

MS-FAST

Mississippi - Federal And State
Technology Partnership Program



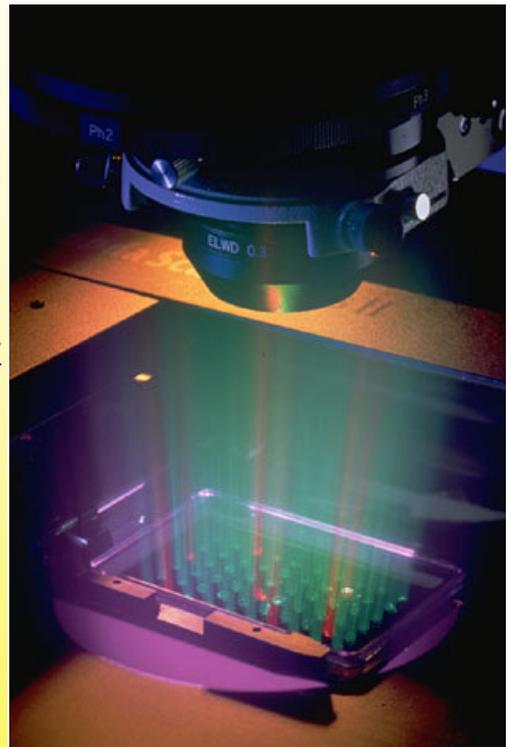
Helping Mississippi Companies Compete in SBIR and STTR

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The MS-FAST Program

The SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) and STTR (Small Business Technology Transfer) programs are two competitively awarded, highly specialized forms of federal funding for small firms (less than 500 employees) to perform cutting-edge R&D that addresses the nation's (government and industry) most critical scientific and engineering needs. These needs span the technology spectrum -- from aviation and agriculture to medicine and manufacturing. Annually over \$2.2 billion are awarded to small businesses by the 11 federal agencies participating in the programs.

Mississippi has historically under participated in these programs. In 2001, the Small Business Administration (SBA) established the Federal and State Technology (FAST) Partnership program designed to strengthen the technological competitiveness of small business concerns in states, particularly those under participating. Mississippi was identified by SBA as being in the bottom third of states. Partnering with the Mississippi Technology Alliance, the University of Southern Mississippi and the other members of the Mississippi Research Consortium, proposed and were awarded a FAST grant in late 2001 to establish the Mississippi FAST program (MS-FAST).

The Mississippi Technology Alliance, for each grant year, has provided a cash match to the MS-FAST program. Of these funds, 85% has been awarded directly to Mississippi companies through a "Phase 0" program in support of a company's development of a Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal to the federal agencies. The remaining 15% of the funding has been expended on regional workshops around the state and associated materials and equipment. These workshops have included the bringing in of current and former federal agency SBIR Program Managers to assist companies one-on-one and explain the federal programs and how best to competitively participate.

MS-FAST has provided additional assistance through the universities to the companies in helping to identify federal agency R&D needs that map to the company's R&D commercialization goals, faculty expertise and lab resources that may support under subcontract the company's SBIR/STTR efforts, Phase I and II proposal development assistance, and the identification of university developed intellectual property that might serve as the basis of a proposal.

The universities and the Mississippi Technology Alliance additionally have assisted companies with commercialization of their innovations through business plan development and assistance in identifying potential venture capital funding sources. MS-FAST works closely with Mississippi's technology based incubators, the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta, the Mississippi Small Business Development Centers, state based federal labs, and other various state and federal service providers and economic development organization in support of Mississippi's small high-tech companies.

MS-FAST Services and Assistance

The MS-FAST program since its inception in October of 2001 has and continues to carry out 5 specific tasks in order to assist Mississippi's companies in better competing for federal SBIR/STTR contracts and grants. These tasks and the means by which MS-FAST carries them out are as follows:

1. To make aware and inform Mississippi companies of the federal SBIR/STTR programs and the available research and development opportunities under these programs.

This task is accomplished in part through MS-FAST's e-mail alerting service, *MS-FAST SBIR News Alert!*

2. To better educate Mississippi companies in the federal SBIR/STTR program solicitation processes and proposal development process.

This task is accomplished through the conducting of various workshops around the state as well as one-on-one proposal development assistance to companies.

