



Translational Opportunity Program (TOP)

Tier 1 Award — Exploration (\$10,000)

Request for Applications

What is the TOP?

The Translational Opportunity Program (TOP) is the University of Oregon's internal funding program for researchers to advance their work that has real-world commercial potential.

Managed by the Industry, Innovation and Translation (IIT) team within the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, TOP connects UO innovators with funding, mentorship, and resources to move their ideas closer to the market.

TOP is not just for scientists and engineers. If you are a researcher in education, psychology, communications, the humanities, or any other field — and you have developed something that could be licensed, scaled, or built into a company — this program may be for you.

Examples of innovations that may be eligible include:

- STEM-based inventions and prototypes
- Educational curricula, assessments, or training programs
- Software tools, digital platforms, or data-driven methodologies
- Diagnostic or research tools
- Manufacturing processes with demonstrable commercial application

The TOP only funds projects with a compelling commercial opportunity. "Commercial" means there is an identifiable market of paying customers.

Tier 1 at a Glance

Award Amount	Up to \$10,000
Performance Period	Up to 6 months
Stage of Innovation	Early-stage (TRL 2+)
Review Cycle	Rolling



Is Tier 1 Right for You?

Tier 1 is designed for innovations at an early but promising stage — you have a concept grounded in your research, and there is early reason to believe it could solve a real problem for a real market. You do not need a finished product or a business plan. You need a well-defined question that funding can help you answer. That question can be either technical or commercial in nature.

Tier 1 is for innovations at [TRL 2](#) or above.

***What is TRL?** Technology Readiness Level (TRL) is a scale used to describe how developed an innovation is, from a basic concept (TRL 1) to a fully market-ready product (TRL 9). TRL 2 means you have moved beyond a raw idea — your research has identified a potential application, and there is a plausible path to making it real.*

In plain terms: You have done enough work to articulate what your innovation does, who it is for, and why it might be valuable — but you have not yet tested or validated it in a commercial context. That is exactly what Tier 1 funding is designed to help you do.

Ask yourself:

- Have I identified a specific problem my solution could solve — for a school, a company, a health system, or another paying customer?
- Is there a clear next step that would tell me whether this idea has commercial legs?
- Am I ready to engage seriously with the question of whether this could become a product, a licensing opportunity, or a company?

If yes, Tier 1 may be the right starting point.

What Tier 1 Funding is For

Tier 1 is structured around one goal: **answering your most critical early commercial question** within six months. That question might be technical ("Does this work reliably enough to be viable?") or commercial ("Is there a real market willing to pay for this?") — or both.

Allowable Costs (examples, not a complete list)

Technical development:

- Pilot studies or early proof-of-concept testing



- Prototype development — physical or digital
- Data generation to support commercially relevant intellectual property claims
- Data needed to build a competitive SBIR/STTR proposal

Commercial validation:

- Customer discovery interviews with potential end users, buyers, or partners
- Market sizing and competitive landscape analysis
- Regulatory or reimbursement pathway analysis
- Pitch development and coaching
- Engagement with a subject matter expert or industry consultant

Third-party services:

- When UO does not have the internal capability to execute specific work, it is acceptable to contract with an external service provider. First, consider the capabilities of UO's [research cores](#) before considering external service providers. IIT will connect awardees with UO Purchasing and Contracting Services (PCS) to ensure appropriate agreements are in place. Proposals involving third-party work must include a specific scope of work for that provider.

Personnel:

- Salary support for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, or non-faculty research staff directly working on the project during the Performance Period, limited to the Performance Period and proportionate to the amount of time working on the project funded under the TOP Award. Personnel who are inventors or authors on the project are eligible only if a Conflict of Interest management plan is in place prior to award.
 - *Note 1:* If hiring graduate employees, include only salary and OPE in your budget. OVPRI will contribute GE tuition, insurance, and fees at the College of Arts and Sciences rate. If your unit has higher rates, include the supplemental amount under "OTHER" in the budget template.
 - *Note 2:* The [R&R Budget template](#) used for your submission automatically calculates and auto-populates cells for GE tuition, fees, and insurance. Please work with your budget/grant administrator to ensure your budget only includes salary and Other Payroll Expenses for GEs.

What Tier 1 Does Not Fund (unallowable costs)

- Faculty salary
- Instructional release or course buyouts
- Basic, fundamental, or exploratory research without a clear commercial application



- Curriculum development or career development activities (as distinct from commercially licensable curriculum products)
- Dissertation research costs
- Capital equipment exceeding \$5,000
- Construction or facility renovation
- Overhead/indirect costs (general facilities and administration). Funding is internal, so these costs do not need to be budgeted.
- Patent expenses (IIT covers these for UO innovations)
- Option and license fees for access to UO intellectual property for a future startup
- Work on intellectual property already licensed or optioned to an external entity
- Development of innovations that are not UO intellectual property

A Note on Intellectual Property

All TOP Award proposals must be connected to UO intellectual property — but **"intellectual property" is broader than patents. In addition to patentable innovations, intellectual property includes:**

- **Copyrightable works** such as curricula, instructional materials, assessments, training programs, and software
- **Tangible results of research:** cell lines, antibodies, transgenic models, research tools, etc.

