



“Valley of Death” SBIR Outreach Event

Subject: Submitted questions from attendees

Updated Date: 5/2/2023

RIO-Specific Questions:

1. What is RIO?

RIO is an acronym for Research, Innovation, and Outcomes. It is a potential Multiple-Award IDIQ contract focused on SBIR Phase III awards. It is currently under development by GSA's IDIQ Labs team.

2. With respect to RIO, what factors are GSA considering to select awardees (i.e. size, SBIR success to date, client interest)?

We are still developing our Acquisition Plan and have not made final decisions on evaluation factors.

3. Is this part of the IDIQ Labs team effort to simplify Phase III contracts? Are there any further developments ?

By creating a Multiple-Award IDIQ contract, the IDIQ Labs team hopes to streamline and expedite the Phase III ordering experience for both AAS and its customers. As of May 4, 2023, the IDIQ Labs team is working on the Acquisition Plan.

4. Would appreciate more info on the difference between utilizing AAS and the forthcoming GWAC (Research Innovation Outcome, RIO).

AAS is full service acquisition support. We are like a moving company that you would hire to move your household goods. You give us the requirements and we do all the contracting. RIO is being developed primarily for direct buy orders. Using RIO is like renting a U-HAUL or other moving vehicle. Your customer's contracting shop is going to do all the contracting work but they are going to use the GSA RIO vehicle.

5. The RIO 1-pager mentions potentially competing new technically innovative needs. I am interested to hear more about this.

One idea for RIO is to allow for agencies to compete requirements as Task Order Requests (TORs) using FAR Part 16 procedures if they so choose, in addition to more typical SBIR Phase III direct award authority.

6. Will there be a search engine available for DoD customers looking for SBIR-STTR technologies?



Since GSA is not a Participating Agency it is unlikely that GSA would provide this type of search engine. However, it is possible that GSA could provide some sort of search capability for customers who would like to use the RIO contract and don't yet have a desired awardee in mind. It is our understanding that the DoD SBIR/STTR community is working with the SBA to improve search capability. This would be found at www.sbir.gov if it becomes available.

7. Does SBIR/STTR Data rights period of effectiveness carry forward with the RIO program?

Yes. In fact, to obtain a Delegation of Procurement Authority (DPA), Contracting Officers will be educated on how to appropriately manage data rights.

8. What is the expected go live for first companies on this to be able to receive customer funds?

9. What is the timeline associated with the Research, Innovation and Outcomes (RIO) contract?

Expect to see RFIs and a draft RFP this summer with final RFP this fall and awards by end of CY, barring unforeseen circumstances.

10. When will the GSA vehicle be available?

Assuming this refers to RIO, we hope by the end of the CY. Assisted acquisition services (AAS) for Phase III contracts are available now. However, the GSA AAS SBIR/STTR support staff is at capacity for new work in FY23 and early FY24.

11. Very interested in when this "IDIQ"-like program will start & what the process will look like, including anticipated timeline.

See answers above.

12. What is the current status of the GSA RIO program?

We have begun to develop our Acquisition Plan.

13. What is the current status of the procurement authority approval for the RIO opportunity?

We have passed our first "gate review" based on our Market Research. The next phase is the development and approval of the Acquisition Plan. We hope to conclude that phase by the end of June.

14. What is the time frame for the release of the RFP?

At this point, likely in the Fall.



15. What kind of marketing/training will GSA be providing business and government as this process rolls out?

Program or General Questions

16. How is the Valley of Death defined?

The Valley of Death occurs after Phase II, where there is a funding gap and some businesses struggle to survive, and Phase III or commercialization.

17. Do you have any recommendations for improving selection of open topic submissions?

This question needs to be directed to the Participating Agency's SBIR/STTR program office. When GSA assists with Phase I/II contracts the selections have already been made by the Participating Agency. Links to those offices are available at www.sbir.gov.

18. I'm interested in learning more about SBIR. What are some good resources?

Please go to www.sbir.gov/applicants. There are resources available to assist you in learning more about the program, including tutorials and where you can find local assistance. The SBA also offers road shows. See www.sbir.gov for more information.

