SBIR ADVANCE GRANT APPLICATION GUIDELINES – Phase I only
For January 2027 Deadline

Program Overview: The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) created the SBIR Advance SBIR/STTR Matching Grant Program to provide funding, training, and other resources to Wisconsin businesses to advance the commercialization of SBIR/STTR-funded technology and accelerate economic and job creation impact in Wisconsin. SBIR Advance funding is intended to cover company technology commercialization costs that are not allowed by federal SBIR and STTR awards, and that advance business development and the commercialization of the SBIR/STTR-based products**. A central focus of the SBIR Advance Phase I Program is to prepare companies for submission of their SBIR/STTR Phase II proposal Commercialization Plans.**

Key Dates:

Intent to Apply Deadline	January 13, 2027 - Noon
Application Deadline	January 22, 2027 – Noon
Notice of Award	Week of February 8, 2027
Milestone Planning	February 8-12, 2027
Orientation	March 4, 2027
1:1 Intro Sessions	March 4-12, 2027
Learning Meetings	March 18 – June 3, 2027

View last cohort's syllabus for more details.

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Program Details

Points of Contact: For questions about the application process or general questions about the SBIR Advance program, please contact one of the following CTC staff members:

Dr. Todd Strother
CTC Consultant
(608) 890-1015
todd.strother@business.wisconsin.edu

Rob Baranowski
CTC Consultant
(608) 262-2855
Rob.baranowski@business.wisconsin.edu

General Program Description. SBIR Advance is a competitive program, and applications are reviewed and scored based on the requirements outlined in this document. The program utilizes data-driven Lean Startup methodologies as a framework for a defensible commercialization plan required for Phase II proposals. Companies must identify and articulate tangible outcomes that validate business hypotheses or promote commercial success.

Rigorous Program Requires Strong Commercial Team. SBIR Advance Phase I awardees **must enthusiastically** participate in the Lean Startup Program to produce deliverables on tangible outcomes validating business hypotheses. Awardees with strong commercial teams that **diligently participate** in and actively engage in all Lean Startup programming are most successful in developing, refining, and validating their business model which correlates with high success rates for Phase II SBIR/STTR federal awards. Diligent teams participate in all sessions outlined in the course syllabus, complete all homework assignments (readings, videos, other activities), complete and document the required number of discovery interviews, and contact the CTC teaching team often to discuss learnings. Each team member should expect to commit 10-15 hours per week to complete course learning and customer discovery.

SPECIAL NOTE ON LEAN START UP PARTICIPATION:
Teams are REQUIRED to complete at least 55 discovery interviews before **June 3, 2027**. Teams that do not complete the Lean Startup Class including at least 55 interviews will be out of compliance with the program and be excluded from the remaining SBIR Advance payments. Teams that do not intend on enthusiastically completing the Lean Startup program including at least 55 discovery interviews should not apply for the program. **Please consult with the SBIR Advance team (Rob Baranowski or Todd Strother) to discuss the strength of your commercial team and commitment to the Lean Startup program compliance prior to applying for SBIR Advance.**

Program Information

Lean Startup Program: The Lean Startup process is intended to shorten the product development cycle by using an iterative approach to test business and market assumptions with customers, measure results, and validate effects. Previous SBIR Advance awardees have reported important findings during the Lean Startup program that have contributed significantly to their SBIR/STTR Phase II Commercialization Plans and the success of their Phase II applications.

View prior cohort's syllabus for more details.

Lean Startup Resources. Learn more about Lean Startup methods, review the following resources:

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=JjDRNGGsiEk

Books:

1. Ries, Eric (2011). *The Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses*. Crown Publishing.
2. Blank and Dorf (2012). *The Startup Owner's Manual: The Step-By-Step Guide for Building a Great Company*. K&S Ranch.
3. Library of resources listed in the Syllabus

Award Information

Type of Award. A Phase I SBIR Advance Grant provides up to 50% match of the Phase I SBIR budget (with a minimum of $50,000 and a maximum of $75,000), depending on the number and quality of applications and the available funding.

