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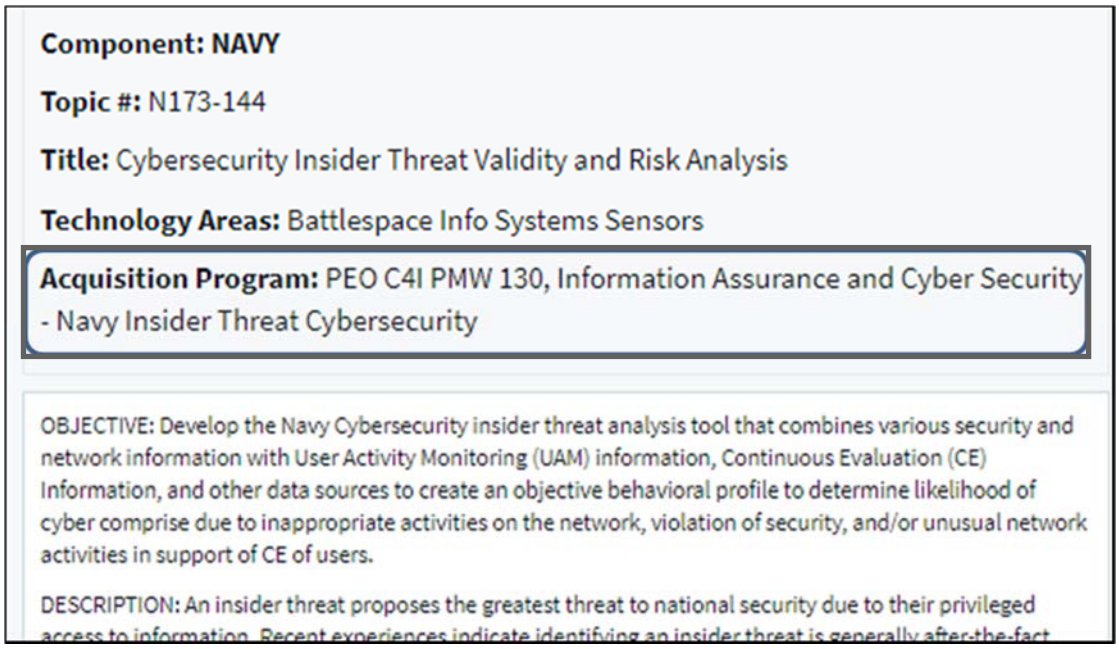
Using the DoD Topic Description to Do Your Homework

If you are interested in winning SBIR/STTR proposals from Department of Defense, you probably know the importance of talking to the Technical Point of Contact (TPOC) or Topic Author during the "open period" before you write your proposal*. You will want to ask any questions or details about the topic itself, and use the discussion as an opportunity to enhance your insight about the Component's' interest in the technology and how they will deploy it for military use.

Before you contact the TPOC, you can use the topic description to do some homework that will make your conversation (and your proposal) more productive. Topic descriptions can be found at https://sbir.defensebusiness.org/ . We'll use Navy topic N173-144 from the 2017.3 SBIR solicitation as an example:



Component: NAVY

Topic #: N173-144

Title: Cybersecurity Insider Threat Validity and Risk Analysis

Technology Areas: Battlespace Info Systems Sensors

Acquisition Program: PEO C4I PMW 130, Information Assurance and Cyber Security - Navy Insider Threat Cybersecurity

OBJECTIVE: Develop the Navy Cybersecurity insider threat analysis tool that combines various security and network information with User Activity Monitoring (UAM) information, Continuous Evaluation (CE) Information, and other data sources to create an objective behavioral profile to determine likelihood of cyber comprise due to inappropriate activities on the network, violation of security, and/or unusual network activities in support of CE of users.

DESCRIPTION: An insider threat proposes the greatest threat to national security due to their privileged access to information. Recent experiences indicate identifying an insider threat is generally after-the-fact

*For those of you who are new to their programs, DoD issues each SBIR and STTR as a PRESOLICITATION with topics listed for each participating component. Potential applicants are given about 30 days to contact the Topic Author directly with any questions or clarifications before the final SOLICITATION is released. From that time until proposals are due, there can be no direct communications with the TPOCs.

(The screen shot above goes on to the Topic Description, Phase I, Phase II, Phase III and Dual Use information, which we have not included here.)

