

Innovate Alabama

Innovative Community Designation Program Guidelines

1. Purpose

- a. Innovate Alabama's asset designation program includes three components: Innovative Community, Innovative University, and Innovative Entity. The Innovative Community Designation Program is designed to recognize and award municipalities, counties, and Native American tribes in Alabama for their commitment to support innovation and knowledge-based economic activity. The program is comprised of two components:
 - i. An initial designation application, where successful applicants can earn the Innovative Community Designation; and,
 - ii. A grant application, where successfully designated applicants can earn grant funding to complete innovation-related projects in their communities.
- b. Through these two components, the Innovative Community Designation will reward communities throughout the state who are committed to expanding innovation-related programming and assets. Expanding these initiatives will grow the Alabama economy by attracting and retaining high and mid-skilled workers; creating programming that connects entrepreneurs with innovation resources; and developing physical assets that contribute to increased quality of life and worker productivity.
- c. Innovate Alabama recognizes three components to a healthy and robust innovation economy: people, place, and resources. People refer to programming and assets that help strengthen the workforce, including such as affordable housing initiatives, education opportunities, workforce development programs, and others. Place refers to the assets that attract and retain workers to communities. Assets and programs may include, such as neighborhood revitalization grants, placemaking initiatives, building rehabilitation or preservation programs, among others. Lastly, resources refer to the financial or programmatic assets that directly grow or serve innovators within the community such as mentorship programs, business incubators, among others. Innovate Alabama understands that innovation activity is the result of a complex interaction between these asset categories and that the examples provided above are non-exhaustive.

2. Program Goals

- a. The Innovative Community Designation aims to catalyze innovation throughout the state of Alabama through accomplishing the following goals.
 - i. Increase innovation related activities in local communities in Alabama.
 - ii. Create a broader network of innovation-related programming and assets in urban and rural areas.
 - iii. Provide access to innovation-related seed funding for localities and communities.
 - iv. Recognize and support the diversity of innovation ecosystem partners throughout the state.
 - v. Encourage partnerships and coordination among partners, particularly to bolster future efforts.

3. Available Funds

- a. Total funds available to rural and urban communities are limited to \$250K per application.*
- b. Total funds available per applicant to be determined.*

4. Eligibility Requirements

- a. The applicant must be a:
 - i. A municipality in Alabama;
 - ii. A county in Alabama; or
 - iii. A federally recognized Native American tribe in Alabama.

5. Additional Considerations

Funding will be awarded to successful applicants at the sole discretion of Innovate Alabama.

6. Application Requirements

- a. The Innovative Community Designation Application consists of three parts.
- b. Part 1: Narrative Application
 - i. The second part of the application will require applicants to answer a series of questions related to assessing the community's existing or proposed efforts to contribute to Innovate Alabama's programmatic goals. Respondents will answer four questions.

1. How does the community's existing or planned programming or assets advance Innovate Alabama's people focus?
 2. How does the community's existing or planned programming or assets advance Innovate Alabama's place focus?
 3. How does the community's existing or planned programming or assets advance Innovate Alabama's resources focus?
 4. How does the community leverage its assets and programming to create or contribute to a regional innovation ecosystem?
- ii. Responses should be limited to 1,000 words for each question. Responses should be sure to include references to related community plans, initiatives, programs, relationships, or impacts. Responses that exceed the word limit will not be considered.
 - iii. Applicants will be allowed to submit up to three supporting documents to assist in illustrating their efforts. Each document will be limited to 10 MB.
 - iv. Responses will be scored using the process outlined in Section 7.
- c. Part 2: Asset Inventory
- i. Applicants will be required to inventory the available innovation assets in their community. These assets will not contribute to the application's score but will be used to help Innovate Alabama understand the breadth of the state's innovation ecosystem.
 - ii. In this section, applicants should list the existing assets and provide a short description of how it contributes to the local innovation ecosystem, including any impacts derived from it. Applicants should also note if an asset directly impacts innovation activity in a marginalized community and if it contributes to a broader regional innovation effort.
 - iii. For an example list of innovation assets, please refer to Section 1 C.
- d. Part 3: Grant Application
- i. At the time of application, communities can apply for grant funding from Innovate Alabama to fund an innovation-related project or program that aligns with the narrative response required in the Narrative Application. The grant application must include the following sections:
 1. Project description including proposed milestones and a statement of how Alabama's economic development will be advanced through an award of funds;

2. Project budget;
 3. Budget justification;
 4. Budget timeline for 12 months after funds are dispersed.
- e. Innovate Alabama will consider each application on a rolling basis and will periodically notify applicants of its decision to award or not award funds and Innovative Community Designation. Innovate Alabama may choose to place particular focus on applications that reflect the diversity of gender, race, and geographical areas of the state. Innovate Alabama has the sole discretion to grant or deny any award and designation.
 - f. The amount and all terms and conditions of the award must be memorialized in a grant agreement between Innovate Alabama and the applicant (the "Grant Agreement"). The Grant Agreement shall provide for the return of grant funds if the applicant does not comply with these guidelines, or if the applicant should repeatedly fail to file reports demonstrating such compliance.
 - g. All documents submitted to Innovate Alabama become the property of Innovate Alabama. The applicant should not disclose to Innovate Alabama any confidential or proprietary information that would adversely affect its intellectual property rights. Innovate Alabama and its members will not be bound by any requirements or expectations of confidentiality as a part of administering the Innovative Community Designation Program.

