



# **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

## **Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs Phase II**

**FUNDING YEAR:** Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 and FY 2025

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:** FY 2024 March 26, 2024  
FY 2025 March 25, 2025 (Anticipated)

**ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING:** FY 2024: \$19,500,000 for SBIR  
\$2,600,000 for STTR  
FY 2025: \$19,500,000 for SBIR  
\$3,250,000 for STTR

**AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL AWARD  
RANGE:** \$600,000 - \$650,000 (As applicable)

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:** USDA-NIFA-SBIR-010287

**ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:** 10.212

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture

**Assistance Listing Number:** The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Programs Phase II is listed in the Assistance Listings number 10.212.

**Key Information 1: Key Dates and Deadlines**

- a) **Application Deadline:** FY 2024: March 26, 2024, 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time  
FY 2025: March 25, 2025, 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time (Anticipated)
- b) **Letter of Intent:** Not Required
- c) **Applicants Comments:** Within six months from the issuance of this notice (NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)

**Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA).** The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when programs are grounded in DEIA. NIFA is committed to enhancing DEIA through its programs and encourages individuals, institutions, and organizations from underserved communities to apply to funding opportunities as lead, co-lead, or subaward recipient(s), and to engage as leaders in the peer panel review process to support the development of strong networks and collaborations. NIFA encourages applications that engage diverse communities and have broad impacts through research, education, extension, and integrated activities to address current and future challenges.

**Stakeholder Input.** NIFA seeks comments on all Request for Applications (RFA) in order to deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments to the extent possible when developing RFAs, and uses comments to help meet the requirements of [Section 103\(c\)\(2\) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 \(7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)\)](#). Applicants may submit written comments to [Policy@usda.gov](mailto:Policy@usda.gov) (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the SBIR/STTR Phase II RFA.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of appropriation acts for FY 2024 and FY 2025. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

This notice identifies the objectives for the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Phase II projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, application forms and associated instructions, and review requirements.

The USDA SBIR/STTR programs focus on transforming scientific discovery into products and services with commercial potential and/or societal benefit. Unlike fundamental research, the USDA SBIR/STTR programs support small businesses in the creation of innovative, and/or disruptive technologies and enable the application of research advancements from conception into the market. The STTR program aims to foster technology transfer through formal cooperative research and development (R&D) between small businesses and nonprofit research institutions.

Different from most other investors, the USDA SBIR/STTR programs fund early or "seed" stage research and development that has a commercial potential. The programs provide equity-free funding and entrepreneurial support at the earliest stages of company and technology development.

Key differences between USDA's SBIR and STTR programs include the percentage of research conducted by nonprofit research institutions (e.g., universities and Federal laboratories) and the primary employment of the project's project director/principal investigator (PD/PI). STTR applications require a formal cooperative agreement detailing the allocation of intellectual property rights to carry out follow-on research, development, or commercialization activities.

NIFA requests applications for the Phase II SBIR/STTR programs for fiscal year FY 2024 and FY 2025 from previous SBIR/STTR program Phase I awardees.

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## PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### A. Legislative Authority

The SBIR and STTR Extension Act of 2022, [Public Law No. 117–183](#), reauthorizes and modifies the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, the Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program, and related pilot programs through FY 2025.

**The act requires agencies with an SBIR or STTR program to assess the security risks presented by offerors with financial ties or obligations to certain foreign countries.** This will be implemented through a Due Diligence to Assess Security Risks Program. SBIR/STTR may not make awards to businesses with certain connections to foreign entities. To comply with this requirement, **the program will require all SBIR/STTR Phase II applicants to complete additional certifications disclosing ties to foreign countries** of concern at application and as needed during the life of the funding agreement. Any questions regarding the Disclosure of Foreign Affiliations or Relationships to Foreign Countries Form should be emailed to [sm.ddsbir@usda.gov](mailto:sm.ddsbir@usda.gov).

#### **These certifications will include:**

1. The identity of all owners and covered individuals of the small business concern (SBC) who are a party to any foreign talent recruitment program of any foreign country of concern;
2. The existence of any joint venture or subsidiary of the SBC that is based in, funded by, or has a foreign affiliation with any foreign country of concern;
3. Any current or pending contractual or financial obligation or other agreement specific to a business arrangement, or joint venture-like arrangement with an enterprise owned by a foreign state or any foreign entity;
4. Whether the SBC is wholly owned in a foreign country of concern;
5. The percentage, if any, of venture capital or institutional investment by an entity that has a general partner or individual holding a leadership role in such entity who has a foreign affiliation with any foreign country of concern;
6. Any technology licensing or intellectual property sales to a foreign country of concern, during the 5-year period preceding submission of the proposal; and
7. Any foreign business entity, offshore entity, or entity outside the United States related to the SBC.

The [SBIR and STTR Extension Act of 2022](#) defines the term “foreign country of concern” to include “the People’s Republic of China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, or any other country determined to be a country of concern by the Secretary of State.”

The term “foreign talent recruitment program” or “malign foreign talent recruitment program” is defined in section 10632 of the [CHIPS Act of 2022, 42 U.S.C.A. § 19237](#). Additional information may be found in the Guidance for Implementing National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 ([NSPM-33](#)) issued by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/010422-NSPM-33-Implementation-Guidance.pdf>.

NSPM-33 describes “Foreign government-sponsored talent recruitment program” as follows:

Effort organized, managed, or funded by a foreign government, or a foreign government instrumentality or entity, to recruit science and technology professionals or students (regardless of citizenship or national origin, or whether having a full-time or part-time position). Some foreign government-sponsored talent recruitment programs operate with the intent to import or otherwise acquire from abroad, sometimes through illicit means, proprietary technology or software, unpublished data and methods, and intellectual property to further the military modernization goals and/or economic goals of a foreign government. Many, but not all, programs aim to incentivize the targeted individual to relocate physically to the foreign state for the above purpose. Some programs allow for or encourage continued employment at United States research facilities or receipt of Federal research funds while concurrently working at and/or receiving compensation from a foreign institution, and some direct participants not to disclose their participation to United States entities. Compensation could take many forms including cash, research funding, complimentary foreign travel, honorific titles, career advancement opportunities, promised future compensation, or other types of remuneration or consideration, including in-kind compensation.

Further, the act instated increased performance standards for more experienced SBIR/STTR firms regarding transition from Phase I to Phase II as well as commercialization benchmarks for Phase II awardees.

Additional guidance and program policy is provided by the Small Business Administration (SBA) through the [SBIR/STTR Policy Directive](#).

## **B. Purpose and Priorities**

The SBIR and STTR Programs are administered by NIFA. The SBIR/STTR programs are Congressionally mandated and intended to support scientific excellence and technological innovation through the investment of Federal research funds to build a strong national economy by stimulating technological innovation in the private sector; strengthening the role of small business in meeting Federal research and development needs; increasing the commercial application of Federally supported research results; and fostering and encouraging participation by socially and economically disadvantaged and women-owned small businesses. Further, the objective of the STTR program is to stimulate formal cooperative partnerships of ideas and technologies between small businesses and nonprofit research institutions (e.g., Universities and Federal laboratories). The USDA SBIR/STTR programs Assistance Listing 10.212, are therefore in a unique position to meet both the goals of USDA and the purpose of the SBIR/STTR legislation by transforming scientific discovery and innovation with both social and economic benefit, and by emphasizing private sector commercialization.

These programs are subject to the provisions found at [7 CFR Part 3403](#). These provisions set forth procedures to be followed when submitting grant applications, rules governing the evaluation of applications and the awarding of grants, and regulations relating to the post-award administration of grant projects.



**The USDA SBIR/STTR programs are carried out in three separate phases.** This program solicitation is only for the preparation and submission of SBIR/STTR Phase II applications. **Only prior Phase I grant recipients are eligible to submit a Phase II application.** The aim of SBIR/STTR Phase II applications is to continue the R&D developed under Phase I with a goal to commercialize and bring the innovation to market as the Phase II project completes. Phase II will require a more comprehensive application, outlining the proposed effort in detail and the commercialization strategy for the effort. USDA-NIFA recognizes that Phase II awards may not be sufficient in either dollars or time for the firm to complete the total R/R&D and the commercialization activities required to bring the project results to a marketplace. Therefore, completion of the research under these circumstances may have to be carried into Phase III. Phase III refers to work that derives from, extends, or logically concludes effort(s) performed under prior SBIR/STTR funding, but is funded by sources other than the SBIR/STTR programs. Phase III work is typically oriented towards completing the commercialization of SBIR/STTR research or technology.

The USDA SBIR/STTR programs currently have no specific procurement focus, and consequently, USDA offers ten solicitation topic areas that are intended to permit a broad spectrum of eligible and innovative science- and technology-based small businesses to compete for funding. The topics are detailed within this solicitation. These ten solicitation topic areas provide an opportunity to pursue the following USDA priorities:

1. Addressing climate change via climate-smart agriculture and forestry
2. Advancing racial justice, equity, and opportunity
3. Creating more and better market opportunities
4. Tackling food and nutrition insecurity

**The SBIR/STTR Phase II programs are aligned with the following [USDA Strategic Goals FY 2022-2026](#):**

1. **Strategic Goal 1:** Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities and specifically addresses Objectives 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.
2. **Strategic Goal 2:** Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous and specifically addresses Objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.
3. **Strategic Goal 3:** Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers and specifically addresses Objectives 3.1 and 3.2.
4. **Strategic Goal 4:** Provide All Americans Safe, Nutritious Food and specifically addresses Objectives 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.
5. **Strategic Goal 5:** Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities and specifically addresses Objectives 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4.

**The SBIR/STTR Phase II programs are aligned with the following [USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023–2026](#) priorities:**

1. **Priority 1:** Accelerating Innovative Technologies & Practices
2. **Priority 2:** Driving Climate-Smart Solutions
3. **Priority 3:** Bolstering Nutrition Security & Health
4. **Priority 4:** Cultivating Resilient Ecosystems

***Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry.*** The USDA SBIR/STTR Programs administered by NIFA recognizes and is committed to supporting [USDA FY 2022-2026 Strategic Goals](#), which includes combating climate change in efforts to support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources, and Communities. NIFA encourages the use of Climate Science Technology when appropriate to enhance projects.

***Global Engagement.*** NIFA supports global engagement that advances U.S. agricultural goals. NIFA recognizes that collaboration with international partners may be necessary to attain the agency's goals for U.S. agriculture, promote global competence of our nation's future agricultural workforce, and promote safe and nutritious food security in a growing world. Therefore, although application to this RFA is limited to eligible U.S. institutions, applicants may collaborate with international partners, to include subcontracts to international partners or other institutions. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the United States.

For a program informational webinar please visit the [NIFA calendar](#) for dates, event registration, and link. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of the informational webinars listed, please contact the event host listed no later than 10 days prior to the event.

**Additional requirements on expected performance goals, indicators and targets may be required as a condition of award.**

### **C. Program Area Descriptions**

NIFA is soliciting applications under the following ten SBIR/STTR topics / program areas:

- 8.1 Forests and Related Resources
- 8.2 Plant Production and Protection (Biology)
- 8.3 Animal Production and Protection
- 8.4 Conservation of Natural Resources
- 8.5 Food Science and Nutrition
- 8.6 Rural and Community Development
- 8.7 Aquaculture
- 8.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products
- 8.12 Small and Mid-size Farms
- 8.13 Plant Production and Protection (Engineering)

#### **1. Forests and Related Resources – Topic Area 8.1**

Contact Dr. Diomides Zamora, NPL for SBIR/STTR Forests and Related Resources, at [Diomides.Zamora@usda.gov](mailto:Diomides.Zamora@usda.gov) or 202-590-6049.

The Forests and Related Resources topic area aims to address the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests to meet the needs of present and future generations through the development of environmentally sound approaches to increase productivity of forest lands, improve sustainability and develop value-added materials derived from forest resources.

**2. Plant Production and Protection – Biology – Topic Area 8.2**

Contact Dr. Christopher Philips, NPL for SBIR/STTR Plant Production and Protection (Biology), at [Christopher.Philips@usda.gov](mailto:Christopher.Philips@usda.gov) or 216-390-4211.

The objective of this topic area is to develop novel ways of enhancing crop production and protection against abiotic and/or biotic stresses through the use of novel diagnostic technologies, plant improvement approaches, and tools or management practices that ensure healthy pollinators.

**3. Animal Production and Protection– Topic Area 8.3**

Contact Dr. Robert M. Smith, NPL for SBIR/STTR Animal Production and Protection, at [Robert.M.Smith@usda.gov](mailto:Robert.M.Smith@usda.gov) or 202-445-3468 or Dr. Kathe Bjork, NPL for SBIR/STTR Animal Production and Protection, at [Kathe.E.Bjork@usda.gov](mailto:Kathe.E.Bjork@usda.gov) or 816-591-7415.

