

# **Employee Commercialization and Business Start-up Guide For Inventors and Entrepreneurs**



## Introduction

The University of South Alabama (USA) is the flagship university of the Gulf Coast, home to over 115 academic programs focused on finding practical solutions to regional and global problems. USA's location in Mobile, AL, offers attractive opportunities to collaborate with regional economic partners in defense, aerospace, shipping and manufacturing, environmental and coastal sciences, and medicine.

USA is committed to fostering innovation, inventorship, and entrepreneurship activities along the Gulf Coast that can provide a greater benefit to our region and around the globe, thereby fulfilling the university's goal to create meaningful contributions to society. USA supports the local commercial and entrepreneurial ecosystem by teaching our students to be skilled intellectual leaders that are ready to address commercial challenges and develop future innovations that support our local economy.

In support of this commitment, USA hopes to empower its entrepreneurial employees to develop the start-up companies that will accelerate innovation in the region and complement the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Mobile, AL. The process to form a start-up company can be complex, but this guide provides tools and resources to help university entrepreneurs through the process.



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## USA Start-up Process

The process of moving your innovation from idea to market is complex, often requiring backgrounds in science, business, and law. But to entrepreneurs, the reward of starting a business and seeking a greater benefit is worth the challenges that will be faced.

The University of South Alabama wants to help employee entrepreneurs start off on the right foot by providing clarity on institutional policies, support in developing business plans, and guiding entrepreneurs to successful commercialization. The process to begin a start-up at USA requires collaboration among entrepreneurs, departments and colleges, and administrators. The Office of Commercialization and Industry Collaboration (OCIC) is here to help entrepreneurs launch their start-up, serving as a central location to facilitate the process.

This guide serves to outline the basic steps in the process and help you anticipate your next steps and responsibilities, from idea to start-up. The process may be slightly different for each start-up, but the following flow diagram highlights the general process covered in the remaining sections.



## Intellectual Property Disclosure

Intellectual Property, or IP, is any intangible idea, work, or invention developed creatively for which the creator has certain protectable rights. In general, there are four broad categories of IP: [patents](#), [copyrights](#), [trademarks](#), and [trade secrets](#). Any IP developments or discoveries created or reduced to practice during the course of employment or affiliation with the university are the property of the university (see [USA Patent and Invention Policy](#)).

For start-up companies, technology protections may be a cornerstone of the business proposition, so obtaining robust IP protection is vital. USA's Office of Commercialization and Industry Collaboration (OCIC) maintains relationships with a number of IP attorneys that can help devise a strategy to maximize protections for the IP. But to initiate this process, inventors must disclose their inventions to OCIC through the Inventor Portal located [here](#).

This private disclosure engages OCIC to assess the technology, provide guidance on IP protection strategies, and identify commercialization pathways. Following disclosure, OCIC will reach out the inventor to schedule a meeting and discuss next steps.



### Submit Invention Disclosure

Disclosing your invention is just the beginning of the path to commercialization.



Begin disclosures here on the OCIC webpage.

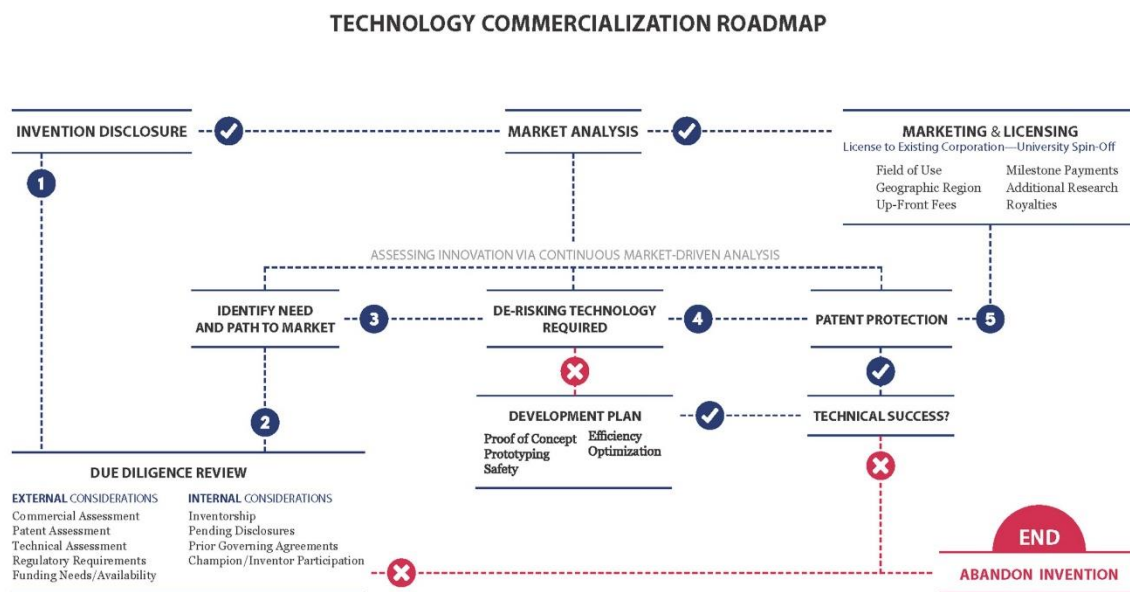
### Notes to help:

