



# The Regional Innovation Strategies Program

2019 Competition Debrief Webinar

*August 21, 2019*

INNOVATION. REGIONAL COLLABORATION. JOB CREATION.



**Craig Buerstatte**

Director (Acting), Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship

**Emily Miller**

Policy Advisor, Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship



- **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  
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**



## Common Issues for FY 2019 Competition:

1. Missing required documentation – *fatal if not met*
  - SPOC requirement
  - Non-profit documentation or articles of incorporation
  - Eligibility
  - **Note appendix D in NOFO for document checklists**
2. Ineligible Match, or Below Req'd Match (\$1 match to every \$1 fed)

**Take advantage of the Optional Pre-Submission Technical Review.**



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”). If and when such funds are raised by the Investment Fund, 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 clearly sync to budget narrative and SF-424**



## **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*



## **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:** Each application 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 six criteria in Section E of the FY 2019 NOFO

## 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

### Budget Narrative

### Staffing Plan

### Match Commit Letter

Personnel: \$185,000

Personnel: \$280,000

Director: \$100,000

Program Mgr: \$80,000

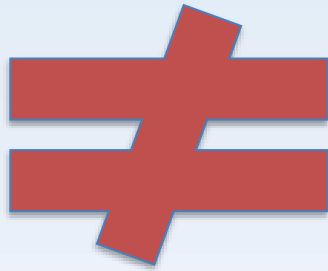
Venture Lead: \$85,000

Venture Lead: \$90,000

@ 20 hrs per week

@ 52 weeks per year

@ hourly rate: \$91.35



Total: \$180,000

Total: \$95,000

100+80+85 = \$265K

\$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](http://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).



Office	POC	Email	Phone
OIE	Craig Buerstette	<a href="mailto:cbuerstette@eda.gov">cbuerstette@eda.gov</a>	(202) 482-6331
OIE	Emily Miller	<a href="mailto:emiller@eda.gov">emiller@eda.gov</a>	(202) 482-5338
Atlanta	Robin Cooley	<a href="mailto:rcooley@eda.gov">rcooley@eda.gov</a>	(803) 253-3640
Austin	Rick Sebenoler	<a href="mailto:rsebenoler@eda.gov">rsebenoler@eda.gov</a>	(512) 381-8159
Chicago	Bill Warren	<a href="mailto:wwarren@eda.gov">wwarren@eda.gov</a>	(312) 789-9765
Denver	Zac Graves	<a href="mailto:zgraves@eda.gov">zgraves@eda.gov</a>	(303) 844-4902
Philadelphia	Chivas Grannum	<a href="mailto:cgrannum@eda.gov">cgrannum@eda.gov</a>	(215) 316-2759
Seattle	Brian Parker	<a href="mailto:bparker3@eda.gov">bparker3@eda.gov</a>	(206) 220-7675