MINavigator High Tech Connect Program Guidelines (MIN)

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1. Program Overview

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (“MEDC”) administers the MINavigator High Tech Connect Program (the “Program”). The Program is the successor to the Michigan Strategic Fund’s SmartZone Gateway Representative Program and provides a coordinated, regionally focused approach to connecting Michigan high-technology companies and entrepreneurs with resources, expertise, and support.

2. Program Goals

The Program is designed to boost Michigan’s high-technology entrepreneurial ecosystem by:

- Strengthening regional and statewide connectivity.
- Improving access to existing entrepreneurial resources.
- Supporting technology commercialization, company growth, and scale.
- Identifying and addressing regional resource gaps.
- Strengthening connections among companies, universities, investors, economic development organizations, service providers, and other ecosystem partners.

3. Eligibility Criteria and Application Contents

To be eligible for consideration, each applicant must, at a minimum:

1. Be a Michigan based non-profit organization, exempt from federal taxation under Section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) of the Internal Revenue Code; and
2. Demonstrate that proposed activities will produce measurable advancement of high technology-based companies and contribute to Michigan's economic growth, with performance measured through company progression, capital formation, commercialization, and revenue outcomes.

Preference will be given to Eligible Applicants that are able to leverage outside funding sources to reduce overhead expenses.

Eligible Applicants must clearly demonstrate the following:

1. A proven track record of providing services to support high-technology companies through demonstrated experience, expertise, and results.
2. A defined high-technology focus, including identified technology sectors and a clear connection to Michigan's economic-development priorities.
3. Ability to identify regional technology shortfalls if applicable, and plan to remedy.
4. Proven experience providing business incubation, acceleration, commercialization or equivalent entrepreneurial support to high-tech companies.
5. Qualified personnel with expertise in technology commercialization, business development, capital formation and/or entrepreneurship.
6. A well-documented company-selection process that identifies, vets and prioritizes companies with meaningful potential for high-tech innovation, commercialization and growth.

7. Provide or facilitate access to a comprehensive portfolio of services, including business planning, market validation, technology commercialization, intellectual property, product development, capital readiness, funding and talent.
8. Established meaningful ecosystem partnerships with universities/research institutions, industry, investors, economic-development organizations and other relevant service providers.
9. Maintain a measurable client-performance system capable of tracking company formation, jobs, investment, revenue, commercialization and other program outcomes.
10. Establish annual performance targets and milestones that are realistic based on historical performance, regional market conditions and available resources.
11. Financial sustainability and leverage, including matching resources and a plan to sustain core incubation activities beyond the requested public investment.

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4. Award Structure

Disbursement of grant funds will be made to each selected applicant based on the completion of milestones outlined in the agreement.

- The awardee may receive an initial disbursement of up to 30% of the grant funds to be made within thirty (30) days of the effective date of the grant agreement.
- Following the initial disbursement, the remaining disbursements will be made based on the MEDC's review and approval of the awardees semi-annual progress reports.
- The MEDC will withhold 10% of the grant funds to disburse during the final year of the grant term. The disbursement shall be made upon the MEDC's review and approval of the awardee's final report.

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5. Funding and Allowable Costs

The Program is supported through state funding administered by MEDC. Specific funding levels, grant terms, and payment schedules are established annually through the applicable funding process and grant agreement. A clearly defined budget that outlines salary and any administrative/overhead fees will be required.

Grant funds shall support reasonable and necessary costs associated with approved MINavigator Program activities and MINavigator salary. The MINavigator salary should primarily support one dedicated position in addition to MINavigator expenses. No more than 15% of the grant funds may be allocated to administrative/overhead costs. All costs must be directly related to approved Program activities, adequately documented, and consistent with the applicable grant agreement.

Examples of allowable administrative/overhead costs include:

- Benefits
- Marketing
- IT and subscription costs

Examples of costs that are not allowable include:

- Direct grants to clients
- Sponsorships
- Rent and building maintenance

6. Program Structure

The Program is a regionally based program that establishes trusted points of connection within Michigan's entrepreneurial ecosystem to statewide networks to connect companies and entrepreneurs with appropriate resources, expertise, and support. The Program is organized around three core functions:

Connect
Link high-technology companies and entrepreneurs with appropriate resources, expertise, programs, and service providers.

Coordinate
Strengthen collaboration and information-sharing among regional and statewide entrepreneurial ecosystem organizations.

