Ohio Third Frontier

Technology Validation and Start-up Fund

Phase 1 – Technology Validation

Round 46

- RFP Released – July 24, 2026
- Application Opens: 10:00 a.m., July 24, 2026
- Written Questions: Accepted through July 31, 2026
- Proposals: Due by 4:00 p.m., August 06, 2026
- Awards: Approximately October 2026

RFP Administered by:
The Ohio Department of Development
Office of Technology Investments

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1 Ohio Third Frontier Statement of Solicitation

1.1 Overview

The Technology Validation and Start-Up Fund (TVSF) provides grants to transition technology from Ohio research institutions into the market through Ohio startup companies. Ohio research institutions may apply for funding for validation (e.g., viability testing, prototyping, etc.) of their unlicensed technologies. This RFP specifically covers **Phase 1 – Technology Validation.** Phase 1 enables the creation of a pool of funds that will in turn support various validation projects originating from an Ohio-based Eligible Institution.

1.2 Background

The Ohio Third Frontier is a $2.1 billion economic development initiative supporting technology entrepreneurship and growing jobs across the state of Ohio. Through a statewide network of resources, entrepreneurs have access to the technology, business assistance, capital, and talent to turn great ideas into thriving companies. Ohio Third Frontier is driving this expanding, vibrant community of high-growth technology companies and making Ohio a leading destination for entrepreneurs.

What Ohio Third Frontier Supports:

Ohio Third Frontier seeks compelling business models for near-term market opportunities based on technology and tech-enabled products and services focused in the following areas:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Advanced Materials
- Biomedical/Life Sciences
- Energy
- Sensors
- Software/Information Technology

For more information about Ohio Third Frontier, visit

https://development.ohio.gov/business/third-frontier-and-technology/third-frontier-technology.

1.3 Request for Proposals Issuance

This Request for Proposals ("RFP") is being issued for funds to be awarded under the Ohio Third Frontier Technology Validation and Start-Up Fund ("Program"), specifically Phase 1 – Technology Validation. This RFP will be released by publication on the Ohio Third Frontier website at https://development.ohio.gov/business/third-frontier-and-technology/technology-validation-start-up-fund.
The Ohio Third Frontier Commission ("Commission") reserves the right to fund any proposal in full or in part, to request additional information to assist in the review process, to reject

any or all proposals responding to this RFP, and to re-issue the RFP and accept new proposals if the Commission determines that doing so is in the best interests of the state of Ohio (the "State"). Issuing this RFP does not bind the State to make an award of Ohio Third Frontier funds. Any award of Ohio Third Frontier funds in respect to this RFP will be subject to availability of funds as provided in Ohio Revised Code Section 126.07.

The Ohio Department of Development ("Development") administers this RFP and reserves the right to adjust the dates for this RFP for whatever reason it deems appropriate. Development's Office of Technology Investments will administer all funds awarded under this RFP. This RFP is not a contract or commitment of any kind on the part of Development.

1.4 RFP Process and Awards Process

The RFP Process will consist of the following steps:

- Release of RFP
- Questions and Answers (Q&A) and Communications
- Submittal of Proposals

Each of these steps is discussed in Appendix A – RFP Process, Awards Process, and Mandatory Compliance.

The Awards Process will consist of the following steps:

- Proposal Review and Evaluation Procedures
- Award Decision
- Award, Agreement Preparation, and Execution

Each of these steps is discussed in Appendix A – RFP Process, Awards Process, and Mandatory Compliance.

All questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing via email to TVSF@development.ohio.gov with a subject line of "TVSF RFP Q&A". Lead Applicants, Licensing Institutions and/or others acting on their behalf shall be aware of all prohibited contact in Section IV of Appendix A – RFP Process, Awards Process, and Mandatory Compliance.

If a Lead Applicant, Client, or others acting on their behalf make prohibited contact, Development, in its sole discretion, may eliminate the proposal from the RFP process.

2 Program Description

2.1 Purpose

The goal of the Ohio Third Frontier Technology Validation and Start-Up Fund is to create greater economic growth in Ohio through startup companies that commercialize technologies developed by institutions of higher education, other nonprofit research institutions and federal labs ("Eligible Institution").

The Program has been designed to: 1) Support protected technologies developed at Ohio Eligible Institutions that need known validation/proof that will directly impact and enhance both their commercial viability and ability to support a startup company (Phase 1 – Technology Validation), and 2) Support Ohio startup and young companies that are in the process of licensing validated/proven technologies from an Eligible Institution and have already engaged with the Eligible Institution in a due diligence discussion for doing so (Phase 2 - Start-Up Fund).

