

## Nebraska Innovation Hub Act Designation Application and Program Guidelines

The Nebraska Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, Legislative Bill 450 during the 2022 Legislative Session creating the Nebraska Innovation Hub Act. The Legislature declared that Innovation hubs could serve as a vital resource for stimulating and supporting entrepreneurship and technology-based small businesses in Nebraska. The Nebraska Innovation Hub Act selected the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) to designate innovation hubs within iHub areas to stimulate partnerships economic development and job creation by leveraging iHub partner assets to provide an innovation platform for startup businesses, economic development organizations, business groups, and venture capitalists.

DED will make an application available from December 1 to December 31, 2025; private nonprofit corporations and inland port authorities created under the Municipal Inland Port Authority Act are invited to apply to be designated as an iHub.

### Program Objectives

Job creation through rapid technology commercialization is a vital part of the state's economic well-being. Innovation and technology-driven entrepreneurial activity coupled with venture investment creates small business startups and expansions at an accelerated rate, which leads to significant employment opportunities that contribute to the state's financial health and economic competitiveness. To maintain a healthy state economy and to aid communities, entrepreneurship and technology-based small businesses must be stimulated and supported. The Nebraska Innovation Hub Act seeks to:

1. Stimulate partnerships, economic development, and job creation, and support entrepreneurship and technology-based small businesses in Nebraska.
2. Accelerate entrepreneurial activity coupled with venture investment.
3. Increase employment opportunities with start-ups and technology-based small businesses.

### Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are private nonprofit corporations located within any of the following areas:

1. An economic redevelopment area. (A map showing economic redevelopment areas can be found at [Application Levels - imagine.nebraska.gov](https://www.imagine.nebraska.gov))
2. An enterprise zone designated pursuant to the Enterprise Zone Act. (A map showing Enterprise Zones can be found at [Nebraska Enterprise Zones](https://www.nebraska.gov/enterprise-zones))
3. An inland port district as defined in section 13-3303. (Locations in [Lincoln County](#), [Bellevue](#), [Omaha](#), [Fremont/Dodge County](#), and [South Sioux City](#))
4. Thirty miles of Lake McConaughy, the largest artificial reservoir constructed in Nebraska for the storage of water.
5. Any county with a population of less than one hundred thousand inhabitants.

### Eligible Partnerships

An iHub shall form a collaborative relationship, through a signed statement of cooperation, with at least three iHub partners. An iHub partner may be any of the following:

1. A postsecondary educational institution.
2. A bank or other financial institution.
3. A municipal economic development division or department.

4. A nonprofit economic development corporation
5. A federal government entity or agency focused on economic development
6. An inland port authority created pursuant to the Municipal Inland Port Authority Act
7. A business support organization, including a workforce development or training organization, an incubator or a business accelerator, a business technical assistance provider, a chamber of commerce, or a networking organization that supports innovation
8. An educational consortium, including technology transfer representatives
9. A venture capital network, including angel investors
10. A business foundation, innovation foundation, science foundation, laboratory research institution, federal laboratory, or research and development facility.

The department may allow an entity not listed in of this section to serve as an iHub partner if the DED finds that such entity is related to the goals of the iHub.

## **Eligible Activities**

1. An iHub may do all of, but shall not be limited to, the following:
  - a) Provide counseling and technical assistance to entrepreneurs, either by direct or indirect services, in the following areas:
    - (1) The legal requirements for starting a business.
    - (2) Entrepreneurial business planning and management.
    - (3) Financing and the use of credit.
    - (4) Marketing for small businesses.
    - (5) Tax education.
    - (6) Financial account management, bookkeeping, and budgeting.
    - (7) Leadership development.
    - (8) Insurance needs and requirements.
    - (9) Sources for grant funding and how to apply for such grants.
    - (10) Financial literacy education.
    - (11) Permit and licensing requirements.
    - (12) Government procurement processes.
  - b) Conduct business workshops, seminars, and conferences with local partners including, but not limited to, universities, community colleges, local governments, state and federal service providers, private industry, workforce investment boards and agencies, small business development centers, microenterprise development organizations, small business service agencies, economic development organizations, and chambers of commerce.
  - c) Facilitate partnerships between innovative startup businesses, research institutions, and venture capitalists or financial institutions.
  - d) Provide the following for entrepreneurs:
    - (1) Housing.
    - (2) Retail space.
    - (3) Commercial kitchens.
    - (4) Community spaces.
    - (5) Coworking spaces.
  - e) Make loans and award grants to entrepreneurs.
2. An iHub shall, to the extent feasible, do all the following:

- a) Work in close collaboration with the activities of the department as its primary statewide partner.
- b) Coordinate activities with community colleges, universities, and other state economic and workforce development programs.
- c) Establish a board of directors including a representative of each iHub partner that has signed a statement of cooperation with the iHub.

