<h1 style="text-align:center">THE SOUTH CAROLINA RELENTLESS CHALLENGE GRANT PROGRAM
2024 NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY</h1>

I. Relentless Challenge Description

The South Carolina Department of Commerce (S.C. Commerce) Innovation team announces the 2024 Relentless Challenge (RC) grant program. The Relentless Challenge grant (RC) is a statewide competitive grant program that plans to award approximately $750,000 for the 2024 funding cycle. The RC grant funds projects focused on fostering a sustainable innovation ecosystem that focuses specifically on high growth/high impact entrepreneurship, talent development, access to capital, and university-industry collaboration focused on commercialization of knowledge to the marketplace.

Individual awards are up to a maximum of $75,000 (no minimum). A demonstrated dollar-for-dollar match from non-state funds will be required for consideration of projects and disbursement of funding. Match funding for this opportunity is defined as non-state dollars, which can mean federal, local or private dollars, or in-kind of up to 25% of the total match amount. Match funding for this opportunity does not include loans or credit. Projects are expected to leverage other public and private investments which serve to catalyze future and sustainable development.

This notice of funding opportunity outlines the details and requirements associated with the 2024 cycle of the Relentless Challenge grant program.

Notices of funding opportunities from previous cycles are not applicable for 2024.

Details on this grant opportunity and how to apply are provided below.

II. General Project Approval Criterion:

The strategic planning process undertaken by S.C. Commerce generated four goals that guide the program investments:

- **Goal** 1- Catalyze high-growth/high-impact entrepreneurship to accelerate the translation of innovations, ideas, intellectual property, and research into products, services, companies, and jobs.
- **Goal 2**- Design programs that enhances talent development and an informed workforce contributing to a sustainable knowledge-economy.
- **Goal 3**- Create networks and tools to provide access and unlock risk capital opportunities for entrepreneurs and/or enable capital flow into high-growth startups.
- **Goal 4** – Support research and development collaboration and partnership between S.C. institutions of higher education and industry, to cultivate the state's technological advances that may result in funding, patent development and licensing for commercialization, and resource connectivity.

For additional information, please reference Innovation Insights, a vision-document produced by S.C. Commerce. Innovation Insights explores South Carolina's current activity in dominating clusters, areas of traction in emerging markets, and recommendations for navigating both opportunities and challenges within the innovation ecosystem.

III. Eligibility

Funding is reserved for South Carolina-based organizations that serve the S.C. innovation community in one or more of the above goals.

Qualifying applicants include:
- Non-profit organizations, including Chambers of Commerce (must be a registered state and federal non-profit organization at time of application).
- State, county or municipal entities
- Public higher education institutions

Eligible applicants may submit one proposal per organization.

Applicants must coordinate with the S.C. Commerce Innovation team and foster an ongoing relationship throughout the course of the project.

IV. Funding Opportunity and Limits

The Relentless Challenge grant program provides funds to support enriching, creative, and distinctive ideas and activities to build and support robust and sustainable innovation within the applicant's community or the state of South Carolina at large. The Relentless Challenge looks to fund new initiatives, **not** sustain initiatives already in existence.

The Relentless Challenge is an implementation grant program with the expectation that all project implementation will commence in Q1 of 2024. Grant funding may only be used for programmatic costs tied directly to the proposed project and NOT for general operating costs, infrastructure, research/feasibility studies, or to fund a capital or subgrant program.

All funding is for programs and participants exclusive to South Carolina.

All requested funding must align with and support the goals and objectives of the proposed project, as well as the Relentless Challenge Grant goals. Applications that do not support the amount of funds requested will be docked ten (10) points during the review and scoring process.

If funding is required for a multi-year program, approval will need to be obtained at least three (3) weeks before the grant application window opens on October 1.

V. Funding Match

All funding requests must have a 1:1 match not appropriated from the State of South Carolina. Match must be acquired no earlier than October 1, 2023.