Two separate mechanisms, with different application requirements, have been set up to achieve these goals: Technology Validation (Phase 1) and Start-Up Fund (Phase 2).

This RFP specifically covers **Phase 1 – Technology Validation.**

2.2 Goals

The specific goals of Phase 1 of the Program include:

- Generate the proof needed to move technologies to the point that they are either ready to be licensed by an Ohio startup company or otherwise deemed unfeasible for commercialization. Applicants are encouraged to work with potential Ohio licensees to identify the proof needed.

- Perform validation activities such as prototyping, demonstration and assessment of critical failure points in subsequent development, scale-up and commercialization in order to generate this proof, with strong preference for these validation activities being performed by an independent source.

2.3 Eligibility

2.3.1 Lead Applicant

A Lead Applicant is the entity that submits a proposal and will be legally and financially responsible for the administration of any resulting award of Ohio Third Frontier funds under this RFP ("Lead Applicant"). The Lead Applicant will be responsible for the administration of its proposal should it be awarded. The Lead Applicant must also serve as both the administrative and technical director of the Project.

An eligible Lead Applicant for the Phase 1 Technology Validation Fund must be:

1) An Ohio institution of higher education; or
2) An Ohio nonprofit research institution that has a history of technology commercialization and creation of startups, institutional infrastructure, and support for commercialization; or
3) A federal research lab.

Eligible Lead Applicants must have a dedicated Technology Transfer Office, defined as an office, internal to an organization's structure, that manages the organization's intellectual property (IP) assets and facilitates the commercialization of the intellectual property through the transfer of the IP and innovations developed and owned by the organization to business and industry.

Eligible Lead Applicants can be approved for no more than one Phase 1 award in any 12-month period of the program, requesting one of these three funding options:

Option 1, requesting between $200,000 and $500,000. This option requires a Cost Share match of 1:1 and, if awarded, Lead Applicants will have one year to allocate program funds to eligible projects with up to a two-year project period. If an Eligible Lead Applicant has previously received a TVSF Phase 1 award that has not been fully allocated to eligible projects, the Eligible Lead Applicant must allocate all funds from its existing award prior to the encumbrance of any new award.

Option 2, requesting $1,000,000. This option requires a Cost Share match of 1:1 and, if awarded, Lead Applicants will have two years to allocate program funds to eligible projects with up to a three-year project period. If an Eligible Lead Applicant has previously received a TVSF Phase 1 award that has not been fully allocated to eligible projects, the Eligible Lead Applicant must allocate all funds from its existing award prior to the encumbrance of any new award.

Option 3, requesting $100,000. This option requires an internship component in lieu of any Cost Share match requirement, as set forth in 2.4.2. If awarded, Lead Applicant will have one year to allocate program funds to eligible projects with up to a two-year project period. If an Eligible Lead Applicant has previously received a TVSF Phase 1 award that has not been fully allocated to eligible projects, the Eligible Lead Applicant must allocate all funds from its existing award prior to the encumbrance of any new award. A Lead Applicant must provide information explaining why the Eligible Institution is unable to provide Cost Share, which will be reviewed in determining whether to award funds under the application.

2.3.2 Specific Technology Validation Projects/Activities

To be considered eligible for Program funds, a technology must already have intellectual property protection, defined as invention disclosure (to USPTO), patent pending, or patent issued, and in the case of IT Technologies only, Trade

Secret, Trademark, or Copyright protection associated with the technology, as appropriate. It is expected that the majority of supported technologies will be patent pending.

Program funds are not meant to be early-stage "proof of concept" funds—specific technologies supported by the Program must have already advanced beyond basic research and must have the equivalent of a laboratory-scale proof of concept prior to application to an Eligible Institution's pool of funds.

Similarly, technologies that have already received TVSF Phase 2 funding are considered too far developed for Phase 1 and thus are ineligible for funding under Phase 1.

2.4 Cost Share

2.4.1 Cost Share

Cost share is the commitment of financial resources to the support of the overall project budget by the Eligible Institution. The primary source of cost share is typically a direct cash contribution from the Eligible Institution.