AAS Role in Awarding SBIR

19. What are some best practices that SBIR Awardees can implement in order to obtain a Phase III contract?

- a. You must find a buyer for your SBIR-derived services and products. This responsibility rests primarily with the SBIR firm. Do your best to identify potential buyers to aid in establishing the ceiling value.
- b. Provide a clear description of how your proposed Phase III work derives from, extends or completes prior SBIR/STTR-funded work. When possible, provide a picture or some sort of illustration that the contracting organization can understand. The technical breadth and complexity of SBIR efforts often make it difficult for non-technical contracting personnel to see the path from Phase I/II work to the Phase III work.
- c. Show how your Phase III work supports the SBIR/STTR program's commercialization objectives including sales in the private sector when possible.

20. What is GSA's role in awarding and managing SBIR/STTR Phase I and Phase II awards?

Although GSA is not a participating agency, the Office of Assisted Acquisition Services (AAS) can award and administer Phase I and II work through use of an Interagency Agreement with a



participating agency. We function as the contracting agent for Phase I/II awards which means that we engage after the solicitation is closed and technical selections have been made.

21. Is there a ceiling for award amounts under the GSA vehicle?

For Phase III contracts, the Indefinite-Delivery, Indefinite-Quantity (IDIQ) contracts have maximum quantity, or ceiling, when established. The ceiling is established based upon an estimate that can be supported by market research. However, there is no limit to the ceiling value. Per the Policy Directive there is no limit to the size of a Phase III contract. At this time it is not expected that there will be a ceiling value on RIO orders.

22. Do you have to hold a GSA contract in order to get a Phase III award from GSA?

No.

23. What are the biggest challenges for this program?

The biggest challenge for the AAS program is resources—people. Government contracting is a resource-intensive activity. We need more sharp, customer-focused people to help us do more. If you know anyone with a background in Government acquisition that you believe would want to work with us please refer them to us.

24. What is the best time of year for “getting in line” for an AAS Phase III IDIQ creation (obviously alongside first TO creation)?

We talk to potential clients and contractors all year long so the best time is when you have a requirement and anticipate funding will be received. The earlier we know that a requirement will be coming, the better the chance is that we will be able to accept it.

25. How can a small business benefit from GSA's AAS?

Assuming that GSA AAS has the capacity to support a new award, GSA will award a Phase III contract to the small business as the prime contractor. We will award the contract as an Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract if appropriate. This will provide at least one usable contract the small business can reference while marketing its SBIR solution to future federal buyers.

26. What are some strategies for transitioning Phase IIs to Phase III?

Phase III is for any work that derives from, extends or completes prior SBIR/STTR-funded work. The scope is broad and Phase III can be used for services, products, more R&D or any combination of the above. Phase III applies to both Government and private sector sales. For Government transition, you must find a Government agency that wants to buy what you have to offer. Each large SBIR/STTR agency has a program to aid in the transition and commercialization of SBIR/STTR technologies. You can find them by navigating from



www.sbir.gov to the agency website. These programs provide resources to assist you in making the transition.

27. What are the most critical aspects in SBIR application? Is sodium-ion cells are of interests to you?

GSA is only a contracting agency. We are interested in awarding and managing contracts for federal customers regardless of the specific technology focus. Technical focus areas are determined by the Participating Agencies. You can access links to their websites via www.sbir.gov.

28. How can we use sole source capability from SBIR projects?

If a federal agency wants to fund work that derives from, extends or complete SBIR/STTR funded work, then by law that agency shall pursue, to the greatest extent possible, direct follow on (i.e. sole source) awards with the firm that developed the technology or is a successor in interest to that technology. All competition requirements for Phase III contracts are satisfied in Phase I/II competitive solicitations. No additional competition is required for Phase III.

29. What are the benefits or disadvantages of direct to Phase II?

This is a question that needs to be directed to the Participating Agency. Reach out to the Participating Agency or use the resources available on www.sbir.gov to get more information.

30. How do we build on Ph1 & PhII SBIR awards to receive a Phase III award from GSA FAS?

You must find a federal buyer who wants to use non-SBIR/STTR funds to do work that derives from, extends or completes your Phase I and/or II work. That is the foundation of all GSA FAS Phase III awards.

