

ignite

Postdoc for Ventures

Program Overview

One of the three signature programs of Ignite Cornell Research Lab to Market gap fund series. Launched in 2022, this Ignite program funds and trains **postdocs with an entrepreneurial outlook to start technology ventures. The goal of the program is to build strong new businesses, grow entrepreneur scientists and engineers, advance technology commercialization, and enrich Cornell's venture ecosystem.**

In the first phase of the program, the postdoc will report to the Faculty Inventor's lab, and in the second phase to the director of one of the three incubator/venture programs, which include the Praxis Center and the McGovern Center on the Ithaca campus, and the Runway Startup Postdocs Program at Cornell Tech. Each phase will last up to a year, with the actual length adjusted based on the need of the project. This model intends to leverage both the technical expertise of the labs where the inventions are created and venture incubation capabilities in the Cornell ecosystem to build a solid foundation for new ventures and to provide the Ignite Postdocs with the technical and business trainings.

The postdoc candidates can be either a Cornell inventor or an external candidate matched to a Cornell Invention. The Faculty Inventor should be a co-applicant of the proposal.

Each selected project will be funded approximately \$120K a year to support the compensation of the postdoc and basic experiment expenses. Half of the financial support in phase I and the total amount in phase II will be combined as the principle of a SAFE note to the startup company once it's established.

Proposals will be selected based on the potential of creating successful startups and building strong entrepreneur teams.

Program Description

A. Program activities:

All Ignite Postdocs will be Cornell employees during both phases I and II of the program under full-time commitment, receiving a salary of \$65K a year plus benefits, and having access to research funding up to \$25K each year, a financial package up to \$120K a year.

	Phase I Report to Faculty Inventor	Phase II Report to Incubator Director
Stage	Before startup registration	After startup registration. (Company is still a shell with no employees and operation)
Length: "1+1" model	Up to a year (likely 6-12 months)	Up to a year (likely 3-12 months)
Supervisor	Faculty Inventor	Incubator Director
Space	-Work at Faculty Inventor lab for technology development -Access to the Incubator as an associate member for business development and connections	-Work at Faculty Inventor lab for technology development -Access to the Incubator as an associate member for business development and connections
Technology Development	Proof of concept, new design, data collection, etc. (Directed by Faculty Inventor)	Prototyping, validation, beta-testing, etc. (Mentored by Faculty Inventor)
Business Development	Market analysis, customer discovery, competitive analysis, business plan/canvas development, etc. (Mentored by Incubator Director)	Connect to entrepreneurs and investors, apply for SBIR/STTR, sharpen business strategy, etc. (Directed by Incubator Director)
Business Training (At initiation)	-Business Primer and Legal Primer offered by a leading law firm -SBIR/STTR facilitation -Additional I-Corp session if not completed prior -Business classes at Cornell when relevant	
Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR)	Two half-time EIRs will be hired—one in life science, one in engineering/physical science. EIR will work closely with the Ignite Postdocs in both phases.	
Intellectual Property	Cornell has generated FastTrack Startup Licenses which can be used under the program for quick access to technologies with favorable terms.	

SAFE note

50% of phase I funding and 100% of phase II funding will be the combined principle for a SAFE note (a simple agreement for future equity similar to what Y Combinator uses) issued to the startup company, with a discount but no cap.

Faculty Inventor: whose lab the technology was generated and whom the Ignite Postdoc will report to in phase I.

Incubator Director: Director in one of three Cornell incubators and venture programs, the McGovern Center for Life Science, the Praxis Center for High Technologies, and the Runway program at Cornell Tech.

Entrepreneur in Residence: EIRs are individuals who have successfully exited companies and raised significant professional financing. They are likely in a stage looking for the next opportunities and/or are interested in engagement with university venture ecosystems. They will likely be individuals who are Cornell alum or have Cornell connections. They will have a termed appointment with Cornell, likely 12-18 months long.

SAFE: background information for SAFE from Y Combinator can be found at <https://www.ycombinator.com/documents/>

The Faculty Inventor, Incubator Director, and EIR will meet regularly to evaluate progress and adjust action plans.

Documents with detailed management of the program and responsibilities of different roles will be developed further for operation. Given the different technology and business fields and available connections and resources, the program will allow some variations in format and emphasis, which are under the discretion of the directors of the incubators and venture programs.

B. Eligibility:

1. Technology: Projects based on Cornell innovations from Cornell's Ithaca, Geneva, and Cornell Tech campuses will be considered. Technologies used in the application should have been disclosed to CTL.
2. Applicant: Ignite Postdoc candidate
 - i) A Cornell inventor of the technology that will be the basis of the proposed startup, who is a Ph.D. student graduating within six months of the application, or a current Cornell postdoc; ii) OR an external or internal

candidate with the relevant technical expertise in the field of the technology but not an inventor of the technology; iii) in either case endorsed by the Faculty Inventor; iv) devoted themselves to be the technology champion and as the entrepreneur or part of a team to launch the startup and develop the products.

- Candidate must have the ability to work in the US. US citizens, US permanent residents (green card holders), and non-immigrants with unrestricted employment authorization (visa holders) are eligible to apply.
3. Co-applicant: Faculty Inventor whose lab the technology was generated and whom the postdoc will report to in Phase I of the program
 - Faculty inventor will be the co-applicant for the application i) endorsing the postdoc candidate to be the technology champion for the startup potential, ii) committing to the commercialization path for the technology.
 4. Additional consideration:
 - Applicants who have gone through programs such as I-Corp from NSF, Commercialization Fellow from Engineering College, or other similar programs prior to application are preferred.

