



Letters of Commitment for Your SBIR/STTR Proposal

As you prepare your NIH proposal, don't forget to leave plenty of time to request letters of support from any consultants, collaborators and other partners who will be included on your SBIR/STTR project. Although these are called Letters of Support, you should instead consider them to be Letters of Commitment. Think of them as IOUs from your collaborators to the company, and as such, they should always be addressed to the Principal Investigator (PI) on the project or the Business Official at the company, and not to NIH.

Let's take a look at what goes into these letters:

- A letter from a **Senior/Key person** (including the PI) will need to be included if the person your company is planning to hire is currently employed elsewhere but plans to join the company at the time of award. The letter will state that they will be employed at the applicant company at the time of award and include their anticipated time commitment and role on the project.
- Letters from **Subcontractors** should mention clearly who at the sub-contracting organization is working on the project, clarify their role and time commitment on the project and the overall budget for the sub-contract.
 - These letters must be written by the legal entity at the institution that is allowed to make such commitments on their behalf, e.g., the Office for Sponsored Research, Contracts Office, Dean of Research, etc., they must be on the sub-contracting organization's letterhead.
- Letters from **Consultants** must specify their time commitment, the specific guidance they are providing on the project, and the level of compensation they are requesting.
- Letters from **Commercialization Partners** are typically part of a Phase II proposal. They are provided by potential investors, distributors, strategic partners, prospective customers, potential licensees, etc. These letters must be "tangible," i.e., demonstrate a market need and clear commercial path for the product being developed and the company's ability to attract the right resources to carry through to successful commercialization.

It's not a good idea (particularly in a Phase I) to include general letters in support of your technology and your team that contain no specific commitment to the company or the project. We call these "blah blah" letters: *"We think this technology is great, the company is great, and support the project wholeheartedly blah blah blah..."* Reviewers don't want to have to wade through these kinds of letters that cost nothing for their authors to write, and commit nothing to the project. Exceptions to this might be if the author is a leading individual in the field, or a major company to giving you a strong endorsement.

So, while a tangible commitment of personnel, finances, resources and partnerships is definitely helpful, generic excitement on a revolutionary technology is not as persuasive. Before you include a letter, ask yourself: *"Will this really sway the reviewers toward supporting my project?"*

And remember that it takes time to assemble your letters, so start early!