- 1) Provide as much detail as possible in the Invention Disclosure.
- 2) Inventions using federal funding must be noted accordingly.
- 3) Please include attachments that help explain the IP.



# Commercialization Roadmap

OCIC utilizes a Commercialization Roadmap to help inventors evaluate IP for commercial potential. Following disclosure to OCIC, inventors will discuss different parts of this roadmap with OCIC personnel to identify challenges to IP protection or commercialization. For some inventions, licensing to an existing corporation has the best chance of commercialization success, whereas other inventions would benefit from an employee-led start-up. The Commercialization Roadmap helps OCIC and inventors make an informed decision about this process. OCIC’s goal in meeting with inventors is to provide constructive feedback and to develop a commercialization plan that coordinates an inventor’s goals with USA’s responsibilities to technology development.



Click [here](#) for a larger version of the Commercialization Roadmap.

The Commercialization Roadmap has five major steps that guide OCIC/USA’s assessment for every invention through the commercialization process (that is, marketing and licensing to an existing corporation or supporting a university spin-off):

- 1) **Due Diligence Review**- As discussed on Page 4, the submission of an invention disclosure to OCIC begins the evaluation process. A thorough invention disclosure results in a more comprehensive assessment by OCIC. A Due-Diligence Review by OCIC confirms inventorship, assesses the technical portions of the invention, evaluates the invention for patentability, identifies the market potential of the technology, and determines a preliminary path to commercialization. A meeting with inventors to discuss their input is a key part of this process.

- 2) **Identify Need and Path to Market-** OCIC, in collaboration with the inventors and possible external reviews, will evaluate the potential applications for an invention in addition to its path to market. Some inventions, though novel and unique, may not have an obvious commercial need, while other inventions may have a difficult path to a viable commercial product that requires extensive outside expertise (for example, clinical trials and FDA approval of a new medicine). OCIC performs a market analysis, which is a continuous, evolving process where business hypotheses are formed and tested. Through continued discussions with the inventors and business partners, OCIC determines viable markets in which commercialization may be successful.
- 3) **De-Risking Technology Required-** Before a company (start-up or established) accepts the financial risk of moving a technology into commercialization, a technology will be de-risked as much as possible. De-risking is a process to reduce the financial loss a company faces if the technology fails during commercialization (due to out-performance by a competing product, high production costs, etc.). An inventor-led development plan or a university start-up could be used to help de-risk technology by providing proof-of-concept, prototyping, or optimization of a process.
- 4) **Patent Protection-** If a technology demonstrates a unique market niche that is novel or has commercialization potential, the university can protect the intellectual property by filing for a patent. Patent protection is discussed more on Page 9.
- 5) **Marketing and Licensing-** The final step of the Commercialization Roadmap is to implement the strategy developed to move the technology to commercialization. In cases where the technology would benefit by having an established company move the technology forward, a marketing campaign is created to identify potential licensees. For technology better suited for a start-up, the university works with the start-up company to license university technology and support the start-up's plans for successful commercialization.