For application options 1 and 2, TVSF Phase 1 requires a cash cost share commitment of at least one dollar for every dollar of Ohio Third Frontier funds requested (i.e., a ratio of 1:1). The match must represent a specific new, unrestricted cash commitment. It will be the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to ensure that the 1:1 cost share requirement is met or exceeded, and all reporting requirements are met. Cost share must be available with no contingencies or conditions at the time of proposal submission to Development. Federal Funds, unless expressly allowed under the applicable Federal Program, state of Ohio General Revenue Funds, Ohio Department of Development program funds, or other Ohio Third Frontier program funds shall not qualify as part of the Cost Share amount.

Because Phase 1 Awards are intended to be matched directly by actual cash that will then be allocated to individual technology validation projects, cost share for these proposals cannot come in the form of researcher release time, student tuition remission, or any other "in-kind" types of support.

If a Lead Applicant is awarded under Option 3, no Cost Share is required.

2.4.2 Internship Requirement

If Lead Applicant is applying for funding under Option 3 identified above, in lieu of any Cost Share requirement, the Lead Applicant must demonstrate at least one internship position supported by the award, anticipated to be located in the Technology Transfer Office. The internship position(s) must either be a paid position or receive institution

credit hours. Note, if the position is compensated, the position may not be funded through any Ohio Department of Development or Ohio Third Frontier program funding. The internship position(s) should be described in the Proposal Narrative.

2.4.3 Specific Technology Validation Projects/Activities

Individual technologies that an Eligible Institution decides to support with its pool of funds must be supported equally across cost share and Program funds (i.e., 1:1). This matching requirement is for the entire project/activity—not necessarily for each expense.

Technology Validation Projects/Activities supported by an Eligible Institution with its pool of funds are intended to be approximately one year in duration and less than $150,000 in total cost, although flexibility is afforded to the Eligible Institution regarding the duration and amounts for individual projects. Development staff must approve projects prior to their support from an Eligible Institution's pool of funds. Seeking approval will require a letter and one-page prospectus, the form of which is determined by Development. Projects that exceed $150,000 in total budget will require additional steps for approval.

For individual projects to be supported by an Institution's pool of funds, funds must be: 1) allocated to individual projects by the end of the awards allocation period; 2) for the performance of activities in direct support of the project; 3) expended by the end of the Project Period identified in the award; 4) charged to resources of the Grantee; and 5) documented in grant accounts or in the grant-related financial books and records. It is preferred that the greatest amount of work as possible to be performed on each project occurs in Ohio. In any event, not less than 51% of the work performed on each project must occur within the state of Ohio.

2.4.3.1 Eligible Expenses

Program funds and cost share may be used only for the following expense types:

- Personnel time for employees of the Eligible Institution
- Purchased Services from vendors outside of the Eligible Institution
- Supplies
- Equipment

2.4.3.2 Ineligible Expenses

Program funds and cost share may not be used for the following expense types:

- Bonuses, incentive compensation, or rewards
- Travel expenses (including conference fees)
- Indirect costs (e.g., F&A)
- Legal fees
- Patent prosecution expenses

- Developing grant proposals
- Administering an OTF award (including a TVSF award from this RFP)
- Any other activity determined to not be consistent with the intent, goal, or rules of the Program.

2.5 Term of Project

The Project is the plan of activity or activities that make up the total scope of work for which an award of Ohio Third Frontier funds is requested and for which a proposal is approved. The period during which the active work funded by the grant award will take place shall be no more than two years for Options 1 and 3 and three years for Option 2 ("Project Period"). All Technology Validation Projects/ Activities must be selected by the Project Selection Committee (as defined in section 3.3.2.1 below). All funds must be allocated within the first year for Options 1 and 3 or two years for Option 2 of the Project Period. The Lead Applicant will also be required to complete and submit quarterly project reports and annual metrics reports during the Project Period, and annual metrics reports for an additional three years following the Project Period ("Post-Term Reporting Period"), to report commercialization successes to Development.

Development will not typically grant any extensions to the Project Period for TVSF Phase 1 awards.

3 General Proposal Requirements

3.1 General Instructions

Program proposals must be submitted via Development's online proposal submission portal. The link for the portal will be posted on the **TVSF Program website** approximately two weeks prior to the proposal submission due dates.

If the portal is unavailable, proposals are to be submitted via email to TVSF@development.ohio.gov.

Lead Applicants must incorporate the questions provided in Appendix B – Phase 1 Application Forms into their proposal narrative. No other materials or narrative beyond what is requested in the appendix may be submitted. It is the Lead Applicant's responsibility to ensure submission of a complete proposal based on all requirements of this RFP.

