SBIR·STTR
America's Seed Fund™
POWERED BY SBA

COURSE 6, TUTORIAL 3

BUILDING A WINNING TEAM

n Course 1 the qualifications for being the principal investigator were discussed and the employment requirements for SBIR and STTR were contrasted. Our intent is not to review those requirements in this tutorial as we assume that you reviewed them previously or will go back to Course 1 if there are still some points that are unclear. Instead the objective of this Tutorial is to help you evaluate and strengthen your team as part of the proposal preparation process. Ideally you would have had the opportunity to think about this before the solicitation of interest is released – but many times that is not possible.

This discussion is aimed at the first time applicant – which is a highly varied group. For sake of this discussion we assume that first time applicants will fall into one of three categories represented in the figure below.

START-UP

R&D FIRM

MANUFACTURING FIRM

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)

The objective of this tutorial is to provide you with ideas regarding how to build your team, starting with the Principal investigator or PI. Every agency is asked to evaluate the ability of the proposer to carry out the proposed project based on the qualifications of the Principal Investigator, other key staff, subcontractors and consultants. How can you determine if your team is compelling - if you have the qualifications that will convince the evaluators that you are capable of performing this project well?

Be sure to seek guidance on how to appropriately make contingent hires – a tentative commitment by both parties.

To answer this question it is important to keep in mind that these awards are made with taxpayer money. Therefore, the individuals charged with making award decisions want to make responsible, informed choices. To that end, they will examine the academic credentials and experience of the PI. Although this is understood, it is often difficult for a first time proposer to evaluate if their experience and credentials are compelling – as they don't know the competition or the evaluators.

To determine if an individual is a good candidate as a PI, a potential proposer may turn to local service providers or even to agency personnel for guidance. However, because of the variability in the criteria that are important to different agencies, you may find that they are reluctant to provide you with this advice. Instead, they are likely to turn this decision back to you – so again, how will you know if a potential PI will be reviewed positively?

EXAMINE NEW WINNER PROFILES

One of the best ways to gain a perspective on this question – is to look at the profile of those who are winning awards now. It's best to look for first time winners, as they will be the most comparable. How can you do this? Let's assume that you are interested in "augmented reality" and want to gain a perspective on the profile of those who are first time winners in this content area from an agency of potential interest. The accompanying video in this Tutorial shows a suggested approach that leverages information that you can find in sbir.gov and linkedIn.

> ### TOOLS YOU CAN USE
>
> **SBIR awards listing**
> https://www.sbir.gov/sbirsearch/award/all
>
> **Linkedin**
> https://www.linkedin.com/

With a start-up, often the founder and the PI are one and the same. If the PI has the experience and academic profile similar to those that are successful, first time winners, then you will have more confidence in your choice of a PI. But what do you do if the proposed PI's profile doesn't look compelling. This situation may arise if the founder has considerable practical experience, but may be weak with respect to academic credentials. If you identify this gap early, you will have time to look for others with complementary skills to add to your team. You can make a contingent hire – that is, make an arrangement with a good candidate that IF you win the award, THEN they will join your team – full time or part time depending on the requirement - at a negotiated rate. You will need to have this agreement in writing and be prepared to submit it with your application, if required.

FINDING GOOD CANDIDATES

But how do you find good candidates? If you are looking to grow your company, start locally as its important to have your team together while at the earliest stages of growth. Contact the Career Centers of universities within your area that have relevant graduate degree programs to see if they can provide potential candidates for you to interview. Also reach out to your personal network and ask for recommendations.

> ### DEPARTMENTS TO CONTACT AT LOCAL UNIVERSITIES
>
> **Office of Career Placement**
> [to find students]
>
> **Office of Sponsored Research Programs**
> [to find faculty]
>
> **Office of Technology Transfer**
> [to find IP and faculty]

The team that you select to work on a Phase I proposal doesn't have to be large, but does need to have the experience and qualifications that will make the agency feel confident in providing your firm with the award. The most important individual is the principal investigator so it is important to assure that this person is carefully selected. Keep in mind that you can complement the skills of your core team with consultants and subcontractors, using them to the extent that is allowed by the SBIR and/or STTR program. When involving others external to your company, issues related to intellectual property need to be considered. The use of consultants and subcontractors will be discussed in subsequent tutorials.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC
SBIR.GOV/TUTORIALS