2026 CRITICAL SUPPLIERS PRIZE COMPETITION

1. Subject of Competition

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is offering up to **$20,000,000** in prize awards. This ***2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition*** (the "Competition") will directly fund U.S.-based small businesses to provide non-dilutive capital towards restoring U.S. industrial supply chains. These funds would be used to refine, accelerate, and scale existing solutions (rather than drive research and development) and would be provided in the form of non-dilutive prize funding.

The Competition is authorized under the America COMPETES Act and through its award aims to stimulate innovation within the U.S. industrial base. Small businesses comprise 98% of all manufacturing in the United States and account for approximately half of our GDP. A significant portion of the U.S. manufacturing base was offshored in the last several decades. This Administration is bringing back this base and strengthening our critical supply chains; however, we cannot simply reshore dated manufacturing production processes and technologies. In restoring our manufacturing base, we must also spur the development of solutions that will drive efficiencies and scale at a rate to effectively compete with our nation's adversaries.

The Competition aims to provide targeted and mission aligned awards that will bring innovation to our manufacturing base and rapidly expand production capacity in areas identified as critical supply chain chokepoints with the overall objective to deliver measurable, near-term improvements by directing resources toward:

- Established suppliers with the ability to scale;
- High-impact supply chain gaps or chokepoints; and
- Actions that achieve defined milestones and/or produce tangible output within a defined timeframe.

Awards will be made to small businesses based on a detailed review of each submission for factors including a demonstrated operating history, proven technical capability, relevance to identified supply chain gaps and chokepoints, creditworthiness, and the ability to achieve measurable outcomes.

2. Competition Goals

Eligible small businesses ("Contestants;" see Section 3 for full eligibility requirements) must have an aligned business strategy that provides tangible deliverables to at least one priority area addressing critical industrial base needs, technology solutions, and supply chain gaps and chokepoints in the U.S. (each an "Award Focus Area"):

- **Advanced Metals Manufacturing** (including rapid tooling, precision casting and forging, heat treated components, strategic and critical minerals, and rare earth element recovery and magnet production)
- **Advanced Materials Manufacturing** (including large format additive manufacturing and materials transformation)
- **Energy Systems, Energetics and Components** (including nuclear energy, battery energy storage systems and standardization efforts)

As part of the competition's Eligibility Requirements, Contestants must demonstrate the ability to deploy funds rapidly (within six months) and that the Contestant is currently profitable and creditworthy. Contestants must also demonstrate that with the award, Contestant will be able to achieve measurable increases in production or will be able to implement a solution that supports efficiencies in production, within six months from being granted the award. This prioritizes execution-ready firms with clear pathways to deliver near-term supply chain impact. Contestants must be a U.S.-based small business (per SBA size standards). Awards will be issued as prize payments tied to projected and completed milestone achievements, consistent with 15 U.S.C. 3719.

3. Eligibility Rules for Participating in the Competition

Only eligible Contestants may submit entries and participate in the Competition. Only one entry per business will be considered. The following entities are eligible to participate in the Competition:

- Private entities or teams that meet SBA's definition of a small business.
- Individuals submitting responses to this opportunity, including individuals representing organizations partnering with the small business applicant, must be Citizens of the United States or lawful permanent residents who are at least eighteen (18) years of age at the time of their submission of an entry.
- An individual cannot belong to more than one entry in this Competition.