The Animal Production and Protection topic area aims to develop innovative, marketable technologies that will provide significant benefit to the production and protection of agricultural animals.

**4. Conservation of Natural Resources– Topic Area 8.4**

Contact Dr. Sandeep Kumar, NPL for SBIR/STTR Conservation of Natural Resources, at [Sandeep.Kumar@usda.gov](mailto:Sandeep.Kumar@usda.gov) or 816-832-7235.

The Conservation of Natural Resources topic area aims to develop innovative technologies that are developed with the purpose to conserve, monitor, improve and/or protect the quality and/or quantity of natural resources while sustaining optimal farm and forest productivity and profitability. We encourage new technologies and innovations that will help improve soil health, reduce soil erosion, improve water and air quality, improve nutrient management and conserve and use water more effectively.

**5. Food Science and Nutrition – Topic Area 8.5**

Contact Dr. Jodi Williams, NPL for SBIR/STTR Food Science and Nutrition, at [Jodi.Williams@usda.gov](mailto:Jodi.Williams@usda.gov) or 202-424-9722.

The Food Science and Nutrition topic area aims to fund projects that support research focusing on developing new and improved processes, technologies, or services that address emerging food safety, food processing, and nutrition issues.

**6. Rural and Community Development – Topic Area 8.6**

Contact Dr. Keith Harris, NPL for SBIR/STTR Rural and Community Development, at [Keith.Harris@usda.gov](mailto:Keith.Harris@usda.gov) or 816-589-6631.

The Rural and Community Development topic area aims to fund the development of new technologies, or for the utilization of existing technologies, that address important economic and social development issues or challenges in rural America. The applications need not be centered on agriculture but may be focused on any area that has the potential to provide significant benefit to rural Americans.

**7. Aquaculture – Topic Area 8.7**

Contact Dr. Timothy Sullivan, NPL for SBIR/STTR Aquaculture, at [Timothy.Sullivan@usda.gov](mailto:Timothy.Sullivan@usda.gov) or 816-527-5434.

The Aquaculture topic area aims to develop new technologies that will enhance the knowledge and technology base necessary for the expansion of the domestic aquaculture industry as a form of production agriculture.

**8. Biofuels and Biobased Products – Topic Area 8.8**

Contact Dr. David Songstad, NPL for SBIR/STTR Biofuels and Biobased Products, at [David.Songstad@usda.gov](mailto:David.Songstad@usda.gov) or 816-401-8904.

The objective of this topic area is to promote the use of biofuels and non-food biobased products by developing new or improved technologies that will lead to increased production of biofuels, industrial chemicals, and other value-added products from agricultural materials.

**9. Small and Mid-Size Farms – Topic Area 8.12**

Contact Dr. Denis Ebodaghe, NPL for SBIR/STTR Small and Mid-Size Farms, at [Denis.Ebodaghe@usda.gov](mailto:Denis.Ebodaghe@usda.gov) or 202-445-5460.

The Small and Mid-Size Farms topic area aims to promote and improve the sustainability and profitability of small and mid-size farms and ranches (where annual sales of agricultural products are less than \$350,000 for small farms and between \$350,000 and \$999,999 for mid-size farms – hereafter referred to as small farms).

**10. Plant Production and Protection – Engineering – Topic Area 8.13**

Contact Dr. Victoria Finkenstadt, NPL for SBIR/STTR Plant Production and Protection (Engineering), at [Victoria.Finkenstadt@usda.gov](mailto:Victoria.Finkenstadt@usda.gov) or 816-520-8456 or Dr. Steven Thomson, NPL for SBIR/STTR Plant Production and Protection (Engineering), at [Steven.J.Thomson@usda.gov](mailto:Steven.J.Thomson@usda.gov) or 202-603-1053.

The objective of this topic area is to enhance crop production by creating and commercializing engineering technologies that enhance system efficiency and profitability and protect crops from pests and pathogens in economically and environmentally sound ways.

In addition to the areas listed above, USDA NIFA recognizes Agricultural-related manufacturing technology and energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy as two crosscutting priorities with relevance to all areas listed in this program solicitation. USDA NIFA encourages applicants to address these priorities, as appropriate, within their applications. However, these are not meant to be standalone topic areas.

Agricultural-related Manufacturing Technology. On February 26, 2004, the President issued Executive Order 13329 ([69 FR 9181](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2004/03/02/69-fr-9181)) entitled “Encouraging Innovation in Manufacturing.” In response to this Executive Order, USDA NIFA encourages the submission of applications that

deal with some aspect of agricultural-related manufacturing technology. Since manufacturing affects all aspects of agriculture and rural development, applications dealing with manufacturing could be submitted to any of the topic areas.

Energy Efficiency and Alternative and Renewable Energy. In an effort to find alternatives to fossil fuels and to reduce overall energy usage, USDA established research on energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy as a high priority. Such research includes development of new energy crops, improved methods for producing biofuels, such as ethanol, butanol, and biodiesel, producing hydrogen and other fuel gases from agricultural waste, and more efficient use of energy in agricultural production and in rural communities. Energy issues affect all aspects of agriculture and rural development and thus applications dealing with energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy could be submitted to any of the topic areas.

#### **D. Potential Commercial Outcome**

In addition to supporting scientific R&D, another program goal is to provide incentives and opportunities for small business firms to convert USDA-NIFA sponsored research into technological innovations in the private sector.

Where Phase II applications are evaluated as having approximately equal technical merit, NIFA will consider optional letters of support or contingent commitment letters. In such instances, Phase II applicants with strong letters of support or contingent commitment letters for non-SBIR/STTR follow-on funding to pursue further development of the commercial potential during Phase III may receive special consideration as a point of merit in the review and evaluation process.

To receive the consideration described above, applicants must submit letters of support or contingent commitment letters between the small business firm and the entity as part of their Phase II application. The letters must be signed by both parties, set forth the specific amount of Phase III funds, and indicate the dates that such funds will be made available to the SBC. The terms cannot be contingent upon obtaining a patent due to the length of time this process requires. The greater value (in Phase II evaluation) will be given for a signed formal agreement with reasonable terms and funding equal to or in excess of the Federal investment requested in the Phase II application.

The commitment may be in the form of venture capital, a package including venture capital, contract research and development; a joint venture, a research and development limited partnership; or other agreement with a non-SBIR/STTR source of funding. No amortization, repayment, or repurchase of commitment funds may be included during the Phase II period of performance.

USDA understands that any such commitment will likely be contingent upon the Phase II awardee attaining technical objectives that are mutually agreed upon between the small business firm and the provider of the follow-on funding. These objectives should be closely related to those delineated in the Phase II research application. The technical objectives should be clearly defined and measurable and should be specified in the commitment agreement at the threshold level that would justify such an investment. The objectives do not have to be identical to those

stated in the Phase II application, but they must be able to be accomplished within the scope of the proposed SBIR/STTR-funded research. Any letters or other forms of tentative commitment for follow-on Phase III funding from sources other than Federal SBIR/STTR programs will be considered.

#### **E. Technical and Business Assistance**

The [John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019](#) permits SBIR/STTR Phase II awardees to enter into agreements with one or more vendors to provide Technical and Business Assistance (TABA). TABA allows an additional \$50,000 supplement to the award and is aimed at improving the commercialization success of SBIR/STTR awardees. USDA SBIR/STTR **does NOT** have a designated Phase II TABA Vendor. Awardees may obtain TABA from entities such as public or private organizations; including from an agency of or other entity established or funded by a State that facilitates or accelerates the commercialization of technologies or assists in the creation and growth of private enterprises that are commercializing technology. TABA may include access to a network of scientists and engineers engaged in a wide range of technologies or access to technical and business literature available through on-line databases. This also includes product sales, IP protections, market research, market validation, development of regulatory plans and manufacturing plans.

The goal of TABA is to assist SBIR/STTR awardees in:

1. Making better technical decisions on SBIR/STTR projects;
2. Solving technical problems that arise during SBIR/STTR projects;
3. Minimizing technical risks associated with SBIR/STTR projects; and
4. Commercializing the SBIR/STTR product or process.

An SBIR/STTR firm acquires TABA services described above on its own. Firms must request this authority from USDA and demonstrate in its SBIR/STTR Phase II proposal that the vendor(s) or entity(ies) selected can provide the specific TABA services needed. In addition, **costs must be included in the application**. The TABA vendors/provider(s) may not be the requesting firm, an affiliate of the requesting firm, an investor of the requesting firm, or a subcontractor or consultant of the requesting firm otherwise required as part of the paid portion of the research effort (*e.g.*, research partner or research institution). The applicant may use TABA funds for commercialization efforts that would require certification or registration of the innovation if the certification or registration process requires a research or analytical effort that is outside the scope of the SBIR/STTR project. However, the costs for certification and registrations that require research and analytical efforts may be counted towards the SBIR/STTR one-half (1/2) cap for subcontracts.

To request TABA services please see [Part IV, B](#) R&R Budget for further details and instructions to complete a TABA Plan.

## **PART II. AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2024 and FY 2025. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for these programs. USDA NIFA plans to fund approximately forty-five (45) percent of the Phase II applications within each of the ten (10) topic areas identified in this RFA. The anticipated amount available for SBIR in FY 2024 is approximately \$19,500,000 and approximately \$19,500,000 for FY 2025. The anticipated amount available for the STTR Program Phase II is approximately \$2,600,000 for FY 2024 and approximately \$3,250,000 for FY 2025. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

### **B. Application Restrictions**

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. Applications for FY 2024 and FY 2025 are limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the SBIR/STTR Phase II Programs. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of applications using evaluation criteria and selection process described in [Part V](#)- Application Review Requirements.

### **C. Project and Grant Types**

The following describes the types of *projects* or *grants* that are eligible for funding:

1. Project Types. Applicants must propose a Research project as described in Program Area Descriptions in [Part I, C](#) of this RFA. Only Research projects described in [Part I, C](#) of this RFA will be considered for review.
2. Grant Types. Applicants must select the Standard grant described in Program Area Descriptions in [Part I, C](#) of this RFA. Only Standard grants described in [Part I, C](#) of this RFA will be considered for review.

Phase II applications may not request more than \$600,000 (not including TABA), with the maximum award available \$650,000 (including TABA) for a period normally not to exceed 24 months. In special cases, NIFA can allow a period of performance up to 36 months, but applicants may not request more than \$600,000 (not including TABA) or \$650,000 (including TABA). The planned period of performance dates are listed below; however, these dates may change due to the enactment of continuing resolutions or an appropriations act.

FY 2024: Phase II: 9/1/2024 through 8/31/2026

FY 2025: Phase II: 9/1/2025 through 8/31/2027

#### **D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects**

In accordance with sections [2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422](#), institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award, that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) for further information.

Reporting Waste, Fraud and Abuse - In the event a company or individual suspects any waste, fraud and/or abuse, the company or individual can contact the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG)'s [hotline](#) or at 800-424-9121.



## **PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligibility Requirements**

SBIR/STTR Phase I awardees who have not previously applied for Phase II support are eligible to apply for Phase II support through the FY 2024 and FY 2025 RFAs. This includes those awardees identified via a “novated” or “successor-in-interest” revised funding agreement. A Phase I project may only apply for a Phase II award once. If a Phase I awardee was unsuccessful in receiving a Phase II award with a previous application, then the awardee is not eligible to resubmit the proposal under this or a future Phase II program solicitation.

Each applicant must qualify as a SBC through registration with the SBA for R/R&D purposes at the time of selection (see Definitions in [Appendix III](#) of this RFA). Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

SBIR/STTR program eligibility requirements are in place to ensure that the funds go only to small, independent U.S. businesses. The regulations include restrictions about (1) the type of firm, (2) its ownership structure, and (3) the firm’s size in terms of the number of employees.

#### **Type of Firm**

The purpose of the requirement regarding type of firm is to target the awards to firms with an economic interest in developing the idea or research into a commercial application.

1. An SBIR/STTR small business awardee must be a business concern – it must be organized as a for-profit concern and meet all of the other requirements for a “business concern” in [13 CFR § 121.105](#). Non-profit entities are not eligible (except as the non-profit research institution collaborator under the STTR Program).
2. If an awardee is a joint venture, limited partnership or venture capital, each party to the joint venture must be a concern that satisfies all program eligibility requirements.

#### **Ownership & Control**

The purpose of the ownership requirement is to limit the program to independent firms controlled by US citizens or permanent resident aliens as a way of maximizing the likelihood that the funding will stimulate innovative activity within the US economy.

A majority (more than 50%) of your firms’ equity (e.g., stock) must be directly owned and controlled by one of the following:

1. One or more individuals who are citizens or permanent resident aliens of the United States,
2. Other for-profit SBC (each of which is directly owned and controlled by individuals who are citizens or permanent resident aliens of the United States).
3. A combination of (1) and (2) above.
4. Multiple venture capital operating companies, hedge funds, private equity firms, or any combination of these, so long as no one such firm owns or controls more than 50% of the equity. This option is allowed only for SBIR/STTR awards from agencies that are using the authority provided in § 5107 of the SBIR/STTR Reauthorization Act (majority-VC- owned authority), [15 U.S.C. § 638\(dd\)\(1\)](#).

