

Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)

Informational Webinar June 10, 2021

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/informational-webinar-presentation-and-qa>.

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 program overview (<https://www.epa.gov/sbir/sbir-program-overview>).

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 Agencies 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

Is this solicitation different from the one released last year?

Yes, this is a new solicitation with different topics than the solicitation released last year.

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 2021-22?

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.

2021-2022 SBIR Topics

Clean and Safe Water

- Modular decentralized non-potable water reuse for urban applications
- Low-input decentralized non-potable water reuse for irrigation applications
- Detection of lead service lines
- Retrofit technologies to improve operation of stormwater management infrastructure
- Technologies to process environmental samples of microplastics
- Technologies to remove microplastics from wastewater or stormwater

Air Quality

- Air monitoring technology for air toxics
- Low-cost sensors for air toxics and odors
- Continuous emission monitoring system for metal HAPs
- Integrated sampling, continuous monitoring for metal HAP emissions
- Technologies to reduce exposure to radon in buildings

- Air monitoring technology for methane (CH₄) from oil and gas storage tanks

Homeland Security

- Air treatment methods to reduce the risks from transmission of viruses and bacteria in enclosed or semi-enclosed environments

Sustainable Materials Management

- Innovative technologies that help consumers prevent food waste in acquisition, preparation, and storage of food
- Innovative technologies that will improve the U.S. recycling system
- Low impact reusable and recyclable material alternatives to low value plastic items that escape management
- Low impact construction materials and technologies to reduce embodied carbon of buildings
- Low impact construction materials and technologies to increase resiliency to disasters and recovery of materials generated from these incidents

Safer Chemicals

- Microphysiological systems for predictive toxicology
- Post application pesticide drift predictor
- PCB-free color technologies

Risk Assessment

- Software tools and machine-learning applications for systematic review in science assessment

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 topics listed in this presentation?

Yes. Proposals must fit the specific topics, not just the larger, focus areas.

Does EPA accept unsolicited proposals? Can you submit a proposal for a topic other than what is listed in the solicitation?

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 June 16th 2021 and close approximately 45 days later. Please check the solicitation for the official close date and time.

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 2022.

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. Last year it was approximately 18%.

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, requirements, and forms?

Yes, each agency has their own application process, requirements, and forms. 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 <https://www.epa.gov/sbir/sbir-funding-opportunities>.

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 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.

Where can you find the specifics regarding the format and length of the proposal?

Specific instructions regarding proposal requirements will be included in the released solicitation.

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.

Are there any resources for disadvantaged businesses to assist in this process?

There are many resources for small businesses looking to apply for an SBIR award. Explore options for SBIR/STTR assistance here: <https://www.sbir.gov/local-assistance> or contact your Small Business Development Center: <https://americassbdc.org/find-your-sbdc/>.

Is there a Phase I/II Fast Track application available?

No, EPA SBIR does not do Phase I/II Fast Track.

Are recent startups encouraged to apply?

Yes, startups are encouraged to apply. Please make sure that you address all of the review criteria when submitting your proposal.

Registration Requirements

Does your small business have to be registered in SAM before you apply for SBIR or just by the time the award is granted?

Your small business must be registered in SAM prior to applying. Please complete SAM registration as soon as possible.

What else should small businesses know about SAM registrations?

1. Please jump on SAM.gov and register as soon as possible if you are thinking about submitting an EPA SBIR proposal. (Please note, SAM is a system outside of EPA. We only access it for information and have no control of the timeliness of their actions.)
2. Please ensure you complete your registration in its entirety
 - a. If you have follow-up items to complete even after you have all required information that SAM generates-you will not be fully active and awardable until those items are cleared in SAM
3. Please ensure you select “contracts” during your registration and not just “grants” as this award is a contract
4. Please ensure you keep your information accurate and up to date on the SAM website

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 officer, Matt Huber (Huber.Matthew@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.

Review Process

How are proposals reviewed at EPA?

Proposals will be reviewed by both internal and external experts on commercial, technical and relevancy criteria. 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). Please make sure to address all of the review criteria to the best of your ability to ensure the best review results.

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.

Do letters of support from industry and/or educational institutions make an application more attractive?

Letters of support can help bolster your responses to the review criteria especially for the commercialization evaluation. Companies should decide what information they want to include given the Phase I page limit.

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.

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 provides commercialization assistance (TABAs – technical and business assistance) to Phase I awardees (in addition to their award) and Phase II awardees can claim TABA expenses as part of their award.

Can the technology that is developed through SBIR be patented afterwards or is it not eligible?

Yes, the technology a small business develops with an EPA SBIR award can be patented.

Is EPA's SBIR program similar to an Airforce SBIR/STTR where you are developing technology the agency would buy as a customer?

Typically, EPA will not be the customer. Small businesses should determine the appropriate market for their technology.

Can a small business team or subcontract with a professor from an international university or foreign company?

Please see the SBA website for more information on program eligibility: <https://www.sbir.gov/faqs/eligibility-requirements>

Can your technology be a service instead of a product?

Any technology that is commercializable could be appropriate for SBIR.

Can I include field work in my Phase I budget?

If field work will advance your Phase I goals, then it can be included in your Phase I project.