Additional Eligibility Requirements:

- Contestants must be current and in good standing on any Federal obligations. Businesses that have, at any time, defaulted on a Federal loan or Federally guaranteed financing that has resulted in the Federal government or any of its agencies or Departments sustaining a loss in any of its programs and businesses owned or controlled a person who previously owned, operated, or controlled a business which defaulted on a Federal loan or guaranteed financing and caused the Federal government or any of its agencies or Departments to sustain a loss in any of its programs are ineligible to apply for the Competition. For purposes of the Competition, a compromise agreement as described at 31 C.F.R. 3711 shall also be considered a loss;
- Contestants must be in good standing in the jurisdiction of their state of organization;
- Contestants must be an entity organized in and maintaining a primary place of business in the United States and/or its territories;

- Contestants must be profitable and demonstrate creditworthiness;

- All members of the senior management team of a Contestant must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United Sates and over the age of 18; and

- Proceeds must **<u>not</u>** be used for any of the following:

    - repayment of indebtedness,
    - hiring of new staff or other employee compensation,
    - additional research and development,
    - distributions to shareholders or investors,
    - advertising or marketing,
    - rent or lease expenses or utilities,
    - business travel, or
    - office supplies.

The following individuals or entities are not eligible to participate in the Competition:

A. SBA employees or an SBA contractor, Federal entities, or Federal employees acting within the scope of their employment; or

B. Individuals or organizations that are currently suspended or debarred by the federal government.

Eligible Contestants must agree to assume risks of personal injury and property damage arising from their participation in the Competition, waive all such claims against the Federal government in order to enter the Competition, and agree to the Liability and Insurance Requirements set forth at Section 14, below.

4. **Important Dates**

- Submission Period: **July 28, 2026, to August 28, 2026, 11:59pm.**

- Screening, Vetting and Judging Period: **July 28, 2026, to September 10, 2026.**

- Winners Announced: **On or about September 10, 2026.**

5. **Submission**

Interested persons or entities should review each term in this document (hereinafter, "Competition Rules") before entering the Competition. All Contestants must provide their submission to investinnovate@sba.gov. Submitting an entry is free of charge.

Your submission may be in the form of a company Pitch Deck, if you choose to provide one. Note that acceptance of an award does not convey intellectual property rights to the Federal government. To assist you with your Pitch Deck Submission, if you choose to provide one, below is an example outline to organize your deck that tells your company's story, how you would use the prize money, and how you would fulfill the 2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition Goals.

Example Outline of Pitch Deck:

A. Introduction

1. Brief description of business and website link of Contestant.
2. A condensed summary of how your business addresses the 2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition Goals.

B. Operating History and Current Capital Needs

1. Snapshot of Contestant's financial performance from the most recent reporting period.
2. Brief description of the history of the Contestant (when founded, milestones achieved to date, etc.).
3. Snapshot of current capital needs of Contestant including summary of current investors, debt providers and cashflow from

operations and a description of any other federal funding received by Contestant.

C. Potential Impact

1. Brief description of near-term milestone to be achieved with award supporting the competition's requirement regarding use of proceeds of award.
   a. Description of the uses of the award proceeds within the next one to six months, description of other sources of capital that will be deployed alongside the award proceeds and proof that the award will not be used for general overhead expenses (supporting the competition's requirement regarding use of proceeds of the award).
2. Snapshot of business plan with revenue forecast assuming achievement of the milestone as compared to projections without the award (supporting the competition's revenue eligibility requirement).

D. References

Names and contact information for references in the following categories: customers, suppliers, board members, accounting firm, outside counsel, other character references for senior management team.

Additional Notes: Visuals & Media

- You may include images, diagrams, tables, etc. with a brief, descriptive caption to accompany each image or table.
  - Minimum resolution: 200 dpi
- Visual aids such as graphics, charts, photos, videos, and demonstrations may be helpful to cover the following topics:
  - the solution/business of the Contestant
  - a snapshot of the current financial performance of the Contestant
  - a description of the ownership of the Contestant
  - the other sources of capital used by the Contestant like, and prototypes

Prohibited Use of SBA Logo – The submission must not use SBA's logo or official seal in the submission and must not claim SBA endorsement. The award of a prize in this

Competition does not constitute an endorsement of a specific entity, service, or product by SBA or the Federal government.

