Small Business Research Assistance Services

Request for Proposals

Last updated January 19, 2024

Version History

January 12, 2024   Original

January 16, 2024   Updated contact information for questions

January 19, 2024   Updated instructions for letters of reference and collaboration

Background

The State of Oklahoma, in alignment with its commitment to fostering an innovative economy, has established funding to deliver the Small Business Research Assistance (SBRA) Service. This initiative is designed to increase the participation and success rate of Oklahoma-based companies in securing federal funds offered through the America's Seed Fund specifically for the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs. According to the Congressional Research Service report (R43695), in FY2019, federal agencies made 178,731 awards totaling more than $54.6 billion all intended to increase the participation of small innovative companies in federally funded research and development (Administered by the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST), SBRA Service is a strategic effort to enhance technological entrepreneurship and innovation across the state.

The RFP seeks service provider(s) to operationalize and manage the SBRA Service, including trainings and programs to improve the quality of proposals through proposal development workshops, external expert proposal reviews, client referrals, collaboration building and partnership with commercialization support services. The program also seeks to offer companies guidance in accessing additional OCAST support and other resources as appropriate to their respective stage of development.

This contract will span up to three years and will be awarded at up to $275,000 annually.

The offerings provided through Small Business Assistance Services are set out in existing state statutes and include but are not limited to the following:

§74-5060.19. Award of Professional Service Contracts

D. The Center is directed to develop a small business innovation research (SBIR) matching support program which meets the highest current standards for state matching support to federal SBIR program grants. The Center shall also develop and implement a program to financially support the preparation of SBIR grant proposals by Oklahoma entities…

Added by Laws 1987, c. 222, § 34, operative July 1, 1987. Amended by Laws 1995, c. 279, § 7, eff. July 1, 1995.

Purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP)

This RFP is intended for informational purposes and reflects current planning. It does not obligate OCAST to make any specific number of awards. In addition, awards are contingent upon the availability of funds. If there is any inconsistency between the information contained in this RFP and the terms of any resulting contract, the terms of the contract are controlling.

This RFP may be amended by OCAST. Should amendments be made they will be posted on OCAST's website: http://OCAST.ok.gov. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to seek out and review any such amendments and make necessary changes in their application to meet the amended RFP requirements.

Scope of Services

The selected service provider will deliver a comprehensive suite of services to increase the participation and success rate of Oklahoma-based companies in securing SBIR and STTR funds with a focus on the following key areas:

SBIR/STTR Application Support:
- Assistance with identifying application opportunities and working with the topic authors.
- Introduction to the SBIR/STTR topic author(s) at the Oklahoma City Air Force Sustainment Center, Tinker AFB.
- Guidance on application processes, proposal writing, and compliance requirements.

Research Collaboration and Commercialization:
- Assistance in translating research into marketable products and services in Phase I, II and III of the federal program.

Training, Workshops and Networking:
- Specialized training sessions on various aspects of SBIR/STTR programs, application development and commercialization strategies.
- Events and forums to connect with potential collaborators, industry partners, and funding sources.
- Update of the current trends, issues and red flags in the participating federal programs.

Mentorship and Expert Guidance:
- Access to a network of experts for advice on business development, technical challenges, and market strategies including investment capital.

Statewide Outreach:
- Regional Engagement: Launch initiatives targeting underrepresented regions of the state to ensure equitable access to commercialization services and financing.
- Community Programs: Collaborate with local governments, economic development groups, and community organizations to tailor services that meet the unique needs of different regions.

Marketing and Promotion:
- Strategies to promote awareness of SBIR/STTR opportunities and successes within the Oklahoma business community.
- Brand and Co-Branding Strategy: Develop a strong and cohesive brand identity for OCAST's Small Business Research Assistance Services ensuring that it is effectively integrated with co-branding elements that represent a partnership between the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST) and the selected service provider(s). This strategy should emphasize the collaborative nature of the SBRA Service, highlighting the combined expertise and resources that OCAST and the service provider(s) bring to the table, and should be consistently applied across all marketing materials and campaigns to reinforce the unity and shared vision of the initiative.
- Success Stories: Showcase client achievements through case studies, press releases, and media campaigns to highlight the center's impact. Note: press releases, success stories, case studies and any other media information must be approved by OCAST prior to release.
- Digital Presence: Leverage social media, content marketing, and online platforms to reach a broader audience and engage with the tech ecosystem.

