



## SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

### Scaling Critical Suppliers in Domestic Supply Chains

**AGENCY:** U.S. Small Business Administration

**ACTION:** Request for information.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) requests public input to inform the design of near-term initiatives intended to strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity for critical components, subcomponents, materials, tooling, and specialized capabilities essential to economic resilience and national security. This request focuses on identifying opportunities to rapidly scale existing domestic supplier capacity in areas characterized by supply chain constraints or choke points. SBA is particularly interested in gaps where qualifying domestic small businesses have a demonstrated operating history but are unable to reach a specific near-term milestone due to a capital shortfall. Information received in response to this Request for information (RFI) will inform the development of SBA innovation programs and initiatives, including potential prize competitions designed to deliver measurable increases in production capacity, supplier participation, and supply chain resilience within a compressed execution window.

**DATES:** Submit comments on or before [INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

**ADDRESSES:** You may send comments, identified by subject line “RFI Response: Strengthening Domestic Supply Chains and Critical Supplier Competition” to [investinnovate@sba.gov](mailto:investinnovate@sba.gov).

*Instructions:* Please include the subject line, “RFI Response: Strengthening Domestic Supply Chains and Critical Supplier Competition”. Your response should include a cover sheet with the following:

- Individual or Organization Name
- (If applicable) Organization/Individual Point of Contact
- (If applicable) Organization UEI

Comments are strictly voluntary.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** Rikki Jones, Program Analyst, Office of Investment and Innovation, U.S. Small Business Administration, [investinnovate@sba.gov](mailto:investinnovate@sba.gov), 202-205-6156. This phone number may also be reached by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have speech disabilities, through the Federal Communications Commission's TTY-Based Telecommunications Relay Service Teletype service at 711.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**I. Background**

SBA administers programs to support small business development, access to capital, and innovation pursuant to the Small Business Act, as amended (15 U.S.C. 631, et seq.), the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, as amended (15 U.S.C. 662, et seq.), and the America COMPETES Act, as amended (15 U.S.C. 3719), including:

- 15 U.S.C. 634(b) (General Powers of the Administrator);
- 15 U.S.C. 662-697g (Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) program);
- 15 U.S.C. 638 (Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs); and
- 15 U.S.C. 3719 (prize competitions).

SBA's investment and innovation programs are implemented in part through regulations at 13 CFR Parts 107 and 121, as well as through sub-regulatory guidance, including Standard Operating Procedures and program notices. The Office of Investment and Innovation (OII) administers SBA's Innovation Network Programs, including the Growth Accelerator Fund Competition, the Regional Innovation Cluster Program, and the Federal and State Technology Partnership Program. These programs support the development of regional and sector-based networks that help small businesses and technology firms scale.

Consistent with SBA's statutory authorities, SBA is seeking input to inform the design of future initiatives, including potential prize competitions authorized under the America COMPETES Act, 15. U.S.C. 3719.

## **II. Purpose and Scope**

SBA seeks input on how to most effectively accelerate the immediate scaling of existing domestic small business suppliers and proven solution providers that support expanded production capacity, and address supply chain choke points through the achievement of measurable near-term milestones.

SBA is also interested in understanding how targeted actions described in this RFI can improve supplier coordination and participation across industries and through vertical integration, particularly where such improvements would enable rapid expansion of domestic production by small business participants in the U.S. industrial base.

## **III. Key Areas of Interest**

This RFI focuses on the following key areas:

- Supply chain gaps where an infusion of capital could measurably scale production capacity or rapidly implement a new technology solution that supports this scaled production;
- Identification of suppliers and solution providers that are ready to execute a near-term milestone (approximately 1-3 months);
- The required incremental capital investment to achieve the stated near-term milestone, including description of the full capital stack required that could include a combination of federal funding and expected non-federal cost share (equity, debt and cashflow from operations, etc.); and
- Non-capital related support and actions that could mitigate execution risk and deliver measurable, near-term improvements in output, cost, lead time, and domestic small business supplier participation.

## **IV. Information Requested**

SBA invites responses from entrepreneurs, small and large businesses, suppliers, manufacturers, entrepreneur support organizations, investors, and other industry stakeholders. Respondents are encouraged to provide concise, operational, and time-bound responses, include quantitative estimates and near-term projections, and identify assumptions and execution risks.