6. Prizes

The Competition will award up to $20,000,000 in total prizes. Awards will support rapid deployment of funds toward clearly defined operational milestones. SBA intends to announce 4-6 award winners on or about September 10, 2026, for an award up to $6.0 million each. Successful Contestants will be able to demonstrate measurable impact to the supply chain and national and economic security impact.

Only one prize will be awarded for each winning submission, regardless of the number of Contestants that created or were involved with that submission.

7. Judging

As set forth below, prior to judging, all submissions will be vetted and screened by SBA for Contestant eligibility and completeness of the submission. SBA reserves the right to vet Contestants at any time, per Section 8 below.

Ultimately, a Judging Panel will rate the submissions based on the Judging Criteria and requirements specified in these Competition Rules. The decision of the Judges will be announced on the Competition website on or about September 10.

The members of the Judging Panel will be selected by SBA, at its sole discretion, and will be comprised of SBA personnel. Each judge will serve on a volunteer basis. Each judge will be screened by SBA to ensure he/she does not: (1) have personal or financial interest in, or serve as an employee, officer, director, or agent of, any Contestant; or (2) have a familial relationship with a Contestant.

8. Selection of Winners

- **Vetting Process** – All Contestant submissions will be vetted and screened by SBA for Contestant eligibility and the following criteria ("Vetting Process"). At any point during the Competition, SBA may review the submissions for eligibility and, among other things, the general business reputation of the owners and management of the Contestants, risks posed by the Contestant's organization, Contestant compliance with Executive Orders and all applicable laws and regulations, and conflicts of interest with the Agency (together, "Vetting Information"). SBA may, at its sole discretion, request clarifying or explanatory information on any matter from the Contestant. Contestants that do not pass the Vetting Process will be ineligible to advance in the Competition. SBA reserves the right to revisit Contestant eligibility and Vetting Information at any time during the Competition.

- **Judging Criteria** – The Judging Panel will choose as winners those submissions that, in the Judging Panel's sole discretion, best satisfy the 2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition Judging Criteria below. Judging Panels may also, in their sole discretion, take into consideration Vetting Information and the geographic location and dispersal of Contestants when selecting winners. During the judging period, SBA may ask Contestants for clarification of the technical and cost aspects of their proposals. This should not be construed as a commitment to fund the proposed effort.

i. <u>Character, Integrity and Cohesion of Management Team</u>
1. There is clear evidence of the senior management team's qualifications for execution of the business model.
2. Review of materials submitted and reference calls indicate high character and integrity of the senior management team of the Contestant.
3. Review of the materials and reference calls indicate high likelihood that the senior management team will continue to work together towards the defined goal for the foreseeable future.

ii. <u>Business Model Evaluation</u>
1. The proposed use of funds aligns with the 2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition Goals and proof that the award monies will not be allocated towards overhead.

iii. <u>Execution Certainty</u>
1. Contestant has a likelihood of future success, in particular, in executing on the 2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition Goals.
2. Contestant has other sources of capital (investors, debt, and cashflow from operations) that round out the necessary capital stack for execution of the business plan of Contestant.

iv. Mission Alignment / Impact

1. Contestant's business aligns with the 2026 Critical Suppliers Prize Competition Goals.
2. Contestant's proposed use of the award monies is within one to six months from the expected date of the award and Contestant's projections demonstrate a measurable impact.

9. **Continuing Compliance**

The winners must continue to comply with all terms and conditions of these Competition Rules, and winning is contingent upon fulfilling all applicable rules, policies and requirements, including the requirements contained herein.

10. **Applicable Law**

This Competition is being conducted by SBA pursuant to the America Competes Act (15 U.S.C. § 3719) and is subject to all applicable federal laws and regulations. By participating in this Competition, each Contestant gives its full and unconditional agreement to the Competition Rules, which are final and binding in all matters related to the Competition. A Contestant's eligibility for a prize award is contingent upon their fulfilling all requirements identified in these Competition Rules. Publication of these Competition Rules is not an obligation of funds on the part of SBA. SBA reserves the right to modify or cancel this Competition, in whole or in part, at any time prior to the award of prizes.

