



# FEDERAL R&D FUNDING: IT'S OUT THERE- GO GET IT!

by J. Eric Whytsell

In today's turbulent economic times, many organizations and individuals find it harder than ever to secure sufficient funding for vital research and development efforts.

If you're in this situation, don't forget about the United States government. Federal agencies have historically been a significant source of R&D funding in a wide range of fields. And, despite the recently proposed spending "freeze," the government will continue to make substantial R&D money available for the foreseeable future – through both contracts and grants. In fact, the FY 2010 budget contains over \$150 billion for R&D.

Federal funding comes with strings attached – and you certainly need to decide whether you can live with those conditions before you sign on the dotted line, but that determination can only be made in the context of a specific opportunity. But before you can concentrate on the fine print, you need to find a contract or grant that fits the R&D you want to conduct. The process entails a lot of hard work, but it can be boiled down to a few simple steps.

## 1. KNOW YOURSELF

Your search for government money should begin with an honest and realistic self assessment of what you have to offer. What type of research do you want to conduct? What do you want to develop? Why would the government be interested in funding your efforts? Armed with these answers, you can begin to identify the agencies and programs whose needs are most likely aligned with your capabilities and interests.

## 2. LEARN WHO'S FUNDING WHAT

The federal government works hard to publicize both contract and grant opportunities. All federal agencies post contracting solicitations on the Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps) website at [www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov). Similarly, the Grants.gov site gathers grant opportunities from around the federal government at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Both sites offer a comprehensive listing of potential funding opportunities that is fully searchable by agency, subject matter and funding type. Be careful not to unduly restrict your search to specific agencies; you might be surprised at which agencies (including many that you've never heard of) are funding what projects.

If you find an interesting opportunity on one of these sites, you should certainly consider submitting a response after studying the details and assessing the risks. However, if you first learn about a specific contract solicitation or grant announcement through FedBizOpps or Grants.gov, you may already be too late to have a reasonable shot at an award. These sites serve as one-stop portals for essential information like contract solicitation and grant announcement documents and proposal and application guidelines. Grants.gov even provides a web-based means of submitting a grant application. But such resources become valuable relatively late in the game. More important in the earlier stages of your search is an understanding of what sorts of efforts are being funded by which agencies.

FedBizOpps and Grants.gov provide a general overview for the agencies' priorities, but you will have to look

elsewhere to obtain more timely information about upcoming government funding opportunities.

### 3. TALK TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The best and most useful sources for information concerning an agency's plans and how you might fit into them are usually the agency's contracting and grant personnel. While applicable laws generally prohibit them from speaking with you about specific procurement or grant activities already underway, agency personnel are usually happy to meet with you to discuss opportunities on the horizon.

As the people responsible for selecting the organizations and individuals best suited to support the agency's goals through the performance of contracts and grants, these personnel have a natural interest in learning about the capabilities and interests of a wide variety of potential contractors/grantees. This is because federal law reflects the belief that the greater the competition between qualified parties for a particular opportunity, the better results for the government.

Take advantage of this dynamic by seeking out and meeting with contracts and grants personnel at the agencies you've identified. You can make first contact at industry forums or conferences, but your efforts should include a one-to-one meeting at some point. Explain what you do and what you want to do and describe the type of support you are seeking. If the right people in the right agencies know who you are and what you are offering, they should make sure you know about upcoming opportunities for which you are qualified.

### 4. DO YOUR HOMEWORK FIRST

Careful preparation before meeting with the agency can greatly improve your chances of success. Driven by a belief in transparency and the power of competition, federal agency websites usually contain vast amounts of data about their mission, priorities and ongoing work they are funding. Use that information to ensure your meeting focuses on what is most important to the agency – and why you are well qualified to meet the agency's future needs.

More and more, agencies also maintain sites that forecast upcoming opportunities before they appear on FedBizOpps or Grants.gov. These can be a treasure-trove of useful information. For example, the Department of Energy now provides forecast information regarding certain future prime contracting opportunities and subcontracting opportunities via the Department's major site and facilities management contractors at <http://hqlnc.doe.gov/support/SmallBusUtil.nsf/>. The Department of Homeland Security maintains a searchable department-wide forecast of upcoming contract and grant opportunities at <http://www.fido.gov/dhs/aap/>

[publicviewsb.asp](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/contract/find/forecast.html). The Department of Education maintains a similarly comprehensive contract forecast site at <http://www2.ed.gov/fund/contract/find/forecast.html>. The State Department's annual forecast of small business contract opportunities is available for download at <http://www.state.gov/m/a/sdbu/pubs/c33080.htm>. And the Department of Commerce is working to develop a similar small business opportunities forecast site at <http://www.osec.doc.gov/osdbu/Forecast.htm>.

Depending on the nature of the R&D you wish to pursue, the Department of Defense's "New Idea Portal" at <http://www.defensesolutions.gov/index.html> may offer a way to submit potential solutions to DoD needs and receive an initial response within 30 days. Although the site is currently limited to one subject matter area – battlefield forensics – new themes will be added.

This general approach is similar to the Broad Area Announcements (BAAs) used by DoD and other agencies to solicit R&D proposals relating to general subject matter areas in which the agency is interested. These BAAs essentially operate as standing solicitations that may remain open for a number of years. One current Army BAA identifies 10 separate areas of basic and applied scientific research that the Army is interested in funding: <http://www.arl.army.mil/www/DownloadedInternetPages/CurrentPages/DoingBusinesswithARL/research/07-r-0003-03.pdf>.

Knowing what the agency is most interested in is half the battle.

### 5. REPEAT

Some meetings with agency personnel pay off almost immediately; other efforts take longer to ripen. In any event, take the long view. Build relationships with the agencies you've strategically identified and maintain regular, ongoing communication with them in order to stay on their radar screen and informed about their plans for the future. ⚙️

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