Alexandria Economic Development Partnership

RFP QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:
Alexandria Business Accelerator – Program Operator

Issued By:	Alexandria Economic Development Partnership
Proposal Deadline:	Wednesday, March 25, 2026; proposals must be received by 5:00pm ET

Thank you to all firms who submitted questions in response to AEDP's RFP for Alexandria Business Accelerator – Program Operator. We received a significant number of thoughtful inquiries. In this document, we have compiled and lightly edited all questions for clarity and consistency, and provided AEDP's official responses organized by theme. These answers are intended to clarify scope, requirements, and expectations for all potential proposers. Please note that the deadline for questions has passed, and no further inquiries will be accepted. This document serves as the official source of responses and supersedes any prior verbal or written guidance provided to proposers.

Program Details

Question	Answer
1. What are the expectations for the duration of the program itself?	AEDP has not prescribed a specific program length. Proposers may recommend a program duration they believe will best support participating startups and program outcomes. While many equity-free accelerator programs range from approximately 5–8 weeks, AEDP is open to alternative structures and encourages proposers to explain the rationale for their recommended timeline.
2. Are founders expected to participate full-time (8 hours/day; 40 hours per week) or part-time?	AEDP has not prescribed a specific time commitment for participating founders. Proposers may recommend a program structure and participation expectations they believe will best support startup growth and founder engagement. Proposals should clearly describe the anticipated time commitment and program format.
3. Would the expectation be fully in-person, remote, or hybrid delivery?	AEDP anticipates that the program will include a strong in-person component to leverage Alexandria's local ecosystem and facilitate connections among founders, mentors, and investors. However, proposers may recommend a hybrid model that incorporates virtual elements where appropriate. Proposals should clearly describe the proposed delivery format and explain how it will support founder engagement and program outcomes.

4. Is there a minimum number of in person vs virtual engagements?

AEDP has not established a minimum number of in-person versus virtual engagements. However, AEDP anticipates that key program milestones (i.e., kickoff meeting, concluding graduation or demo event) will be held in person. Proposers may recommend an appropriate balance of in-person and virtual programming.

5. Does AEDP have a location or preference for where the signature events will take place, or is the vendor responsible for identifying and paying for the venue(s)?

AEDP may be able to provide or assist in identifying event space in Alexandria, including space at its offices, subject to availability. Proposers should include any venue or event-related costs necessary to deliver the signature events in their proposed budget. Final arrangements will be determined in coordination with the selected proposer

6. The RFP notes that AEDP will assist with event space identification, including the free use of the event spaces at 1940 Duke Street, pending availability. To ensure accurate budgeting for the mandatory pitch competition/demo day, could you provide the approximate capacity and technological capabilities (e.g., A/V for hybrid attendance) of this space? Should proposers assume this space is adequate for a large-scale showcase, or should we allocate direct program costs for a larger third-party venue in Alexandria?

AEDP may be able to provide access to meeting and event space at its offices at 1940 Duke Street, subject to availability. Available spaces can accommodate small meetings (approximately 10–25 people) up to larger gatherings of roughly 100 people, with basic A/V and streaming capabilities available in some rooms. Rooftop space with larger capacity may also be available seasonally. After-hours use may require additional fees. Proposers should assess whether these spaces meet their needs for program activities, including the graduation or demo day, and include any additional venue or production costs in their proposed budget if a larger or alternative venue is desired.

7. If accelerator programming is expected to be delivered person, does AEDP have a physical location that can or is expected to be used? Will a venue be provided, or should we include the cost of renting office space?

AEDP can provide access to meeting space at its offices for certain program activities. Available rooms can accommodate small groups (approximately 5–10 participants) up to larger town-hall style gatherings (approximately 20–100 participants). Individual offices or dedicated workspace will not be available. Proposers should account for any additional space or venue requirements in their proposed budget. AEDP is open to requesting event space with its partners such as Virginia Tech and Alexandria coworking offices.

