Funding Opportunity: SBA Announces Competitions to Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Lewis-Burke Associates LLC – May 27, 2021

The Small Business Administration (SBA) recently released a solicitation with two distinct tracks, focused on enhancing regional innovation and entrepreneurship. The solicitation aligns with SBA’s role as coordinator of the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs (SBIR/STTR), which are cornerstone investments by federal agencies to commercialize federally funded basic research. Tracks include the Growth Accelerator Fund Competition (GFAC), which supports individual entrepreneurial training organizations, and SBIR Catalyst, which supports clusters of organizations. Through these awards, SBA provides funding to local innovation facilities to further support the development of start-up companies and awareness of SBIR/STTR.

The solicitation specifically seeks to identify models for addressing longtime directives to improve SBIR/STTR participation and success among women, socially/economically distressed individuals, and individuals from states and regions that are historically underrepresented in the programs. While funding for these programs is limited, they represent a small number of federal opportunities that explicitly fund efforts to support commercialization and entrepreneurship across disciplines and they could be of interest to innovation organizations and university technology transfer offices.

Applications for both tracks must include a PowerPoint presentation similar to one used in a pitch competition and a 90-second video. Organizations can apply for both tracks but cannot be selected as the lead applicant for both.

Track One: Growth Accelerator Fund Competition

*Award Information:* SBA will award up to 84 prizes of $50,000 each. This is 24 more than the last competition in 2019.

*Overview:* GFAC provides additional resources to accelerators and incubators to “help these entities provide focused assistance to high tech entrepreneurs, including support for company formation as well as awareness and education of the SBIR and STTR programs.” Applicants must focus proposed efforts to support entrepreneurs in one of the priority groups listed in the solicitation, including those underrepresented in SBIR/STTR as designated by SBA and entrepreneurs building technologies in key areas, including but not limited to:

- “Clean Energy: such as electric vehicles, solar, wind, geothermal, nuclear, energy efficiency;
- Supply Chain Resilience: such as semiconductors, pharmaceuticals and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), high-capacity batteries, critical minerals, agricultural commodities;
- Infrastructure: such as broadband, electrical grid, water supply and sewer, transportation infrastructure, electric vehicle charging stations; and
- Other STEM/R&D areas.”
SBA intends for no less than 50 percent of Growth Accelerator prizes to go to first-time GAFC winners, and no less than 50 percent of GAFC prizes to go to applicants located in the 29 states/territories receiving the fewest number of SBIR/STTR Phase I awards, which are listed in the solicitation.

**Track Two: SBIR Catalyst**

*Award Information:* SBA will award up to seven prizes of $150,000 each. Although it is not required, competitive preference will be given to applicants that secure matching funding.

*Overview:* The SBIR Catalyst will support collaborative partnerships between organizations that support entrepreneurs in underserved communities. Contestants will be expected to submit a proposal involving multiple entrepreneur support organizations and partners from different states/territories in a large geographic area. Funding may be used to establish and scale partnerships, expand access to mentorship in early-stage technology development, train applicants to submit competitive SBIR/STTR proposals, develop commercialization pathways for STEM companies, and importantly, seek to fill gaps in the innovation ecosystem.

*Dates:* The submission period for entries is ongoing and will end **July 2, 2021 4:00 PM EDT**. An informational webinar will be held **June 2, 2021 at 2 PM EDT**.

*Eligibility:* Eligibility is broad and includes citizens over 18 years old and individuals submitting on behalf of both for profit and non-profit organizations. Universities are eligible to apply.

*Sources and Additional Information:*
  - More information on the funding opportunity, including a link to register to the webinar and templates for the slide decks can be found at [https://www.sbir.gov/accelerators](https://www.sbir.gov/accelerators).