Disbursement of Funds. Payout of SBIR Advance grants is driven by the following factors:

1. Signing the contract and agreed upon business validation deliverables. (e.g. letters of commercial and/or investment interest; validation of key partners; regulatory strategy, intellectual property milestones, or other tangible deliverables articulated in the applicants' SBIR Advance proposal.)
2. Diligent completion of SBIR Advance course programming, which includes:
   - Enthusiastic collection of primary business data through interviews
   - Participating in all sessions outlined in the syllabus.
   - Completing and documenting the required discovery interviews.
   - Scheduling frequent office hours with Lean Startup team to discuss learnings.
3. Submission to CTC of an approved draft commercialization plan.
4. Completion of a company defined business/commercialization activity/milestone NOT associated with the Lean Startup program. This deliverable is based on what the applicant deems as an important milestone critical for the commercial success of the company. Use this Milestone and deliverables template to assist in determining your milestones.
5. A copy of and evidence of successful submission of Phase II SBIR/STTR proposal, and any final reporting requirements to Center for Technology Commercialization (CTC).

Eligible Use of Funds. Applicants will justify appropriate use of tax-payer funds to accelerate commercialization of *the matching SBIR project technology.* SBIR Advance funds can be used to support commercialization costs not covered by federal SBIR/STTR awards. Below is a sample list of potential activities; however, applicants will be required to include and propose their own tangible deliverables as outcomes from these efforts.

- Customer discovery and validation activities. This is typically the most significant use of the Phase I match funding.
- Hiring of business development staff and/or consultants (applicant must be

specific about the work and measurable outcomes to be produced by these team additions). Note the strength of the commercial team and business development expertise is a key review criterion.
- Market research, data subscriptions.
- Intellectual property assessment and patent filing.
- Feasibility assessment.
- Commercialization plan preparation.
- Prototype/MVP development and testing that directly provides customer validation and accelerates commercialization.
- Regulatory assessment and planning.
- Approved travel to meet with customers, partners, licensees, etc.

Eligibility

Companies must meet the following eligibility criteria to apply for the SBIR Advance Phase I Program:

Wisconsin-based Small Business	• Company is registered to do business in Wisconsin (https://www.wdfi.org/), and • >50% of the company employees are Wisconsin residents, and • At least one executive staff member is in Wisconsin at the time of application and throughout the award period, and • Company has both its SAM registration and its SBIR/STTR grant address listed as a Wisconsin address, and • Company maintains its Wisconsin-based small business status for five (5) years after receiving the award. **Failure to do so will constitute an event of default, and the company may be required to return 100% of the total amount of funds disbursed under the SBIR Advance Agreement.**
SBIR/STTR Phase I Award Status	Current or recent Phase I SBIR/STTR Phase I awardees (i.e., recipients that received an award in **October 2025** or thereafter) that are eligible to submit a corresponding Phase II SBIR/STTR proposal and intend to submit it after **June 3, 2027**.
Team for Training Program	Company has identified a commercial team of at least 3 **active** participants including company senior leadership and agrees to participate in all sessions of the Lean Startup Training Program outlined on the course syllabus. Team members will be required to sign or affirm that they will be enthusiastically and actively participating in the sessions and perform the Lean Startup duties. ***NOTE: Phase I match applicants that do not have a strong commercial team will be penalized in the review scoring. It is suggested that all applicants discuss the strength of their***

	commercial team with the SBIR Advance program manager prior to applying.

The following companies are **not eligible** to apply for the SBIR Advance Phase I Program:

- Companies who have a current SBIR Advance award underway or companies that have received an SBIR Advance grant for this Phase I project previously.
- Companies not designated as eligible Wisconsin businesses at the time of application.
- Companies that have a Phase II and Phase I underway, should apply only for the SBIR Advance Phase II Program.
- Companies that previously completed more than three Phase II SBIR/STTR awards in the last five years are not eligible for SBIR Advance matching funds. If your company has completed multiple Phase II SBIR/STTR awards five or more years ago, please contact the SBIR Advance team (p.2) to discuss your eligibility status.

