**Innovate Alabama Network Program Guidelines**

1. **Purpose**
   1. The Innovate Alabama Network is designed to recognize and award ecosystem partners for their commitment to support innovation and knowledge-based economic activity.
   2. The Innovate Alabama Network will reward partners 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.
   3. 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. Assets in this category may include mentorship programs, non-profit accelerators, 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 Benefits**
   1. Upon earning a designation, applicants will earn up to $250,000 as an award for acceptance and ongoing access to the Innovate Alabama Network. This award should be used to advance innovation along Innovate Alabama’s people, place, and resource components.
   2. Additionally, successful applicants will be able to call themselves a part of the Innovate Alabama Network and can use the designated seal and other marketing materials.
   3. Additionally, upon receiving admission in to the Innovate Alabama Network, applicants may submit an additional grant request to Innovate Alabama to advance a specific innovation-related project which requires funds above the initial up to $250,000 award. More information about this additional grant request can be found on the Innovate Alabama website or through contacting [Partners@InnovateAlabama.org](mailto:Partners@InnovateAlabama.org)
3. **Program Goals**
   1. The Innovate Alabama Network aims to catalyze innovation throughout the state of Alabama through accomplishing the following goals.
      1. Increase innovation related activities in local communities in Alabama.
      2. Create a broader network of innovation-related programming and assets in urban and rural areas.
      3. Provide access to innovation-related seed funding for localities and communities.
      4. Recognize and support the diversity of innovation ecosystem partners throughout the state.
      5. Encourage partnerships and coordination among partners, particularly to bolster future efforts.
4. **Available Funds**
   1. Upon earning a designation, applicants will earn a one-time award of up to $250,000.
5. **Eligibility Requirements**
   1. The program is open to non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and communities.
   2. To qualify as a community, the applicant must be a:
      1. A municipality in Alabama;
      2. A county in Alabama; or
      3. A federally recognized Native American tribe in Alabama.
   3. To qualify as non-profit organization, the applicant must be a:
      1. Nonprofit validly existing and registered to do business in Alabama, with a determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service evidencing its 501(c)(3) status.
   4. To qualify as an educational institute, the applicant must be a public or private university or college, accredited by any of the following accrediting institutions:

* Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
* National Accrediting Commission of Career Arts and Sciences (NACCAS)
* Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
* Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE)
* Council on Occupational Education (COE)
* Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC)
* Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES)
* Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC)
* American Osteopathic Association (AOA)

1. **Additional Considerations**
   1. Funding will be awarded to successful applicants at the sole discretion of Innovate Alabama.
2. **Application Requirements** 
   1. The Innovate Alabama Network application consists of three to four parts, depending on the applicant.
   2. Part 1: Narrative Application
      1. The application will require applicants to answer a series of questions related to assessing the applicant’s existing or proposed efforts to contribute to Innovate Alabama’s programmatic goals. Respondents will answer four questions.
         1. How does the applicant’s existing or planned programming or assets advance Innovate Alabama’s people focus?
         2. How does the applicant’s existing or planned programming or assets advance Innovate Alabama’s place focus?
         3. How does the applicant’s existing or planned programming or assets advance Innovate Alabama’s resources focus?
         4. How does the applicant leverage its assets and programming to create or contribute a regional innovation ecosystem?
      2. Responses should be limited to 500 words for each question and should include references to related plans, initiatives, programs, relationships, or impacts. Responses that exceed the word limit will not be considered.
      3. 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.
      4. Responses will be scored using the process outlined in Section 8.
   3. Part 2: Innovation Asset Inventory
      1. Applicants will be required to inventory the available innovation assets associated with the applicant. 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.
      2. 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.
      3. For an example list of innovation assets, please refer to Section 1 C.
   4. Part 3: Executive Summary
      1. Applicants will be required to submit an executive summary form. This form should contain the same answers as the narrative application.
      2. This form is located on the website. It should be completed and submitted in a PDF format at the time of application.
      3. This form should be attached separately from other application materials.
   5. Part 4: Capacity Assessment (ONLY REQUIRED FOR NON-PROFIT APPLICANTS)
      1. A non-profit entity will answer a series of questions designed to assess its organizational health, which refers to its capacity to support and catalyze innovation. Components may include a mission or vision statement, governance model, financial plan, and/or clear evaluation metrics, among others. The maximum score will be 10 points. Entities with a score higher than 5 will be designated a higher capacity entity. Those with a score lower than 5 or non-profit entities in a rural location will be a lower capacity entity.[[1]](#footnote-2)
      2. This portion of the application will have no bearing on the entity’s total score. The capacity designation will determine the entity’s designation scoring threshold. Higher capacity organizations will be expected to earn a higher score on the narrative application to earn entry into the Innovate Alabama Network.
   6. 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.
   7. 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 Innovate Alabama Network.
3. **Application Scoring**
   1. Innovate Alabama will score the Narrative Application 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.
   2. Depending on whether the applicant is a non-profit entity, educational institution, or community, determines the score needed to gain admission into the network.
   3. For eligible community applicants:
      1. Communities that receive a score of 6 or more will earn an admission into the Innovate Alabama Network.
      2. Communities who receive a score of 5 or below, will receive a gain entry to the Innovate Alabama Network as an “Emerging Innovation 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 the Innovate Alabama Network as a regular member, along with a larger monetary award, in the future.
   4. For eligible non-profit organizations:
      1. Higher capacity entities (as designated in 7. e.) that earn a score of 10 or higher will earn admission into the Innovate Alabama Network.
      2. Lower capacity entities (as designated in 7. e.) or applicants located in rural locations, that earn a score of 5 or higher will earn admission into the Innovate Alabama Network.
   5. For eligible educational institutions:
      1. Institutions that receive a score of 9 or more will earn admission into the Innovate Alabama Network.
4. **Award Process**
   1. Applicants who successfully earn admission into the Innovate Alabama Network will earn an award as written in 4. a.
   2. 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.
5. **Reporting**
   1. Award recipients will be required to submit a 6- and 12-month report to Innovate Alabama documenting the use of award 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:
      1. Total award funds used;
      2. Additional capital raised from all sources;
      3. Number of partners engaged around project development;
      4. Number of new innovation jobs created or retained;
      5. Number of residents served by new programming;
      6. Any new scientific discoveries, including patents or commercialization efforts; and
      7. New businesses created or supported by the funding.
   2. Innovate Alabama may require additional topics to be included at its discretion.
   3. If the applicant does not complete either the 6- or 12-month reporting period, future funding may not be granted.
6. **Timeline**
   1. Innovate Alabama will accept applications for Round 2 of the program beginning on September 9, 2023. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. Round 2 will close at 5 PM CT on January 5th, 2024.
7. **Audit Oversight**
   1. The applicant shall maintain records to document its expenditure 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.
8. **Additional Information**
   1. If you have questions about the Innovate Alabama Network, please email at partners@innovatealabama.org or visit Innovate Alabama’s website at [www.innovatealabama.org](http://www.innovatealabama.org).
9. **Scoring Rubric**
   1. Applicants 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.[[2]](#footnote-3) | 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 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Resource |  | People |  | Place |  | Region |  | Total Score |
|  | **+** |  | **+** |  | **+** |  | **=** |  |

1. The data used to determine rural status is based on the guidelines provided by the Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD). More information can be found [here](https://hifld-geoplatform.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/geoplatform::urban-areas/about). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *Target audiences include entrepreneurs; K-12 public school students; university students, faculty, and/or researchers, and rural-based economic development partnerships.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)