The Entrepreneurial Signature Program (ESP) is funded by the Third Frontier Initiative—a $1.6 billion Ohio Department of Development project—and provides grants to significantly increase technology-based entrepreneurial commercialization outcomes in six defined geographic regions. The “signature” aspect of this program focuses on technology-based sectors that have the potential to become important economic development prospects for each region.

The Southeast Ohio ESP is a 3-year $15 million initiative focused on 19 counties, defined by the Third Frontier as the Southeast Region, that addresses the two most common obstacles to entrepreneurial and business growth:

- Attracting sufficient equity capital.
- Lack of technical assistance for starting and expanding businesses.

Key project partners

- Ohio University
  - Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs—lead applicant
  - Edison Biotechnology Institute
  - Innovation Center
- Woodland Venture Management/Adena Ventures
- OSU South Centers
- East Central Ohio Technology Angel Fund

Implementation partners throughout the region include Local Development Districts, Governor's Regional Economic Development Reps, local economic development professionals, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), business incubators, Chambers of Commerce, Port Authorities, Financial Institutions, Higher Education Institutions, and other such entities.

This program expands on the Ohio University/Adena model that combines operational assistance services and early stage venture capital to companies. The Southeast ESP bridges the gap between idea and institutional venture capital by establishing a $3 million pre-seed fund a $2 million angel fund, and nearly $10 million of operational assistance services.

The operational assistance component will prepare technology companies to receive equity investment and bank financing by:

- Creating sales and marketing programs to demonstrate market acceptance.
- Recruiting senior level management to execute the business plan.
- Providing professional services to protect intellectual property, usually in the form of a patent.
- Developing proposals for SBIR and other Federal commercialization grant programs.

Universal operational assistance services will be provided by both Ohio University and OSU South Centers to all technology companies.

Operational assistance “signature/emphasis areas” include:

- Digital interactive media led by Ohio University’s Voinovich School.
- Endocrine therapeutics disorders to be led by Ohio University’s Edison Biotechnology Institute (EBI).
- Food, agriculture, and natural resources technology areas for the entire region to be led by OSU South Centers.

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