## **Outcome of Commercialization Assessment**

Evaluation of technologies can result in one of three potential outcomes:

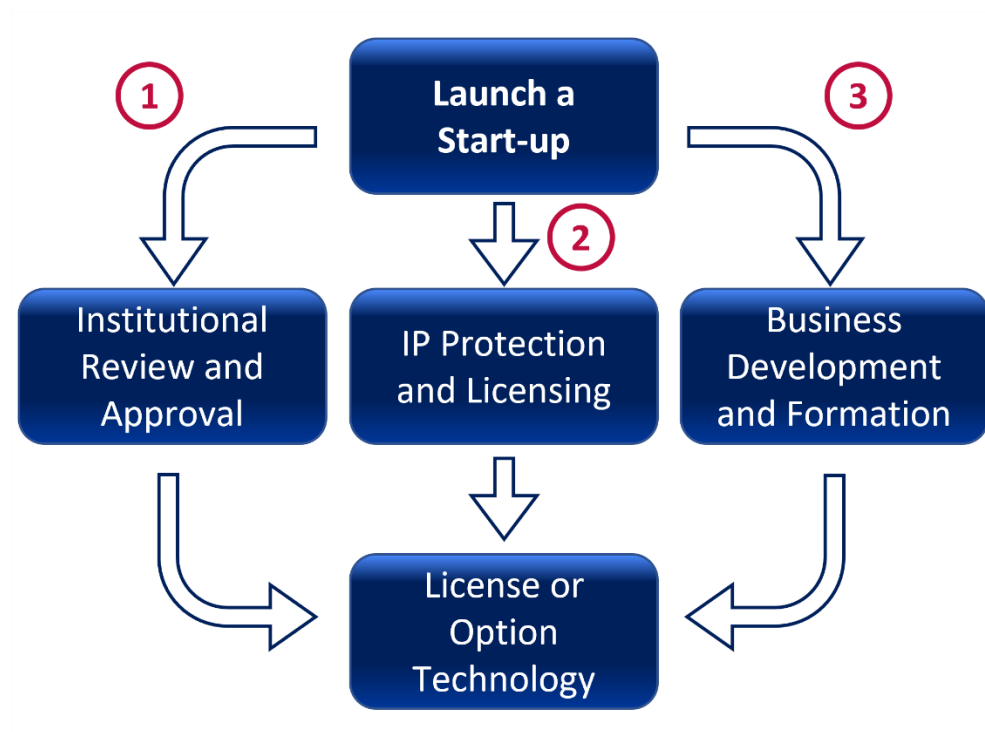
- 1) Technology is not ready yet, and additional information is needed to articulate a successful commercialization strategy.
- 2) Technology is ready, and OCIC and the inventor agree that an external business partner would have the greatest likelihood of success in advancing the commercialization of the technology.
- 3) Technology is ready, and OCIC and the inventor agree that an employee-led start-up provides a viable commercial strategy to ensure the technology leads to the greatest public benefit.

## Pathway to Start-up

When OCIC and the inventor agree that an employee start-up represents a viable pathway to commercialization, the path to a start-up becomes a bit more complex. Three separate task groups begin to take shape, with each part being performed in collaboration between the inventor and a different supporter (with more details provided in upcoming sections):

- 1) University Review and Approval – managed by USA’s [Office of Research Compliance and Assurance](#);
- 2) IP Protection and Licensing – managed by [OCIC](#);
- 3) Business Development and Formation – managed by the Inventor, business partners, university partners, and corporate law firms.

In general, the tasks in each group can be performed whenever the inventor/start-up chooses, but each task must be performed and completed prior to licensing technology from OCIC/USA, which represents the final step of the university start-up process.





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## Institutional Review and Approval

University employees are required to fulfill their institutional responsibilities based on professional judgement that is not biased by their personal relationships or financial interests. Starting a business is a challenging endeavor, but starting a business while a university employee can add concerns if not properly addressed. Changes in effort or commitment must be accounted for, and conflicts of interest must be managed. Fortunately, the [Office of Research Compliance and Assurance](#) provides [policies](#) to manage conflicts and has streamlined the process into two primary steps. Disclosure and transparency are critical to successful management of potential conflicts of interest.

- 1) Complete/Update an [External Professional Activities](#) request form (and review the associated [policy](#)).
- 2) Complete a Conflict of Interest Management Plan (See a template [here](#)).

The External Professional Activities (EPA) request form is submitted by each university employee who is to be engaged in the start-up, and the EPA requests are routed to either the appropriate supervisor (e.g. department chair and/or dean) for approval. The supervisors will be allowed to approve or deny the request, so it is in the benefit of all parties to **begin discussions about a start-up with your supervisor as early as possible**.