You do not need to have filed a patent, copyright, or trademark application to apply. You *do* need to have an innovation disclosure on file with IIT before submitting. If you have not yet filed a disclosure — or are not sure whether your work qualifies — IIT will help you determine that in your pre-application conversation (see Application Process below).

Not sure if your work counts? If you have developed a curriculum, assessment, framework, or tool that others would pay to use, license, or replicate — it may qualify. Reach out to IIT before you rule yourself out.

To begin the disclosure process: research.uoregon.edu/manage/innovation-impact/reporting-innovation

Eligibility

Who can apply:

- **UO Tenure-track faculty** — all tenure-track faculty are eligible
- **UO Research and career faculty** — eligible if they hold a full-time appointment (0.75+ FTE) with substantial research responsibilities, have been employed by UO for at least



one year at the time of application, and will hold a UO appointment during the performance period

- *A waiver of the one-year employment requirement may be requested based on circumstances, such as a technology already disclosed to IIT and under active management*
- **Students** — may not serve as the applicant but may be members of the research team

Additional eligibility requirements:

- Applicants must be committed to actively leading the proposed work during the performance period
- The innovation must be disclosed to IIT prior to submission
- Applicants proposing work that involves forming or coordinating with an outside company must have a current [Conflict of Interest/Conflict of Commitment disclosure](#) on file with OVPRI at the time of submission

Multiple awards: Applicants may receive more than one Tier 1 award for different aspects of the same project's commercialization. The cumulative maximum across all tiers for any single innovation is \$250,000.

What a Strong Tier 1 Application Looks Like

Reviewers evaluate using the following criteria:

- **A clear problem and a credible solution** — Who has this problem? Why does your innovation solve it better than what exists today? Significance of the problem and potential impact of the solution, including market size.
- **Evidence of commercial potential** — Is there a market? Are there paying customers? Have you talked to any?
- **A well-defined question** — What specific technical or commercial question will this funding help you answer and why is it relevant to commercial development?
- **Measurable, achievable milestones** — What will you accomplish in six months, and how will you know if you succeeded? What is the likelihood the proposed milestones will meaningfully de-risk the innovation?
- **A realistic budget and timeline** — Does the funding request match the scope of work? Is the timeline feasible?
- **Plans to leverage other resources** — what other programs or funding are you pursuing (internal or external)?

How Applications are Reviewed



Tier 1 applications are reviewed on a rolling basis by commercialization and innovation leaders within UO and IIT, and may include external reviewers (such as representatives from Launch Oregon or relevant subject matter experts) under a non-disclosure agreement.

IIT makes funding recommendations to the Vice President for Research and Innovation for final approval. All applicants receive feedback if their proposal is not selected.

Application Process

Step 1: Have a conversation with IIT. Before submitting, all applicants must meet with the [Associate Director of Commercialization](#). This conversation helps determine whether your innovation is a fit for TOP, which tier is appropriate, and how to frame your proposal most effectively. This is also the right time to start or confirm your innovation disclosure.

This step is not a barrier — it is a resource. IIT's role is to help you put forward the strongest possible application, which involves bringing a commercial perspective and working collaboratively with the applicant to determine the appropriate pathway. Sometimes, a program such as I-Corps or Lens of the Market is a required precursor to a proposal.

Step 2: Prepare your application materials.

- **Project Deck** — use the template in Appendix B
- **Project Budget** — use the template in Appendix C

Step 3: Submit via the online application form.

- Application Form: app.smartsheet.com/b/form/e8685aa9e5634a1cae74324ebd6f1d86
- Combine all proposal documents into a single PDF
- File naming convention: *[Last Name] FY2X Tier 1 TOP Award Application*
- Unit Head approval is routed automatically through the form

Step 4: Complete the [optional demographic survey](#).

- To advance the university's flourishing and belonging goals, this program particularly seeks applications from innovators who come from populations that are historically underrepresented in translational research.
- The application form includes a section to disclose demographic information aimed at assessing the success of our activities towards this goal. Response to these questions is entirely optional and is not considered in award decisions. This information will not be seen by the review committee but used by OVPRI leadership to ensure our internal granting programs are inclusive and equitable and serve diverse populations at UO. We welcome submission of this information from all PIs on the project.



