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Idaho Surges Ahead: Elevate Idaho Announces Unprecedented Rise in Federal SBIR/STTR Awards

IDAHO FALLS, ID -- (March 31, 2026) – Elevate Idaho reports record number of federal SBIR/STTR awards across Idaho since its inception in 2020.

In early 2020, Regional Economic Development for Eastern Idaho (REDI) took the lead in forming a partnership with Idaho APEX Accelerator and the Idaho Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Idaho Falls to launch Elevate Idaho. This initiative was created to manage and enhance the SBIR/STTR Program statewide through a unique and collaborative partnership.

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs—collectively known as America’s Seed Fund—offer non-dilutive funding to support the development of new and innovative technologies and help pave the way toward commercialization. Under this program, eleven federal agencies are congressionally mandated to allocate a portion of their annual budgets to the SBIR/STTR program, distributing a combined \$4.7 billion in contract and grant funding each year.

“Elevate Idaho plays a pivotal role for entrepreneurs by connecting them with key resources that support their journey from early-stage development to commercialization—an important milestone for those pursuing SBIR/STTR funding,” says Teresa McKnight, CEO of REDI. She adds, “Through the Elevate Idaho Program, we have assembled a team of mentors and professionals with deep SBIR/STTR expertise and expanded our statewide cohort to also include professionals with entrepreneurship and research experience. This approach has enabled us to create a robust network throughout Idaho, working collaboratively to provide critical guidance and build a pipeline that transforms innovative concepts into market-ready, commercially successful products.”

Prior to the establishment of Elevate Idaho, our research showed that, from 2017 to 2019, Idaho entrepreneurs secured only 17 SBIR/STTR grants totaling \$5.8 million. At that time, Idaho ranked the lowest among Rocky Mountain states in securing these awards. This finding led REDI to launch Elevate Idaho as a pilot program in 2020, aimed at boosting both engagement and success rates in SBIR/STTR grants. By implementing outreach initiatives such as training sessions, educational workshops, personalized counseling, and proposal reviews, we generated significant statewide interest in the SBIR/STTR program. Consequently, Idaho saw a marked increase in grant submissions and reached a new high in awards. Between 2020 and 2025, Elevate Idaho helped quadruple the number of grant applications and awards, culminating in 91 grants and \$95.1 million in funding for entrepreneurs across the state, as noted by McKnight.

“Elevate Idaho creates opportunities for collaboration that might not have occurred otherwise and, most importantly, helps to strengthen Idaho’s entrepreneurial and research ecosystem at both the regional and statewide levels,” says Bam Omotowa, Senior Business Consultant at Idaho APEX Accelerator in Idaho Falls.

This collaboration was founded on a common vision: to foster innovation and entrepreneurship across Idaho. Through Elevate Idaho, aspiring business owners gain a clear route to transform their ideas into real opportunities. According to McKnight, pursuing these opportunities often requires accessing a variety of funding options. Elevate Idaho provides an ideal setting for launching and growing businesses in a vibrant entrepreneurial community, and programs like SBIR and STTR serve as valuable resources for helping new ventures develop and flourish in Idaho.

Regional Economic Development for Eastern Idaho (REDI) leads this statewide initiative, working closely with support partners like the Idaho APEX Accelerator and the Idaho Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Key partners also include Idaho State University's Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, the Boise State University Technology Transfer Office, the University of Idaho Technology Transfer Office, Idaho National Lab Tech Deployment Office, and Idaho Commerce.

For more information, visit Elevate Idaho's webpage at: <https://www.rediconnects.org/elevate-idaho/>

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ABOUT ELEVATE IDAHO: Elevate Idaho is a unique partnership that consists of a strong statewide network of professional regional, state, university, and federal mentors with expertise in the SBIR/STTR Grant Programs. This unique partnership provides a one-stop solution for Idaho startups and emerging companies working on technology innovations with commercial value. Elevate Idaho offers free consultations, training, and proposal assistance to help Idaho Companies succeed in winning SBIR and STTR Grants, which in turn creates a solid foundation to build a robust SBIR/STTR Program across Idaho. For more information visit Elevate Idaho's webpage - <https://www.rediconnects.org/elevate-idaho/>

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SBIR/STTR PROGRAM: The SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) and STTR (Small Business Technology Transfer) programs are highly competitive programs offered to American businesses to promote Research and Development (R&D) with the hopes of commercialization. Every year, the federal government sets aside \$4.7 billion to help small businesses minimize risk so innovative technology moves to commercialization. There are eleven federal agencies that participate under the SBIR program, five of which also participate in the STTR program. Both programs are congressionally mandated programs. These funds are non-dilutive federal dollars, meaning there is no loss of equity or ownership, and no payback of funds required. Through supporting small businesses and inventors, the federal government is promoting the entrepreneurial spirit that has made the United States so advanced and bridges the gap between science and technology to world-wide application and commercialization. The SBIR/STTR grant program allows young businesses access to non-dilutive R&D funding, which the successful award advances the commercialization of new technologies, which in turn provides a strong economic multiplier and great return on investment. In turn, state economies are bolstered, the innovator is rewarded, and the commercialization of new technologies creates high-tech jobs, wages, and tax dollars get re-invested back into the economy.