Announcing Request for Proposals for UC Davis Engineering Student Startup Center’s Microgrants Funding Program

Background

The Engineering Student Startup Center (ESSC) was founded in October 2013 to provide ideation, prototyping, collaboration and entrepreneurship opportunities to UC Davis students. With the goal to continue building the innovation culture on campus and with generous support from the UC Davis College of Engineering and VentureWell, a national organization for student entrepreneurship, ESSC is proud to announce a microgrants program that will provide funding and mentoring to UC Davis students with promising ideas and/or prototypes. The goal of this program is to catalyze the formation of emerging student startup teams (E-Teams) at UC Davis by helping students elucidate if their idea/prototype has technical and market feasibility. E-Teams can be originated from the ECH 98 - Creativity and Entrepreneurship for Engineers course, from ESSC activities, or from on-campus curricular or extracurricular programs.

Eligibility

- Applicant teams must be led by a UC Davis undergraduate or graduate student. The student lead is responsible for overseeing and tracking the expenses of the microgrant award.
- Teams must be comprised of at least 1 currently active UC Davis undergraduate or graduate student in good standing for the duration of the grant period (proposals will not be penalized for having just one team member). There is no maximum team size, although successful startup founding teams are generally comprised of 2-3 members, and to a lesser extent, 4 members.
- Teams must be comprised of at least one student with affiliation to the College of Engineering. Proposals that bring together students from different disciplines, such as engineering, science, design, arts, and business, are encouraged.
- Teams must have an idea and/or prototype focused on technology entrepreneurship (i.e., a technology-based idea or invention that is scalable, commercially promising, and has a positive societal impact). Both mobile/web/app software projects and hardware/tangible product projects are appropriate for this funding opportunity. Ideas and/or prototypes at any stage of development are encouraged, even if it’s just a concept or a rough prototype (the goal of the program is to help you figure out if the idea has market and technical feasibility).
- Teams should have a desire to explore the commercial potential of their idea/prototype if successful. Proposals that are purely academic or for just research projects will not be considered.
- Teams may be incorporated as a company, but should not have received private investment funding by the time of the award.

**Funding and Timeline**

- Total microgrant funding available in the program:
  - Up to $20,000 each academic year for the next 3 years
- Funds available per team for ideation, customer development, and prototyping:
  - **Stage 1** - $300 (awarded to 10-15 teams for a 3-month period)
  - **Stage 2** - $1,000 (awarded to 10-15 teams for a 6-month period, contingent on satisfactory progress during Stage 1 and continued team commitment for Stage 2). In rare cases, reviewers may fast-track eligible and promising teams directly to Stage 2.

First round of microgrants will be awarded during spring quarter. Funds must be utilized within the designated period after receipt.

**Allowable Expenses**

Microgrant funds may be used exclusively for materials and consumables that are directly related to the development of a proof-of-concept and/or prototype for the proposed idea or technology. Only expenses that are made during the grant period will be covered by the microgrant funds. Ineligible expenses include: salary, stipends for team members, consultant fees, travel and transportation expenses, patent costs, and other expenses not directly related to proving the concept or developing a prototype.

**Benefits Additional to Funding**

- Mentoring meetings with ESSC director to receive feedback on pitch presentations, business model development, commercial plan, and patent strategy, among other topics
- Access to ESSC special events for microgrants-funded teams
- Connections to startup services required by emerging technology startups such as banking, legal, accounting, insurance, incubation space and programs, and more
- Connections to UC Davis alumni that can serve as mentors
- Advice for application to VentureWell E-Team grants program for follow-up funding support

**Application Instructions and Deadline**

A complete application packet must include:
- **1-page cover letter**, including:
  - Name of team/project/startup
  - Name of each team member, major, year, and expected graduation date
  - Statement indicating the students' plans for summer (i.e. summer school, internship, student leave, no plans, etc.) and how much time each team member expects to invest on the project during the summer and the academic year (this is for informational purposes only, teams will not be penalized by their entry in this section)
  - 250-word abstract summarizing the idea/prototype/innovation, market, potential customers, traction and progress to date, milestones expected to be achieved during the program period, and how the microgrant funds would be used

- **Proposal narrative** (prepared with 12-pt Arial font and 1-inch margins), including:
  - Description of idea/technology and current stage of proof-of-concept/prototype (if applicable, drawings and/or pictures are encouraged) (1 page)
  - Current understanding of potential market, customers, value proposition, and proposed business model (1 page)
  - Team expertise and skills (half page)
  - Expected outcomes and use of funds description (half page)

- **Resumes** for each team member

All application materials must be submitted via email to essc@ucdavis.edu as a single attachment with the title “ESSC Microgrants Proposal - [Team Name]”. The deadline for this microgrants opportunity will be announced each year.

**Questions?**

You can contact ESSC director Lucas Arzola at larzola@ucdavis.edu for questions regarding eligibility, proposal content, or any other general microgrants fund questions.