Following approval of the EPA form, a Conflict of Interest Management Plan must be developed to ensure that conflicts between the employee's commitments to the university and the employee's commitments to the new start-up are minimized and addressed. A template of the Conflict of Interest Management Plan can be found [here](#), but please note that each start-up will have unique circumstances that will need to be addressed. To help develop a plan and help administrators understand the employee's level of commitment to the start-up, you will need to complete a [Licensed-Start-up Company Information Submission Form](#). All financial conflicts of interest involving research will require a formal management plan and a management team appointed to review and participate in the monitoring process of the prescribed plan. The Conflict of Interest Management Plan will provide clear expectations of what the university will require from the start-up employee to remain in compliance. One conflict area that can arise is the employment of students, post-docs, or foreign nationals in the start-up. Employment of trainees is documented in the plan, and conflicts are managed and mitigated during review to protect the business, trainees, and the university.

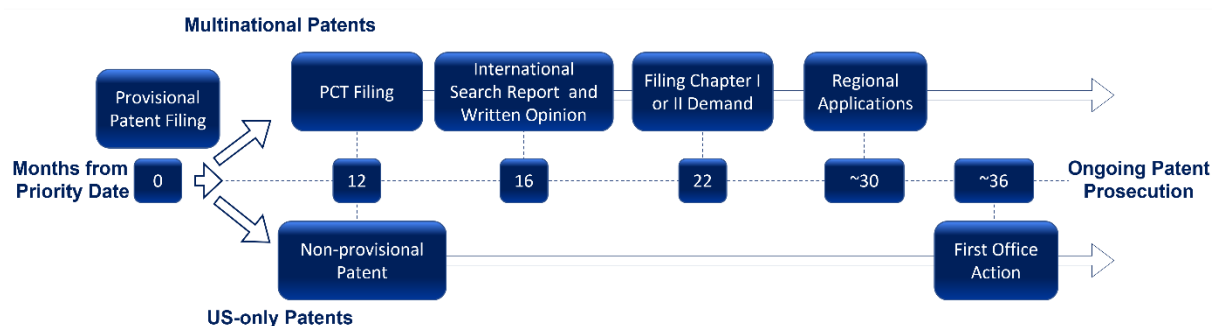
Please note that an **employee start-up will not be allowed to license university intellectual property without a completed EPA form and an authorized Conflict of Interest Management Plan**.

## Patent Protection and Licensing

Securing a patent on an invention provides a competitive advantage for a start-up. A patent provides up to 20 years for the patent holder to successfully market and commercialize the invention while prohibiting others from practicing/utilizing the invention. For a university, filing a patent represents the university's responsibility to maximize the potential public benefit from inventions. If the inventor, OCIC, and a patent attorney determine that an invention is patentable and can be commercialized, OCIC will coordinate with the patent attorney and inventor to file the patent on behalf of the University of South Alabama. However, if the invention or technology has already been licensed by a company for commercialization prior to filing a patent, the company will be responsible for all patent filings, even though the university retains partial ownership of the patent.

Please note that **any inventions which are conceived or first actually reduced to practice in the course of employment or affiliation with the University, or through participation in sponsored research made available by the University, shall be the property of the University** (see [Patent and Invention](#) policy). To help the University file a timely patent claim, the University inventor must notify OCIC as soon as possible by submitting an invention disclosure. With the passage of the America Invents Act in 2012, the United States moved to a "first inventor to file" system, as opposed to the original "first to invent" approach.

The patent process is a multi-year effort executed with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). It involves the filing, review, response, and reward of the patent if a number of criteria are demonstrated. The intention must be: 1) novel, 2) useful, 3) non-obvious, and 4) must be something eligible for patenting. A patent attorney can provide guidance on addressing these criteria.



In general, a patent filing will follow predetermined paths, which are informed by discussions between the inventor and OCIC. A provisional patent application serves to set a priority date (or the earliest date that an inventor can claim to be "first" to a new invention). It does not undergo a review by the USPTO, but it establishes a 12-month window during which an

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inventor must file a full, reviewable patent application called a non-provisional patent application. The nonprovisional patent application claims the priority date of the provisional patent, is used to file for a patent in the United States only, will be reviewed by patent examiners at the USPTO, and will be used to establish the claims awarded in the patent.

