Secrets to a Successful Submission

Session Transcript:
2021 HHS Small Business Program Conference: Diverse Perspectives SEEDing Impactful Innovations

Patti Weber: Welcome, everyone. So I'm going to get started. I'm going to moderate today, but I'm also going to speak. I'm Patti Weber. I'm a program director at NCI's SBIR Development Center, and the other speaker is Dr. Eva Garland, and she runs a small business, Eva Garland Consulting, where she helps small businesses like yourself to submit grant applications to the NIH. So this session is on secrets to a successful submission. Next slide.

So we really want to impress on you that one of the most important things that you can do is to start early. Strong proposals take time to develop. You need to refine the message about your product. You're going to need to gain access to equipment, facilities and other resources, and you're also going to have to assemble a strong scientific team and obtain letters of support from collaborators, and all of these things take time. In addition to that, you need to complete the administrative registrations, and there are five required registrations, and you'll find a link here in this slide to more information about those. And you'll also need to send your specific aims to a program director at least a month before the due date. Next slide.

So you want to discuss your aims with the program director. So there's a program contact information for each NIH institute, and it's in the solicitation. In the SF424, you'll also find information there, but each solicitation will have programmatic contact, so it's very important to reach out to the program officers, send them your aims page and request a phone call or a WebEx meeting, whatever, to discuss them before you submit, well in advance. Next slide.

So the specific aims page, it's a very important page in the application. It's really meant to be the focal point, and it's intended to capture the essence of the application. And you need to, in that aims page, describe quantitative milestones for each of your aims, and you definitely want to highlight the innovation and the significance. So your background section should contain information about the product, then the innovation and significance, and your aims need to be goals-based statements. They should include .. . models and include those quantitative milestones. And then you want to have a sentence or two at the end to just set the stage for what would follow on in your application. So, "These studies will get us to," or, "Next these data will be used for." Next slide.

You also want to understand the peer review process. It's very important to talk about the investigators. You want to make sure that the investigators, the collaborators, and the consultants are all appropriately trained and capable of completing all of the project tasks, and this leads to the significance. You want to make sure that you talk about the product, and does it address an important problem and have commercial potential, and is there market pull for the product? You want to talk about in the approach section, are the design and methods well developed and appropriate? Have problem areas been addressed? You want to make sure you bring up potential pitfalls and how you would deal with those pitfalls. What alternative approaches could you provide? And the innovation here is very important. How novel is your technology or product and the approaches that you propose to test feasibility? And you want to talk about commercialization. Even in a Phase I application, you want to have a paragraph or two about what the company's business strategy is, and you want to make sure that it's one that has a high potential for success. And last but not least, you want to make sure that you explain to the reviewers what the scientific environment is where you're going to be doing the work. What facilities do you have access to if your company doesn't have their own? So you want to make sure you cover all of these areas, because these are what the reviewers are going to score your application on. Next slide.

So these are some resources that you need to know, so you want to be sure to read the solicitation, the SF424, very carefully so that you understand the requirements, so there's a few links here in this slide that will get you to these guides. You also might want to take a look at similar funded NIH SBIR and STTR projects, so you can use the NIH Project RePorter database to do this. You can key-word search. You can search on a company's name. You can search on a PI's name. You know, I've also provided a couple of links here to sample applications. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has a few. R43, those are SBIR Phase I and II and STTR Phase Is and IIs. And NCI has recently put out some sample applications as well. So I recommend that you take a look at those just to get an idea of how these successful applicants wrote their specific aims page and the other sections as well. Next slide.

So I just want to introduce you to this program that the NIH is running. It's called the Applicant Assistance Program. This is a free application preparation and assistance program. The goal of the program is to provide a mentor for applicants that have great technology but little NIH experience and limited NIH experience in their network. And this application is .. . going to close May 20th. And Dr. Garland is going to be talking a little bit more about the Applicant Assistance Program, but I want to impress on you a few things about what it does provide for you. It provides you application preparation support and review for Phase I only, does not provide you with a grant writer. It'll help you to review your Aims page, and along with an NIH program director, they'll also work together with your assigned mentor. They're not going to write your research plan and development. They're going to just coach you through the whole submission process, but you're still responsible to get those registrations done and make sure that you're ready to submit when the deadline comes. So there will be an outreach webinar to explain more about the program on May 4th, so I encourage you to register for that, and there will also be a Q and A session on May 20th, so you may also register for that.

