Grant Announcement - ***Accelerating Concept to Commercialization in Kansas (ACCEL-KS) Program***

Kansas Office of Innovation

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |

**Innovation Grant Announcement**

**Program Title:** Accelerating Concept to Commercialization in Kansas (ACCEL-KS) Program

**Application Stream:** Proof of Concept

**Issuing Organization:** Kansas Department of Commerce (KDC), Office of Innovation

**Application Due Date:** May 09, 2025

**Project Funding Amount:** Up to $500,000
**Project Funding Match:** 25% cash match of maximum award amount

**Total Program Allocation:** Up to $1,000,000.00

**Introduction and Purpose**

Kansas Department of Commerce (KDC), through the Office of Innovation, invites grant applications from eligible start-up incubators and innovation hubs for the Accelerating Concept to Commercialization in Kansas (ACCEL-KS) program, Proof-of-Concept (PoC) stream.

* An incubator is defined as “an organization that houses programming that provides support and guidance to start-up companies during the embryonic phases of their development to support job creation and retention. Support can include technical assistance, facility access, financing, mentorship, and networking opportunities.” ([Economic Development Glossary | U.S. Economic Development Administration](https://www.eda.gov/about/economic-development-glossary/))

This program aims to provide comprehensive support to Kansas-based innovators, startups, and businesses to progress from initial concept to market-ready solutions with an aim to deliver high-potential projects that contribute to Kansas’s economic growth and competitive edge.

KDC is seeking state-wide delivery partners to help identify and support idea and early-stage innovators and startups with the resources and wrap-around support for PoC projects designed to further research, spur commercialization, and assist entrepreneurs in raising funds to expand their businesses.

The Accelerating Concept to Commercialization in Kansas (ACCEL-KS) program, Proof-of-Concept stream, embodies KDC’s commitment to supporting high-potential projects through essential resources, mentorship, and wrap-around support aimed at PoC efforts. A collaborative, ecosystem-driven approach is central to initiative's mission. This program not only seeks to advance innovation but aims to measurably increase Kansas’s economic vitality by driving private investment, generating high-wage jobs, and scaling entrepreneurial ventures across all regions.

**Project Scope and Objectives**

Successful applicants will design and implement programs that support innovators and idea and early-stage startups across the following areas:

1. **Programming:** Develop an effective, results-driven, and universally accessible program (cohort-based or otherwise) that provides comprehensive support, including access to mentorship, funding, market insights, and technical expertise, to bridge the gap between concept validation and market readiness.
2. **Research & Development (R&D):** Facilitate the development and validation of new products and services through prototyping, testing, and technical support for innovators, idea, and early-stage businesses.
3. **Proof of Concept (PoC):** Enable innovators and early-stage businesses to assess the commercial viability of their ideas and innovative technologies with technical and business development resources.
4. **Ecosystem Development:** Strengthen Kansas's innovation ecosystem by offering resources to innovators and entrepreneurs and fostering collaborative networks among ecosystem partners.

KDC expects that the majority of program funds be directly allocated to innovators, entrepreneurs, and businesses in the form of grants, rather than being primarily used for internal capacity building by incubators. Refer to the “Eligible Cost” table below for permissible capacity-building expenditures.

**Key Program Components**

Applications should address the following program components:

1. **Proof of Concept Development:** Explain how your organization will assist innovators and businesses in validating their technologies, including advanced testing, prototyping, market analysis, and planning for commercialization.
2. **Technical Assistance:** Describe how your organization will provide or access technical expertise in R&D, including prototyping, testing, validation, and strategies for commercialization.
3. **Collaborative Networks:** Outline partnerships with universities, industry, R&D facilities, and support organizations that will enhance service delivery. Include details on access to specialized facilities or personnel, as well as how they will convene ecosystem partners regularly and coordinate referrals or shared services.
4. **Research and Development:** Explain how your organization will assist innovators, idea-stage businesses, and early-stage businesses in their efforts to develop and/or improve products and services.
5. **Funding Support and Resources:** Outline your approach to facilitate financial support for innovators and businesses, such as grants, convertible funding, or facilitating external investment.
6. **Measuring Success:** Provide a plan for evaluating program success, tracking metrics, and outcomes related to product development, commercialization, and business capacity enhancement.

