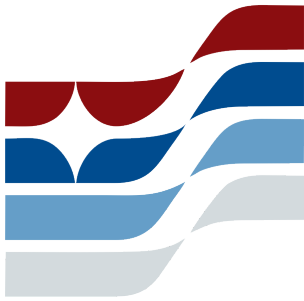




SMI INSIGHT

FROM CONCEPT TO CAPABILITY

TURNING MEDICAL INNOVATION INTO A WINNING DEFENSE HEALTH PROPOSAL

By Dr. Travis Taylor, Vice President and Life Sciences Practice Area Lead

KEY POINTS

- Defense health funding requests are strongest when they begin with a clearly defined military medical need.
- Scientific merit alone is not enough. Proposals must show why the work matters to Service members and military readiness.
- Competitive projects connect innovation to Department of War priorities, operational gaps, and a realistic path toward execution.
- A credible execution plan should explain who would manage the effort, how funds would be used, and what milestones would be achieved.
- Tools such as CRADAs can help demonstrate alignment with federal research environments, but they do not guarantee funding.
- Clear communication is essential. Congressional and Pentagon audiences need to quickly understand the need, solution, funding request, and expected impact.

Each year, Congress adds funding to the defense appropriations bill for projects that were not included, or were not fully funded, in the President's Budget request. In military medicine and defense health, those additions can help move biomedical innovation toward practical use for Service members and eventually civilian populations.

But not every promising life sciences idea is a strong candidate for defense health funding. The most competitive projects are not simply innovative technologies looking for federal support. They are projects that address a military medical challenge, align with the Department of War's priorities, and have a plausible execution path. Just as important, they can be explained clearly to both congressional and Pentagon audiences.

That distinction matters. For companies, universities, and research institutes interested in the defense health market, the first question should not be, "How do we get Congress to fund this?" It should be, "Does this project address a military medical need in a way the Department can understand, evaluate, and eventually use?"

START WITH THE MISSION NEED

The most compelling defense health projects begin with the mission. Scientific merit and commercial potential are important, but they are not enough. A project must be connected to a military health objective – such as combat casualty care, traumatic brain injury, infectious disease, musculoskeletal injury, psychological health, or another condition that affects the force.

That is one reason I make a point of attending the Department of War's annual Military Health System Research Symposium (MHSRS). This year's MHSRS recently wrapped up in the Orlando area, where the military medical research community gathered to discuss the priorities, research gaps, and operational health challenges shaping the future of defense health. For life sciences organizations, MHSRS offers a straightforward value: it is one of the best places to hear how the Department defines the problems it is trying to solve.

The lesson is to listen before pitching. Before developing a funding request, companies and research institutions should understand the military medical need, the relevant defense health community, and how their work fits the mission context.

TRANSLATE THE SCIENCE INTO MILITARY RELEVANCE

An effective defense health proposal does not merely describe a novel product, platform, diagnostic, therapeutic, or research concept. It explains why that work matters to the military.

SMI is a government affairs firm based in Washington, D.C.



Dr. Travis Taylor

SMI Vice President, Life Sciences
Practice Area lead

Contact:

Email: Travis@strategicmi.com



From Concept to Capability

For over 30 years, we've helped to secure federal funding for national security and dual-use technologies.

SMI
200 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Suite 510
Washington, D.C. 20001
Strategicmi.com



That means translating technical or scientific value into military relevance. What gap does the project address? Who would benefit? How does it support warfighter readiness? Why is defense funding the right fit?

This is often where otherwise sound ideas falter. A proposal may be technically impressive but still fail to show why it belongs in the defense appropriations process. The closer the project is tied to an operational gap, an unmet military medical challenge, or an existing defense health priority, the easier it is for decisionmakers to evaluate.

SHOW A CREDIBLE EXECUTION PATH

A project is also more persuasive when it can point to a realistic path for commercial development and eventual procurement. That does not necessarily mean a company, university, or research institute must already have a formal government partner before seeking funding. But the proposal should explain where the funding would fit within the Department and how the work could be carried out through a relevant program office, laboratory, medical research organization, contract, grant, cooperative agreement, or other vehicle.

For some organizations, a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement, or CRADA, may help demonstrate that connection. A CRADA allows a federal laboratory and a non-federal partner to collaborate on mission-relevant research and development. It does not guarantee funding, but it can show that the project is connected to a real defense health research environment rather than standing apart from the Department's work.

The key point is executability. If funding is provided, who would manage the effort? Who would perform the work? What milestones would be achieved? And how would the project move from an appropriations request to measurable progress?

COMMUNICATE THE PROPOSAL CLEARLY

Even a compelling defense health project can fall flat if it is not communicated clearly. Congressional staff and Pentagon officials are asked to evaluate many proposals, often on compressed timelines. A project that is well-supported but difficult to explain may struggle to gain traction.

That is why a well-developed funding proposal matters. At a minimum, organizations should be prepared to explain the military medical need, the proposed solution, the requested funding amount, the likely execution path, and the expected benefit to military readiness. Those points should be captured in a concise white paper and, when appropriate, a short slide deck that can communicate the case quickly.

The goal is not to oversell the project. It is to make the project understandable. A clear proposal helps decisionmakers see why the work matters, why defense funding is appropriate, how the money would be used, and what progress the funding would enable.

THE BOTTOM LINE

For life sciences organizations, defense health funding is not simply about having a good idea. It is about showing that the idea advances a defense health priority, aligns with Department aims, can be executed responsibly, and has a realistic path toward impact.

In defense health, the strongest funding requests begin long before the appropriations cycle. They begin with listening.