South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency

Request for Applications

2026 Entrepreneur Incubation Pathway Cohort

RFA SPIPA-EP-2026-01

SPIPA is seeking eight existing Native-owned businesses for its 2026 Entrepreneur Incubation Pathway Cohort. Selected businesses will receive coaching, training, mentorship, and access to free office and workspace. Each business will establish individualized milestones and set concrete goals to meet during the first 12 months of participation.

Key Actions and Dates:

Action	Date and time
Applications open	November 13, 2026
Application Submission Deadline	December 9, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time
Anticipated decision notices	December 16, 2026
Anticipated cohort start date	December 18, 2026

How to Submit Applications:

Submit the completed Application Form (Attachment A) and optional supporting materials as one PDF by email to epc@spipa.org, or as a printed application packet by postal mail or hand delivery to the office locations listed below. All applications must be received by the application deadline. A postmark will not establish timely receipt.

Olympia Location
SPIPA Entrepreneurial Program
Native Entrepreneurial Professional Center
6541 Sexton Dr NW, Building G
Olympia, WA 98502

Shelton Location
SPIPA Entrepreneurial Program
3104 SE Old Olympic Hwy
Shelton, WA 98584

This Request for Applications is accessible at www.spipa.org/jobs
Questions and application assistance: 360-426-3990 or epc@spipa.org

1. The 2026 Entrepreneur Incubation Pathway Cohort

1.1 Who is Eligible and what is Required?

SPIPA's Entrepreneurial Program will accept up to eight Native businesses to participate in its 2026 Entrepreneur Incubation Pathway Cohort. Applicants must be enrolled members of a federally recognized Tribe, live in SPIPA's eight-county service area, and own at least 51% of the existing business. Only existing businesses are eligible to apply and must meet location and Tribal community service requirements. Businesses that are not currently operating are not eligible to apply.

Selected businesses will be required to develop an Individualized Incubation Plan which includes coaching, training, mentorship, and connections to lenders and professional networks. Participation in most activities will be in person. Incubation Plans will establish agreed-upon milestones and measurable goals to be met during the first 12 months. There is no cost for a business to participate in this program.

All applications will be reviewed for market opportunity, readiness and commitment, fit with incubator services, Tribal community impact, measurable business goals, and application completeness. Program staff is available to assist businesses with application completion.

1.2 What is SPIPA and the Entrepreneurial Program?

The South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency is an intertribal consortium consisting of five federally recognized Tribes: the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Nisqually Indian Tribe, Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe, Skokomish Indian Tribe, and Squaxin Island Tribe. SPIPA operates health, workforce, family, and economic programs for Tribal communities in its service area.

SPIPA's Entrepreneurial Program provides business coaching, training, workspace, technology, and referrals through the Native Entrepreneurial Professional Center located in Olympia, Washington.

1.3 Why is SPIPA Providing this Opportunity?

SPIPA is implementing this program because it focuses on existing Native businesses that can benefit from coaching and technical assistance to meet current business challenges. The approach is geared to help business owners strengthen operations, address barriers, make practical plans, and work toward measurable growth that benefits Tribal communities.

1.4 What will a Business Participant Accomplish?

Businesses will strengthen their stability, reach targeted customers, maintain or create new jobs, and improve their access to capital to meet business goals. Businesses will also provide useful products, services, and economic opportunities for Tribal communities.

1.5 How is this Program Funded?

The 2026 Entrepreneur Incubation Pathway Cohort is supported by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Economic Development, Indian Business Incubators Program. Selected businesses will receive all services at no cost, but they will not receive cash, grants, loans, contracts, investments, employment, or other financial awards from this program.

2. Program Services and Eligibility

2.1 What Services will be Available to Participants?

Each selected business will receive assistance from staff in developing an Individualized Incubation Plan, based on an intake assessment and business goals. Depending on the plan, services may include:

- One-on-one business coaching.
- Financial, management, and marketing assistance.
- Training and mentorship.
- Networking with lenders, investors, and professional organizations.
- Workspace, equipment, and technology at the Native Entrepreneurial Professional Center, subject to availability and site rules.

