

BEST PRACTICES

- Remember, you are trying to win funding. Don't give the reviewers a reason to select another application over yours.
- Be sure read through what agency is looking for with regard to letters of support. Each asks for something slightly different and have different limitations.
- **Addressing the Letter of Support (LOS):** Each should be addressed either to the Project Director, Principal Investigator or Executive Director of the organization submitting the proposal OR to the granting agency – check the guidelines of the specific grant to see who should or should not include.
- **Align LOS to Proposal:** Your letters should ideally reinforce and support what you are proposing. If the LOS is not aligned with the proposal, at the very least it should speak to the ability to project director or executive director's experience and ability to handle or run the organization's endeavor.
- **Include the signature of the organization decision maker:** The signature of the owner or executive director is generally more valuable than the signature of a coordinator or project manager; however, if a letter from a lower level employee in the organization would be more inclusive of details about how the agencies work together; do it.
- **No form letters:** Each should be unique and written from the point of view of your collaborator(s) or key stakeholders (*which can include parents, teachers, partners, elected officials, colleagues or whomever within your field*). The practice of substituting the letterhead and the name of the organization demonstrates a lack of collaboration, which is opposite to the effect you want.
- **State Relationship History:** If your potential LOS writer has worked with you as a collaborator before, remind them to say so. It demonstrates that a relationship has already been established.
- **Use official letterhead:** Each LOS should be printed on their letterhead and signed by the appropriate party (someone authorized to make the commitment of support). This makes it look much more official than a letter on plain white paper.
- **Set a deadline:** While you are requesting a LOS be sure to be clear with when you would like LOSs to be submitted. Don't run the risk of receiving a high-quality LOS only to have it submitted to you after the proposal deadline because you were not clear with expectations.
- **Overall Recommendations:** We typically recommend to clients that they should try to have a diverse audience providing LOSs and try to get as many as you can. That doesn't mean you will submit all. Rather it will allow you to select from among the stronger LOSs submitted to you.

AGENCY SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

NSF SBIR

- Letter(s) of Support (**strongly recommended; no more than three letters**). Letters of support act as an indication of market validation for the proposed innovation and add significant credibility to the proposed effort. Letters of support should demonstrate that the company has initiated dialogue with relevant stakeholders (potential customers, strategic partners or investors) for the proposed innovation and that a legitimate business opportunity may exist should the technology prove feasible.
- The letter(s) **must** contain affiliation and contact information for the signatory stakeholder. Letters and supporting documents from consultants and subcontractors (or any personnel identified in the preliminary Budget Justification) are **NOT** considered letters of support and instead should be included in the preliminary Budget Justification section.
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- The letter(s) **must** contain affiliation and contact information for the signatory stakeholder.
- **Letter(s) of Collaboration (not to be confused with Letters of Support)**. Each consultant, whether paid or unpaid, must provide a signed statement that confirms availability, time commitment, role in the project, and the agreed consulting rate (not to exceed \$600 per day). Provide this letter as part of the Budget Justification and NOT as a Supplementary Document.

AGENCY SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

NIH SBIR

- There is **NO LIMIT** on the number of Letters that can be submitted since they will be combined into one PDF and attached at a specific spot in ASSIST.
- Ideally, we want letters from individuals agreeing to support the project in a substantial, measurable way and confirm their roles in the project. NIH has updated their expectations of who you CAN include into your LOS pool. I did speak w/ someone at NIH and did get confirmation of this.
- According to NIH "*Attach all appropriate letters of support, including any letters necessary to demonstrate the support of consortium participants and collaborators such as Senior/Key Personnel and Other Significant Contributors included in the grant application. Letters are not required for personnel (such as research assistants) not contributing in a substantive, measurable way to the scientific development or execution of the project. Letters should stipulate expectations for co-authorship, and whether cell lines, samples or other resources promised in the letter are freely available to other investigators in the scientific community or will be provided to the particular investigators only. For consultants, letters should include rate/charge for consulting services and level of effort/number of hours per year anticipated. In addition, letters ensuring access to core facilities and resources should stipulate whether access will be provided as a fee-for-service. Do not place these letters in the Appendix. Consultant biographical sketches should be in the Biographical Sketch section.*"
- In short: NIH wants LOSs from consultants (who are typically listed as sub-contractors in the proposal) AND collaborators (this may include Key Personnel) to provide LOSs, plus anyone else you think can speak your project.