Next slide. So these are the institutes that are currently participating in the AAP program. As you may know, there are 27 institutes and centers at the NIH, but not all of them are participating in the program, so you have to make sure that if you want to apply to this program that your technology fits one of the participating institutes. Next slide. So I'm now going to turn it over to Dr. Eva Garland, and she's going to talk to you a little bit more about the AAP, and then we'll be able to get to some questions to help you if you have any questions about a successful submission so, Dr. Garland.

Eva Garland: Thank you, Patti. It's great to be here, and by way of background, my name is Eva Garland. I'm CEO of Eva Garland Consulting. We're a firm in Raleigh, North Carolina, with approximately 50 employees, 35 of whom are scientific consultants and then another dozen or so accountants helping with the grants management aspects of securing various grant awards but particularly SBIR/STTR funding. Our mission is advancing science, and we have found that one of the best ways to advance early stage science is leveraging the incredible resources available through the SBIR/STTR program. As such, we are thrilled to be partnering with the NIH and with Patti and other program officers to facilitate the Application Assistance Program. This is a program that while there are no shortcuts to being successful in securing SBIR/STTR funding, there are ways I think to streamline the process and to develop a proposal in a very organized way. There's a lot that goes in to putting together an SBIR/STTR application, as you've been hearing today. In fact, the Small Business Administration estimates that it's approximately 100 to 150 hours of time to put together a competitive SBIR or STTR application. And what we've done at EGC is we have taken all of the different components that are necessary to put together a high quality application and organized them in a way that you can complete your proposal preparation in a structured 10-week process, and we've put together a book, you can see an image there, called "Winning SBIR/STTR Grants" that is used really as the basis of the Application Assistance Program. If you wanted to take a look at the book, it's also available on amazon.com, and we also have a Phase II book available for those of you who already have your Phase I award. But the structure of the AAP involves working with a coach in a very customized process through each of the 10 weeks of the program. In the first week for example, you'll work with your coach to start working on some of those long lead time items such as completing all of the registrations that you need to have in order to submit, downloading the application guide, and what's really unique about the AAP is that a main part of the program is contacting and having a custom one-on-one conversation with your program officer, and so in week one, you will set time on your calendars to meet with a program officer in week four, and then you'll take weeks one through three to put together your specific aims and other components that you'll be able to discuss with your program officer when you have that one-on-one meeting. So I'll go to the next slide.

In week four, you have your one-on-one meeting with your program officer where you discuss your aims and perhaps any tweaks you need to make to them in order to ensure that you're putting forth your best possible application and that you are in line with the mission of the institute that you are applying to. Once you have the game plan together, you're going to spend the bulk of weeks five, six and seven on your research plan, and that's also the area that Patti talked the most about in terms of being really critical. As we're talking about secrets to a successful application, the research plan, that six-page plan is really the heart of your application. And so at the end of week seven, you should have a nice, solid draft of your entire research plan. You'll be able to send it out for review. And we'll go to the next slide. And a copy editor will help to go through the different parts of your research plan and make sure that it's readable, so that you are able to be competitive in that review process. Week nine is all of the last-minute tasks that you need to do to get your proposal ready, and week 10 is time to submit your proposal. So I'll move to the next slide.

