



Program Resource Guide

Strengthening Alabama's Innovation Ecosystem

Program Overview

The Innovate Alabama Network is a statewide initiative designed to recognize and support organizations that advance innovation and entrepreneurship through one of three focus areas: access to resources, talent development, or outdoor recreation. Organizations apply to join the Network through our Designation grant. Once designated, organizations receive ongoing access to project funding opportunities.

Program Focus Areas

<u>Focus Area</u>	<u>Description</u>
Access to Resources	Expanding access to capital, mentorship, and critical business resources that help innovative small businesses develop, scale, and succeed.
Talent Development	Strengthening Alabama's workforce pipeline through STEM exposure, upskilling and training, talent attraction/retention, and entrepreneurship training for K-12 & college students.
Outdoor Recreation	Leveraging Alabama's outdoor assets to enhance quality of life, attract and retain talent, and support vibrant communities where entrepreneurs and businesses can thrive.

How the Program Works

Step 1 – Initial Interest Form

Organizations submit a short form to confirm eligibility and alignment with program focus areas. Organizations that meet alignment criteria are invited to apply for designation.

Step 2 – Designation Application

Invited organizations submit a designation application expanding on their initial interest form and outlining their work supporting innovation.

	<u>Award</u>	<u>Avg. Award</u>
Designation	Up to \$250,000	~ \$20,000 - \$50,000

Step 3 – Project Grant

Upon entrance into the Network, organizations are eligible to apply for Project grant funding. This is a 1-year seed grant designed to build programs to support small businesses in our state through one of these three priorities mentioned above.

	<u>Award</u>	<u>Avg. Award</u>
Project *	Up to \$750,000	~ \$350,000

* Project Grant award amounts vary by funding cycle and are determined based on available funding.

Funding Cycles

The Innovate Alabama Network runs (3) funding cycles each year to support communities across the state.

- (2) Network Designation grant rounds (one focused on rural communities and one focused on urban communities).
 - Rural eligibility: municipality population of 50,000 or fewer.
- (1) Project grant round open to both rural and urban Network organizations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Program

What does Network Designation mean?

Network Designation recognizes organizations that play an active role in supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in Alabama. Designated organizations become part of the Innovate Alabama Network to foster collaboration across the state's innovation ecosystem through programs, partnerships, and community engagement.

Once my organization joins the Network, do we need to reapply?

No. Once an organization receives designation, it does not need to reapply; however, the organization must remain active in the program. Organizations will solely apply for Project Grants going forward.

What keeps my designation status active?

Organizations maintain their designation status by remaining actively engaged in the Innovate Alabama Network. Engagement opportunities may include applying for project grants, participation in Innovate Alabama's annual State of Innovation Day event, award ceremonies, regional convenings, and serving on scoring committees during new funding cycles. Designated organizations must complete all required reporting to remain in good standing with the program.

Eligibility

Who is eligible to apply?

Eligible nonprofits, municipalities, and educational institutions that are advancing entrepreneurship and innovation through one or more of the following: access to resources, talent development, and/or outdoor recreation.

What nonprofits are eligible to apply for the Innovate Alabama Network?

Eligible nonprofits must be registered 501(c)(3) organizations with legal registration to do business in Alabama whose mission includes supporting entrepreneurial growth and innovation through one of Innovate Alabama's focus areas: Access to Resources, Talent Development, or Outdoor Recreation. 501(c)(6) entities are NOT eligible to apply.

How do I know if my organization is eligible for the rural designation round?

Organizations are eligible for the rural designation round if they are located in a municipality with a population of 50,000 or fewer residents.

Application Process

When can I apply for the Innovate Alabama Network?

Applications may only be submitted during open funding cycles. If you are unable to access the Initial Interest Form, the application cycle has not yet opened. Application dates will be posted on the Innovate Alabama website once they are finalized.

Can organizations request funding outside of an open funding cycle?

No. Funding requests may only be submitted during Innovate Alabama Network funding cycles.

How long does the application process take for each grant?

After applications have closed, the review and approval process typically takes approximately 3–4 months.

How are applications evaluated?

Applications are reviewed by a committee primarily composed of existing Innovate Alabama Network organizations that are not applying in the current funding cycle. Both Network Designation and Project Grant applications are scored on a 100-point scale. Designation applications evaluate how an organization contributes to strengthening Alabama's innovation ecosystem. Project Grant applications are evaluated based on alignment with Innovate Alabama focus areas, clearly defined objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs), project feasibility, and the anticipated impact on Alabama's innovation ecosystem.

Funding & Budget

Will organizations always receive the full amount requested?

The requested amount is not guaranteed. Award amounts are determined through the review process and available funding and may be less than the amount requested in the application.

What happens if my organization does not receive the full amount requested?

If an award amount is lower than requested, Innovate Alabama will work with the organization to revise the project budget and scope as needed before executing the funding agreement.

Are indirect costs allowed in the project budget?

Yes. Indirect costs may be included in the project budget but may not exceed 15% of the total project budget. Indirect costs should reflect reasonable operational expenses that support the implementation of the proposed project.

Can organizations collaborate on project grants?

Yes. Collaboration is strongly encouraged to maximize impact across communities.

Grant Management & Reporting

How long is the grant period?

The grant period is typically 12 months from the date funds are disbursed for both Designation and Project grants.

What reporting is required?

Funded organizations must submit a 6-month progress report and a 12-month final close-out report.

Connect with Us

For questions about the program, requirements, and application process connect with the Innovate Alabama Network team.

[Schedule a meeting](#)