



SME Steward Grant Proposal Submission Request

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1. The SME Steward Grant

This two-year research project by a post-secondary institution will collect and analyze real time quantitative and qualitative data. The objective of the project is to assess the quality of the Alberta Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (SME)-Entrepreneur Ecosystem¹, and to determine if the addition of a proactive connector service increases uptake of services and ultimately improves the success of small business launch and growth.

Currently there are over 280 small business service providers in Alberta. Add to this list financial institutions and an ever-changing environment of federal and provincial resources and programs and it is difficult to ascertain how a small business might navigate and leverage the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem. This gap in knowledge is reflected in the “reactive” nature of economic development planning and, as such, programs are often designed to respond to the needs expressed by the most proactive stakeholders rather than empirical data illuminating service gaps, barriers to success, economic opportunities, sector trends, etc.

In addition, from the perspective of the small businesses, there is no clear point of entry into the business SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem. Businesses often aren’t aware of the resources available to them and, as such, their growth and success are jeopardized while service providers remain underutilized and find it difficult to connect with new subjects. There is a lack of market intelligence about small business activities and the service provider ecosystem as a whole.

The SME Steward Tool (the Steward Tool), developed by Alberta Economic Development and Trade (EDT), can be employed to enter and guide study subjects through the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem. The Steward Tool will self-populate over the course of the project with 3,000 willing small business study participants. Working with Service Alberta and the Registry Agent Network, prospective participants in the study will be given the option to sign-up to the project when they register their business at select registry agents across Alberta. Using predictive modeling the enrollment of subjects can be controlled and staggered to ensure the project is not overwhelmed by early buy-in.

The Steward Tool also organizes the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem by the services, sectors and phases (among other fields) they focus on. As such, it can be used by a researcher to match SME Subjects (small businesses) to the available services and then map and evaluate an SME subject’s experiences navigating the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem. It is in this process that gaps and barriers will be identified and analyzed. In addition to providing data, this exchange also entails a high degree of customer service for the SME Subject, and the successful incumbent will also learn about best approaches to support the Subject as they move within the system.

In addition to the financial resources outlined in *Section 5* the successful applicant will have access to the Steward Tool.

¹ The SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem is the term given to the 280+ different small business service providers operating in Alberta.

The SME Steward Grant recipient will be granted access to unprecedented levels of real-time data on:

- What types of businesses are registering in Alberta (e.g. sectors, ownership structures, locations)
- What opportunities and barriers businesses are facing
- Where gaps exist within the Alberta SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem
- Where resources are being optimized within the Alberta SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem
- What variables influence business success/failure in Alberta

2. Roles and Responsibilities of the SME Steward Grant Recipient

Leverage the “Steward Tool” to Design and Implement Research on the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem

The SME Steward Grant is designed to enable a researcher to leverage the Steward Tool by contacting and establishing relationships with the small businesses enrolled in the project to identify their goals, challenges, opportunities and needs. The Steward Tool will then identify the best-matched resources within the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem for the subject to be referred to. This is made possible because the Steward Tool, which is populated with organizations in the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem, can easily match service provider expertise to subject needs. The researcher has the opportunity to inform the refinement of the Steward Tool to better capture data.

The researcher will also make several follow-up calls to the small business subject throughout the year, gathering information on their challenges, resources they have utilized and their level of success. The information garnered from this project on small business activities, and the effectiveness of the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem will be a valuable resource for policy and program development and evaluation.

Design Methods of Engagement and Data Capture

The refinement of scripts, methods of engagements (email, telephone, text...) and refinement of what data should be collected and the most effective methods to meet that objective is the responsibility of the successful grant recipient.

Data collection considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring the right data on project success is collected and effectively analyzed (see section 7, Performance Measurement),
- The information garnered from this project on small business activities, and the effectiveness of the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem will be a valuable resource for program development and evaluation. As such, the right data sets need to be designed for market intelligence analysis that can be utilized by the public, private and academic

community to identify opportunities, assess resource allocations and focus attention towards the goals of economic development, and

- The researcher can inform the refinement of the Steward Tool to better capture data towards the objectives of the project.

Data Analysis

In addition to the design and refinement of data collection, data analysis should inform the following:

- Most effective method of subject engagement,
- Performance measurement of the Steward Tool,
- Performance measurement of subjects:
 - Defining and capturing evidence on the impact of the project on subjects.
- Identification of barriers to business success in Alberta,
- Gaps in services and resources the SME-Entrepreneurship Ecosystem,
- Opportunities and program attention/change/expansion in the grantee's institution as well as potentially in government,
- Efficiencies/inefficiencies in the SME-Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.

Annual Fiscal Reporting

Reporting will be adhered to as set forth in the Grant Agreement.

3. Data Ownership

The Steward Tool utilizes the GOA's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database, and all data collected is stored in the 'cloud'. EDT will work with the grant recipient to enable access for use of the Steward Tool for purposes of the project. The grant recipient will be subject to terms of use and security considerations with respect to the Steward Tool, including limitations on ownership of and license to use data that is collected and stored within the CRM database. Access to the Steward Tool will be through a license to create, read, update and delete research data as it relates to the project.

