
Tools help tech companies compete for federal grants

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Washington entrepreneurs developing high-tech products now have more tools to compete for federal funding.

In October, the U.S. Small Business Administration gave the Washington Technology Center and its partners a renewable \$100,000 matching grant to help Washington companies, especially those outside of the Seattle metro area, compete more successfully for a type of funding known as SBIR/STTR. The abbreviation stands for Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer. Under these programs, federal agencies set aside part of their budgets to fund small businesses that are pursuing commercially promising technologies.

Traditionally, much of the SBIR/STTR funding in Washington has gone to the tech-heavy Seattle metro area. "While about 40 percent of companies eligible for SBIR/STTR grants are located outside the Puget Sound region, they receive only about 15 percent of SBIR/STTR awards," said Tab Wilkins, operations director for the Washington Technology Center. Firms in King County, for example, won more than \$81 million from 1995-1998, while those in Benton County won \$2.8 million in the same time period.

Now other parts of the state, including the Tri-Cities, are getting more services to help apply for this funding and commercialize the resulting high-tech products. The program of services is called WaFAST, short for Washington Federal and State Technology Partnership Program. In the first year of the program through September 2002, WaFAST is offering a range of assistance from evaluating ideas to honing investor pitches. The consortium is matching the WaFAST grant with an additional \$215,000.