# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:
# Alexandria Business Accelerator – Program Operator

| Issued By: | Alexandria Economic Development Partnership |
|---|---|
| Date Issued: | March 4, 2026 |
| Submission Deadline: | 5:00pm ET on March 25, 2026 |
| Program Completed by: | December 31, 2026 |

## 1. Background

The City of Alexandria's infrastructure, talent pipeline, and strategic location make it uniquely positioned to be a hub for innovation. Alexandria, which is home to a number of high-growth startups, has many of the ingredients of a strong innovation ecosystem; including a venture capital and investor network, high-net worth individuals, and the Virginia Tech (VT) Institute for Advanced Computing. Despite these advantages, the City currently lacks a structured program or services to support and retain high-growth entrepreneurs while neighboring jurisdictions have rolled out programs such as the Arlington Innovation Fund, Fairfax Founders Fund, Starburst National Landing Launchpad, Bowie Innovation Center, and Loudoun Innovation Challenge.

In 2025, Alexandria's City Council approved funding to support an **Alexandria Business Accelerator** program. In line with recommendations from [ALX Forward](#), the City's recently released strategic framework for economic growth, the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership ([AEDP](#)) is planning to launch an Alexandria Business Accelerator focused on emerging and technology-oriented industries, including (but not limited to) robotics, aerospace, quantum, AI, energy tech, computer services, cybersecurity, and defense.

The goal of the **Alexandria Business Accelerator** is twofold: (i) to accelerate the growth of a cohort of up to 15 Alexandria startups that are poised to scale and (ii) to serve as a foundational program in building up the City's innovation ecosystem to inform the development of future services and programs geared at high-growth entrepreneurs. Rather than off-the-shelf curricula, this accelerator program should be focused on **specialized mentorship and technical execution** for a cohort of Alexandria-based startups.

The selected Program Operator shall design and implement a high-touch framework that moves beyond general business coaching to provide deep, functional expertise to founders based on where they are in their growth trajectory/maturity, including capital connections and community building.

## 2. Purpose of this RFP

AEDP is a nonprofit organization charged with promoting economic growth and business investment in the City of Alexandria, Virginia. AEDP is launching the Alexandria Business Accelerator and seeks to engage a qualified firm to serve as the Program Operator for the Accelerator.

The selected vendor will be responsible for the design, implementation, and management of a high-touch accelerator program serving a cohort of up to 15 Alexandria-based startups. The Program

Operator will deliver curated programming and services that accelerate company growth, strengthen the local innovation ecosystem, and align with AEDP's economic development goals.

The selected Program Operator may be either (i) an established accelerator provider delivering the program directly, or (ii) a lead firm delivering the program through one or more subcontractors. In all cases, the selected vendor will serve as the prime contractor and retain full responsibility for program performance, coordination of subcontractors, and achievement of defined outcomes.

AEDP will retain strategic oversight, brand authority, and final decision-making responsibility. The Program Operator will work collaboratively with AEDP staff to ensure alignment with organizational priorities and community objectives.

The purpose of this RFP is to solicit proposals from experienced firms to:
- Design and execute a milestone-driven accelerator program that provides deep, functional expertise tailored to the needs of Alexandria-based startups.
- Recruit, select, and support a cohort of up to 15 qualified startup companies aligned with the Accelerator's focus industries.
- Manage all aspects of program delivery, including mentor and subject-matter expert engagement, scheduling, communications, investor engagement strategy, and event execution.
- Design and deliver a business showcase, pitch competition, or other demonstration event that aligns with accelerator outcomes and ecosystem engagement goals.
- Track performance metrics and provide regular reporting to AEDP to ensure the program remains on schedule, within scope, and outcome-focused.

## 3. Scope of Services

The selected vendor will be expected to deliver the following services through their own offerings or via partnerships with other providers. Proposers may recommend refinements or alternatives in their proposals, provided they clearly explain the rationale.

