



TUTORIAL 15

Drafting the First Section of the Project Narrative

THE FIRST SECTION

The Project Narrative is the heart of the Application Package and therefore requires substantial thought, consideration, and time in its development. As noted in Tutorial 6, we recommend that you start working on the project narrative, as soon as you have down selected a topic and subtopic pair that appears to be a good match with your skills. The outline for the Project Narrative is always contained in the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) and rarely changes from one solicitation to the next. Therefore, after the Cover page, the first section that you will address is “The Identification and Significance of the Problem

or Opportunity, and Technical Approach.” DOE’s guidelines for this section indicate that you should do the following:

“Define the specific technical problem or opportunity addressed by your application. Provide enough background information so that the importance of the problem/opportunity is clear. Indicate the overall technical approach to the problem/opportunity and the part that the proposed research plays in providing needed results.”



THE PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY

As you can see, there are two major parts to this section: First, a discussion of the problem or opportunity and Second: a discussion of the technical approach you have decided to take. It's fine to use subheadings in this section to differentiate between these two parts. However, before you begin writing this section it is imperative that you spend time thoroughly analyzing the guidance that DOE has provided regarding both the Topic and Subtopic to which you are responding. DOE makes it very clear in the Topics document that once you select a subtopic to which you wish to respond, you must also address any of the requirements in the associated topic, as well.

Before you write this section carefully read all the details provided in the Topic and subtopic description. There must be synergy between your interests and DOE's needs.

In other words, there must be synergy between your interests and the needs specified by the Department of Energy. Small businesses who have never submitted an SBIR/STTR proposal before may be inclined to propose a problem that is quite tangential to the topic or subtopic that DOE has presented. However, there must be a match between what the small business proposes, and the needs identified by DOE. If you have not taken the opportunity to speak with the topic manager yet, please review Tutorial 5 on how to speak with a topic manager and make sure that you call him or her to assure that you thoroughly understand DOE's need.

DISCUSSION OF THE TECHNICAL APPROACH

The second part of this section is where the applicant presents their technical approach. This is the only part of the Project Narrative where the technical approach is discussed – so assure that the approach you plan to take is clearly presented. If you have conducted preliminary research that lays the foundation for the approach that you propose, this is appropriate to mention in this section. More importantly this is where you must also clarify what will be gained from funding your approach as opposed to an alternative. In other words, it is important to clearly identify the benefit that will accrue to DOE because of funding what you

propose. This is accomplished by clarifying how your method will advance or address the identified topic/subtopic pair. It is inappropriate to have this section be nothing more than a list of features of what you have already accomplished. Keep in mind that you will discuss the objectives and specific tasks to be undertaken in subsequent sections. Therefore, the discussion of the technical approach should provide a general overview of the methods you will use, the expected outcomes, and the benefit to your immediate R&D customer. Applicants may find it easiest to separate the technical discussion into the following subsections:

In the Technical section provide a general overview of the methods you will use, the expected outcomes, and the benefit to your immediate R&D customer.

- » Current methods used to address problem
- » [Company name]'s Technical Approach

TAKE THE TIME TO PREPARE THIS SECTION WELL

Preparing and writing this section often takes the most time – as it is the cornerstone for everything else that follows. It is recommended that you have a service provider review your draft of this section – as it is important that this section be prepared well. The discussion of the technical problem or opportunity should be presented in a scholarly fashion, so that statements made regarding the problem are substantiated. Figures and tables are often used by proposers in the technical section to help make their explanation come alive. As a benchmark, the average length of “The Identification and Significance of the Problem or Opportunity, and Technical Approach” in winning proposals is three pages.

It is best to have the project narrative reviewed in stages, rather than just at the end. Be sure to seek a service provider who can assist with this. See Tutorial 9 for guidance.