So far, the AAP has had six cycles starting with a pilot cycle with the National Cancer Institute in 2019, and a total of 349 small businesses have participated in the AAP. What we're very, very proud about is that 70 percent of AAP companies have been women-owned or operated which is really a fantastic statistic after hearing some of the earlier talks today about the challenges of increasing diversity within the representation of the SBIR/STTR program. We've also had 36 percent of applicants from - participants, sorry from underrepresented groups, and 27 participants have been located in HUBZones. So far, we've had 44 states and one US territory represented in the AAP, and we certainly hope the remaining six states are represented in future cohorts of the AAP. Next slide. Of the companies that have participated in the AAP, we have a great completion rate of 93 percent. Companies to date, it's still early. A lot of the applications are still under review, but to date we already have $20.5 million raised in non-dilutive funding after participation in the AAP, and one thing that's really quite interesting to me is that companies who participate in the AAP have secured not only non-dilutive grant funding but have also been very successful in securing equity funding with a total of $165 million raised from AAP participants in venture capital, angel and other equity investments. But the truth is that as great as these statistics are, the program isn't about these broad statistics. The program is about the individual companies and the success and being able to catalyze the advancement of critical technology in the health sciences. And so I'd like to just give you a couple of examples of some companies who've been successful through this program. Next slide.

One company who participated in the 2020 January AAP round is Mulberry Biotherapeutics. Mulberry Biotherapeutics was able to secure a $700,000 Phase I STTR award through NINDS, and with this funding, Dr. Luo, who is the principal investigator, indicated that the actionable guidance that they received, the actionable participation in which the coach really provides that customized guidance was really invaluable in helping to put together a solid application, as well as the additional follow-on funding that Mulberry Bio is now in the process of securing through a Series A financing. And what Dr. Luo indicated, which we hear a lot, is that the NIH funding was more than just the money alone. It was also validation, because it is so competitive and prestigious to win an SBIR or STTR award. That provides additional validation that is really impressive to investors and really puts you in a good spot for additional follow-on funding as well. So next slide.

Another successful company through the AAP is Doric Pharma. Doric Pharma was part of our pilot round in September of 2019 and received a Phase I STTR award of $299,000 from the National Cancer Institute. What's interesting, another interesting thing about Doric Pharma is that in addition to the STTR award, they were able to leverage more resources through the award process, and they've joined the I-Corps program, which is helping them with commercialization and market analysis, as well as the NIH diversity supplement that Stephanie Fertig mentioned earlier, and so this is a nice story of success where they received the funds for the STTR award, but also received other resources that are going to help Doric Pharma be successful in their commercialization.

Next slide, please. A third one I'd like to mention is PETcoil. PETcoil was also part of the pilot AAP round in 2019 and received a Phase I STTR award for $494,000 from the National Cancer Institute. And in addition to the STTR award, this is another story where they were able to leverage the success from this award in order to build the team and start the R & D that they needed to do which then led to follow-on funding through additional grants, angel investments, and also venture capitalist investment. So next slide.

And a final example I'll mention, it's a little unusual. This one is Oncodisc. They participated in the January 2020 AAP, and I mention them because they actually received an NSF SBIR Phase I grant. And they credit the AAP cycle and more broadly than just preparing for a NIH grant, but for more broadly helping with their grant writing and refining their value proposition that ended up at least for now being a really good fit for NSF, and then they also on top of that were able to close a $1.2 million private financing round. So next slide.

So I mentioned some examples. We really hope that some of you will be the next success stories leveraging the AAP. The AAP for the September 7th, 2021 cycle is currently open. I encourage you to apply. You can go to the website evagarland.com/AAP. The application is fairly straightforward, and so you can get on the site. You can take a look at the application, download it, and then when you're ready, you can apply. You need to apply no later than May 20th, although we definitely encourage you to apply earlier, and the 10-week program for this next cycle will be held between June 21st and August 30th. And this will prepare you for a complete and hopefully competitive submission for the September 7th, 2021 NIH SBIR/STTR submission deadline. So with that, Patti and I wanted to make sure that we had plenty of time for questions, and I'll go ahead and open it up to any questions that we have.

Patti Weber: .. . "specifically for applicants that have no academic affiliations," so no academic affiliations. Do you want to take that one, Eva?

Eva Garland: Yeah, I heard the second part of the question. Could you repeat it one more time?

Patti Weber: Yeah. "Do you have advice specifically for applicants that have no academic affiliations?"