- Notes: 1) If an Employee Stock Ownership Plan owns all or part of the SBC, each stock trustee and plan member is considered an owner. If a trust owns all or part of the SBC, each trustee and trust beneficiary is considered an owner.
- 2) A potential grantee that is a subsidiary must show that the parent company or parent companies are also a small business entity, and the parent company or parent companies must provide documentation supporting their small business status (the documentation should be included in the Research and Related (R&R) Other Project Information form under Other Attachments, as directed by [Part IV](#) of this RFA). If the parent company or one of the parent companies is a nonprofit organization, then the subsidiary is not eligible to submit an SBIR/STTR application.

### **Size**

The purpose of the size restriction (number of employees of the firm and its affiliates) is to limit program funding to SBC that have a unique capacity for innovation and are more likely to be constrained by lack of access to such funding. An SBIR/STTR awardee, combined with its affiliates, must not have more than 500 employees.

For more information on SBIR/STTR eligibility go to [https://www.sbir.gov/sites/default/files/elig\\_size\\_compliance\\_guide.pdf](https://www.sbir.gov/sites/default/files/elig_size_compliance_guide.pdf)

### **SBIR/STTR Program Eligibilities**

Applicants can choose from SBIR only, STTR only, or Both (SBIR/STTR in a single submission). The following SBIR and STTR program eligibility distinctions are summarized in the table below.

To apply for *SBIR only*, the primary employment of the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) must be with the SBC at the time of award and during the conduct of the proposed project. Eligible primary employment means that more than one-half (51%) of the PD's/PI's time is spent in the employ of the SBC during the award period of performance. Primary employment with the SBC precludes the applicant as a full-time employee with another organization or academic institution. While the PD/PI must work more than one-half (51%) of his/her time for the SBC during the entire grant period, there is no time requirement for the PD's/PI's work on the proposed research. Prior Federal Employees must provide documentation that post termination requirements from Federal Service has been completed at time of submission. For SBIR Phase II, as determined by budget expenditures, a *minimum of one-half* (50%) of the research or analytical work must be performed by the proposing SBC.

To apply for *STTR only*, the PD/PI for the proposed project (or, if multiple PD/PIs, at least one PD/PI) must be employed by and perform more than one half (51%) of the PD's/PI's time in the employ of either the SBC or the partnering nonprofit Research Institution. For projects with multiple PD/PIs, at least one PD/PI must meet the primary employment requirement. That PD/PI will serve as the contact PD/PI for the Project Team. For STTR Phase II, as determined by budget expenditures, a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 60% of the research or analytical work must be performed by a single nonprofit research institution (e.g., University, Federal Laboratory, etc.), and the SBC must conduct a *minimum* of 40% of the proposed research or analytical work.

To apply to *Both (SBIR and STTR)*, the PD/PI must be employed more than one-half (51%) by the SBC. For Phase II, as determined by budget expenditures, a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 50% of the research and analytical work must be conducted by a single non-profit research institution (e.g., University, Federal Laboratory, etc.).

**Key Information 2: Comparison of Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Programs for Phase II**

Elements	SBIR	STTR	Both
Applicant	Small Business	Small Business	Small Business
Award Size, without TABA	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000
Duration	24 months	24 months	24 months
% of Agency's Extramural R&D Budget	3.20%	0.45%	N/A
Formal Cooperative Agreement Required Outlining Intellectual Property Rights	No	Yes	Yes
Nonprofit Research Institution or Federally Funded Research and Development Center Participation Required	No	Yes	Yes
% Participation of Nonprofit Research Institution or Federally Funded Research and Development Center	Less than 50%	30 to 60%	30 to 50%
PI/PD Employment	Small Business	Small Business or Research Institution	Small Business

**Work in the United States**

For Phase II, the R/R&D work must be performed in the United States. On rare and unique circumstances, for example, a supply, material, or project requirement may not be available in the United States, and agencies may allow that particular portion of the R/R&D work to be performed or obtained outside of the United States. Upon award, the Phase II awardee may request an exception as described in the Award [Terms and Conditions](#) and submit to USDA-NIFA for approval.

**Benchmark**

The Phase I to Phase II Transition Rate Benchmark was published at [78 FR 30951](#) in May 2013, and the Commercialization Rate Benchmark was published at [78 FR 59410](#) in September 2013. The [SBIR and STTR Extension Act of 2022](#) amended the application of these benchmarks for more experienced firms. A summary of the benchmarks is located at <https://www.sbir.gov/performance-benchmarks>.

**Phase I to Phase II Transition Rate Benchmark**

Any SBC that has received at least 20 Phase I awards, regardless of the awarding agency, during the five-year period (Fiscal Year 2018 through 2022) must have received a minimum of five Phase II awards (25% conversion rate), regardless of the awarding agency, over the same five-year period to be eligible to submit a Phase I application. If a company has not received an SBIR/STTR award or has received less than 20 SBIR/STTR awards, this benchmark requirement does not apply.

Any SBC that has received more than 50 Phase I awards during the five-year period (Fiscal Year 2018 through 2022) must average one Phase II for every Phase I award received (50% conversion rate). If a company has received less than 50 SBIR/STTR Phase I awards, this benchmark requirement does not apply.

### **Commercialization Rate Benchmark**

Any SBC that has received 16 or more Phase II awards during the consecutive period of 10 fiscal years preceding the more recent two fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021) must average at least \$100,000 of sales and/or investments per Phase II award received during the period; or have received a number of patents equal to or greater than 15% of the number of Phase II awards during the period. If a company has not received an SBIR/STTR award or has received less than 16 SBIR/STTR awards, this benchmark requirement does not apply.

Any SBC that has received more than 50 Phase II awards during the consecutive period of 10 fiscal years preceding the most recent 2 fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021), must have an average of \$250,000 of aggregate sales and investments per Phase II award received during such covered period. Any SBC that has received more than 100 Phase II awards during the consecutive period of 10 fiscal years preceding the most recent 2 fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021) must have an average of \$450,000 of aggregate sales and investments per Phase II award received during such covered period.

Each SBC that is subject to an increased performance standard for the Commercialization Rate Benchmark must submit to the SBA supporting documentation evidencing that all covered sales of the SBC were properly used to meet the increased minimum performance standard. Covered sales are defined at [15 U.S.C. § 638\(qq\)\(3\)\(B\)\(iii\)\(II\)](#).

There are consequences of failure to meet the Phase I to Phase II Transition or the Commercialization Benchmarks, including ineligibility to submit a proposal for a Phase I for a period of one year beginning on June 1, and if the increased performance standards for more experienced firms are not met, then companies may not receive more than 20 total Phase I awards from each agency during the 1-year period beginning on June 1.

**Duplicate or Multiple Submissions** – Duplicate submissions of the same application to more than one topic area are not allowed. Multiple, distinctively different proposals may be submitted in the same grant year. For those new to Federal financial assistance, [NIFA's Grants Overview](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

### **B. STTR Partnering Nonprofit Research Institution Eligibility Criteria**

Must be located in the United States and meet one of three definitions 1) Nonprofit college or university, 2) Domestic nonprofit research organization, or 3) Federally funded R&D center (FFRDC).

### **C. Cost Sharing or Matching**

**No Match Required** - The SBIR/STTR programs have **NO** matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

## PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

### A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [Grants 101](#). See [Steps to Obtain Application Materials](#) below for instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) registration process. The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is contained in the specific funding opportunity package or a sample of the guide can be found [here](#). When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system.

#### Key Information 1: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

- Step One:** Register or renew entity (annually) at [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) to obtain Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), a 12-digit alphanumeric identifier required to conduct business with the Federal government. Registration can take 4-6 weeks to complete.
- Step Two:** Register: New Users to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) must register early with [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) prior to submitting an application ([Register Here](#)).
- Step Three:** Download Adobe: Download and Install [Adobe Reader](#) (see [Adobe Software Compatibility](#) for basic system requirements)
- Step Four:** Find Request for Application (RFA). Using this funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-SBIR-010287**, search for RFA here: [Opportunity Package](#).
- Step Five:** Assess Readiness: Contact an Authorized Organizational Representative (AR) prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

#### Key Information 2: Help and Resources

##### Grants.gov Support

[Grants.gov Online Support](#)

**Telephone support:** 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035

**Email support:** [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov)

**Self-service customer-based support:** [Grants.gov iPortal](#)

**Key Information:** Customer service business Hours 24/7, except [Federal holidays](#).

##### NIFA Support

**Email:** [grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov](mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov)

**Key Information:** Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m.-5p.m. ET, except [Federal holidays](#).

### B. Content and Form of the Application

The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. NIFA will accept subsequent submissions to an application until the application deadline. However, applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA's review. NIFA will assign a

proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. [Key Application Instructions](#) below outlines other key instructions for applicants.

### **Key Information 3: Key Application Instructions**

**All references are to the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#)**

- a) Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format. **(Part IV.200)**
- b) Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format. **(Part VI.100 Option 2)**
- c) Follow the submission instructions. **(Part IV.300)**
- d) Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R. **(Part V.100 Field 5)**
- e) Contact the [Grants.gov](#) helpdesk for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.
- f) Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 30 days of the application deadline.

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in **Part IV.200** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). *Any proposals that are non-compliant with the requirements (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protect files) will be at risk of being excluded from NIFA review.* Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or whether attachments are in PDF format; see **Part VI.100 Option 2** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review.

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) and the RFA. Further questions regarding application preparation or content of forms can be addressed to the SBIR/STTR Office:

1. Email: [sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov)
2. Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.-5 p.m. CST, excluding [federal holidays](#).

For Phase II applications, an SBC must not propose large scale demonstration projects, or classified research. Many of the research projects supported by the SBIR/STTR programs lead to the development of new products based upon the research results obtained during the project. However, projects that seek funding solely for product development where no research is involved (i.e., the funds are needed to permit the development of a product based on previously completed research) will not be accepted. Research may be carried out through the construction and evaluation of a laboratory prototype, where necessary, however the prototype will have to comply with Federal Regulations ([7 CFR 3403](#)) for disposition at the end of the grant and cannot be used for Phase III activities. The prototype should be used as a model to manufacture new versions of the innovation for sale to a commercial market.

Literature surveys should be completed prior to the Phase II application and cannot be proposed as part of the R&D effort. Phase II Applicants must respond to a topic area listed (see [Part I, C](#) of this RFA) that corresponds to the Phase I work that was previously funded.



The purpose of a research application is to provide a written statement that contains sufficient information to persuade members of the research community who review the application and then advise the USDA SBIR/STTR professional staff that the proposed research is a sound approach to an important scientific question and is worthy of support under the stated USDA NIFA evaluation criteria (RFA [Part V, B](#)). The application is to be self-contained and written with the care and thoroughness accorded papers for publication. Each application should be reviewed carefully by the applicant prior to submission and by others knowledgeable on the subject to ensure inclusion of data essential for comprehensive evaluation.

Modifications to the application will not be accepted after the closing date of this program solicitation. Under some circumstances, changes, additions, or corrections may be necessary to an application submitted to the USDA NIFA SBIR/STTR program via Grants.gov before the specified program solicitation closing date. Modifications to applications will require a resubmission of the entire application package, and the applicant must notify the program at [sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov). Submitting changes to Grants.gov without contacting the program contact could significantly delay your application submission and may result in the application not being reviewed.

***SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet.*** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for the required certifications and assurances.

***SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s).*** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

***R&R Other Project Information Form.*** See **Part V.120** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Field 7.** Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of SBIR/STTR Phase II Program. See **Part V.120 Field 7** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates. The PS is limited to 250 words with a font size no smaller than 12-point Times New Roman and should [NIFA's Project Summary Application Template](#). The PS should be attached as a PDF.

The PS must include a description of the problem or opportunity, project objectives, and a description of the effort. The PS must also discuss the anticipated results and potential commercial applications of the proposed research. NIFA may publish the PS of successful applications; therefore, the PS should not contain proprietary information.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to review the attachment for the 250-word limit and PDF compliance before submission. NIFA will not review applications that exceed the required 250-word limit.

2. **Field 8.** Project Narrative (PN). The PN must not exceed a total of 20 pages of written text including all figures and tables with line spacing set at 1.5 and at least 1-inch margins with font size no smaller than 12-point Times New Roman (the font size for tables and figures should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are

allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. Applicants **must not** include additional information such as cover sheets, table of contents, reference listings, budgets, and appendices unless the applicant intends for NIFA to consider them in the page limit.