8. Will participating founders have access to any city-supported workspace that can be utilized outside of accelerator programming (e.g., coworking facilities or partner organizations), or should the operator include these resources as part of the program design?

See #7 above.

9. If virtual delivery/participation is permitted, are founders required to attend the two signature events?

While the program may incorporate virtual elements, AEDP anticipates that founders will participate in person for key program milestones, including the program kickoff and the concluding graduation or demo event, unless otherwise approved. Proposers may recommend how best to structure participation to balance accessibility with meaningful in-person engagement.

10. If fewer than fifteen qualified startups apply are selected for the cohort, would AEDP prefer to proceed with a smaller cohort or extend the recruitment period to reach the maximum target number of participants? Is AEDP open to a slightly smaller cohort (e.g., 8–10 startups) if it allows for deeper mentorship and greater program impact?

AEDP anticipates a cohort of approximately 10–15 startups. If fewer qualified applicants are identified, AEDP would prioritize maintaining a high-quality cohort rather than filling seats solely to reach the maximum number of participants. The selected Program Operator will work with AEDP to determine whether a smaller cohort or an extended recruitment period is appropriate based on the applicant pool and program timeline.

11. Beyond AEDP's provision of marketing/graphic design support and potential free event space at 1940 Duke Street, should offerors assume that all other direct program costs (mentors, speakers, investor engagement, events, software/tools, participant support) are the responsibility of the Program Operator? Relatedly, for required signature events (e.g., demo day, networking events), should offerors assume the Program Operator is responsible for all event production costs (e.g., AV, catering) or will AEDP cover any of these expenses?

Beyond AEDP's marketing/graphic design support and potential access to meeting space at 1940 Duke Street (subject to availability), proposers should generally assume responsibility for the direct costs associated with delivering the program, including mentors, speakers, investor engagement, events, software/tools, and participant support. AEDP may be able to assist with certain logistical elements, such as space or coordination, where feasible; however, proposers should include in their budgets any program delivery and event production costs necessary to implement their proposed approach. Final arrangements will be determined in coordination with the selected proposer.

12. Will AEDP provide the venue and catering costs for lectures and/or events, or will these costs be borne by the proposer?

AEDP anticipates supporting the program with access to local venues and may assist with certain event logistics, including space and catering, for key program activities where feasible. Proposers should include in their budgets any event-related costs they believe are necessary to successfully deliver the program. The final allocation of responsibilities and resources will be determined in coordination with the selected proposer.

Accelerator Participant Eligibility

Question

Answer

1. Do the companies need to be Virginia entities? Do founders need to reside in Virginia?

Startups are not required to be incorporated in Virginia, and founders are not required to reside in Virginia. However, participating companies will be expected to hold a valid and up-to-date Alexandria business license and demonstrate a meaningful connection or intention to operate in the City of Alexandria.

2. Do the companies need to be based in Alexandria? If not, does AEDP offer any incentive packages to non-Virginia based entities to participate in the accelerator? Do startup participants need to be residents of Alexandria with an Alexandria business license, or can they have only an Alexandria business license?

All businesses participating in the accelerator should have a valid and up-to-date Alexandria business license. On average it takes about two weeks for businesses to obtain an Alexandria business license. Founders are not required to reside in Alexandria. The state of incorporation is not determinative; for example, startups incorporated in Delaware but operating in Alexandria and holding an Alexandria business license would be considered eligible participants. AEDP does not currently offer incentive packages to companies to relocate or participate in the program.

3. Is there a definition of qualified startups (e.g., what is the stage or level of startups AEDP is looking to support? How does AEDP define an "Alexandria-based" business for purposes of cohort eligibility (e.g., headquarters location, principal place of business, registered address, employee count in Alexandria, or other criteria)?

