



Congregate: A Solutions Accelerator to Safely Re-Open the Tourism, Hospitality and Performing Arts Industries

Purpose

COVID-19 has brought tourism and the affiliated services to a halt – from live music, to tribal entertainment venues, to cruise travel – it has all stopped. To reopen these industries, we need both technologies and policies that ensure public health and technology that allow us to congregate safely.



The Cruise Industry is a critical component to the state's of Washington and Alaska tourism industry.

That includes technologies for: (1) health pre-clearance, (2) air filtration, and (3) touchless and disease-resistant surfaces. And beyond the invention of these technologies, we need connections with industry and regulators that ensure that they can be deployed at attractions in a safe manner.

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a statutory, public-private partnership with a 30-year history of working in regional economic development and recovery planning. The PNWER region includes five U.S. states (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington) and five Canadian territories and provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and the

Yukon). PNWER has also maintained a very active Tourism Working Group which includes industry and government stakeholders with a vested interest in the success and sustainability of the region's tourism industry.

Opportunity

PNWER has a long history of working with state and local governments, industry leaders, and innovators to partner on solutions that drive the northwest economy forward. Our strength is partnership. In this effort, we seek to leverage the world-class expertise in cloud computing, AI, biotech, and innovation management to support this critical industry sector. The U.S. Economic Development Agency is providing strategic investments on a competitive merit basis to support economic development, foster job creation, and attract private investment in economically distressed areas of the United States to address the economic, health, and safety risks caused by the coronavirus pandemic through entrepreneurship and innovation. PNWER is developing a proposal for this grant opportunity for a solutions accelerator directed at the PNW tourism and hospitality sector. We will be (1) scaling innovative biotechnology, health security, and supply chain technologies and solutions to market, (2) increasing regional, national, and government connectivity across innovation clusters to support commercialization and entrepreneurship, and (3) developing and scaling innovative entrepreneurship support models to address the new congregation environments of the pandemic.

Solution

The project will convene experts from the tourism and hospitality industry that will provide program guidance and direction to address current challenges and develop a structure to address future challenges as well. We will develop a 12-week accelerator focused on three technology areas: (1) health pre-clearance, (2) air filtration, and (3) touchless and disease-resistant surfaces. We are forming an industry council of venues (e.g. sports arenas, casinos, concert halls), transportation companies (e.g. cruise companies, airlines), and attractions (e.g. museums, ski lodges) that would serve as mentors and potential partners for the startups we bring into the accelerator. With input from experts, we will help further refine the topic areas and provide input for company selection to the program. Our partner Moonbeam Exchange has a platform with over two million deep technology companies and will help us source candidate companies. Additionally, we are working to align government support across regional departments of commerce and tourism to maximize the effect on the economy and address the regulatory and compliance challenges related to reopening. The Accelerator will be funded for two years with shared grant funds and industry investment.



Audience at McCaw Hall in Seattle. The Accelerator will explore solutions so that we can return to venues safely.

Key goals of the project:

Convene

- ✓ Convene experts from industry and government
- ✓ Collaborate and identify public health requirements

Prove

- ✓ Engage innovation ecosystem to address public health needs
- ✓ Support innovators to navigate various stakeholders and build scalable solutions

Scale

- ✓ Prove efficacy of solutions that allow people to congregate again
- ✓ Establish solutions in the U.S. that scale globally

Programming

The overall initiative involves two cohorts of companies in 18 months. See below for a draft timeline for the project. The Solution Accelerator itself would be 12 weeks which would be the time we would be directly working with the companies. Companies accepted into the program would get mentorship from industry leaders on challenges and business models in the tourism sector, support in navigating regulation and public health policies, and engagement with the investment community to help scale solutions.

Timeline

Apr 1-Jun 31, 2021	Program development, contracting, and identification of key industry challenges, scout for innovative technologies
Jul 1-Aug 31, 2021	Program implementation – Venture capital and stakeholder engagement, scout for startups (Cohort 1)
Aug 2021	PNWER Annual Summit Briefing to regional policy makers
Sep 1-Nov 30, 2021	Accelerator programming, Mentor workshops and matching industry experts with technology expertise, pitching solutions
Oct 2021	Regulatory compliance workshop with policy makers and state regulators
Nov 30 - Dec 31, 2021:	Programmatic updates and retooling based on stakeholder feedback
Jan 1-Mar 30, 2022	Scouting for startups (Cohort 2)
Apr 1-Apr 30, 2022	Venture capital and stakeholder engagement
May 1-Jul 31, 2022	Accelerator programming (Cohort 2), PNWER Annual Summit Briefing to regional policy makers
Aug 1-Sep 31, 2022	Sustainability Plan implementation; analysis of success, economic impacts of cohorts, impact report.

Impact

The regional impact will be to benefit the tourism industry including the cruise industry, casinos, and large venue locations. Safely reopening the tourism sector will require identifying technology for the national need. This accelerator project has the potential of connecting venture capital to new and proven technologies. Investments like these are vital to improving U.S. domestic manufacturing and drawing in foreign investment for global challenges with U.S. solutions.