Performance Measurement:
- Impact Analysis: Establish metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs), in coordination with OCAST, based on technology based economic development standards to evaluate program effectiveness and impact on participants' success in securing SBIR/STTR funding.
- Continuous Improvement: Implement feedback mechanisms to continuously refine services based on client needs, results from focus groups of experienced business leaders and demonstrable market demands.
- Reporting and Accountability: Provide at least quarterly, detailed reports to stakeholders on progress, outcomes, and financial stewardship. These quarterly reports will include a discussion of gaps discovered in successful application to programs and solutions implemented or being considered to overcome those gaps.

Strategic Plan Support:
- Engagement with policymakers to enhance the SBIR/STTR ecosystem in Oklahoma
- Strategic Alignment: Ensure that all activities are in line with the state's science and innovation strategic plan and contribute to the overarching goals of economic growth and diversification.
- Policy Input: Offer insights and recommendations to update and evolve the state's and OCAST's strategic plans based on emerging trends and industry shifts.

- Long-Term Visioning: Participate in the state's long-term planning processes to forecast technology trends and prepare the ecosystem for future opportunities.

The SBRA is expected to become an integral program supporting Oklahoma's innovation landscape, driving access to federal, non-dilutive funds.

Eligibility Criteria
Applicants must demonstrate:
- Applicant must have been registered to do business in Oklahoma for at least one year at the time the application is submitted.
- A proven track record in assisting with securing SBIR/STTR funds, or show key personnel and partners have proven track record.
- Financial stability and the capacity to manage a budget of $275,000 annually.
- Experience in securing funding from diverse sources in support of startup and existing Oklahoma based companies and manufacturers.
- Extensive knowledge of the Oklahoma entrepreneurial ecosystem, or the ability to rapidly acquire such knowledge.
- Ability to create and implement effective marketing strategies.

Proposal Submission
Proposals submitted in response to this RFP must be comprehensive and provide a clear understanding of how the service provider will fulfill the requirements outlined in the Scope of Services. The following components must be included in the proposal:

Executive Summary (maximum of two pages):
- Overview: Concise summary of the proposal, highlighting the provider's experience, unique value proposition and alignment with the SBRA's objectives.
- High level budget outline and justification.

Detailed Approach (maximum of five pages):
- Service Delivery Plan: A step-by-step plan detailing how the service provider will execute each aspect of the Scope of Services, including who will deliver services. Include resumes of these individuals (resumes are not included in the five-page limit).
- Innovation Strategies: Description of innovative practices or tools that will be utilized to enhance service delivery and program outcomes, in both urban and rural parts of the state.

Annual Budget Breakdown (maximum of two pages):
- Yearly Financial Projections: A detailed annual budget for each of the five years, showing planned expenditures, projected revenues, and allocation of the $275,000 annual funding.
- Cost Justification: Rationale for budget allocations and explanations of cost-efficiency measures including number of entrepreneurs and unique businesses served through each program offering.
- Please outline areas and costs associated with or where other partners (if to be employed in service delivery) will be compensated to deliver SBRA services.

Funding Success (maximum of three pages):
- Funding Track Record: Evidence of the applicant's and their partners' (if involved in delivery of services) success in securing outside funding, including grants, investments, and other financial supports.
- Financial Acumen: Demonstrated ability to manage and leverage funds effectively to achieve program objectives and sustain operations.

Program Delivery Success (maximum of three pages):
- Performance Metrics: Documentation of the applicant's current success in delivering program objectives, including tangible outcomes and performance metrics.
- Projected impact numbers: detailed list of projected impact numbers by program or service delivery area.
- Case Studies: Specific examples or case studies that illustrate the applicant's success in fostering technology commercialization and innovation.

Partnership Success (maximum of three pages):
- Partnership Profiles: Detailed information on comprehensive partnerships the applicant has built, including the roles and contributions of each partner to past initiatives.
- Network Utilization: Examples of how these partnerships have been leveraged to achieve desired outcomes and deliver value to clients.
- Access to international partners and markets a preference.

