LaunchPad - Innovation and Tech Transfer Grant Program

Office of Sponsored Programs & Research (OSPR) and StarTUp at Towson

I. Program Overview

The LaunchPad is an eighteen month internal funding and support program designed to surface faculty inventions and support promising innovations in moving toward commercialization and external investment. The goal is to build a strong pipeline of faculty-led innovations that can attract external investment and/or licensing opportunities while contributing to Towson University's mission and regional economic development.

The program provides:

1. Guided support through internal administrative steps (e.g., invention disclosure, IP review, patenting and licensing).
2. Seed funding to advance prototypes, validate markets and competition, scalability studies, and building preliminary commercialization plan
3. Mentorship from StarTUp at Towson
    a. Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR)/Faculty Connector
    b. Acceptance into the TU StarTUp Accelerator Program
    c. Access to the second-floor resident company workspace
4. Structured preparation for external commercialization pathways, including but not limited to:
    - USM Launch fund, Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII), , NSF I-Corps, SBIR/STTR, and regional accelerators

II. Program Goals

1. Build faculty capacity and culture around innovation and entrepreneurship.
2. Increase the number and competitiveness of TU proposals to NSF I-Corps, SBIR/STTR, MII, and related programs.
3. Encourage faculty to identify and develop innovations with commercial and societal impact.
4. Support faculty through the internal commercialization pathway—from disclosure to accelerator participation.

III. Funding & Project Period

Award amount: Up to $15,000 in direct costs per project.

Five thousand of these funds must be expended in accordance with university policies and procedures. Some, but not all, allowable expenses include support for prototype development and testing, travel related to commercialization activities, student stipends, user/customer discovery activities, and limited summer salary (subject to College and OSPR guidelines). Questions regarding allowability of costs can be directed to ospr@towson.edu

Ten thousand of these funds will be provided as non-dilutive funding to the faculty-driven company when admitted to the TU StarTUp accelerator program.

Number of awards: Anticipated 1-2 awards per cycle, contingent on number of applications and merit.

Project period: Approximately 18 months, beginning in the spring.

IV. Eligibility

PI Eligibility:

- Full-time Towson University faculty (tenured, tenure-track, or clinical/teaching/ professor of practice and other faculty lines).
- Co-inventors may include staff or postdoctoral researchers where appropriate.
- For purposes of collaborative grants, eligibility is tired to the Principal Investigator only

V. Program Timeline

- **Fall/Winter**: Discussion with VPR, AVP OSPR and Executive Director TU StarTUp or their designees. Regularly attend faculty sessions led by TU StarTUp.
- **Third Friday in January**: Applications and invention disclosures due
- **Winter/Spring:** Engage with Entrepreneur-in-Residence/Faculty Connector; conduct customer discovery and refinement.
- **Spring:** If advised by StarTUp designees, apply to TU or external accelerator (e.g., StarTUp at Towson, regional accelerators, etc.)
- **Summer (June–August):** Focus on prototype development, pilots, market and competition validation.
- **By Fall the following year:** Prepare and submit applications to external programs (e.g., NSF I-Corps, SBIR/STTR, MII).
- **By Spring of the following year:** Apply to to TU or external accelerator (e.g., StarTUp at Towson, regional accelerators, etc.) if faculty member has not applied in the previous year.

VI. Application Requirements

Applications should be submitted as a single PDF with the following sections in order:

1. Cover Page (1 page): Project title; PI name, department, college, email, phone; Co-PI(s) and key team members; Total amount requested; Brief (2–3 sentence) project summary.
2. Project Summary & Innovation Description (1–2 pages): Clear description of the innovation; Problem or need being addressed; Target users/customers and value proposition; Current stage of development (idea, prototype, pilot, etc.).
3. Commercialization Potential (1–2 pages): Preliminary market or user segment(s); Competing or alternative solutions; Why this innovation is unique or advantageous; Potential technical risks that could impede the commercialization pathway; Potential revenue models and commercialization pathways (e.g., licensing, startup, partnership).

