A Guide to DARPA Funding: Process, Financial, and Technical Requirements

By Stephen Richardson, Managing Consultant and Eric Jia-Sobota, Founder

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), part of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), is renowned for funding groundbreaking and high-risk research projects with the potential for high reward. DARPA's mission is to maintain the technological superiority of the U.S. military by fostering innovation across a wide range of disciplines. This guide outlines the application process, financial considerations, and technical requirements necessary for securing DARPA funding.

Application Process

1. Identify a Relevant DARPA Program
Start by exploring active DARPA programs on their website to find opportunities that align with your research capabilities. Each program includes a Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) that details the scope of work, technical areas of interest, and application guidelines.

2. Submit a Concept Paper
Before developing a full proposal, submit a concept paper that outlines your idea. This step allows DARPA program managers to evaluate the alignment of your project with their objectives. Key elements to include are:
- **Relevance**: How your project supports DARPA's mission.
- **Innovative Approach**: Highlight what makes your project novel.
- **Potential Impact**: Describe the anticipated benefits or breakthroughs.

3. Full Proposal Submission
If your concept paper is approved, you will be invited to submit a full proposal. A complete submission includes:
- **Technical Volume**:
  o Detailed objectives, research methods, and timelines.
  o Preliminary data or proof of concept.
  o Plans for transition or commercialization.
- **Business Volume**:
  o Comprehensive budget with direct and indirect costs.
  o Financial stability documentation.

4. Evaluation Process
DARPA uses a merit-based review process to evaluate proposals. Criteria include:
- **Scientific and Technical Merit**: Innovation and feasibility of the proposed solution.
- **Alignment with DARPA Goals**: Contribution to technological superiority and defense needs.
- **Capability**: Applicant's qualifications and access to resources.

5. Negotiation and Award
If selected, DARPA will enter into negotiations to finalize the award terms. This involves:
- Budget verification.
- Contract terms agreement.
- Issuance of an official contract or cooperative agreement.

Financial Requirements
Securing DARPA funding involves strict financial guidelines to ensure accountability and transparency. Key requirements include:
- **Detailed Budget**:
  o Provide a breakdown of direct costs (e.g., salaries, equipment) and indirect costs (e.g., administrative overhead).
  o Justify all costs in alignment with the proposed scope of work.
- **Cost Sharing**:

  o While not always required, cost-sharing can enhance your proposal's competitiveness by demonstrating commitment.
- **Financial Documentation**:
  o Include audited financial statements and documentation of financial stability.
- **Audit Compliance**:
  o Adhere to federal regulations for audits, particularly if your organization receives over $750,000 in federal funds.

Technical Requirements

DARPA prioritizes innovative, high-risk projects that offer the potential for groundbreaking results. Key technical requirements include:

Innovation and Feasibility
- Propose a novel approach that addresses a critical challenge.
- Provide preliminary data or theoretical evidence supporting feasibility.

Alignment with Defense Objectives
- Clearly articulate how your project addresses national security needs or advances military capabilities.

Team Expertise and Capability
- Highlight the qualifications of your team members, emphasizing expertise relevant to the project.
- Demonstrate access to necessary facilities and resources.

Risk Mitigation
- Identify potential technical and logistical risks and propose strategies to mitigate them.

Partner with EverGlade Consulting

Navigating the DARPA funding process can be complex, but with the right expertise, you can significantly enhance your chances of success. EverGlade Consulting offers comprehensive support to help you:

- **Craft Winning Proposals**: Develop detailed, compelling submissions that align with DARPA's priorities.
- **Optimize Budgets**: Create thorough and justifiable budgets that comply with federal regulations.
- **End-to-End Guidance**: Assist with concept papers, full proposals, and contract negotiations.

With a proven track record in securing federal funding, EverGlade Consulting is your trusted partner in advancing innovation. Let us help you bring your groundbreaking ideas to life.

Contact us today at info@everglade.com to learn more about our DARPA funding support services.