### A. Accelerator Support Services - Program Design
- Finalize and implement cohort focus area in alignment with AEDP priorities
- Establish application/selection process and materials (i.e. participant eligibility criteria, application, and selection framework with final approval to be provided by AEDP)
- Recommend optimal program design to include the following components, at a minimum. For each component, please identify the provider and delivery format:
  - Core educational/mentorship programming, including strategy for engaging mentors and investors
  - A business showcase, pitch competition[1] or other readiness event, including support for participant storytelling, product or service demonstrations, and structured evaluation criteria
  - Networking, convenings, founder engagement activities and program graduation. **NOTE:** These events must be held in the City of Alexandria and have a majority of Alexandria attendees but can be regional in nature.

---

[1] For purposes of this RFP, a "business showcase, pitch competition or demo day" refers to an event in which participating businesses present and demonstrate their products or services to stakeholders to gain critical feedback.

**B.  Program Execution**
- Oversee evaluation and selection of program applicants; recommend finalists to AEDP (this includes managing communication with applicants)
- Deliver the core educational/mentorship programming, a business readiness event (as applicable), founder networking events and other accelerator related activities
- Ensure project timelines allow for adequate promotion and marketing for the cohort selection process and any public programming
- Create and administer a post-accelerator survey

**C.  Program Management, Implementation & Coordination**
- Serve as day-to-day program manager and primary liaison among mentors, partners, subcontractors, and AEDP
- Coordinate timelines, deliverables, and communications between providers and AEDP
- Flag risks, delays, or scope changes early and propose mitigation strategies
- Support AEDP in preparing internal and external updates, as needed
- Work with AEDP to develop a logo as well as any necessary communications and marketing materials. (AEDP will provide copywriting and graphic design, but the Program Operator must collaborate and allow time for development in their project plans)

**D.  Reporting & Close-Out**
- Provide regular written status updates to AEDP, cadence to be specified upon award
- Support preparation of summary materials for City or stakeholder updates
- Deliver a final written summary documenting the outcomes, lessons learned, framework for surveys and outcome measurements after program completion, and recommendations for future cohorts or related activities

## 4.  Vendor/Program Requirements

- **Access to Capital Strategy:** The program must include a formal strategy to leverage investor relations to benefit cohort founders. Applicants should demonstrate a track record of securing follow-on financing for founders, where applicable.
- **Industry/Founder Focus**: The proposed curriculum must be tailored to the recommended Alexandria cohort focus area or founder experience.
- **Subject-Matter Expert (SME) Network:** To ensure the program meets the specific needs of the cohort, the Program Operator shall curate a program that leverages mentors with verified experience in specialized domains relevant to the cohort.
- **Local Ecosystem Assets:** Successful applicants will demonstrate a strategy to leverage local innovation assets and strategic partners such as Virginia Tech, local coworking spaces, US Patent & Trademark Office, Northern Virginia Community College, National Science Foundation, and National Innovation Quarter.
- **Milestone-Based Coaching/Programming:** Mentorship and programming should be structured around the achievement of specific milestones in the founder journey (e.g., securing a Letter of Intent, finalizing a Beta, or completing a SOC2 audit) rather than a generic curriculum.
- **Performance Tracking:** The Program Operator must implement a feedback loop where founders rate the utility of mentor sessions. Mentors who consistently fail to provide actionable, high-level value must be rotated out of the program.

- **Outcome Measurement:** In addition to qualitative feedback mechanisms, proposers must define and report on minimum outcome metrics, including:
    – Participation: Number of participants enrolled, diversity of entrepreneurs served, and geographic representation.
    – Economic Impact: Number of businesses launched or expanded, net new jobs created in Alexandria, and revenue growth among cohort participants.
    – Investment Secured: Funding obtained by cohort participants.
    – Program Effectiveness: Mentor engagement and effectiveness scores, founder satisfaction with program value and mentorship.
    Outcome metrics are intended for reporting and program evaluation purposes and do not constitute guaranteed financial or job creation outcomes. Proposers should describe data collection methods, reporting frequency, and any post-program tracking approach (such as follow-on funding secured and business survival rate).

