

TIPS FOR INVENTORS

1. **Prepare a formal written record of your invention, describing all salient features and probable advantages. Have at least two copies signed, witnessed and dated. If additions, revisions or modifications are needed, file signed, dated and witnessed copies of these with the original(s).** Whenever you discuss or share your idea with anyone (in person, via phone or e-mail, etc.), note the date and exactly what information you provide. Remember--you might someday have to prove in court that this is *really* your idea.

2. If your invention is a device with functional (but not necessarily moving) parts, build a model. Make sure it works as conceived. It doesn't have to be elegant -- all you are trying to do is show that your idea has feasibility and can work.

3. You can find out for yourself whether your invention has already been patented before going to the expense of hiring a patent attorney. If you have a computer, do your patent search at www.uspto.gov. You can also do this search free of charge at most libraries and most have staff that will assist you. It is important to identify the patent class and sub-class that pertain to your invention and to familiarize yourself with the most recent three or four patents issued in that sub-class. Remember that the basic criteria for patentability are *novelty* and *utility*.

4. Give some thought to potential extensions and modifications to your idea that might extend the scope of your patent. Trusted friends or associates can help with this conception process. Document, date and witness all seemingly worthwhile thoughts and append to the original idea description.

5. If your patent search shows that your idea has *not* been patented and you have been able to build a model to show that your invention works, make an appointment with a patent attorney. Schedule a consultation with a patent attorney. The main objective of this conference is to get a perspective on the patenting process, the likely costs and time involved and what level of effort on your part will be required to achieve your goal.

6. After all the thought you've given to your invention plus the work you did to reduce it to practice, you may lack needed objectivity about your idea. For that reason, you should have it evaluated by an unbiased professional. When you do, **be sure to have the reviewer sign a non-disclosure agreement beforehand.** (Since SCORE counselors have to sign confidentiality agreements that apply to all clients, they may be good individuals to start with.) In some cases, you may well need someone skilled in a particular technology or application area to review your idea. NOTE: Only at that point should you make the decision as to whether to pursue a patent.

7. Read as much as you can about how to protect inventions and develop new products. Learn how to take your invention from the idea phase to the manufacturing phase. You may find that to commercialize your idea yourself will require expertise and/or financial resources that you cannot (or don't want to) put forth. In such a case, sale or licensing of your idea to others could be an attractive option.

8. Avoid invention marketing companies that promise to market your invention. They are expensive, and rarely successful.

SCORE and SBDC are ready to help you by providing FREE business counseling.