3.1.1 General Formatting Requirements

- Proposals are to be submitted on 8.5 x 11-inch page size. Margins must not be less than ¾ of an inch on all sides
- Font must be 11 point or larger with no more than 6 lines per inch.
- All pages must be numbered consecutively using the format "Page [#] of [total number of pages]" (e.g., Page 2 of 25).
- The proposal title and Lead Applicant name must appear at the bottom of each page.
- Proposals should not include color figures that cannot be understood when photocopied in black and white.
- Do not include a cover or cover letter other than the Application Information Page.

3.1.2 Page Limitations

Any pages beyond the page limits listed below will be eliminated from the proposal before it is sent for review and evaluation. Except as otherwise noted, appendices or other methods to augment the information presented in the proposal are not allowed. References to web-based information to supplement the proposal are not permitted, and such references will not be considered in the evaluation.

Section	Page Limit
3.3.1 **Administrative Pages**	3 pages
3.3.2 **Proposal Narrative**	7 pages
3.3.3 **Proposal Supplement: Summary of Previous Phase 1 Awards**	1 page
3.3.4 **Letters of Commitment**	1 page per member of the Proposal Selection Committee

3.2 Trade Secret Information

All Lead Applicants are strongly discouraged from including in a Proposal any information that the Lead Applicant considers to be a "trade secret," as that term is defined in Section 1333.61(D) of the Ohio Revised Code. All information submitted in response to this RFP is public information unless a statutory exception exists that exempts it from public release under the Ohio Public Records Act in Section 149.43 of the Ohio Revised Code. If any information in the Proposal is to be treated as a trade secret, the Proposal must:

- Identify each and every occurrence of the information within the Proposal with an asterisk before and after each line containing trade secret information and underline the trade secret information itself;

- Check the "This Application Does include information considered a 'trade secret'" box on the Applicant Information Page; and

- Include a page immediately after the Application Information Page that lists each page in the Proposal that includes trade secret information and the number of occurrences of trade secret information on that page.

To determine what qualifies as trade secret information, refer to the definition of "trade secret" in the Ohio Revised Code at 1333.61 (D), which is reproduced below for reference:

> (D) "Trade Secret" means information, including the whole or any portion or phase of any scientific or technical information, design, process, procedure, formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or improvement, or any business information or plans, financial information, or listing of names, addresses, or telephone numbers, that satisfies both of the following:
>
> (1) It derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use.
>
> (2) It is the subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy.

Development requires non-disclosure agreements from all non-Development persons who may have access to Proposals containing trade secret information, including evaluators.

3.3 Order and Content of Proposal Sections

The proposal must address all the elements listed in this section in the order requested.

3.3.1 Administrative Pages

The first three pages of the proposal must be the completed pages from Appendix B – Phase 1 Application Forms.

3.3.1.1 Application Information

The first page must be the Application Information Page, which must contain the title and signature of the Lead Applicant's Authorizing Agent. For a Phase 1 application, the Authorizing Agent should be an individual in the given Technology Transfer Office.

3.3.1.2 Financial Liability and Legal History

The second page must be the Financial Liability and Legal History page.

3.3.1.3 Lead Applicant Contact Information

The third page must be the Lead Applicant Contact Information page.

3.3.2 Proposal Narrative

Applicants must answer the questions provided in Appendix B – Phase 1 Application Forms. While the overall proposal narrative may not exceed seven pages, it is up to the applicant to allocate the space among the questions as they think best presents the opportunity.

Applicants should carefully examine Section 4 to understand the evaluation criteria to best use their available space. With the short page limit, the Proposal narrative is not expected to be an in-depth technical assessment of the problem and the work plan.

3.3.2.1 Project Selection Committee

A critical element for the success of a Phase 1 award is the membership of the Project Selection Committee. As a part of the proposal narrative (Question 5), Phase 1 proposals must specify the membership of their Project Selection Committee. For the best chance at success, the following rules shall apply to the membership:

- A majority of the Project Selection Committee membership may not be employed or otherwise affiliated with the Lead Applicant. Only one seat of the committee may be occupied by an executive (President, Vice President, or similarly situated) from the Lead Applicant. Instances where the Lead Applicant has only one or zero seats on the committee will be viewed favorably.

- At least one member of the Project Selection Committee must be a representative from the local Entrepreneurial Services Provider (ESP).
- At least one member of the Project Selection Committee must be a representative from an outside angel or venture capital interest. Representation from downstream investor groups will be viewed favorably.

