

STARTUP Central Proof of Concept (POC) Fund – Cohort 2

Note: Written proposal due on December 2, 2024. All written proposals must be submitted through your institution's sponsored research office. Proposal guidelines must be followed. Please register for the information session at <https://forms.gle/WNdQUnzdmYZaXkhK9>.

Statement of Purpose

The **S**mart **T**ools to **A**ccelerate **R**esearch **T**ranslation by **U**plifting **P**articipants for the Central IDeA State Region (**STARTUP Central**) program is providing support for testing initial proof of concept for biomedical product ideas for researchers in academic institutions in the IDeA Central Region (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma). STARTUP Central will provide resources for product development research and work with investigators to use hypothesis testing to determine the commercialization potential of their biomedical product idea with the objective of licensing the technology into a company in the near term. The STARTUP Central POC funding is not intended to fund basic science research or to be awarded to existing startup companies; however, awards may be made to academic researchers who are developing improvements on intellectual property that is already licensed.

A fund of \$375,000 has been established that will fund up to 15 projects. Information on the program, the solicitation, and other associated materials can be found on the STARTUP Central website (www.startup-central.org).

Eligibility

PI-eligible faculty and research staff at all IDeA Central Region campuses are eligible to compete for funding through this program. STARTUP Central will only consider technologies that fit within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) mission and goals <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/mission-goals>. When a compelling case can be made, copyrightable software may also be eligible for funding through this mechanism. Preference will be given to proposals based on technology that is not licensed, optioned, or encumbered with other obligations; however, proposals for new intellectual property improvements on technologies already licensed will be eligible to compete for funding. The technology must be owned or co-owned by an IDeA Central Region institution. Preference will be given to proposals with 1) a clearly identified commercial product or method, 2) evidence of inventor(s) investment in entrepreneurial education (e.g., Startup School; SBIR/STTR Training; iCorps, etc.), and 3) pending or approved/issued invention disclosures or patents. Projects are funded for eight months, with a possible four-month no-cost extension. All investigators on a funded team are required to complete the online training program during the first eight months of the project period.

Award Amount

Awards will generally be in the range of \$15,000-\$30,000 in total costs. Investigators are encouraged to seek additional matching funds to leverage the POC Fund resources. Matching funds are not required to be considered for POC Fund support but will be viewed as an added-value component to the submission. Contracts will be generated awarding funds from Continuum Educational Technologies, PBC to the institutional home of the applicant. At the time of award, applicants will be required to provide documentation that they have filed appropriate assurances with their grant administration office prior to the release of funds.

Proposal Guidelines

The proposal submission process will be in two stages: written and oral. Written proposals are due by December 2, 2024 at 5:00 PM CST. All written component submissions must be received electronically as a single PDF and emailed to POC@continuumedtech.com. The proposal must be submitted by the university research office on behalf of the PI. Please use the naming convention {University_PI_Date.pdf} for the proposal file. Upon receipt of the written proposals, oral proposal presentations will be scheduled for December 9-13, 2024.

- **Written Proposal**

The written portion of the proposal is limited a maximum of four pages (11 point font, 0.5 inch margins). The first two pages are the statement of research, team, and other required statements. The third page is the budget and justification, and the fourth (optional) page is the business model canvas (described in the introduction module).

Page 1: The first page of the proposal must have the following sections:

- **Problem** (describe the problem/opportunity your technology is intended to address)
- **Solution** (how does your technology address the users' problem and how is that solution differentiated from others competing in this space)
- **Rationale** (why should your proposal be awarded)
- **Research Proposed** (list what product development work will be done during the project period)

Page 2: The second page of the proposal must have the following sections:

- **Current Development Status** (sentence describing current technology development efforts and results to date)
- **Team** (briefly identify team members and provide a brief statement of the team qualifications for pursuing the development of this technology)
- **Benefit of the Program Statement** (up to two sentences about how the PI and team will benefit from the educational products and/or coaching provided by STARTUP Central)
- **Participation Statement** (one sentence statement of the team's agreement to participate in all the educational modules and submit the deliverables at the end of the project period)

Page 3: The third page of the proposal must have the following sections:

- **Budget Request Breakdown** (identify the amount, not to exceed \$30,000 over the 1-year period with a breakdown of major categories of funding request as follows)
 - Student salaries. Stipends for students or Post Docs are allowed; however, funding for student tuition or tuition waivers (scholarships) are not permitted. The role and/or task of any personnel on the project should be defined in the justification.
 - Other salaries. Faculty members (including visiting faculty) are not eligible for salary support. Salaries for office/administrative staff are not allowed.
 - Supplies. List general categories of supplies needed to complete the project
 - Fabrication costs. If the product development research requires the fabrication of prototypes for reduction to practice or test jigs must be made, a

one-time fabrication cost is allowable. Specify who will do the fabrication of parts, the location of the facilities where the fabrication will occur, a cost estimate, and an estimate of the time required to produce the working prototype or test jigs.

