
GRANTS FOR PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAMS

Accelerating the next generation of Victorian AI
and DeepTech startups

BACKGROUND

The Victorian startup ecosystem has undergone significant growth in the past 8 years, with the number of startups increasing over three times from around 1,000 to over 4,300. However, globally leading startup ecosystems support many more startups, which in turn contribute to economic growth through job creation. It is therefore imperative that we continue to support the creation of new startups in Victoria.

Pre-accelerator programs have proven to be one of the most effective ways to stimulate startup creation. These programs provide aspiring founders with the early-stage support, mentorship, and networks needed to turn ideas into viable businesses, strengthening Victoria's pipeline of innovative companies.

Building on the success of 30 previously supported pre-accelerator programs across a range of sectors, LaunchVic is now seeking to fund new pre-accelerators that support early-stage founders focused on building AI and DeepTech Startups. Encouraging more early-stage founders to develop AI and DeepTech Startups will help strength Victoria's position as a leader in emerging technologies.

LaunchVic welcomes pre-accelerators targeted on the Victorian Government's priority sectors including health technologies, circular economy, agribusiness, digital technologies including AI and quantum, and advanced manufacturing and defence¹. Sector agnostic pre-accelerators may also apply, however they should demonstrate a strong AI or DeepTech component in their service delivery.

OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVE

The successfully funded Pre-Accelerator Programs will:

- Encourage the creation of AI and DeepTech startups, by helping entrepreneurs bring their ideas to life and create an MVP
- Increase the pipeline of quality startups entering accelerator programs in Victoria; and
- Support startups to be successful beyond the program by providing guidance, resources, networks, and planning to help them scale.

This initiative provides both existing and new organisations with the opportunity to apply for funding to deliver a pre-accelerator program for startups. Applicants must demonstrate a strong understanding of startup creation, proven experience in growing startups and startup communities, be able to demonstrate how they provide AI and/or DeepTech expertise and the ability to deliver a program that supports founders to succeed during and after the program.

¹ <https://www.vic.gov.au/priority-sectors>

DEFINITIONS

The below definitions apply to this Grant Round:

Deep Tech is a term used to describe highly sophisticated technology rooted in advanced scientific principles or discoveries and engineering breakthroughs. It requires significant technical expertise, and development of intellectual property that is hard to reproduce. While DeepTech is often found in places such as medicine, energy, manufacturing and agriculture, DeepTech itself refers to the technologies used rather than the industry it is used in. DeepTech often focuses on solving some of society's toughest challenges and includes (but is not limited to): big data, robotics, biotechnology, green energy, nano technology and materials etc.

Pre-Accelerator is a program targeted at Startup Entrepreneurs who have a technology-based idea for a startup and want to establish a business and develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). The program runs for a designated period (a minimum of 6-weeks), and participants 'graduate' from the program having followed a set methodology to establish a startup. A Pre-Accelerator program can provide a pathway to an Accelerator program.

Startups are defined by LaunchVic as an innovative, technology-based business that can scale rapidly and capture mass markets. Examples of technology-based businesses include: software and application development (Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain, big data analytics, e-commerce or marketplaces, augmented or virtual reality, Software as a Service (SaaS)), hardware, advanced manufacturing, sensor technology, robotics, autonomous vehicles, quantum technology, DeepTech, and genomics and life sciences (including BioTech & MedTech). Once a startup has demonstrated accelerated growth sufficiently it becomes a scaleup.

Startup Entrepreneurs are individuals who have an idea for a technology-based Startup and are seeking to launch a Startup and register their new Company via ASIC in the State of Victoria.

Operating Costs include staff salaries, rent, event costs, insurance, accounting and legal costs, marketing and promotion costs, reasonable domestic travel costs, grants to startups and other reasonable operating costs.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the simulation of intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. These processes include learning (the acquisition of information and rules for using the information), reasoning (using the rules to reach approximate or definite conclusions), and self-correction.

AI-native is a company where Artificial Intelligence is central to its product, service, or operations, driving the core value, functionality, and scalability of the business.

