



## Do You Have a Vision for Your Project?

Over the next few months, many of our readers will be considering and/or busily preparing SBIR/STTR proposals for various agency solicitations that are or will be opening. In preparation for its upcoming SBIR solicitation, the USDA presented a webinar on program basics that included some good advice for those pursuing Phase I SBIR/STTR grants across all the participating agencies. We've embellished each point with some added thoughts and advice:

### **Sell the importance of your project**

- It all starts with the problem to be solved. The world's sexiest technology applied to a trivial problem is not the recipe for a competitive SBIR project.
- Besides you, who else thinks the problem is important? Support your argument with published studies, expert opinion, statistics, etc.
- The problem should also map to the target agency's mission and program priorities.

### **Provide a vision of where you want to be at the end of Phase II**

- All the agencies want to see a solution with IMPACT. New products/technologies often take time to diffuse into widespread use. Adjust the time horizon of your vision accordingly. Don't hesitate to look beyond the end of the Phase II project if necessary.
- Be realistic in describing what the agency's million dollars will buy. Depending on the problem and the technology a successful Phase I/Phase II might deliver a working prototype.

### **Focus the Phase I research on critical enabling factor(s)**

- A useful definition of feasibility can only be developed in the context of a technical solution to a specific problem.
- Feasibility usually is connected to what's most innovative about your proposed approach.
- Ask the question: What must I prove to convince a technically-knowledgeable skeptic that my proposed approach might work?
- Focus your Phase I activities on generating that proof.

### **Provide a detailed experimental plan**

- Reviewers want to understand not only what you plan to do and how, but also the basis on which you'll conclude that you've succeeded. This is where the convincing definition of feasibility comes in and why you must present Success Criteria that are as quantifiable as possible.
- Include detailed descriptions of your approach for those areas that highlight your strengths as a team and your technological innovation. If you have a novel approach that makes you stand out, include that information, but not details of routine experiments.

### **Provide insight into commercial potential**

- Billion dollars markets do not guarantee commercial potential. First, convince me that your product/service creates value for the individual grappling with the problem you're solving. Then you're halfway there.

### **Show connectivity with the communities you are intending to serve**

- Collaboration is also important in the commercialization phase. Do you have an effective working relationship with the individuals and organizations that understand the problem from the users' perspective?
- Make sure you articulate the business model your company will employ to bring the product to the marketplace, i.e., what will you do and what will you partner with others to do? Provide evidence that you have validated your approach with those potential partners.
- USDA, for one, encourages R&D collaborations...with universities and government labs...and with other companies.