



## Entrepreneurship Partner Grant Program

<b>Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2025</b>			
<b>Lead Division:</b> Entrepreneurship and Innovation			
<input type="checkbox"/> New	<input type="checkbox"/> Revised		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grant	<input type="checkbox"/> Loan	<input type="checkbox"/> Tax Credit	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical Assistance

### Introduction

**Background Information:** The Entrepreneurship Partner Grant (EPG) was developed in FY22 as a combination of the previous Seed Accelerator and Capacity Building Entrepreneurial Support programs. The programs were combined to simplify program offerings and provide support outside the structure of a traditional accelerator.

The Seed Accelerator and the competitive Entrepreneurship Support programs saw heavy repeat use from mature organizations with successful programs. Because of the strength of proposals from mature programs E&I wanted to preserve accessibility for new organizations or untested programs (pilots). To address the different levels of program maturity the FY22 EPG program was offered with two avenues – competitive and open rounds.

In FY23 the EPG program was changed to become a completely competitive application process. This change was completed in order to further clarify and simplify eligibility and review parameters. In addition, WEDC implemented application rounds with a focus on increasing opportunities in underserved communities (rural, veteran and minority focused).

**Program’s Purpose:** The EPG program provides grants to technical assistance providers, which can be used for their operational costs and for accelerator or more in-depth programs. It may also offer direct investments or grants to entrepreneurs. These funds support early-stage (idea stage through ongoing profitability) companies and entrepreneurs as they develop their business strategy through technical assistance, planning, and programming.

The EPG program is intended to increase entrepreneurship activities across Wisconsin. Utilizing community building, capacity building, business financing, technical assistance, and other similar support, the program will strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Those served by the funded programs may be provided with a wide range of support including, but not limited to, financing, experienced hands-on mentorship, educational programming, visibility to investors, community building, leadership training, entrepreneurship and networking events, idea validation, and business development strategies.

The program provides an entity operating a not-for-profit entrepreneurship program with grant funding used to support its direct operational expenses for specific projects and initiatives. Program funds may also be used for eligible financial support of participant companies/individuals related to technical assistance program participation.

### Eligibility Requirements

**Eligible Applicants:** EPG applicants must meet the following criteria:



- Be a not-for-profit organization, to include nonprofit entities, units of government, educational institutions, community organizations, foundations, Tribal entities, or non-profit entities acting as a fiscal agent on behalf of another organization.
- Is requesting funding to create and/or manage programs aimed at fostering entrepreneurial community development, enhancing capacity, providing business financing, offering technical assistance, or supporting other similar entrepreneurial initiatives or program(s) to support the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

**Eligible Use of Funds:** EPGs can fund the following activities. Costs are only eligible to be applied to grant and matching fund expenses after WEDC approval.

- Operational expenses related to the project and provision of technical assistance to businesses.
- Funding to businesses related to the project.

**Matching:** Applicants must provide matching funds at a rate of 1:1 of the EPG funds. Matching funds may be cash or in-kind contributions.

### **Available Incentives**

**FY25:** \$2,250,000

**Award Sizes:** The maximum EPG grant amount is \$200,000.

**Award per Applicant:** No more than one award per fiscal year.

### **Activities and Expected Outcomes**

Assist 20 organizations to pass through to 350 companies.

**Impact:** Enhance the statewide startup ecosystem to support and accelerate the success of Wisconsin's early-stage companies through high-quality financial and technical assistance programs. Enhancing the growth and long-term success of Wisconsin's early-stage companies and entrepreneurs through financial and technical assistance programs offered by EPG partners, ultimately increases the number of startups, fosters growth opportunities, and creates more jobs.

### **Metrics:**

- Leverage – Total.
- Individuals Served/Engaged.
- Pass-through Businesses Assisted (technical).
- Pass-through Businesses Assisted (financial), if pass-through grants or loans.
- Pass-through Leverage Total, if applicable.
- Pass-through Job Creation, if applicable.
- Pass-through Job Retention, if applicable.
- Pass-through Commercialized Product Sales, if applicable.
- Project milestone, if applicable (e.g., expansion of services).

### **Application Guideline**

**Timeline:** Applications will be accepted, evaluated, and awarded twice per fiscal year during the summer and the winter. The grant is a competitive program and award rounds may have a focus such as expanding existing programs, pilot programs, and programs focused on identified themes at the time of the announcement.

**Scoring Criteria:** WEDC will include but not limit the Entrepreneurship Partner Grant scoring criteria to the below items. Specific scoring criteria will be announced along with the opening of each round of applications.

**Project Alignment and Feasibility:**

- The extent to which the work plan is feasible including project range, duration, and impact.
- The extent to which the applicant and project collaborators may have relevant experience and historical performance in program administration including previous WEDC awards, if applicable.
- **Financial Viability:**
  - The extent to which matching resources are available and utilized within the project budget.
  - The extent to which the project budget supports entrepreneurs compared to supporting operations as it relates to the overall intensity, duration or rigor of the project.
  - The extent to which WEDC funds impact the applicants' ability to assist individuals and/or companies.
- **Outcome and Impact:**
  - The extent to which the applicant demonstrates and plans to track impact within measurable, feasible, and impactful project outcomes.
  - The extent to which the applicant demonstrates a unique position to meet community need for the target population or location.
- **Innovation and Sustainability:**
  - The extent to which the program model can be replicated and/or sustained in other areas of Wisconsin.
- **Additional Considerations:**
  - Presence of partnering and collaborating organizations and extent of community support.
  - Use of novel and innovative approach to supporting individuals and/or companies
  - Alignment to WEDC priorities for industry sectors, local economic factors, geography, and target populations.

**How to Apply:** An interested applicant should contact a WEDC Account Manager to determine if their project is right for the program. Upon review of the project, and alignment with eligibility criteria, an applicant will be invited to submit their application through Network Wisconsin.

**Award Process:** The completed application will be assigned to a scoring committee for review and recommendation. A WEDC underwriter will be assigned to review each recommended award and go through the award review process.



**Performance Reporting:** Recipients must submit periodic reports on project activities and the number of businesses technically assisted where applicable, and any other contract deliverable.

WEDC annually selects awards on a sample basis for an audit. All backup to the performance report and financial records must be maintained by the recipient for at least three (3) years after the last performance report is due.

WEDC may impose additional reporting requirements to evaluate project performance and to ensure compliance with contract deliverables.

### **Revision History**

#### **Program Inception – Fiscal Year 2022**

- 7/1/2022: Clarifies program description; expands eligibility; adds factors that WEDC may consider when considering funding; shifts to fully competitive program.