



# TUTORIAL 23

## Securing Letters of Support

Agencies differ in the value that they and their reviewers place upon Letters of Support that a company may secure and include with their proposals. However, such letters are useful and demonstrate your willingness and ability to network. A letter of support is rarely a commitment of funds – however, in some cases it may include a commitment. An example of this situation is when a state organization in addition to endorsing the importance of the work also indicates that it will provide matching funds if the company secures an SBIR/STTR award. More commonly, a letter of support is either an endorsement for the proposed work OR an offer to provide facilities or data. Let's discuss each of these.

Endorsements are helpful if they come from well-known individuals in the field – that is an industry expert who can attest to the significance of the problem and/or the

potential value of the approach proposed by the small business. The industry expert could be an academic or a key player in the target market. For the letter of support to have genuine value it should be from an individual or an organization with name recognition.

**Letters of Support must be on letterhead and signed by the individual providing the letter.**

Another type of support that an organization can provide is the use of their facilities at no cost for either the company or a third party to conduct a test. Related support is the provision of a data set or a coupon that can be used for testing. As with an endorsement letter of support, if the individual or organization is well known, such a letter will catch the reviewer's attention. More importantly, efforts to secure such letters demonstrate that the company is exhibiting some of the behavior that are essential for relationship building – which is essential for successful commercialization.



## Sources for Potential Letters of Support



**Academia**



**Federal Labs**



**Industry**

### HOW TO SECURE A LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM ACADEMIA

Most individuals looking to secure a meaningful letter of support do not already have a relationship with the individual they are approaching. Therefore, the first question is how do you decide who to approach? There are various paths depending on whether the person is from academia, industry, or a federal lab.

Let's assume that you wish to receive a letter of support from a well-known individual in academia. If you are not already intimately familiar with the literature, you could use Google Scholar as a starting point. It's easy to navigate to this site by simply typing in "Google Scholar" in your browser. Let's assume that you want to find the leading researchers working with battery separators for lithium ion batteries. Search for the phrase "battery separators for lithium ion batteries"; then sort the results by relevance and determine whose work is cited most frequently. Proceeding in this fashion you can find the names of individuals that you may wish to approach to request a letter of support. In reaching out to the individual, be sure to indicate why you are contacting them and what it is that you want. You will also need to divulge some information about what you are doing so that they can assess whether they believe that your work is innovative.


**Google Scholar is a good resource for finding relevant and well-known individuals in academia.**

Unless you are willing to share some information, you should not pursue this path. However, the nature of the information that you share should be limited to a clarification of the problem you are tackling and what it is you are trying to ascertain. If you have already written your public abstract – it is suggested that you excerpt information from that. You don't need to divulge

technical details regarding what you are doing – but be prepared for the fact that they may ask. A sample introductory e-mail is included in the tools section of this Tutorial.

### HOW TO SECURE A LETTER OF INTENT FROM INDUSTRY

The approach to industry would be different and more circumspect. It is wise to consider reaching out to industry as a step in the process of developing a relationship with a potential licensee or partner. If possible, we would recommend attending conferences where companies in which you have a potential interest are making presentations. Listen to their presentations and then follow up at the conference with questions or contact them afterwards and begin to develop a relationship.



**Consider attending relevant conferences and networking with companies of interest.**

So how do you know which conferences players of interest to you may be attending? It's not as hard as you might think. Most larger companies usually list the conferences that they will be attending on their website. Seek out key conferences and plan to attend. Your mission in attending the conference is to listen to the presenters, learn what they are doing, and assess if you may wish to reach out to them in the future. As it is unlikely that you will find a relevant conference to attend while a Department of Energy (DOE) Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) is open, view this approach as part

**Allow at least six weeks to secure a Letter of Support.**

of a longer-term strategy. If you find a person's work to be of particular interest, be sure to introduce yourself, and provide them with your business card. Later, follow up by email. A sample email is provided in the Tools section of this Tutorial. This sample can be easily modified for your application.

In closing, a final comment. This process takes time, so when looking for an individual who will provide a Letter of Support, be sure to allow at least six weeks to implement this process.