

2024 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition (GAFC) FAQ

Download the full competition guidelines and stay up to date here:
<https://www.americasseedfund.us/accelerators>

Purpose

Speed the launch, growth, and scale of STEM/R&D-focused small businesses through impactful and inclusive approaches.

Nurture a national equitable entrepreneurship ecosystem – new collaborations and support for entrepreneur support organizations to enhance small business success.

Theme Areas

2024 GROWTH ACCELERATOR FUND COMPETITION | THEME AREAS



National and Economic Security

Including but not limited to:

- National Security and Defense
- Artificial Intelligence
- Microelectronics
- Advanced Computing and Software
- Quantum Computing
- Human-Machine Interfaces
- Other Critical and Emerging Technologies



Domestic Manufacturing and Production

Including but not limited to:

- Advanced Manufacturing R&D
- Supply Chain Resiliency
- Critical and Resilient Infrastructure
- AgTech and Agricultural Innovation
- Other Supply Chain, Infrastructure, and Manufacturing Technologies



Sustainability and Biotechnology

Including but not limited to:

- Energy and Sustainability
- Biotechnology
- Climate and Environment
- Public Health
- Renewable Energy Generation and Storage
- Electric Vehicles
- Blue Economy
- Other Climate, Energy, and Life Science Technologies

***** GAFC award funding should only be used to fund the Catalyst's proposed budget (not to include university facilities and administration (F&A) costs). Direct investments in any businesses are expressly prohibited.*****

Eligibility

Who can apply as a Stage One Catalyst?

- Private entities (for- and non-profits) such as corporations or other organizations, that are incorporated or organized in and maintain a primary place of business in the U.S.
- Non-Federal government entities, such as states, counties, tribes, and municipalities.
- Academic Institutions based in the U.S.
- Individuals or teams that are U.S. citizens or permanent residents and at least 18 years old at the time of submission.

The following are NOT eligible:

- Federal entities
- Federal employees acting within the scope of their employment
- SBA employees and SBA contractors
- Individuals or organizations that are currently suspended or debarred by the federal government

We're a start-up looking for funds to scale our company and invest in additional R&D. Can we apply for the 2024 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition (GAFC)?

No, prize funds from GAFC cannot be used for direct investment in small businesses or startups. The purpose of this program is to nurture an equitable innovation entrepreneurship ecosystem throughout the United States by strengthening collaborations and support for entrepreneur support organizations.

Can a past GAFC winner apply for 2024 funding?

Yes. Previous funding will have no impact on the selection of Stage One Catalyze submissions. As indicated in the Competition Criteria, preference will be given to Contestants who include new Ecosystem Partners in their Growth Accelerator Partnerships.

We won a GAFC award in a prior competition. Do we still have to apply for Stage One this year or can we skip to Stage Two?

Only winners of the 2024 Stage One Catalyst Prize may apply for Stage Two funding.

For previous awardees, are you looking to build on the previous work or for something new?

This Competition does not require any previous winners to build upon their work from other awards, nor does it require previous winners to develop a new program.

Can a consortium or existing partnership apply to be a Catalyst?

Stage One Catalyze funds will be awarded to a single organization. If a consortium of organizations would like to apply at Stage One, please choose a single member to apply on behalf of the consortium. To disburse the prize funds, an organization must have an active SAM.gov registration, so it may make sense to use an organization that already has a SAM registration as the applicant on behalf of a consortium.

Can an SBA-supported Partner (such as a Women's Business Center, Small Business Development Center, Veteran's Business Development Center, etc.) apply?

Yes.

Is there a requirement for years in the operation of the business?

There is no requirement for years of operation.

Use of Stage One Prize Funds and Payment

What are Stage One funds meant for?

SBA expects Catalyst winners to use Stage One funds for ecosystem-building activities, including but not limited to:

- Recruitment of new, community-connected Ecosystem Partners
- Co-design with Ecosystem Partners
- Establishment of novel partnerships
- Strengthening existing alliances among stakeholders (including public, private, non-profit, and academic partners)
- Developing resources to support the Growth Accelerator Partnership impact during Stage Two
- Creating a new ecosystem-focused accelerator model

Can the funding be used for operations (human resources)?

Yes, including fringe costs.

Are there any restrictions on the use of funds?

GAFC awards are to be used to fund the accelerator and incubator operating budgets, not for direct investment in small businesses or startups.

How long do we have to use the funds, if awarded?

There is no period of performance. Stage One metrics will be collected after Stage Two awards are made.

Could award funds from this competition be used to formally structure our consortium and then execute the plan submitted in the application? Are there any allowed cost lists to review?

SBA expects Catalyst winners to use Stage One funds for ecosystem-building activities.

Award funding from SBA is to be used to fund the operating budget for Catalysts and cannot be used for direct investment in small businesses or startups. Funding may be reserved for proposed Growth Accelerator Partnership activities at Stage Two. There is no list of allowable costs.

Is there a specific expectation for how funds are divided up between the Catalyst and Ecosystem Partners in both Stage One and Stage Two of the prize?

