

2024 MIRTA Accelerator Program

Request for Applications

The University of Maine Office of Strategic Partnerships, Innovation, Resources, and Engagement (SPIRE) is excited to announce the 2024 MIRTA Program. This initiative aims to accelerate University of Maine System research projects from the applied research and development stage to a viable commercialization pathway. Commercialization is broadly defined as the development of new marketable products or services, process improvements, creative works, social innovations, curricula, or programs with the potential to generate revenue.

Program Overview

- **Duration:** **August 6, 2024 - November 22, 2024**
- **Funding:** Selected teams may receive up to \$25,000 to be applied toward the goal of developing a commercialization implementation plan.

Eligibility Criteria

- Teams must comprise at least two members with a maximum of four members per team. Single-member teams are not allowed to participate.
- At least one key team member has been identified to dedicate approximately 20 hours per week to program activities designed to accelerate commercialization of the funded project.
- One team member must be faculty or staff from any UMS campus. Additional team members might include undergraduate or graduate students, other faculty or staff, or industry collaborators.
- Preference will be given to those who have participated in the I-Corps program. Teams not in the I-Corps portfolio can apply if they present a compelling commercialization opportunity.
- All projects to be considered must be tied to Maine businesses or to industries that provide opportunities for the future of Maine.
- **Full participation in all program sessions is mandatory.** All team members are required to attend all learning sessions and weekly coaching sessions. Teams with incomplete participation will not receive funding through the program.

Application Timeline

- **Application Deadline:** July 3, 2024
- **Interviews:** Week of July 8, 2024
- **Cohort Announcement:** Week of July 22, 2022

What is MIRT?

MIRT is an intensive accelerator program that guides participants through market analysis, intellectual property analysis, and business model development. The end goal is to develop a commercialization plan for bringing the research to market, which could include starting a company, licensing to an existing company, generating revenue through direct user engagement, or forming an extended research collaboration with an industry partner. Through weekly coaching sessions with SPIRE staff, teams determine how to position and develop their research for commercialization success. Specific activities include:

- **Market Analysis:** Identifying market opportunities within specific customer segments and clearly defining the value being created for each segment.
- **Prototype Development:** Designing a minimally viable version of the product or service to clearly communicate the value being provided to the potential customer.
- **Technology Evaluation:** Understanding intellectual property rights and commercial viability.
- **Commercialization Pathway Development:** Creating viable business models and commercialization strategies.

Core Activities

- **Commercialization Bootcamp:** An intensive initial training covering key topics like customer discovery, intellectual property, prototyping, minimum viable product, and more.
- **Weekly Coaching Sessions:** Structured sessions to help teams position and develop their research for commercialization success.
- **Monthly Learning Sessions:** Detailed discussions on topics such as market channels, prototyping, funding, and team roles.
- **External Advisory Group:** Each team will be supported by an external advisory group of industry and technology experts to provide feedback and advice on the team's weekly learning activities and the ultimate commercialization strategy.

Additional Support and Resources

- **Access to Mentors and Industry Experts:** Personalized guidance and advice.
- **Conference/Training Registrations:** Opportunities to network with potential customers and industry leaders.
- **Assistance from Interns and Program Staff:** Additional support for project-specific needs.
- **Future Funding Analysis and Grant Writing:** Strategies to secure additional funding.

Funding & Budget

Each accelerator team is eligible for up to \$25,000 to be used toward the goal of developing a commercialization implementation plan. Funds may be used for:

- Customer discovery
- Travel to partner/customer sites
- Market research
- Patentability assessment
- Participation in conferences
- Prototype development
- Team staffing such as a course buy-out, graduate student stipend and/or staff/technician release time.

A detailed budget is not required at the time of application. The funding provided through MIRTHA will be based on achieving milestones and will be used to leverage additional funding. A funding plan will be developed with each team and reevaluated by program staff as part of the team's weekly learning cycles.

This program is funded by the **University of Maine System's Research Reinvestment Fund (RRF)** and the [Maine Technology Institute](#).

Program Calendar

- **Application Deadline:** July 3, 2024
- **Interviews:** Week of July 8, 2024
- **Cohort Announcement:** Week of July 22, 2022
- **Kickoff Workshop:** August 6-8, 2024, in-person, 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.
- **Monthly Learning Sessions:** TBA
- **Weekly Coaching Sessions:** TBA
- **Demo Day:** Week of November 18, 2024 (TBA)

Application Instructions

Submit application materials to Anthony Durante at Anthony.Durante@maine.edu by 5:00 p.m. on July 3, 2024. Please write the application in a way that can be easily understood by a general audience. *The application should be written based upon the work completed to date and current project status.* Conversations with program staff prior to submission are highly encouraged.