The underlining requirement that grantees provide a match toward the Relentless grant is to encourage and establish local support for the program. When the state funding for the program ends, the goal is for the grantee to continue the program with established local support. While S.C. Commerce encourages the use of cash contribution as the source of the required match toward its grants, in-kind contributions are valuable assets that can assist grantees as they grow their program.

Cash match needs to be non-state appropriated and may come from federal, local or private funds. **In-kind contribution is a non-monetary contribution.** Goods or services offered free or at less than the usual charge result in an in-kind contribution. The contribution must impact and assist with the implementation of the scope of work for the Relentless program.

Salaries - labor costs (salaries and fringe) are not conducive to the design of a sustainable innovation ecosystem program; therefore, an RC grant application submitting labor costs as a "cash match" may be disqualified.

In-kind contribution will be allowed for up to 25% of the total eligible match. Adequate documentation of how the in-kind contribution is calculated, and how the contribution impacts and assists the overall scope of work for the grant, must be included in applicant's proposal, as well as with matching funds certification at time of payment request (for those who are ultimately awarded funding). Proposals with the least amount of in-kind contribution will receive the greatest consideration.

- Determination of In-Kind Value of Volunteer Time: determine the hourly rate to be used for volunteer services based upon current prevailing rates for that service and years of experience. Each applicant must provide a brief explanation of how hourly rate was determined and establish the hourly rate that will be utilized for the time limit of the grant agreement.
- Determination of In-Kind Value of Goods and Services (services, materials, and equipment): Decide the appropriate value of goods or services by considering the cost if the goods or services were not donated and needed to be purchased or leased. Each applicant will provide a brief explanation of how the value was determined and must be approved by S.C. Commerce

The S.C. Commerce Innovation team is available to answer any questions related to what may be needed to support the calculation of in-kind match.

VI. Pre-Application Concept Deck
Get the conversation started with the Innovation team at S.C. Commerce by submitting an optional pre-application concept deck no later than September 26, 2023. However, any organization that submits a pre-application concept deck **by 5PM ET on July 20, 2023 will receive a 5-point bonus** during the formal application review process (30-point scoring scale). Submission of a pre-application concept deck is optional but recommended. In addition to the potential for an extra five points, organizations can have one-on-one time with the Innovation team and receive feedback on eligibility and application planning support.

Important Note - a full, formal application must be submitted during the application window in October to be considered for Relentless Challenge funding.

Pre-Application Concept Deck Requirements:
— Maximum 9-slide deck template
— [Click here](#) to download the deck template with further direction.
— [Click here](#) to submit a pre-proposal deck.

VII. Virtual Information Sessions

In 2023 S.C. Commerce's Innovation team will host regularly scheduled one-hour virtual information sessions. Meetings will be held 1-2 times per month starting in June (see dates below). Each session will go over grant program details, including what it is, who is eligible, how to apply, and to ask questions. It is highly recommended applicants attend at least one Relentless Challenge information session; however, people should feel free to attend more than one to ask additional questions. If a full one-hour session is not needed for those who attend, then calls may end earlier than scheduled.

Conference Call Session Dates:

— **Wednesday, June 14, 2023: 10am – 11am EST**
— **Wednesday, June 21, 2023: 10am – 11am EST**
— **Wednesday, July 12, 2023: 10am – 11am EST**
— **Wednesday, July 26, 2023: 10:30am – 11:30am EST**
— **Wednesday, August 23, 2023: 10am – 11am EST**
— **Wednesday, September 20, 2023: 10:30am – 11:30am am EST**
— **Wednesday, October 4, 2023: 10am – 11am**

[Click to register](#) for one of the dates above.

