

Challenge 3: Building cross-university programs that increase knowledge related to securing research and development funding and commercializing available technology in order to start new businesses.

Summary

While the Heartland is home to research strengths in agriculture, animal science, healthcare and others, the region receives few patents and grants to engage small businesses in the process of refining these technologies (SBIR/STTR). This is driven in part by the Heartland's lack of infrastructure to support growth in these areas.

Basic improvements to the regional support structure like creating educational programs to help prepare potential SBIR applicants, pursuing iCorps programs and node status¹, and Phase 1 matching funds could have immediate and drastic impacts on the ability of the region to convert research and technologies to businesses.

To address this, the Foundation is interested in supporting cross-university collaborative planning efforts that will increase knowledge and skills in securing federal research and development funding.

Activities Eligible for Funding

Grants made under this Challenge will fund efforts to convene multiple regional universities to create strategic and operational plans to address regional weaknesses in securing federal research and development (R&D) funding and commercializing technology in the Heartland.

Preference will be given to efforts that:

- Convene partner institutions in multiple states or across multiple systems (limited to the Heartland).
- Demonstrate a commitment for following-on funding to implement the plan from another source or sources.
- Demonstrate commitment from partners by executing a binding agreement or committing financial resources to the effort.
- Can articulate an industry-relevant specializations or themes.
- Build broad engagement into planning efforts—both internal and external to the participating universities.
- Can demonstrate internal track records of success on behalf of one member entity, or as a group, of achieving R&D funding, patent, licensing and/or commercialization outcomes.
- Can demonstrate internal track records of success on behalf of one member entity, or as a group, of supporting entrepreneurs

Required Evaluation Metrics

Grants made under this Challenge will be required to report on the following output and outcome metrics at six months after award date, and the end of the grant (12 months after award date). During the application process, grantees will work with their program officers to define specific outputs and outcomes. They may include the following:

Outputs: The number of conversations or interviews conducted with model programs to inform plan creation, the number of in-person planning meetings to move the project forward, the number of university personnel (tenured faculty, post-docs, administration, students) consulted or involved in planning efforts, the creation of a written plan at the end of the grant, the amount of funding committed by partners to fund implementation of the plan.

Outcomes: The creation of binding agreements executed by Chancellor, Provost or Presidents reflecting the University's commitment to continuing in the execution of the plan, the number and percentage of active participants reporting increased trust in other members of the project team, an increase in applications for federal R&D funding (SBIR/STTR grants) submitted, an increase in number of patent registrations submitted, an increase in faculty and staff with interest in commercialization, a measure of participants' increased confidence in university's ability to support entrepreneurship, the number participants reporting increased skills and knowledge, the number of participants reporting a business start/launch, the number of participants reporting capital raised, the number of participants reporting adding a team member/full-time job, the effort's Net Promoter Score.

¹ https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/i-corps/nodes.jsp

All applicants will have to indicate which Challenge for which they are applying. Each applicant can only apply for one Challenge. While we understand that Heartland entrepreneurs face a variety of challenges to entrepreneurship beyond those outlined above, we are not able to accept applications covering topics other than the three above.