

2026 K-Startup Grand Challenge (KSGC) Call for Applications for (Pre-)Startups

The Ministry of SMEs and Startups hereby announces the recruitment of (pre-)startups for the K-Startup Grand Challenge (KSGC), a program designed to support outstanding global startups in entering, settling, and growing in the Korean market.

May 6, 2026

Minister of SMEs and Startups

1 Program Overview

- **Program Benefits:** Support program for entry, settlement, and growth in the Korean market; Demo Day participation and investment attraction opportunities; Visa acquisition and company incorporation support; Provision of office space, etc.

< Key Updates for the 2026 KSGC Program >

- ▶ **(Settlement-oriented selection)** Shifting the evaluation system from technology-focused to settlement potential in Korea, including company establishment and commercialization feasibility
- ▶ **(Intensive operation of core programs)** Intensive short-term operation of key programs such as business matching, IR and incorporation aligned with entry timing ("Core Week")
- ▶ **(Expansion of international student participation)** Increased participation of pre-startups including international students and strengthening of entrepreneurship capacity-building programs
- ▶ **(Enhanced follow-up support)** Continued support for the growth of alumni, including investment attraction and collaboration with large and mid-sized enterprises

- ☐ **Eligibility:** Overseas (pre-)startups wishing to enter the Korean market (Separate track available for international students)

KSGC Main Track	International Student Track
Overseas (pre-)startups wishing to enter the Korean market	International students residing in Korea

- ☐ **Selection Scale:** Approximately 100 teams

KSGC Main Track	International Student Track
80 teams	20 teams

- ☐ **Program Period:** July 2026 - April 2027

Classification	Phase-1	Phase-2	Phase-3
KSGC Main Track	Support for 'Market Exploration' in Korea 80 teams	Support for 'Market Entry' in Korea 40 teams	Support for 'Market Growth' in Korea 20 teams
International Student Track	Business plan development training for program application (Information Session)	Entrepreneurship capacity-building training and mentoring 20 teams	Support for participation in the GSC program, etc. 3 teams
Program Period & Participation Method	2nd week of July – 2nd week of August 2026 Online participation	September – December 2026 Online & offline participation	January – April 2027 Online & offline participation

2 Eligibility Requirements

1. Eligibility for Application to the K-Startup Grand Challenge (All of the following requirements must be met)

- Pre-startups or startups established within seven (7) years of incorporation

* However, for startups in new industry sectors, applications are accepted up to ten (10) years from the date of incorporation.

** The date of incorporation must be on or after May 7, 2019 (or on or after May 7, 2016 for startups in new industry sectors).

- The representative (CEO) of the (pre-)startup must not be a Korean national
- * In cases where there are multiple representatives, all representatives must hold non-Korean nationality.

2. Eligibility for the International Student Track (All of the following requirements must be met and will be verified based on a Certificate of Enrollment)

- A pre-startup team composed of university (undergraduate or graduate) students, led by an international student currently enrolled in a university (or graduate school) in Korea
- A startup team in which at least fifty percent (50%) of the members are international students
- A startup team that includes either international students expected to graduate by 2027 or graduate students

☐ **Ineligible Applicants** (Applicants shall be disqualified if they fall under any of the following conditions)

- Entities engaged in industries that significantly violate good morals or economic order, including but not limited to: general entertainment bars, dance halls with entertainment services, casino operations, and management and operation of gambling facilities
- Applicants who were previously selected as KSGC Top 40 teams between 2016 and 2025, including those whose selection was terminated or who voluntarily withdrew
- * Applicants who previously applied to KSGC but were not selected remain eligible to apply

- Applicants who are unable to enter Korea due to visa issues or other related restrictions
- Companies that have participated in the Global Startup Commercialization Support Program between 2024 and 2026, including those whose selection was terminated or who voluntarily withdrew

3 KSGC Program Benefits and Support Details

1. Prize Money and Financial Support

- (Participation Grants) Provided to forty (40) teams to cover expenses such as airfare required for participation in the Phase 2 program
- (Prize Money) Awarded to the top twenty (20) teams selected through the KSGC Demo Day
- (Growth Grants) Provided to the top eight (8) teams based on the commercialization evaluation conducted after the completion of Phase 3

<Prize Money and Financial Support>

Category	Recipients	Details	Timing
Participation Grants (Total: KRW 320 million)	40 teams participating in Phase 2	① First entry: KRW 4 million per team ② Second entry: KRW 4 million per team	① First entry (September) ② Second entry (December)
Prize Money (Total: KRW 380 million)	Top 20 teams selected at the COMEUP Demo Day	1st: KRW 100 million / 2nd: KRW 70 million 3rd: KRW 50 million / 4th: KRW 40 million 5th: KRW 30 million / 6th–8th: KRW 10 million 9th–20th: KRW 5 million	At the end of Phase 2 (December 2026)
Growth Grants (Total: KRW 250 million)	Top 8 teams based on commercialization evaluation	EX Grade: KRW 50 million × 2 teams VG Grade: KRW 30 million × 3 teams GD Grade: KRW 20 million × 3 teams	At the end of Phase 3 (April 2027)

2. Korea Market Entry Support Program

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

- (Recipients) 80 teams
- (Participation Method) Online (via video conferencing)
- (Support Details) Introduction to the Korean startup ecosystem through online sessions, lectures by companies that have successfully entered the Korean market, consulting on each company's Korea market entry plan and localization strategy, etc.