Eva Garland: Sure. Well, the SBIR program is really meant to fund a comprehensive portfolio of innovations both academic and non-academic. Whereas the STTR often includes an affiliation with an academic institute, SBIRs definitely don't need to, and I would say from our experience, if you are in academics, you probably have the advantage of having written a lot of grant proposals in your career, but not necessarily SBIR/STTR applications which have kind of additional components to them. So I would say that if you are not academic and you've never written a grant proposal before, it's nice to partner up and find some resources of individuals who have written grant proposals, because there's sort of a trick to going about putting together your proposal. But in terms of your competitiveness for an award, you are just as competitive, and your proposal will be evaluated based on the technology and the plan of work that you put forth.

Patti Weber: Thank you, Eva, and I'd just like to add here that you're certainly not required to have an academic affiliation. If you have a technology and some of the work can be done by a contract research organization, you're free to contract work out, and if it's fee-for-service type of work, that can be part of the company's budget, and so you just need to be able to show that you've got the team, and possibly consultants, who are going to be able to evaluate the data that come back from that contract research organization. So another question here, "Are AAP mentors NIH employees or a third party?" I'll answer that, so there are third parties. So the NIH has contracted with Eva Garland Consulting to manage the program, so the application come in, and the institutes review them, and we score them. Eva Garland reviews them and scores them, and then we go through an internal process, and the institutes select the companies that we want to send through the program, and then they're partnered up. Eva's company does that. Each company gets assigned a mentor. So the next question here is, "What are common mistakes that small businesses make when selecting a grant assist firm?" I'll let you take that, Eva.

Eva Garland: Oh, gosh. I think that probably the most common mistake I see in general is starting too close to the deadline. It really does take 2 to 3 months to put together a quality application, and so as you're looking for what resources you need to help support your application, make sure you have plenty of lead time. And I'll say that certainly Eva Garland Consulting is one of the grant writing assist firms that are out there, but that's not enough. In addition to having strong grant writing assistance, you need to have a strong plan, and that's really where I see maybe companies struggle is hoping that they can just show up and get their grant written, but really what you need to do is to have a clear plan of work in place. You need to have your team staffed. If you're going to be doing studies internally, you're going to need to have experts in the space already lined up who can do those studies or interpret CRO data as Patti mentioned. And so I would say the biggest thing is to give yourself enough time and to recognize that it takes a lot of different resources collectively to put together a quality proposal.

Patti Weber: Another question here is, "Does AAP include budget assistance?"

Eva Garland: Yes, it does. I think we spend almost a whole week just putting together your budget. We provide a budget template for you to use, and your coach will walk you through all of the complexities and intricacies of directs, and indirects, and fees, and how to put all that together to structure your budget. I think one other thing that I'll mention that you may have seen as I was presenting some of the information earlier is that different institutes and centers have different maximum allowable budgets for their Phase I SBIR/STTRs, and that's really good thing to keep in mind and to make sure that you're asking the program officer during your conversation with your PO what are the budget levels that are allowable for that particular IC? And the AAP will also help you to structure an overall budget that's appropriate for your proposal and that fits in with the guidelines of that specific IC.

Patti Weber: Great. I have another question here. "Our question is about the review process. How do you deal with contradictory review reports, assuming two reviewers gave a good rating and the third one was off-grid?" I can take this one. We see this quite often. I recommend in the case of going over a summary statement, particularly when there are contradictory scores and comments from reviewers, that you must contact the program officer that's assigned to your grant application. They're really the best person who can go through the summary statement with you and give you advice on how to respond to reviewer comments in a resubmission, so that's something you must do. Another comment here, "In the summary of our rejected application, we found several key instances where reviewers ignored facts which are supported by citations and instead interject their personal perspective. The underlying facts are critical to the proposal, and we don't know how to get the reviewers to stick to facts instead of opinions." Again, you just need to spend some time going over the summary statement with your program official. We listen to a lot of reviews. We read a lot of summary statements, and so we're the best people that can help you figure out how to maybe rework your application a little bit, how to phrase your introduction to the resubmission, so that's the best advice that I can give you. Another person has asked, "We've submitted a few times for NIH SBIRs. They're university-based. We get high marks for our university expert partners. Our staff are judged as qualified. Our feedback is consistent that we're not likely to succeed. Our experts tell us we're advanced in our approach and that the reviewers are not thinking broadly enough. What suggestions do you have?" I'm going to tell you again to go back to your program official, but, Eva, if you have any comments you might want to add to this one.

