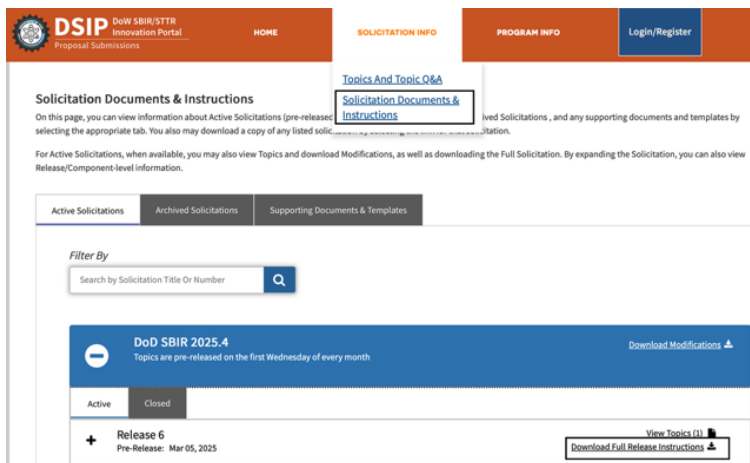




DOW Agency level vs Component level Instructions

The most important step for any SBIR/STTR submission is reading the instructions. The Department of War (DOW), also known as the Department of Defense (DOD), releases its solicitation and instructions on the Defense SBIR/STTR Innovation Portal (DSIP). 14 different DOW/DOD components participate in SBIR/STTR, with the largest being the Army, Navy & Air Force. And for every topic released, there are two sets of instructions: the agency-level instructions and the component-level instructions. Which one should you read? The answer is both.



The **agency-level solicitation establishes universal rules** that apply to all Components, such as eligibility, funding thresholds, and basic formatting. Think of it as the master rulebook. **Each component can issue supplementary instructions** for its mission requirements. These instructions provide specific guidance on aspects like technical volume format, budget format, and required forms. They appear in the solicitation under “Component Instructions” and apply only to proposals submitted under that component’s topics.

What happens when the two instructions conflict? This occurs quite often. For example, the DOW instructions have a 20-page limit for the technical proposal, whereas the Army may have a 5-page limit plus an additional commercialization slide deck. Or the DOW instructions specify that you must submit your cost volume using the DSIP web form, but the component instructions require the use of their component-specific Excel document. In these cases, you must follow the component-level instructions.

The Component is the actual contracting entity for your SBIR award, and their guidance reflects how your proposal will be reviewed and managed.

If something seems unclear or inconsistent, do the following:

- Check for FAQs or amendments (Components often issue clarifications mid-solicitation.)
- Contact the Component’s SBIR Help Desk or Program Manager, not the general DoD hotline.
- Keep written records of any clarification you receive.

Even experienced SBIR proposers can stumble over details. Here are the main pitfalls to avoid:

- Using the wrong cost template or format.
- Forgetting to include a necessary attachment, like a slide deck or quad chart.
- Overlooking component-specific page limits or font rules.
- Assuming deadlines are the same for every component (they often aren’t).