receive multiple SBIR's?

Yes, small businesses can apply and receive multiple SBIR awards from different agencies as long as the projects are not duplicative.

What if a project fits under two topic areas? How do we choose?

It is the company's responsibility to choose the topic that is the best match for their technology. Read the full topic descriptions in the solicitation.

Can a company apply directly to Phase II?

No, EPA does not allow direct applications to Phase II. Only Phase I recipients are eligible to apply for Phase II awards.

What is the expected TRL (Technology Readiness Levels) for Phase I fit? Given that there is no Direct-to-Phase II, is there something as too advanced for Phase I?

EPA SBIR does not use TRLs. We usually get a breadth of technology levels in Phase I submissions. Phase I projects are for proof of concept- so small businesses would need some data or some proof that the technology is going to work or has potential.

Does EPA keep our information confidential?

Yes, EPA will keep your proposal confidential through all phases of the review process. The proposal summary is intended for publication and should not contain any confidential information.

Contacts

How do we contact the program manager?

General questions can be addressed to the SBIR Program Manager, April Richards (richards.april@epa.gov).

Contractual questions should be addressed to the contracts specialist, Lisa Mitchell-Flinn (Mitchell-Flinn.Lisa@epa.gov). Please note, it is the responsibility of the small business to determine whether they think their technology is appropriate to a specific topic and whether they should submit a proposal or not.

Is there a way we can check if our solution fits the EPA SBIR's topics area with EPA staff in person?

Unfortunately, due to the current circumstances of COVID-19, EPA staff, including SBIR staff, are required to abide by the stay-at-home order. We are currently teleworking from our homes. If you have

any technical questions regarding your research please connect with April Richards directly through email at Richards.april@epa.gov.

Review Process

How are proposals reviewed at EPA?

Proposals will be reviewed by both internal and external experts on commercial and technical strength as well as responsiveness to the topics and EPA priorities. Additionally, the official solicitation will provide detailed guidance on EPA's evaluation process.

Will lack of commercialization experience count against a new company?

EPA makes funding decisions based on the evaluation criteria provided in the solicitation. If a company is a new business, then they need to demonstrate that they are capable of responding to the commercialization criteria as part of the review. That could mean adding commercialization expertise to their team. On the flip side, if the company is an experienced company, then they must demonstrate that they've been able to commercialize past technologies (within and outside of the SBIR program).

How do you ensure the confidentiality of proposals? Do peer reviewers sign a confidentiality agreement?

Yes, EPA will keep your proposal confidential through all phases of the review process. All reviewers are required to sign an agreement to protect the confidentiality of all proposal material and certify that no conflict of interest exists between them and the offeror.

If rejected from the program, do you provide reasoning why?

If a small business is rejected from the program, they can request a de-briefing which contains reviewer feedback.

Projects

Do you require preliminary data for Phase I?

Phase I of the SBIR Program is designed for "proof of concept" of the proposed technology. The technology should be beyond a literature search, should have some data to demonstrate its performance but should not be commercially viable yet. It could be for a new application for an existing technology, but not solely for effectiveness testing of an existing technology. For more general information on the SBIR program, see <https://www.sbir.gov/about/about-sbir#sbir-program>.

Do we need to have a prototype?

A prototype is not required but depending on the type of technology being developed may be an important step towards commercialization.

I know with the NSF SBIR program, there is a big push that the aims of the proposal must be true R&D, not just engineering, is there similar requirements for the EPA SBIR program?

EPA does have a strong emphasis on commercialization even in Phase I. Read the review criteria for EPA SBIR in the solicitation once it is released and be sure to address the criteria.

Is it required to collaborate with a university on research?

No. While SBIR-funded small businesses are welcome to collaborate with a university on research, it is not required.

Are co-PIs allowed?

Yes, co-PIs are allowed if a small business wants another PI to balance out the expertise or time.

Will it affect EPA SBIR award if we have SBIR awards from other agencies such as NSF?

Many companies have multiple SBIR awards from different agencies. Per the solicitation, we would like to see that the small business has been successfully commercialized with prior investments.

What are the limitations on use of subcontractors?

For Phase I, a small business must perform a minimum of 2/3 of the research and/or analytical effort. One third may be subcontracted to another firm or research organization. For more FAQs on SBIR, see: <https://www.sbir.gov/faqs/other>.

Is there a place learn about what the funding is used for- if you dedicate 100% of your time and you have no revenue yet? Is Salary allowed as part of the funding use?

This information is detailed in the solicitation language and will be available to view once the solicitation is released. Salary is allowed as part of funding use. Find helpful information on this topic from SBIR.gov here: <https://www.sbir.gov/tutorials/accounting-finance/tutorial-4>.

Does EPA provide commercialization assistance?

Yes, EPA has historically provided commercialization assistance to both Phase I and Phase II awardees. EPA is making plans to implement the new TABA guidance.