Key Personnel (no limit to key personnel, limit of two pages on team structure):
- Staff Profiles: Resumes of key personnel who will be involved in the project, including their qualifications, experience, and relevant successes.
- Team Structure: An organizational chart showing the team structure, roles, and lines of communication.

Letters of Reference (no limit on collaboration letters, max limit of seven endorsements):

- Collaboration Details: Letters from proposed partners and collaborators detailing the programs on which they will collaborate and the services they will offer, including any commitments or agreements in principle.
- Letters of Reference: Letters from stakeholders or previous clients endorsing the applicant's capability and reliability in delivering similar services.
- ==Please address the collaboration and reference letters to *Jennifer McGrail*. These need to be included in the application package. Please note that there is a difference between collaboration letters and reference letters as well as their count towards the page limits on the responses.==

Submission Instructions:

- Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF document.
- Main proposal shall be no more than 20 pages. Each proposal shall include an appendix with the resumes of key personnel, collaboration letters, and no more than seven endorsement letters.
- All proposals must be complete and received by the stipulated deadline to be considered.
- OCAST reserves the right to come back to applicants with clarifying questions from evaluators and could require applicants to participate in a question-and-answer session with evaluators if deemed necessary.

OCAST is committed to a transparent and competitive selection process to ensure that the most capable service provider is chosen to help increase the number of Oklahoma companies securing SBIR/STTR funds. We look forward to reviewing detailed proposals with contracted external experts that demonstrate the ability to deliver a high return on investment and substantial economic impact for the state.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated in no particular order based on:

- Approach to service delivery.
- Demonstrated understanding of how the SBIR/STTR programs function.
- Prior experience and success rate.
- Quality and extensiveness of partnership networks.
- Innovative strategies for funding acquisition for Phase III and beyond.
- Marketing and outreach plans.
- ROI on all program offerings (including but not limited to number of founders served, unique programs offered, trainings offered, number of consultations.)
  - All key terms used by the applicant must be defined, for example what constitutes a consultation, etc.

- Matching funds and/or in-kind support to broaden impact of program offerings.
- Alignment with Oklahoma's Science and Innovation Strategic Plan.
- Demonstrated knowledge of Oklahoma's ecosystem or a detailed plan to acquire such knowledge.

Evaluation Process:
- Proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee of external contracted experts, and applicants may be invited for a presentation or interview.
- The selection process will include a thorough review of all materials provided, and applicants may be asked to furnish additional information if necessary.

Submission Deadline

The application will open January 12, 2024, and close February 12, 2024, 5:00 PM CST. All proposals must be submitted electronically by to OCAST-SBRA-RFP@ocast.ok.gov.

No applications will be accepted after this stated deadline for any reason. After this deadline will be a blackout period and OCAST staff will be unable to communicate about your application.

Contact Information

All questions must be received in writing and will be answered in writing through an updated RFP, please contact:

Kristina Wadley, Associate Director of Program

OCAST-SBRA-RFP@ocast.ok.gov

Terms and Conditions

The contract will be eligible for renewal annually, for a period of up to three years, subject to annual reviews, availability of funds, and approval of the OSTRaD Board. The State of Oklahoma reserves the right to reject all proposals. OCAST additionally reserves the right to accept only partial portions of proposals and combine them with the services of other proposals.

After award announcement, Provider(s) will complete a background review. Once the background review is completed, OCAST will execute a Professional Services Contract. Funds will be dispersed through a yearly contract, which will be a cost-reimbursable contract between OCAST and the selected provider(s), subrecipient(s). Providers are required to submit a detailed budget as part of their professional services contractual agreement itemizing salaries, benefits, travel, supplies/materials, and other costs associated with the proposed program plan.

Providers must be registered with the State of Oklahoma Supplier Portal located at https://oklahoma.gov/omes/divisions/central-purchasing/vendors-and-payees/supplier-

portal/supplier-portal-signin.html in order to receive funds– but need not be registered at the time of application to be considered eligible for an award.

This RFP represents a significant commitment by the State of Oklahoma to advance its technological capabilities and innovation landscape. We look forward to receiving detailed proposals that demonstrate an understanding of our objectives and the ability to deliver results.