2.2 What are the Program's Responsibilities?

SPIPA will:

- Maintain the workspace facility, coordinate the workspace schedule, provide business coaching, and arrange training presentations.
- Assist participants with making connections with lenders, mentors, and other Tribal resources.
- Review participants' progress on a quarterly basis and assist participants with their individualized plans.

2.3 Which Businesses are Eligible to Apply?

SPIPA will screen all applications for eligibility before scoring such applications. Eligibility will be verified at all stages of the selection process. Applicants must meet all five requirements listed below.

- Service-Area Residency: Applicants must live in Mason, Thurston, Pierce, Lewis, Kitsap, Grays Harbor, Pacific, or Wahkiakum County, Washington. Businesses must be located in one of these counties.
- Tribal Enrollment: The applicant must be an enrolled member of a federally recognized Tribe and provide proof of such enrollment.
- Existing Business and Ownership: Businesses must be Native-owned and be fully operational. An enrolled member of a federally recognized Tribe must own and control at least 51% of the business.
- Tribal Community Service: Businesses must provide products or services to one or more Tribal or Reservation communities.
- Authority and Commitment: The applicant must be an authorized representative of the eligible business and commit engaging fully in coaching, training, progress reporting, and other in-person activities.

***Please Note:* All business participants must fully comply with all applicable federal, state, and Tribal laws, rules, and regulations. Participants must also follow all rules, policies, and guidelines established by the program. Additionally, all participants must disclose in writing any relationship they have with SPIPA employees, SPIPA Board members, application reviewers, or Tribal Council members that may create a conflict of interest.**

2.4 What are Participants Required to do?

All program participants shall:

- Complete eligibility verification, orientation, intake assessment, and sign the participant agreement.
- Develop an Individualized Incubation Plan with agreed-upon actions, milestones, and quarterly progress reviews.
- Participate in scheduled coaching and other activities in person at the Native Entrepreneurial Professional Center. Limited online or hybrid participation may be permitted upon request.

- Meet and communicate with program staff at agreed-upon intervals and promptly address any barriers.
- Follow all program, facility, technology, and equipment rules and regulations.
- Provide reasonable baseline, milestone, and follow-up information and take part in cohort alumni follow-up for up to five years after completion.

Graduation is contingent upon successful completion of agreed-upon milestones, an exit review, and finalization of a 12-month Post-Incubation Growth Plan. Written participation agreements shall set forth a participation schedule and all graduation requirements. A 12-month goal-setting period does not establish a fixed program end date. *Participants who are unwilling to comply with any of the participation requirements set forth above and in the participant agreement may be subject to expulsion from the cohort.*

2.5 How is Participant Progress Measured?

Program staff will collect information from participants through intake, quarterly reviews, exit reviews, and alumni follow-up. Reporting connects individual goals with the program outcomes below. SPIPA reports information on deliverables to the grantor using aggregate numbers. Any information shared in reports to the grantor will not contain any personal identifiers; however, SPIPA may reference a participating business name.

Measure	Type	Source and timing
Businesses completing their Individualized Incubation Plan milestones	Outcome	Quarterly progress reviews completed by program staff.
Changes in sales, customers, and jobs from baseline	Outcome	Intake, quarterly reviews, and exit reviews collected from participants by staff.
Capital accessed through loans, investment, and grants	Outcome	Quarterly reviews and exit reports collected from participants by staff.
Businesses graduating with a Post-Incubation Growth Plan	Outcome	Exit reviews collected by program staff when agreed-upon milestones have been completed.
Businesses still operating after completion, including at years 1, 3, and 5	Outcome	Annual alumni follow-up done by program staff for up to five years post-graduation.

3. The Application Process

3.1 What is Included in the Application?

Complete Attachment A using the form provided or a document with the same headings and numbering. Answer any questions clearly and completely. Include specific information as requested. Submit only the completed application and supporting materials. The RFA instructions do not need to be included in your submitted application.

Application item	Location	Limit
Applicant, business, ownership, and baseline information	Part 1	No page limit
Five written response sections	Parts 2 through 6	8 pages total
Eligibility, conflicts, and certification	Part 7	No page limit
Optional supporting materials	After the form	10 pages total

Optional materials may include a business or growth plan, customer feedback, market research, marketing materials, contracts or letters of interest, and financial statements or projections. Please use 11-point font or larger in separate responses. Count continuation pages toward the eight-page written-response limit. If an answer exceeds a form field's visible space, attach a clearly labeled continuation page so the entire answer can be read and printed.