1. **Supply Chain Gaps and Choke Points.** What supply chain gaps or choke points and/or applicable solutions relating to manufacturing and/or production processes most constrain domestic production or U.S. economic resilience?

a. Respondents may address:

- i. Industry, sector, or application (including defense, commercial or dual-use relevance);
- ii. The subject component, material, or solution and its position and/or impact in the supply chain or;
- iii. An assessment or quantification of the impact of such supply chain gap or lacking solution on cost, lead time, or dependency;
- iv. Whether the constraint is driven by insufficient production capacity, outdated production processes or increased cost or lack of supply of upstream components;
- v. Any single points of failure or highly concentrated supply segments that could be effectively addressed by U.S. small businesses; and
- vi. Whether such domestic firms could achieve a near-term milestone (1-3 months) with targeted support (financial and non-financial).

2. **Supplier Readiness to Scale.** What suppliers and/or solution providers are currently positioned in the near term to scale, address a vital supply chain choke point, or facilitate advanced and more efficient production processes?

a. Respondents may address:

- i. Evidence of existing production capability and/or tested or proven solutions;
- ii. Current utilization and surge capacity, as applicable;
- iii. Customer demand, contracts, or near-term pipeline; and
- iv. Ability to address supply chain chokepoint or implement solution(s) within a compressed timeframe (1-3 months).

3. **Constraints to Near-Term Scaling.** What factors are preventing capable suppliers and solution providers from expanding production in the near-term?

a. Respondents may address:

- i. Capital requirements (equipment, materials, working capital);
- ii. Workforce availability and training;
- iii. Certification or qualification requirements for both commercial and government contracts;
- iv. Demand uncertainty;
- v. Infrastructure or equipment limitations;
- vi. Price fluctuations and availability of upstream inputs; and
- vii. Other risks that could adversely affect near-term execution.

4. **Effective Interventions for Rapid Scaling.** What types of actions most effectively enable rapid near-term supplier scaling?

a. Respondents may address:

- i. Financial support mechanisms that can be deployed quickly;
- ii. Demand commitments or procurement alignment;
- iii. Technical assistance or validation support;
- iv. Innovations and solutions that facilitate near-term growth and/or efficiencies;
- v. Partnerships or coordinated actions; and

- vi. Role of service providers or intermediaries in removing bottleneck.
5. **Investment, Milestones, and Expected Outcomes.** What level of capital infusion would be required to achieve measurable increases in production capacity within a short timeframe?
- a. Respondents may address:
    - i. Estimated level of funding required;
    - ii. Expected non-federal cost share or private investment;
    - iii. Specific milestones achievable within 1-3 months;
    - iv. Anticipated increases in output and throughput; and
    - v. Expected improvements in cost, lead time, or supplier participation.
6. **Data and Measurement.** What data sources and metrics should SBA use to assess impact?
- a. Respondents may address:
    - i. Methods for estimating current and near-term production capacity growth;
    - ii. Metrics for tracking short-term output increases;
    - iii. Indicators of reduced lead times, or cost performance;
    - iv. Metrics for measuring a specific supply chain's resilience or vulnerability;  
and
    - v. Metrics or indicators relating to improving national or economic security  
through the implementation of the applicable solution or scaled production.

## **V. Potential Program Design Considerations**

SBA is considering approaches that may include:

- Direct support to small businesses to scale production capacity and/or implement solutions that serve supply chain resiliency;
- Support to entities that enable supplier scaling by addressing bottlenecks;
- Milestone-based funding structures tied to measurable, near-term outcomes;

- Requirements for demonstrated production capability and/or solution implementation and readiness to execute; and
- Consideration of creditworthiness, sources of capital (other than the government), ability to deploy funds rapidly, likelihood of achievement of stated milestones (execution risk), management team qualifications and track record demonstrating success, overall impact applicable to an award of incremental capital towards economic and national security priorities.

This section is provided to inform responses and does not represent final program design.

## **VI. Use of Information**

Responses to this RFI will inform the development of SBA initiatives, including SBA's Innovation Network Programs and potential prize competitions designed to deliver rapid, measurable increases in domestic production capacity through solutions that improve efficiencies and through scale and strengthened resiliency with respect to critical supply chains.

## **VII. Disclaimer**

No reimbursement will be made for any costs associated with providing information in response to this RFI or any follow-up information requests. Moreover, any and all information shared in response to this RFI is protected by SBA's deliberative process and will not be associated with any single entity, person, and/or organization.

## **VIII. Authority**

This request is issued pursuant to:

- 15 U.S.C. 631 et seq. (Small Business Act);
- 15 U.S.C. 634(b) (General Powers of the Administrator);
- 15 U.S.C. 662-697g (Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) program);
- 15 U.S.C. 638 (Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs);
- 15 U.S.C. 3719 (Prize Competitions); and

- Implementing regulations at 13 CFR Parts 107 and 121 and related authorities.

**Joshua Carter,**

*Associate Administrator for the Office of Investment and Innovation.*

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