31. How to originate a Ph. III once two Ph. II's has ended? What can I do to increase Ph. III likelihood? Should I do Ph III or POM?

Phase III is for any work that derives from, extends or completes prior SBIR/STTR-funded work. The scope is broad and Phase III can be used for services, products, more R&D or any combination of the above. Phase III applies to both Government and private sector sales. For Government transition, you must find a Government agency that wants to buy what you have to offer. Each large SBIR/STTR agency has a program to aid in the transition and commercialization of SBIR/STTR technologies. You can find them by navigating from www.sbir.gov to the agency website. These programs provide resources to assist you in making the transition.

32. How do you think Blockchain or AI will help in bridging the "Valley of Death"?



This is a technical question. GSA AAS is a contracting activity. If you have a SBIR/STTR funded technology in this space and find a federal buyer who wants to invest in Phase III work, that will provide cash flow to the company to help bridge the valley.

33. What is the easiest way to reach commercialization goals?

Find federal or private sector buyers who want to buy what you have to offer. The large SBIR/STTR offices have a Commercialization Readiness Program or equivalent that can assist you. You can navigate your way to their websites through www.sbir.gov.

34. How can billing help with commercialization?

It is not clear what is meant by this question. Please follow up to discuss in more detail.

35. What is the best way to promote commercialization?

Find federal or private sector buyers who want to buy what you have to offer. The large SBIR/STTR offices have a Commercialization Readiness Program or equivalent that can assist you. You can navigate your way to their websites through www.sbir.gov.

36. How can GSA assist us with SBIR efforts?

GSA AAS can award Phase I/II (with some limitations) and Phase III contracts. The Government customer or the SBIR firm needs to reach out to GSA AAS at gsasbir-sttr@gsa.gov and someone will follow up.

37. How does a Phase II applicant find a sponsor?

Business development. The large SBIR/STTR offices have a Commercialization Readiness Program or equivalent that may be able to assist you. You can navigate your way to their websites through www.sbir.gov. You can also hire the services of a private consulting firm that may be able to assist. GSA is not endorsing or recommending that option but it does exist.

38. What contract types are available for AAS?

Our acquisition professionals are familiar with all types of contracts. The Contracting Officer will review the requirement with the customer to determine the most appropriate contract type based upon the factors listed at [FAR 16.104](#).

39. Do we have to have our funding ready in order to even get in the queue with GSA? How do we know we are in the queue?

For GSA AAS, funding must be provided early in the process. AAS is a 100% fee for service activity. While we may engage in some business development and requirement vetting at no charge, we must have adequate funds before our staff can do any heavy lifting on a new contract. GSA AAS will assign a staff member to manage your contract. That individual will



reach out to you, set up regular meetings, etc. Please let us know at gsasbir-sttr@gsa.gov if your experience is otherwise.

40. Can a SBIR Phase I contract go straight to a SBIR Phase III contract?

Yes. Please see Section 4 of the most recent version of the SBIR/STTR Policy Directive located at www.sbir.gov/about for additional information.

41. Is the program staffed in such a way, that you can respond to phone and/or email inquiries.

Yes. You may reach out to us at gsasbir-sttr@gsa.gov and someone will follow-up with you.

42. Would like to understand the formal process required to use RIO, when it is approved.

Once RIO is awarded, a potential customer agency would need to contact GSA and acquire a Delegation of Procurement Authority (DPA). Once they have the DPA, they can execute task orders against the RIO contract at their convenience.

43. Who is qualified for Phase III

Any Phase I or Phase II awardee or a successor in interest is entitled to a Phase III award for work that derives from, extends or completes the Phase I and/or II efforts.

44. Does GSA require a funded task at the start to set up a Phase III contract the small business can then market against?

For RIO, we anticipate that “on-ramps” to the contract will require a signed Letter of Intent from a customer organization with funding for the Phase III effort.

For an AAS IDIQ type of contract, yes, funding is required fairly early in the process in order for AAS to establish the contract.

45. Does Phase III include advanced R&D contracts?

While Phase III may be used to continue R&D of Phase I and/or II funded efforts, Phase III is typically geared towards commercialization so indefinite R&D may not be appropriate.