No. A strong submission will clearly describe a shared vision and the role of each partner entity in nurturing an equitable ecosystem. This could include how the Partnership will leverage and deploy assets, resources, expertise, and access across Ecosystem Partner organizations (and with other mission-aligned entities) to benefit the ecosystem (e.g. creating efficiencies, sharing best practices,

and supporting newer Ecosystem Partners within the network) and any additional entities (other than Ecosystem Partners) who will engage with and/or contribute resources to support the success of the Growth Accelerator Partnership, including their role in the Partnership (if any), mission, and strengths/assets you intend to share with the network.

Is the 2024 GAFC a reimbursement-type program?

No. Funding is distributed through the Catalyst's SAM.gov registration as a single direct deposit payment as soon as possible after winners are announced. Stage One winners are expected to be announced in April 2024.

What does SAM stand for?

System for Award Management.

Should applicants start their SAM registration NOW?

An active SAM registration is only required for prize winners to receive funds. It is valuable for organizations that intend to receive Federal funding through any mechanism to register in SAM.

Theme Areas

Can we apply for more than one Theme Area?

Yes, you should apply for at least one Theme Area, but you are not limited to only one Theme Area. Your application should clearly explain why your organization has selected that Theme Area(s).

Do we have to choose a sub-theme listed under one of the Theme Areas?

No, you do not have to choose a specific sub-theme, and you can select more than one sub-theme in the same Theme Area.

Miscellaneous

Is it required to have a physical location to count as an incubator/accelerator for GAFC?

No, you do not need to have a physical location; you will need to provide a location for a main address when submitting your information.

Do I need Letters of Support/Commitment and Matching Funds?

Letters of support are NOT part of this prize competition.

Any support statements/quotes/commitments can be summarized in the submission slide deck. Matching Funds are not required, but SBA has an interest in understanding what additional resources are committed to the project from your organization and organizational partners that would allow for program continuation beyond the prize award.

Can the font be larger than 11 points for headings?

Yes.

Can we add graphics/designs to the slides?

Yes.

Can we add live links to outside websites to the slides?

No. The only outside link should be to the 90-second video, on the first slide of the deck.

Are there any budget reporting requirements for this award? Is there any data or metrics that need to be tracked and submitted?

As this is a prize and not a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement, there are no specific budget reporting requirements. The SBA will collect Stage One metrics after Stage Two awards are made. An applicant will track and report out on the Stage One metrics proposed in their submission.

How will SBA select Stage One winners?

SBA will review submissions for completeness and Contestant eligibility. SBA will choose winners whose submissions best satisfy the Competition criteria and present the greatest potential for success. SBA may also consider the geographic location and dispersal of Contestants, the extension of services to underserved populations, industry diversity, the risk posed by the Contestant's organization, and similar considerations when selecting winners.

SBA, at its sole discretion, may request clarifying/explanatory information.

Contestants selected for awards will be vetted by SBA for, among other things, conflicts of interest with the Agency.

Our organization is applying as a Catalyst for Stage One, and we would like to include an organization that receives SBA funding through a separate grant, and their leadership wants to know whether they would put that funding at risk if they were part of this partnership.

The GAFC prize funding will not affect any other SBA award or other federal funding. Small Business Development Centers, Veteran Business Outreach Centers, and other SBA resource partners are welcome to participate with no impact on their current or future funding agreements or opportunities.

Can a Stage One application address more than one Theme Area?

Yes, as long as a single application is submitted. Each organization may only submit one GAFC application.

Do we have to submit the 90-second video as part of our Stage One application?

Yes. A complete Stage One application has three components: a 13-slide PowerPoint deck saved as a pdf; a single summary slide (also a pdf) that can be made public if the application is chosen as a Stage One winner; and a 90-second video. Failure to submit all three components will result in the application not passing the administrative review and not being considered by the reviewers.

Is there a place where I can see the type of applications that won GAFC funding last year?

Yes. All Stage One and Stage Two 2023 GAFC winners are listed in our online directory, found here: <https://bit.ly/GAFC23Directory>. You can find more information about the 2023 competition here: <https://www.sbir.gov/accelerators>.

The startups that we work with are not necessarily focused on bringing lab R&D and new technologies to market. Would that limit our competitiveness for this prize?

Yes. The goal of the 2023 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition (GAFC) is to catalyze strategic ecosystem partnerships to build community and organizational capacity for the successful launch, growth, and scale of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)-based entrepreneurs and small businesses.

If we are the Catalyst organization, can you provide some guidance on when we are meant to involve our Ecosystem Partner, both in the proposal development and execution processes?

SBA expects Catalyst winners to use Stage One funds for ecosystem-building activities, including but not limited to the recruitment of new, community-connected Ecosystem Partners, designing a program for Stage Two applications, and the creation of novel partnerships. Stage Two prizes will advance the collaboration between Catalysts and Ecosystem Partners to enhance small business success. SBA expects Stage One winning Catalysts and Ecosystem Partners to submit a joint proposal for Stage Two describing the Growth Accelerator Partnership, and their shared vision and plan for use of the prize funding.

Who do I contact with questions?

Please reach out to accelerators@sba.gov.

You are responsible for reviewing the full and complete competition guidelines at Challenge.gov or: AmericasSeedFund.us/accelerators