



## Project Grant Resource Guide

*Strengthening Alabama's Innovation Ecosystem*

## Round 5 Timeline

Application Opens: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Application Deadline: July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Decisions: September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026

Please Note: Funding will not be received until after Oct 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026.

## Project Grant Overview

The Innovate Alabama Network Project Grant is a competitive funding opportunity available exclusively to organizations part of the Innovate Alabama Network. Project Grants are designed as **one-year seed** investments that support innovative programs, initiatives, and infrastructure that strengthen Alabama’s innovation support system.

## 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.

## Project Grant Funding

**Grant Period:** 12 months

Maximum Award: Up to \$750,000

Typical Award: Approximately \$350,000

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

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

## Eligibility Requirements

- Not have an active Innovate Alabama Network Project Grant at time of application.
- Have submitted all required 6-month and 12-month reports.
- Have fully expended all previously awarded Project Grant funds.

## Project Expectations

Competitive projects should address a clearly defined objective, align with the selected focus area, include measurable outcomes and KPIs, demonstrate feasibility/sustainability, and provide a meaningful impact for Alabama.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Eligibility

#### Who can apply?

Only designated Network organizations.

#### Can organizations have multiple active Project Grants?

No. Previous Project Grants must be fully closed out before applying for new funding.

#### Can organizations submit more than one application?

No. One application per organization per funding cycle.

### 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.

### **What are allowable costs?**

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Personnel directly supporting project implementation (should not exceed 15% of budget)
- Program materials and supplies
- Equipment necessary to execute the project
- Marketing and outreach related to project activities
- Contracted services and consultants
- Training and educational resources

### **What are unallowable costs?**

Project Grants are intended as one-time seed investments; grant funds may not be used to support general organizational overhead operating expenses, such as payroll, employee benefits, etc.

### **Can organizations collaborate on project grants?**

Yes. Collaboration is strongly encouraged to maximize impact across communities. Collaborators may include, but are not limited to nonprofits, municipalities, industry partners, universities/colleges, etc.

### **Grant Management & Reporting**

#### **How long is the grant period?**

The grant period is 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.

### Common Application Mistakes

- Submitting projects that do not clearly align with the selected focus area.
- Providing budgets that do not match proposed activities.
- Failing to identify measurable outcomes.
- Including costs that are not directly related to the project.
- Waiting until the final days of the application period to begin the application.

### Round 5 Funding Priorities

While all eligible projects aligned with the Innovate Alabama Network pillars will be considered, applicants are encouraged to develop projects that advance the following priority areas.

#### Access to Resources

Projects should strengthen the support systems that help innovative small businesses start, grow, and scale.

#### Priority Areas

##### Increasing Access to Capital

- Expanding entrepreneur access to funding opportunities, investment readiness programming, and capital networks.
- Developing programs that connect founders with investors, financial institutions, and funding resources.

##### Commercialization and Innovation

- Supporting the development and commercialization of innovative products, technologies, and research.
- Assisting entrepreneurs and startups in moving ideas from concept to market.
- Strengthening pathways for technology transfer, product development, and business growth.

- Connecting startups and innovative small businesses to potential customers, industry partners, and market opportunities.
- Supporting initiatives that help companies validate products, secure pilot opportunities, and accelerate customer acquisition.
- Expanding access to resources that increase the likelihood of successful market adoption and business growth.

### **Rural Innovation**

- Expanding innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities in rural communities.
- Supporting programs, infrastructure, and partnerships that strengthen rural innovation capacity.
- Increasing access to entrepreneurial resources and support services in rural areas.
- Developing initiatives that create economic opportunity and long-term competitiveness for rural communities as it relates to the innovation economy.

### **Entrepreneur Support Services**

- Providing mentorship networks, technical assistance, business coaching, and entrepreneurial programming.
- Expanding access to critical resources that help businesses launch and scale.

### **Talent Development**

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Projects should strengthen Alabama's talent pipeline and create opportunities for individuals to gain the skills needed to participate in the state's innovation economy.

### **Priority Areas**

#### **Work-based learning**

- Initiatives that create paid internships, apprenticeships, or fellowships
- Must be in STEM-related fields

#### **Entrepreneurial development for students**

- Initiatives that support student entrepreneurs in the development of their companies through mentorship, training and education, capital access, or other resources
- Must be STEM-related companies

- Special consideration will be given to projects that support students who are beyond the ideation phase and are actively pursuing company growth (i.e., they have legally formed companies, revenue, etc.).

### **Connecting STEM talent to Alabama's quality of life**

- Initiatives that engage STEM talent with Alabama's lifestyle and recreation offerings.
  - Can target talent both from within Alabama and outside of the state
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### **Outdoor Recreation**

Projects should leverage outdoor recreation assets as a strategy for attracting, retaining, and supporting the talent needed by innovative companies across Alabama.

### **Priority Areas**

#### **Talent Attraction and Retention for Innovative Companies**

- Supporting place-based strategies that make Alabama communities attractive locations for innovative companies and the talent they depend upon.
- Enhancing community assets that improve a region's ability to compete for talent and support long-term business growth.
- Leveraging outdoor recreation assets to strengthen a community's ability to recruit, retain, and support the workforce necessary to advance innovation and entrepreneurship.