MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP & OUTREACH

NSF I-Corps Site at MSU

Overview

The National Science Foundation's Innovation Corps (NSF I-Corps) program aims to help entrepreneurs launch new products and businesses.

In March 2017, Mississippi State University was designated an official NSF I-Corps Site, with the purpose of developing potential I-Corps Team projects for the National I-Corps program and providing an entrepreneurial program for student (graduate and undergraduate), faculty, staff and alumni teams to complete together to achieve their business potential.

Participants will complete MSU's FlashPoint training, which is a targeted 3-week curriculum based on Lean Launchpad developed at Stanford University. FlashPoint teaches participants on powerful methodologies to identify valuable product opportunities that can emerge from academic research.

MSU's I-Corps Site will provide infrastructure, advice, resources, networking opportunities, training, and modest funding (awards of $1,000 – $3,000 per team) to enable teams to transition their work into the marketplace or into becoming I-Corps Team applicants.

Our Goals:

- ✓ Form I-Corps Teams composed of MSU faculty, students, and alumni
- ✓ Train teams on lean principles in a condensed three-week version of the national I-Corps training curriculum
- ✓ Propel teams into existing infrastructure of training and investment capital.

Upon completion, **participants are eligible to apply for the national NSF I-Corps Team program with the opportunity to be awarded a $50,000 grant**.

Team Composition

I-Corps Teams are comprised of three main members:

I. **Entrepreneurial Lead (EL)** – Typically a post-doc, graduate student, student, or alumni, who possesses relevant technical knowledge and a deep commitment to investigate the commercial landscape surrounding the innovation.
II. **Academic Lead (AL)** – A faculty member or co-inventor designated by faculty member serves as the technical lead and project manager.
III. **Business Mentor (M)** – Brings entrepreneurial experience and serves as the principal guide in determining the technology disposition.

Eligibility and Selection Criteria

All current undergraduate and graduate students, doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers, alumni, administrative staff, and faculty are eligible to apply as an Entrepreneurial Lead (EL). Academic Leads (AL) must be Mississippi State University faculty members. Students may only apply once per cohort and be on one team per cohort.

Eligible Business Ventures

Business ventures must be inherently technology-based, and generally fit within the STEM fields. Strong preference will be given in the following categories:

- Physical Sciences
- Life Sciences
- Agricultural Technology
- Software

Selection Criteria

Teams are selected by a review committee composed of five randomly selected members of MSU's Entrepreneurship Center Advisory Board (ECAB). The committee evaluates on the following criteria:

A. Team and Commitment – The I-Corps Sites program seeks participants with an interest in entrepreneurship and technology commercialization. This includes a willingness to talk to non-scientists about your technology, develop hypotheses on how the technology might be developed into a product, and work towards technology development (rather than basic research) grants. Experience is a plus, but not a requirement.

B. Intellectual Property Strength – Strong patent protection is characterized by broad claims that protect your technology and the space around it, as well as an understanding of related patents and publications that may limit your patent's scope. A patent or copyright (or a willingness to file one) is a requirement to participate in I-Corps Sites.

C. Technology Strength – I-Corps Sites deals mainly with early stage technologies in need of some level of validation. The committee will look at research to date that would indicate likely success, and at the technology's potential to by applied to more than one application or to fit very well into the proposed application.

D. Commercial Potential/Applications – The committee is looking for a thoughtful, and plausible, explanation of how your technology might be turned into a saleable product. Much of the program is dedicated to testing your hypotheses about commercialization. However, strong applicants will have basic ideas about what a product would look like, who would buy it, and who their competitors would be.

E. Fit with I-Corps Program – The first and most important goal of I-Corps Sites is to teach faculty and students how to think about commercialization. Teams that are enthusiastic about technology commercialization and have clear goals that fit synergistically with what is taught in the program will be favored. The committee will also look for teams with testable hypotheses regarding how their technology could be commercialized.

Commitment and Expected Outcomes

MSU's I-Corp Site program will help teams develop an individual strategy for business, product, and financial development. Participants are expected to commit at **least 3-5 hours per person per week** to market research, customer discovery and other commercialization-focused activities during the 3-week program.

By the end of the program, you will have:

- Interviewed 15 potential customers or end users;
- Completed a first draft of standard business model canvas;
- Started research on competing patents and publications;
- Found general data on market size and any key market trends;
- Analyzed competitive products;
- Learned about 3 potential sources of early-stage commercialization funding;
- Decided whether to pursue commercialization of the technology or idea; and
- Completed much of the research needed to apply for a commercialization-focused grant.



Schedule

MSU will conduct three annual cohorts of 10-15 teams in the spring, summer, and fall aligning with NSF's national I-Corps Teams solicitation. Dates are subject to change.

Cohort I – Summer 2017

Jun 12, 2017 – Jun 30, 2017

Applications Due: May 19th, 2017
Notification: May 26th, 2017

Cohort II – Fall 2017

Oct 23, 2017 – Nov 10, 2017

Applications Due: Sep 27th, 2017
Notification: Oct 4th, 2017

Cohort III – Spring 2018

Feb 19, 2018 – Mar 9, 2018

Applications Due: Jan 24th, 2018
Notification: Jan 31st, 2018

Funding and Budget

MSU I-Corps Sites Teams may apply for financial support to define value propositions, identify and validate customer segments, and draft their business model. Micro grants of $1,000-$3,000 are for:

Budget Category	Types of Expenses	How to Pay
Materials & Supplies	• Materials and supplies used to create a prototype (for product) or pilot program (for services) o Must be integral in the function or development of the product or service to be eligible	• Invoice • Procard • Reimburse
Meetings and Conferences	• Cost of admission as well as ancillary costs (i.e., transportation, meals, speaker's fees, etc.) o Conferences related to your product/service's industry o Meetings hosted by the team for purpose of customer discovery or market research	• Invoice • Procard • Reimburse
Personnel & Fringe	• Graduate students • Undergraduate research assistants • Research assistants • Laboratory staff	• Direct pay
Contractors	• Consultants, contractors, contracted proof-of-concept production, external testing o Must meet requirements of Mississippi State University Procurement.	• Invoice
Travel	• Visit potential customers and end users • Conferences • Trade shows • *All travel must follow university travel policies.*	• Reimburse
Other	• Training or education in entrepreneurship • Other needed resource, subject to approval	• Invoice • Procard • Reimburse