



EDA Technical Assistance Memo:

Obtaining Specific, Public, and High Impact Commitments from Coalition and Industry Partners

Many of the finalists succeeded in bringing together significant industry, philanthropy and anchor institution commitments for their Phase I applications. The Phase II application is a leveraging opportunity you can use to engage existing and new partners in developing, specifying, and expanding on these commitments.

The most competitive applications will favor specific commitments for action – versus boilerplate letters of support – that draw on organizations' strengths in support of an overall strategic vision. Impactful commitments will depend on the institution's unique assets. For example:

- Employers can marshal financial resources and technical assistance to address key market gap and make hiring commitments that advance equity and economic development;
- Universities can take new steps to clear the path for translating research into regional economic outcomes, recruit and retain diverse economic development leadership and build stronger partnerships with the private sector; and
- Workforce development organizations and entrepreneurial incubators can build community inroads for non-traditionally skilled individuals to find gainful employment opportunities.

The identity of the commitment-maker can also matter significantly: senior leaders with the authority to ensure follow-through lend commitments credibility. A letter from the State Governor or state economic development agency indicating that a Phase II award would be complemented by additional investments would be materially different in authority and content than one from an agency without the ability to bring resources to the table. Likewise a commitment from a CEO or University President carries more authority than a statement made on an organization's general letterhead.

Commitments are important for the sustainability of your economic development plans and persistence of the key partnerships that underpin them, as well as Phase II Scoring Criteria of Sustainability, Regional Assets, Industry Leadership. If your Phase 1 application listed a research university, academic medical center, ports, bases, national labs, elected officials, national philanthropies, and/or any other high-leverage partner, we strongly encourage you to read this memo and engage our TA Coalition for feedback in designing your own commitments.

We hope this guide serves as a useful primer that provides context and catalyzes discussion within your coalition over commitments most useful for driving long-lasting economic growth.

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Identifying and Developing Commitments

Generally, commitments will fit within your overarching strategy and unlock programmatic and operational “wins” that align with EDA’s investment priorities. The best commitments are public, draw on the institution’s strengths, and discrete in terms of tangible impact, evidence, and metrics of success over an intended timeline (e.g., short, medium, long-term). Key Institutional Actors might include:

- Research University and/or Academic Medical Center;
- Ports, bases, and other regional infrastructure;
- Governors, elected officials, and State Economic Development Agencies;
- Federal actors, like national labs & agency funded projects;
- Philanthropic actors.

[Intake Form for Targeted Technical Assistance](#)

Strong commitments benefit from targeted workshopping and feedback. We encourage applicants to share their thoughts on areas of greatest need through this intake form. The responses will help orient our forthcoming commitments guidance and sessions towards high-leverage support areas. As always, any information shared during the TA process will be held in confidentiality and/or anonymously between Phase 2 applicants, the TA Coalition, and EDA. Please reach out to Ishan Sharma (isharma@fas.org) with any questions.

Key Examples of Commitments

Below are four examples of commitments language, from a university, corporate partner, elected official, and philanthropy. **By no means are these examples necessarily suitable for all applicants.** It is up to your coalition and partners to design commitments most relevant to your application’s vision, approach, and needs. We encourage you to submit your existing commitments for tailored guidance through the form below, as well as be selective and creative in the design of new commitments. Your Phase II application should demonstrate not quantity but quality of commitments.

Figure 1: University Commitments

University Commitment

The University will create a new role within the President's Office responsible for coordinating a local economic development strategy, aligned with the proposed cluster, that brings together the technology transfer office, the entrepreneurship center, the business school and an Entrepreneur-in-Residence program to ensure university-wide coordination with the specific goal of increasing the University's commercialization output 2x by 2024.

The University's current organizational structure does not align related functions that are critical for commercialization of university-developed R&D, a process that could be significantly improved by streamlining roles and responsibilities. While restructuring has been considered in the past, with EDA funding, the new position would become necessary to successfully manage the expected workflow.

In the above example, the University makes a commitment that is:

- **New and Specific:** the creation of a new role – not something the University had already planned to do – with ownership over a unique scope of work or set of responsibilities distinct from other executives, while reforming an organizational process that would dramatically enhance capacity to drive economic development.
- **Measurable:** includes a clear articulation of “but-for” impact that can be tracked over time.

Other University commitments could include:

- **Construct five new testbeds** and facilities for underrepresented cluster participants to test new technologies at commercial scale.
- **Create “[X Cluster] Chairs”** that recruit and reward researchers who are testing and seeking to commercialize cluster-relevant technologies within regional cities (e.g. sensors, community health, etc.).

University institutions generally can commit in the following areas:

- **Policy changes**, including organizational, operational, and internal restructuring in support of cluster-relevant research, development, and commercialization.
- **Investments** in new institutions and initiatives that span the boundaries between research and commercialization (e.g. Proof of Concept Centers).
- **Educational/training programs**, curricula, and other cluster-relevant workforce and STEM education pipeline development.