The PN must include all the following:

- a. **Responsiveness to USDA NIFA SBIR/STTR Program Priorities:** Indicate if the application has a connection to agricultural–related manufacturing technology, energy efficiency and alternative and renewable energy. Provide a brief explanation of how the application is related to the area indicated.
- b. **Prior USDA Support:** USDA-NIFA is interested in documenting examples of SBIR/STTR projects that are developing new technologies based on earlier USDA-supported research and development projects awarded to the proposing small business, university, or government scientist collaborators by other USDA research and development programs, such as the Agricultural Food and Research Initiative (AFRI). If any such support exists, it should be documented in this section by listing the PD, application title, organization that received the award, and the USDA program that awarded the project.
- c. **Identification and Significance of the Problem or Opportunity:** Clearly state the specific technical problem or opportunity addressed and its importance.
- d. **Background and Rationale:** Indicate the overall background and technical approach to the problem or opportunity as identified in the Phase I project. Describe the part that the proposed Phase II research plays in providing needed results to scale up the research and development and commercialization. As a part of this section, it is critical that applications adequately cite relevant scientific literature to demonstrate support for your proposed research. Moreover, all citations provided must be properly referenced in the Bibliography & References Cited as a separate attachment (see [Field 9](#), below). USDA NIFA has the right to decline any application where there is evidence of plagiarism.
- e. **Relationship with Research or Research and Development:** Discuss the results of the Phase I project. Include a discussion of the overall background of the Phase I project, a list of the Phase I technical objectives, a presentation of a detailed description of the Phase I results, a clear interpretation of the results, and conclusions as to the feasibility of the project. This section is where the Phase II applicant establishes technical feasibility by presenting results from Phase I. Therefore, this section should provide an adequate discussion of Phase I results. The applicant should also state the anticipated results of the proposed approach if the project is successful.
- f. **Technical Objectives:** State the specific objectives of the research or research and development effort. Include the technical questions needed to establish the feasibility of the proposed approach.
- g. **Work Plan:** The work plan must provide an explicit, detailed description of the research or research and development approach. The plan should list the tasks to be performed, provide details of the methodology that would be used to research each task, including statistical analysis, if applicable, and indicate how and where the work will be carried out. The effort should attempt to determine the technical



h. **Related Research or Research and Development:** Describe significant research or Research and Development (R&D) activities that are directly related to the proposed effort, including any conducted by the Project Director or by the proposing SBC, how the proposed effort expands on the related work, and any planned coordination with outside sources. Describe any commercial products, services, or innovations that are already in the market and if the project relates back to that R&D. Discussion of existing innovations in the application should convince reviewers that the applicant is aware of related research and commercial innovations in the selected subject. It is critical that the applicant make a convincing case that the proposed research builds upon previous research and, if successful, will lead to the development of new innovations or to substantial improvement of an existing product, process, service, or technology.

i. **Potential Post Application:** For this section, briefly describe the market potential for the innovation. In Phase II, demonstration of commercialization potential requires a more extensive commercialization plan that must be presented as directed later in this RFA (see the [SBIR/STTR Information Form, Question 8.](#))

- a. DISCLOSURE OF FOREIGN RELATIONSHIPS (REQUIRED)**

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without review at USDA-NIFA's discretion. Any questions regarding the Disclosure of Foreign Affiliations or Relationships to Foreign Countries Form should be emailed to [sm.ddsbir@usda.gov](mailto:sm.ddsbir@usda.gov).

- b. **Company Commercialization Report** must be downloaded from [sbir.gov](http://sbir.gov) and included in a company's application as a portable document format (PDF). All companies are required to update their commercialization status through the SBIR/STTR Company Dashboard once logged into [sbir.gov](http://sbir.gov).
- c. **Use of Facilities or Equipment.** If university facilities, private facilities, or government laboratories are being used, there must be a letter in the application from the authorized organizational representative of the university, private facility, or government laboratory describing the arrangement and testifying that the facilities will be subject to the exclusive use and control of the applicant.
- d. **Outside Services.** Involvement of university, government, or other outside personnel in the planning and research stages of the project as consultants or through subcontracting arrangements is permitted and may be particularly helpful to small businesses that have not previously received Federal research awards.
  - i. For STTR, involvement with a nonprofit research institution (e.g., Universities, Federal Laboratories) *is required*. A single nonprofit research institution must perform a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 60% of the work. For STTR, the small business and the nonprofit research institution are *required* to include a formal cooperative agreement detailing the allocation of intellectual property rights and rights to carry out follow-on research, development, or commercialization activities.
  - ii. Establishment of a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) with a USDA laboratory or other Federal laboratory may also be beneficial to proposing firms. If the application involves outside consultants, subcontracts, or involvement with a CRADA partner, these arrangements must be described in detail. Applications must include letters from proposed consultants, subcontractors, or CRADA cooperators indicating their willingness to serve in order for such participation to be considered during the application review and evaluation process.
- e. **Letters of Support.** Letters of Support should be included. Letters of support act as an indication of market validation and technical support for the proposed innovation and add significant credibility to the proposed effort. Letters of support demonstrate that the company has initiated dialogue with relevant stakeholders (potential customers or end users, strategic partners, or investors) for the proposed innovation and that a legitimate business opportunity may exist should the technology prove feasible. The letter(s) must contain affiliation and contact information for the signatory stakeholder and should be addressed to the applicant. Letters of support from consultants or subcontractors may be provided if they are providing a critical role in the project, such as access to facilities, equipment, or expertise. The recommended page limit for each individual letter is two pages. Letters and supporting documents from State, Local and Congressional representatives are NOT considered letters of support and should not be submitted as part of the application. Applicants must include letters in a PDF format and

upload to Field 12 of the R&R Other Project Information form (Add Other Attachments).

If letters of support are not appropriate for this stage of an innovation, due to business considerations, then the applicant must clearly justify why letters of support are not being included in a PDF format and uploaded to Field 12 of the R&R Other Project Information form (Add Other Attachments). The justification should relate to the technical and commercial considerations of the innovation proposed in the application.

- f. **Duration Exceeds Normal Project Period.** The proposed duration of Phase II projects will not normally exceed twenty-four (24) months, except in special, justified circumstances. Where a proposed research project requires more than twenty-four months to complete Phase II, a longer project period, not to exceed thirty-six (36) months, may be requested. An applicant of a Phase II project with an anticipated duration beyond twenty-four months should specify and justify the length of duration in the application at the time of its submission to USDA NIFA.
- g. **Applicant is a Subsidiary.** A potential grantee that is a subsidiary must show that the parent company or parent companies are also a small business entity, and the parent company or parent companies must provide documentation supporting their small business status. The parent company or companies must reside in the U.S. and cannot be a nonprofit. The subsidiary must provide documentation to support its independent viable financial status.
- h. **Statement of Delinquency on Federal Debts by Applicants for Federal Assistance.** An applicant that is delinquent on Federal debts must attach, in PDF format, explanatory information detailing all relevant particulars concerning the Federal debt.
- i. **Non-Domestic Performance Explanation.** In the budget justification, provide the purpose, the destination, method of travel, number of persons traveling, number of days, and estimated cost for each trip. If details of each trip are not known at the time of application submission, provide the basis for determining the amount requested. All Applicants **MUST** note that per the Terms and Conditions of the award, “All foreign travel performed under this project must be approved in writing by USDA NIFA prior to departure. If foreign travel is authorized under this project, the approved budget will identify funds for this purpose. Where foreign travel is contemplated, subsequent to the effective date of the project, a written request must be submitted to the USDA NIFA outlining the purpose of the proposed trip, the inclusive dates of travel, the destination, and estimated costs involved.”

***R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded).*** See **Part V.130** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for profile requirements, details about the biographical sketch, and suggested support templates. Applicants must fill out a profile for the PD and anyone who the budget will support. All biographical sketches must indicate the employment history of each PD and Co-PD for the last 10 years. The PD and Co-PDs must include the current and pending support form as an attachment in the application. For the current and pending form, if no other funding is “Active,” then this application is to be identified as “Pending” in the information

submitted. Templates for both, current and pending and conflict-of-interest, can be found at [NIFA's Application Support Templates](#).

**R&R Personal Data.** This information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award (see Part V.140 of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#)).

**R&R Budget.** See Part V.150 of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). A R&R Budget form must be completed for each year (or partial year) for which work is proposed under this program solicitation. Applicants must ensure that the budget provided in the R&R Budget forms matches the requested budget amount found in Field 15(a) on the SF-424 form and that this number does not exceed the budget ceiling of \$600,000 (not including optional TABA) with the maximum award available \$650,000 (including TABA) for a period of 24 months. Budget requests that exceed the ceiling will be excluded from review.

**1. Request for use of Technical and Business Assistance (TABA) –**

USDA SBIR/STTR does NOT have a Phase II TABA Vendor. If an applicant wishes to utilize TABA, then they must request their own TABA assistance vendor(s).

An applicant may choose to request up to \$50,000 for TABA (see [Part I, E](#) of this RFA) by submitting a TABA plan as a PDF file and attaching the plan to Field 12, Other Attachments of the R&R Other Project Information Form (see [Part IV, B](#) of this RFA). The TABA plan must not exceed three (3) pages from the applicant that describes the following:

- a. Name and contact information for vendor(s) that will provide the services;
- b. Description of vendor(s) expertise and knowledge of providing technical and business assistance services;
- c. Itemized list of services to be provided;
- d. Expected metric and outcome for each service to be provided;
- e. Plans to report back to USDA as a deliverable on the outcomes and success of the TABA services and what information will be provided to validate the results; and
- f. Ensure the costs are reflected in the budget forms.
  - i. If you wish to utilize a technical assistance vendor/provider, you are required to include this as a consultant in your budget and to provide a detailed budget justification indicating the costs per service.

The TABA Plan must also include a maximum three (3) page qualification statement from each selected vendors(s) that describes the following:

- a. Statement must be provided on the selected vendor(s) letterhead and signed by an authorizing entity within the vendor's organization that can attest to the services being provided.
- b. Include a capabilities statement that provides the following:
  - i. Indicates the qualifications, expertise, and knowledge to provide the TABA services requested by the applicant.
  - ii. Indicate the level of expertise and knowledge of the Federal SBIR/STTR programs and specifically any prior support provided to Phase II awardees.
- c. Describe the overall metrics of success for the services requested by the applicant.

- d. Describe the plans to report back to USDA as a deliverable on the outcomes and success of the TABA services and what information will be provided to validate the results.

USDA-NIFA reserves the right to withhold funds requested for TABA until formal review and approval of the requested vendor is provided by NIFA's Award Management Branch and SBIR/STTR staff. If the project is selected for an award and the applicant demonstrates this requirement sufficiently as determined by the Government, USDA will permit the awardee to acquire such TABA assistance itself, in an amount up to \$50,000 for the full Phase II project, as an allowable cost of the SBIR/STTR award. The amount will be in addition to the award of \$600,000 and is not subject to any profit or fee by the requesting firm and cannot be used in the calculation of indirect cost rates. The amount is based on the original grant period of performance and does not apply to period of performance extensions. Requests for TABA funding outside of the Phase II application submission will not be considered.

2. **Indirect costs (IDC)** – See [Part IV, C](#) of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding indirect cost, and **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for additional information.
3. **Fee** - A reasonable fee, not to exceed seven percent of total Federal funds awarded of Field I (Total Direct and Indirect Costs) is permitted under this program solicitation, but applicants are encouraged to minimize fee requests due to the small amount of funds available. All fees are subject to negotiation with USDA NIFA. If a fee is requested, the amount should be indicated in Field J “Fee” on the R&R Budget form. If an applicant requests a fee, the combined total of “Section I - Total Direct and Indirect Costs” and “Section J – Fee” on the R&R Budget form must not exceed the ceiling of this solicitation. Proposals with budgets exceeding \$600,000 (without TABA) or \$650,000 (with TABA) will be returned without review.
4. **Budget Justification** – See **Part V.150 Section L** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). Applicants must provide a detailed budget justification (PDF) in Section L of the R&R Budget form. All items included in the R&R Budget Form should be addressed in the budget justification.

***R&R Sub-award Budget Attachment.*** See **Part V.150** [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). By statute, the USDA NIFA SBIR Phase II program can only allow a *maximum* of one-half (50%) of the grant funds, as determined by budget expenditures, to be used for outside services. The USDA NIFA STTR Phase II program requires a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 60%, as determined by budget expenditures, be used for outside services. Additionally, for STTR, a *minimum* of 30% of the budget expenditures must be to a single nonprofit research entity. To apply for both SBIR and STTR, a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 50%, as determined by budget expenditures, can be used for outside services. Additionally, to apply for both SBIR and STTR, a *minimum* of 30% of the budget expenditures must be to a single nonprofit research entity.

***NIFA Supplemental Information Form.*** See **Part V.300** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Field 2.** Program to which you are applying. This refers to the SBIR/STTR topic area to

which you are submitting your USDA NIFA SBIR/STTR application. Enter the program code name, for example, “Animal Production and. Protection,” and the corresponding program code, “8.3.” It is extremely important the Program Code Name and Program Code are spelled correctly and exactly match one of the topic areas indicated in [Part I, C](#) of this RFA. Failure to complete these fields correctly could significantly delay the acceptance of your application into the program and the application may not be reviewed. Accurate entry is critical.

