
Nebraska Startup Starter Kit



The purpose of this guide is to help Nebraska entrepreneurs navigate the startup journey by bringing together the resources, organizations, programs, and practical guidance needed to build and grow a successful company. Whether you're validating an idea, forming a business, raising capital, hiring your first employees, or preparing to scale, this guide is designed to serve as a one-stop resource for Nebraska founders.

Nebraska is a great place to build a company because it offers entrepreneurs the advantages of a collaborative startup ecosystem, a low cost of living, access to talented graduates, and a strong network of investors, mentors, and business support organizations that are invested in founders' success. Compared to many larger startup hubs, founders can stretch their capital further, build meaningful relationships more quickly, and receive personalized support from organizations across the state.

You'll find Nebraska-based funding options, programs, events, and other resources in this guide:

<i>Nebraska-Based Investors</i>	3
<i>Grants & Non-Dilutive Funding</i>	6
<i>Accelerators, Incubators, and Other Programs</i>	9
<i>Entrepreneurial Support Organizations</i>	13
<i>Recurring Events & Conferences</i>	19
<i>Service Provider Directory</i>	23
<i>Coworking/Collaborative Spaces</i>	26
<i>Pitch Competitions & Challenges</i>	29
<i>Startup Resource Library</i>	31
<i>Understanding Startup Valuations</i>	34
<i>Understanding Fundraising Instruments</i>	38

Nebraska-Based Investors

Invest Nebraska

A nonprofit venture development organization that partners with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to administer a seed fund investing in early-stage and venture-scale technology companies based in Nebraska.

Investment Amount: \$100,000 - \$1,000,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: Shelby Strattan, Investment Manager (shelby@investnebraska.com)

Website: <https://www.investnebraska.com/>

Nebraska Angels

A network of accredited investors who help entrepreneurs scale their businesses with angel investments.

Investment Amount: \$25,000 - \$500,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: Josh Bartels, Executive Director (josh@nebraskaangels.org)

Website: <https://www.nebraskaangels.org/>

MOVE Venture Capital

A pre-seed and seed venture capital fund that invests in technology companies across Nebraska and the Midwest while providing founders with early capital, mentorship, and strategic support.

Investment Amount: \$50,000 - \$100,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: Charlie Cuddy, Managing Partner (ccuddy@movevc.com)

Website: <https://www.movevc.com/>

Nelnet Ventures

The corporate venture capital arm of Nelnet that invests in early-stage, high-growth technology companies, providing founders with capital, strategic partnerships, and access to Nelnet's extensive business ecosystem to accelerate growth.

Investment Amount: \$100,000 - \$1,000,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: Chuck Norris, Managing Director (charles.norris@nelnet.net)

Website: <https://nelnet.com/capabilities/investing/venture-capital-investments/>

Grit Road Partners

An Omaha-based venture capital firm that invests in seed-stage AgTech companies developing innovative solutions for agriculture.

Investment Amount: \$500,000

Industry Focus: Agriculture Technology

Contact: Ben Williamson, Partner (bwilliamson@gritrd.com)

Website: <https://gritrd.com/>

PGSA Venture Capital

A Midwest-focused venture capital firm that invests in pre-seed through Series A startups, partnering with founders building scalable, capital-efficient businesses with early traction.

Investment Amount: \$100,000 - \$500,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: TJ Andreasen, Associate (tjandreasen@pgsa.com)

Website: <https://pgsa.com/venture-capital/>

M-One Capital

A private equity firm that partners with founders, management teams, and family-owned businesses by providing growth equity, strategic guidance, and long-term capital to help businesses scale.

Investment Amount: \$5,000,000 - \$125,000,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: BJ Hansen, Managing Director (bhansen@m-onecapital.com)

Website: <https://www.m-onecapital.com/>

Husker Venture Fund

A student-led venture capital fund at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln that provides early-stage funding to startups while giving students hands-on experience sourcing, evaluating, and investing in high-growth companies.

Investment Amount: \$25,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: hvf@unl.edu

Website: <https://business.unl.edu/husker-venture-fund/>

Maverick Venture Fund

A student-led venture capital fund at the University of Nebraska at Omaha that provides early-stage funding to startups while giving students hands-on experience sourcing, evaluating, and investing in high-growth companies.

Investment Amount: \$25,000

Industry Focus: Agnostic

Contact: mvf@unomaha.edu

Website: <https://maverickventurefund.com/>

Grants & Non-Dilutive Funding

Nebraska Innovation Fund Prototype Grant

A matching program, administered by the Nebraska DED, that provides financial assistance for new product development to businesses operating in Nebraska.

- Prototype grants are awarded at up to \$150,000 per project.
- Applicants must be businesses operating in Nebraska that can provide a minimum of 50% of the grant request as matching funds. Projects qualifying as value-added agriculture require a reduced match of 25%.

Website: <https://opportunity.nebraska.gov/programs/business/nif-prototype-grants/>

SBIR/STTR Grant

The Nebraska Small Business Innovation Research / Small Business Technology Transfer Initiative (SBIR/STTR) is a matching grant, administered by the Nebraska DED, that provides financial assistance to Nebraska businesses that have received a Federal SBIR or STTR grant.