Figure 2: Industry Commitments

Industry Commitment

The undersigned corporations commit to hiring 25,000 low-income, minority, and non-traditionally educated citizens of the state over the next 5 years into a range of technical roles to meet the cluster's growing workforce needs.

This commitment reflects our confidence in the approach and scope of the application's proposed workforce development initiatives and our belief that our advance commitment will help ensure broad uptake from low-income and minority communities. We were inspired by the [New York Jobs CEO Council](#) and intend to run a similar program.

In addition to being new, specific, and measurable, these commitments are:

- **Relevant:** The corporations represent the coalition's lead employers, anticipate job growth through the proposed actions and commit to advancing equity.
- **High-Impact:** This commitment both enhances the tangible outcomes associated with the application's proposed workforce development project while advancing long-lasting, equitable economic growth.

Other industry commitments include:

- **Creating a funding pool** to support Entrepreneurs-in-Residence positions aligned with cluster needs at universities, labs, and companies to support entrepreneurial activities from historically excluded communities.
- **Annually invest and provide technical assistance** to cultivate local STEM education programs that provide a cluster-aligned workforce pipeline from the ground-up, including funding, events, internships, and sponsorships.

Industry institutions generally can commit in the following areas:

- **Hiring and training** through Internships or job creation.
- **Financial support** for new ventures as well as market and technical assistance.
- **Research collaborations** supported by industry resources.
- **STEM Education support** through local Investments.

Figure 3: Political Leadership Commitments

Political Leadership Commitment

As Governor, if this application is awarded a Build Back Better Regional Challenge award, I commit to using \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding to launch a new statewide innovation challenge focused on equitable state-based opportunities to support this cluster and related sectors.

A portion of these funds will be devoted to coordinating among existing State Small Business Credit Initiative funding at the State Economic Development Agency that ensures investments will complement rather than make redundant EDA awards in supporting the cluster and the region's overall economic development strategy.

Among other features, the Governor makes a commitment that is:

- **High-impact and Relevant:** With an influx of American Rescue Plan funding, several states have already introduced plans to launch their own innovation challenges. Securing a commitment to co-invest and coordinate other large-scale funds is something only the Governor could ensure.

Other Political Leadership commitments could include:

- **Establishing an early stage venture fund** for startups founded and headquartered in the state;
- **Funding X number of innovation vouchers and R&D and manufacturing tax credits** specific to the cluster, such as relevant labs or startups;
- **Providing state or municipal-owned land and buildings** for construction projects;
- **Expediting regulatory processing** through any state or local construction permit requirements.

Political Leadership institutions generally can commit in the following areas:

- **Aligning Statewide investment priorities** with cluster strategies.
- **Making legislative or regulatory changes** for cluster growth.
- **Leveraging federal funding**, whether incoming or existing, to support cluster growth.

Figure 4: Philanthropic Commitments

Philanthropic Commitment

The undersigned philanthropies are committed to publicly aligning our five-year strategic investments with the priorities of economic development outlined in this cluster application, with a commitment of at least \$25 million annually. In particular, we will commit \$1 million annually towards a Rapid Response Contracting Fund to respond to key market failures in scaling the cluster, to be accrued each year but used in total by the end of the award period on the basis of demonstrated evidence of market gaps and in coordination with the Lead Applicant and coalition partners.

While we believe our proposed economic development plan is air-tight given our feasibility studies and analysis of market demand, a rapid response flex fund would serve as a catch-all in the event of unforeseen market failures such as a lack of workforce, demonstration facilities, or seed funding for startups. These funds could be used, for example, to create a proof of concept center, hire a cadre of experienced startup founders relevant to the cluster to provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs, or something else.

In addition to new, specific, and measurable, the philanthropies make a commitment that is:

- **Public:** As national foundations, the philanthropies have significant traction. By publicly committing, they not only provide substantive support but also generate the potential for follow-on momentum.
- **Relevant:** Each of the philanthropies are offering both their analytical and monetary resources, and demonstrating their expertise with concrete examples of programmatic support.
- **High Impact:** The commitment addresses the sustainability concerns of EDA, and includes elements of coalition governance and voice.

Other Philanthropic commitments include:

- **Providing technical assistance** to faculty and startups by identifying and engaging the best grant writers from grantees to provide technical assistance supporting cluster development;
- **Creating a ridealong, independent evaluation process**, either through existing processes and or the creation of new evaluation criteria, to track the coalition's development progress and make recommendations in the event of underperformance.

Philanthropic institutions generally can commit in the following areas:

- **Financial support** in areas of high leverage.
- **Technical assistance** through project evaluation and grant-writing.