AGENCY SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION - SBIR

- Offerors may provide up to three (3) letters to endorse the significance of the proposed product or the potential pathways for commercial dissemination and sustainability of the proposed product. Each letter must not exceed 1-page in length. Letters must adhere to the requirements as set forth in the solicitation.
- Strong letters of endorsement (1) state the endorser's qualifications (e.g., why does this individual/organization have expertise in the area of the proposed product?), (2) refer to the specifics of the proposal, and (3) may speak to the significance of the proposed product and specify future roles or involvement with the project down the line (e.g., Phase II or Phase III) should it be successful.
- Letters endorsing the significance of the proposed product or for potential pathways for its commercial dissemination and sustainability may come from individual experts, associations, or organizations in the specific field of interest, future potential partners or investors, from school practitioners who would use or possibly purchase the product if it were commercially available, among others.
- Offerors should not include letters of endorsement from key members of the project team, such as consultants or subcontractors, as the confirmation of involvement of members of the project team is to be provided in the Biographical Summary of Key Personnel (Section III.F.4) and can be discussed in terms of how the project is managed. Offerors should not include letters from banks or personal lenders as a means to demonstrate the potential availability of Phase III financing.

EXAMPLE OF HOW TO REQUEST A LOS

Dear Advisors and Friends of [Sample Company Name],

[Sample Company Name] is in the process of applying for an NIH-SBIR grant to enlarge the current pilot study at the Department of Vascular Surgery, [Sample location] in Houston. This is the initial pilot study of 30 subjects, all high-risk diabetics with peripheral neuropathy, preventing the development of foot ulcers. We have had some preliminary results using [Sample Company Name's Product] in these subjects with very promising results and [Sample Company Name's Product] always intended to expand the study to be a multi-center study to have a much larger sampling for statistical analysis, decrease institutional bias and more medical exposure. This grant could exceed \$1.5M to [Sample Company Name's Product] and we are well positioned to receive it.

Because you are familiar with the [Sample Company Name's Product] story and are some of our most trusted supporters, I am asking if you would write a letter of endorsement to the SBIR for funding this diabetic study. Your letter will be included in the SBIR submission package. We also will be submitting applications for other grants to fund this very important study and would like to use your letters of recommendation in these applications as well. Unfortunately, I apologize for the short notice since the deadline is Jan. 5th. Please send the letters directly to me at: XXXXX@XXX by December 21st. In your letter, it is important to emphasize one or more of these themes:

- Impact [Sample Company Name's Product] will have on overall patient health
- How many patients in your experience and/or practice could benefit; not just diabetics
- How this will reduce costs (I.e. Reducing hospital admissions, amputations, other more expensive treatments, etc.)
- The unique nature of [Sample Company Name's Product] (portable, affordable, easy to use) and why patients will use the product and be compliant

The current pilot study protocol, using [Sample Company Name's Product] compared to baseline metrics, measures 1. Edema reduction by volume displacement, 2. Peripheral neuropathy by measuring balance and gait disturbances, 3. Transcutaneous perfusion improvement, 4. Foot temperature (thermography) and pressures, 5. Fit (reduction of skin shear) and ease of application of the shoe with the Boa closure, 6. Some subjective scales I.e. User friendliness, discomfort with the device.

Some pertinent background information that you are aware of but I want to reiterate some focus points. Diabetic ulcers have a huge and growing impact on the US's and the EU's economies with 2% of all health care dollars spent on treatment of DU. \$17B are spent annually treating and preventing diabetic foot conditions in the US. [Sample Company Name's Product] promising technology housed in an insole, will enable patients to have total mobility without any extra cords, tubes or battery packs and wear shoes that don't label them as diabetics. It is all housed in an insole sealed and controlled by wireless blue tooth technology. The cost will be affordable for most everyone and certainly reduce or prevent the most costly "in patient" hospital admissions. Currently 10% of all admissions are related to diabetic complications. Please let me know if you will be able to help us this effort.