



# Oklahoma Accelerator Program Tulsa Accelerator

Request for Proposals

### Version History

October 24, 2025	Original
November 3, 2025	Updated to answer questions received

## **Introduction**

The Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST), pursuant to 74 O.S. § 5060.45, seeks proposals from qualified service providers to establish and operate the Tulsa Accelerator as a core initiative of the Oklahoma Accelerator Program.

This initiative is designed to stimulate the growth of early-stage startup companies through a comprehensive, equity-neutral accelerator program that connects founders with capital, talent, mentorship, and global entrepreneurial networks.

This RFP is for a one-year contract at \$1,000,000, with an option for one renewal, contingent upon performance, availability of funds, and approval by the Oklahoma Science and Technology Research and Development (OSTRaD) Board.

## **Scope of Services**

The selected service provider will:

1. Design and Deliver a Cohort-Based Accelerator
  - Provide structured programming (10–16 weeks) for scalable, early-stage startups.
  - Focus on investment-readiness, product-market fit, and founder development.
  - Recruit diverse industries, with intentional efforts to ensure inclusive access statewide.
2. Leverage and Expand Ecosystem Partnerships
  - Build on existing Tulsa partnerships and OCAST's statewide innovation ecosystem assets.
  - Identify and address ecosystem gaps (e.g., industry verticals, underserved geographies, post-acceleration support).
  - Form or deepen collaborations with academic institutions, corporate innovation arms, OCAST's SSBCI Capital and Technical Assistance programs, industry partners, and local capital providers.
3. Unlock Access to Capital and Financial Pathways
  - Develop a proactive strategy to attract and integrate new capital sources for participating startups, including but not limited to

venture capital, angel investment, revenue-based financing, federal loan programs, and stacked/blended capital models.

- Build or strengthen new and existing pipelines that connect founders to regional, national, and international investment networks, with emphasis on first-time relationships and novel capital sources outside of Oklahoma.
- Offer founder education, matchmaking, and preparation services to enhance fundability and investor engagement.

#### 4. Facilitate Market Access and Expansion

- Establish or leverage connections that help startups access national and global markets, including through partnerships with international accelerators, export programs, or industry-specific networks.
- Assist startups in navigating market entry barriers, including regulatory, distribution, and customer acquisition challenges.
- Provide programming or mentorship that supports internationalization and scaling.

#### 5. Promote Long-Term Financial Sustainability

- Propose a plan to ensure the accelerator program's operational sustainability beyond OCAST funding.
- Identify and pursue diversified revenue streams (e.g., sponsor contributions, equity returns, program fees, philanthropic support).

#### 6. Deliver on Metrics and Public Value

- Track and report startup and program outcomes, including investment raised, revenues generated, job creation, and geographic and demographic reach.
- Be responsible for timely reporting and providing accurate documentation to OCAST, participation in monthly partner calls, and assisting with surveying of clients.
- Ensure data is disaggregated and aligned with state-level economic development and innovation performance benchmarks.

#### 7. Operate with Strong Brand Alignment

- Implement a co-branding and communications strategy in alignment with OCAST branding.

- Serve as a visible hub of Oklahoma's innovation infrastructure.

### **Proposal Requirements**

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP must be comprehensive and provide a clear understanding of how the service provider will fulfill the requirements outlined in the Scope of Services.

The following components must be included in the proposal:

1. Title Page (maximum of one page)
  - Name of Program
  - Lead Organization and any other significant partner organizations
  - Points of contact
    - Name
    - Organization
    - Title
    - Phone Number
    - Email Address
2. Executive Summary (maximum of two pages)
  - Summary of proposed program.
  - Key differentiators and value to Oklahoma's innovation ecosystem.
  - High-level budget outline.
3. Detailed Proposal Narrative (maximum of ten pages)
  - Description of the accelerator structure, curriculum, and services.
  - Detailed narrative on how the applicant will identify and target founders and startups.
  - Strategy for ecosystem integration and gap analysis.
  - Sustainability model beyond the life of the contract.
  - Capital Strategy: Describe how the program will introduce or improve access to capital for participating startups, going beyond a simple list to include specific strategies, partners, and founder support mechanisms.
  - Market Expansion Strategy: Detail how the program will help startups access national and international markets through partnerships, programming, and support services.
  - Program calendar with milestone activities.