Do not include copies of any Tribal Identification or enrollment cards, full enrollment numbers, Social Security numbers, full tax ID numbers, or bank account numbers. Eligibility is verified through a secure process after screening and selection is completed.

3.2 How and When must the Application be Submitted?

All applications must be received no later than December 9, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time. Late applications will not be accepted or reviewed. Please use one of the following methods to submit your application:

- Email one PDF file containing the completed application and supporting materials to epc@spipa.org. Subject line: "SPIPA-EP-2026-01 - Your business name"; or
- Mail or hand-deliver a hard copy of your completed application packet to either location:

  Olympia location
  SPIPA Entrepreneurial Program
  Native Entrepreneurial Professional Center
  6541 Sexton Dr NW, Building G
  Olympia, WA 98502

  Shelton location
  SPIPA Entrepreneurial Program
  3104 SE Old Olympic Hwy
  Shelton, WA 98584

Please call 360-426-3990 to confirm drop-off arrangements. If mailed, please allow for delivery time. A postmark will not establish timely receipt.

SPIPA will confirm receipt of your application via email within two business days. If you do not receive confirmation, please call 360-426-3990. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that their applications are completed and signed by the submission deadline. *No corrections or amendments to submitted applications will be accepted after the deadline for submission: December 9, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time.*

3.3 What if there are Questions or Application Assistance is Needed?

Please direct any questions to the Entrepreneurial Program by sending an email epc@spipa.org.

Application submission assistance is available. Program staff can clarify instructions or provide general

information. Applicants must provide their own independent responses to the scored questions.

4. The Screening, Scoring, and Selection Process

4.1 How will Applications be Screened for Eligibility?

SPIPA will check all applications for timely receipt, completeness, and whether all eligibility requirements have been met. SPIPA will also review whether business activities are compatible with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies. No corrections or amendments to submitted applications will be accepted.

4.2 Scoring Criteria

Criterion	What reviewers assess	Points
Part 2 Business and market opportunity	Customer need, distinct value, evidence of demand, and a realistic revenue approach.	20
Part 3 Readiness and commitment	Availability, follow-through, openness to coaching, and a practical plan to address barriers.	20
Part 4 Necessity and fit with services	Priority challenges, match with program services, and ability to benefit from assistance.	20
Part 5 Tribal community and economic impact	Community connection, useful products or services, job creation, local spending, and responsiveness to needs.	20
Part 6 Measurable 12-month goals	Specific goals, achievable actions, target dates, and measurable progress.	15
Whole application Completeness and responsiveness	Complete, consistent, and responsive answers. Supporting material will be considered when provided.	5
Total possible score		100

Tribal enrollment and business ownership establish eligibility and do not earn points. Requesting assistance or accommodation will not lower an applicant's score. Optional supporting materials are not required.

4.3 How Does Scoring Work?

The members of the review committee will independently score each eligible application. The committee consists of one individual from the Entrepreneurial Program, one from a consortium Tribe, and one with a significant business or financial background. Reviewers disclose conflicts and recuse themselves when required.

SPIPA will rank all eligible applications according to their final score, apply the selection outcomes and tie-break rules*, and send electronic notices to the successful applicants.

Final score	Outcome
75 points or higher	Competitive for selection; ranked by final score to fill the eight available spots.
65 to 74.9 points	May be placed on a waitlist or conditional pathway, with qualifications and participation requirements determined by the Entrepreneurial Program.
Below 65 points	Not selected for this cohort.

**Final scoring ties are resolved by first taking into account the highest Tribal community and economic impact score, then the highest combined readiness and service-fit scores.*

4.4 How will Applicants be Notified?

Each applicant will receive an email notification of selection, conditional selection, waitlisting, non-selection, or ineligibility. Waitlist notices will include the applicant's standing. Any subsequent openings in the program will be offered according to final scores and tie-break order. Enrollment will depend on completed verification, final SPIPA approval, capacity, and funding availability.