AEDP anticipates supporting early-stage, high-growth startups in sectors aligned with the program focus, such as emerging technology, computer services, cybersecurity, and life sciences. For purposes of the program, an "Alexandria-based" company generally refers to a business that holds an Alexandria business license and demonstrates active business operations or engagement within the city.

4. Can AEDP clarify the meaning of the note that "this is not an accelerator for business attraction?" Does this statement mean that startups that are not currently Alexandria-based are not eligible to participate if they commit to relocating to Alexandria during the accelerator? Should offerors avoid promoting this opportunity to businesses outside the city?

The statement that the program is "not an accelerator for business attraction" reflects AEDP's intent that the program primarily support companies with a meaningful connection to Alexandria and contribute to the city's existing innovation ecosystem. Companies that are not currently Alexandria-based may still be eligible to participate, particularly if they demonstrate a clear intention to establish business operations in Alexandria and obtain an Alexandria business license. Recruitment efforts may extend beyond the city; however, proposals should prioritize companies that will contribute to Alexandria's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Based on the performance of this first accelerator, AEDP may consider funding future accelerator programs where the focus is on business attraction.

5. Does AEDP offer any funding for non-Virginia based business entities to help cover travel costs to Alexandria for the program and its events?

AEDP does not anticipate providing additional travel funding for participating startups or program contributors. Proposers should include in their proposed budgets any travel or related costs necessary to deliver the program, including costs associated with non-Virginia-based speakers, mentors, or subject matter experts.

6. How does AEDP define Alexandria-based startups (e.g., business address/paying taxes or employees there)? Does AEDP consider Delaware-incorporated startups that are based in Alexandria as potential participants?

See #2 and #3 above.

7. What stage of startup maturity is the accelerator intended to target (for example, idea-stage, pre-seed, seed-stage, early traction, or growth-stage companies), and are there minimum requirements related to revenue, product development, or funding that applicants must meet? Is the vendor free to use its own selection criteria or will AEDP play a role?

AEDP anticipates targeting early-stage, high-growth startups that are beyond the idea stage and demonstrate potential to scale. The RFP does not establish specific minimum requirements related to revenue, product development, or prior funding. Proposers may recommend appropriate selection criteria and screening processes as part of their proposed program design. AEDP expects to collaborate with the selected Program Operator in the final selection of cohort participants.

8. Does AEDP have a preference among the listed technology sectors such as robotics, aerospace, quantum, artificial intelligence, energy technology, computer services, cybersecurity, and defense? Does the accelerator need to include at least one company from each of these industries, or does any mix suffice?

AEDP does not require representation from each of the listed sectors. The industries referenced in the RFP are intended to illustrate the types of emerging and technology-oriented companies the program seeks to support. A mix of companies across relevant sectors is acceptable, and proposals are not limited to the industries specifically listed. Applicants should explain their rationale for which industries or startup stage to focus on for this cohort.

9. Can you provide more clarification on what aspects of the defense industry accelerator participants might focus on, such as drone technology?

The reference to the defense sector is intended to include companies developing technologies that may have applications in defense or national security, such as advanced computing, cybersecurity, autonomous systems, robotics, or related technologies. The RFP does not prescribe specific subsectors, and proposals may include companies working on technologies with potential defense or dual-use applications.

Recruitment Strategy

Question

1. Recruitment Strategy (Section 9, Item 4): This section requires a defined recruitment strategy targeting underrepresented founders with clear KPIs reflecting the City's demographics. To ensure our baseline metrics align perfectly with the City's equity objectives under the ALX Forward framework, does AEDP have a specific demographic dataset or preferred local community baseline they expect the Program Operator to utilize?

2. What level of involvement does AEDP expect in the recruitment, vetting, and selection of startup applicants, and will AEDP participate directly in evaluating finalists or rely primarily on recommendations from the program operator? What role will the program operator be expected to play in the identification, solicitation, vetting, and selection of the 15 startups?