- Participant Selection Strategy: Describe how the program will market itself to encourage application and what criteria the accelerator will utilize to identify accepted founders.
  - Oklahoma Impact and Legacy Plan: Describe how the program will strengthen Oklahoma's innovation ecosystem during and after the contract term, including specific details of how activities, partnerships, and capacity built through this program will be sustained beyond the funding period.
4. Budget and Use of Funds (maximum of two pages)
- Detailed budget of the \$1M funding.
  - Justification for all expenses.
  - Description of matching funds or in-kind contributions (preferred, not required).
5. Deliverables and Impact Goals
- Projected metrics (e.g., startups accelerated, capital raised, follow-on support).
  - Clear and measurable quarterly deliverables.
  - Outline of data collection and reporting process.
6. Letters of Support
- Unlimited collaboration letters. Collaboration letters are those entities which will participate with the program. Letters should outline the support being provided or aspects of collaboration.
  - Maximum of seven endorsement letters. Endorsement letters are those from entities which can provide insight into the applicant's ability to deliver programmatically or manage this level of funding.
7. Key Personnel and Organizational Capacity (maximum of two pages + resumes)
- Resumes and qualifications of lead staff.
  - Organizational structure, including key partners and roles.
  - If key personnel are not onboard at the time of submission, a job description outlining the role, responsibilities, along with required and preferred qualifications will be accepted.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Strength of the accelerator model and service delivery approach.

- Demonstrated ability to leverage private capital to stimulate early-stage company growth and connect startups with national and global entrepreneurial networks.
- Integration with local and state innovation ecosystems and ability to attract out-of-state or national partners, mentors, and investors.
- Past performance and impact in Oklahoma, including measurable outcomes, partnerships, and ecosystem contributions. New applicants must demonstrate clear plans for meaningful local engagement and impact.
- Value-added contribution and gap alignment, showing how the proposal fills ecosystem gaps, complements existing efforts, and builds capacity that will remain in Oklahoma beyond the funding period.
- Partnership development and sustainability, including evidence of collaborations that will endure beyond OCAST funding.
- Effective and strategic use of funds for programmatic activity and in-state capacity building.
- Potential for long-term financial and operational sustainability.
- Experience and qualifications of the delivery team.
- Effectiveness of branding and marketing strategy.
- Anticipated ROI and impact (capital raised, jobs created, startups supported).
- Matching funds or in-kind contributions (preferred).
- Alignment with Oklahoma's Science and Innovation Strategic Plan.

### Submission Process

- **Deadline: November 12, 2025 @ 11:59pm**
- Submission Email: kristina.wadley@ocast.ok.gov
- Format: One PDF, max 25 pages (excluding appendix)
- Appendix: Resumes, collaboration and endorsement letters

Questions must be submitted in writing to the contact below. Responses will be provided through an amended version of this RFP, which will be updated no more than once per day. The amended version will be posted at the link provided on [OCAST.OK.GOV](https://ocast.ok.gov). Respondents are responsible for monitoring this link for any updates or changes to the RFP.

### Contact Information

Kristina Wadley

Associate Director of Programs

Email: kristina.wadley@ocast.ok.gov

## Terms and Conditions

- Providers must be registered in the Oklahoma Supplier Portal to receive funds.
- Renewal subject to annual review, availability of funds, and approval by the OSTRaD Board.
- The State of Oklahoma reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.
- OCAST may accept partial portions of proposals or combine elements from multiple proposals.
- After selection, the provider must enter into a Professional Services Agreement with OCAST.
- A detailed budget itemizing all program-related costs must be submitted as part of the contract process.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Question:**

**Define equity-neutral and how it relates to the sustainability of the accelerator program and the potential for equity returns listed in section 5 of the Scope of Services**

Response:

"Equity-neutral" means that the accelerator program does not require participating startups to give up equity in exchange for participation in the core program services funded by this RFP. The purpose of this approach is to maximize accessibility and inclusivity, particularly for early-stage founders who may lack access to capital or be equity-sensitive.

