

Recruitment of (Pre-) Startups for 2025 K-Startup Grand Challenge

K-Startup Grand Challenge, KSCG, is a global startup program aiming at identifying and supporting prominent non-Korean startups for their Korean market expansion. We hereby announce the recruitment of (pre-) startups to take part in the program.

April 29, 2025

Minister of SMEs and Startups

1 Overview

- ☐ **Contents** : Prize money (Total KRW 380M), business acceleration, visa & incorporation support, office space, for global startup's market expansion, settlement and scale-up in Korea.

< Key Reforms in 2025 Batch KSGC Program >

- ▶ **(Bigger Prize Money)** Prize money, used to be provided to only top three in the previous batches, is to be awarded to top 20.
- ▶ **(Eased Regulation on Program Participation) Staff members**, including representative of a startup, **can take part in the program.**
- ▶ **(Advanced Accelerating Modules)** Practical support for startups' business activities is to be provided, including matching to business partners and VCs, consulting on Korean market expansion and localization strategies, settlement support etc.
- ▶ **(Adjustable Schedule)** During the program, startups' individual schedule is to be taken into account, except for orientation session and presentation evaluation.
 - * Long-term incubation modules in Korea are to be abolished.
- ▶ **(Grant for Participation)** Government grants for startups' travel expenses are to be provided for their participation in the program such as Demo Day event.

- ☐ **Target** : Non-Korean (pre-) startups that wish to enter the Korean market (Foreign students studying in Korea are also eligible)

- ☐ **Scale** : 80 teams

- ☐ **Program Period** : July 2025 ~ April 2026

Phase-1	Phase-2	Phase-3
Korean market "discovery"	business "expansion"	Scale-up in the market
80 teams	40 teams (Presentation evaluation is to take place after the end of Phase-1.)	20 teams (Demo Day event is to be held after the end of Phase-2.)
4 th week of July – 2 nd week of August, 2025	Sept. - Dec. 2025	Jan. - Apr. 2026
Online	Online and offline	Online and offline

2 Eligibility

- ☐ **Eligibility** (Applicants shall satisfy all of the following requirements)
 - Pre-startups or startups with seven years or less of experience (Foreign students studying in Korea are also eligible.)
 - * A startup with ten years or less of experience is also eligible, in case it is a new industry business startup. (Please refer to the attached table.)
 - ** Startups established no earlier than April 30, 2018; April 30, 2015, in case a startup is a new industry business startup.
 - The representative of an applicant must have foreign nationalities.
 - * In case a startup is operated by multiple representatives, all of them must have foreign nationalities.
- ☐ **Exclusion Criteria** (Startups are unable to apply if they fall into any of the followings)
 - Those who lead businesses that are clearly against the economic order and good public morals, such as general entertainment bar business, dancing entertainment bar business, and other business of managing and operating gambling facilities
 - Those who have been selected to participate in KSGC program between 2016 and 2024, including those who gave up, or whose participation in the program was suspended in the middle.
 - * A person who applied to KSGC but not selected is eligible for the application.
 - Those who are unable to enter Korea due to visa issues, etc.

1. Prize Money and Government Grants

- **(Grants for Travel Expenses)** Airfares, etc, are to be provided for startups' participation in Phase-2 modules. (40 teams)
- **(Prize Money)** Prize money is to be given to top 20 teams selected through KSGC Demo Day event.
- **(Grants for Scale-up)** The grants are to be provided after Phase-3 to top eight teams selected through commercialization evaluation.

Category	Targets	Contents	Payment Period
Grants for Travel Expenses (KRW 320M in total)	40 teams in Phase-2	① KRW 4M/team ② KRW 4M/team	① 1 st entry into Korea (Early Sept.) ② 2 nd entry into Korea (End of Nov.)
Prize Money (KRW 380M in total)	Top 20 teams selected through COMEUP Demo Day event	1 st place: KRW 100M 2 nd place: KRW 70M 3 rd place: KRW 50M 4 th place: KRW 40M 5 th place: KRW 30M 6 th -8 th place: KRW 10M 9 th -20 th place: KRW 5M	End of Phase-2
Grants for Scale-up (KRW 250M in total)	Top eight teams selected through commercialization evaluation	Tier 1(EX): KRW 50M×2 teams Tier 2(VG): KRW 30M×3 teams Tier 3(GD): KRW 20M×3 teams	End of Phase-3

2. Startup Program Modules for Korean Market Expansion

□ [Phase-1] Support for Korean Market “Exploration”

- **(Target)** 80 teams
- **(Method)** Online (Video conference)
- **(Contents)** Introduction to the Korean startup ecosystem, sessions from alumni startups who successfully entered the Korean market, plans for market expansion and localization strategies by each startup are to be offered through video conference.