Eva Garland: Yeah, I think that you really need to read exactly what the reviewers are saying and to respond very specifically to their concerns. It's a challenge putting these proposals together. You only have six pages to convey a lot of information, and it's difficult because it really is impossible to be able to put in all of the information that you would want to share with somebody to indicate the feasibility of your idea, but it is really important, if you get those summary statements and the reviews back, that you respond very specifically to the concerns that are expressed because you may have a great project that's completely viable, but it just wasn't conveyed well enough within those six pages, and so that's really the trick, and I agree. The program officers are just so valuable in helping you to kind of dig through all of the different reviewer comments and really pick out those ones that are score-driving and being able to come up with a strategy for what you would need to really address those.

Patti Weber: So another question here, "Is the AAP free, or is there a fee to it? What is the cost of AAP participation?" It is free to those who are accepted into the program. So each of the institutes pays the fee to Eva Garland Consulting, so there's no cost to the participant. Another question here, "What are legal entities accepted such as sole proprietor, C-corp?" As long as you're a small business that's formed in the US, sole proprietor, C-corp, LLC, you can apply to the SBIR program. Another question, "If a company, small business is in concept phase and is looking to receive support to conduct proof of concept, are we less likely to be funded in this early infancy stage?" I can take that one as well. We do fund early stage companies. I will be honest though, and say that to be competitive, it's a good idea to try to have a little bit of preliminary data. However, I've seen applications come in where the application has cited literature data as supporting information that their idea might be feasible, but really a Phase I SBIR or STTR is intended to fund feasibility studies, so you just want to spend some time making a solid argument for your technology and the innovation and then describing what you're going to use the grant funds for. Can feel free to add to that if you want, Eva.

Eva Garland: Yeah, I completely agree. I've seen very, very early stage projects get SBIR/STTR funding, and I've seen ones that are a little bit further along. Really, I do think that you need to have a strong argument for the feasibility, so even if you don't have a lot of preliminary data, you do need to be able to justify that there's a good chance that you'll be successful in moving the project forward. I would also say that areas that have greater unmet needs are potentially more likely to take more of a risk on funding earlier stage technologies. That's something I've seen as well kind of in the, over the years.

Patti Weber: There's another question. "Does AAP provide assistance to companies that have applied to SBIRs before or just those that never applied?" I'll answer that. You can have applied before, but it's for those who have not been successful in the past. We do have a rule that if you applied and were awarded 10 years ago, then if it's not within the last 10 years, you can certainly apply to the program and be accepted, but it's really intended for those who have never been successful. And so then another question, "Does the AAP help with resubmissions?" Yes, it does. If you've applied and weren't successful and you want to resubmit, you're eligible to apply for the program, and it is for Phase Is only. We don't have Phase II AAP support. Let's see. There were some questions about the cost, so I think we covered that. Here is someone who wants to know if the AAP is comparable to private consultants like BBC consulting and other programs that can cost applicants thousands of dollars. I'll let Eva answer that.

Eva Garland: Sure. I would say the one area of the AAP that you won't get if you hire, say, a private grant writer is you won't have somebody writing your proposal, so if you join the AAP, you are responsible for writing the proposal. You're responsible for completing all of the different proposal components, and you are responsible for ultimately submitting the proposal, so you can think of the AAP as being coaching as opposed to someone who's actually writing and submitting that proposal for you.

Patti Weber: So let's see. Somebody just mentioned that the website was down. I'm just going to say to keep trying to where you can get your application in.

Eva Garland: Yeah, the website might be overloaded just with the high numbers of this conference, so if you try back again in an hour, I'm sure it'll be working.