## 5. Roles & Responsibilities

- AEDP will:
    - Retain final decision-making authority
    - Select Accelerator Program Operator
    - Assist with event space identification including free use of the events spaces at 1940 Duke Street pending availability
    - Provide marketing and graphic design support
    - Manage contracts and payments
    - Provide strategic direction and approvals
    - Upon program completion, manage post-program surveys and data collection
- Program Operator will:
    - Lead research, analysis, coordination, and project management activities
    - Deliver agreed-upon outputs in accordance with the project schedule
    - Work collaboratively with AEDP staff

## 6. Deliverables

At a minimum, deliverables shall include:

- Final accelerator program roadmap and implementation plan
- Proposed project timeline
- Recruitment and selection materials (application and evaluation framework)
- Plan and execute a minimum of two signature events to include a business readiness (business showcase, pitch competition, demo day) event and one networking event
- Ongoing status reports (monthly minimum)
- Final written report summarizing:
    - Participation metrics
    - Economic impact metrics
    - Investment secured
    - Program effectiveness
    - Lessons learned
    - Recommendations for future cohorts

## 7. Proposed Timeline

Proposers should include a proposed timeline that aligns with the following target milestones. Proposers must also specify a **proposed project end date** and provide justification based on cohort duration, reporting requirements, and completion of final report.

| | |
|---|---|
| RFP Issued: | March 4, 2026 |
| Proposals Due: | No later than 5:00pm ET on March 25, 2026 |
| Consultant Selected & Onboarded: | By April 15, 2026 |
| Cohort Recruitment Launch: | To occur no later than June 2026 (exact date to be proposed by Program Operator) |
| Cohort Selection Completed: | To occur no later than July 2026 (exact date to be proposed by Program Operator) |
| Programming Launch: | Summer 2026 (specific timeline to be proposed by Program Operator) |
| Program Completion & Final Report: | December 31, 2026 |

### Questions and Clarifications

Proposers may submit written questions regarding this RFP to the AEDP contact listed in Section 10 by 5:00pm ET on Wednesday, March 11, 2026. AEDP intends to respond to substantive questions through a written addendum or clarification distributed to all invited proposers, as appropriate, by 5:00pm ET on March 16, 2026. AEDP is not obligated to respond to all questions.

## 8. Budget

AEDP anticipates a total budget of $200,000 for the design, implementation, and execution of this engagement. The $200,000 represents the total anticipated budget for the Alexandria Business Accelerator program, inclusive of operator fees and all direct program-related expenses unless otherwise proposed. Proposers should assume this amount as the baseline budget when developing their proposals. Proposers must clearly identify operator compensation, direct program costs, and any optional enhancements.

AEDP may consider allocating additional funds if a proposer clearly demonstrates:
- Strong anticipated return on investment (ROI)
- Measurable business outcomes aligned with AEDP goals
- Opportunities to leverage matching funds, sponsorships, or in-kind support

Proposers are encouraged to:
- Clearly articulate assumptions and level of effort
- Identify optional or scalable components
- Distinguish between core services and value-added enhancements

All proposals must include a clear, itemized cost proposal, including:
- Total not-to-exceed cost
- Hourly rates and/or fixed-fee components
- Any optional or alternate pricing scenarios

AEDP reserves the right to negotiate scope and fees.

## 9. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals should include the following sections:
1. Firm or Consultant Overview
2. Relevant Experience and Qualifications
3. Proposed Approach and Work Plan
4. A defined recruitment strategy that includes tactics for reaching underrepresented founders, with clear KPIs for cohort diversity that reflect the City's demographics
5. Project Management and Communication Plan
6. Proposed Timeline
7. Cost Proposal
8. References and Testimonials from clients and/or founders (minimum of two)
9. Proposals should not exceed 25 pages, excluding appendices.