However, this does not preclude the accelerator from offering optional, separate investment mechanisms outside of the state-funded activities (e.g., through an affiliated investment vehicle or syndicate). Any such activities must be clearly distinguished from those funded by OCAST and cannot be required for program participation.

In Section 5 (Sustainability), the mention of "equity returns" refers to potential long-term revenue models that may support the accelerator's sustainability beyond the contract term. These returns could come from optional equity investments made by a separate legal entity or partner fund—not OCAST—provided no state funds are used to take or hold equity positions.

### **Question:**



**Can the funding go toward investments in, or grants to, participating startups? Are there directives on allowable/non-allowable expenses attached to overhead, rent, etc.?**

Response:

The program funds may not be used for equity investments or for any form of capital that requires repayment, ownership stake, or other similar consideration from the participating startup.

However, non-dilutive grants to participating startups are allowable as part of a competitive, merit-based program component—provided that no equity is taken, no repayment is required, and no grant acceptance is a condition for participation in the accelerator program. These grants must be designed to further the goals of the Oklahoma Accelerator Program and must be clearly defined, fairly administered, and reported as part of program deliverables.

Allowable uses of funds include, but are not limited to:

- Personnel (salary and fringe)
- Program delivery expenses
- Curriculum development
- Mentorship stipends
- Travel (aligned with program delivery)
- Marketing and outreach
- Equipment, supplies, and software related to program services
- Reasonable overhead and facilities costs (e.g., rent, utilities)
- Contracted services and partner fees
- Startup grants, provided they are non-dilutive, non-repayable, and administered under criteria and terms approved by OCAST.

All expenditures must comply with generally accepted cost principles and be reasonable, necessary, and allocable to the objectives of the accelerator. Final budgets will be subject to OCAST review and approval during contract negotiation.

**Question:**

**What are the funding restrictions for the monies more generally?**

Response:

Funding must be used in alignment with 74 O.S. § 5060.45, which establishes the Oklahoma Accelerator Program to stimulate early-stage company growth by leveraging private capital and connecting startups with global entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Restrictions include:

- Funds cannot be used for lobbying or political activities
- Funds cannot be used to make equity investments
- Funds must support accelerator operations and services as outlined in the RFP
- Funds are typically cost-reimbursed and subject to state rules

However, if an advance is necessary to provide the operational flexibility needed to launch or stand up the program, applicants should clearly outline this request in their proposal and budget documentation, including justification and the proposed amount. Such requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis during the contracting process.

Additional guidance will be provided during contracting and budgeting.

**Question:**

**Are co-applicants or secondary awardees able to apply with other groups?**

Response:

Yes. OCAST encourages collaborative proposals that include co-applicants, sub-awardees, or formally partnered entities. However, one organization must serve as the lead applicant and fiscal agent responsible for contract management, performance reporting, and compliance.

Co-applicants may be other nonprofits, academic institutions, tribal entities, or mission-aligned for-profits, provided their roles and compensation are clearly defined in the proposal.

**Question:**

**Does the OCAST strategic plan need to contribute to the make-up of the industry groups being served? Can we have a copy of the current OCAST industry strategic plan?**

Response:

While alignment with the Oklahoma Science and Innovation Strategic Plan is encouraged, accelerator programs are not required to serve all industry sectors outlined in the plan. Proposals may focus on one or more strategic sectors as long as the approach supports innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic diversification in Oklahoma.

Applicants should clearly explain how their industry focus aligns with the broader goals of the strategic plan, but are not expected to address every sector listed.