Patti Weber: Someone wants to know what's the success rate of the AAP, and is this rate above the national average?

Eva Garland: I don't know if we have the actual details of the success rate, if that's been actually tallied up yet. It is still a fairly new program, and we're actually still finding out about some of the applicants from the early rounds who are getting funding, and so I don't believe that we have actual statistics on that yet. One thing that I would like to add though to that question is that we've had many instances where AAP companies haven't received funding on the first round but reapplied and did get funding on their resubmission, and that goes back again to what Stephanie Fertig was saying earlier, which is your chance of success is always going to be higher on a resubmission than on your first submission. So if you submit and you get the grant, that's fantastic, but even if you don't, please consider resubmitting because there's just a really good chance that you'll get funded on that second cycle.

Patti Weber: Someone has asked, "I just started a nonprofit but have not filed for 501(c)(3) yet. Is it needed before applying for grants?" Well, you have to form a for-profit entity in order to apply for SBIR or STTR funding. You can't be a nonprofit. Now if you are with a nonprofit and you have an invention, you can find a for-profit small business to help you to commercialize your invention, and you sign an agreement with that other small business that is for-profit. I've seen that work for some companies. Here is another question. "Waiting for review, what's the difference between STTR, SBIR application to NSF regarding need to have robust preliminary data? And what's the difference between NSF and NIH? And how much can a company contract out to a CRO in terms of money under NSF or NIH?" Do you want to try to take that one, Eva?

Eva Garland: Sure. I think overall the programs are fairly similar in terms of the focus on the innovation of your technology and the feasibility of being able to carry out the proposed studies. That's very similar across both agencies. NSF does not fund clinical trials, so you want to keep that in mind. NSF can be a good option if you have more of a platform technology. With NIH, you're going to have to choose a specific institute or center that's often going to be focused on a specific area or a specific disease, whereas NSF is a good choice if you have something that's a platform that can apply to a large number of different potential areas. NIH can fund that as well. Certainly through NCATS, that's a great IC that will fund platforms that advance development or research tools as well. But I would say as I'm trying to make a decision between NSF or NIH, if you have a technology that could be a fit for both, I think it's a good idea to look into both agencies, and they can be very complementary in helping you to get the resources that you need to advance the technology development. But back to that initial question, is there a difference in terms of the usage of CROs or other kind of aspects of the SBIR program? Most of those are actually set at the congressional level and apply to all of the different agencies that have SBIR and STTR programs, so there's not a lot of difference from those structural aspects of what's allowable and what's not allowable.

Patti Weber: I'll add that I do recommend that you talk to your program official. You know, contact them with your aims page, and that's also a time that you can ask about contracting out various fee-for-service kinds of studies like animal studies for developing a therapeutic. You can talk about that with a program officer. Another question here is, "How many applications can or should we file? Understanding no overlap and assuming we can avoid this, different disease indications or Phase I for a new indication, is it unwise to submit in September when an April filing is pending or perhaps recently awarded as of September?" I can answer that. If you do have a platform technology that can be used in different disease indications, it's okay to submit more than one application to the NIH provided that there's not overlap, as you mentioned. So you don't want to be asking for funding to manufacture, for example, the same compound unless you make it clear that obviously you need 20 grams for the diabetes indication and another 20 for the cancer indication. But you just want to make sure that you're careful about structuring your specific aims, but it is okay to submit more than one Phase I, and most likely if it's disease-specific, it will probably be reviewed by different study sections. There's a question here about, "Can AAP help to edit grant writing?" I'll let Eva take that.

Eva Garland: Sure, so the AAP includes an overall review of all of the components of your application, but the editing support is only for the specific aims and research strategy, and the editing is copy editing, and so you won't have specific editing relating to your science because you need to know your science yourself. But the copy editing is really very valuable in terms of areas like sentence structure and other ways to make sure that your message is being conveyed clearly to the reviewers. So copy editing is including but no other kind of scientific editing.

Patti Weber: Here's another question. "Are there support for women-owned businesses?" Eva.