Importantly, AI is not an add-on feature to an existing offering—it is fundamental to how the startup creates impact and delivers its offerings.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must satisfy the following eligibility criterion:

1. **Program Focus** The proposed program can be a new or existing Pre-Accelerator program. The program must primarily support Victorian Startup Entrepreneurs (over the age of 18). We are not providing funds directly to Startups or Startup Entrepreneurs through this Grant Round.
2. **Applicant Experience** Applicants that are eligible include a delivery team that has proven expertise in supporting early-stage technology startups to launch and grow, exemplified by experience in delivering pre-accelerator or other startup programs. Applicant must demonstrate strong startup experience.
3. **Type of Organisation** The types of organisations that are eligible to apply include a:
 - a) Registered company/organisation headquartered in the State of Victoria; or
 - b) Registered company/organisation with an office in the State of Victoria; or
 - c) Registered company/organisation located outside the State of Victoria (in Australia) proposing a program to be delivered in the State of Victoria; or
 - d) An experienced delivery team (as per Criteria 2 above) who agrees to setup a new company to primarily run the Pre-Accelerator Program and register the new entity in Victoria before contract execution.

Please note a company/organisation with an Australian Business Number (ABN) is defined as 'registered'. Not-for-profit organisations can apply. If you are unsure about your eligibility, please contact the [LaunchVic Grants Team](#). Preference may be given to applications made by companies headquartered in Victoria or companies with an established office or actively working in Victoria.

4. **Grant Amount** Applications up to \$400,000 (plus GST) over maximum of two years are eligible. The grant's timeline will conclude in April 2028.
5. **Existing Grant Recipients** Applications from existing Pre-Accelerators with whom LaunchVic already has a grant agreement in place may apply for funding, however any new funding awarded through this grant round will be contracted via milestone payments dated after the end date of the existing grant and be conditional on the successful achievement of KPIs under the current grant agreement.
6. **Grant Completion** Applicants must commit to delivering a minimum of two cohorts, with all program activity concluding by April 2028.

7. **Application submission** must be via the [LaunchVic online application system](#) before the closing date and time to be eligible.

KEY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Applicants are required to address the following Key Assessment Criteria via the LaunchVic online application system. Included below are the required responses and the maximum word count for responses.

	Criteria	Response
1. Overview	a) Outline the proposed program, including: - What impact and benefits to Victorian Startups or Startup Entrepreneurs will the program deliver? - What is the focus area and why? - Why are you uniquely placed to deliver this pre-accelerator? - Demonstrate the market need for this program. How it differentiates from other pre-accelerators in market?	500 words
	b) How will your program engage with and support startups in AI and/or DeepTech?	300 words
2. Program Delivery	a) Provide details on how the program will be delivered including: - Delivery mechanisms, including location - Cost of the program to the participant (if any) - Number and length of cohorts - Curriculum overview - Details on partners to support program delivery (if any) - Details on community building initiatives that will be undertaken.	300 words
	b) Upload a proposed timeline of program activities that fits within the timeframe outlined.	Upload
3. Outcomes	a) What are the expected outcomes and learnings of graduated participants? And how does the program delivery and curriculum described above help achieve these outcomes? Please include any AI or DeepTech specific outcomes or learnings your program will support.	250 words
	b) How will you support startups to succeed in the 12 months following your program? I.e. helping them develop a clear go-to-market strategy or implementation plan?	250 words