A copy of the current plan can be found here:

<https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/ocast/documents/Oklahoma%20Science%20and%20Innovation%20Plan.pdf>

**Question:**

**Can an out-of-state organization submit a response to the proposal?**

Response:

Yes, an out-of-state organization may apply but should meet all requirements for and be registered in the State of Oklahoma Vendor Portal. The organization must demonstrate the capability to engage with the Tulsa ecosystem and in-state resources.

**Question:**

**What type of organizations may apply?**

Response:

Both nonprofit and for-profit organizations are eligible to apply.

**Question:**

**Do you have a headcount / resource requirement to be full time in Tulsa?**

Response:

No, there is no defined headcount or full-time resource requirement in Tulsa; however, physical presence and adequate resources are required to effectively support and recruit startups. Additionally, the team must be able to meet all defined program requirements to ensure successful delivery and outcomes.

**Question:**

**Is a convertible grant mechanism where the grant is non-repayable unless a revenue milestone is met—eligible under this RFP?**

Response:

No. Grants to participating startups must be non-dilutive and non-repayable. Any form of conditional repayment—even if contingent upon a milestone like \$250,000 in revenue—would not be eligible for use of program funds under this contract.

Programs may explore other sustainability mechanisms or optional capital structures outside the scope of state-funded activities, but any startup grants funded through this RFP must not require repayment or equity in any form. However, it is acceptable and encouraged to use the state-funded accelerator program as a platform to attract and leverage outside capital—such as

philanthropic, venture, or mission-aligned investment funds—that may support complementary financing structures (e.g., revenue-contingent grants or convertible capital). These external funds must be clearly distinguished from OCAST funding and participation in the accelerator must not be contingent on acceptance of such capital mechanisms. Proposals should articulate how these strategies will enhance sustainability while preserving equity-neutral access to the core program.

**Question:**

**What is an “equity-neutral” accelerator?**

Response:

An “equity-neutral” accelerator is one that does not require startups to give up equity or ownership in exchange for participation in the core accelerator program funded by this RFP. This model prioritizes accessibility for early-stage entrepreneurs without placing ownership constraints on their companies.

**Questions:**

**Can the accelerator invest in participants and graduates of the accelerator?**

Response:

The use of OCAST funds may not be used for any equity investments, including those into participants or graduates of the program. However, the accelerator may establish separate investment vehicles or partnerships—such as affiliated funds, syndicates, or other capital mechanisms—to make equity investments, provided that these structures are funded entirely through non-OCAST sources. These investment opportunities must remain optional and distinct from participation in the accelerator program, and cannot be a condition of enrollment or access to state-funded services.

**Question:**

**Can an affiliate of the accelerator invest in participants and graduates of the accelerator?**

Response:

Yes—if the investment is made with non-OCAST funds, through an affiliated but separate legal entity, and participation in the investment opportunity is optional and not tied to participation in the accelerator. The accelerator must clearly separate these activities and may not condition program access on investment participation.

**Question:**

**Can the accelerator take equity in participants and graduates of the accelerator?**

Response:

No. The accelerator itself—under this contract—cannot take equity in exchange for participation or support services funded through the program. Optional equity-based relationships facilitated through external entities are allowed but must be disclosed and separate from core offerings.

**Question:**

**How many startups per year does the RFP contemplate the accelerator working with?**

Response:

There is no prescribed number of startups required. However, proposals should include realistic projections for the number of startups served, aligned with the \$1 million annual funding and the program's deliverables and ROI expectations.

**Question:**

**Can the accelerator operate more than one cohort per year? Is there a minimum or maximum size per cohort?**

Response:

Yes. Applicants may propose more than one cohort per year if it fits within the scope and budget. There is no required minimum or maximum cohort size, but proposals should justify cohort strategy, size, and cadence based on program capacity, quality of support, and impact goals.