5. Other Key Information

5.1 What are SPIPA's Reserved Rights?

SPIPA may select fewer than eight businesses for participation and is not obligated to accept any particular applicant. Further clarification and/or correction of application materials may be requested by the program before the application deadline. After the deadline, SPIPA may verify information already submitted but will not accept any corrections, additional information, or amendments to the application. SPIPA may, at its own discretion, remove a participant from an active cohort if the participant fails to comply with any of the requirements of the program or is in violation of any applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies. agreement.

5.2 Will Applicant Information be Shared with other Entities?

SPIPA may share application information with reviewers, grantors, and auditors. SPIPA uses applicant information for eligibility review, program services, management, evaluation, and required aggregate or de-identified reporting consistent with applicable law and SPIPA policies. Individual financial information or private identifiers will not be shared unless authorized by the applicant or required by law. Federal funders may have access to program records upon request.

5.3 Are Financial Grants or Awards Provided to Participants?

Participants will not be provided with any financial grants, cash assistance, or loans. Furthermore, no contracts are awarded to participants, no investments are made in businesses, and no offers of employment are made to participants.

5.4 Must Applicants Disclose all Potential Conflicts of Interest?

Applicants must disclose relationships with SPIPA staff, board members, reviewers, or a member Tribe's council that could create a conflict. Staff and reviewers with a conflict will not participate in that application's review. Applicants may not offer gifts, favors, or employment to anyone involved in the selection process.

5.5 What is SPIPA's Nondiscrimination Policy?

SPIPA applies all program eligibility requirements consistently and does not discriminate on any basis prohibited by applicable laws, regulations, rules, or policies.

5.6 What Application Records will be Maintained by SPIPA?

SPIPA retains all application and selection records in accordance with applicable award requirements and its records-retention procedures. Such records are made available to grantors and auditors as required. Disclosure of any confidential records or private information is strictly prohibited.

Attachment A: Application Form

RFA SPIPA-EP-2026-01 | 2026 Entrepreneur Incubation Pathway Cohort

Please complete every part of this form. Type in the Word or PDF fields or legibly complete a paper copy. You may use a separate document with the same headings and numbering. Parts 2 through 6, including continuation pages, may not exceed eight pages total. Optional supporting materials may not exceed 10 pages. Complete the certification in Part 7. Do not include sensitive identification or account numbers.

Part 1

Applicant Information

Your name	
Role or title in the business	
Federally recognized Tribe of enrollment	
Home street address	
City, state, and ZIP	
County of residence	
Mailing address if different	
Phone	
Email	
How did you hear about this opportunity?	

Business Information

Business legal name	
DBA or trade name if different	
Business street address	
City, state, ZIP, and county	
Date operations began	
Legal structure (sole proprietorship, LLC, etc.) and registration or license status	
Washington UBI number if you have one	
Website or social media	

Part 1 (cont.)

Ownership and Control

Please list the full name of every owner. Ownership percentages must total 100 percent. Identify each Tribal owner's federally recognized Tribe and each owner's management or control role. At least 51% of the business must be owned and controlled by the applicant, who must be an enrolled member of a federally recognized Tribe. Include additional rows if needed.

Owner Name	Federally Recognized Tribe (if any)	Owned %	Management or Control Role

Business Baseline

This information supports planning for services and aggregate reporting. It is not a measure of applicant worthiness. Revenue and capital information may be supplied in ranges or marked "Prefer not to answer."

Current business status	
Number of owners actively working in the business	
Full-time employees excluding owners	
Part-time employees excluding owners	
Gross annual revenue range or prefer not to answer	
Capital accessed so far: loans, investment, grants; range or prefer not to answer	

Businesses that have not begun operations are not eligible to apply.

Part 2

Business and Market Opportunity

20 points | Parts 2 through 6 may not exceed eight pages total.

2.1 What does your business sell, who buys it, and what need does it meet? How do you sell your product or services and how do you get it to customers?

2.2 What makes your products or services different from other available options? How do you price your products or services?

2.3 Show the demand for your product or services. Give examples such as sales numbers or ranges, customer feedback, contracts, pre-orders, surveys, or letters of interest. You may attach copies.

Part 3

Readiness and Commitment

20 points | Parts 2 through 6 may not exceed eight pages total.