In some cases, patents will need to be filed in multiple jurisdictions around the world. In this case, a Patent Cooperation Treaty (or PCT) application can be filed. The PCT application is reviewed, and subsequent nationalized patents may be filed to obtain specific countries/regions of protection (e.g. US, European Union, etc.).

If a patent is awarded, this patent (and any associated know-how) can be licensed to a university-associated start-up through a licensing or option agreement (discussed in more detail later).

## Building a Business Plan

Developing a business plan is a crucial part of focusing a start-up on what will become the revenue-generating activities for the business. The business plan can be used to help secure funding, answer common questions about the business' planned activities and operations, and highlight novel approaches or technologies. There are no page limits or fixed structures for the document, but in general, most business plans are concise and contain the following parts:

- 1) **Executive Summary-** It should be short and clearly state the most important things a reader must know about your business, including company name, products or services offered, and what the purpose of the document is (usually, it's to secure additional funding).
- 2) **Company Description-** A more detailed background of the company, including its legal structure (e.g. Corporation, LLC, etc.), a summary of company growth, and business goals.
- 3) **Organization Description-** This section lays out the company's management team (along with their background and qualifications) and its organization structure. It also details how the company will operate (such as logistics, hiring, etc.)
- 4) **Products and Services Offered-** This section states the value proposition of the company (i.e. the benefits a customer receives using the company's products or services). It also includes any intellectual property (copyrights, patents, or trade secrets), and research and development activities for new products and services being developed.
- 5) **Market Analysis-** A market analysis shows the current products and services available to a consumer and how the business intends to target consumers. A market analysis may

include the size of a market, descriptions of main competitors, and projected value of entering into the market.

- 6) **Strategy-** The business strategy details how the business intends to lead a successful commercialization of products and services to generate profit and build the business. Including both short-term and long-term strategies can demonstrate a founder's knowledge of the market and build confidence by investors. Additionally, a Business Model Canvas can be used to summarize the value proposition, customer segments, and revenue generation.
- 7) **Financial Plan and Goals-** The financial plan provides a detailed analysis of the funding received to date, how much additional funding may be needed to create a viable revenue stream for the business, from where and how much that revenue stream is anticipated to be, and a projection of cash flows and operating costs.
- 8) **One-page Summary-** This summarizes all components of the business plan into a single page and is meant to provide a concise view of the company, the technology, and the team that can be quickly absorbed by potential investors.

## Building a Business Team

Depending on the size and direction of the company, a start-up will need to draw on the expertise from multiple fields to succeed. Unless the employee(s) running the start-up is(are) comfortable with the following facets of business operations and development, it is recommended to seek advice from the following people during the initial stages of company formation:

- 1) Business attorney- to help establish and advise the newly formed start-up.
- 2) Accountant- to assist in corporate tax filings and provide guidance on financial and tax considerations.
- 3) Business manager- this is a general term to describe someone whose business skills complement the technical skills of the university employee.

Additionally, when the company begins to expand and seek out capital investments, it can be wise to develop a business advisory team with the complementary skills necessary to expand and commercialize the growing company. In some cases, this may be two or three additional people, but in other cases it may be wise to include more expertise to bolster investor confidence. The size and depth of your business team can help increase the chances of your start-up succeeding. But foremost, it is important to surround yourself with people you trust to provide you with sound advice to build a successful start-up.

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## Your Role in the Company

If you are a university employee and participating in a start-up, your role in the company represents an important source of conflict worth considering. While the university is supportive of start-ups, conflicts between the university's goals and the business' goals can arise. Situations when a university employee's role are more likely to create conflicts are when the university employee is in a leadership role (CEO, President, CFO, board member, etc.) in the start-up, when the university employee maintains significant equity or control of the start-up, when the university employee is required to authorize business transactions for the university that involve the start-up with which they're affiliated, or when their position in the start-up requires the university employee to negotiate with the university on behalf of the start-up. This is one reason why employees are required to complete a Conflict of Interest Management Plan (see Page 8). In general, the university is supportive of roles in such as CSO, CTO, or Scientific Advisor that usually have a lower chance of creating conflicts with the university. In select cases, the university may approve the formation of a start-up in which the university employee serves as a leader if the position is only to facilitate early corporate growth and does not conflict with the employee's university-associated responsibilities.