Application & Submission Information

Intent to Apply

Due Date: January 13, 2027 by noon

Grants Management Portal Link

Requirements: Companies that intend to submit a full SBIR Advance proposal must complete the following steps by the designated due date:

1. Create a new account or log-in to an existing account on the CTC **Grants Management Portal** ("the portal") using the link below. https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=uwex
2. Complete the online **Intent to Apply Form** that appears in the portal. You will be asked for basic information about your SBIR/STTR Phase I award, your plans to submit a Phase II, the commercial status of your company, and verification that you are a Wisconsin-based business, as described in the Eligibility section.
3. Upload to the portal, a **PDF copy of the grant award or contract letter** documenting the federal SBIR award. This is the award that the company is applying to match. (Note: Agency communications indicating an SBIR/STTR award is imminent or likely are not enough. **An actual award letter or contract is required**)
4. **All** SBIR Advance team members read and sign the Lean Startup Training & Compliance Form. Upload a PDF of the signed form to the portal.
5. Following submission of the above items, the applicant may be contacted by the SBIR Advance Program Manager to review the applicant's commercial team and eligibility for the Program, as well as verifying the team's enthusiasm for actively participating in the required Lean Startup activities.

Application: Full Proposal

Due Date: January 24, 2027, by noon

Grants Management Portal Link

Confidentiality and Promotion: The SBIR Advance Program will maintain confidentiality of the full details of your application proposal and supporting documents. However, as the program is financially supported by both the State and UW System, CTC may need to release the name/business name and a short description of the business idea for compliance reporting and promotional purposes.

Application Requirements: To submit a full proposal, companies must complete the following steps by the designated due date.

1. Upload to the portal, a **copy of the SBIR/STTR Phase I proposal** that is being leveraged for the SBIR Advance matching funds. Acceptable versions of this document are listed below:
    a. At a minimum, the applicant should provide a single PDF document that includes the Project Summary/Abstract, Research Proposal/Project Description, Project Team Description/Bios, and Facilities Description.
    b. Alternatively, the applicant can provide the entire winning proposal PDF package that was submitted to the SBIR/STTR agency. However, **please do not submit the agency produced Grants Application Package,** which is the dynamic, fillable PDF that embeds your SBIR/STTR documents requiring you to "view attachments" to see specific documents.
2. Complete the online **SBIR Advance Application Form** that appears in the portal. See Table 1 below to become familiar with the information you will be asked to provide.
3. Full proposals (all items listed above) must be submitted through the portal by **noon on January 26, 2027**. **Applications submitted after this time will not be accepted.** For questions on the upload process, please contact Margaret Ramey at margaret.ramey@business.wisconsin.edu or Rob Baranowski at rob.baranowski@business.wisconsin.edu.

Table 1: Information Needed for SBIR Advance Proposal Form

Section	Information Required	Tips
Cover Page (not scored)	• Project title • Company contact info • SBIR Adv team member contact info • A brief introduction to the company and product.	**General**: Use as many of the allowed characters as you can. Reviewers prefer to have more information about your business than less.
Business Thesis and Business Model (Limit: 1500 characters including spaces)	• Business thesis: What customer segment will/does the company sell to, and what value does the company brings to these customers?	The SBIR Advance Program is about the commercial opportunity, not your technology. Avoid technical jargon and acronyms. Be concise and as