**Question:**

**Do all of the startups have to be Oklahoma-based?**

Response:

No. While the focus should be on Oklahoma-based startups, programs may serve out-of-state or relocating founders as long as the program demonstrates a strong benefit to the Oklahoma innovation ecosystem. Proposals should explain their recruitment strategy and how they intend to create value for the state.

**Question:**

**What is the definition of “Oklahoma-based”?**

Response:

“Oklahoma-based” typically refers to a company that meets one or more of the following:

- Is legally registered to do business in Oklahoma

- Has a primary office or operational presence in the state
- Has founders or team members residing in Oklahoma
- Is actively building or testing their business in-state

Proposals should define how they will assess and prioritize Oklahoma-based participation in alignment with the program's goals.

**Question:**

**What outcomes/KPIs does the State intend to measure the accelerator on?**

Response:

Key outcomes and KPIs will include:

- Number of startups accelerated
- Capital raised by participating startups
- Jobs created and retained
- Revenue growth
- Founder demographics and geographic reach
- Partnerships created
- Market access or expansion achievements
- Delivery against quarterly and final deliverables

Proposals should specify their own projected KPIs and reporting approach, as required in the proposal template.

**Question:**

**How will applications be graded and who is reviewing the applications?**

Response:

Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of contracted external reviewers using a formal scoring rubric based on the criteria outlined in the RFP. These include:

- Program design and delivery
- Capital and market access strategy
- Ecosystem alignment and partnerships
- Organizational capacity
- Budget clarity and sustainability
- Anticipated ROI and impact

Each application will be scored independently, and OCAST may request clarifications as part of the review process.

**Question:**

**Can an applicant submit more than one application?**

Response:

Yes. An organization may submit more than one application if it proposes

distinct program designs or delivery models. Each application must stand on its own merit, with a unique value proposition, budget, and team structure. Applications must clearly distinguish how each proposed approach would serve different objectives, industries, or founder communities. While this flexibility exists, OCAST encourages applicants to avoid duplicative submissions unless there is a compelling programmatic rationale.

**Question:**

**Can you apply for less than the full \$1M? If yes, how would that be evaluated?**

Response:

Yes. Applicants may request less than the full \$1M available under this RFP. However, the proposed budget must be proportional to the program scope, with deliverables and impact scaled accordingly. Smaller funding requests will be evaluated based on the same criteria as full proposals. Proposals should justify why a reduced funding level is appropriate and how outcomes will still align with the goals of the Oklahoma Accelerator Program.

**Question:**

**Can an organization be both an applicant on one application and a co-applicant on another application?**

Response:

Yes. An organization may serve as a lead applicant on one proposal and a co-applicant or collaborating partner on another.

**Question:**

**When is the deadline for proposal submissions for this RFP?**

Response:

Submissions for the Tulsa Accelerator RFP are due and will be accepted no later than 11:59pm, November 12, 2025.

**Questions Received in Reference to RFP**

**Question:**

**for clarification regarding Section 3 (Detailed Proposal Narrative) of the RFP. The required components include both:**

- **“Detailed narrative on how the applicant will identify and target founders and startups,” and**
- **“Participant Selection Strategy: Describe how the program will market itself to encourage application and what criteria the accelerator will utilize to identify accepted founders.”**

**At first glance, these appear to request similar information. Could you please clarify the intended distinction between these two sections? For example, should the first focus more on the outreach and targeting strategy (how we find and attract founders) and the second on the evaluation and selection criteria (how we choose among applicants)?**

Response:

While related, these two sections address different aspects of program design.

The “Detailed narrative on how the applicant will identify and target founders and startups” should describe the applicant’s outreach and engagement strategy—how the program will find, reach, and attract founders to apply. This may include target industries or founder profiles, recruitment channels, marketing strategies, and efforts to ensure statewide and inclusive participation.

The “Participant Selection Strategy” should explain the evaluation and decision-making process used once applications are received. This includes the criteria, process, and governance for determining which applicants are accepted into the program (e.g., scoring rubrics, interview methods, or selection committees).