Proposers may include a description of any experience, partnerships, or connections relevant to Alexandria that would enhance their ability to successfully deliver the Alexandria Business Accelerator program. Such factors are not required but may be considered as part of the overall evaluation.

## 10. Submission Instructions
Proposals must be received electronically as a single PDF document by 5:00pm ET on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, to apply@alexandriaecon.org with the subject line "Alexandria Business Accelerator Proposal: [Proposer Name]."

**\*\*Proposals received after 5:00pm on March 25 will not be considered.\*\***

## 11. Evaluation Process
Proposals will be evaluated by a panel comprised of AEDP and select partners using the criteria outlined in Section 12. AEDP may request interviews with shortlisted firms. AEDP reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to request clarifications, to waive informalities, to select the proposal that best meets organizational needs, and to negotiate final scope and fees with the selected Program Operator.

## 12. Evaluation Criteria & Scoring Rubric

| Criteria | Description | Weight |
|---|---|---|
| **Relevant Experience & Past Performance** | • Demonstrated success delivering accelerator programs, entrepreneurship initiatives, or similar economic development programs. <br>• Proposers should include measurable outcomes (e.g., follow-on funding secured, revenue growth, job creation, and cohort completion rates). <br>• Demonstrated knowledge of the local Alexandria/DC Metro area tech ecosystem and relationships with relevant stakeholders. <br>• Demonstrated ability to manage mentors, subject-matter experts, and ecosystem stakeholders. | 30% |
| **Proposed Program Design & Approach** | • Clarity, feasibility, and alignment of proposed accelerator model, including | 30% |

| Criteria | Description | Weight |
|---|---|---|
| | milestone-driven programming, mentor/subject-matter expert engagement strategy, investor engagement approach, and business showcase, pitch competition, demo day or other readiness event design.<br>• Alignment with AEDP goals and Alexandria's target industries.<br>• Clearly defined strategy to come up with and deliver customized content for Alexandria cohort vs. off-the-shelf content.<br>• Evidence that the proposed program model is intentionally tailored to local assets, stakeholders, and economic development objectives rather than a generic accelerator model.<br>• If applicable, a feasible strategy to leverage strategic partnerships, sponsorships, or in-kind support to enhance program impact. External funding is not required and will not substitute for demonstrated program quality. | |
| **Project Management & Operational Capacity** | • Demonstrated track record managing timelines, stakeholders, subcontractors (if applicable), reporting, and event execution.<br>• Clear communication plan and risk mitigation approach. | 20% |
| **Value & Cost Reasonableness** | • Total proposed cost relative to scope and anticipated outcomes.<br>• Transparency of budget structure.<br>• Clear distinction between operator fees and direct program costs. | 15% |
| **Understanding of AEDP Priorities & Local Ecosystem Alignment** | • Demonstrated understanding of AEDP's mission and strategic goals.<br>• Ability to leverage existing ecosystem relationships and partnerships to enhance program quality, participant experience, and community integration. | 5% |
| **Total** | | **100%** |

## 13. Additional Terms

- AEDP is not responsible for costs incurred in preparing proposals.
- All submitted materials become the property of AEDP.
- The selected consultant will be required to enter a written contract with AEDP.
- Late submissions will not be considered.
- All proposals submitted in response to this RFP will be handled in accordance with applicable public records and disclosure laws. AEDP does not guarantee confidentiality of proposal content. Proposers may designate portions of their proposal as proprietary or confidential; however, such designation does not guarantee that the information will be exempt from disclosure.

- AEDP is seeking an Accelerator Program Operator that can accommodate *multiple* emerging and technology-oriented industries.
- All program materials, curriculum frameworks, reporting templates, branding elements, and other work products developed under this engagement shall become the property of AEDP upon payment.
- **NOTE:** This is not an accelerator for business attraction.