Section	Information Required	Tips
	• Business model: How does the company envision making money on the SBIR/STTR funded project? Summarize your current thoughts about revenue streams, cost structure, key partners, key business activities, and go-to-market strategy.	specific as possible. For example: "Hospitals" or "Large Companies" are not specific customers. Think about who specifically in these entities will benefit from and purchase your product.
Need for Tax-Payer Funds and Course Programming Justification (Limit: 2000 characters including spaces)	• Make a case for why it is appropriate and timely to use taxpayer funded SBIR Advance grants for the proposed work to accelerate and commercialize the technology. • Why should the funds come in the form of this grant rather than from a company owner, investors, sales or licensing revenue or some other source? • Make a case for why your company needs the Lean Startup course programming.	Include any funds obtained from other sources and why those funds are insufficient to perform the required activities. If your team has prior Lean Startup experience, list it and describe your specific need for additional development in this area. Include enthusiastic support to perform the Lean Startup activities including at least 55 discovery interviews. Describe why other company funds are not available to do the necessary hypothesis validation.
Use of Funds to Accelerate Commercial Milestones (No character limit)	• Use this milestone template to list one commercial milestone in addition to the Lean Startup Course milestone and tangible deliverables that will be achieved because of the SBIR Advance grant. Provide a description of why these two milestones are important to accelerate commercialization. • If the funds will be used for business development staff or consultants, or C-level business mentors to support the Lean Startup program, please specify the milestones that will be accomplished by retaining this person.	Don't be vague. Milestones that are specific, impactful, and relevant to your company will help your application stand out. It is expected that awardees will spend some of the money on getting interviews and fulfilling the goals of the Lean Startup class. Beyond the Lean Startup class, propose and describe tangible outcomes as metrics of success in validating key business hypotheses
Benefits of Funds & Wisconsin Impact (Limit: 2000	• Clearly show how tax-payer funding will accelerate the commercialization of the	Think beyond increased employment. Applications that make a case for impact on a

Section	Information Required	Tips
characters including spaces)	technology and benefit the company's development. • Describe the expected Wisconsin impact and improvement in an overall Wisconsin economic sector resulting from your company's success from the matching award.	significant Wisconsin economic sector or engage with commercial partners in Wisconsin or demonstrate strong market opportunity fare better than applications that only indicate increased company employment in the state.
Commercialization Team & Project Environment (Limit: 2000 characters including spaces)	• Identify a 3-person team that will participate in the Lean Startup Program. The team will typically consist of the SBIR project Principal Investigator, a C-level/founder, and a business mentor. • Describe team member roles and capabilities to participate in and accomplish the goals of this Program. • Discuss "project environment" factors that are essential for commercial success, such as facilities, advisers, strategic partners, IP status, etc.	Applicants with inadequate commercial team participation in the Lean Startup program will be penalized in the scoring and selection process. If you do not have dedicated staff and advisors to direct business development, consider hiring someone to complement the team using the proposed SBIR Advance funding to provide compensation.
Additional Information (optional; Limit: 1000 chars including spaces)	• Share anything else related to your project that you think reviewers should know.	Do you have an X-factor or comment that will help set you apart?

Review Process, Criteria & Scoring

Review Process:

- Applications will be evaluated by a Review Committee consisting of CTC/WEDC staff and external reviewers who are technology entrepreneurs and investors.
- Applications will be reviewed and scored for compliance with the SBIR Advance requirements as indicated in Table 1 above.
- Scored applications will be discussed during a formal Review meeting during which the merits of the competing applications will be contrasted, ranked, and selected based on the selection criteria.

Selection and Scoring Criteria:

- **Business Thesis and Business Model:** Applicant clearly identifies potential customer

segments and value proposition and expresses reasonable assumptions about potential revenue streams. Applicant touches upon other stand-out elements of its business model, which could include key partners, go-to-market strategy or other relevant factors.