VIII. Program Timeline

- **July 20, 2023(5PM ET):** Deadline to submit pre-application concept deck and receive 5 extra points (optional, but highly recommended)
- **September 26, 2023:** Last day to submit a pre-application concept deck.
- While decks received after 7/20/23 won't be eligible for the 5 extra points, submitting a deck after 7/20 still provides applicants the opportunity to receive highly targeted direction and feedback from the S.C. Commerce's Innovation team prior to formal application in October. (optional step, but highly recommended).
- **October 1, 2023:** Application Window Opens (see section X below)
- **October 12, 2023 (5PM ET):** Deadline for Questions or Requests for Clarification
  - This is a very busy time of year for the Innovation team at S.C. Commerce. Those who wait until the last minute to ask a question may not receive an answer until after the application window closes.
- **October 31, 2023 (5PM ET):** Application Window Closes
- **December 2023:** Award Announcements Made

Grant applications are due **October 31, 2023, at 5:00 PM ET**. Applications received after this deadline will not be reviewed. The term of the grant is 12 months. An in-person (if possible) kick-off event will be held in late February or early March of 2024 in Columbia, SC. Any submissions not receiving an award will receive notice. Agreements with awardees will be completed in January 2024.

IX. Formal Project Proposal (Required)

Proposals should be limited to six (6) numbered pages, plus a one-page cover sheet (see template with link to download - Appendix A). Budget, metrics, and timeline tables must be submitted with each proposal (see templates with links to download – Appendices B-D). In addition to the proposal itself, applying organizations need to submit supporting documentation such as previous reports (if applicable), letters of support, qualifications, and non-profit documentation, as outlined in letters K-O of this Section IX.

The Relentless proposal must include the following and be submitted in the format outlined:

A. **Title:** Title of the proposed activity/project (consider adding to header of each page)
B. **Mission:** What is the mission or overall purpose of the project?
C. **Strategic Rationale:** Succinctly explain the critical circumstances that compel the project to be funded by the Relentless Challenge**.** What are the problems and/or opportunities the project will address? How does it support the relentless pursuit of transformational ideas? Specifically discuss how the project will affect one or more of the innovation goals outlined in Section II of this notice.
D. **Project Description & Detail:** Clear and precise project description outlining what the project will entail, who it will impact, how the program will be implemented, where the activities will occur, and what the final deliverables will include.

    Discuss how the project is innovative. Are there any other efforts or existing projects underway that would compete or contribute to this innovation/idea?
E. **Validation:** Provide a short narrative around how the proposed project was validated with stakeholders and those the project seeks to serve. Be sure to reference who/which organizations were engaged in validation conversations. Note: these individuals serve as good letters of support. S.C. Commerce will question a seemingly well validated project that does not also include letters of support from the validating parties.
F. **Awareness:** Provide a short narrative around how the proposed project will be promoted to those it seeks to support and other stakeholders and supporters.
G. **Sustainability:** Outline a plan for how the project will continue to be funded and/or how it will self-sustain after the grant period has ended. It should not be anticipated that Relentless will be used to sustain a project in the future.
H. **Timeline:** Provide a timeline of milestones necessary to complete the project. Please note that grants are expected to be completed and funds utilized within twelve months of award. Projects are required to commence within three months of award. *Leverage the table in Appendix B to develop a timeline for your program*. *Feel free to add additional dates.*
I. **Budget:** Provide a brief narrative on the planned spending. Please include how awarded grant funds will be spent and the justification for funding requested, including how the amount is consistent with the associated output to be achieved (cost/benefit). *Please leverage the table in Appendix C to develop a budget table*.
J. **Metrics:** Provide a description of expected outcomes and overall impact of the proposed project. Historically, Relentless projects have easily targeted one Relentless grant goal (the primary goal) but have also touched upon one or two of the other grant goals (secondary goal(s)). Use the provided table to list out metrics as follows:
    *   List 6+ metrics for the primary grant goal your project will affect.
    *   List 1+ metric(s) for the secondary grant goal(s) your project affects**.**

Ex: If your program primarily affects the access to capital goal, but also somewhat affects both the high-growth entrepreneurship and talent development goals, then your metrics table will list 6+ metrics tied specifically to the access to capital goal and 1+ metrics tied to each of the other two goals.

Leverage the table in Appendix D to develop a Metrics plan.

Awarded organizations will submit a progress report and final close-out report that reports on both quantitative and qualitative data to the S.C. Commerce's Innovation team and to grant partners.

K. **Past Reporting**: If your organization received Relentless Challenge funding within the past two years or if your proposal references any past Relentlessly funded project, please include the most
recent progress report or final report for the previous Relentless project.