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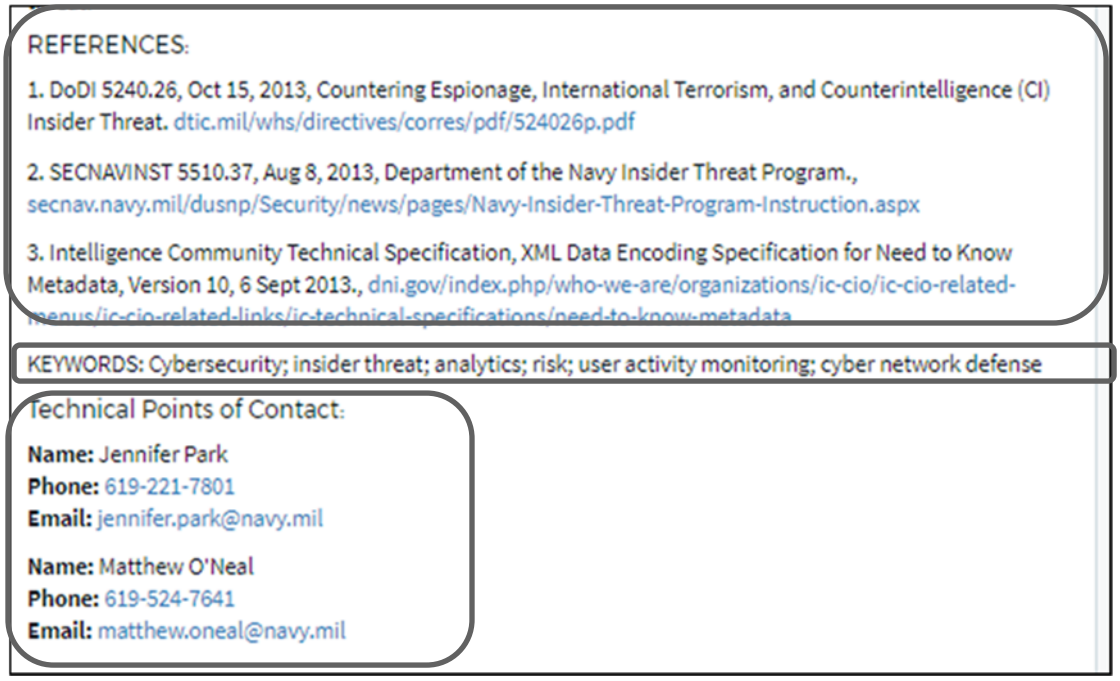

REFERENCES:

1. DoDI 5240.26, Oct 15, 2013, Countering Espionage, International Terrorism, and Counterintelligence (CI) Insider Threat. dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/524026p.pdf

2. SECNAVINST 5510.37, Aug 8, 2013, Department of the Navy Insider Threat Program., secnav.navy.mil/dusnp/Security/news/pages/Navy-Insider-Threat-Program-Instruction.aspx

3. Intelligence Community Technical Specification, XML Data Encoding Specification for Need to Know Metadata, Version 10, 6 Sept 2013., dni.gov/index.php/who-we-are/organizations/ic-cio/ic-cio-related-menus/ic-cio-related-links/ic-technical-specifications/need-to-know-metadata

KEYWORDS: Cybersecurity; insider threat; analytics; risk; user activity monitoring; cyber network defense

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Acquisition Program

There will not be an Acquisition Program designated for every topic, but it can be useful information if your topic includes one. A DoD Acquisition Program is a directed, funded effort that provides a new, improved or continuing materiel, weapon or information system in response to an approved need. Note that it is FUNDED and APPROVED. About half of DoD SBIR/STTR topics should have an Acquisition Program identified.

We recommend that if you are not familiar with the Acquisition Program, simply search the term in Google and see what you can learn. For example, a search for “Navy PEO C41 PMW 130” and “Information Assurance and Cybersecurity” and “Navy Insider Threat Cybersecurity” from the Navy topic uncovered the Program description, Strategic Plan, the PMW 130 Program/Project Listing, PowerPoint presentations describing the program, its platforms and engineering strategy, and a host of additional information. This information will allow you to be more informed and aware of the ultimate target application(s) for your technology before you talk to the TPOC.

References

Obviously you will want to obtain and read all of the references cited in the topic description thoroughly. In addition to important technical information and specifications you’ll need when you write your proposal, you may also glean information about what the component currently uses and what they view as the current state of the art. The Navy topic leads us to a number of DoD Directives and documents necessary to prepare an informed proposal. When technical articles are cited, we recommend using Google Scholar to search for the citations using the title of the article. This will provide not only the article itself, but other articles that cite it. Repeating for the author of the articles located additional related articles, and repeating in standard Google found the author’s LinkedIn information. If the author is employed by a small US business, that company might be a competitor for this topic’s funding.

Key Words

Each topic will list several key words that may help you learn about similar, previously funded projects from DoD. Again, this may be useful information about your competition, applications of your technology and current state of the science. For example, a search done at the DoD SBIR award search site on the keyword “insider threat” from the Navy topic identified 16 awards between 2013 and 2017:

While not all of these awarded projects are likely to be relevant, some may be important sources of information.

In summary, be sure to talk to the Topic Author or TPOC from the appropriate DoD component before you write your SBIR or STTR proposal. Take time to prepare for the discussion using information provided in many of the topics. If you need additional assistance preparing or writing your proposal, feel free to contact BBCetc.