OCIC has provided guidance in the [Founder Equity in Technology Licensing](#) policy that outlines the limits that helps define if the university employee represents the business or the university during licensing efforts.

## Employing Students, Post-Docs, or Foreign Nationals

USA recognizes the educational benefits for students and post-docs to work in a start-up environment and the desire of students and postdocs to be involved in commercializing their research work. The use of students and post-docs must receive approval from the university to ensure that the student or postdoc is benefitting from the educational benefits of working for a start-up without negatively impacting their academic interests or career development. Please note that the university will provide oversight for the use of students and post-docs for the duration of their employment under the Conflict of Interest Management Plan.

While post-docs are considered university employees, not all students are employees of the university. Also, depending on their employment status and their role in performing the research, a university student may or may not be an inventor on the intellectual property that they are seeking to commercialize and/or the university may or may not have ownership in the

invention (more information can be found in the [Patent and Invention](#) policy). Clarification on a student's employment status (and how it may create conflict in the start-up venture) can be provided by the [Office of Research and Economic Development](#).

In general, a student or postdoctoral employee's role in a start-up can create conflict when the employee is in a leadership role (CEO, President, CFO, board member, etc.) in the start-up, when the employee maintains significant equity or control of the start-up, when the student or postdoctoral employee's time commitment to the start-up interferes with their university-delegated responsibilities, or when the employee's position in the start-up requires the university employee to negotiate with the university on behalf of the start-up.

In some cases, a start-up may wish to use students or post-docs that are in the United States through a visa with employment restrictions. Visas obtained for use of study at USA are not transferrable to a company, and start-up companies should seek independent legal counsel to facilitate employment of foreign nationals.

## Alabama Ethics Act

The Alabama Ethics Commission was created in 1973 to ensure that public officials are independent and impartial in their dealings for and with the state. Alabama public officials and employees are not permitted to use their position for private gain. A university entrepreneur is required to abide by the Alabama Ethics Act to ensure that their dealings between their business and the university are fair and impartial. The [Alabama Ethics Act \(2022\)](#) provides a description of prohibited activities. OCIC and the Office of Research Compliance and Assurance strongly encourage university entrepreneurs to review the Alabama Ethics Act to reduce potential conflicts and prevent illegal activities in the start-up entity.





## Using University Space and Equipment

A start-up entity's access or use to the university's research infrastructure is governed by USA's policies and guidelines concerning such use by external entities. The policy of the university on [Use of University Research Facilities and Equipment by External Entities](#) to allow external use of its research facilities and/or equipment requires an assessment to determine if the benefit to the university is specific, reasonably quantifiable and sufficient to justify allowance for use. This includes the collaborative use of [Research Centers and Service Centers](#) established by the university. If a university employee wishes to utilize university resources to support their start-up, the start-up company must obtain written approval and submit a [Request to Use Research Facility/Equipment form](#) to the chair of the academic department responsible for the facilities/equipment. The start-up company must agree to enter into and comply with the requirements outlined in a Research Facility and Equipment Use Agreement. If no agreement exists between USA and the company, use of university resources is prohibited. In addition to the policy referenced above, the supplemental document [Guidelines: Leasing Space to External Entities for Research Purposes](#) should be referenced as an aid in facilitating these requirements.



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## Creating a Legal Entity

When starting a business, you will need to decide on the legal business entity that you wish to establish. Each type of business entity has benefits and drawbacks, depending on size, liability for debt, control, and tax structure. For tax purposes, the Internal Revenue Service recognizes five broad classifications of businesses:

- 1) Sole Proprietorships
- 2) Partnerships
- 3) Corporations
- 4) S-Corporations
- 5) Limited Liability Corporations (LLC)

It is encouraged that you contact a business attorney to provide guidance in the process of establishing the start-up entity. The attorney can help explain the differences between business types as well as file legal documents to establish the entity.