**You must submit your Phase II application to the same SBIR/STTR topic area as your Phase I award.** This requirement is non-negotiable, and it is extremely important that the Program Code Name and Program Code are spelled correctly and exactly match one of the topic areas for which you are applying. Failure to complete these fields correctly may jeopardize the review of your application.

2. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V.300** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). Required for all Senior/Key Persons. Combine all Conflict of Interest forms into a single PDF attachment. A template is located at [NIFA’s Application Support Template Resource](#).

**Data Management Plan.** A Data Management Plan (DMP) is NOT required for these programs.

**SBIR/STTR Information.** See **Part V.210** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#), unless noted below.

**Agency to which you are applying:** Select USDA

**SBC Control ID** – Companies that submit an application to any SBIR/STTR solicitation are required to register with the SBIR/STTR company registry and obtain a SBC Control Number. Please enter your Small Business Concern (SBC) number that you received upon registering at <https://www.sbir.gov/registration>.

**Program Type-Select SBIR, STTR, or Both.** Applications may be submitted to both (SBIR and STTR) within the same topic area if the proposed project aligns with the regulations for both programs, as indicated below:

**SBIR:** The PD/PI must be employed more than one-half (51%) of the time with the SBC, and the SBC must perform a *minimum* of one-half (50%) of the proposed research or analytical work, as determined by budget expenditures.

**STTR:** At least one of the PD/PI or Co-PD/PIs must be employed more than one-half (51%) of the time with either the SBC or the partnering non-profit research institution. The SBC must have a single non-profit research institution conduct a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 60% of the research or analytical work, as determined by budget expenditures. The SBC must perform a *minimum* of 40% of the proposed research or analytical work.



**Both** (SBIR and STTR): The PD/PI must be employed more than one-half (51%) of the time with the SBC, and a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 50% of the research and analytical work as determined by budget expenditures, must be conducted by a single nonprofit research institution.

**Application Type** – Select Phase II.

**Letter of Intent Number** - This solicitation does not require a letter of intent. Enter “NA.”

**Question 1-7** must be completed by all SBIR and STTR applicants.

**Question 8.** Commercialization Plan. (PDF format only) – All proposed Phase II projects should have a commercial outcome; therefore, the application requires an extensive commercialization plan.

The Commercialization Plan must only include information pertaining to the items listed below and shall not exceed 10 pages of written text including all figures and tables with line spacing set at 1.5 and at least 1-inch margins with font size no smaller than 12-point Times New Roman (the font size for figures and tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman).

Include the following sections and information in the commercialization plan:

- 1. Introduction of the SBIR/STTR Project and Expected Outcomes:** Describe, in layperson's terms, the proposed project and its key technology objectives. Clarify the need addressed, specifying weaknesses in the current approaches to meet this need. In addition, describe the commercial applications of the research and the innovation inherent in the application.
- 2. Company Information:** Give a brief description of your company including corporate objectives, core competencies, size (annual sales level), and number and types of employees for the last 5 years (if company has existed for more than 5 years), and any current products/services that have significant sales. Those grantees existing for less than five years should provide this information for the years they have been operational. Indicate your vision for the future and how you will grow/maintain a sustainable business entity. Include a short description of the origins of the company.
- 3. The Market, Customer, and Competition:** Describe the national and/or global market and/or market segments (for the product, technology, or service) you are targeting. Provide information on the size of the market(s) and a brief profile of the potential customer(s). State what significant advantages your innovation will bring to the market(s) (e.g., better performance, lower cost, faster, more efficient or effective, new capability). Explain the hurdles you will need to overcome in order to gain market/customer acceptance of your innovation. Briefly explain the plans you have for approaching your potential customers (i.e., your marketing and sales strategy).  
Describe the current competition and any potential competitors over the next several years. Include a schedule showing the projected needs (e.g., amount of additional investment, timeframe) from the end of Phase II until commercialization. Indicate any other potential

commercial factors that are not described above.

**4. Intellectual Property:** Describe how you will protect the intellectual property that results from your innovation. Note any actions you may consider to attain at least a temporary competitive advantage. What is the company's prior record in this area? Comment on the company's strategy to build a sustainable business through protection of intellectual property.

**5. Revenue Stream:** Describe the plans for generating a revenue stream and include the assumptions that form the basis for revenue projections. Address how the revenue stream will be profitable to the company or at least sustain the product through its life cycle.

**6. Financing:** How will you raise the necessary financing for Phase III commercialization? Provide evidence of the plan for this funding in one or more of the following ways: A letter of commitment\* for follow-on funding;

- a. A letter of intent\* or evidence of negotiations to provide funding, should the Phase II project be successful, and the market need still exists;
- b. A letter of support\* for the project and/or some in-kind commitment; and
- c. A specific plan to secure Phase III funding.

\*Any formal letters of commitment, intent or support are not to be included here but instead in Field 12, Other Attachments of the Other Project Information Form (see [section C.6.c](#) of this Part).

**Questions 9-10** Please respond if applying for SBIR Only or Both (SBIR and STTR). If you are submitting only an STTR application, then leave these questions blank.

**Question 9.** Documentation of Prior SBIR/STTR Phase II Awards – There are two documents Phase II applicants must provide. Combine both documents into a single PDF. There are consequences of failure to meet the Phase I to Phase II Transition or the Commercialization Benchmarks, including ineligibility to submit a proposal for a Phase I for a period of one year beginning on June 1, and if the increased performance standards for more experienced firms are not met, then companies may not receive more than 20 total Phase I awards from each agency during the 1-year period beginning in June.

**1. Attachment 1:** Phase I to Phase II Transition Rate Benchmark

Any SBC that has received at least 20 Phase I awards, regardless of the awarding agency, during the five-year period (Fiscal Year 2018 through 2022) must have received a minimum of five Phase II awards (25% conversion rate), regardless of the awarding agency, over the same five-year period to be eligible to submit a Phase I. If a company has not received an SBIR/STTR award or has received less than 20 SBIR/STTR awards, this benchmark requirement does not apply.

Any SBC that has received more than 50 Phase I awards during the five-year period (Fiscal Year 2018 through 2022) must average one Phase II for every Phase I award received (50% conversion rate). If a company has not received an SBIR/STTR award or has received less than 50 SBIR/STTR awards, this benchmark requirement does not apply.

If the applicant falls under the thresholds indicated above, the applicant must provide an attachment stating, "Fewer than 20 Phase I awards have been granted to [Insert Company Name] during the preceding five fiscal years."



## 2. **Attachment 2: Commercialization Rate Benchmark**

Any SBC that has received 16 or more Phase II awards during the consecutive period of 10 fiscal years preceding the more recent two fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021) must average at least \$100,000 of sales and/or investments per Phase II award received during the period; or have received a number of patents equal to or greater than 15% of the number of Phase II awards during the period. If a company has not received an SBIR/STTR award or has received less than 16 SBIR/STTR awards, this benchmark requirement does not apply.

Any SBC that has received more than 50 Phase II awards during the consecutive period of 10 fiscal years preceding the most recent 2 fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021), must have an average of \$250,000 of aggregate sales and investments per Phase II award received during such covered period. Any SBC that has received more than 100 Phase II awards during the consecutive period of 10 fiscal years preceding the most recent 2 fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021) must have an average of \$450,000 of aggregate sales and investments per Phase II award received during such covered period.

Each SBC that is subject to an increased performance standard for the Commercialization Rate Benchmark must submit to the SBA supporting documentation evidencing that all covered sales of the SBC were properly used to meet the increased minimum performance standard. Covered sales are defined at [15 U.S.C. § 638\(qq\)\(3\)\(B\)\(iii\)\(II\)](#).

### **The documentation must include:**

1. Business name
2. Year company was founded
3. Identify any name change your business has gone through within the past five years.
4. List the parent company if you were a subsidiary or a spin-off.
5. Percentage of company revenues for the 10 fiscal years preceding the more recent two fiscal years (Fiscal Year 2012 through 2021) from Federal SBIR/STTR Phase II funding.
6. Phase II Grant Information
7. Partnership-Related Activities
8. Funding: Describe any funding and third-party investments
9. Revenue & Sales that were directly attributed to the prior Phase II SBIR/STTR awards.
10. Intellectual Property Assets
11. Other Success Indicators (Employees, Acquisitions, Return on Investment (ROI), etc.)
12. Company Achievements

If the applicant has not received Phase II funding, the applicant must provide an attachment stating, “No prior Phase II awards have been issued to [Insert Company Name]”.

USDA NIFA SBIR/STTR shall collect and retain the information for its internal use. Any data provided under this section of the application may lead to USDA NIFA contacting the

applicant to coordinate the development of additional information that can serve to inform the public and the Federal Government on the benefits of the USDA NIFA SBIR/STTR programs to Small Businesses.

**Questions 11-13** Please respond if applying for STTR Only or to Both (SBIR and STTR). If you are submitting only an SBIR application, then leave these questions blank.

### **C. Funding Restrictions**

#### ***Indirect Costs (IDC)***

**Fully negotiated rate.** Applicants must use the current negotiated Indirect Cost (IDC) rate established by its cognizant Federal agency (the agency that provides the most funds). If awarded, the applicant will be required to produce a negotiated IDC rate agreement from the cognizant agency to recover IDC.

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant may request an IDC rate. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process and need only to calculate a rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate, may elect the De Minimis rate ([2 CFR 200.414](#)). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de Minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described above and in [2 CFR 200.403](#), costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

See [NIFA Indirect Costs](#) for information including [additional resources](#) and [NIFA Indirect Cost Guidance Chart](#).

### **D. Submission Dates and Times**

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application before submission via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all preparation instructions, including page limits and PDF requirements.

Instructions for submitting an application are included in **Part IV.300** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

Applications for FY 2024 must be received by Grants.gov by 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time on **March 26, 2024**. Applications for FY 2025 must be received by Grants.gov by 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time on **March 25, 2025** (anticipated). Applications received after this deadline WILL NOT be considered for review or funding.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See

[Part IV, A](#) of this RFA for Grants.gov contact information.

**Applicants must allow additional time for electronic submission** and plan ahead to allow time for correction of technical errors identified by Grants.gov. It is recommended that applicants begin submitting their completed application at least one day prior to the deadline. The USDA NIFA SBIR/STTR Programs rarely accept late applications. Exceptions are only made for delays due to natural disasters or technical problems experienced by Grants.gov that impact the entire applicant community. Documentation of the problem will be required. Exception made for technical problems will be for Grants.gov failures prior to the deadline that impact the entire applicant community. Applicants who have problems with their submissions to Grants.gov must call the Grants.gov help desk to resolve the problems and keep a record of the following:

1. Grants.gov Tracking Numbers
2. Case numbers provided by Grants.gov
3. Any correspondence with Grants.gov regarding the submission problem.
4. Any correspondence with SAM.gov during the registration process

Once the application is successfully submitted to Grants.gov, the applicant must forward the information above via email to [sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov). Information obtained from the case number and correspondence will be used to verify if the submission problem was due to a Grants.gov system failure that impacted the entire applicant community or due to a problem with the applicant. This information will be used to determine the final decision to accept or not accept a late application.

We send email correspondence to the Authorized Representative (AR) regarding the status of submitted applications. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence from NIFA regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact [sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov) and request the application number assigned to the application. Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned an application number, you should cite this number on all future correspondence.

## **PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENT**

### **A. NIFA's Evaluation Process**

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. All administrative requirements must be met in order for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met the administrative requirements using a review panel (see [NIFA Peer Review Process](#)).

#### **Scientific Peer Review Process:**

NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

1. The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities.
2. The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields.
3. The need to include other experts (*e.g.*, producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs.
4. The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (*e.g.*, colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations.
5. The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to race, ethnicity, gender representation, and an equitable age distribution.
6. The need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of NIFA will recommend that your project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (*e.g.*, reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, excluding the reviewers' identity, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

**Conflicts of interest.** NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)).

USDA-NIFA SBIR/STTR staff understand that applicants may at times disagree with the outcome of the panel deliberations, review comments, panel summary, recommendations, or the

funding line. Applicants may request a debriefing from the National Program Leader for the SBIR/STTR topic area to discuss the review and outcome.

Due to the competitive nature and limited funding for this program, *recommendations to fund or not fund an application will remain final, regardless of the outcome of the debriefing and applicants cannot contest the decision.*

USDA-NIFA SBIR/STTR staff will not move any application above another application that ranked higher in the panel recommendations unless an applicant that was recommended for an award has failed to meet eligibility requirements for the program or cannot pass the administrative review. In these rare cases, USDA-NIFA SBIR/STTR staff have the right to not fund any additional projects, or based on the panel recommendation select the next Phase II application that fell below the funding line and was next in line for funding.