	c) Provide details of expected program outputs, including; - Number of Startups or Startup Entrepreneurs supported and graduated (per cohort and cumulative) - Other activities that will support the growth of the Victorian ecosystem (e.g. events for the broader community)	Table & 100 words
4. Experience and expertise	a) For existing pre-accelerator programs, list the pre-accelerator's achievements to date including number of startups supported and other metrics (further progression into other startup programs, capital raised, jobs created within startups etc.). If your program is for a new pre-accelerator program outline your experience in founding and running a startup program, or experience in early-stage startup support.	250 words
	b) List the key pre-accelerator personnel (program management and delivery team members etc.) and their relevant expertise and/or experience in delivering pre-accelerator programs. Nominate the Project Manager who will oversee and manage project delivery, and outline staff to be based in Victoria.	Table (Name, Role, 1 page CV's, Victorian based (up to 50 words))
5. Funding	Provide details on the following: a) Funding amount requested from LaunchVic b) i) Cash and/or in-kind contributions by the Applicant (not mandatory but will be viewed favourably). ii) Cash and/or in-kind contributions by Partner Organisations (not mandatory but will be viewed favourably). iii) Letters of support that commit funding must be provided to be considered.	Numbers Numbers Numbers Upload
	c) Budget: Provide a budget for the project (complete the budget table), including income and expenditure. Expenditure of the LaunchVic Grant can only be used for Operating Costs.	Table
6. Diversity and Inclusion	How will you incorporate the values of diversity, equity and inclusion in your operations? How do you ensure your program design and delivery is upholding these values?	200 words

ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

Eligible applications will be evaluated against the Key Assessment Criteria by an “Assessment Panel” (comprising at least three LaunchVic staff). LaunchVic may also appoint external members to assess applications.

Preference may be given to applications made by companies headquartered in Victoria or companies with an established office/actively working in Victoria.

Q&A: Shortlisted applicants will be required to attend a virtual Q&A session with the Assessment Panel to be held during the day on 19 February 2026 (this date is subject to change). If there is no representation from the applicant, the application may be rejected.

Due Diligence: shortlisted applicants will undergo due diligence by LaunchVic and the Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (or approved third parties), who will conduct a Financial Risk Assessment where applicable. Financial reports (up to 3 years) will be required for a Financial Risk Assessment. The Reports required include (but not limited to):

- Profit and loss statements
- Balance sheets; and
- Cash flows

For new entities, information on the Company and Directors for the newly established organisation will be required including (but not limited to), the following information on the Company Directors:

- Full Name
- Date of Birth
- Address
- List of other Company Director Positions

Information provided will be kept strictly confidential.

Applicants may be required to provide additional information as part of the application process. LaunchVic may enter negotiations with shortlisted applicants to refine project proposals. Funding outcomes are ultimately determined by the LaunchVic CEO and Board Chair and their decision is final.

All applications are made at the applicants' own cost and will not be reimbursed, whether the application is successful or unsuccessful.

CONTRACT

Successful applicants will be required to enter a legal contract (Grant Agreement) with LaunchVic and provide project reporting and evidence of project progress against KPIs (such as number of Participants and number of new Companies registered in Victoria via ASIC) to receive payments under agreed milestones. Contracts typically include approximately five to seven milestones. The number of milestones, and associated funding amounts, are determined by LaunchVic.

APPLICATION FORM

To preview and start an application form please go to the [LaunchVic online application system](#). Applicants will be required to address Eligibility Criteria and Applicant Information including: Organisational Details, Key Contact and Secondary Contact. Applicants will also need to provide Project Details including: Project Title, Project Summary (100 words), Project Start and End Date, Funding Amount, Funding Contributions (if any). Applicants will also need to address Key Assessment Criteria and complete the Declaration before submission.

TIMINGS

Indicative timings listed below, please refer to the LaunchVic website for the most up to date timings:

- **Round launched:** Wednesday 19th November 2025 at 10am (AEDT)
- **Information Session:** Tuesday 2nd December 2025 at 11am by webinar (AEDT)
- **Round Closes:** Wednesday 28th January 2026 at 5pm (AEDT)
- **Communications:** to unsuccessful and applicants moving to Stage 2 by 12th February 2026
- **Q&A Session:** Thursday 19th February 2026
- **Communications:** to unsuccessful and applicants moving to the next stage late Feb
- **Contracting:** Contract execution with recipients expected in April 2026
- **Announcement:** An announcement will follow once contracts are executed

QUESTIONS?

If you have a question regarding this program, please email grants@launchvic.org. Relevant questions will be posted on the Grant Round **FAQs**.

CHANGE REGISTER

NUMBER	SECTION	CHANGE DESCRIPTION SUMMARY	DATE CHANGE ISSUED