

NSF SBIR Phase I readiness checklist

Work through this before you write. Most declines we see are not bad science, they are missing registrations, an unstated technical risk, or a commercialization section written in the last two days.

BEFORE YOU WRITE ANYTHING

- ☐ SAM.gov registration active with a UEI number (allow 2 to 4 weeks)
- ☐ SBA Company Registry ID obtained
- ☐ Research.gov account created for the submitting official
- ☐ For-profit US company, fewer than 500 employees
- ☐ Majority owned by US citizens or permanent residents
- ☐ Principal Investigator primarily employed by the company at award
- ☐ R&D work will be performed in the United States

PROJECT PITCH (THE REAL GATE)

- ☐ One clear technical innovation stated in a single sentence
- ☐ The hard technical risk named explicitly, not hidden
- ☐ Evidence this is research, not engineering or integration
- ☐ Named target customer and the problem they pay to solve
- ☐ Market size grounded in a bottom-up figure, not a headline TAM
- ☐ No overlap with an existing federal award for the same work

PHASE I FULL PROPOSAL

- ☐ Project Description structured to NSF's required section order
- ☐ Technical objectives written as testable success criteria
- ☐ Task-by-task R&D plan with milestones over 6 to 12 months
- ☐ Commercialization plan with customer discovery evidence
- ☐ Budget justification that ties every line to a task
- ☐ Letters of support from customers or partners, dated and specific
- ☐ Biosketches for PI and senior personnel in the current format
- ☐ Facilities, equipment and other resources documented
- ☐ Subaward or consultant agreements in place if applicable

REVIEWER SANITY CHECK

- ☐ Intellectual merit: is the risk genuinely novel?
- ☐ Broader impacts: societal benefit stated, not implied
- ☐ Team: evidence you can actually execute the plan
- ☐ Plain language: a smart non-specialist can follow page one
- ☐ Every claim either cited, evidenced, or removed

How an NSF reviewer actually reads your submission

- Innovation** Is this a technical unknown, or a known solution applied to a new place?
- Technical risk** State the thing that might not work. Hiding it reads as naivety.
- Feasibility** Can this team hit the milestones in the time and money requested?
- Commercial potential** Evidence of customer pull beats market size every time.
- Broader impacts** Who benefits beyond your cap table, and how do you know?

NOTES

Federal SBIR deadline calendar

Agency dates move. Verified July 28, 2026. Always confirm on the agency page before you plan around them. "Start by" is the date you need to begin to submit something competitive rather than something rushed.

AGENCY	PROGRAM	DEADLINE	START BY
NSF	SBIR/STTR Project Pitch Accepted continuously, invitation issued in about 3 weeks. Required gate before any full proposal, so this is almost always the first move.	Rolling	As soon as ready
NIH	SBIR/STTR standard due date Cycles fall Sep 5, Jan 5, Apr 5. eRA Commons and SAM.gov registration first.	Sep 5, 2026	Jun 27, 2026
USDA	NIFA SBIR Phase I Food science, forestry, rural development, agricultural engineering.	Oct 1, 2026	Aug 6, 2026
DoD	SBIR/STTR BAA cycle Topics release about a month ahead. Use the pre-release Q&A window.	Oct 21, 2026	Sep 9, 2026
NSF	SBIR/STTR Phase I full proposal Invited pitches only. A proper full proposal takes 6 to 8 weeks.	Nov 4, 2026	Sep 9, 2026
NASA	SBIR/STTR Phase I Subtopics publish in the autumn. Subtopic fit matters more than anywhere.	Jan 13, 2027	Nov 18, 2026
DOE	SBIR/STTR Phase I Release 2 Letter of Intent is mandatory and closes weeks before the full proposal.	Feb 8, 2027	Dec 14, 2026

Registration lead times, the thing that kills most first attempts

SAM.gov and UEI	2 to 4 weeks, longer if entity validation is queried
SBA Company Registry	Same day, but needed before you can submit
Research.gov / eRA Commons	Days, but the submitting official must be set up
Grants.gov (DOE, USDA)	Up to a week for role approval

Want us to check your fit before you write?

Book a free consultation with a PhD-level consultant who has written and won NSF, NIH and DOE SBIR submissions. Our team has raised over \$240M for innovative companies. No software, no templates.

grantup.com/contact