

The American Ceramic Society

Innovation Fund

Guidelines for Applicants

1. Purpose

The ACerS Innovation Fund was established to encourage members to propose innovative new revenue-generating products and services that meet the needs of the ceramics, glass, and materials community. The Fund is designed to support pilot projects—new ideas whose initial costs may go beyond the traditional limits of Divisional budgets or other internal funding sources. Funded projects will be judged on their ability to positively impact the Society and, ultimately, to generate sufficient direct income to become self-sustaining.

2. Funding

The Innovation Fund will receive \$50,000 annually from the Society's reserves. The Fund will operate for an initial period of five years, after which the Board of Directors will conduct an analysis to determine whether it should continue. The Fund may be paused during years of severe financial distress.

Co-investment from external partners (e.g., companies, universities, other organizations) is welcome and encouraged where appropriate. Proposals involving co-investment should clearly describe the nature, amount, and terms of the external contribution.

3. Eligibility

Any ACerS member may submit a proposal, whether as an individual or as part of a group. Eligible proposing entities include, but are not limited to:

- Board Members
- Principal Activity Committees
- SPEO
- Divisions, Sections, and Chapters (including ACerS International Chapters)
- ACerS Committees

4. Proposal Requirements

Proposers must complete the official application form provided by ACerS and submit it by the annual deadline. Each proposal must include the following:

1. A clear description of the proposed product, service, or initiative.
2. An explanation of how the proposal will benefit the Society and the ceramics, glass, and materials community.
3. A detailed itemized budget. Proposals requesting less than \$5,000 will not be considered. Although the Society expects that most proposals will not exceed \$25,000,

larger amounts can be requested; however, the evaluation process will be modified, and any funding beyond \$25,000 may be approved separately by the Board.

4. A description of the proposal's financial potential, including how the project is expected to generate revenue or become self-sustaining. Proposers are not required to perform formal return-on-investment (ROI) calculations—ACerS staff can carry out ROI analyses based on internal data—but the proposal must clearly address its financial intent.
5. A proposed assessment methodology appropriate to the idea, explaining how success will be measured and how the initial investment will be repaid. This methodology will be reviewed and vetted by the Innovation Fund Committee.

5. Deadlines and Timeline

- **Annual submission deadline:** July 1 of each year. The first deadline is July 1, 2026.
- **Notification of outcomes:** Proposal submitters will be informed of the results following the annual MS&T meeting (typically held in October).
- **Spending period:** Successful proposals will be allowed to spend allocated funds over a period of up to three years from the date of approval. All monies will be allocated in the year the proposal is approved and disbursed over time by ACerS staff.

6. Evaluation Process

All proposals will be evaluated by the Innovation Fund Committee (IFC), which is composed of:

- The ACerS President
- The ACerS President-Elect
- The Executive Director
- The Treasurer
- The Chief Financial Officer

The IFC will determine one of three outcomes for each proposal:

- A. Fund the project as proposed.
- B. Fund a smaller pilot program.
- C. Decline the project.

The key factors in evaluating proposals are the predicted return on investment, the scalability and repeatability of the idea, and the overall benefit to the Society. The evaluation rubric is available on the ACerS website.

Proposals recommended for funding by the IFC will then go to the full Board of Directors for final approval. The full Board will have access to successful proposal packages for informational purposes.

7. Expectations for Funded Projects

- Funded projects are expected to repay the initial investment within 4 years and then return a 5% ROI thereafter.
- ACerS staff will manage funded projects, working in partnership with volunteers and the proposing group. Funds will not be sent directly to volunteers; ACerS staff will control the budget and disbursement of all funds.
- Successful projects that generate revenue may be incorporated into the overall ACerS budget and ongoing operations.
- Projects that do not meet expectations will be recorded with all assessment data and stored for future reference.
- Unused funds from a funded project will be returned to that year's general budget.

8. Resubmissions

Resubmission of unsuccessful proposals is permitted. Authors are encouraged to discuss potential resubmissions with the President of the Society and/or the Executive Director prior to reapplying. Reviews of individual proposals will typically not be provided.

9. Intellectual Property and Ownership

All proposals—whether funded or not—become the property of the American Ceramic Society and will be maintained in a database for future use.

When a proposal involves external partners or co-investment, the intellectual property rights, licensing arrangements, and revenue-sharing terms must be clearly defined in the proposal and agreed upon with ACerS prior to the start of the project. ACerS retains final authority over all IP decisions related to funded projects.

10. Co-Investment

The Society welcomes and encourages co-investment from external partners where appropriate. Proposals that include co-investment should describe the nature, amount, and terms of the external contribution, as well as how the partnership will be structured. Co-investment may take the form of financial contributions, in-kind resources, or other forms of support.

11. Discontinuation of Funded Projects

The Society reserves the right to cancel an ongoing grant if circumstances change such that the idea can no longer be implemented, or if volunteers no longer pursue the activity.

12. How to Apply

To apply, complete the official ACerS Innovation Fund application form and submit it by the annual July 1 deadline. The application form, evaluation rubric, and any supplementary materials are available at [ACerS website URL].

For questions about the Innovation Fund or the application process, please contact Erica Zimmerman at ezimmerman@ceramics.org.