



Why BBCetc?

Recently BBCetc' Sr. Principal Consultant, Andrea Johanson, PhD, had an email exchange describing how we work and our value add. We thought it was a good description and wanted to share it

...I want to give you a little background on why we do things the way we do. BBC has been working with companies submitting NIH SBIR grants for almost 3 decades, and I personally have been at BBC for 11+ years. In a typical year I work with upward of 100 companies to submit SBIR/STTR proposals to the NIH. Many of our clients share their reviews with us, so we get a quite unique window into how the reviewers rate the proposals, what they are looking for, and what they like and don't like.

Our outlines and templates have been developed over many years based on the solicitations themselves, the NIH review criteria, what we have seen in hundreds of Summary Statements, and from a great deal of interaction with the NIH SBIR Program staff. Several of us at BBC have been invited by the NIH to present at NIH National and Regional conferences. I say this not to blow our own trumpet, but to explain that our approach is not coming out of left field. We do things the way we do because it works, and because we have seen hundreds of companies from all over the US be successful, and be awarded tens of millions of dollars of funding using this approach.

Of course our approach is not the only one you can use to succeed. You will find examples of funded proposals on the internet, and they will probably look different to the advice we give. However, when looking at sample proposals, it's important to note that we generally have no idea why that proposal was funded. It may be because the author(s) were NIH rock stars. It may be because the technology is truly ground-breaking. Under those circumstances, even poorly-written proposals can get funded, but copying that format/structure may not be successful for anyone else. BBC's outlines help people to include all of the information that is required in an SBIR, and perhaps more importantly, they help reviewers *easily find the information* they need to review the proposal. The benefits of this cannot be overstated, and many, many NIH reviewers have shared this viewpoint with us. Unfortunately I have seen dozens of proposals written by extremely well respected NIH-funded faculty be unsuccessful in SBIR.

SBIR/STTR is a little different in the NIH world because although it is a research mechanism, it isn't *just* a research mechanism. If you write an R01 or an R21 and submit it as an SBIR it will not be funded. SBIR is focused on product development. One of the review criteria is Commercial Potential and the reviewers look at more than just the science. They also review the company itself, and whether the team and the company has the capability to take a research idea from the bench through the long process of product development, and out to the marketplace. The reviewer pool is made up of MD/PhDs, but in the SBIR/STTR study sections, many of them also have industry and small business experience, and they will comment on a lot more than just the science itself.

Our advice to write for an *educated lay person* has been emphasized over and over by NIH staff and reviewers, and applies more broadly than to SBIR/STTR. It is part of the general advice that the NIH gives to researchers. One of the reasons for this is that the reviewer pool for any one proposal is broad, and the chances of you having reviewers that are intimately aware of the minutiae of what you do is fairly small. But reviewers are always grateful if you give them enough background and context for them to understand your proposal. Making reviewers work too hard is never a great idea! The easier you can make it for them, the better. One of the best quotes I have seen from a veteran NIH reviewer is that "you should assume that your audience is uninformed but infinitely intelligent." ...