Answer

AEDP does not require the use of a specific dataset or baseline for this section. Proposers may reference publicly available demographic data for the City of Alexandria or the broader regional entrepreneurial ecosystem when developing their recruitment strategy and related KPIs. AEDP is interested in approaches that demonstrate thoughtful outreach to underrepresented founders and alignment with the equity and inclusion goals outlined in the ALX Forward framework.

The selected Program Operator will be expected to play a primary role in identifying, recruiting, vetting, and recommending startups for participation in the program. AEDP anticipates collaborating with the Program Operator in the final review and selection of cohort participants to ensure alignment with program goals and priorities.

Budget

Question

1. What is the rough budget available?

Answer

The anticipated funding for this initiative is described in the RFP. As noted, AEDP anticipates a total budget of $200,000 for the design, implementation, and execution of this engagement. Proposers should assume this amount as the baseline budget when developing their proposals. AEDP may consider allocating additional funds if a proposer clearly demonstrates: strong anticipated return on investment; measurable business outcomes aligned with AEDP goals; and/or opportunities to leverage matching funds, sponsorships, or in-kind support.

2. The RFP indicates that AEDP may consider allocating additional funds if a proposer demonstrates opportunities to leverage matching funds, sponsorships, or in-kind support. Can the Program Operator secure third-party corporate sponsors (such as local banking, insurance, VC, or private investment firms) specifically to fund non-dilutive cash prizes for the concluding pitch competition? Furthermore, are there any municipal restrictions or conflict-of-interest guidelines regarding the types of corporate sponsors we can engage for this purpose?

AEDP is open to proposals that include leveraging third-party sponsorships, matching funds, or in-kind support to enhance program elements such as non-dilutive cash prizes for the concluding pitch competition. Proposers should clearly describe any anticipated sponsorship strategy and the role of sponsors in their proposal. Any sponsorship arrangements would be subject to AEDP approval and must comply with applicable City of Alexandria policies, conflict-of-interest standards, and procurement and ethics guidelines. Final details regarding sponsorship structure and eligible partners would be addressed during contract negotiations with the selected proposer.

3. Evaluation Criteria (Section 12): This section allocates 15% to Value & Cost Reasonableness, including a "clear distinction between operator fees and direct program costs." Does AEDP have a preferred or maximum ratio for operator/management fees versus direct program execution costs (e.g., events, marketing, founder resources) within the $200,000 base budget? Within the anticipated $200,000 total program budget, are there any expectations or guidelines regarding the proportion allocated to operator fees, program delivery costs, events, mentor engagement, or other direct program expenses?

AEDP has not established a specific ratio or maximum allocation for operator fees versus direct program costs. As noted in the RFP, proposers should clearly distinguish between operator/management fees and direct program execution costs in their proposed budget. AEDP will evaluate proposals based on overall value, cost reasonableness, and the extent to which the proposed budget supports effective program delivery within the available funding.

Measures of Success & Goals

Question

1. What does a successful accelerator look like? What are the KPIs for a successful accelerator?

Answer

AEDP anticipates that a successful accelerator will support the growth and scaling of participating startups while strengthening Alexandria's innovation ecosystem. Proposers are encouraged to identify the KPIs they believe best demonstrate program success. AEDP expects that these metrics may include, but are not limited to, measures such as application volume and quality, founder diversity, startup growth and survival, follow-on capital raised, job creation, and engagement with Alexandria's local business and investment community.

2. According to the RFP, the program operator will be expected to: design and deliver a business showcase, pitch competition, or other demonstration event that aligns with accelerator outcomes and ecosystem engagement goals." What are the ecosystem engagement goals?

AEDP's ecosystem engagement goals include strengthening connections among participating startups, mentors, investors, corporate partners, and other stakeholders in Alexandria's innovation ecosystem. AEDP is interested in program elements that increase visibility for participating companies, foster meaningful local relationships, and support longer-term engagement within the city's entrepreneurial community.