□ [Phase-2] Support for Korean Market “Expansion”

- **(Target)** Top 40 teams selected through presentation evaluation after the end of Phase-1
- **(Method)** Online and offline
- **(Contents)** Matching with and meetings with business partners in Korea facilitated by professional managers, participation in fundraising IR events, support for visa acquisition and incorporation in Korea, expenses for visit and stay in Korea, office space, etc.

- ▶ **(Acceleration)** Matching to and meetings with business partners including potential clients in Korea, IR pitching engaging Korean VCs, consulting on Korean market expansion strategies, product and service localization plans, etc.
- ▶ **(Grants for Program Participation)** Airfares, grants for stay in Korea for startups' participation in accelerating modules such as orientation session, demo day events, meetings with (potential) business partners in Korea, etc. (Max. KRW 4M / startup)
 - * Orientation session (Sept. 3, 2025, Jeju), KSGC Demo Day (Dec. 10, 2025, COMEUP in Seoul)
- ▶ **(Visa Acquisition)** Recommendation letters to be issued for Startup Prep. Visa acquisition (D-10-2, Six-month stay)
- ▶ **(Incorporation)** Virtual address, administrative support for incorporation
- ▶ **(Office Space)** Office space for free for global startups (Max. two staff members by team)
 - * Office desks, chairs, wired internet, printers, etc, to be provided.

□ [Phase-3] Support for “Scale-up” in the Korean Market

- **(Target)** Top 20 teams selected through KSGC Demo Day after the end of Phase-2
- **(Method)** Online and offline
- **(Contents)** Intensive acceleration and government grants for stable scale-up in the Korean market, matching to government-supported programs, etc.
 - After the end of Phase-3, top eight teams are to be selected to provide follow-up support such as government grants for scale-up and matching to other government-supported programs, etc.

- ▶ **(Dedicated Manager)** Professional managers to be assigned to startups to support Korean market expansion
- ▶ **(Acceleration)** Matching to potential clients and partners in Korea through online and offline
- ▶ **(Visa Acquisition)** Recommendation letters to be provided for Startup Visa acquisition (D-8-4, two-year stay)
- ▶ **(Grants for Scale-up)** Top eight teams selected through commercialization evaluation to be given different amount of grants according to their performance level
 - * Lv. EX (two teams) : KRW 50M/team, Lv. VG (three teams) : KRW 30M/team, Lv. GD (three teams) : KRW 20M/team
- ▶ **(Matching to Government Programs)** Benefits to be provided: different amount of additional points in upcoming government programs to be provided according to startups' performance level in commercialization evaluation; exemption from document screening in other government programs to be granted, etc.

4 Application

- **Period** : Apr. 29, 2025 (Tue) - 15:00, June. 13, 2025 (Fri)(KST)
- **Method** : Online (Homepage of K-Startup Grand Challenge)
 - URL : <https://k-startupgc.org>

□ Required Documents

Category	Required Documents	Remarks
Upon application	Application form (Refer to Att. 1)	The form must be written in English
	Introductory materials	English version shall be submitted.
After the preliminary review (Details to be announced)	Supporting evidence for additional points in document screening	Recommendation e-mails issued from the embassies
	Passport (of the representative)	It is to verify the nationality of the applicants (representatives).
	Business registration	Startups' business registration issued in their home countries, or any other documents equivalent thereto
	Promotional videos	Detailed guide to be announced

* Please note that the files to be uploaded shall not exceed **100MB**.

** Please make sure to use the application form attached. Application not using the attached format shall be disregarded from the evaluation. If an applicant fails to submit any of the required documents mentioned above, the application shall also be set aside.

