Entrepreneurial Training & Consulting

18650 W Old US12
Chelsea, MI 48118
734-930-9741
info@bbcetc.com | www.BBCetc.com

POST-EVENT BRIEFING | SEPTEMBER 22, 2026 | WASHINGTON, DC

Defense Tech Connect 2026: What You Need to Know

On September 22, 2026, BBCetc exhibited at Defense Tech Connect in Washington, DC, alongside our partner Totem Tech. The event brought together SBIR program managers, the Federal and State Technology (FAST) Partnership ecosystem, small businesses, and defense primes. Here is what small businesses need to know.

Key Takeaways

Act now	EPA SBIR proposals are due **November 8, 2026**. DHS SBIR is coming soon.
DOW	Starting next cycle, only one proposal per company per topic.
AFWERX	Moving to customer-led open topics, following the Navy model.
DOE	Redesigned SBIR/STTR application and award process.
TABA	Now mandatory for all agencies to offer.
Foreign risk	Disclosing does not automatically disqualify an application.

Open Now and Coming Soon

EPA SBIR Solicitation	
Status	**Open**
Released	September 24, 2026
Due	**November 8, 2026**
Window	About six weeks, so start now

DHS SBIR Solicitation	
Status	**Coming soon**
Announced	At Defense Tech Connect
Release date	Not yet announced
Next step	Prepare now so you are ready at release

If either agency fits your technology, contact us now. A short window leaves little room to build a compliant, competitive proposal from scratch.

What's Changing at the Agencies

Department of War (DOW)

- Starting next cycle, DOW will accept only **one proposal per company per topic**.
- DOW publishes more than 300 topics a year, so choose your strongest approach for each topic.
- The Navy will run open topics every quarter and is standing up a dedicated SBIR contracting center.
- AFWERX is moving its open topic to the Navy model, where the government customer writes the topic. A customer memorandum will no longer be required for AFWERX Phase II open topics.

Why it matters: Phase I is the hardest gate. With one shot per topic, proposal quality and topic fit matter more than ever.

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Department of Energy (DOE)

DOE presented a redesigned applicant and awardee experience for its SBIR/STTR program.

- **Simpler application:** 83% fewer application inputs.
- **One application:** enter once, then move through later phases via Go/No-Go decisions.
- **Flexible progression:** awardees advance at their own pace by meeting established milestones.
- **More commercialization support:** enhanced assistance and connections to the National Laboratories.
- **New partnerships:** funding mechanisms with the Foundation for Energy Security and Innovation (FESI) and ConnectWerx are designed to increase speed and expand access.

Where DOE Is Looking for Innovation

- Critical Minerals & Materials
- Domestic Manufacturing
- Energy Generation, Storage & Efficiency
- Advanced Transportation & Fuels
- Nuclear & Fusion Energy
- Grid, Cybersecurity & Resilience
- Hydrocarbons & Geothermal
- AI, Advanced Computing & Scientific Software
- Scientific Instrumentation & Sensing
- Biological & Environmental Technologies

Specific topics and subtopics vary by funding opportunity.

Technical and Business Assistance (TABA): Now Mandatory

TABA helps you fill the commercialization skill gaps on your team, and every agency must now offer it.

PHASE I	PHASE II
Up to $6,500	**Up to $50,000**

All agencies	TABA can be part of the R&D award or in addition to it, depending on the agency.
NSF	You do not need to disclose or map out TABA use in your proposal.
NIH	Prefers TABA in the application. Midstream supplements are possible, but each institute or center decides based on its resources.

Foreign Risk: Plan Your Disclosures Early

Foreign risk reviews were one of the most discussed topics of the day. Agencies encouraged applicants to disclose any potential foreign risk, since disclosing does not automatically disqualify an application, while an omission discovered later can do real damage. If you have foreign investors, collaborators, or personnel, plan your disclosures early.

CMMC Compliance with Totem Tech

For DOW SBIR companies, cybersecurity compliance is not optional. The required CMMC level for a DOW SBIR/STTR award is determined by its topic, and awards can be held up without compliance. We are proud to partner with Totem Tech on a no-nonsense and affordable solution for CMMC compliance (SBIR CMMC Survival Kit™: HRDN-IT™).

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Faster Paths to Funding

Several programs are moving money in weeks, not months.

Navy LEAN Power Network. LEAN Power (Logistics, Energy and Access for Naval Power) is run by the Expeditionary Missions Consortium, Crane (EMC^2) and addresses Navy needs in contested logistics, resiliency, operational energy, and installation energy infrastructure. Presenters noted that one small business was funded within **six weeks** through this OTA pathway. Technology areas include microgrids, advanced batteries, shipboard power and propulsion, water resilience, unmanned persistence, and supply chain. The network is especially interested in post-SBIR companies with military energy solutions seeking a path to transition. Membership is free, but you must first join the EMC^2 Consortium. Learn More

NSF TIP STRIDE Ventures. Launched by NSF's Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP) and Start2 Group, STRIDE Ventures moves NSF-funded technologies into real-world use with minimal bureaucracy, with challenge awards made within **6 to 8 weeks**. Current challenges include the AI Efficiency Challenge, focused on deploying AI/ML efficiency technologies at scale, and the multi-year Tech Metal Transformation Challenge, focused on turning domestic waste streams into high-performance materials for critical metals supply chains. Learn More

Partnering with Federal Labs

The Federal Laboratory Consortium (FLC) connects businesses to a network of over 300 federal labs and their research, facilities, and technical experts. Through technology transfer partnerships, small businesses can access patents and licenses, specialized equipment, and lab talent to develop better products and reach market faster. Learn More

FLC Business	Search available technologies, facilities, equipment, and patents across the federal lab network
Notices of Intent to License	Be first in line for new licensing opportunities
Member Connect and Lab Showcases	Hear directly from labs about their capabilities and partnership needs
Federal Facilities Heat Map	Find labs and facilities near you
How to Work with the FLC	A quick-start guide to federal lab partnerships

How BBCetc Can Help

With new proposal limits and closer scrutiny of foreign risk and commercialization, every submission needs to count. BBCetc helps companies choose the right topics, build competitive proposals, plan TABA use, and prepare commercialization and disclosure documentation.

Reach out to talk through the EPA and DHS opportunities or your DOW strategy for the next cycle.