**Funding and Matching Requirements**

* **Available Funding:** Up to $500,000 per grantee
* **Matching Requirements:** A minimum 25% cash match for requested grant funds is required (approximately $125,000 of max. award amount). In-kind contributions and relevant assets should be leveraged and detailed in the narrative but will not count towards this match requirement.

**Eligible Applicants**

Eligible organizations are incubators or innovation hubs with proven expertise in business development, commercialization support, and/or R&D assistance. See the definition provided for incubator located in the “Introduction and Purpose” section of this grant applications.

**Submission Requirements**

Applications will be reviewed on these areas:

1. **Organizational Overview:** Describe your organization’s background, experience, and qualifications relevant to Proof-of-Concept programming, small business innovation, R&D, and support services.
2. **Program Plan:** Provide a detailed outline for achieving the program’s goals, with specific plans for state-wide collaboration to strengthen the Kansas innovation ecosystem.
3. **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Highlight collaborations with universities, industry organizations, or other relevant entities that will enhance program outcomes.
4. **Project Budget:** Include a detailed project budget outlining use of funds, matching funds, in-kind contributions, and other financial resources.
5. **Timeline and Deliverables:** Present a timeline for project execution, specifying key milestones and deliverables.
6. **Communications and Marketing Plan:** Provide a detailed outline for how your organization will effectively promote and communicate the program’s offering, values, goals, and outcomes to various stakeholders. Additionally, outline how your organization will elevate the ACCEL-KS program.
7. **Metrics and Evaluation Plan:** Specify performance metrics and expected outcomes, including business development, commercialization milestones, and methods for evaluating project success.

**Selection Criteria**

Applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

* **Organizational Overview (10 pts)**
	+ Experience in supporting innovation, R&D, and business growth.
	+ Capacity to deliver high-quality, impactful services.
	+ Evidence of success in similar initiatives.
* **Program Plan (20 pts)**
	+ Clear, strategic approach to meeting program objectives.
	+ Comprehensive service scope and alignment with innovation goals.
	+ Innovative strategies for small business support.
	+ A clear and detailed program outline that demonstrates flexibility and universality in access.
	+ Number of innovators, startups, and businesses supported. Minimum 30% of projects from rural communities
* **Partnerships and Collaborations (15 pts)**
	+ Strong, relevant partnerships enhancing program success.
	+ Minimum of 5 partnerships detailed in narrative.
	+ Clear roles for each partner.
	+ Synergy potential among collaborators.
* **Universal Access Considerations (20 pts)**
	+ Demonstrate a clear pathway to ensuring all eligible Kansans have an opportunity to utilize this program
	+ Clear strategy to engage and support projects in western and rural Kansas.
	+ Clear strategy to engage and support economically and socially disadvantaged groups.
	+ Clear objectives and audience.
	+ Community development and socioeconomic impact.
	+ Sustainability and long-term commitment to universal access.
* **Project Budget (10 pts)**
	+ Realistic, thorough budget that meets matching requirements.
	+ Identifies additional financial resources where applicable.
* **Timeline and Deliverables (10 pts)**
	+ Feasible timeline with key milestones and realistic deliverables.
	+ Capability to meet program deadlines.
* **Marketing and Communication Plan (5 pts)**
	+ Clarity and specificity.
	+ Branding consistency and messaging.
	+ Target audience definition and engagement strategy.
	+ Effectiveness of proposed channels and tactics.
* **Metrics and Evaluation Plan (10 pts)**
	+ Defined, measurable metrics.
	+ Comprehensive evaluation strategy to assess project impact.