46. What is the procedure to get a GSA award

For an AAS award, the process consists of submitting an inquiry, providing GSA with the requested information, and collaborating with GSA throughout the acquisition process. Refer to the slides given in the presentation and to the GSA SBIR/STTR website at <https://aas.gsa.gov/sbir/> for more detailed information.

47. Look forward to understanding the SBIR application process.



Assuming this comment is geared towards RIO, the solicitation will be announced on SAM.gov. The process will be explained and instructions will be provided.

48. How can a small business that is new to government contracting benefit from this? The small business is registered on sam.gov.

For both AAS and RIO Phase III contracts, the resulting contract offers the small business a means by which to sell its goods and services to the Government. One of the top challenges faced by small businesses is that they have a buyer but no contract. A GSA Phase III contract will address that challenge.

49. Can this device be used for Phase II contracts with DOD?

For RIO, no. For assisted acquisition services, GSA's AAS can award Phase I and II contracts on behalf of participating agencies.

GSA AAS is authorized to award Phase II contracts on behalf of Participating Agencies.

50. What different benefits does the GSA AAS team provide that is more beneficial than opportunities through technical and business assistance (TABAs) funding?

GSA AAS does not provide any funding or technical assistance comparable to that provided by Participating Agencies under TABA funding. If you have a Government buyer and GSA AAS has capacity, we will establish a contract with you for the sales of your SBIR-derived goods and services. We do that on a fee for service basis and the Government customers pay us for our services.

51. Do you have suggestions on who / where to contact to establish a new Phase III IDIQ contract based on our past SBIR work?

If you already have a Government buyer and that buyer's internal contracting activity is unable to award a Phase III contract, reach out to us at gsasbir-sttr@gsa.gov and someone will follow-up with you.

If you are asking how to find a Government buyer, you will need to do that via business development. The large SBIR/STTR offices have a Commercialization Readiness Program or equivalent that may be able to assist you. You can navigate your way to their websites through www.sbir.gov. You can also hire the services of a private consulting firm that may be able to assist. GSA is not endorsing or recommending that option but it does exist.

52. How does the big picture see a phase I become a phase III and above eventually?

Phase III is for any work that derives from, extends or completes prior SBIR/STTR-funded work. The scope is broad and Phase III can be used for services, products, more R&D or any combination of the above. Phase III applies to both Government and private sector sales. Topic



announcements that accompany the Phase I/II solicitations typically include some suggested areas for commercialization.

53. Regarding your recommended Phase III initiatives, which have been the most successful?

Our top initiative for GSA AAS is to increase our staffing numbers. We need to hire many highly skilled customer focused acquisition professionals to keep pace with requests. We have not been as successful at bringing on new AAS acquisition project managers as quickly as we would like. Please refer interested inquirers to us.

Perhaps the most successful streamlining initiative we have achieved is that the requirement for a Justification and Approval (J&A) document for direct awards was lifted from the two most seasoned GSA SBIR/STTR support teams and has made its way into a FAR CASE. Once entrenched in the FAR, there should no longer be any confusion throughout the Government regarding the J&A requirement.

54. Which agencies are forcing the GSA service and which are transitioning to phase III just fine on their own?

No agencies are forcing or requiring GSA service. We serve to meet what our customers need. Our biggest customers to date have been the Air Force, the Navy and other DoD offices. The Navy has been a leader in Phase III awards for many years. The Air Force is growing its numbers due in large part to the AFWERX Open Topic dual use announcements issued in the last few years.

55. How can SBIR Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs) assist companies interface with GSA?

Primarily by spreading awareness. ESOs can refer companies to GSA AAS if they have a Government buyer lined up and to the RIO office if interested in getting on the RIO contract.

56. Interested in seeing how this program will be structured and advertised across DoD.

Stay tuned. We plan to hold outreach webinars several times each year. We will provide updates in those webinars. Please note that, while the DoD is our largest customer, GSA Phase III support is available to all federal agencies.

57. How is GSA helping 'market' the value of SBIRs to Contracting Officers?

GSA is not marketing the SBIR program per se. GSA is not a Participating Agency. We award and administer contracts on behalf of external agencies. We certainly embrace the SBIR program objectives and its importance to our industrial base but the Participating Agencies market the program with the aid of the SBA. For events and resources, go to www.sbir.gov.

