Preparing a Phase I Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) or Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) proposal can be a formidable task, especially if this is your first attempt. There are many steps involved, as well as potential obstacles that require successful navigation. These include: starting the preparation process early enough; navigating the numerous registrations; developing a commercialization strategy; assembling a winning team with both technical and business expertise; understanding how to develop the required budget; and translating an innovative solution into a compelling work plan.

**PHASE 0 ASSISTANCE**

To overcome these obstacles, small businesses often need one or more forms of assistance to help prepare their first Phase I SBIR or STTR proposal. Assistance at this pre-proposal stage is most commonly referred to as Phase 0. Phase 0 assistance can take several forms and is offered by various organizations at the state level. Services vary widely from state to state but most commonly include: grant writing services; purchasing market research reports; assistance with identifying potential partners; and budget preparation and proposal review.

**FUNDING & SERVICE SUPPORT**

Some Phase 0 programs provide support in the form of pre-approved funds to reimburse expenses incurred by the small business in preparation of a federal Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal. Eligible expenses often include hiring grant writers, subject matter experts (SMEs), other consultants, or purchasing market research reports. You must apply for these funds before incurring the expenses. To find out more about these opportunities, contact the relevant organization directly to determine eligibility and the timeframe for the award.

State organizations also provide business services in addition to or instead of funds. These services may include personalized counseling, aid in identifying relevant federal granting agencies and topics, assistance with registration, review of the proposal,
technical review of the innovation, market intelligence, cost proposal and budget assistance, commercialization assistance, assistance with identifying strategic partners, and coaching on licensing and IP issues. The level and combination of services is varied depending on the organization.

ORGANIZATIONS OFFERING SBIR/STTR ASSISTANCE

At last count, 23 states had a formal Phase 0 program. A list of these organizations is included in the Links Tool section of this tutorial. In addition to Phase 0 assistance, most states offer other kinds of information and guidance regarding the SBIR and STTR programs. These organizations include Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), Departments of Economic Development, Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs), and universities. For universities, the relevant department can be the Technology Transfer Office, the Research and Economic Development Office, an incubator, or an innovation center. The purpose of this brief course is to introduce you to this network, so that you can determine how to find and leverage the services of a local organization in your area.

DETERMINING WHAT TYPE OF SERVICES ONE NEEDS

However, before deciding which organization to approach for assistance, it is important that you determine what kind of assistance you need. Are you looking for someone to review your business plan or SBIR proposal? Are you looking for a coach to guide you through the process of starting or growing a business? Do you need technical assistance from SMEs? Perhaps further training is required to improve your understanding of government accounting, federal contracts and procurement. You might be looking for a loan or line of credit to bridge a gap or hire an expert.

Once you’ve determined the types of services you need to start and grow your small business, look for a local organization that can provide the assistance needed. There are a number of URLs in the Links Tool section associated with this tutorial to get you started. We will start with a quick introduction to the network of SBDCs.

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) designates and supports a nationwide network of SBDCs and Small Business Technology Development Centers (SBTDCs). SBDCs are one of the nation’s largest small business assistance programs in the federal government. There are 63 lead SBDCs covering every state and region of the country. Some lead centers cover the entire state, while others are assigned to regions within a state. These lead centers take the responsibility of subcontracting with specific service providers to provide no-cost technical assistance and low-cost training to small businesses within their regions. Dozens of these host networks branch out to more than 900 service delivery points throughout the U.S. and its territories. SBDCs are typically located within universities, community colleges, or longstanding economic development agencies with experience in small business development services. You can easily find an SBDC office near you.

Advisors at the SBDCs and SBTDCs provide entrepreneurs and small business owners a variety of business and technology consulting, training services, and workshops including topics such as: business plan development; manufacturing assistance; financial packaging and lending assistance; pre-venture planning; and many others.

Anyone interested in starting a small business or improving or expanding its services, is eligible for assistance. The SBDCs make special efforts to reach minority members of socially and economically disadvantaged groups, as well as veterans, women, and the disabled. For more information on these efforts please consult SBA’s website directly.