**Budget**

|  |
| --- |
| **ELIGIBLE COSTS** |
| **COST CATEGORY** | **DESCRIPTION** |
| **Materials and Supplies** | * Consumables and project-specific materials required for programming.
* Software licenses, tools, and supplies for successful project execution.
 |
| **Equipment and Facility Use** | * Costs associated with leasing or renting specialized equipment or facilities associated with the program.
 |
| **Grant Funding or Further Funds Distribution** | * Grant funding to be issued as part of successful projects.
* Funds to be further distributed as part of necessary and outlined activities in successful projects.
* Up to $25,000 to an individual, or individual entity or group.
 |
| **Consulting and Professional Services** | * Fees for external consultants, technical experts, or third-party service providers that contribute directly to the program outcomes.
 |
| **Travel, Marketing and Communications** | * Project-related travel for recruitment, technical assistance, or other necessary activities. Up to $7,000.
* Marketing and communication activities related to the recruitment and awareness of the program. Up to $8,000.
 |
| **Training and Workforce Development** | * Training or certification costs for team members to acquire specialized skills needed for the project. Up to $5,000.
* Workforce development initiatives that enhance project outcomes, such as technical workshops or industry-related training.
 |
| **Program Sustainability** | * Ensure long-term viability through diversified funding, strategic partnerships, and operational efficiency.
 |
| **Administration and Salaries**  | * Primary applicants are permitted to claim up to 10% of grant award for project administration.
* Can be used for staffing and labor directly related to activities supporting this program.
 |
| **NON-ELIGIBLE COSTS** |
| **COST CATEGORY** | **DESCRIPTION** |
| **General Overhead and Operating Costs** | * Routine office expenses, such as rent, utilities, or office supplies not directly tied to the program.
* Administrative staff salaries that do not directly contribute to program goals.
 |
| **Debt Payments and Financial Obligations** | * Interest payments on loans, financing charges, or payments on any pre-existing debt.
* Penalties, fines, or legal settlements.
 |
| **Capital Expenditures** | * Purchase of land, buildings, or large-scale facility construction costs.
* Major equipment purchases that exceed the program’s guidelines or are not exclusively for program use.
 |
| **Employee Benefits and Bonuses** | * Fringe benefits, bonuses, or other forms of employee incentives outside of approved salaries or wages.
* Unrelated personal development training and all professional memberships.
 |
|  **Of Non-Program Related Travel** | * Travel expenses unrelated to the program, such as commuting costs or expenses for non-program staff.
* Costs for travel outside the approved program scope.
 |
| **Alcohol, Entertainment, and Gifts** | * Any costs for entertainment, meals unrelated to project tasks, alcohol, gifts, or hospitality events.
* Holiday parties, team-building events, or personal celebrations.
 |
| **Lobbying and Political Activities** | * Any expenditures related to lobbying, advocacy, or political contributions.
* Memberships to organizations engaged primarily in lobbying or political activities.
 |

**Minimum Deliverables:**

**1.** Minimum 30% of projects supported must come from rural Kansas counties with populations of 40,000 or less.

* Rural is being defined as counties with populations of 40,000 or less.

2. Minimum of twenty (20) projects supported during the grant cycle.

3. Minimum five (5) active project partners.

4. State-wide effort to recruit and support innovators and small businesses.

**Submission Instructions**

All applications must be submitted by May 09, 2025, by 5:00pm CST to [the application portal](https://kansasdepartmentofcommerce.submittable.com/submit/f5fa8c10-5452-47c4-be0f-2977ad2f81bd/accel-ks-grant-application). Late submissions will not be considered.

Applications should not exceed ten (10) pages. A detailed budget spreadsheet must be provided, as well as a one (1) page narrative justifying each line item. Additional documents can be provided as appendices but should not exceed five (5) pages total. Any pages that exceed the defined limits will not be scored by the review team. Applications can be submitted in Microsoft Office (Word and Excel) or Adobe PDF formats.

We encourage all eligible and interested organizations to reach out with any questions or to request additional information through the following contact:

**Name:** Brandon Hutton, Director of Innovation Development and Programming

**Email:** brandon.hutton@ks.gov

Informational sessions about this grant application will be available virtually on April 11, 2025, from 10:00am-11:00am and on April 23, 2025, from 2:00pm-3:00pm. Attendance to these sessions are not mandatory. A letter of intent is not required for this grant applications.

**Contract Term**
The initial term of the contract will be for a period of one (1) year, starting July 1, 2025, and concluding June 30, 2026. During this period, the selected organization will be responsible for executing the agreed-upon scope of work as outlined in the grant application and the final contract. Quarterly progress reports will be required, detailing outputs, key metrics, success stories, and any challenges. A final impact report will be due within thirty (30) days of contract close, including insights for scaling or improving the program.

**Termination**
Kansas Department of Commerce (KDC) reserves the right to terminate the contract at any time, with or without cause, upon providing thirty (30) days written notice to the selected organization. In the event of termination, the agency will be compensated for work satisfactorily completed up to the date of termination.This contract term and renewal structure is designed to ensure flexibility and alignment with the KDC’s evolving goals while providing the selected organization with a clear and structured engagement period.