11. **Conflicts of Interest**

No individual acting as a judge at any stage of this Competition may have personal or financial interests in, or be an employee, officer, director, or agent of any Contestant or have a familial or financial relationship with a Contestant.

12. **Intellectual Property Rights**

All entries submitted in response to this Competition will remain the sole intellectual property of the individuals or organizations that developed them. By registering and entering a submission, each Contestant represents and warrants that it is the sole author and copyright owner of the submission, and that the submission is an original work of the contestant, or that the Contestant has acquired sufficient rights to use and to authorize others to use the submission, and that the submission does not infringe upon any copyright or upon any other third party rights of which the Contestant is aware.

13. **Publicity Rights**

By entering a submission, each Contestant consents to SBA's and its agents' use, in perpetuity, of its name, likeness, photograph, voice, opinions, and/or hometown and state information for promotional or informational purposes through any form of media, worldwide, without further payment or consideration.

14. **Liability and Insurance Requirements**

By entering a submission, each Contestant agrees to waive any and all claims they may have arising from their participation in the Competition against (1) the U.S. Government and its related entities, (2) SBA, (3) all Competition judges acting in their official capacity as judges, and (4) any party authorized to administer the Competition on behalf of SBA, except in the case of willful misconduct, for any injury, death, damage, or loss of property, revenue, or profits, whether direct, indirect, or consequential, arising from their participation in this Competition, regardless of whether the injury, death, damage, or loss arises through negligence or otherwise. By entering a submission, each Contestant assumes any and all risks associated with the Competition and further represents and warrants that it possesses sufficient liability insurance or financial resources to (a) cover claims by a third party for death, bodily injury, or property damage or loss resulting from any activity the Contestant carries out in connection with its participation in this Competition, or (b) cover claims by the U.S. Government for damage or loss to Government property resulting from the Contestant's participation in the Competition. Contestants should be prepared to immediately demonstrate proof of such insurance or financial resources in the event the SBA deems it necessary.

15. **Record Retention and Disclosure**

All submissions and related materials provided or made available to SBA in connection with this Competition automatically become SBA records and cannot be returned. All submission and related materials shall be kept by SBA in accordance with the National Archives and Records Administration guidelines for record retention. Contestants should identify any confidential commercial information contained in their entries at the time of their submission to SBA. SBA will notify Contestants of any Freedom of Information Act requests the Agency receives during the Competition related to their submissions in accordance with 13 C.F.R., Part 102.

16. **Disclaimers**

The United States, SBA, or any of their agents are not responsible for:

a) Any incorrect or inaccurate information, whether caused by Contestants, printing errors, or by any of the equipment or programming associated with or utilized in the Competition;

b) Technical failure of any kind, including, but not limited to malfunctions, interruptions or disconnections in phone lines, network hardware or software, or in connection with the Competition website;
c) Unauthorized intervention, including unauthorized human intervention, in any part of the entry process or the Competition;
d) Technical or human error which may occur in the administration of the Competition or the processing of entries; or
e) Any injury or damage to persons or property which may be caused, directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, from Contestant's participation in the Competition or receipt, use, or misuse of any prize awarded in the Competition.

If for any reason a Contestant's entry is confirmed to have been erroneously deleted, lost, or otherwise destroyed or corrupted, Contestant's sole remedy is to submit another entry in the Competition, provided it is submitted before the initial screening of entries is completed.

17. **General Conditions**

SBA reserves the right at any time, for any reason, to cancel, suspend, and/or modify the Competition, or any part of it.

Participation constitutes each Contestant's full and unconditional agreement to these Competition Rules and administrative decisions thereunder, which are final and binding in all matters related to the Competition. By participating in the Competition, Contestants acknowledge that the publication of the Competition Rules is not an obligation of funds and that the final award of prizes is contingent upon the availability of appropriated or donated funds.