The main body of the white paper, sections 1-5, is limited to two pages, single-spaced, using Aptos, Calibri, or Arial fonts, 12-point font, and 1" margins. The following sections are required and should be labeled with subheadings:

1. **Project Title**
2. **Team Composition:** *Who is on the team (name, title, contact information, etc.)?* Identify the lead faculty/staff person, associated faculty/staff, additional team members, and external partners. Identify the team member who will commit 20 hours per week to program activities designed to accelerate commercialization of the project. Note: A detailed breakout of team time commitments will be included later (see #9).
3. **Problem and Proposed Solution:** *What is the problem/need that exists in the world today and how does your product or service solve that problem or fulfill that need?* Succinctly describe your technology, product, or service, and how it improves upon current solutions on the market.
4. **Market Opportunity Snapshot:** *How big is the problem you're solving and does anyone care? What is the economic benefit that your proposed solution provides to the customer?* Describe the potential customer(s) for your proposed solution and provide clear evidence of the market opportunity. Applications may include a preliminary market analysis and potential barriers to success (i.e., size of the market, current competition, customer purchasing habits/processes, legal/regulatory requirements, etc.).
5. **Project Status:** *How well developed is your potential product or service? What needs to be done to get the product/service ready for a pilot installation or purchase?* Provide the current project status and updates from prior reporting, including product and/or service maturity level (e.g., early stage, benchtop level, prototype level, etc.). Describe in no more than a few sentences the evidence you have that the solution is technically feasible. Discuss commercialization activities accomplished to date, including IP development, identification of industry partners, third-party/business agreements, new business startup, customer interactions, market research, prototype development, identification and/or award of follow-on funding to support future work (e.g. SBIR/STTR, MTI, venture capital, external grants, etc.).
6. **Relevance to Maine:** Describe how this project will provide economic benefits to the state, such as business formation, job creation, IP generation, and increased revenue.

Additional Sections (not counted towards the two-page limit)

7. **Bibliography:** Only include references cited in the text.
8. **Biographical Sketches:** Two-page biographical sketches for the PI and Co-Investigators, detailing professional positions, educational background, select grant proposals, and key publications or presentations from the last five years. Include previously RRF-funded projects.
9. **Letters of Support (optional):** Up to three letters supporting the project's market need, team, milestones, and economic benefits to Maine.
10. **Time Commitment:** Detailed contributions of hours by team members toward the MIRTA program. At least one key individual should commit at least 20 hours per week to program activities

Application Review & Selection

Application review and team selection decisions for the 2024 MIRT Program will be made by the University of Maine Office of Strategic Partnerships, Innovation, Resources, and Engagement (SPIRE) with input from additional faculty and staff reviewers, who will consider the merits of the proposed efforts, the impact of the work related to measurable outcomes associated with Maine-based research, development, and commercialization, and the overall balance of the portfolio of projects.

Prior to final selections, each applying team will participate in a 30-minute interview to allow the MIRT program staff to meet the team, ask clarifying questions regarding the application, and review accelerator requirements with the team members.

Contact Information

Questions about the MIRT Accelerator Program can be directed to Anthony Durante at Anthony.Durante@maine.edu. The deadline for proposals is 5:00 p.m. on June 28, 2024.