4. Work Plan & Timeline (1–2 pages): Major objectives and milestones aligned with the program timeline; Key tasks, responsible team members, and expected outcomes at each stage; Risk mitigation strategies.
5. Team and Environment (1–2 pages): Relevant expertise and roles of PI and team members; Prior experience with commercialization, startups, or industry collaborations (if any); Available facilities and resources at Towson that support the project.
6. Budget & Budget Justification (up to 2 pages): Line-item budget for the full project period; Justification for each cost and its connection to commercialization goals.
7. External Funding Strategy (1 page): Target external program(s); How this internal grant will position the project for a competitive external application; Anticipated timeline for external submission(s).
8. CV/Biosketches (up to 2 pages per key person): Brief CV or biosketch for PI and key co-investigators/team members.
9. Optional Letters of Support (up to 3 letters): From department chair, industry partners, community organizations, or potential customers validating interest/need.

VII. Application Submission Instructions

Application Submission Form

Questions: Direct questions to Rebecca O'Brien, AVP for OSPR, robrien@towson.edu and/or [StarTUp contact Ardys Russakis, Executive Director arussakis@towson.edu].

VIII. Review Process & Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee convened by OSPR and the StarTUp at Towson. Reviewers will evaluate proposals based on:

- Innovation & Significance: Novelty of the idea and potential for impact.
- Commercialization Potential: Evidence of a real problem/need and plausible market; Competitive advantage over existing solutions.
- Feasibility & Work Plan: Clarity and realism of the timeline and milestones; Alignment with the program's September–Fall external submission pathway.
- Team Strength: Qualifications, complementary skills, and commitment of the project team.
- External Funding Strategy: Clear plan to pursue I-Corps, SBIR/STTR, MII, or similar programs.
- Alignment with TU Mission & Regional Impact: Potential to enhance Towson's reputation in innovation and benefit the region.

IX. Awardee Responsibilities

Awarded PIs agree to:

- Adhere to the Program Timeline: Submit an invention disclosure to Towson's designated office (if applicable) by the second Friday in January; Apply to a TU or external accelerator in Spring and actively participate if selected; Work with the Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR) and StarTUp on customer discovery, business modeling, pitch development, and participation in Showcase event; Conduct focused development/pilot work during Summer; Prepare and submit at least one external commercialization-related proposal by Fall.

- Engage with Support Resources: Attend cohort meetings, workshops, or check-ins coordinated by OSPR and the StarTUp; Participate in coaching sessions and pitch preparation activities as requested.
- Reporting: Submit a brief mid-year progress report and a final report at the end of the project period summarizing milestones achieved, disclosures filed, prototypes/pilots completed, customer discovery outcomes, and external proposals submitted.
- Dissemination & Recognition: Present project outcomes in a TU innovation/commercialization showcase or similar event, if requested; Acknowledge OSPR and the StarTUp at Towson support in presentations and proposals as appropriate.

X. Intellectual Property and Compliance

All intellectual property (IP) will be governed by Towson University's policies on inventions and patents, as well as any applicable sponsor or collaborator agreements.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with OSPR staff early in the process regarding IP, ownership, and licensing questions.

Projects involving human subjects, animals, or regulated activities must obtain appropriate IRB/IACUC/other approvals before funds are released for those activities.

XI. Expected Outcomes

By the end of the project year, successful teams will typically have:

- Filed appropriate invention disclosures (as applicable).
- Validated key aspects of the problem, market, and solution through customer discovery.
- Developed or refined a functional prototype and/or completed a pilot study.
- Prepared a compelling pitch and commercialization narrative.
- Submitted at least one competitive application to NSF I-Corps, SBIR/STTR, Maryland Innovation Initiative, or similar program.

Longer term, the program seeks to increase the number and success rate of TU external innovation/commercialization awards; Faculty and student participation in entrepreneurial ecosystems; and Partnerships with industry, community organizations, and regional innovation partners.