



INVENTION TO INNOVATION CENTER (I²C) @ THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

Guide to applying for the National Science Foundation Innovation Corps (I-Corps) Team Program

I-Corps Team

I²C has a dedicated focus on the National Science Foundation (NSF) initiated Innovation Corps (I-Corps) program, which presents unique opportunities to accelerate innovation and new venture creation throughout the UAH community.

We welcome all aspiring entrepreneurs to explore I-Corps and reap the benefits of early customer discovery through programming, mentorship and funding support.

The Program

What is I-Corps?

As stated on the NSF website, “the Innovation Corps (I-Corps) is a set of activities and programs that prepare scientists and engineers to extend their focus beyond the laboratory and broadens the impact of select, NSF-funded, basic-research projects”. For additional details click [here](#).

What is I-Corps Team?

The purpose of the I-Corps Team program is to identify NSF-funded researchers who will receive additional support in the form of mentoring and funding to accelerate the translation of knowledge derived from fundamental research into emerging products and services that can attract subsequent third-party funding.

I-Corps Teams are composed of three main members:

iCORP TEAM UNIT



Student

Entrepreneurial Lead (EL)

Post doc, graduate student, or other student. Possesses relevant technical knowledge and a deep commitment to investigate the commercial landscape surrounding the innovation.

Professor

Principal Investigator (PI)

Professor responsible for overall grant management.

Business Expert

Mentor (M)

Experienced or emerging entrepreneur with proximity to the institution and experience in transitioning technology out of Academic labs.

All three members of the team participate fully in the I-Corps Curriculum.

What is the program duration?

The I-Corps Teams grant is six months in duration. This includes participation in the cohorts, online learning modules and ongoing customer discovery.

What is the curriculum?

The I-Corps Program is modeled after the Lean LaunchPad course developed by [Steve Blank](#). For additional details click [here](#).

How much is the grant value?

Approximately \$50,000. For additional details click [here](#).

What is the eligibility criteria?

To be eligible to pursue funding under an I-Corps Teams award, applicants must have received a prior award from NSF (in a scientific or engineering field relevant to the proposed innovation) that is currently active or that has been active within five years from the date of the I-Corps Teams proposal submission. The lineage of the prior award extends to the PI, Co-PIs, Senior Personnel, Post Docs, Professional Staff or others who were supported under the award. The prior award could range from a modest single-investigator award to a large, distributed center and also includes awards involving students such as REU Sites.

What is the expected outcome of the program?

The outcomes of I-Corps Teams projects will be threefold: 1) a clear go/no go decision regarding viability of products and services, 2) should the decision be to move the effort forward, a transition plan to do so, and 3) a technology demonstration for potential partners.

The go/no go decision of the proposed effort will be made by the I-Corps team in consultation with the I-Corps Cognizant Program Directors.

Where can I find additional information on the program?

The National Science Foundation has a comprehensive site which can be found [here](#).

Information source: NSF I-Corps. Click [here](#) for complete details on the program, deadlines, eligibility and application process.

Our Role

How can the I²C help me?

The role of the I²C is to foster, facilitate and champion UAH's efforts in the I-Corps Team program. We play a critical part throughout the duration of the program. We are dead serious about our involvement in putting forth viable and scalable innovations that can truly benefit from early funding through the I-Corps Team program. We expect 100% commitment from the selected UAH Teams so as to ensure maximum impact from the Lean LaunchPad curriculum.



Assess

Due diligence on the innovation and its commercial viability (value proposition, market and scalability).



Assemble

Application review, mentor selection and other relevant components that will strengthen the proposal.



Prepare

Critical inputs on interview preparation, sample Q/As and overall preparedness for panel questions.



Monitor

EL coaching on Lean LaunchPad curriculum post selection.

Continuous monitoring of team's progress during program.

What is in it for the I²C?

I²C is committed to supporting new venture activity and entrepreneurship involving UAH technologies. The I²C Team serves as a reliable partner for UAH faculty, staff, and students, as well as local and regional entrepreneurs who are exploring new ventures based on UAH technologies. Support for the I-Corps Team program is part of this broader mission.

What is I²C's selection process?

The I²C will assess EVERY proposal on the merit of three primary criteria: viability, marketability and scalability as it relates to the innovation under consideration. Additionally, we will also determine the merits of the Team from an execution stand point. The core objective of our efforts is to ensure quantifiable success on the program. We want to put our best and brightest forward.

Can I²C draft my proposal?

No. It is the responsibility of the PI and EL to draft the I-Corps Team proposal. I²C will provide strategic inputs, help review and fine tune the document for maximum impact. To review the solicitation click [here](#).

Can the I²C help me find the Mentor?

Yes. I²C's role in the development of your I-Corps Team proposal involves matching the PI and EL with an industry Mentor who will be dedicated to the success of the team.

How do I get started?

Engage early and plan your strategy. Contact I²C at i2c@uah.edu, if you feel you have what it takes to explore I-Corps.

The Mentor

What is the role of the Mentor?

Within each I-Corps project team, the I-Corps Mentor will play an essential role: providing insight from the private sector. This individual typically will be an experienced or emerging entrepreneur with experience in transiting technology out of academic labs. He or she will also be in close proximity to the academic institution and have connections throughout the region.

The I-Corps Mentor will serve as the principal guide in determining the technology disposition. He or she also will be responsible for regularly updating the cognizant NSF I-Corps program director on progress toward this goal.

Mentors need to be intimately involved with their team. As part of the 15 hours of effort, the mentors need to commit five (three for the curriculum + two) hours of "face time" per week, and cannot "dial in" their team meetings. These team meetings must include:

- Updating the customer contact strategy - the teams needs to make five to ten customer contacts per week.
- Ensuring that there is at least one update per week from the Mentor, the Entrepreneurial Lead and Principal Investigator.
- Summarize the lessons learned from the week and figure out the next steps.
- Reviewing the team's weekly presentation before they present to their peers.
- Identifying and correcting gaps in the Principal Investigator and Entrepreneurial Lead's business knowledge.

Bottom---line: The role of the Mentor is extremely critical to the team's success. We expect 100% commitment and involvement from our Mentors. This is serious business!

Can I participate as a Mentor?

We are selective in our Mentor intake process. Click [here](#) if you are interested in applying to our Mentor pool.

Will I get compensated for my time and efforts for participating as a Mentor?

No. Participation is voluntary and by invitation only. We are looking for individuals who can help, contribute and add to our entrepreneurial eco-system.

Who can I contact for additional details?

Contact I2C at i2c@uah.edu for additional details on the I-Corps mentor program.