General Questions

Question	Answer
1. How much turnaround time does AEDP need to review proposed participants and make final decisions for accelerator participants?	AEDP anticipates working collaboratively with the selected Program Operator on cohort review and final participant selection. Proposers should include a reasonable review period in their proposed timeline to allow for AEDP input and final confirmation.
2. Post-Program Data Collection (Section 5): The RFP notes that AEDP will manage post-program surveys and data collection upon program completion. What is the expected duration and scope of the Program Operator's involvement in transitioning data and facilitating this handover following the December 31, 2026, completion date?	AEDP anticipates that the Program Operator will provide a reasonable transition period at the conclusion of the contract to transfer program records, participant information, and other relevant materials needed for AEDP's post-program follow-up and evaluation. The specific scope and timing of that handoff will be coordinated with the selected proposer.
3. Are you open to proposals with timelines that extend beyond December 31, 2026?	Proposers should base their submissions on the timeline set forth in the RFP. AEDP expects the program to be completed by December 31, 2026; any proposal to depart from this timeline should be accompanied by strong rationale.
4. Is this in partnership with Virginia Tech?	No. This RFP is being issued by AEDP. Virginia Tech is supportive of this program as a strategic partner in building the regional innovation ecosystem.
5. Does AEDP plan to provide access to existing local investor networks, ecosystem partners, and industry stakeholders that AEDP may have identified based on its diagnostic reports, or is the program operator expected to independently establish and manage these relationships?	AEDP expects the Program Operator to play a primary role in establishing and managing the relationships necessary to deliver the program. AEDP may, where appropriate, facilitate introductions to relevant local ecosystem partners, investors, and stakeholders; however, proposers should not assume that AEDP will independently provide or manage these relationships.

6. What specific expectations does AEDP have regarding investor engagement? Recognizing that the success of investor pitches ultimately reside in the founders and their decision to accept and implement (or not) the accelerator program and mentors' feedback, does AEDP require that some of the companies raise capital before the end of the program (if so, how many?), or does AEDP expect that the program is only responsible for facilitating introductions to investors by the end of the program via mentorship and the signature events?

AEDP expects the program to include meaningful investor engagement, such as mentorship, exposure, and opportunities for introductions through program activities and signature events. AEDP does not require that participating companies raise capital by the end of the program. Rather, the expectation is that the Program Operator will create a strong platform for investor readiness and connection.

7. An accelerator typically takes equity position in cohort participants. Is the accelerator operator allowed to take equity stakes in promising firms?

AEDP intends for this to be an equity-free accelerator program for participating startups. Any proposed arrangement involving equity or other financial interest in cohort companies should be clearly disclosed in the proposal and may be subject to review for consistency with program intent and applicable conflict-of-interest standards.

8. Does AEDP envision mentorship to be voluntary, compensated, or a combination?

AEDP is open to mentorship models that are voluntary, compensated, or a combination, depending on the proposer's approach. Proposals should clearly describe the mentorship structure and any associated costs.

9. The RFP appears to permit offerors to propose whatever contract pricing mechanism (e.g., cost-reimbursable, time-and-materials, firm-fixed-price) they consider reasonable for the work. Can AEDP confirm that this is the case, and that there is no preferred pricing mechanism for this work? Similarly, could AEDP share its payment terms? Will funding be advanced so that the contractor has working capital to execute the program?

Proposers may recommend a pricing structure they believe is appropriate for the proposed scope of work, provided the budget is clear, reasonable, and consistent with the RFP requirements. AEDP has not identified a preferred pricing mechanism in the RFP. Payment terms and invoicing structure will be finalized as part of contract negotiations with the selected proposer. Proposers should not assume that program funding will be advanced unless specifically agreed to in the final contract.

10. For references and testimonials, do you expect formal letters from clients/founders as part of the RFP response, or is a list of client/founder names/organizations and contact information acceptable?

A list of relevant client or founder references with organization names and contact information is acceptable. Proposers may include additional testimonials or supporting materials at their discretion.