## United States Air Force (USAF) Open Topics SBIR/STTR Quick-Start Guide

This quick-start guide has been designed to get you started with a USAF Open Topics SBIR/STTR proposal package.

The Open Topics are an effort by the Air Force to open the innovation and procurement pipeline, and are intended to reduce the barriers for small businesses and leverage new methods of doing business. Unlike traditional topic areas, open innovation topics allow for commercial products to enter the defense ecosystem under the SBIR program, carry a shorter (30 day) award notification, are streamlined to a two-month technical and one month reporting program, and have a $75K award. These efforts are all aligned towards the goal of boosting commercialization rates of awardees and speeding up the technology transfer process, so that the government can operate at the speed of innovation.

As USAF Open Topics still fall under the SBIR/STTR programs, you will need the following registrations. It is important that you complete these registrations as soon as possible, as some can take up to 14 days to issue, and not having these in place can impact your ability to submit a proposal. Please reach out to the NM FAST team if you need assistance with any of these registrations.

1. **SAM:** The System for Award Management, or SAM, is the first registration to complete in terms of priority. There are a few steps to getting your SAM registration in place. The first one is that you must create a Login.gov account, which you will be prompted to do when you click the registration link below. If you have never registered your business, you will also create a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) during this process; if you have already registered with the government, you will be able to transition your DUNS into a UEI, or it is already available to you in a SAM registration. While the digital portion of this registration can take up to an hour, as it requires quite a few markers for your business, including your foundation date, points of contact (which can all be the same person), and your ACH banking information, the information you input will go through a series of government checks. It is not unheard for it to be a four to six week process. Please plan accordingly. https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration. The following video walks you through this process: https://youtu.be/0uv1YNAsINk?si=tle7IuW_0WA2mS0G.
2. **SBC Control ID**: This registration is required by the Small Business Administration (SBA), which coordinates the SBIR/STTR programs. You have to have your UEI, at minimum, to complete this registration. https://www.sbir.gov/registration
3. **DoD SBIR/STTR Web Portal:** This is the submission site for DoD and where you will submit questions related to a specific topic. https://sbir.defensebusiness.org/

Open Topics also follow the two pre-submission periods that other SBIR/STTR DoD components follow.

The first is the period from "Pre-Release" to "Open." During this period, business concerns are free to contact the technical authors for clarification on topic areas, additional guidance on the sought solution parameters, and other technical aspects for answering the DoD's need on a particular area. This period lasts roughly 30 days.

The second is the period from "Open" to "Close." During this period, business concerns cannot directly contact the topic authors, and will instead need to submit any technical questions through SITIS, the SBIR Interactive Topic Information System. You should familiarize yourself with SITIS as soon as possible, as there is a wealth of "need-to-know" information posted to this site. Any question you post on SITIS will be public, along with the answer (your name/company will remain unanimous). This period lasts roughly 30

days. You can access the SITIS website at (https://sbir.defensebusiness.org/topics) – please note, access is limited until the pre-release opens.

The following are some action items and next steps for you to complete as you start your SBIR package.

1. **Customer Discovery** – Part of your Phase I proposal package requires you to specify a specific defense end user for your innovative product. Rather than having a vague idea on who your potential customer is, you must accurately describe the problem that you believe they have that your innovation can solve, and how you can solve that problem. While you do not need to have worked with or spoken with this person before, you do have to provide exacting information on what they need and why they need it. Because this requires a lot of detail, and is a prime component of your proposal, performing an initial customer search is highly recommended. AFWERX maintains a list of focus areas and Air Force user needs on their website (https://www.afwerx.af.mil/sbir.html), so that is a good place to start your search. In the outreach, you should contact the designated technical POC and find out more about their specific "pain points".

2. **Budget** – Open Topics carry a smaller budget to match the shorter work schedule (maximum of $75,000 for a Phase I). Since part of the proposed work will be to travel and meet with your potential Air Force customer, find out more about their need, and receive baseline information on how to tweak your innovation to fit their needs, you must budget carefully for your project. In creating your budget, after you have located your possible customer in your pre-work on customer discovery, plan multiple trips to their site during the two month technical period. You can use the GSA travel site (https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates) to find allowances for per diem and hotel rates for most areas of the country.

The NM FAST team has a suite of resources (e.g. YouTube instructional videos, check-lists, compliance matrices, etc.) available for use in proposal creation that can be found on our Resources page (https://arrowheadcenter.nmsu.edu/program/nm-fast/nm-fast-resources/). Please reach out to Dana Catron (dderego@nmsu.edu) for more information, or to receive a digital copy of this print-out.

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