## **B. Evaluation Criteria**

NIFA anticipates that the evaluation of SBIR/STTR Phase II applications will require approximately six months from submission deadline. No information on application status will be available until NIFA makes the final selections. NIFA will notify both successful and unsuccessful applicants of final award decisions via email. For information about the status of a submitted application, see **Part VI.100** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

*Initial Screening Criteria.* Applicants should be aware that applications that do not satisfy all of the screening criteria will be returned to the proposing entity without review. Returned applications may not be resubmitted (with or without revision) under this solicitation. The initial screening criteria are the following:

1. The proposing firm must qualify as an SBC and have received a SBC Control Number. USDA NIFA uses the Small Business Administration (SBA) SBIR/STTR company registry certification that the applicant is to provide with the application to confirm the applicant is a SBC;
2. The application **must meet** the Application Content and Format requirements as described in this RFA. This includes page length requirements, all required forms and all files in PDF;
3. The proposed budget must be within the dollar ceiling identified in this RFA;
4. The proposed Phase II research must fall within the topic area that the project was originally funded under Phase I;
5. An application must contain adequate scientific/technical and market opportunity information that clearly states the project plan and objectives. USDA NIFA reserves the right not to submit for review any application that it finds to have insufficient information;
6. It is clear that for SBIR, the PD/PI will work a minimum of 51 percent of his/her time for the SBC during the period of the grant and that the SBC will conduct a minimum of one-half of the research effort. For STTR, the PD/PI will work a minimum of 51 percent of his/her time for *either* the SBC or the nonprofit research institution and the nonprofit research institution will conduct a *minimum* of 30% and a *maximum* of 60% of the proposed research effort. However, the PD/PI may spend less than 50 percent of his/her time on the Phase II project.

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate proposals submitted in response to this RFA that pass the screening criteria described above:

1. **Degree to Which Phase I Objectives were Met and Technical Feasibility Established:** The extent to which:
  - a. Phase I project demonstrated novelty, innovation, uniqueness, and originality;
  - b. Conceptual adequacy of the research and suitability of the hypothesis, as applicable;
  - c. Clarity and delineation of Phase I objectives;
  - d. Demonstration of feasibility through preliminary data; and
  - e. Probability of success of the project to move into Phase II is appropriate given the level of scientific originality, and risk-reward balance.
2. **Phase II Scientific and Technical Feasibility:**
  - a. Project objectives and outcomes are clearly described, adequate, and appropriate. All project components (i.e., research and commercialization) are reflected in one or more project objectives;
  - b. Proposed approach, procedures, or methodologies are innovative, original, clearly described, suitable, and feasible;
  - c. Expected results or outcomes are clearly stated, measurable, and achievable within the allotted time frame;
  - d. Proposed research fills knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of new innovations to address the stated problem of issue; and
  - e. Proposed research is up to date on the current state of the art (i.e., literature reviews have been completed).
3. **Commercial Potential:** The commercial potential will be assessed based on how well the following criteria are presented:
  - a. Demonstration of the company's ability to commercialize the innovation;
  - b. Relevant and current market information for the innovation (stakeholder needs for the innovation, size of the market, potential customers, competition, etc.);
  - c. Strategy for commercializing the innovation including follow-on commitments from private sector or non-SBIR/STTR funding sources;
  - d. Plans for protection of intellectual property;
  - e. Projected revenue stream and assumptions; and
  - f. Record of commercializing new products and/or services during the last 5 years, especially from prior SBIR and STTR projects.

A Commercialization Plan showing that the proposing firm has no prior Phase II awards will not affect the evaluation of an application; the application will be evaluated for commercial potential based on its commercialization strategy.
4. **Importance of the Problem:** How well the application justifies the importance of the problem. The degree the project satisfies a public interest (one or more of the strategic goals listed in the RFA).
5. **Investigator and Resource Qualifications:**
  - a. Roles of key personnel are clearly defined;
  - b. Key personnel have sufficient scientific and business expertise to complete the proposed project, and where appropriate, partnerships with other disciplines and institutions are established;

- c. PD and Co-PD biographic information/resumes provide relevant employment history;
  - d. Support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation are sufficient;
  - e. A clear plan is articulated for project management, including time allocated for attainment of objectives and delivery of products, maintenance of partnerships and collaborations, and a strategy to enhance communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the project team;
  - f. Consultants, subcontractors, or CRADA cooperators that are involved in the project have provided letters verifying their willingness to participate in the project; and
  - g. Personnel on subcontract(s) and consulting agreement(s) have defined roles and responsibilities.
6. **Budget:** The budget is appropriate for the proposed research plan, and the application provides sufficient budget detail to indicate clearly how the funds would be utilized.
7. **Duplication:**
- a. There is no duplication of any ongoing or previous research by the small business firm or by other researchers; and
  - b. Application clearly indicates how the proposed technology would differ significantly from existing innovations.

NIFA uses an electronic Peer Review System (PRS) that allows reviewers of the application the ability to provide comments, scores, and recommendations to SBIR/STTR staff. NIFA provides guidance and instructions to the reviewers on how to access PRS and that the above review criteria serve as the basis for the review. Approximately equal consideration will be given to each criterion, except for items (1), (2), and (3) which will receive twice the value of any of the other items:

Additional factors that will be considered in the review process are whether an SBIR/STTR application involves a CRADA with a USDA or other Federal laboratory or contains a follow-on funding commitment for Phase III. In the event that two or more applications are of approximately equal merit, the existence of a CRADA with a USDA or other Federal laboratory or a follow-on funding commitment for Phase III will be an important consideration to break the tie. The value of any commitment will depend upon the degree of financial commitment made by non-Federal investors, with the greater **value resulting from a signed agreement with reasonable terms for an amount at least equal to the funding requested from USDA in Phase II.**

### C. **Proprietary Information**

Information contained in unsuccessful applications will remain the property of the applicant. The Government may, however, retain copies of all applications. Public release of information in any application submitted will be subject to existing statutory and regulatory requirements. If proprietary information is provided in an application, which constitutes a trade secret, proprietary commercial or financial information, confidential personal information, or data affecting the national security, it will be treated in confidence, to the extent permitted by law. This information must be clearly marked by the applicant with the term “confidential proprietary information,” and the following legend must appear on each PDF attachment



submitted as a part of the application:

“These data shall not be disclosed outside the Government and shall not be duplicated, used, or disclosed in whole or in part for any purpose other than evaluation of this application. If a funding agreement is awarded to this applicant as a result of or in connection with the submission of these data, the Government shall have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the funding agreement and pursuant to applicable law. This restriction does not limit the Government’s right to use information contained in the data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained on pages (insert pages) of this application.”

Any other legend may be unacceptable to the Government and may constitute grounds for removing the application from further consideration without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure. The Government will limit dissemination of such information to within official channels.

USDA NIFA, by law, is required to make the final decision as to whether the information is required to be kept in confidence. USDA NIFA will retain for three years one file copy of all applications received. Public release of information for any application submitted will be subject to existing statutory and regulatory requirements. The legislation reauthorizing the SBIR/STTR Programs strengthened the protection of awardee firms relative to maintaining confidentiality of proprietary information for a period of twenty years after the end of the grant period (See § 8(b)(4) of the [SBIR/STTR Policy Directive](#)). However, any application that is funded will be considered an integral part of the award and normally will be made available to the public upon request through the Freedom of Information Act, except for designated proprietary information.

The inclusion of proprietary information is discouraged unless it is necessary for the proper evaluation of the application. If proprietary information is to be included, it should be limited, set apart from other text on a separate page, and keyed to the text by numbers. It should be confined to a few critical technical items that, if disclosed, could jeopardize the obtaining of foreign or domestic patents. Trade secrets, salaries, or other information that could jeopardize commercial competitiveness should be similarly keyed and presented on a separate page. Applications or reports that attempt to restrict dissemination of large amounts of information may be found unacceptable by USDA NIFA.

#### **D. Rights in Technical Data**

Rights in technical data, including software developed under the terms of any funding agreement resulting from an application submitted in response to this solicitation, shall remain with the grantee. However, the Government shall have the limited right to use such data for Governmental purposes and shall not release such data outside the Government without permission of the grantee for a period of twenty years from completion of the project under which the data were generated. Effective at the conclusion of the twenty-year period, the Government shall retain a royalty-free license for Governmental use of any technical data delivered under the agreement, whether patented or not.

## **Rights in Data Developed Under SBIR/STTR Funding Agreement.**

The SBIR/STTR Act provides for “retention by a SBC of the rights to data generated by the concern in the performance of an SBIR/STTR award.”

1. Each agency must refrain from disclosing SBIR/STTR technical data to outside the Government (except reviewers) and especially to competitors of the SBC, or from using the information to produce future technical procurement specifications that could harm the SBC that discovered and developed the innovation.
2. SBIR/STTR agencies must protect from disclosure and non-governmental use all SBIR/STTR technical data developed from work performed under an SBIR/STTR funding agreement for a period of not less than twenty years from delivery of the last deliverable under that agreement (either Phase I, Phase II, or Federally funded SBIR/STTR Phase III) unless the agency obtains permission to disclose such SBIR/STTR technical data from the awardee or SBIR/STTR applicant. Agencies are released from obligation to protect SBIR/STTR data upon expiration of the protection period except that any such data that is also protected and referenced under a subsequent SBIR/STTR award must remain protected through the protection period of that subsequent SBIR/STTR award. For example, if a Phase III award is issued within or after the Phase II data rights protection period and the Phase III award refers to and protects data developed and protected under the Phase II award, then that data must continue to be protected through the Phase III protection period. Agencies have discretion to adopt a protection period longer than twenty years. The Government retains a royalty-free license for Government use of any technical data delivered under an SBIR/STTR award, whether patented or not. This section does not apply to program evaluation.
3. SBIR/STTR technical data rights apply to all SBIR/STTR awards, including subcontracts to such awards, that fall within the statutory definition of Phase I, II, or III of the SBIR/STTR Programs, as described in the [SBIR/STTR Policy Directive](#). The scope and extent of the SBIR/STTR technical data rights applicable to Federally funded Phase III awards is identical to the SBIR/STTR data rights applicable to Phases I and II SBIR/STTR awards. The data rights protection period lapses only:
  - a. Upon expiration of the protection period applicable to the SBIR/STTR award; or
  - b. By agreement between the awardee and the agency.

## **E. Copyrights**

Grantees also should assert copyright in scientific and technical articles based on data produced under the grant where necessary to effect journal publication or inclusion in proceedings associated with professional activities. Journal or other copyright practices are acceptable unless the copyright policy prevents the grantee from making copies for its own use.

Proper acknowledgement of public funding in published scientific articles, manuscripts, presentations, and press releases is critical for the success of the agency’s programs. Please use the following language to acknowledge NIFA support in such publications and associated presentations, as appropriate:

“This research was supported [in part] by the intramural research program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, [insert program type Small Business Innovative Research, Small Business Technology Transfer, etc., and accession number, if applicable].”

The recipient must also include a disclaimer in all publications and presentations stating the following:

“The Findings and Conclusions in This Preliminary [Publication/Presentation/Blog] Have Not Been Formally Disseminated by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and Should Not Be Construed to Represent Any Agency Determination or Policy.”

Presentations should include this disclaimer on the title slide in similar font and size to the name and title of the presenter.

If the grantee plans to issue a press release concerning the outcome of NIFA grant-supported research, they should notify NIFA in advance to allow for coordination. Publications resulting from work performed under a NIFA grant-supported project must be included as part of the annual or final progress report submitted to NIFA. When publications are available electronically, electronic access information should be provided.

#### **F. Patents and Inventions**

Allocation of rights to inventions shall be in accordance with [35 U.S.C. 202-206](#) and the Department of Commerce implementing regulations entitled “Rights to Inventions Made by Nonprofit Organizations and Small Business Firms under Government Grants, Contracts and Cooperative Agreements” at [37 CFR Part 401](#). These regulations provide that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA NIFA support. USDA NIFA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically. To the extent authorized by [35 U.S.C. 205](#), USDA NIFA will not make public any information disclosing a USDA-supported invention for a twenty-year period to allow the grantee a reasonable time to file an initial patent application. Additional information may be obtained by contacting:

Alexis Nazario-Negron, Director of Planning, Accountability, and Reporting  
Email: [Alexis.NazarioNegron@usda.gov](mailto:Alexis.NazarioNegron@usda.gov)

The reporting of inventions must be made through submission to Interagency Edison ([www.iedison.gov](http://www.iedison.gov)). Specific instructions for invention reporting are contained in the agency’s Terms and Conditions, a copy of which can be provided upon request. SBIR/STTR awardees must report inventions to the awarding agency within two months of the inventor’s report to the awardee.