5 Evaluation and Selection

□ Evaluation Process

- ① **(Preliminary Review)** This step is to exclude applications who failed to fill minimum amount of the application form (less than 60%), those whose application is unassessable (omission of certain required documents, application written in languages other than English, etc), and duplicate applications.
- ② **(Document Screening, Video Evaluation)** Among those who passed the preliminary, top 80 startups are to be selected through document screening and video evaluation.
 - Those who wish to receive additional points must submit evidential documents related thereto. (Max. five additional points)

< Additional Points >

Target	Points	Evidential Documents
Startups recommended by "K-Scouters"	5	Put a check in the box in the application form that the applicant is recommended by K-Scouters. (Implementing Institution is to verify the fact.)
Startups recommended by Korean embassies in startups' home countries	5	The embassies are to send an email. (Formats are to be distributed)

□ Process of Startup Evaluation

① Preliminary Review	② Submission of Additional Materials	③ Document Screening, Video Evaluation	④ Selection Result Announcement
Exclusion of applicants falling short. Confirmation of startups to be evaluated ~3 rd week of June. 2025	Submission of promotional videos, required documents ~4 th week of June. 2025	Evaluation on team composition, core technologies, competitiveness, etc. ~1 st week of July. 2025	Selection of top 80 teams ~2 nd week of July. 2025

□ Evaluation Criteria

Category	Key Details
Problem Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What is the problem to solve? What is the pain point of the customers? ▶ What is the applicant's solution—goods and services—to the problem, and is it creative / innovative? ▶ Does the applicant understand business model, namely B2B, B2C, and B2G, and does the one have clear target customers?
Viability and Differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Is the applicant's item viable—possibility of improvement or development? What is the detailed plan for commercialization? ▶ What is the applicant's sales record, funding round, amount of funding, etc? ▶ What differentiates the applicant from its competitors around the world: technological barriers, etc?
Korean Market Expansion Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Is the applicant's market targeting analysis-based and feasible? ▶ Does the applicant have a detailed commercialization strategy for market expansion? ▶ Is the applicant willing to make a foray into the Korean market, incorporation in Korea or relocation of its headquarters to Korea?
Team Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Experience in starting up a business, core capability of the team ▶ Growth potential and sustainability of the team

* (Pre-) Startups are preferred who have detailed plan of headquarters relocation to, or incorporation in Korea.

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Note

- Application to the program must be made **under the name of the representative of the applying startup**.
 - * If an applicant's name is different from its representative's name stated in the submitted documents, the application is to be excluded from the evaluation.
- The representative of an applying startup must attend the presentation evaluation.
 - * Notwithstanding, if there is an unavoidable reason, a staff member is allowed to make a presentation instead. (In case, statement of reasons shall be submitted.)
- The entire processes, application, evaluation and selection, market expansion program, are to take place in English. Interpreting services are not to be provided.
- Guide for finally selected startups is to be sent. Responsibility and accountability for ignorance of the contents rest with the applicants.
- During the evaluation process, or even after final selection, any startup found to have failed to satisfy eligibility and requirements, or submitted false information, may be subject to restrictions, such as selection cancellation, disgorgement of prize money and government grants, exclusion from participation in future programs, etc.

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Contact

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Ref.	New Industry Business Startup Sectors
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< New Industry Business Startup Sector >

①	Artificial Intelligence	⑩	Self driving vehicle	⑲	Smart home
②	Big Data	⑪	Electric, hydrogen car	⑳	Renewable energy
③	5G+	⑫	Bio	㉑	Secondary battery
④	Blockchain	⑬	Medical device	㉒	Carbon capture, utilization, and storage, CCUS
⑤	Service platform	⑭	Functional foods	㉓	Resource recycling, energy reuse
⑥	Realistic contents	⑮	Drone, personal mobility device	㉔	Aerospace
⑦	Intelligent robotics	⑯	Future fleet	㉕	Next generation nuclear power
⑧	Smart manufacturing	⑰	Disaster and safety	㉖	Quantum
⑨	System semiconductor	⑱	Smart city	㉗	Cybersecurity