GSA AAS is exploring the concept of standing up a cell of experienced acquisition experts to assist agency Contracting Officers who would like to award a Phase III contract but need some guidance. This would be provided as a consulting type of service on a fee for service basis.



58. How do the GSA Phase III contract vehicles work in concert with other agencies.

GSA awards and manages Phase III contracts in support of federal agencies. The vast majority of orders against those contracts are for external agencies and for the DoD in particular. Our contracts enable other agencies to tap into SBIR solutions to meet their mission needs.

59. Really interested in learning how SBIR can help facilitate access to GSA schedule.

The GSA schedule program is set up for commercial goods and services. If a company matures its technology via SBIR funding and is ready to sell on the commercial market, then SBIR funding would serve as an enabler in that situation. Another item of concern is that Phase III contracts are almost always direct follow-on awards to prior SBIR-funded contracts. Orders on GSA schedule contracts are governed by FAR Section 8 and there is no exclusion to full and open competition based on the SBIR statute. This makes it challenging to place Phase III direct orders under the schedules program.

60. What are the key, common elements in SBIR proposals that are awarded?

This question is geared towards Phases I/II. GSA serves only as a contracting agency for Phase I and II awards. You will need to reach out to the Participating Agencies for this type of information. You may access links to their websites via www.sbir.gov.

61. How to register and get certified?

Assuming this question is for applicants seeking to submit SBIR/STTR proposals, follow the instructions found at www.sbir.gov and/or in Participating Agency solicitations.

62. What is the timeline for this program? Does a current GSA Schedule help?

For RIO we hope to issue the solicitation in the fall of 2023. For GSA AAS, the time to award varies based on contract size, contract complexity, type of contract and GSA workload. At this time it takes about 6 months or maybe longer to award large, complex IDIQ contracts. Having a GSA schedule does not impact the timeline in either case.

63. What is GSA doing to increase contracting capacity and accelerate time to contract award?

Hiring: We are trying to hire as many sharp, customer focused acquisition professionals as we can. Hiring has proven to be more challenging since the pandemic. If you know anyone with Government acquisition experience who may be interested in helping us do more, please send them to us.

Streamlining: We are working to eliminate non value-added work to the extent possible and we are advocating for consolidation of our SBIR/STTR support teams into a single entity similar to what the Navy, Air Force and Army have done.

Governance: This is more long term but we are advocating for simple updates to regulations and policy documents to make SBIR/STTR contracting easier and faster.



RIO: GSA AAS will use RIO as much as we can. We can order from an existing contract much quicker than writing a new contract. This should reduce the time and capacity to award.

64. Is there interest in self healing infrastructure?

This sounds like a technical focus area question. Those need to be directed to the Participating Agencies. You may access links to their websites via www.sbir.gov.

65. How to educate a client who's not familiar with the SBIR program?

There is a wealth of information available from the SBA and Participating Agencies. You may access links to their websites via www.sbir.gov.

66. What is your goal for the SBIR Program?

GSA wants to support our federal customers to the greatest extent possible. Our primary goal in GSA AAS is to improve our capacity to support more SBIR/STTR and other innovation types of awards. We want to be a reliable, efficient source of AAS support to these important programs. Our primary goal with RIO is to improve Government-wide access to innovative business concerns for SBIR/STTR Phase III solutions.

67. Interested in learning more about SBIR contract management

Contract management is pretty much the same for SBIR contracts as for other contracts. The only real difference for SBIR contracts is the governance and some aspects of the pre-award process. If you are looking for more information contact us at gsasbir-sttr@gsa.gov and someone will follow-up with you.

68. Where do you see the SBIR program in 20 years?

Considering that Congress has never made the program permanent, it is difficult to speculate that far out. With recent changes to our national security strategy and concerns about technological superiority, it is reasonable to expect that the SBIR program or something very similar will remain in existence.

69. Will this mtg be recorded? I have a customer meeting at this time that I can't miss.

Yes, the meeting was recorded and is available at www.aas.gsa.gov/sbir.