4. Project Duration and Funding

Eligible organizations will be approved to receive two years of grant funding up to \$280,000.00 in total through the completion and submission of a Project Grant Proposal to the SME Steward Grant. All applications will be reviewed by an evaluation team, through a consistent process and against detailed criteria (see Section 9: Adjudication Process and Appendix B: Evaluation Matrix). Successful applicants will then be required to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Government of Alberta. The Grant Agreement will lay out the specific legal and reporting

requirements for the SME Steward Project to comply with throughout the term of the funding (as set by the grant agreement).

5. Research Opportunities

The successful applicant will have access to a large sample of Alberta small businesses, affording the collection and analysis of data on leader behavior, firm growth, and program effectiveness. The research will involve a time series with multiple data points, allowing for the creation of datasets and the subsequent analysis of leader and firm change and evolution. Applicants are encouraged to use the data (please see Section 13: Data Ownership) towards academic analysis, findings and publication.

6. Eligible Project Expenses

Personnel- Project Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional manpower specifically required to deliver project outcomes, at industry standard annual salary rates. <p>NOTE: Salaries of permanent employees of grant recipient are not eligible</p>
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel to present or discuss project with Grant sponsor
Capital Assets/Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment directly required for the project as specified in the project guideline documents, not to exceed 5% of the project costs
Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of supplies directly required for the project
Communication, Dissemination, Linkage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost associated with dissemination of knowledge to potential subjects and stakeholders Cost of academic publication if appropriate
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirect overhead is not an allowable expense Incremental administrative expenses, directly required to achieve the project outcome are eligible
Work Associated with Product Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project refinement, design, and formulation expenses Focus groups and consumer surveys Evaluation of technical elements (CRM) Support for pilot and preliminary scale-up problem identification and problem solving

Out-of-scope expenses include the following:

- Intellectual property protection
- Packaging development
- Listing fees

7. Reporting and Monitoring

Initial Report

An initial report to ensure grant expenditure benchmarks, such as staffing and equipment, have been achieved before business subjects are brought into the project.

Quarterly Reports

Quarterly reports will be simple and correspond to an agreed upon template that will capture sufficient qualitative and quantitative information to ensure other project stakeholders and resources are coordinating with performance and needs. These reports will include:

- (a) information on, and assessment of, the progress of the project, within the designated reporting period, measured against the actions set out in the Proposal;
- (b) an acceptable financial statement accounting for all Project revenues and expenditures, including all interest and other income earned from investments of the Grant Proceeds and a statement of the amount of unexpended Grant Proceeds. Progress Reports without a financial statement will be considered incomplete and will not be accepted.

Ongoing Expectation of Communication

Communication between the grant recipient and EDT will be essential to guide the gated subject enrollment mechanism at Registry Agencies that will ensure staggered benchmark numbers are met and the researcher is not overwhelmed by enrollment.

Final Report

A final report will be delivered upon the completion of the two year project and will include information on:

- Effectiveness of the Steward Tool,
- Identification of barriers to business success in Alberta,
- Gaps in services and resources the SME-Entrepreneurship Ecosystem,
- Opportunities for program attention/change/expansion in the grantee's institution as well as potentially in government
- Efficiencies/inefficiencies in the SME-Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.
- Optimal methods of engagement of project subjects, including scripting and communication mechanisms (phone, email, text, app...).

8. Performance Measurement

Success of the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem

The successful applicant will track and measure the performance of external business service providers. The design of this analysis is the responsibility of the grant recipient and may include:

- Mapping referral networks

- Satisfaction of subjects of external business service providers
- The effectiveness of the Steward Tool in evaluating the SME-Entrepreneur Ecosystem

Success of Subjects

Ascertaining and attributing how subject success should be determined and tested during the project and is the responsibility of the grant recipient.

9. Applicant Eligibility

The main applicant must be a qualified researcher or a team of researchers within Alberta academic institutions committed to basic and/or applied research. The applicant must have a strong, demonstrated knowledge of Alberta businesses.

Proposals should identify opportunities for effective collaboration to ensure best use of resources, highly qualified personnel and infrastructure.

10. Application Process and Contact Information

Please submit Project Proposals to:

Andrew Clark
 Alberta Economic Development and Trade
 5th Floor, Commerce Place
 10155 – 102 Street
 Edmonton Alberta

andrew.clark@gov.ab.ca
 780 427 9448

Applicants are encouraged to send questions or comments to the same contact. Any question received will be answered via email to all perspective applicants.

Steward Project Timetable	
Date	Item
December 9, 2016 4:30	Full Project Proposals are due. Late submission will not be accepted.
December 22, 2016 4:30 (anticipated)	Applicants are contacted regarding decisions.
January 13, 2017 4:30 (anticipated)	Grant agreements are completed. Project may commence.
March 31. 2017 4:30	Project must have started.

11.The Adjudication Process and Criteria

All Project Grant Proposals will be evaluated by a grant selection committee for research, project development and business excellence using pre-established criteria by Alberta Economic Development and Trade. The 9 areas of evaluation and their weighted importance in the overall evaluation are:

1. Organizational Background and Description of Project Approach (10%)
2. Alignment or Applicant Organizational Objectives and Outcomes of Project (10%)
3. Project Delivery Services and Targets for 2016-17, 2017-18 (30%)
4. Identification of Significant Partnerships and Collaborations (5%)
5. Proposal Alignment with Steward Project Outcomes (5%)
6. Project Team (15%)
7. Budget Information (5%)
8. Risk Management (10%)
9. Performance Measurement and Reporting (10%)