□ [Phase-2] Support for “Market Entry” in Korea

- (Recipients) 40 teams selected through presentation evaluation after the completion of Phase 1
- (Participation Method) Online & Offline
- (Support Details) Business partner matching and meeting support in Korea through dedicated professional managers, participation in investor pitching (IR presentations), support for visa acquisition and incorporation in Korea, coverage of travel and accommodation expenses for visits to Korea, provision of office space, etc.

▶ **(Acceleration)** Business partner matching and meetings with potential customers in Korea, IR pitching to Korean investors, consulting on Korea market entry strategies and product/service localization, etc.

▶ **(Participation Grants)** Support for airfare and accommodation expenses required for participation in orientation, Demo Day, and acceleration programs (KRW 4 million per team for the first entry, and KRW 4 million per team for the second entry)

* Orientation (scheduled for September 2026, Seoul), KSGC Demo Day (scheduled for December 2026, Seoul)

▶ **(Visa Support)** Issuance of a recommendation letter for the Startup Preparation Visa (D-10-2, valid for one year)

▶ **(Company Incorporation)** Administrative support required for establishing a corporation in Korea

▶ **(Office Space)** Provision of office space for global startups

* Provision of office desks and chairs, wired network, printers, and other basic facilities

□ [Phase-3] Support for “Market Growth” in Korea

- **(Recipients)** Top twenty (20) teams selected at the KSGC Demo Day after the completion of Phase 2
- **(Participation Method)** Online & Offline
- **(Support Details)** Provision of intensive acceleration programs and growth grants to support stable expansion in the Korean market, as well as linkage to relevant government support policies
- Upon completion of Phase 3, eight (8) teams will be selected based on commercialization evaluation, and will receive growth grants along with follow-up support, including collaboration opportunities (Open Innovation, OI) with large corporations and mid-sized enterprises.

- ▶ **(Dedicated Manager)** Assignment of a dedicated professional manager to each company to support entry into the Korean market
 - ▶ **(Acceleration)** Online and offline matching with potential customers and business partners in Korea on a per-company basis
 - ▶ **(Visa Support)** Issuance of a recommendation letter for the Technology Startup Visa (D-8-4, valid for two years)
 - ▶ **(Growth Grants)** Differential grants awarded to the top eight (8) teams based on commercialization evaluation results
- * EX Grade (2 teams): KRW 50 million per team, VG Grade (3 teams): KRW 30 million per team, GD Grade (3 teams): KRW 20 million per team

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International Student Track: Program Benefits and Support

□ [Phase-1] Business Plan Development Training for Application of International Students

- **(Recipients)** International students residing in Korea who wish to participate

- **(Participation Method)** Online (via video conferencing)
- **(Support Details)** Basic training programs to enhance application capabilities of international students, including understanding of the Korean startup ecosystem and business plan development

□ **[Phase-2] Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring**

- **(Recipients)** Top twenty (20) teams selected through document and presentation evaluation
- **(Participation Method)** Online & Offline
- **(Support Details)** Practical training covering overall entrepreneurship including business model advancement, market validation, and investment understanding, along with customized mentoring for each team to strengthen pitching capabilities

□ **[Phase-3] Support for Outstanding International Student Teams**

- **(Recipients)** Top three (3) teams selected at the Demo Day
- **(Support Details)** Awarding of prize money totaling KRW 15 million to the top three teams selected through the International Student Track Demo Day

* 1st place: KRW 7 million, 2nd place: KRW 5 million, 3rd place: KRW 3 million

- Linkage with inbound policies (e.g., support for participation in programs such as the GSC Program) and preferential consideration in the document evaluation stage of the K-Startup Grand Challenge main track

1. K-Startup Grand Challenge

☐ **Application Period:** May 6 (Wed), 2026 – June 17 (Wed), 2026, 15:00 (KST)

☐ **Application Method:** Online application via the K-Startup Grand Challenge website

- URL : <https://ksgc.global>

☐ Required Documents

Category	Required Documents	Remarks
At the time of initial submission	Completion of the business plan on the web application page (no separate document submission required)	Language: English
Further instructions will be provided to selected applicants	Passport (Representative)	Proof of nationality of the applicant (representative)
	Business Registration Certificate	Business registration certificate issued in the relevant country or an equivalent document

2. International Student Track

☐ **Application Period:** July 13(Mon), 2026 – August 14(Fri), 2026, 15:00 (KST)

