

Summer of Intelligence Lunch 'n Learn Series

Grants and Funding

June 10th, 2025

Leigh Blancato, NC IDEA

Quick recap

This meeting was an information session about NC IDEA grants, presented by Lee Blancato from the NC IDEA grants team. Lee provided a comprehensive overview of both Micro and Seed grant programs, explaining eligibility requirements, application processes, and timelines for the fall grant cycle opening July 27th. She detailed the differences between Micro (\$10,000) and Seed (\$50,000) grants, noting that food and beverage companies must have specific revenue requirements to qualify, and outlined the competitive review process including interviews and programming components. Gwendolyn shared her experience as a grant recipient who used the funding for packaging, equipment, and expansion into retail stores, emphasizing the importance of having a clear plan for how the grant would unlock specific business opportunities. Lee also addressed common questions about reapplying after previous denials and provided detailed application tips, including advice about using AI tools appropriately while maintaining the applicant's voice in the application.

Next steps

Leigh

- Send the fall grant cycle resource page link and application templates to NC when available (by July 1).
- Email presentation slides to NC for distribution to attendees.
- Send out finalized fall grant cycle dates and information to NC and the group when available.

NC

- Distribute the meeting recording and slides to all registered attendees after the meeting.

- Include information about the fall grant cycle and resources in the upcoming newsletter (first week of July/August).

Collaboration

- All interested applicants: Submit applications for the NC IDEA Micro and Seed grants via the online portal between July 27 and August 24, ensuring submission a few days before the deadline.
- All interested applicants: Download and review the updated application templates when posted, and prepare applications accordingly.
- All interested applicants: Sign up for office hours with NC IDEA staff during August if specific application questions arise.

Summary

Fall Grant Cycle Information Session

The meeting began with introductions and technical preparations for Leigh's presentation, including testing screen sharing capabilities. Leigh announced this was the first of many information sessions leading up to the fall grant cycle starting in late July, with final dates being finalized that week. Leigh agreed to send NC the fall grant cycle webpage link by July 1 for inclusion in the monthly newsletter, and NC offered to monitor the chat box during the presentation to address any questions that might arise.

NCIDEA Grant Programs Overview

Lee Blancato from NCIDEA presented an overview of the organization's grant programs, focusing on Micro and Seed grants for entrepreneurs. She explained that Micro grants provide \$10,000 while Seed grants offer \$50,000, with both programs opening and closing twice yearly. Lee outlined eligibility requirements, including the need for North Carolina-based businesses with specific revenue thresholds for food and beverage companies, and emphasized that grants are non-dilutive and support companies on a path to scale to at least \$10 million in revenue.

Micro and Seed Grant Differences

Leigh explained the differences between micro and seed grants, noting that both focus on scaling but micro grants target earlier-stage companies with lower revenue while seed grants are for more established companies. She outlined specific requirements including revenue thresholds, founder commitment expectations, and programming components for each stage. Leigh also detailed common uses for the funding, including packaging

redesign, marketing campaigns, legal costs, and inventory bulk ordering, and confirmed that there are two grant cycles annually with specific award numbers for each stage.

NCIDEA Grant Experience Sharing

Gwendolyn shared her experience receiving a NCIDEA seed grant in 2021, explaining how the \$50,000 funding helped transform her business by purchasing essential equipment including a delivery van and blender, as well as investing in branding and packaging design. She emphasized the importance of having a clear story about how the funds would be used to enable business growth, maintaining strong financial tracking, and leveraging community networks for application support. Leigh confirmed that applicants can reapply for different grant levels, noting that 40-50% of applicants are re-applicants due to the competitive nature of the process.

Fall Grant Application Process

Leigh presented detailed information about the fall grant cycle timeline and application process for both micro and seed grants. She outlined key dates including application opening on July 27th and closing August 24th, with micro grants awarded in late October and seed grants in November. Leigh provided specific guidance on application best practices, emphasizing the importance of being clear and concise, incorporating personal voice rather than relying heavily on AI tools, and submitting early to avoid technical issues. The session concluded with a question about AI usage in applications, where Leigh clarified that while AI tools are permitted for assistance, applications must maintain personal business specifics and metrics rather than appearing solely written by AI.