Advance
Help companies navigate barriers and access resources that support commercialization, growth, and scale.

7. MINavigator Responsibilities and Qualifications

MINavigators serve as trusted advisors and connectors for high-technology companies and entrepreneurs. MINavigators are expected to maintain a public facing role, acting as the first point of contact for an entrepreneur. In addition, MINavigators also provide outreach through quarterly group presentations regarding statewide toolbox offerings. Collaboration is a key component among MINavigators and other ecosystem partners and is strongly advised. Effective partnership strengthens resource connectivity and the overall support system for Michigan entrepreneurs and high-technology companies.

At minimum, MINavigators shall:

- Understand regional and statewide entrepreneurial resources.
- Assess company and entrepreneur needs.
- Provide referrals and resource navigation.
- Facilitate connections with experts, service providers, investors, universities, and other partners.
- Support access to commercialization, capital, talent, and technical resources.
- Identify and address regional ecosystem gaps or barriers.
- Collaborate with other MINavigators and ecosystem organizations.
- Assist entrepreneurs with the assembly of applications to state programs.
- Track engagement and report outcomes to the MEDC.

8. MINavigator Activities

MINavigators may provide or facilitate activities in one or more of the following areas, at no cost to eligible companies and entrepreneurs:

Company and Entrepreneur Support

- Business planning and strategy
- Market validation
- Product development
- Technology commercialization
- Intellectual property resources
- Capital readiness and investor connections
- Funding resources
- Talent and workforce connections

Ecosystem Coordination

- Company referrals and resource navigation
- Regional and statewide partnership development
- Coordination among ecosystem organizations
- Identification of resource gaps and barriers
- Strategies to improve access to existing resources

University and Research Commercialization

- Technology transfer
- Researcher and entrepreneur connections
- Commercialization support
- University-industry partnerships

Data and Performance Management

- Company intake and engagement tracking
- Outcome measurement
- Data collection and reporting
- Performance analysis

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9. Company Eligibility

- To be eligible for MINavigator assistance, a company or entrepreneur must be a Michigan based company with at least 50% of its operations in Michigan or an entrepreneur located in Michigan. Preference will be given to companies with a dedicated team showing commitment to Michigan-based growth.
- Eligible high-technology companies or entrepreneurs should have:
    - A unique, disruptive, defensible innovation in technology, product design, or operational process model.
    - Innovation that typically involves research and development, intellectual property, contributes to a strong competitive advantage in the marketplace, is scalable, and has potential for a high rate of growth.

- Technology examples:
  - AI and machine learning
  - Quantum computing
  - Autonomous systems such as drones and vehicles
  - Advanced robotics
  - Space and satellite technology
  - Biotechnology
  - Water and Environmental Technology
  - Cybersecurity and Digital Identity

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10. Program Performance

The Program is intended to generate measurable benefits for Michigan's high-technology companies and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Performance may be measured across one or more of the following areas:

Performance Area	Examples
Company Engagement	Companies served, referrals, companies receiving support
Company Formation	New companies formed
Capital Formation	Capital raised, financing secured, investor connections
Commercialization	Products launched, technologies commercialized, licenses executed
Revenue	New or increased company revenue
Jobs	Jobs created
Market Access	Customer introductions, contracts, market expansion
Ecosystem Connectivity	Referrals, partnerships, organizations engaged
Resource Utilization	Connections to public, private, university, and regional resources, intellectual property formation
Other	Any other metrics agreed upon

Performance measures and targets may vary based on geographic focus, technology sectors, company pipeline, organizational capacity, and available resources. Participating organizations must maintain appropriate records and provide performance information to the MEDC in accordance with established reporting requirements.

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11. Administration and Coordination

The Program is administered by the MEDC. Participating organizations operate under grant agreements that establish applicable Program activities, budgets, grant terms, performance measures, reporting requirements, payment terms, and compliance requirements.

Organizations are responsible for maintaining appropriate documentation related to expenditures, activities, company engagement, and performance outcomes.

Statewide Coordination

The MEDC will facilitate coordination among MINavigators to strengthen connections and consistency across Michigan's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Coordination may include:

- Regular MINavigator meetings
- Peer learning and best-practice sharing
- Statewide ecosystem coordination
- Data and performance reporting
- Resource sharing
- Success-story collection