### **G. Research Involving Special Considerations**

A number of situations frequently encountered in the conduct of scientific research require the submission of special information for a particular project. Since some types of research targeted for SBIR/STTR support have high probability of involving human subjects at risk or vertebrate animals, special instructions follow:

If the proposed research will involve human subjects at risk or vertebrate animals, the application must so indicate by checking “Yes” on the R&R Other Project Information form found in [Part IV, B](#) of this RFA. Further, in the event that the project is funded, the applicant may be required to have the research plan reviewed and approved by the appropriate review board or committee. It is suggested that applicants contact local universities, colleges, or nonprofit research organizations that have established such reviewing mechanisms to have this service performed.

Guidelines to be applied and observed when conducting such research are outlined below:

1. Human Subjects at Risk - Regulations issued by the Department of Agriculture to be used in safeguarding the rights and welfare of human subjects used in research supported with USDA grant funds are contained in [45 CFR Part 46](#) and USDA regulations set forth in [7 CFR Part 1c](#). All nonexempt research projects involving human subjects must be approved by an Institutional Review Board prior to commencing actual substantive work.
2. Animal Care - The performing organization must comply with the Animal Welfare Act ([7 U.S.C., 2131-2156](#)); [Public Law 89-544, 1996](#) and the regulations issued by the Department of Agriculture in [9 CFR](#) parts [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), and [4](#). In the case of domesticated farm animals housed under farm conditions, the grantee must adhere to the principles stated in the Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Agricultural Research and Teaching, Federation of Animal Sciences Societies, 2020. In the event a project involving the use of living vertebrate animals results in a grant award, funds will be released only after a qualified Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has approved the project.

### **H. Grantee Commitments**

Upon issuance of a research grant by USDA NIFA, the awardee will be required to make certain legal commitments through acceptance of the award document and the terms and conditions attached thereto, as well as any project-specific terms or conditions outlined.

### **I. Additional Information**

1. This RFA is intended for informational purposes and reflects current planning. If there is any inconsistency between the information contained herein and the terms of any resulting SBIR/STTR funding agreement, the terms and conditions of the funding agreement are controlling.

Under Federal law it is USDA NIFA’s responsibility to ensure Federal funds are disbursed in accordance with Federal regulations. USDA NIFA reserves the right to enact additional oversight controls on awardees deemed to be high risk based on organizational management, personnel, and financial information provided.

2. If an applicant or a grantee is contemplating any type of transaction involving the entity (*i.e.*, merger, spin-off or sale), it is advised that the applicant or the grantee contact one of the SBIR/STTR NPLs (see [Part I, C](#) or [Appendix I](#) of the RFA) for knowledge of how the transaction may affect a potential grant or the grant, as applicable.
3. USDA NIFA is not responsible for any monies expended by the applicant prior to the award of any funding agreement.
4. This RFA is not an offer by USDA NIFA and does not obligate USDA NIFA to make any specific number of awards. In addition, awards under these programs are contingent upon the availability of funds.
5. Unsolicited applications will not be accepted under the SBIR/STTR programs.
6. The applicant must provide the total number of employees for the organization and its subsidiaries and/or parent company, if applicable.
7. Under Federal law, it is USDA NIFA's responsibility to ensure Federal funds are disbursed in accordance with Federal regulations. USDA NIFA reserves the right to enact additional oversight controls on awardees deemed high risk based on organizational management, personnel, and financial information provided.

#### **J. Organizational Management Information**

After notification of selection for an award, USDA NIFA requires the submission of certain organizational management, personnel, and financial information in order to complete a financial risk assessment of the applicant, as well as certification that the proposing organization complies with the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#). The required forms will be provided to the SBC by the NIFA OGFM-Awards Management Division. Although an applicant may be eligible for participation in the SBIR/STTR program, there are factors that could exclude an applicant from receiving Federal assistance (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not fiscally responsible).

USDA NIFA will not issue an award until all requested organizational and financial management information has been received. It is highly recommended that all requested documents be submitted within 10 days of the request for information. Delaying or failing to submit this information could result in the funding for the proposal being rescinded. The required information includes the following:

1. Organization Affiliations
2. Financial Information
  - a. Policies and procedures of your organization's internal controls for administration and financial management.
  - b. A description of the timekeeping system that tracks personnel expenses and time distribution.
  - c. Up-to-date financial information (e.g., certified audit reports, balance sheets, or

income statements for the previous two years)

3. Articles of Incorporation or By-Laws
4. A list of current and recent Federal awards, including grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements. Please include the agency's name, award number, the title of the project, and start and end date(s)

**K. Application Disposition**

Applicants may withdraw at any time before NIFA makes a final funding decision. NIFA will retain all applications, including withdrawn applications and unfunded applications.

## **PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. General**

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable Federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and [NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions, 7 CFR Part 3430, subparts A through E](#).

***Award Notice.*** The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in [2 CFR 200.211](#) (see [NIFA's SBIR/STTR Terms and Conditions](#)).

### **B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide](#) applies to all NIFA awards.

### **C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements**

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see [Terms and Conditions](#) for information about NIFA SBIR/STTR award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those, if any, will be identified in the award.

#### **SBIR/STTR Phase II Technical Reports.**

For all Phase II awards, an interim technical progress report must be submitted at approximately the mid-point in the project which, upon acceptance and approval will release the final 50% increment of funding on the project (in most cases 50% of funding is released in first half of project period). In addition, a comprehensive final technical report will be required within 120 days following the expiration of the Phase II grant. These reports will be submitted electronically per the award [Terms and Conditions](#) to [sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov). Each Phase II project will schedule an out briefing with SBIR/STTR staff to discuss the results and impact of the grant. Additional information on the deliverables and schedules can be found in the [Terms and Conditions](#) provided with the award.

Note: All technical reports will be held confidential for a period covering twenty years after the termination of the project. As such, proprietary information may be included in the interim and comprehensive final reports when necessary to provide the USDA-NIFA SBIR/STTR staff adequate information to evaluate the progress and outcome of the project. For the out briefing, USDA SBIR/STTR staff may request permission from the grantee to use some of the information to communicate the success of the grant and the USDA SBIR/STTR program.



## REEdport

Grantees must submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system, REEdport, that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award [terms and conditions](#) (see [REEdport Guide for Project Directors](#)). Reports submitted via REEdport will be placed in the USDA Current Research Information System (CRIS) database. CRIS is an online *public* database meant to provide information to the general public on all awards made by USDA NIFA. As such, proprietary information *should not* be included in these reports. Additionally, a REEdport submission does not meet the requirements for the interim technical and comprehensive final reports as these are additional reports required under the [terms and conditions](#) for the SBIR/STTR grant.

## Federal Financial Management Requirements.

Grantees must comply with applicable Federal financial management requirements included in the award's [terms and conditions](#), [7 CFR part 3403](#), [48 CFR part 31](#) and [2 CFR part 200](#). Below is a list of major requirements. Failure to comply could trigger significant audit liability and require global reconstruction of the grantees accounting system.

**Separation of Funds.** To avoid commingling of funds, grantees must establish a unique account(s) in their accounting system to capture and accumulate funding and related costs of the grant, apart from other Federal and non-Federal grants, projects, and cost centers.

**Timekeeping.** To support direct and indirect labor charges, grantees must maintain hourly timesheets that encompass all hours worked and not worked on a daily basis. The timesheet should identify the: (a) grant, project or cost center being worked on; (b) number of hours worked on each; (c) description of work performed; and (d) Paid Time Off (PTO) hours. The total hours recorded each day should coincide with an individual's employment status in accordance with established policy (*i.e.*, full-time employees work 8 hours each day, etc.).

**Paid Time Off (PTO).** Grantees may not directly charge a grant for time not spent working on the grant. Therefore, PTO (*i.e.*, vacation, holiday, sick and other paid leave) is not recoverable directly from grants, but rather must be allocated to all grants, projects, and cost centers over an entire cost accounting period.

**Full-Time University and other Organization Appointments.** For SBIR, the effort and compensation of individuals budgeted to work on grants, but who also hold full-time appointments at a university or another organization, may not exceed 100 percent. If applicable, it is necessary to:

1. obtain a letter releasing the individual from their full-time appointment. The release should be reflected in the organization's official payroll distribution system;
2. limit effort on the grant to time periods not covered by the full-time appointment; or
3. remove and replace with alternative research personnel. In addition, for SBIR, the primary employment of the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) must be with the SBC at the time of award and during the conduct of the proposed research. For SBIR, eligible primary employment means that more than one-half (51%) of the PD's/PI's time

is spent in the employ of the SBC during the award period of performance. For SBIR, primary employment with the SBC precludes the applicant as a full-time employee with another organization or academic institution. For SBIR, while the PD/PI must work more than one-half (51%) of his/her time for the small business during the entire grant period, there is no time requirement for the PD's/PI's work on the proposed research.

For STTR, the PD/PI for the proposed project (or, if multiple PD/PIs, at least one PD/PI) must be employed by and perform more than one half (51%) of the PD/PI's time in the employ of either the SBC or the partnering nonprofit Research Institution. For projects with multiple PD/PIs, at least one PD/PI must meet the primary employment requirement. That PD/PI will serve as the contact PD/PI for the Project Team. For STTR, while the PD/PI must work more than one-half (51%) of his/her time for the SBC or the partnering nonprofit Research Institution during the entire grant period, there is no time requirement for the PD's/PI's work on the proposed research.

To apply to both the SBIR and STTR programs, the PD/PI must be employed more than one-half (51%) by the SBC.

**Owners of Closely Held Corporations (Limited Liability Companies, Partnerships, S-Corporations, etc.).** Owners of closely held corporations whose compensation is charged directly or indirectly to Federal awards must take their compensations in the form of W-2 supported salaries, or guaranteed payments in order to: (a) trigger expense recognition in the accounting system; (b) ensure all compensation is reflected in grant-specific ledgers; and (c) to create a clear audit trail.

**Consistent Treatment of Costs.** Grantees must treat costs consistently across all Federal and non-Federal grants, projects, and cost centers. For example, grantees may not direct-charge Federal grants for costs typically considered indirect in nature, unless done consistently. Examples of indirect costs include administrative salaries, rent, accounting fees, utilities, etc. In most cases, the cost to develop an accounting system adequate to justify direct charging of the aforementioned items outweighs the benefits. As a result, use of an indirect cost rate is the most effective mechanism to recover these costs and not violate Federal financial requirements of consistency, allocability, and allowability. Additional guidance on indirect cost calculations can be found at [USDA NIFA Indirect Cost](#).

## PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

### A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

***Delegation of fiscal responsibility.*** Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

***Changes in Budget or Project Plans.*** In accordance with [2 CFR 200.308](#), awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring).
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the Federal award.
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project.
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with [2 CFR 200 Subpart E \(Cost Principles\)](#), or [45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, \(Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals\)](#), or [48 CFR](#), unless waived by the Federal awarding agency, [48 CFR Part 31 \(Contract Cost Principles and Procedures\)](#);
5. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
6. Subcontracting, transferring or contracting out of any work under a Federal award, including fixed amount subcontracts (see [2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved Federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
7. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-Federal entity;
8. The need for additional Federal funds to complete the project.

### B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of NIFA transaction records, which are available to the public. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, applicants should clearly mark any information within the application they wish to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary. NIFA will retain a copy of an application that does not result in an award for three years. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An applicant may withdraw at any time prior to the final action thereon.

### C. Regulatory Information

These programs are not subject to the provisions of [Executive Order 12372](#), which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials. Under the provisions of the [Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 \(44 U.S.C. Chapter 35\)](#), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under [OMB Document No. 0524-0039](#).

**D. Limited English Proficiency**

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit [NIFA Language Access Services](#) or contact Lois Tuttle, Equal Opportunity Specialist, at [Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov](mailto:Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov) or (443) 386-9488.

## APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACTS

### Program Contacts

#### 8.1 Forests and Related Resources

Dr. Diomides (Diomy) Zamora

[Diomides.Zamora@usda.gov](mailto:Diomides.Zamora@usda.gov)

(202) 590-6049

#### 8.2 Plant Production and Protection-Biology

Dr. Christopher Philips

[Christopher.Philips@usda.gov](mailto:Christopher.Philips@usda.gov)

(216) 390-4211

#### 8.3 Animal Production and Protection

Dr. Robert Smith

[Robert.M.Smith@usda.gov](mailto:Robert.M.Smith@usda.gov)

(202) 445-3468

Dr. Kathe Bjork

[Kathe.E.Bjork@usda.gov](mailto:Kathe.E.Bjork@usda.gov)

(816) 591-7415

#### 8.4 Conservation of Natural Resources

Dr. Sandeep Kumar

[Sandeep.Kumar@usda.gov](mailto:Sandeep.Kumar@usda.gov)

(816) 832-7235

#### 8.5 Food Science and Nutrition

Dr. Jodi Williams

[Jodi.Williams@usda.gov](mailto:Jodi.Williams@usda.gov)

(202) 424-9722

#### 8.6 Rural and Community Development

Dr. Keith Harris

[Keith.Harris@usda.gov](mailto:Keith.Harris@usda.gov)

(816) 916-0332

#### 8.7 Aquaculture

Dr. Timothy Sullivan

[Timothy.Sullivan@usda.gov](mailto:Timothy.Sullivan@usda.gov)

(816) 527-5434

#### 8.8 Biofuels and Biobased Products

Dr. David Songstad

[David.Songstad@usda.gov](mailto:David.Songstad@usda.gov)

(816) 401-8904

#### 8.12 Small and Mid-Size Farms

Dr. Denis Ebodaghe

[Denis.Ebodaghe@usda.gov](mailto:Denis.Ebodaghe@usda.gov)

(202) 445-5460

#### 8.13 Plant Production and Protection – Engineering

Dr. Victoria Finkensadt

[Victoria.Finkensadt@usda.gov](mailto:Victoria.Finkensadt@usda.gov)

(816) 520-8456

Dr. Steven Thomson

[Steven.J.Thomson@usda.gov](mailto:Steven.J.Thomson@usda.gov)

(816) 908-3310

#### SBIR/STTR Program Coordinator

Melinda Coffman

[Melinda.Coffman@usda.gov](mailto:Melinda.Coffman@usda.gov)

(816) 854-0299

#### SBIR/STTR General Mailbox

[sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov)

#### SBIR/STTR Due Diligence Mailbox

[sm.ddsbir@usda.gov](mailto:sm.ddsbir@usda.gov)

For science-related questions, please contact the topic area NPL. For program content-related questions, please contact the SBIR/STTR General Mailbox: [sbir@usda.gov](mailto:sbir@usda.gov).

For administrative questions related to;

1. Grants.gov, see [Part IV](#) of this RFA
2. Other RFA or application questions, please email [grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov](mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov)
3. Awards under this RFA, please email [awards@usda.gov](mailto:awards@usda.gov)

**U.S. Postal Mailing Address:**

National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000  
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

**Courier/Package Delivery Address:**

National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000  
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

## **APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

### **Glossary of Terms**

Authorized Organizational Representative – AR  
Cooperative Research and Development Agreement – CRADA  
Data Management Plan – DMP  
Federally Funded R&D Center – FFRDC  
General & Administrative – G&A  
Historically Underutilized Business Zone – HUBZone  
Indirect Costs – IDC  
Limited Liability Company – LLC  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA  
National Program Leader – NPL  
Project Director/Principal Investigator – PD/PI  
Project Narrative – PN  
Project Summary – PS  
Research or Research and Development – R/R&D  
Request for Application – RFA  
Small Business Administration – SBA  
Small Business Concern – SBC  
Small Business Innovation Research Program – SBIR  
Small Business Technology Transfer Program – STTR  
Technical and Business Assistance – TABA  
United States Department of Agriculture – USDA  
Venture Capital Operating Companies – VCOC



## APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to [7 CFR 3430 Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

### Definitions

#### Ad hoc Reviewers:

Experts or consultants qualified by training and experience in particular scientific or technical fields to render expert advice on the scientific technical merit of the grant applications in those fields. They review on an individual basis one or several of the eligible applications submitted to this program in their area of expertise and who submit to the Department written evaluations of such applications.

#### Affiliate:

As set forth in [13 CFR Part 121—Small Business Size Regulations, §121.103](#). Further information about SBA's affiliation rules and guides on [Affiliation](#) and [Size Standards](#) are available at SBIR STTR.

#### Applicant:

The organizational entity that, at the time of award, will qualify as a small business concern and that submits a grant application for a funding agreement under the SBIR/STTR programs.

#### Authorized Departmental Officer:

The Secretary or any employee of the Department who has the authority to issue or modify grant instruments on behalf of the Secretary.

#### Authorized Organizational Representative:

The president, director, chief executive officer or other designated official of the applicant organization who has the authority to commit the resources of the organization, also referred to as the AR or AOR.

#### Budget Period:

Interval of time into which the project period is divided for budgetary and reporting purposes.

#### Commercialization:

The process of developing marketable products, processes, technologies, or services and the production and delivery (whether by the originating party or others) of the products, processes, technologies, or services for sale to or use by the Federal government or commercial markets.

#### Covered Small Business Concern:

A small business that is not majority-owned by multiple VCOCs, hedge funds, or private equity firms on the date on which it submits an application in response to a solicitation under the SBIR/STTR programs or on the date of the SBIR/STTR award.

#### Cooperative Research and Development Agreement:

A legal agreement between a federal agency and one or more non-Federal parties. Purpose is to foster Federal/private collaborations to bring new technology to the marketplace. Used Federal government wide. Allows non-Federal party the right to negotiate an exclusive license to CRADA inventions.

#### Direct Costs:

Costs that occur in direct support of a single project or that can be clearly identified, segregated, and billed directly to the project via the companies' accounting system.

**Essentially Equivalent Work:**

Occurs when (1) substantially the same research is proposed for funding in more than one grant application submitted to the same Federal agency; (2) substantially the same research is submitted to two or more different Federal agencies for review and funding consideration; or (3) a specific research objective and the research design for accomplishing an objective are the same or closely related in two or more applications or awards, regardless of the funding source.

**Fee:**

The amount of profit a company will receive from the grant.

**Funding Agreement:**

Any contract, grant, or cooperative agreement entered into between any Federal agency and any small business concern for the performance of experimental, developmental or research work, including products or services funded in whole or in part by the Federal Government.

**Grant:**

A financial assistance mechanism providing money, property or both to an eligible entity to carry out the approved project or activity, and substantial programmatic involvement by Government is not anticipated.

**Grantee:**

The small business concern designated in the grant award document as the responsible legal entity to whom the grant is awarded under this part, also referred to as an “awardee.”

**Historically Underutilized Business Zone:**

A small business concern meeting the following criteria:

1. Located in a “historically underutilized business zone” or HUBZone area located in one or more of the following:
  - a) A qualified census tract (as defined in section 42(d)(5)(C)(i)(I) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986);
  - b) A qualified “non-metropolitan county” (as defined in section 143(k)(2)(B) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986); or
  - c) On an Indian Reservation- Land within the boundaries of a Federally recognized Indian Reservation.
2. Owned and controlled by one or more U.S. Citizens; and
3. At least 35 percent of its employees must reside in a HUBZone.

**Indirect Costs:**

Costs which occur in support of more than one objective and therefore cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular project, often called overhead, F&A, or G&A.

**Innovation:**

A new or improved item having marketable potential including (1) development of new technologies; (2) refinement of existing technologies; or (3) development of new applications for existing technologies.

**Intellectual Property:**

The separate and distinct types of intangible property that are referred to collectively as “intellectual property,” including but not limited to: patents, trademarks, copyrights, trade secrets, SBIR/STTR technical data (as defined in this section), ideas, designs, know-how,

business, technical and research methods, other types of intangible business assets, and all types of intangible assets either proposed or generated by a small business concern as a result of its participation in the SBIR/STTR program.

**Joint Venture:**

An association of concerns with interests in any degree or proportion by way of contract expresses or implied, consorting to engage in and carry out a single specific business venture for joint profit, for which purpose they combine their efforts, property, money, skill, or knowledge, but not on a continuing or permanent basis for conducting business generally. A joint venture is viewed as a business entity in determining power to control its management.

**Manufacturing Related:**

Encompasses improvements in existing methods or processes as well as wholly new processes, machines, or systems. Four main areas include:

1. Unit process level technologies that create or improve manufacturing processes, including:
  - a) Fundamental improvements in existing manufacturing processes that deliver substantial productivity, quality, or environmental benefits; or
  - b) Development of new manufacturing processes, including new materials, coatings, methods, and associated practices.
2. Machine level technologies that create or improve manufacturing equipment, including:
  - a) Improvements in capital equipment that create increased capability, such as accuracy or repeatability, increased capacity through productivity improvements or cost reduction or increased environmental efficiency, such as safety, energy efficiency and, environmental impact; or
  - b) New apparatus and equipment for manufacturing, including additive and subtractive manufacturing, deformation and molding, assembly and test, semiconductor fabrication, and nanotechnology.
3. Systems level technologies for innovation in the manufacturing enterprise, including:
  - a) Advances in controls, sensors, networks, and other information technologies that improve the quality and productivity of manufacturing cells, lines, systems, and facilities;
  - b) Innovation in extended enterprise functions critical to manufacturing, such as quality systems, resource management, supply change integration and distribution, scheduling, and tracking; or
  - c) Technologies that enable integrated and collaborative product and process development, including computer- aided and expert systems for design, tolerance development, process and materials selection, life cycle cost estimation, rapid prototyping, and tooling.
4. Environment or societal level technologies that improve workforce abilities, productivity, and manufacturing competitiveness, including:
  - a) Technologies for improved workforce health and safety, such as human factors and ergonomics; or
  - b) Technologies that aid and improve workforce manufacturing skill and technical excellence, such as educational systems incorporating improved

manufacturing knowledge and instructional methods.

**Matching:**

The process through which a grant recipient matches awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.

**New Application:**

An application not previously submitted to a program.

**Outcome:**

The measure of long-term, eventual, program impact

**Output:**

The measures of near-term program impact.

**Peer Review Group:**

Experts or consultants, qualified by training and experience in particular scientific or technical fields to give expert advice on the scientific and technical merit of grant applications to those fields, who assemble as a group to discuss and evaluate all of the eligible applications submitted to this program in their area of expertise.

**Program Solicitation:**

A formal request for applications whereby a federal agency notifies the small business community of its R/R&D needs and interests in broad and selected areas, as appropriate to the agency, as appropriate to the agency, and requests applications from small business concerns in response to these needs and interests.

**Project Director / Principal Investigator:**

An individual designated by the applicant to provide the scientific and technical direction to a project supported by the funding agreement.

**Prototype:**

A model of something to be further developed, which includes designs, protocols, questionnaires, software, and devices.

**Project Period:**

The proposed duration of Phase II projects will not normally exceed twenty-four (24) months, except in special, justified circumstances. Where a proposed research project requires more than twenty-four months to complete Phase II, a longer project period, not to exceed thirty-six (36) months, may be requested. An applicant of a Phase II project with an anticipated duration beyond twenty-four months should specify and justify the length of duration in the application at the time of its submission to USDA/NIFA.

**Research or Research and Development:**

R/R&D activity is:

1. A systematic, intensive study directed toward greater knowledge or understanding of the subject studied;
2. A systematic study directed at applying new knowledge to meet a recognized need; or
3. A systematic application of knowledge toward the production of useful materials, devices and systems or methods, including design, development, and improvement of prototypes, and new processes to meet specific requirements.

**Research Project Grant:**

The award by the Department of funds to a grantee to assist in meeting the costs of conducting for the benefit of the public an identified project, which is intended and

designed to establish, discover, elucidate, or confirm information or the underlying mechanisms relating to a research topic area identified in the annual solicitation of applications.

**SBIR/STTR Participants:**

Business concerns that have received SBIR/STTR awards or that have submitted SBIR/STTR applications.

**SBIR/STTR Technical Data:**

All data generated during the performance of an SBIR/STTR award.

**SBIR/STTR Technical Data Rights:**

The rights a small business concern obtains in data generated during the performance of any SBIR/STTR award that an awardee delivers to the Government during or upon completion of a Federally funded project and to which the government receives a license.

**Small Business Concern:**

A concern that meets the requirements set forth in [13 CFR 121.702](#).

**Small Business Entity:**

A small business entity is typically defined as a sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, and S corporation. An LLC is a business structure allowed by state statute.

**Small Farms or Mid-sized Farms:**

Small farms are defined as farms or ranches with less than \$350,000 in annual agricultural sales. Mid-sized farms are farms or ranches with less than \$999,999 in annual agricultural sales.

**Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Small Business Concern:**

A socially and economically disadvantaged small business concern is one:

1. Which is at least 51 percent owned by (i) an Indian tribe or a native Hawaiian organization or (ii) one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals; and
2. Whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

For purposes of this solicitation, a socially and economically disadvantaged individual is defined as a member of any of the following groups: Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific Americans, Subcontinent Asian Americans, other groups designated from time to time by the Small Business Administration (SBA) to be socially disadvantaged, or any other individual found to be socially and economically disadvantaged by the SBA pursuant to Section 8(a) of the Small Business Act, [15 U.S.C. 637\(a\)](#). Note: The certification of socially and economically disadvantaged small business is for statistical purposes only.

**Subcontract:**

Any agreement, other than one involving an employer-employee relationship, entered into by an awardee of a funding agreement calling for supplies or services for the performance of the original funding agreement.

**Women-owned Small Business Concern:**

A women-owned small business concern is a SBC:

1. Which is at least 51 percent owned by one or more women; and
2. Whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more women. Note: Certification of women-owned small business is for statistical purposes only.