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UNH Business Development Center Wins Grant to Help State's Small Firms

By [Janet Lathrop](#)
UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- New Hampshire came out a winner recently among states competing for federal dollars to help strengthen the technological competitiveness of small businesses. The University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business and Economics, along with its Small Business Development Center (SBDC), was awarded the first \$100,000 of a five-year Federal and State Technology Partnership (FAST) grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Whittemore School and its new Hamel Center for the Management of Technology provided matching funds which helped attract the federal program, says Mary Collins, SBDC director. Steve Bolander, dean of UNH's Whittemore School, is delighted with the university's and Hamel Center's partnership with agencies serving the New Hampshire business community.

"This is a golden opportunity not only for the state's entrepreneurs and small businesses, but for our faculty to provide research and other support, and for students to learn first-hand about carrying a product to market," says Bolander. "By coordinating communication between our small business community and agencies already helping, the SBDC expects to reach more clients with appropriate services relevant to their precise needs, to reduce duplication of services, and in general galvanize the New Hampshire business community."

Bob Ebberson, an SBDC regional manager for New Hampshire who will manage FAST, says one of the

program's goals is to help businesses, especially those in rural areas, compete more successfully for grants in the national Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. SBIR provides funding to companies with fewer than 500 employees to meet the research needs of 10 federal agencies. An estimated \$1.2 billion is available in 2002 to small businesses who submit proposals for early stage research and development in response to federal research requirements. To be successful, products must have some commercialization potential.

The U.S. Departments of Defense and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, NASA, the National Science Foundation and five others regularly put out "shopping lists" of new products they want but which have not yet been developed. These usually require some research, but if a New Hampshire manufacturing firm feels it can develop such a product, SBDC will help locate funding for re-tooling machinery, product testing or patent protection, for example.

The FAST program will coordinate the efforts of more than a dozen agencies already serving New Hampshire, Ebberson says, making the process more convenient. "In a nutshell, the FAST program will help with everything from thought to bought," Ebberson says. "We see ourselves as the networking center for SBIR in New Hampshire."

Collins adds, "We're working one-on-one with companies now, connecting them with business development support. One of the real strengths of this program is collaboration."

She estimates that nearly 100 New Hampshire companies have received more than 500 awards since the SBIR program began in 1984. Congress recently re-authorized the SBIR program through 2008, and added the FAST grant to boost that number upward every year for the next five.

New Hampshire's FAST grant came after an intense evaluation at the federal level, says Collins. Only 30 were awarded. Governor Jeanne Shaheen, in a letter accompanying the application, praised SBDC for working hard to enhance opportunities for small companies. "New Hampshire is a leader in the high-

tech, global economy, ranked near the top nationally in international trade, Internet use, innovation capacity and percentage of high-tech workers," Shaheen wrote. The governor added that she looks forward to the state building on that success through the FAST Partnership.

For more details about SBIR, contact Ebberson at 634-2496.

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