What Happens After You Apply

- You will receive confirmation of receipt within five business days of submission
- The Associate Director of Commercialization will work with you collaboratively on any revisions needed before final review
- If funded, you will sign a Letter of Award outlining terms and conditions

Reporting Requirements for Awardees

TOP Award recipients are expected to remain engaged with IIT throughout and after the performance period:

- **Quarterly check-ins:** 30-minute progress meetings with the Associate Director of Commercialization every three months during the performance period
- **Final report:** Due within one month of the end of the performance period
- **Post-award surveys:** Short progress surveys every six months for three years, tracking commercialization milestones, subsequent funding, and outcomes

Awardees must acknowledge TOP Award support in publications, press releases, and other communications. Template language will be provided in the Letter of Award. Awardees are also expected to contribute to IIT's efforts to communicate program impact more broadly.

Sustainability of Program

TOP Awards are considered a cost to be deducted from gross royalty income received by the University. As such, the cost of TOP Awards will be recouped from licensing income resulting from an innovation before distribution of funds to the inventors/authors and the university. These recouped costs fund subsequent TOP Awards.

Mechanism for Distributing TOP Award Funds

See Appendix A for the sample Letter of Award and its associated terms and conditions. For each TOP Award, an “index” (aka account) will be created and access will be granted to the awardee’s department administrator. Funds are to be used for allowable expenditures as outlined in the approved budget proposal. Aligning with the goal of rapid acceleration of discoveries towards the market, TOP Award funds expire at the end of the Performance Period as outlined by a Letter of Award that will be signed by the awardee. All encumbrances must be cleared within 60 days of the Performance Period, after which the remaining funds will be swept.

Fiscal regulations governing the expenditure of UO and State funds must be observed, and all purchases must be made using University and State guidelines. More information and



assistance are available at <https://pcs.uoregon.edu/uo-department-information> or from your departmental accounting contact.

Letters of Award may include conditions requiring participation in specific programs (e.g. Lens of the Market, I-Corps) prior to funding or contemporaneous to the Performance Period.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Do I need a patent to apply? No. You need an innovation disclosure in development or on file with IIT — not a filed patent, copyright, or trademark. IIT will help you determine what type of IP protection may be appropriate for your innovation.

I'm not a scientist. Is this program really for me? Yes — if your research or scholarly activity has produced something with commercial potential. Curricula, assessments, training programs, methodologies, and software are all eligible innovations. If you are not sure, reach out to IIT before ruling yourself out.

What if I'm not sure my idea is ready? That is exactly what the pre-application conversation with IIT is for. You do not need to have everything figured out before reaching out.

What if my project takes longer than six months? The six-month performance period is a firm parameter for Tier 1. If your project requires more time or funding, Tier 2 may be a better fit — something IIT can help you assess.

Can I apply for Tier 1 more than once? Yes. You may receive more than one Tier 1 award for different aspects of the same project's commercialization effort, subject to the \$250,000 cumulative cap across all tiers.

How will I be notified about funding decisions? You will be notified at your UO email with any decisions or questions.

How can I find resources to help me prepare my application? Reach out to the IIT team, who can advise on composing a meritorious proposal, guide you towards which tier of funding is appropriate, and point you to resources to address commercial components of the application.

Can I use AI tools to help write my application? AI tools can be a useful resource throughout the application process – for gathering and synthesizing market research, identifying potential competitors or customers, analyzing industry trends, estimating market size, refining your value proposition, and drafting or editing proposal content.



Applicants are encouraged to indicate the extent to which, if any, generative AI technology was used and how it was used to develop their proposal.

Regardless of tools used, the ideas, evidence, and commercial rationale in your application must authentically represent your own work and thinking — reviewers will be looking for that depth of understanding in any follow-up conversations. [Applicants should refer to UO Guidelines related to AI](#) for additional guidance.

Does IIT use AI to evaluate my proposal? Yes, as part of our review process, IIT uses AI tools to support assessment of the commercial potential of proposed innovations — including market sizing, competitive landscape analysis, and commercial readiness. AI tools may also be used to gather and synthesize publicly available research and industry data relevant to your innovation.

IIT takes the privacy and confidentiality of applicant information seriously. Where confidential or sensitive information is involved, IIT uses only UO-approved tools with appropriate data protections in place. Applicants can refer to [UO's Guidance on Data Protections in Copilot](#).

AI-assisted analysis informs but does not replace human judgment. All funding recommendations are made by IIT reviewers and funding decisions are made by the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

Contact

Please read this solicitation in full before reaching out. Questions not addressed here can be directed to:

Drew Worden, Associate Director of Commercialization wordend@uoregon.edu



Appendix A
Sample Letter of Award



Appendix B

Project Deck Template (PowerPoint)