While the University of South Alabama and OCIC do not endorse any single business attorney, we do recommend you consider the following:

1. **Experience and Specialization:** The attorney should have significant experience in business law, specifically in the area of entity formation.
2. **Good Reputation and Reviews:** Check for online reviews, testimonials, and references. A reputable attorney will have a track record of satisfied clients.
3. **Clear Communication:** The attorney should be able to explain legal concepts in a way that is easy to understand without excessive legal jargon. Effective communication is key to ensuring that you are fully informed about your legal options and obligations.
4. **Fees and Billing Practices:** Understand their fee structure and billing practices. Some attorneys charge by the hour, while others may offer flat-rate fees for certain services. Make sure their fees are transparent and within your budget.
5. **Personal Fit:** It's important that you feel comfortable with the attorney. You will be sharing sensitive information and making important decisions with their guidance, so a good personal fit is crucial.

Remember, the right attorney can be a crucial advisor for your business, so take the time to choose someone who meets these criteria and aligns well with your business's needs and goals.

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## License Agreements and Options

OCIC manages the licensing of the University of South Alabama's intellectual property. An employee-led start-up works with OCIC to develop an agreement that best fits the needs and goals of the start-up's commercialization plans. There are multiple forms that this agreement can take, and while OCIC maintains standard templates for these agreements, each agreement will be tailored to maximize the benefits to the start-up and the university. The license agreement is a legally binding document between the start-up and the university, and it is strongly encouraged that the start-up consult legal counsel in evaluating the agreement.

The first choice is whether a full license or a short-term license, or option, is desired. The full license agreement provides the company the robust terms to protect their business and investment but also comes with more responsibilities for the company, including reporting commercialization milestones to the university. Alternatively, an option allows a company to have an exclusive right to the technology for a short period of time to determine if it can successfully commercialize the technology within the selected field of use. If the company determines there is a successful pathway to commercialization, the company can transition the option into a full license at a later time. An option provides more flexibility to the company, but it may be looked on as non-committal by investors.

Additional terms in the license are articulated as needed, but some useful ones are below:

**License-** a grant of specific rights provided by the owner of the IP to a company/start-up allowing it to practice and/or use the owner's IP.

**Patent Rights and Know-How-** Any patent rights or know-how associated with a university technology ID for which the start-up wishes to license.

**Field of Use-** the license provides the right to practice the invention only in the defined uses.

**Exclusive license-** the licensed rights may only be practiced by a single licensing company within a field of use.

**Non-exclusive license-** the licensed rights may be practiced by multiple companies.

**Royalty-** a percentage of net sales paid to the university by the start-up for utilizing university intellectual property.

**Milestones-** set goals, determined by OCIC and the start-up, to ensure the company is on track to commercialize the invention.

**Waiver and Release with Royalty Tail-** In special cases, the university may release the technology to the inventor for further development and commercialization. The university will retain a royalty tail (see **Royalty** above) consistent with its contribution to and ownership of the technology.

## Business Funding

Raising early-stage capital to fund a start-up can be challenging for many entrepreneurs because the channels to obtain funding vary for each company. No two companies will have the same funding pathways to success, but there are general stages that can help guide entrepreneurs to target the right funding sources.

- A) **Pre-seed funding**- In this stage, the start-up needs to raise around \$10,000 to \$150,000 to fund additional research, market analysis, and prototype development. Because the idea has not produced a commercialized product or has not been tested at a commercial level before, there is a high risk of failure that many investors refuse to accept. The most successful sources of funds come from personal loans or investments made by the entrepreneur, their friends, or their family.
- B) **Seed stage funding**- In this stage, the business has commercialized a product or is close to commercialization, and a customer or market segment has shown interest in purchasing appreciable amounts of the product. Funding would be used to launch the product into a larger market, expand the company's work force, and perform more extensive marketing. Funding can range from \$150,000 up to around \$5 million. Because the company is starting to show product sales and business viability, the investment risk is high but lower than in the pre-seed stage. Here, angel investors can provide meaningful investment in exchange for equity, along with additional funding from friends and family.
- C) **Series A-D funding**- In this stage, the company begins to move beyond a "start-up" label and into a viable long-term business investment with moderate-to-high risk. Multiple investment rounds (labeled A to D) can be used to raise business capital from venture capitalists, with the investments increasing to \$100 million or more. In most cases, funds are raised in exchange for equity in the business.

## SBIR/STTR Government-Supported Funding

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs are competitive government programs that encourage small businesses to engage in Federal Research/Research and Development (R/R&D) with the potential for commercialization. Through a competitive awards-based program, SBIR and STTR enable small businesses to explore their technological potential and commercialization.