On the whole, the Project Selection Committee should encompass significant startup expertise and appropriate linkages (including to industry sectors and possibly alumni) that would enable the recruitment of strategic partners and qualified entrepreneurs to move successful projects to the next level of commercialization. Lead Applicants are strongly encouraged to avoid using boiler plate biographical information to describe the selection committee members.

3.3.2.2 Engagement with the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The Ohio Third Frontier has made significant investment into fostering a statewide entrepreneurial ecosystem. This investment is particularly visible in the Entrepreneurial Services Provider (ESP) Program, a statewide network of regionally based organizations designed to provide services and capital to help entrepreneurs with a startup technology company accelerate their growth and get their ideas to market. Each of the six regions of the state has a lead organization that, along with its extensive collaborator network, provides services including:

- Mentorship by seasoned entrepreneurs and industry professionals.
- Help with business planning and investment pitch preparation.
- Access to investors and capital.
- Business support including legal, tax, and accounting services.
- Assistance developing intellectual property and marketing/sales strategies.
- Help recruiting talent.
- State-of-the-art workspaces at incubators.

Engagement with the local ESP is critical for Phase 1 applicants and as indicated in the previous section, Phase 1 proposals will need to specify a Project Selection Committee that includes one representative from the local ESP.

3.3.3 Proposal Supplement: Summary of Previous Phase 1 Awards

If the Lead Applicant has previously received Phase 1 awards, the applicant must provide a summary of the validation activities conducted under those awards

(including the older style, directly funded Phase 1 validation projects). The summary should not exceed one page in length and must include the table included in Appendix B – Phase 1 Application Forms.

3.3.4 Letters of Commitment

A Commitment Letter must be provided for each organization and/or individual that will have a seat on the Project Selection Committee as well as from the Lead Applicant. Commitment letters may not exceed one page and may not include attachments.

Commitment letters must meet each of the following requirements:

- Be submitted on the letterhead of the relevant organization.
- Include the name of the Lead Applicant.
- Briefly state the nature and duration of any relationship with the Lead Applicant.
- State the intent/willingness to serve on the Project Selection Committee.
- The Lead Applicant's letter must indicate the source and amount of cost share and must indicate that the cost share is a new, unrestricted cash commitment.

General support letters are not allowed. Any such letters submitted will be removed from the proposal and not transmitted to the external evaluation team.

4 Evaluation Criteria

Only the most meritorious proposals are sought for funding. Proposals will be evaluated by a third-party evaluator based on responsiveness to all the requirements of this RFP. Implicit in those requirements and evaluation criteria is the quality of the statement of work and budget.

The following criteria have been designated with the highest relevance to and weighting for the Technology Validation and Start-Up Fund:

Alignment of the proposal with the Program purpose, goals, objectives, eligibility, and funding requirements as described in this RFP.
Compliance with this RFP's administrative requirements.
Quality of the responses to the requirements of this RFP as outlined in the proposal narrative. The following specific elements will be examined:

- The degree to which the Lead Applicant is able to meaningfully demonstrate the quantity and quality of their likely projects and their ability to allocate the pool of funds to projects within the Allocation Period.
- The degree to which the Lead Applicant is able to demonstrate its ability to manage the proposed pool of funds, including administrative and reporting processes.
- The robustness of the Lead Applicant's project selection process, including the background and experience of the proposed members of the Eligible Institution's Project Selection Committee. Note that a majority of the Project Selection Committee may not be employed or otherwise affiliated with Lead Applicant. It is preferred that Lead Applicants minimize their role in the Project Selection Committee. As mentioned in section 3.3.2.1, one member of the Project Selection Committee must be from the local ESP and at least one member must represent an outside angel or venture capital interest.
- The degree to which the Lead Applicant demonstrates its ability to integrate their activities with the Ohio Third Frontier ESP Program and other state-funded programs and organizations sharing complementary missions.
- The degree to which the Program funds will be impactful as evidenced by the magnitude and realism of the projected metrics, including the creation of new companies.
- The performance on prior Ohio Third Frontier awards, particularly the licensing status of completed Phase 1 projects.
  Strong preference will be given to applications that can demonstrate that validation activities will be performed by independent third parties.

The evaluation criteria are designed to support the mission and goals of Ohio Third Frontier and its various programs.

5 APPENDICES

Appendix A – RFP Process, Awards Process, and Mandatory Compliance

Appendix B – Phase 1 Application Forms