- **Justification for Need for Funds and Course Programming**: Applicant clearly shows why SBIR Advance grant funds are needed to accelerate the commercialization of its technology, i.e. why company, investor funding or sales cannot be used and why it is appropriate to use State tax-payer funds to pay for these expenses. (Phase I Applicants also clearly articulate why the company needs the SBIR Advance Lean Startup course programming and the benefits it envisions gaining from the program work.)
- **Use of Funds to Accelerate Commercial Milestones**: Applicant clearly describes the work to be performed, the expected outcome, how this proposed work accelerates commercialization, and the measurable milestones that will be achieved. How will the funds be used to accomplish (specific milestones) and what is the significance for measurably accelerating commercial milestones? (Phase I Applicants: Does the proposed use of funds confirm the team's commitment to the Lean Startup program, and specifically to conducting the required customer discovery interviews to validate business hypotheses?)
- **Benefits of Match Funding and Wisconsin Impact**: Applicant provides a credible analysis of the benefits of match funding and the impact to the state and economy. What is the significance for Wisconsin and the expected quantified Wisconsin impact including the quantifiable benefits for the company development, growth, and/or investment and Wisconsin impact for job creation, economic and industry cluster advancement, and other impacts? Reviewers will make a judgment on the expected overall impact of funding this project including the potential impact and probability of commercial success.
- **Team and Environment**: Applicant provides a description of the commercial team that will bring the product to market, their qualifications and experience to do so, and their roles and responsibilities for the company and specifically relative to the proposed SBIR Advance program. (For Phase I Match applicants, this criterion will evaluate the commitment to and team plan for the Lean Startup Training, i.e. specify the three team members who will participate in the Lean Startup Program.) Environment represents the factors essential for commercial success, such as facilities, advisers, strategic partners, IP status, etc. As such, this scoring criterion will reflect the Review Committee's judgment on "probability of success" based on the company's application.

Scoring System:

Each of the selection criteria will be scored from 1-10 points using the rationale shown in the table below. All applications will then be ranked by total scores.

Table 2: Scoring system

Rating Score	Rationale (applied to each criterion)
1	The proposal is not responsive.
2-3	Poor: A significant amount of additional information is needed and/or a weak case for this criterion.
4-6	Fair: Meets minimum proposal requirements with a moderately compelling case for this criterion.
7-8	Good: Strongly responsive and compelling case for this criterion.
9-10	Excellent: The most responsive and well-supported for this criterion

Other Requirements

Grant Agreement

Example SBIR Advance Grant Agreement: A blank template of an SBIR Advance agreement from a prior round can be found at the link below. Awardees will be asked to review and sign the grant agreement, which also includes a Lean Startup Training and Compliance Form.
Sample SBIR Advance Phase I Grant Agreement template

Investment Reporting

Business performance data is collected at the beginning of your SBIR Advance award and before the final disbursement. The *Investment Report* is then updated annually for four (4) additional years thereafter. The SBIR Advance Program will work with your team to ensure reporting compliance. **Any changes to your business contact information must be reported to the program team ctc@lists.wisconsin.edu immediately.**

What does investment reporting look like? Check out the link below to see the template.
Investment Reporting

SBIR Advance Proposal Terms and Conditions

Only applicant(s) who meet and agree to the following criteria will be considered eligible to submit an SBIR Advance proposal:

- Applicants are SBIR/STTR awardees and eligible for the Matching grant as per the criteria set forth in this SBIR ADVANCE GRANT APPLICATION GUIDELINES document.
- Applicant(s) will define all key contributors in this application. Competitive applications will have a diverse team to help with key commercialization milestones.
- The project must be focused on commercial development of SBIR funded technology.
- Project milestones and deliverables must be achievable within 12 months of the start of funding for the Match awards. Additional time may be granted on a case-by-case basis upon review by the SBIR Advance Program Manager, Lean Startup Consultant, and business mentor.

- All Phase I Match awardees must complete Lean Startup training as a deliverable, **including at least 55 business hypothesis discovery interviews.**
- All awardees must report on their progress on an annual basis for a period of 5 years after award according to SBIR Advance guidelines.
- The applicant certifies that to the best of his/her knowledge and belief, the information being submitted on this SBIR Advance application is true and correct.
- The applicant(s) certifies that (s)he has disclosed and will continue to disclose any occurrence or event that could have an adverse material impact on the project. Adverse material impact includes but is not limited to SBIR award termination, lawsuits, criminal or civil actions, bankruptcy proceedings, cessation or pausing of operations, regulatory intervention, inadequate capital to complete the project or relocation of the company/employees outside of Wisconsin to an extent that is no longer a qualified Wisconsin company.