C. Applications:

Applications are accepted one cycle per year in the spring. The targeting starting time for Ignite Postdocs is the beginning of Cornell fiscal year in July. The actual starting time can vary for different projects with the approval of the Committee, provided that all accepted Ignite Postdocs are committed to attending the initial training sessions after or prior to their official starting time.

The application package should include the following information:

1. Opportunity:
 - i) Technology: A brief overview of the underpinning technology, developmental status, proof-of-concept that have been demonstrated, patent application (or other Intellectual Property), and status.
 - ii) Market and competition: Overview of product ideas, customer discovery, market analysis, competitive landscape, and early indication of interests from investors, partners, and entrepreneurs.
 - iii) Proposal:
 - Key technology and business activities proposed for phase I and phase II, respectively, with measurable milestones/deliverables to be accomplished.

- Provide a rationale for why the proposed activities and milestones are important for building the startup and their impact on funding raising, product development, and team formation.
2. Applicant (Ignite Postdoc):
 - Personal statement about the motivation to be an entrepreneur and the reason to pursue the particular business idea. Description of early experience and exposure to entrepreneurship will be helpful.
 - CV or resume with two references.
 3. Co-applicant (Faculty Inventor):
 - Statement to endorse the Ignite Postdoc for the opportunity and proposal, and commit time and effort to supervise the Ignite Postdoc and support the startup direction for the technology.

D. Application Review and Selection process:

1. The selection and awards will be decided by the Ignite Postdoc for Ventures Committee. The Committee will consist of **four external committee members, two faculty representatives, directors of the three participating incubators and venture programs, and the Executive Director of CTL**. The external committee members will include early-stage venture investors and successful technology entrepreneurs who are familiar with university technology development and startup ecosystems and volunteer their time to support Cornell's innovation. Faculty representatives will be individuals with venture background and experience guiding next-generation entrepreneur engineers and scientists.
2. CTL will send eligible proposals to the Committee for review after initial screening for compliance. Two to three Committee members will be assigned to each proposal for interviewing the applicant and co-applicant. Committee members can invite other technology advisors with domain expertise, if needed, to join the interviews.
3. A meeting where applicants will present to the Committee will be organized by CTL. The presentation shall include:
 - Brief summary of the proposed technology and potential products
 - Market needs and competitive advantages
 - Current development status
 - Proposed activities to advance technology and business potential

- Customer discovery summary, early investor and partner feedback.
4. Based on the submitted proposals, presentations, and interviews, Ignite Committee for Postdoc for Ventures will reach the final decision within a 4-6 weeks window after the closing of the applications.

E. Joining the program:

1. Each selected Ignite Postdoc should generally start within three months after their acceptance to the program. Normal Cornell hiring procedure and conditions for postdoc will apply. An Ignite Postdoc Agreement covering responsibilities and obligations will be executed at the time of acceptance.
2. Ignite Postdocs should attend all required initial training sessions after or prior to their official start.
3. After the onboarding process, Ignite Postdocs should follow program activities as described at the beginning of the document. Their supervisor can specify more details and overall Ignite program management procedures. Progress will be evaluated continuously by the Faculty Inventor, Incubator Director and EIR jointly.
4. Ignite Postdocs will present to the Committee at least every six months to report their progress.

F. Advancement from Phase I to Phase 2 to the program:

1. It is expected that the new venture will be registered before the end of 12 months of phase I. During the semi-annual meetings, the Committee will decide whether an Ignite Postdoc and the related business opportunity is on track to receive the Phase 2 funding.
2. If the Ignite Postdoc and the related business opportunity is progressing to the next stage earlier and wish to advance to Phase 2 between the regular meeting schedule, approval can be obtained when more than half of the Committee members voted in favor.
3. If the Ignite Postdoc and the related business opportunity is successful in fund raising and no longer needs Phase 2 financial support from the program, it can graduate without Phase 2.

4. Ignite Postdoc and Faculty Inventor might decide not to pursue the business opportunity as a startup after Phase I development and further evaluation. They should submit relevant data, analysis, and reports to the Committee, which may help CTL for IP and other commercial licensing decisions.
5. Phase I could be extended with the approval of the Committee, but only in a rare and unique circumstance.

G. Graduation from the Program

1. Once the company is able to raise funding to hire employees and start operation, Ignite Postdoc will graduate from Phase 2 of the program. Such funding will include equity investment, debt financing, and grants from the government or other sources.
2. After graduation from the program, a company can become a resident company of Praxis or McGovern incubators if such admission is granted. There is no obligation for the company to enroll in the incubator.
3. The program will not exceed 2-year maximum for an individual Ignite Postdoc even if the company has not reached the status of independent operation in that time frame.
4. All Ignite Postdocs whose companies successfully reached the status of independent operation and graduated will receive a certificate from the program.
5. Within one month of leaving the program, Ignite Postdocs should submit the final reports to CTL, including technical and business achievements and results. Program alumni are also required to provide updates to CTL on funding-raising activities after graduation.
6. Program alumni will be invited to present at Cornell events or similar to help with their business connections or highlight Ignite programs.