☐ **Application Method:** Online application via the K-Startup Grand Challenge website

- URL : <https://ksgc.global>

☐ Required Documents

Category	Required Documents	Remarks
At the time of initial application	Completion of the business plan on the web application page (no separate document submission required)	Language: English
Further instructions will be provided to selected applicants	Passport (International Student)	Proof of nationality of the applicant
	Certificate of Enrollment	Verification of eligibility

1. K-Startup Grand Challenge

□ Evaluation Procedure

- ① **(Eligibility Review)** Review of application requirements, including prior participation history, grounds for disqualification (e.g., incomplete business plan, submission in languages other than English), and duplicate applications
- ② **(Document and Video Evaluation)** Applicants who pass the eligibility review will be evaluated based on submitted documents and video materials, through which approximately eighty (80) teams will be selected.

□ Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Category	Key Considerations
Problem Recognition	▶ What problem is being addressed and what are the current customer pain points? ▶ What is the proposed solution (product/service), and is it creative and innovative? ▶ Is the business model (B2B, B2C, B2G) clearly defined with a specific target market?
Feasibility and Differentiation	▶ Feasibility and development plan of the business item (improvement, development, and implementation) ▶ Performance metrics over the past three years, including revenue, investment rounds, and funds raised ▶ Differentiation from competitors and technological barriers to entry
Korea Market Entry Plan	▶ Validity of target market selection based on analysis of the Korean market ▶ Specificity of commercialization strategy for entering the Korean market (including initial customer acquisition strategy, domestic partnership plans, and PoC plans) ▶ Commitment to entering the Korean market, such as establishing a local entity or relocating headquarters to Korea
Team Competency	▶ Founding experience and core competencies of the team ▶ Potential for team development and sustainability ▶ Ability to reside in Korea and to adapt to localization requirements

- * Preference will be given to (pre-)startups with concrete plans to relocate their headquarters to Korea or establish a local entity in Korea.

2. International Student Track

☐ Evaluation Procedure

- ① **(Eligibility Review)** Review of application requirements, including grounds for disqualification (e.g., incomplete business plan)
- ② **(Document and Presentation Evaluation)** Applicants who pass the eligibility review will be evaluated based on submitted documents and presentations, through which approximately twenty (20) teams will be selected

☐ Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Category	Key Considerations
Problem Recognition	▶ What problem is being addressed and what are the current customer pain points? ▶ Is the business model (B2B, B2C, B2G) clearly defined with a specific target market?
Feasibility and Differentiation	▶ Feasibility and development plan of the business item (improvement, development, and implementation) ▶ Differentiation potential compared to competing ideas or similar services
Korea Market Entry Plan	▶ Basic understanding of and interest in the Korean market or industry ▶ Willingness to start a business in Korea and direction of commercialization, etc.
Team Competency	▶ Founding experience or relevant activities, and fundamental capabilities of the team ▶ Potential of team development and growth

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Important Notes

- Applications must be submitted under the name of the representative (CEO) of the startup or startup team.
 - * If the applicant and the individual indicated in the submitted documents do not match, the application will be excluded from the evaluation process.
- The representative (CEO) of the startup or startup team must directly participate in the presentation evaluation.

- * However, in exceptional circumstances deemed unavoidable, a designated employee of the startup may present on behalf of the representative, subject to submission of a written explanation.
- All processes, including application submission, evaluation, and participation in the Korea market entry support program, shall be conducted in English, and interpretation services will not be provided.
- * For the International Student Track, participation may be conducted in Korean upon request of the participating team.
- Separate guidelines will be provided to selected startups or startup teams, and any disadvantages or liabilities arising from failure to review such guidelines shall be borne by the applicant.
- At any stage during the evaluation process or after selection, if it is found that the applicant does not meet the eligibility requirements or has provided false information, sanctions may be imposed, including cancellation of selection, recovery of prize money and financial support, and restriction on participation.

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Contact Information

- K-Startup Grand Challenge Secretariat
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Reference

Emerging Industry Startup Sectors

< Emerging Industry Startup Sectors >

①	Artificial Intelligence (AI)	⑩	Autonomous Vehicles	⑲	Smart Homes
②	Big Data	⑪	Electric and Hydrogen Vehicles	⑳	Renewable Energy
③	5G+	⑫	Biotechnology (Bio)	㉑	Secondary Batteries
④	Blockchain	⑬	Medical Devices	㉒	CCUS (Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage)
⑤	Service Platforms	⑭	Functional Foods	㉓	Resource Circulation and Energy Recycling
⑥	Immersive Content (XR/VR/AR)	⑮	Drones and Personal Mobility	㉔	Space Technology
⑦	Intelligent Robotics	⑯	Next-Generation Ships	㉕	Next-Generation Nuclear Power
⑧	Smart Manufacturing	⑰	Disaster and Safety Technologies	㉖	Quantum Technology
⑨	System Semiconductors	⑱	Smart Cities	㉗	Cybersecurity