Eva Garland: Yeah, well, we are thrilled that 70 percent of AAP companies to date have been either women-owned or had women in the C suite, so yes, the AAP has just been a wonderful program for women-owned businesses, and we've had many successes.

Patti Weber: Here is a question related to the business plan. "So how much of the six pages should be dedicated to the business plan?" Eva.

Eva Garland: Well, yeah, in Phase I, you only have six pages, so you really can't put a lot about your business plan. But what you should do is to make sure that you demonstrate that there is commercial feasibility, and I would say you're talking about maybe half a page at the most. I like to use the innovation section to indicate what the innovation is, what unmet need it's going to be addressing, and then what is your market opportunity, your IP position and some of those other areas that help to demonstrate the commercial feasibility.

Patti Weber: "Is it okay to apply for multiple agencies for the same idea, product, or is this not a good idea?" Eva.

Eva Garland: Well, I would say I think you addressed that a little bit earlier, Patti, in terms of you don't want to have overlapping aims, so as long as you have a completely different product development path for different end products, then I think it's perfectly fine to apply for multiple agencies. Now remember, if you're a small business, you don't want to stretch yourself too thin, and that's one of the challenges that small businesses have when you see so many potential opportunities. Sometimes it does make more business sense to start with one and do it really well and then move onto the next one. But certainly if you have a couple of different potential end products and you have different development pathways to get to those end products, you can apply for multiple agencies.

Patti Weber: Here is a question from an early career investigator writing their first SBIR. "For AAP, when mentioning limited personal experience or network experience in NIH, please define the network portion. How do you assess that?" I'll let you take that, Eva.

Eva Garland: Sure, right, and so a challenge when you're a junior investigator is that you're competing against other companies that have a lot more experience than you. So you do need to find a way to fill your team with other experienced personnel who can assist you. You can do this through bringing in consultants. You can do this through partnering up with academic institutions and academic PIs who have experience, but the reason for this is because as the reviewers are looking at your proposal, they are looking at one criteria being the potential for success, and if you have more experience that you can draw from, you're going to be able to leverage that experience to increase your chance of ultimately being successful. So if you are a junior investigator, it's important to build your team with others who have more experience, who can help coach and guide you as you develop your product.

Patti Weber: Here is a question again for Eva. "Does the AAP claim any profit later on for helping?" So I think they're asking if EGC Consulting claims any profit from the small business for helping as I think that is the model for some companies out there. They'll help you for maybe a portion of the fee or for some percentage, so I'll let Eva take this one.

Eva Garland: Yeah, the answer is no. It's free. It's sort of amazing. I mean, we get a lot of questions of, "How can this possibly be free?" But it's a wonderful, wonderful program that the NIH has committed to and starting with the NCI who funded the pilot program, and now it's grown to eight ICs, and so NIH is paying for 100 percent. There's no string attached. The money is all yours on the back end.

Patti Weber: Great. Thank you. Gosh, I'm scanning the questions here. So here is for AAP. "If there's a woman CEO who owns less than 50 percent of the company, does that qualify?" Absolutely.

Eva Garland: Yeah. Yes, and just to clarify, you don't have to be women or minority-owned or underrepresented group to apply for the AAP. Anyone is eligible to apply for the AAP. We just like to keep statistics and see how the AAP is doing such a great job of benefiting the broad diversity of groups who have potential innovations for SBIR/STTR funding.

Patti Weber: All right. Thanks, everyone. It's time to wrap it up. Thanks for joining us today. We hope that you found this session useful. So many of you have asked about a copy of the presentation. Right now, you can find a PDF of the presentation slides on the session page as a link. If you have additional questions, take the opportunity to meet with a small business program expert for a 15-minute appointment this week, so just visit the HHS and NIH hub on the conference site to get started. If you have any issues, click the information tab, and you can get some help. And so as a reminder, many of the unanswered questions will be addressed in the FAQs that will be posted on this session page in the near future. Thanks very much for joining today. Thanks, Eva.

Eva Garland: Thank you. Thank you, Patti.