



News Release

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Pacific NorthWest Economic Region Launches Congregate: A Solutions Accelerator

New program to welcome innovative companies region-wide to solve pandemic-driven problems

Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is now soliciting interest from the innovation economy of the northwest to support the acceleration and scaling solutions of that help safely re-open tourism, performing arts, travel, and hospitality by participating in the “Congregate: A Solutions Accelerator” (Congregate). The challenges facing the tourism industry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic remain a continued threat to the future recovery and resilience of the tourism sector. Congregate will focus on four of these challenges: Immunity verification, Hybrid events, Contactless/Remote Commerce, and Workforce.

The Congregate Accelerator is uniquely focused on bringing the healthcare industry experts together with the tourism industry stakeholders most affected by the pandemic, with the innovative companies looking to solve these problems. The accelerator will be organized around the industry challenges that were deliberated and established by convening a listening tour of the tourism industry. Those challenges are:

- **Workforce** - The tourism sector is experiencing a massive labor shortage particularly in rural and nature destinations which are seeing heightened demand. They seek solutions that address their workforce needs, from solutions leveraging the gig-economy for surge needs, to training solutions, to marketplaces. We are looking for creative solutions to address the current crisis and position for the future.
- **Immunity verification** - Pacific Northwest tourism destinations seek solutions that enable them the option of creating and enforcing “Vaccinated Visitor Sections” or otherwise verify immunization status in an opt-in manner.
- **Hybrid events** - Museum and performance venues seek solutions that enable remote visitors to connect with on-site attractions and on-site visitors to interact with remote presenters and exhibitors.
- **Contactless and remote commerce** - Large venues seek solutions for contactless pre-event and in-event commerce such as ticketing, concessions, and application

interoperation solutions that enable visitors to reduce the need for face-to-face interaction with vendors.

Companies with unique skills and products that can help roll out solutions to any of the challenges are welcome. Participation in the Congregate Accelerator does not require an exchange of equity and offers a multitude of opportunities to participating companies including mentorship from experts in the regulation and healthcare industries, as well as partnership opportunities with northwest companies like Amazon and Microsoft.

"The Congregate Accelerator Program offers organizations across the Pacific Northwest funding and partnerships to rapidly develop technology solutions which help our important tourism, performing arts, travel, and hospitality sectors recover from the pandemic," said Michael Schutzler, CEO, WTIA. "Our region is known for its fast-moving, innovative companies and entrepreneurs, so I encourage all creative technologists across the Pacific Northwest to help our economy recover for the sake of all who live in this beautiful place."

The Congregate Accelerator will find and incubate potential solutions, pilot these solutions with affected industries, and scale solutions globally to reopen and bring jobs to the U.S. economy by bringing the expertise of healthcare regulators directly to the innovators. PNWER is excited to have partners from Amazon, Microsoft, Washington Technology Industry Association, Alaska Travel Industry Association, Future Border Coalition, and innovation broker Moonbeam Exchange join this project with expertise and resources that will support the Congregate Accelerator. Additionally, PNWER has received support for this program from both Washington and Alaska state and Congressional members.

Speaking on what the Congregate Accelerator can bring to Alaska, Lt. Governor Kevin Meyer said, "The COVID-19 pandemic has had its effect on Alaska's tourism industry. The lack of cruise ships in 2020 and the reduced 2021 season have hurt businesses across the State. I think the darkest days are behind us and brighter days are ahead. This is an opportunity to help find solutions for the future of tourism in Alaska."

On the benefits of the Congregate Accelerator for Washington State, Representative Cindy Ryu, Chair of WA State Community & Economic Development Committee said, "I am pleased to have advocated for PNWER in receiving this SPRINT Challenge Grant. In the midst of living and working during this pandemic, the Congregate Accelerator is bringing our communities and region together to solve current challenges, while accelerating innovation for a more inclusive and resilient future in the Pacific NW Economic Region."

WA Representative Matt Boehnke added, "As we continue to address the challenges of COVID-19 and encourage individuals to get vaccinated, we must also work to develop

innovative solutions that will help Washington's economy safely and fully reopen. The Congregate Accelerator is an ambitious effort that will bring critical entities together in common purpose to keep us moving in the right direction. I encourage Washingtonians to take advantage of the opportunity to be a part of the solution and help make a real and lasting difference for our state."

More information about the Congregate Accelerator Program, the challenges, partner companies, and how to get involved can be found at www.congregate.resiliencefoundry.org.

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ABOUT PNWER

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a public/private non-profit organization created by statute in 1991. Member jurisdictions include Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Washington, and the Canadian provinces and territories of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon. PNWER's mission is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region; identify and promote "models of success; and serve as a conduit to exchange information.

ABOUT ATIA

The Alaska Travel Industry Association is the leading statewide nonprofit association and the voice for Alaska's tourism industry. Over 600 tourism business members operate in every region of the state, including individual fishing guides, wilderness lodge owners, cultural attraction managers, and cruise ship executives. ATIA, in partnership with the Alaska Dept. of Commerce, Community & Economic Development, is also the manager of Alaska's destination marketing program: Travel Alaska.

ABOUT WTIA

The Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to building a strong and sustainable technology sector and supporting a thriving community. WTIA's transformative programs leverage the collective power of the technology industry for more than 1000 member companies and their employees. WTIA includes the 501c6 WTIA Member Trade Association, the 501c3 WTIA Workforce Institute dba Apprenti, and the for-profit company HR Benefits, Inc.

ABOUT SPRINT GRANT

The Scaling Pandemic Resilience through Innovation and Technology (SPRINT) Challenge Grant was awarded to PNWER by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.