2024 MIRT Application Evaluation Criteria

Poor (1)	Good (2)	Very Good (3)	Excellent (4)	Overall
Commercialization Potential				
There is no clear evidence the team understands the potential customers, markets, and competition; market opportunity is not significant; there is no competitive advantage over current solutions; project commercial outputs as described are not compelling.	Some evidence the team understands the potential customers, markets, and competition; some market opportunity exists; some competitive advantage over current solutions demonstrated; project commercial outputs are described.	Evidence the team understands the potential customers, markets, and competition; good market opportunity exists; good competitive advantage over current solutions demonstrated; project commercial outputs as described are compelling.	Clear evidence the team understands the potential customers, markets, and competition; market opportunity is significant; clear competitive advantage over current solutions demonstrated; project commercial outputs as described are very compelling.	
Relevance to Maine's Economy				
There is no clear link between the proposed activities and Maine's economy; low likelihood of job creation, technology commercialization, licensing opportunities, economic impact, etc.	Proposed activities are somewhat linked to Maine's economy; moderate likelihood of job creation, technology commercialization, licensing opportunities, economic impact, etc.	Proposed activities well linked to Maine's economy; high likelihood of job creation, technology commercialization, licensing opportunities, economic impact, etc.	Proposed activities intimately linked to Maine's economy; very high likelihood of job creation, technology commercialization, licensing opportunities, economic impact, etc.	
Team Commitment				
At least one team member has committed to 20 hours per week for participation; no complimentary skill sets within the team and no previous experience working together.	At least one team member has committed to 20 hours per week for participation; minimal complimentary skill sets within the team and little previous experience working together.	At least one team member has committed to 20 hours per week for participation; Some complimentary skill sets within the team and some previous experience working together.	More than one team member has committed to 20 hours per week for participation; evident complimentary skill sets within the team and significant previous experience working together.	
External Partnerships				
Proposal has no evidence of collaboration with external/industry partners; collaborations are not clearly linked to the proposed activities; roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined.	Proposal has some evidence of collaboration with external/industry partners; collaborations are linked to the proposed activities; roles and responsibilities are somewhat defined.	Proposal has evidence of interest from external/industry partners to collaborate; collaborations are well linked to the proposed activities; roles and responsibilities are defined.	Proposal has strong evidence of collaboration with external/industrial partners; collaborations are clearly linked to the proposed activities; roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.	
Likelihood of Additional Funding				
Commercialization activities are unlikely to lead to external funding.	Commercialization activities are somewhat likely to lead to external funding; targets lacking.	Commercialization activities are likely to lead to external funding; targets given.	Commercialization activities are highly likely to lead to external funding; specific targets given.	

2024 MIRTA Accelerator Program

Tentative Kickoff Workshop Schedule

Day 1 – August 6, 2024

8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Arrival / Breakfast / Networking
9:00 AM - 9:30 AM	Introduction to MIRTA
9:30 AM - 10:00 AM	Team Introduction Slide Ver. 1.0
10:00 AM - 10:15 AM	BREAK
10:15 AM - 11:15 AM	Commercialization Canvas
11:15 AM - 11:45 AM	PDSA Cycles
11:45 AM - 12:15 PM	LUNCH
12:15 PM - 12:45 PM	Customer Discovery
12:45 PM - 2:15 PM	<i>Exercise: Market Segmentation</i>
2:15 PM - 2:30 PM	BREAK
2:30 PM - 3:15 PM	<i>Exercise: Yellow Card</i>
3:15 PM - 3:45 PM	<i>Exercise: Customer Discovery Design</i>
3:45 PM - 5:15 PM	<i>Exercise: Initial Interviews (2)</i>
5:15 PM - 6:45 PM	Working Dinner - Prep Team Intro Slide Ver. 2.0
6:45 PM - 7:00 PM	DAY 1 Wrap-up

Day 2 – August 7, 2024

8:30 AM - 9:15 AM	Working Breakfast - Present Update Team Intro Slide Ver. 2.0
9:15 AM - 9:45 AM	Scientist to Entrepreneur
9:45 AM - 10:15 AM	How to Determine Market Size
10:15 AM - 10:45 AM	<i>Exercise: Market Sizing the Beachhead Market</i>
10:45 AM - 11:00 AM	BREAK
11:00 AM - 11:30 AM	Competitor Analysis
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Working Lunch - Exercise: Competitor Matrix
12:30 PM - 1:15 PM	Present Competitor Matrix
1:15 PM - 1:45 PM	Why prototype?
1:45 PM - 2:15 PM	MVP Design
2:15 PM - 3:15 PM	<i>Exercise: Designing the MVP</i>
3:15 PM - 3:45 PM	Working with key partners
3:45 PM - 4:15 PM	<i>Exercise: Roadmap</i>
4:15 PM - 5:00 PM	Present Roadmap
5:00 PM - 5:15 PM	DAY 2 Wrap-up
HOMEWORK	Prep Team Intro Slide Ver. 3.0

Day 3 – August 8, 2024

8:30 AM - 9:15 AM	Working Breakfast - Present Update Team Intro Slide 3.0
9:15 AM - 11:15 AM	Building an Effective & Engaged Team
11:15 AM - 11:30 AM	BREAK
11:30 AM - 12:00 PM	Conflict of Interest
12:00 PM - 12:15 PM	Start-up Checklist
12:15 PM - 12:45 PM	Intellectual property
12:45 PM - 1:15 PM	LUNCH
1:15 PM - 2:45 PM	Funding Sources – MTI / SBIR / STTR / Angel & Venture Capital
2:45 PM - 3:00 PM	BREAK
3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	VIRAL Levels & Self-Assessment
4:00 PM - 4:30 PM	Developing a One-Pager
4:30 PM - 5:00 PM	Next Steps & Wrap-up
5:00 PM	DONE!