

# Idaho startups take advantage of federal funding program

By: [Sharon Fisher](#) June 12, 2020 0

Some Idaho startups are starting to take more advantage of a federal program intended to help turn technologies into products.

The program is Small Business Innovation Research, and 11 federal agencies, ranging from the Department of Agriculture to the National Science Foundation, use it to offer funding to startups.

"Idaho is seriously underrepresented in SBIR grants," said Norris Krueger, goal champion for the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's ESHIP initiative to grow ecosystem building, in an email message.

## Use in Idaho

So far, only a few Idaho startups have been taking advantage of the program, in some cases because they're not aware of it and in some cases because the application process is arduous.



Jeff Nelson

Most recently, AppliedApps is working on an application for a request from the National Science Foundation, said Jeff Nelson, CEO and founder of AppliedApps, based in Ketchum, in an email message.

"Through machine learning and artificial intelligence, we are able to start with a limited data set (three data points) and with the consent of the consumer, build out a full financial profile with all assets, income, employment, banking, investments, credit and property information in moments, which supports complex financial transactions like a mortgage to be fulfilled near instantaneously," Nelson said. "The information is aggregated on behalf of the consumer, who owns the generated data and 'shares' it with whom and when they please. Think of it as any other ID, driver's license or Social Security card that simplifies financial literacy."

The company was accepted and has a year to write its proposal, Nelson said.

"We are at the proposal stage and writing the drafts," he said.

The company has added a University of Southern California intern, a finance major who is becoming the submissions expert with NSF, he said. In addition, the company is adding the chief technology officer required to manage the technology build and is also intending to add Boise State computer science students based on the company's needs and the students' qualifications, Nelson said.

Nelson isn't alone.

"We've been most successful with National Institutes of Health SBIRs' including a new PhaseIb starting in July," said Ron Oberleitner, founder of Behavior Imaging. "I do have experience with other Institutes as well."



Norris Krueger

Krueger's best advice to companies interested in applying for SBIR grants is simple: "Read the danged instructions," he said in an email message.

"Thanks to Norris, as we would a) not have known of the opportunity, and b) certainly would have failed at our attempts to apply without his oversight," said Nelson. "We appreciate the opportunity that may come our way from the NSF/SBIR and are very appreciative of the government's support for these programs."

## Program details

But while few Idaho companies have been able to take advantage of the program thus far, Idaho entrepreneurs are becoming more aware of the program, and people who work within the entrepreneurial community are helping startups find out about the program and navigate the application process.



Carmen Achabal

For example, the Idaho Department of Commerce has a [website about the program](#) that includes all 11 federal agencies that offer SBIR funding, said Carmen Achabal, program manager for the Idaho Global Entrepreneurial Mission. All told, the program has about \$2.5 billion to give away, a total of about 3% of the combined federal agency budgets, she said. "They post a solicitation. 'This is the problem with which we need assistance,'" Achabal said. The response is a three-phase evaluation process. The first is feasibility, which lasts from six to nine months and awards up to \$150,000. The second phase could be \$1 million or more. "If they are successful in phase 2, they can be a provider and contract with the federal government," she said. COVID-19 is actually creating more opportunities for SBIR funding, like that awarded to AppliedApps, Achabal said. "Several agencies had opened up solicitations in direct response to COVID, looking for technologies to address market gaps," she said.