- Equipment. It is anticipated that budget levels will not allow for equipment (\$5K or more). If equipment is required to complete the product development work, the PI should consult STARTUP Central before submitting the proposal.
 - Travel. Any travel funds must be justified as essential to the success of the project. Travel funds may not exceed \$2,000 unless deemed essential to the development of the product.
 - Other. All other budget line items must directly impact the success of the project and must be sufficiently justified with a focus on driving innovation and translation of product concepts. Hiring an external firm to create a prototype may be acceptable, given a compelling rationale. Responsible budget formation is a criterion in the selection for awarding.
 - Matching Funds. Industry or university matching funds are encouraged but not required.
- **Justification** (justify the amount requested in each category, giving sufficient details of why the request is needed for advancing the translation potential of the product concept)

Budget expenditures encumbered before the award date will not be reimbursed.

Page 4. Though not required, the applicants may choose to submit a completed one-page business model canvas. See <https://canvanizer.com/new/business-model-canvas> for a template that can be used.

Other documents required at time of proposal submission:

- NIH face page for the proposal prepared by the PI's institutional sponsored research office (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>)
- NIH format biosketch of the PI (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biographical-sketch-format-page-non-fellowship-forms-h>)
- Vertebrate animal or human subjects research approval documentation must be provided.

• **Oral Proposal Presentation**

After submission of the written proposal, eligible applicants will be invited to give a five-minute pitch of their proposed research and product concept to a committee composed of experienced entrepreneurs and investors. Feedback on the product concept and proposed product development efforts will be given at the time of presentation.

Review Criteria and Selection Process

The review process will be completed within four weeks of the proposal submission date. Probable notice of award funding decisions will be made by December 16, 2024; funding decisions must be approved by NIH to be finalized. Final notice of the award will be communicated to both the applicant, their research institute, and their technology transfer staff.

The review process will consist of an independent review by the STARTUP Central External Advisory Committee (EAC). A score for each proposal will be assigned. The primary criteria include the likelihood of commercial success of the technology as measured by the potential for launch of a startup company, ability to secure outside investment, and anticipated need of additional funds to bring the product to market. EAC members with a conflict with any of the applications received will be recused.

A brief summary of the EAC review comments after the Oral Proposal Presentation will be provided to the PI applicant. EAC members may seek outside opinions. All reviewers (EAC members and any additional reviewers) will be under a confidentiality agreement with Continuum Educational Technologies, PBC. The NIH review proposal rating scale will be used in the evaluation of the proposals. Elements considered in the criteria scoring include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Significance of the product concept.
- Innovation of the product concept.
- Appropriateness of the approach to accelerate product development.
- Evidence budget is reasonable and sufficient to achieve milestones proposed.
- Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the product concept and proposed approach.

Each proposal will receive a final score on which the funding decision will be made. Awards generally will be in the range of \$15,000-\$30,000 depending on the project, with an average of \$25,000 per project.

Educational Program Participation Requirements

Teams selected for POC Funds must agree to participate in the educational program's online modules. Team participation is a critical requirement, and consent to this arrangement is expected as part of the selection process. This implies that acceptance of POC funds comes with the responsibility of engaging in and benefiting from the prescribed educational content delivered via online platforms. Funded teams will also meet as a cohort on Zoom for one hour, one time each month of the project period.

Reporting Requirements

A draft of an NIH Phase 1 SBIR or STTR proposal is due at the end of the eight-month project period. The draft proposal should include a brief section of the work completed in the project period that supports the product concept development. The draft will be reviewed by a consulting firm. Feedback on the proposal will be provided back to the POC Fund PI. All unused funds will be returned at the end of the project period.

Contact

For questions regarding the STARTUP Central POC application, please contact:

Lisa Friis, PhD
lfriis@ku.edu

Adam Courtney
info@continuumedtech.com