## **iHub Application Requirements**

The application shall include but not be limited to, the following:

1. A statement of purpose.
2. A signed statement of cooperation and a description of the roles and relationships of each iHub partner.
3. A clear explanation and map conveying the iHub area.
4. A clearly identified central location for the iHub, which shall be a physical location.
5. A complete budget, including a description of secured funds, pending funds, and potential future funding sources.
6. A clearly articulated iHub management structure and plan, which may include a description of the capabilities, qualifications, and experience of the proposed management team, team leaders, or key personnel who are critical to achieving the proposed objectives.
7. A list of iHub assets and resources.
8. A clearly articulated industry focus area of the iHub, including industry sectors or other targeted areas for development and growth.
9. A list of specific resources available to support and guide startup companies.
10. A five-year plan, which shall include a clearly articulated list of goals to be achieved with the designation of the iHub.
11. Defined performance standards agreed upon by the applicant and the proposed iHub partners, which may include expectations for job development and business creation.
12. Evaluation procedures that will be used to measure the level of achievement for each stated goal.
13. A plan for sustainability.
14. Demonstrated experience with innovation programs, such as involvement with technology commercialization.
15. Evidence of community engagement and support.
16. An application fee of one thousand dollars.
17. Before official designation, the applicant shall self-certify that the iHub and its iHub partners are current in the payment of all state and local taxes owed, except for the payment of state and local taxes by an applicant that is exempt from such payment pursuant to [section 13-3309](#).

## **iHub Designation Criteria**

NDED shall establish a scoring system to evaluate applications for iHub designations, with priority given to start-up nonprofits and inland port authorities expressing new and innovative ideas. Such scoring system shall consider, at a minimum:

1. Whether the iHub is committed to serving underrepresented communities in the proposed iHub area.

2. Whether the iHub has a plan for marketing and outreach to underrepresented communities in the proposed iHub area.
3. Whether the iHub has signed statements of cooperation with at least three proposed iHub partners.
4. The quality of the iHub's five-year plan.
5. An iHub area may overlap with another iHub area if there is a clear distinction between the industry focus areas of the iHubs involved, except that no iHub located within a city of the metropolitan class shall be located within three miles of another iHub. (Not applicable to any inland port authority designated as an iHub)
6. The department shall designate no more than six iHubs in the first congressional district, no more than four iHubs in the second congressional district, and no more than six iHubs in the third congressional district.

## **Application Timing and Process**

Applications shall be submitted between December 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025. DED shall determine whether or not to approve the requested iHub designation by no later than February 15, 2026. Each iHub designation shall be for a term of five years. Applications must be completed online and will be accepted at <https://ne.amplifund.com/account/Login.aspx>, and must fully comply with all requirements within the specified period. Applications that do not include all the documentation or attachments specified or have not been fully completed, will not be considered. At its discretion, the DED may request supplemental materials from applicants.

## **iHub Designation**

The iHub designation shall not be official until a memorandum of understanding is entered into by the applicant and the DED. The memorandum of understanding shall include the goals and performance standards identified in the application and other related requirements as determined by the DED. The department shall terminate any iHub designation for any iHub that has not fully implemented the memorandum of understanding within three years of designation.

## **iHub Reporting Requirements**

An iHub shall annually report to the DED on its progress in meeting the goals and performance standards as described in the iHub application and the implementing memorandum of understanding with the DED. A copy of the report shall also be submitted electronically to the chairperson of the Urban Affairs Committee of the Legislature. The report shall include information regarding the number of businesses served, the number of jobs created, and the amount of funds raised by the iHub. The DED shall annually post the information from these reports on the DED website and provide notice to the Governor and the Legislature that the information is available on the website.

## **DED PROGRAM CONTACT PERSON**

For additional information or clarifications regarding this program, please direct inquiries to:

**Nora Furr**

*Small Business Assistance Consultant | Business Development*

**Nebraska Department of Economic Development**

245 Fallbrook Blvd, Suite 002

Lincoln, NE 68521

CELL: 402-417-9250

[nora.furr@nebraska.gov](mailto:nora.furr@nebraska.gov)