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How do I know if NIH is interested in funding my project?

The Sept. 5 deadline has passed but Jan. 5 now looms, so exactly how do you go about assessing if your project will interest the National Institutes of Health (NIH)?

The NIH is one of the 'easier' federal agencies to apply to because every year it issues an **Omnibus Solicitation**, requesting investigator-initiated topics. This means that rather than issuing a call for specific topics, the NIH asks *you*, the investigator, to come up with the ideas. If these ideas are related to Human Health, have the requisite level of Technological Innovation and Commercial Potential, they may be appropriate for SBIR/STTR.

However, you still need to do some homework to make sure your idea fits within the research interests of the NIH's Institutes and Centers. Each NIH Institute has its own independent budget and areas of interest, and it is the institutes that will ultimately fund your project. So before you put a lot of work into developing your proposal, it's important to do some background research to 'find a home' for your project. There are a few ways you can do this:

1. **Search NIH's RePORTER Database**
RePORTER is an online searchable database tool that allows users to search all previously and currently NIH-funded research projects. You can use keywords to search for projects, view their abstracts, and determine whether NIH has previously-funded projects in your research area, and which NIH Institutes might be most likely to fund particular projects.

You can use the drop-down menus to restrict your search by funding mechanism (e.g. SBIR/STTR or other NIH funding mechanism such as R01, R21 etc.), by state, by year, by Principal Investigator etc. Identify the Institutes and Centers that funded projects (both Phase I and Phase II) in your area.

2. **Check in the SBIR/STTR Program Descriptions and Research Topics Document**
Another good place to start is to look at the 2018 SBIR/STTR 'Program Descriptions and Research Topics'. This can be downloaded as a pdf or Word document from here. The document lists all of the Institutes and Centers at NIH and outlines their areas of interest. It also gives the **contact details** for all of the program staff in each institute.

3. **Speak with Program Staff at NIH**
Once you think you have identified an Institute within the NIH that might be appropriate for your research idea, you should contact the relevant Program Staff to discuss your idea. NIH strongly encourages you to do this. Some Institutes have several program staff responsible for different areas, so make sure you find the one most appropriate for your project. We recommend that you first send an email to the program staff listed and ask to follow up with a phone call. Ideally you should send them a draft of your one-page Specific Aims document. *Resist the urge to send PowerPoint decks and other larger documents!*

If your proposal might be a possible fit in more than one NIH institute, (e.g. an intervention for children with asthma might equally fit within the National Institute for Heart, Lung and Blood, and the National Institute for Child Health and Development), you can contact program staff from both Institutes.

Other things to ask the Program Staff while you have them on the phone are:
- If your project idea fits with the *goals* of the Institute.
- Whether the *scope* of your Phase I and Phase II aims are appropriate for SBIR/STTR
- Whether your project falls under a category that allows you to EXCEED the Phase I and Phase II caps ($225K and $1.5M). Budget waivers for some project areas are listed in this document.

If you haven't done this already, we encourage you to contact a Program Director. They are there to help you. We recommend that no one submit an SBIR to the NIH without first speaking to the relevant NIH Program staff.