L. **S.C. Commerce Engagement:** Description of how applicant will utilize and engage the S.C. Commerce's Innovation team over the course of the project.

M. **Qualification:** How is the applicant qualified to address the project for which the funds are being sought?
   - Key personnel/contributors to the project as well as their role and/or responsibilities. Please provide CVs in the appendices.

N. **Non-Profit Documentation:** Non-profits must submit a Certificate of Good Standing from the state of its incorporation, a copy of the organization's Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws <u>at the time of application</u>.

O. **Letter(s) of Support:** At least one letter of support that directly acknowledges and confirms the focus of grant application.

Format: One (1) PDF file. 8.5x11 with 1.5 spaced copy using Arial, 11-point font. Body of Proposal should not exceed six (6) pages (not including cover sheet) with page numbers in the lower right-hand corner; budget, metrics, or timeline templates; letters of support; previous Relentless reports, CVs; or additional non-profit documentation).

Attachments must appear behind the proposal and include in order, Budget, Metrics or Timeline Templates, Letters of Support, Previous RCG Reports, CV's, and any additional non-profit documentation.

X. Selection Process

A Relentless Challenge grant Review Board will score proposals using a 30-point system and make recommendations to Commerce leadership for awarding grants. Proposals will be evaluated with emphasis on alignment with the grant goals, strength of project concept, achievability, and sustainability. Projects showing a greater than 1:1 funding match ratio will stand out as ones that show strong ability for long-term success.

Keep in mind that the Review Board may not be familiar with industry or organizational verbiage and acronyms. It is best to either define acronyms and terms or avoid them altogether.

XI. Reporting

Grant recipients must submit a six-month progress report and a final close-out report and letter. Templates will be provided by the S.C. Commerce.

At the six-month reporting period, a mandatory in-person (if possible) session will be held for all grant recipients. **Not attending the session will make the applicant ineligible for the next round of funding through the S.C. Commerce**.

The final close-out report will include results/outcomes of the project, as well as lessons learned, and obstacles encountered while engaged with the grant work. The close-out letter will indicate that all funds have been expended. Dates for the six-month progress report and final reporting and letter will be provided after notification of award.

All grant recipients will be expected to hold update meetings or provide copies of the progress and final reports with all organizations that provide a letter of support and all organizations and individuals that provide cash and in-kind match commitment."

XII. Questions and Submission
2024 Relentless Challenge grant application submissions will be accepted electronically from October 1 to 5 PM ET on October 31, 2023.

Questions or requests for clarification regarding this application must be submitted in writing to nconwell@sccommerce.com no later than 5:00 PM ET on October 12, 2023. **Applicants must apply electronically by filling out this form**.

Reference the Relentless Challenge FAQ's for answers to some commonly asked questions.

Appendix A

Cover Sheet

A downloadable cover sheet template can be found here.

The Cover Sheet should provide a quick reference around your organization and contact details, as well as very high-level project information. Cover sheet should be no longer than one (1) page, with fragments/bullets being acceptable.

[Entity Name and Address]
[Type of Entity (501c3/4/6, etc.)]
[Project Lead and Contact Information]
[Name of Project]
[Project Mission & Goals]
[Topline Deliverable(s) – What will exist at the end of the project that didn't exist at the beginning?]
[Relentless Funding Request]

Appendix B

Milestone Table

A downloadable milestone template can be found [here](#).

RELENTLESS CHALLENGE - Project Milestones		
Milestone	**Project-Specific Deliverable(s) Tied to Milestone (To be filled out by grantee)**	**Due Date**
Milestone 1	Examples: All program planning done; mentors and mentees in place; 1st training occurred; 3rd party contracts signed, and development started, etc.	3/1/2024
Milestone 2	Examples: at least 4 of 16 training programs delivered; at least 25% of mentor/mentee meetings have occurred; at least 25% of intern/fellow time has passed, etc.	5/16/2024
Milestone 3	Send Relentless Progress Report to Office of Innovation*	7/18/2024
Milestone 4		8/15/2024
Milestone 5		11/15/2024
Milestone 6		1/17/2025
Milestone 7	Send Final Close-Out Report to Office of Innovation*	4/15/2025

* Template provided by Commerce's Innovation team

Payment: Grant funds can be drawn whenever match is secured. However, if match will be secured throughout the term of the grant agreement, consider using your project timeline to guide your decision as to when to draw funds. Example: Use the completion of the project item you list as Milestone 2 (5/16/24) as the date to have 25% of your match secured and submitted to Commerce's Innovation team. The Innovation team will then disburse 25% of your granted money.