7. Application Scoring

- a. Innovate Alabama will score part 1 (6.b.) of the applications on a 16-point scale. These scores will reflect how strongly the narrative shows the community is advancing or plans to advance the three focus areas of Innovate Alabama in its region and across the state.
- b. Communities that receive a score of 5 or more will earn an Innovative Community Designation. This will include ongoing access to the Innovate Alabama Network and a monetary award to advance the proposed project in part 3 (6.d.) of the application.
- c. Communities who receive a score lower than 4, will receive an Emerging Innovative Community. This designation will award communities with a smaller monetary award to help strengthen their score for future application rounds. These communities will be eligible to apply for the Innovative Community Designation program in the future.

8. Award Process

- a. Applicants who successfully earn an Innovative Community Designation will earn grant funding to support the proposed innovation project. Innovate Alabama will determine the means by which awards will be disbursed and may require reporting and proof of expenditures before making an award. Innovate Alabama may impose conditions on the payment of awards at any time before such a payment is made.
- b. Awards should be used to advance the community's innovation ecosystem as aligned with the proposed project in part 3 (6.d.) of the Innovative Community Designation application.

9. Reporting

- a. Grant recipients will be required to submit a 6- and 12-month report to Innovate Alabama documenting the use of funds, project progress, and project impacts. The report must include a short summary indicating the progress that has been made, including, but not limited to:
 - i. Total award funds used;
 - ii. Additional capital raised from all sources;
 - iii. Number of partners engaged around project development;
 - iv. Number of new innovation jobs created or retained;
 - v. Number of residents served by new programming;
 - vi. Any new scientific discoveries, including patents or commercialization efforts; and
 - vii. New businesses created or supported by the funding.
- b. Innovate Alabama may require additional topics to be included at its discretion.
- c. If the applicant does not complete either the 6- or 12-month reporting period, future funding may not be granted.

10. Timeline

- a. Innovate Alabama will accept applications to the Innovative Community Designation program beginning on July 10, 2023. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until funding for the program is no longer available.
- b. Accepted applicants can expect funds to be granted in mid-August.

11. Audit Oversight

- a. The applicant shall maintain records to document its expenditures of the funds for a minimum of five years after the date of the award. All such records and accounts shall be made available on reasonable demand to Innovate Alabama.

12. Additional Information

- a. If you have questions about the Innovate Alabama Innovative Designation Programs, please email at partners@innovatealabama.org or visit Innovate Alabama's website at www.innovatealabama.org.

13. Scoring Rubric

- a. Innovative Community Designation applications will be scored using the following rubric. Applications can earn up to 16 points.

FOCUS AREAS	CRITERIA (WORTH 1 POINT EACH)					FOCUS AREA SCORE
RESOURCE	Understands and promotes or participates in Innovate Alabama's resources programming.	Connects entrepreneurs to sources of funding or innovation ecosystem assets/ programming.	Actively grants resources, funding, or programming opportunities to people interested in entrepreneurs.	Organization has a specific focus on serving MWBE, youth, or other marginalized communities	Actively participates and engages in a regional network or collaboration which aims to connect entrepreneurs with resources.	/ 5 points
PEOPLE	Engages, or seeks to engage, with Innovate Alabama's target audiences. ¹	Supports programs and partnerships aimed at introducing target audiences to innovation assets, topics, and opportunities.	Manages and/or supports recurring, cohort-based programs to support start-up incubation, on-the-job training, and/or educational experiences.	Manages and/or supports innovation programs directly focused on HBCU Engagement and Rural Retention.	Develops implementation plans that, building off existing programs and outcomes, will lead to measurable expansion to new geographies and demographics.	/ 5 points
PLACE	Ties mission directly to needs and success of a specified community.	Attends statewide events that tie the innovation economy into quality-of-life offerings.	Actively engages in local programming to promote the quality of life in their focus community.	Hosts and/or sponsors quality of life-enriching programs in their focus community that tie to economic and community development priorities.	Actively represents Alabama at national and/or international events, helping refine and share the "Why Alabama?" story to employers, highly-skilled innovation professionals, prospective students, and media outlets.	/ 5 points
REGION	Applicants engage with other municipalities in innovation programming or asset development.					/ 1 point

Program	People	Place	Region	Total Score
+	+	+	=	

¹ Target audiences include entrepreneurs; K-12 public school students; university students, faculty, and/or researchers, and rural-based economic development partnerships.

