

“This shortage is further challenged with skill imbalances in some places, along with the inability to realign work to meet the changing demands in other places. Add to these challenges the absence of electronic tools, current policy, standardized processes and training to expedite our work.”

To address the challenges, Riley stresses the importance of making contracting a core competency, partnering internally and externally, and building a world-class professional contracting branch.

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Army Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program

Susan Nichols and Jennifer M. Thompson

The SBIR is a congressionally mandated Army program designed to provide small, high-tech businesses the opportunity to propose innovative research and development (R&D) solutions in response to critical Army needs, and to provide “seed” money to a select group of U.S. small businesses to conduct R&D in support of Army technology requirements. The Army SBIR program is carried out by the U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM).

What’s New?

The program has been in existence since 1984, but substantial new program enhancements have taken place over the past 2 years, creating objectives to increase technology transition and commercialization success. These initiatives, the Commercialization Pilot Program (CPP) and Technical Assistance (TA), accelerate the fielding of capabilities to Soldiers and benefit the Nation through stimulated technological innovation, improved manufacturing capability, increased competition and productivity, and economic growth.

CPP

CPP, established in response to the *2006 National Defense Authorization Act*, is a 2-phase process as follows:

- Assess, identify and recommend SBIR Phase II firms that strongly align with CPP goals.



CPP and TA accelerate the fielding of capabilities to Soldiers and benefit the Nation through stimulated technological innovation, improved manufacturing capability, increased competition and productivity, and economic growth. Here, PFC Kenneth Armbrister, Co. A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division (ID), scans for enemy activity during *Operation Browning* in southern Arab Jabour, Iraq, Jan. 28, 2008. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Luis Delgadillo.)

- Assist the recommended firms to achieve accelerated commercialization and transition success.

Phase I firms that have exceptional results and have identified strategies or paths for transition from research to an operational capability are invited to participate in the SBIR as a Phase II project. Phase II represents a major R&D effort culminating in a well-defined deliverable prototype.

The CPP looks for Phase II SBIR firms that address high-priority Army needs, exhibit potential for accelerated transition and offer high-commercialization potential as measured through the CPP-defined return on investment metric.

The Army selected MILCOM Venture Partners (MVP) to manage CPP. MVP supports CPP objectives, including identifying and recommending CPP firms, assisting with market research and business planning, matching CPP firms with customers and facilitating collaboration, supporting technology transition plans and recommending funding levels from an FY08 \$15 million allocation to CPP firms’ commercialization plans.

SBIR recently approved 25 small businesses to participate in the current CPP FY. This year’s CPP firm spans a broad spectrum of the Army’s technology portfolio and end-user applications including next generation night vision sensors, advanced unmanned vehicle control devices, medical diagnostics to improve Soldier survivability, low-profile scanning arrays for satellite communications, improved personal

armor, health and monitoring systems to increase aircraft effectiveness while reducing operational costs and high-performance, low-signature tactical generators.

TA

Following the *SBIR Reauthorization Act of 2000, Public Law 106-554, Section 9 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S. Code 638)*, the Army is providing TA services to small businesses with SBIR projects. Real success for an SBIR project goes beyond solving a research problem. Ultimately, the Army would like SBIR technologies developed into a useable prototype and transitioned into a military or commercial product. The Army understands that for many small businesses and their potential customers, the path to successful transition can be extremely difficult and is therefore providing TA.

TA advocates (TAAs) assigned to five Army regions provide assistance to small businesses that have projects with the participating organizations. The TAAs are talented and experienced industry professionals with varied backgrounds. They work closely with small businesses to ensure their technologies/products fit the company's goals and Army requirements. They assist small businesses in making better technical decisions and solving technical problems, thereby minimizing the risks associated with the SBIR projects. Using their experience, TAAs play an important role in commercializing new products and processes by identifying potential military and/or commercialization partners.

Coordinating with the government research manager, SBIR awardees and any stakeholder TAAs will provide Phase III transition plans for Phase II projects. The Phase III plan will transition and document the strategy, requirements and resources to change the SBIR project into an acquisition program, larger science and technology (S&T) effort or a stand-alone product or service.

Another important TAA role is to work with the government on technology transition planning and developing integration road maps. By participating in acquisition requirements development, technology assessment and technology transition planning and management activities, TAAs will identify SBIR technology insertion points into an acquisition program executive office (PEO)/program manager (PM) program or a larger S&T program. TA and more PEO/PM involvement in managing the yearly \$270 million in SBIR research will result in more relevant products/services to meet near-term needs, resulting in increased transition opportunities.



This year's CPP firm spans a broad spectrum of the Army's technology portfolio and end-user applications. Here, combat medics SPCs Aimee Collver and Vanessa Bolognese, 25th ID, pull security during a mission in Amerli, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Mike Alberts.)

Although both the CPP and TA are in their infancy, feedback from the small business community and government researchers has been overwhelmingly positive. Through these two initiatives, SBIR can tap into the innovativeness and creativity of the small business community and meet some of the Army's most critical R&D requirements. Ultimately, this will provide our deployed Soldiers with world-class and state-of-the-art technologies while also helping small businesses to commercialize their products.

For more information on the Army SBIR program and these two new initiatives, visit their Web site at www.armysbir.com.

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Natick Contracting Division (NCD) Interns Quickly Adapt to New Contracting Reports

Nathan Jordan

Beginning in FY07, reporting of contracts to Congress changed from the *Individual Contracting Action Report (DD Form 350)* to the Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation Contract Action Reports (CAR) system. As this was a new procedure, there was a learning curve that delayed CAR reporting. This applied to the U.S. Army Research,