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Date: 5/6/2014 5:24:31 PM
Subject: ED LS: DOC awards \$2.4 million in Innovation Grants

Commerce awards \$2.4 million in innovation grants

May62014

14 organizations to receive support toward efforts fostering high-tech and entrepreneurial endeavors

COLUMBIA, S.C. - In its inaugural round of innovation-related grants, the South Carolina Department of Commerce is awarding \$2.4 million in grant funds to 14 organizations across the state to further high-tech and entrepreneurial economic development.

As part of its efforts to support and grow an innovative, technology-based and entrepreneurial business environment, the Department of Commerce launched the state's first Office of Innovation in the fall of 2013. In January, the Department of Commerce issued a notice of funding opportunity, dubbed the South Carolina Innovation Challenge, soliciting proposals for projects that focus on fostering technology-based economic development, entrepreneurship and innovation in South Carolina communities through university collaboration, local government participation or public-private partnerships. Projects were required to address one or more goals of the [South Carolina Innovation Plan](#).

Proposals totaling more than \$6.8 million in requests from cities, county offices, chambers of commerce, universities and startup incubators and accelerators were submitted for \$2.5 million in available first-round funds. A project could be awarded a maximum of \$250,000 in grant funds, with a required non-state match of funds. A second round of competitive grant funds likely will be announced later this year.

"I'm excited to see the energy and impact that South Carolina's startup community has created, and we hope to help continue that momentum through this new program," said Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt. "The knowledge economy represents a vital part of South Carolina's present and future. Through the Office of Innovation, we want to create a business environment in South Carolina that is ideal to start and build a high-growth company."

Projects at 14 organizations in Anderson, Beaufort, Charleston, Darlington, Florence, Greenville, Horry, Pickens, Richland, Spartanburg and York counties were selected to receive funding. These diverse projects focus on IT training, entrepreneur support, fostering startup companies and agribusiness:

- **Charleston Digital Corridor Foundation, Charleston - CODEcamp - \$247,000**

CODEcamp is a software education initiative focused on developing new talent and providing students with the skills they need - including hands-on training, mentorship and networking- to enter the workplace and develop high-tech software skills.

- **College of Charleston, Charleston - I-CAT - \$250,000**

I-CAT - the International Cross-Curricular Accelerator for Technology - a technological accelerator that provides students a unique opportunity to develop their business, computing and entrepreneurial skills leading to business creation and placement in emerging technology businesses within South Carolina.

- **Don Ryan Center for Innovation, Bluffton - \$100,000**

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI) is a hybrid internet-consultant program designed to support new high-tech/high-impact and high-innovation company formation and development in the Greater Bluffton region.

- **Duke Energy Center for Innovation, Hartsville - Phase II - \$100,000**

The Duke Energy Center for Innovation is expanding community and market impact through the creation of new and innovative programs targeted at building the knowledge network through regional business and educational partnerships in Hartsville and the surrounding area.

- **Faber Entrepreneurship Center, Columbia - High-Impact Consortium - \$75,000**

This project will develop a self-funded consortium managed by South Carolina Chamber of Commerce to help

scale up high-impact firms in the state of South Carolina.

- **Grand Strand Technology Council, Myrtle Beach - Grand Strand Startup Initiative (GSSI) - \$250,000**

The GSSI is a comprehensive plan for fostering scalable startups as a focused and ongoing economic development effort in Georgetown and Horry counties. GSSI is opening operations this summer in a facility provided by Georgetown County Economic Development.

- **Greenville Chamber, Greenville - NEXT Ecosystem Expansion - \$250,000**

The NEXT Ecosystem Expansion project is comprised of a bundle of interconnected products that work together to accelerate the critical mass of target high-impact companies and the development of the supporting ecosystem in the Upstate area.

- **The Harbor Entrepreneur Center, Mount Pleasant - \$250,000**

The Harbor Entrepreneur Center provides high-value programs such as Accelerator and Forum that are designed to create collision among high-impact entrepreneurs, founders and investors.

- **Innovate Anderson, Anderson - Innovate Electric City - \$250,000**

Innovate Electric City will be a hybrid incubator-accelerator-workforce development model which will allow the business community in Anderson and their partners to work with startup companies at various levels.

- **Lowcountry Local First, Charleston - Entrepreneurship and Innovation through Small Business and Agriculture - \$100,000**

In order to foster a diverse entrepreneurial economy, programs such as Local Works (the community coworking facility) and Dirt Works Incubator Farm offer resources of mentorship, educational opportunities and connecting to capital in the Charleston metro area.

- **North Dargan Innovation Center, Florence - \$200,000**

The North Dargan Innovation Center is a business incubator in downtown Florence whose purpose is to assist entrepreneurs in starting their own technology-based or other high employment growth business.

- **Rock Hill Economic Development Corporation, Rock Hill - Knowledge Park Innovation Center - \$250,000**

The Knowledge Park Innovation Center will focus on the development of the talented workers required by knowledge economy businesses. The Innovation Center is a key component of Knowledge Park, a new urban business park linking downtown Rock Hill to Winthrop University.

- **South Carolina's Coalition for Mathematics & Science, Clemson - STEMLinx: South Carolina's One Stop Discovery Site for STEM Resources - \$25,000**

STEMLinx is a digital marketplace of visual and textual information that identifies a broad range of STEM education programs located in South Carolina that are accessible and useful to STEM constituencies including educators, parents, students, scientists, engineers, professional organizations, economic development entities and government agencies.

- **Spartanburg Economic Futures Group, Spartanburg - Spartanburg Entrepreneurial Resource Network (SERN) - \$70,000**

SERN offers coordinated efforts of support across groups in order to assist and empower entrepreneurial efforts in Spartanburg. SERN provides mentorship, professional advice, financial assistance, introduction to contacts, research and short-term incubation facilities.

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