Exhibit C

Budget Table

A downloadable budget template with formulas can be found here.

TOTAL BUDGET BREAKDOWN*					
			Relentless Match **		
Contribution Source	Contribution Amount	% of Total Budget	Amount to be Used for 1:1 Match Requirement	% of Total Match	Match Details (Federal ARC grant, City of XYZ, volunteer hours, etc.)
Relentless Challenge	$75,000.00	23%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Federal	$150,000.00	47%	$40,000.00	53%	Ex: ARC Grant, EDA Grant
State	$25,000.00	8%	$0.00	0%	
Local	$20,000.00	6%	$20,000.00	27%	Ex: City of XYZ, Town of XYZ Chamber
Private	$10,000.00	3%	$10,000.00	13%	Ex: 123 Foundation, org/program sponsorship
In-Kind Value***	$40,000.00	13%	$5,000.00	7%	38 mentor volunteer hours at $100/hr. 120 student volunteer hours at $10/hr.
TOTAL PROGRAM BUDGET*	$320,000.00	100%	$75,000.00	100%	

* If the Relentless Challenge will help fund a larger initiative, please have the Total Program Budget reflect the overall program budget.

** Match does not need to be secured prior to proposal submission. Budget information provided in the table should reflect *anticipated* match dollars and details. Match must come from non-state appropriated funds, and all in-kind match needs to be outlined with details and value.

*** In-Kind can be no greater than 25% of the overall match. Proposals with the least amount of in-kind will receive the most consideration.

Appendix D

Metrics Table

A downloadable metrics template can be found here. Metrics provide S.C. Commerce's Innovation Team with much needed visibility and understanding. Innovation uses the information to not only understand the accomplishments of induvial projects, but also assess the overall success of the grant program itself. Ultimately, insight into results allows the Office of Innovation to uncover new opportunities and potentially consider expansion of grant funding in the future.

The Review Board considers the legitimacy and breadth of listed goals. Listing well thought-out goals that truly align with the proposed program is the Review Board's expectation.

RELENTLESS CHALLENGE METRICS TABLE									
Relentless Challenge Grant Goals	Talent Development			Entrepreneurship			Access to Capital		
	Metric	Current Number	Goal Number	Metric	Current Number	Goal Number	Metric	Current Number	Goal Number
List 6+ metrics associated with the primary goal category your program affects. *									
List 1+ metric(s) associated with each secondary goal category your program affects. *									

Note: newly launching programs with no historical data should reflect 0 in the Current Number column.

* Feel free to pull from listed metrics or choose your own:	Talent Development			Entrepreneurship			Access to Capital		
	# of interns/fellows			# of mentor:mentee sessions/mo.			Total # of funding pitches made		
	# of intern/fellow hours per mo.			# of mentor:mentee hours/mo.			Total amt of new capital raised		
	# of jobs created			Ttl # of mentor sessions			Total amt of grant funding awarded		
	# of people hired			Ttl # of mentor hours			Total # of new investment options created		
	# of externship cohorts			Total # mentors			# of Investor Education training sessions/mo.		
				Total # of mentees			# of Investor Education training hours/mo.		
				# of entrepreneurship training sessions/mo**			Total # of 'Access to Capital/Raising Capital' workshops		
				# of entrepreneurship training hours/mo.**					
				# of attendees at culminating event (not including presenters)					

** Examples of training: Business Fundamental Workshops (e.g., legal, accounting); Business Plan Development Workshops (e.g., Business Model Canvas)