Central to the SBIR/STTR program is the partnership between small businesses and nonprofit research institutions such as the University of South Alabama. An SBIR grant does not require but allows a small company to collaborate with a research institution to contribute to the commercialization of technology through data generation or intellectual property development. The STTR program requires the small business to formally collaborate with a research institution in Phase I and Phase II. An SBIR/STTR's most important role is to bridge the gap between performance of basic science and commercialization of resulting innovations. For both SBIR and STTR applications, the percent of a research institution's contribution to the grant is limited (see [SBIR.gov](http://SBIR.gov) for more information).

**SBIR and STTR grants are submitted by small businesses, and USA provides only secondary support for scope of work and financial/cost documentation. It is the responsibility of the small business to draft and file the SBIR/STTR application.**

Additionally, [Innovate Alabama](http://InnovateAlabama) offers a matching grant program for successful Alabama-based SBIR/STTR awardees (either up to one half of the actual award, or up to \$100,000 for Phase 1 or \$250,000 for Phase 2, whichever is less).

SBIR and STTR grants have different filing requirements depending the roles of the company and the university. The table below (adapted from [here](#)) summarizes the differences, and visit [SBIR.gov](http://SBIR.gov) and review its [Program Eligibility documentation](#) for more details.

	<b>SBIR</b>	<b>STTR</b>
<b>Phase 1 Duration</b>	6 months	12 months
<b>Phase 2 Duration</b>	24 months	24 months
<b>Number of Participating Agencies</b>	12	5
<b>Phase 1 Award Size</b>	Agency Dependent	Agency Dependent
<b>IP Allocation Agreement Required</b>	No	Yes
<b>Nonprofit Research Institute Required</b>	No	Yes
<b>PI Employment</b>	Small Business	Small Business or Research Institute
<b>Applicant</b>	Small Business	Small Business

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## Tools to Help You Succeed

The following are a list of resources that may be useful in developing business plans or obtaining seed funding. This is not an exhaustive list.

### **Business Assistance:**

[Economic Development Partnership of Alabama \(EDPA\)](#)- EDPA's primary focus is to help Alabama attract and retain industry. EDPA fills a critical role in business attraction by marketing and promoting Alabama as a business location and providing information analysis and fact-based proposals to companies and consultants that are looking for a site.

[Melton Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation](#)- Located in the USA Mitchell College of Business, MCEI plays a leadership role in stimulating and nurturing local and regional economic development. The MCEI elevates the University's entrepreneurship and economic development programs by providing opportunities to improve entrepreneurship education and expand the university impact on the region.

[Mobile Chamber of Commerce](#)- The Mobile Chamber serves as an advocate for business needs and a supporter of economic development to promote the Mobile area's economy.

[Small Business Administration](#)- The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is an independent agency of the federal government to aid, counsel, assist and protect the interests of small business concerns, to preserve free competitive enterprise and to maintain and strengthen the overall economy of our nation.

[Small Business Development Center](#)- The Alabama Small Business Development Center network is a statewide, inter-institutional program available at Alabama member universities to provide management and technical assistance to small businesses.

[Innovation Portal](#)- The Innovation Portal is a nonprofit incubator and innovations hub accelerating startup growth in the Gulf Coast region through programming to encourage successful launch, development, and scaling of local ventures.

[RAMP \(Real Advice Mentoring Program\)](#)- Developed by MIT, RAMP is a mentoring program for businesses in south Alabama that provides expert guidance from a team of successful business community members.

### **Seed Stage Funding:**

[Alabama Launchpad](#)- Alabama Launchpad provides a framework for individuals in the state to locate innovations, develop their business ideas, and connect to a network of experts, investors, and service providers.

[Innovate Alabama](#)- Innovate Alabama helps build Alabama's innovation ecosystem by attracting and retaining businesses as well as supporting entrepreneurship and technology growth.

### **Government Funding:**

[SBIR/STTR Grant Program](#)- The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program and the Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program are competitive grant programs that encourages domestic small businesses to engage in Federal Research/Research and Development (R/R&D) through public/private partnership to include the joint venture opportunities for small businesses and nonprofit research institutions.



## Department Contacts

### Office of Commercialization and Industry Collaboration (OCIC)

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