3. To provide financial support to Mississippi companies in developing competitive Phase I proposals to the federal SBIR/STTR solicitations.

This task is accomplished through MS-FAST's "Phase 0" program providing \$3,000 contracts to Mississippi companies competitively selected through the program.

4. To provide access to university resources and faculty in support of SBIR/STTR proposals and projects.

This task is accomplished through assistance provided by the MRC representative, located at each of the MRC institutions' Office of Research, who is familiar with the university's resources, faculty and intellectual property holdings and the policy and procedures for accessing them in support of SBIR/STTR efforts.

5. To provide commercialization assistance of new or improved products and or services developed under SBIR/STTR Phase I & II contracts and grants by Mississippi companies.

This task is accomplished through networking with various state economic development entities, business incubators, and the Mississippi Technology Alliance as well as providing needed access to the resources and faculty of the MRC members' business and engineering schools.

MS-FAST Phase 0 Program Description

A principal means for supporting Phase I proposal development by companies is the MS-FAST “Phase 0” program. Designed to be similar to the federal SBIR Phase I solicitations, the Phase 0 program provides Mississippi companies with an opportunity to be awarded a \$3,000 contract for development and submission of a Phase I proposal while becoming better acquainted with the federal SBIR/STTR proposal process. MTA provides the funding for awarding the selected Phase 0 contracts and participates on the Phase 0 review and selection board.

Phase 0 Proposal Development and Selection Process

Applications from technology-based small businesses are competitively selected and awarded for either or both of the following:

- Preliminary data acquisition and analysis
- Assistance in preparation of a Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal

To each technology-based small company that is qualified to submit a SBIR/STTR proposal and that requests Phase 0 support, the Phase 0 program offers assistance in locating a qualified university faculty member who can work with the company in preparing the Phase I proposal response. The incentive for the faculty member is the potential for consulting in preparation of the Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal and for supporting the project under a subcontract if it awarded to the small business that submitted the SBIR/STTR proposal.

The Phase 0 solicitation requires the company to submit a short (2 or 3 page) Application outlining their proposed Phase 0 project and its expected outcomes. Applications are evaluated by a review team composed of a representative from each MRC member, MTA and at least one individual, when available, who has served as a Federal SBIR/STTR proposal evaluator. Ad hoc members may also be appointed who are experts in technical areas represented in particular proposed technology applications.

The reviews focus on the scientific/technical merit of the proposed innovations and consider the federal agencies’ mission needs as well as the commercial application potential. The reviews specifically consider the following criteria:

- Unique ness of the proposed concept as a technological innovation
- Scientific/Technological quality of the proposed research
- Soundness of the research plan to support a Phase I proposal
- Potential of the proposed concept for mission response and commercial application
- Qualification and experience of the research and technology application team
- Relevance of the budget including matching funds, if any
- Clarity of the proposal

Phase 0 projects are awarded up to the following amounts:

Research to acquire preliminary data	\$2500
Phase I SBIR/STTR Proposal preparation assistance	\$1500
Maximum total grant (using a combination of the two categories)	\$3000

Fifty percent of the funds are paid at the time of award and the balance upon receipt of the final report (including a copy of the Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal). A draft of the Phase I SBIR/STTR proposal is requested two weeks prior to the required submittal date and if requested comment will be provided to the author within one week.

A conscious effort is made not to solely award Phase 0 contracts to companies with the apparent highest probability of obtaining a Phase I award (those with a demonstrated track record of previous Phase I awards), but to also award to companies new to the program that propose new and highly innovative innovations and that may benefit most from both MS-FAST's financial and non-financial assistance.

Companies not awarded a Phase 0 contract for their proposal submissions are still provided with critical review comments and score of their Phase 0 proposal. Companies with a high score are strongly encouraged to submit a Phase I proposal. In all cases, companies not receiving Phase 0 funding assistance are offered non financial assistance to include draft Phase I proposal review and identification of university resources and faculty that may strengthen the Phase I proposal submission.

Phase 0 Solicitation Announcements

MS-FAST Phase 0 solicitations are announced via the *MS-FAST SBIR News Alert!* e-mail service. To be added to this service, a company may e-mail its request to: jgrabben@ssc.nasa.gov In the subject line type, "Add to *MS-FAST SBIR News Alert!*"