

Testimony
Senate Appropriations Committee
Senator Ray Holmberg, Chairman

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Tyler Demars and I am the Program Director for the IDEA Center at CTB – one of four ND Certified Entrepreneurial Centers. The IDEA Center is located right here in Bismarck-Mandan and supports entrepreneurs across our state, focusing on Central and Western ND.

I am here speaking in support of funding Entrepreneurship Program Grant initiatives, specifically related to the Innovate ND program.

Entrepreneur Grants through Innovate ND is a high impact program with goals of diversifying ND's economy through entrepreneurship and innovation. The program has a strong track record of being successful, creating jobs and new revenue for ND, while supporting new ideas, innovation, and scale-able business startups.

Each of the four Certified Entrepreneurial Centers (located in Bismarck, Grand Forks, Fargo, and Jamestown) provide technical assistance to Innovate ND Clients and Program Grant Recipients all while carving out specific niches to remove chances of duplicative services which in turn promotes collaboration amongst the centers. Additionally, Innovate ND provides grant funding to entrepreneurs supporting prototyping, technology development, marketing strategy development, and intellectual property protection.

In our center at CTB we have 30 clients currently enrolled and have supported 60 Innovate ND clients in the current biennium. The entrepreneurs that we've assisted and surveyed over the past 2 years report that they have generated 52 FTE jobs and generated gross revenues totaling more than \$9 Million dollars. Again, these results are from our center alone and do not include results from the good work being done by our counterpart entrepreneurial centers and their clients in Grand Forks, Fargo, and Jamestown.

The funding support we receive through Innovate ND allows us to drive value beyond the work of our Innovate ND clients. Our team at CTB operates a full-service entrepreneurship center supported by a large referral resource partner network to minimize any duplicative services.

Our services include:

- Business advising available to all entrepreneurs and small business owners as they develop from idea stage to commercialization including coaching related to prototyping, market research, protecting intellectual property, operations planning, financial management, operational assistance, and access to capital.

- A full incubation space that allows new entrepreneurs affordable office space and professional amenities
- Conference room rental space for trainings, meetings, co-working spaces, and other business development activities
- Collaboration within our resource partner network to grow a thriving and supportive startup ecosystem primarily as lead organizers of 1 Million Cups Bismarck & Mandan and TEDx Bismarck. This ecosystem development work allows us to maintain a large, diverse network of mentors and experienced professional service providers that we leverage in support of our clients. We pride ourselves on helping our clients develop the supportive relationships and network needed to give them the best chance of success.

Some comments from entrepreneurs we've assisted through the InnovateND program:

"I can say confidently that I would not be where I am today with two successful entrepreneurial ventures, without the support from the Innovate ND program, and the leadership found at the IDEA Center."

"Innovate ND and the IDEA Center have been critical in providing my entrepreneurial vision with the support and guidance needed to build it into... the emergent and profitable business it is today".

"With support from the IDEA Center and InnovateND, our business has grown and been accelerated through some of the most vulnerable stages in a startup's life cycle."

"The entrepreneurial centers lower barriers to starting a business for people without entrepreneurial experience."

"The centers provide an important space where ideas can be explored and grown"

"The centers support success stories and entrepreneurial ambassadors which are critical to a strong startup ecosystem."

In closing, Entrepreneur Grants for InnovateND and Entrepreneurship Centers is one of the most successful Commerce programs and most importantly it impacts more entrepreneurs (emerging employers) than any other program. Thank you for your time and consideration to continue stable funding for Entrepreneur Grants and the Entrepreneurship Centers that provide the assistance.

I am happy to answer any questions you have.