The Regional Innovation Strategies Program

2019 Competition Debrief Webinar

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INNOVATION. REGIONAL COLLABORATION. JOB CREATION.

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- **Today's audience…**
    - applied for the 2019 RIS program
    - leads their program efforts (not a grant office representative)
    - and a good understanding of the RIS program

- **This is _not_ an introduction to the RIS program or EDA**

RIS APPLICATIONS

183 applications

40 SFS applications
143 i6 applications

RIS GRANTS

44 grants
28 states + 2 territories

18 SFS Grants
26 i6 Grants

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Application Submission → Technical Review → Merit Review → Selection

~3 month review cycle

- **Fatal Technical Issues**
- **Program Alignment & Fit**
- **Common Issues & Trends**
- **Next Steps (Future Funding Opportunities)**
- **Questions**

Many states have unique intergovernmental review requirements, aka State Single-Point-of-Contact Review (SPOC):

https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SPOC-February-2019.pdf

For example, Iowa, Maryland, and West Virginia participate in SPOC review, but make exceptions for some programs and sometimes change that list annually.

Validate your service area's state requirements (*ALL* relevant states) and comply

Organizations failed to provide supporting documentation for their respective organizations, such as

- some for-profit entities applied on behalf of their non-profit arms or referenced co-applicants, but included no documentation / required forms for a complete application
- some for-profit entities applied but provided no evidence of their eligibility as one of the eligible entities as defined on page 9 of NOFO, C. Eligibility Information

A real 2019 example that does NOT meet NOFO guidelines:

"Applicant commits to use commercially reasonable efforts to lead the creation of a $750,000 investment fund (the "Investment Fund"). <u>If and when such funds are raised by the Investment Fund</u>, that will then trigger a grant of $750,000, which will be allocated as matching funds…"

- **Ineligible** match because the funds are not **"*unencumbered, unrestricted, and committed at the time of award..*"** (see c. Matching Share Commitment Letters, pg.14 of NOFO)

Make sure matching sources <u>clearly sync to budget narrative and SF-424</u>

I6 CHALLENGE
funding to build regional capacity to translate ideas and inventions into products, services, companies, and jobs

SEED FUND SUPPORT (SFS) GRANT COMPETITION
funding to increase availability of and access to regional equity-based capital for early-stage companies

U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

i6 CHALLENGE
$750k federal funds cap; min. 1:1 match required

SEED FUND SUPPORT (SFS) GRANT COMPETITION
$300k federal funds cap; min. 1:1 match required

Merit Reviews: <u>Each application</u> was reviewed by a minimum of three Federal employees.

- National competition; reviewers included members with diversity across regions, Federal agencies/bureaus, and expertise
- Each reviewer evaluated applications using the **<u>six criteria in Section E of the FY 2019 NOFO</u>**

Final Award Selection

EDA Grants Officer made final award decisions based on scores in light of the selection criteria in NOFO.

Proposals Poorly Organized

REAL examples of project narratives that struggled:

- Used five pages to discuss the location and region – *what about the actual project, project timeline, sustainability plan, etc?*

- Submitted a draft version with working comments and edits still embedded

- Verbose, confusing, and disjointed from other pieces of the application

- Lacked evidence supporting strategy and/or impact claims

Projects Not Aligned with Program Goals

Proposals lacked clear connection with desired program outputs and outcomes:

- **i6 proposals** not clearly designed to *"increase entrepreneurship that is driven by innovations, ideas, intellectual property (IP), and applied research through the process of technology commercialization"*
  - E.g. projects supporting small/main street businesses, or without a plan to engage/support startups that are maturing technologies will *not* compete well

- **SFS proposals** not clearly designed to *"support the formation, launch, or scale of cluster-focused seed funds"*
  - *E.g. providing technical assistance and accelerator-like activities are i6 activities and may not necessarily directly support forming or scaling seed funds*

Support and Commitment Letters

REAL examples of problematic letters:

- Pro forma, with no mention of the specific EDA program (i6 or SFS proposal) and how proposed activities would benefit region/partner/econ dev efforts

- Commitment letters that did not account for actual matching amounts – e.g. no valuation of in-kind services, or inconsistent with budget narrative (fatal issue)

- Proposed partners and stakeholders lacked relevance to project (quality vs. quantity is always preferred)

Budget Inconsistencies

SF-424A

Personnel: $185,000

Budget Narrative

Personnel: $280,000

Staffing Plan

Director: $100,000
Program Mgr: $80,000
Venture Lead: $85,000

Total: $180,000

100+80+85 = $265K

Match Commit Letter

Venture Lead: $90,000

@ 20 hrs per week

@ 52 weeks per year

@ hourly rate: $91.35

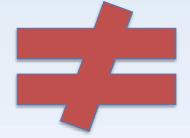**Total: $95,000**

$95K $90K ?

Former Grantees or Regions

Duplication and redundancy concerns:

- Applicants requesting funding for a similar project in the same region that was previously funded – e.g. same cluster, same focus, but different lead organization

- Not clear on how the 2019 proposal would build on previous RIS investments

- Circumventing eligibility constraints with vague partnerships, but already doing the same work on a current RIS grant

- Prior performance issues from same team/leadership

Workforce

For programs that chose to focus on workforce development:

- Did not align workforce development efforts with desired i6 Challenge outcomes of increased commercialization and new businesses (startup activity)

- REAL examples include; K-12 STEM education program, advanced manufacturing apprenticeship development, and corporate talent connection efforts that lacked strong and clear connections to how those efforts would increase commercialization and startup activity in the region

FY 2020 RIS Competition

Pending appropriations, EDA anticipates releasing the FY2020 RIS NOFO early in the calendar year (~February)

- 2020 RIS NOFO may reflect a two-phase process – a leaner "concept" proposal phase, followed by a full application phase for competitive applications

- EDA expects similar investment goals and priorities for 2020 RIS

Sign up for email alerts on www.grants.gov for notification about future solicitations, and sign up for EDA's monthly newsletter to ensure you receive notification about this and other EDA programs.

Questions?

Please type any questions into the chat box and we will work to address those questions today, or in future resources (FAQs, NOFO, webinars).

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