

RCW 43.330.270 Innovation partnership zone program. (1) The department must design and implement an innovation partnership zone program through which the state will encourage and support research institutions, workforce training organizations, and globally competitive companies to work cooperatively in close geographic proximity to create commercially viable products and jobs.

(2) The director must designate innovation partnership zones on the basis of the following criteria:

(a) Innovation partnership zones must have three types of institutions operating within their boundaries, or show evidence of planning and local partnerships that will lead to dense concentrations of these institutions:

(i) Research capacity in the form of a university or community college fostering commercially valuable research, nonprofit institutions creating commercially applicable innovations, or a national laboratory;

(ii) An industry cluster as defined in RCW 43.330.090. The cluster must include a dense proximity of globally competitive firms in a research-based industry or industries or individual firms with innovation strategies linked to (a)(i) of this subsection. A globally competitive firm may be signified through international organization for standardization 9000 or 1400 certification, or evidence of sales in international markets; and

(iii) Training capacity either within the zone or readily accessible to the zone. The training capacity requirement may be met by the same institution as the research capacity requirement, to the extent both are associated with an educational institution in the proposed zone;

(b) The support of a local jurisdiction, a research institution, an educational institution, an industry or cluster association, a workforce development council, and an associate development organization, port, or chamber of commerce;

(c) Identifiable boundaries for the zone within which the applicant will concentrate efforts to connect innovative researchers, entrepreneurs, investors, industry associations or clusters, and training providers. The geographic area defined should lend itself to a distinct identity and have the capacity to accommodate firm growth;

(d) The innovation partnership zone administrator must be an economic development council, port, workforce development council, city, or county.

(3) With respect solely to the research capacity required in subsection (2)(a)(i) of this section, the director may waive the requirement that the research institution be located within the zone. To be considered for such a waiver, an applicant must provide a specific plan that demonstrates the research institution's unique qualifications and suitability for the zone, and the types of jointly executed activities that will be used to ensure ongoing, face-to-face interaction and research collaboration among the zone's partners.

(4) On October 1st of each odd-numbered year, the director must designate innovation partnership zones on the basis of applications that meet the legislative criteria, estimated economic impact of the zone, evidence of forward planning for the zone, and other criteria as developed by the department. Estimated economic impact must include evidence of anticipated private investment, job creation, innovation, and commercialization. The director must require evidence that zone applicants will promote commercialization, innovation, and collaboration among zone residents.

(5) Innovation partnership zones are eligible for funds and other resources as provided by the legislature or at the discretion of the governor.

(6) If the innovation partnership zone meets the other requirements of the fund sources, then the zone is eligible for the following funds relating to:

(a) The local infrastructure financing tools program;

(b) The sales and use tax for public facilities in rural counties;

(c) Job skills;

(d) Local improvement districts; and

(e) Community economic revitalization board projects under chapter 43.160 RCW.

(7) An innovation partnership zone must be designated as a zone for a four-year period. At the end of the four-year period, the zone must reapply for the designation through the department.

(8) If the director finds that an applicant does not meet all of the statutory criteria or additional criteria recommended by the department to be designated as an innovation partnership zone, the department must:

(a) Identify the deficiencies in the proposal and recommended steps for the applicant to take to strengthen the proposal;

(b) Provide the applicant with the opportunity to appeal the decision to the director; and

(c) Allow the applicant to reapply for innovation partnership designation on October 1st of the following calendar year or during any subsequent application cycle.

(9) If the director finds at any time after the initial year of designation that an innovation partnership zone is failing to meet the performance standards required in its contract with the department, the director may withdraw such designation and cease state funding of the zone.

(10) The department must convene annual information sharing events for innovation partnership zone administrators and other interested parties.

(11) An innovation partnership zone must annually provide performance measures as required by the director, including but not limited to private investment measures, job creation measures, and measures of innovation such as licensing of ideas in research institutions, patents, or other recognized measures of innovation.

(12) The department must compile a biennial report on the innovation partnership zone program by December 1st of every even-numbered year. The report must provide information for each zone on its: Objectives; funding, tax incentives, and other support obtained from public sector sources; major activities; partnerships; performance measures; and outcomes achieved since the inception of the zone or since the previous biennial report. The department must submit the report to the governor and legislature beginning December 1, 2010. [2014 c 112 s 115; 2012 c 225 s 1; 2009 c 72 s 1; 2007 c 227 s 1.]