3.1 Why is now the right time to join the incubator? What steps have you taken to move your business forward in the past year, or since starting your business if it is less than a year old?

3.2 Most activities are in person at the center located in Olympia. What days and times are you available, and how many hours per month can you commit to this program?

3.3 Tell us about a time you received advice or feedback on your business. What did you do with it?

3.4 What could get in the way of your participation? What is your plan to remove such barriers, and what type of support could help? Requesting support will not lower your score.

Part 4

Business Necessity and Fit with Program

20 points | Parts 2 through 6 may not exceed eight pages total.

4.1 What are the three biggest challenges your business is facing right now? For each one, explain why it matters now.

4.2 For each challenge, which services listed in RFA Section 2.1 would help, and how would you use that assistance?

4.3 What workspace, equipment, technology, mentorship, marketing, financial, or other business support do you need most, and why?

Part 5

Tribal Community and Economic impact

20 points | Parts 2 through 6 may not exceed eight pages total.

SPIPA serves the Chehalis, Nisqually, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, and Squaxin Island Tribes. Businesses serving other Tribal or reservation communities may apply if all eligibility requirements are met.

5.1 Which Tribal or reservation communities does your business currently serve or plans to serve? How?

5.2 How does your business currently help, or plan to help, these communities? Give examples such as job creation, local purchases, meeting community needs, and strengthening Tribal economies.

5.3 Describe the community relationships, partnerships, cultural values, or accessibility considerations that shape how you do business.

Part 6

Measurable 12-Month Goals

15 points | Parts 2 through 6 may not exceed eight pages total.

6.1 Give three realistic goals for the next 12 months. Goals may address stability, sales, products or services, jobs, financing readiness, capital access, or new markets. Goals are planning targets, not promises.

Goal 1	**Where you are now**
Your 12-month target	**Key actions and target dates**
Support you need	**How you will measure progress**

Goal 2	**Where you are now**
Your 12-month target	**Key actions and target dates**
Support you need	**How you will measure progress**

Goal 3	**Where you are now**
Your 12-month target	**Key actions and target dates**
Support you need	**How you will measure progress**

6.2 What would successful completion of your Individualized Incubation Plan look like?

Part 7

Potential Conflicts of Interest and Certification

Eligibility attestation. Check all five statements to confirm eligibility and readiness for verification.

☐ I currently live in one of the eight service-area counties listed in RFA Section 2.3.

☐ I am an enrolled member of a federally recognized Tribe.

☐ This is a currently existing business, and I certify that I have at least 51% ownership and control as an enrolled member of a federally recognized Tribe.

☐ My business is currently located in SPIPA's eight-county service area and provides, or plans to provide, products or services to Tribal or reservation communities.

☐ I am authorized to apply and commit the business to participating in (primarily in-person) activities, reporting, verifying, and complying with a participant agreement.

Conflicts of interest. Describe any relationship with SPIPA staff, Board members, application reviewers, or members of a consortium Tribe's Council that may create a potential conflict of interest.

Applicant Certification

By signing, I hereby certify that the information provided herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and that all business activities comply with applicable laws, regulations, rules, and policies. I authorize SPIPA to verify eligibility, ownership, and control of my business. I agree to immediately report any material changes to business status, ownership, eligibility, or contact information. I understand that selection for this program is competitive and does not guarantee acceptance.

I consent to SPIPA's use of my information as described in RFA Section 5.2, Applicant information. If selected, I agree to follow the participant agreement and all program rules.

For electronic applications, please type your full name and check the electronic-signature consent box. For hard copy applications, please include your signature and provide your printed name, title, and date.

Signature or Full Name	
Printed Name	
Title or Role	
Date Signed	

☐ For electronic submissions: My typed full name shall serve as my electronic signature, and I hereby agree to the certification and consent statements set forth above.

Submission Checklist

☐ Part 1, including ownership and baseline information, is complete.

☐ Parts 2 through 6 are answered and within the eight-pages limit. Optional supporting materials are within the 10-page limit.

☐ Part 7 is complete and signed. For electronic submissions, the electronic-signature consent box is checked.

☐ Submission is being made via email, postal mail, or hand delivery for receipt no later than **December 9, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time.**