Top 10 Challenges Facing Universities Participating in SBIR/STTR Programs

Gary K. Ostrander

Vice-President for Research

Florida State University

1. Not Intended as Primary Support for Research Programs

* Attractive Success Rates

* Flexible Dollars

* Focus is on Commercialization

* Junior Faculty Particularly Susceptible

2. Internal versus External Technology

* External – Private Company
    Usually takes less time

* Internal – Faculty Member's Technology
    Usually takes a lot of time

3. Promotion and Tenure

* Will these awards count at your university?

* ***"The Times They Are a-Changin"---Bob Dylan***

* Sanberg, P.R et al. 2014. *Changing the academic culture: Valuing patents and commercialization toward tenure and career advancement.* PNAS, 111:6542-6547.

4. Conflict of Interest

* Is the faculty member working on "university research" or "company research" ?

* How would you know? & Do you need to know?

* Postdocs and Graduate Students

* Publications

5. Conflict of Commitment

* Is the faculty member working for the university or the company?

* How would you know? Do you need to know?

* SBIR/STTR grants are long-term commitment and they take a lot of time!

6. Intellectual Property Ownership

* Companies may consider all the products of the research funded by the SBIR/STTR to be their intellectual property

* Universities may consider all the products of the research funded by the SBIR/STTR to be their intellectual property

* Faculty may consider all the products……

7. F & A Rates

* Phase 1 Awards are Small

* Company needs the F&A and by the time they partner with the university there is little left for the university direct and indirect costs

* *"The only reason to write a Phase 1 application is to get a Phase 2 award"*

8. Space Utilization

* Ideally, faculty would like their "university" staff and "company" staff in the same facility

* Presents a real problem in tax-payer funded university facilities

* Short-term leases and market rates

9. Equipment/Infrastructure Use

* Again…..faculty would ideally like their "university" staff and "company" staff to have access to the same equipment/infrastructure

* Specialized equipment

* Library, cold rooms, core facilities, clean rooms etc.

10. Faculty Involvement with SBIR/STTR partners

* Faculty serving in executive position with company partnering with university on SBIR/STTR grants provides many challenges

* Conflict of commitment, conflict of interest, university liability, etc.

* Movement toward not allowing faculty to serve in executive positions

Summary

Expectations of companies, universities, and faculty can significantly differ

At the earliest possible moment every effort should be made to understand and, if possible, align the goals and objectives of all parties