- Phase 0 grants can reimburse for up to \$5,000 per project for costs incurred in preparing a federal Phase 1 proposal.
- Phase 1 grants will match federal SBIR/STTR awards up to \$150,000 or 65% of the federal grant, whichever is less.
- Phase 2 grants will match federal SBIR/STTR awards up to \$300,000 or 65% of the federal grant, whichever is less.

Website: <https://opportunity.nebraska.gov/programs/business/sbir-sttr/>

Nebraska Academic R&D Grant

This program, administered by the Nebraska DED, offers Nebraska businesses a matching competitive grant for research and development activities done in conjunction with a Nebraska college or university, and/or supports Nebraska businesses licensing technology from a Nebraska college or university.

- Phase I R&D awards are capped at \$100,000.
- Phase II R&D awards are capped at \$400,000. Businesses are eligible to apply for Phase II awards if they have successfully completed a Phase I award as determined by DED.

- R&D grant funding must be matched at 100% (1:1) of the requested grant amount with eligible matching funds. R&D Grant funding for value-added agriculture projects must be matched at 25% (4:1) of the requested grant amount with eligible matching funds.

Website: <https://opportunity.nebraska.gov/programs/business/nebraska-academic-research-and-development-grant/>

LaunchLNK Grant

The LaunchLNK grant helps scalable startups get established and grow in Lincoln, NE. Recipients of the grant receive \$20,000, connections to potential sources of additional capital and mentors, and introductions to local corporations who may become early customers or partners.

Website: <https://www.startuplnk.com/launch-lnk-grant>

MAC Emergency Fund Grant

A grant offered by the MAC Chamber that provides eligible member businesses facing financial hardship with up to \$1,000 in emergency grant funding to help cover critical operating expenses and maintain business continuity during times of crisis.

Website: <https://midlandsafricanchamber.com/members-emergency-fund-program/>

SBA Microloans

This program, administered by Community Development Resources, is designed to assist new and existing small businesses with startup and growth capital; available in amounts from \$1,000 - \$50,000 with a term from 1 - 6 years.

Website: <https://cdr-nebraska.org/what-we-do/sba-micro-loans.html>

SBA 504 Loans

This program, administered by Community Development Resources, provides small businesses access to low cost fixed rate financing with long term payback; available in amounts from \$100,000 - \$5,000,000 with a term from 10, 20, and 25 years.

Website: <https://cdr-nebraska.org/what-we-do/sba-504-loans.html>

Nebraska Enterprise Fund Loans

NEF provides flexible lending products to businesses across Nebraska to support capital needs and growth plans; available in amounts from \$50,000 - \$1,000,000.

Website: <https://nebbiz.org/get-started#capital>

NENEDD Loans

The Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District provides business loans in select counties to fill financial gaps and support the creation of new job opportunities.

Website: <https://nenedd.org/business-loans/>

CFRA Small Business Loans

The Center for Rural Affairs provides loans for small businesses; available in amounts from \$1,000 - \$250,000 with 1 - 15 year terms.

Website: <https://www.cfra.org/small-business-loans>

Lending Link Micro-Business Loans

Lending Link provides a loan for business with a small origination fee, low interest rate, and up to 24 months to pay it back.

Website: <https://lendinglinkomaha.org/products-services/loan-products/>

MEDC Microenterprise Loans

The McCook Economic Development Corporation provides loans of up to \$50,000 for small businesses/entrepreneurs in McCook and Red Willow County. An applicant must provide participation and evidence of participation through private funding as distinguished from federal, state, or local funding in the minimum amount of 10% equity investment.

Website: <https://mccookne.org/start-your-business/>

Omaha 100 SSBCI Matching Loan

A financing program administered by Omaha 100 through Nebraska's State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) that helps small businesses access growth capital by providing a matching loan alongside financing from another lending institution.

Website: <https://www.omaha100.org/business-lending>

Accelerators, Incubators, and Other Programs

NMotion

A mentor-driven accelerator, providing a 12-week program that invests in six high-growth startups per cohort with funding, experienced mentors, investor introductions, and lifelong access to the Gener8tor network.

Address: 151 N 8th Street, Suite 518, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.nmotion.co/>

Techstars Founder Catalyst

A 10-week, no-equity pre-accelerator program in Omaha that helps early-stage founders validate their ideas, refine their business models, develop investor-ready pitches, and build their companies through mentorship, education, and access to Techstars' global startup network.

Address: Omaha, NE

Website: <https://www.techstars.com/founder-catalyst>

MAC Xcelerator

A 12-week accelerator from the Midlands African Chamber that equips underserved entrepreneurs with mentorship, business education, coaching, and access to capital to help them launch and scale successful businesses.

Address: 7930 Blondo Street, Suite 100, Omaha, NE 68134

Website: <https://midlandsafricanchamber.com/mac-xcelerator/>

EO Accelerator Nebraska

A growth program for entrepreneurs with at least \$250,000 in annual revenue, providing structured learning, peer accountability, mentorship, and proven frameworks to help businesses scale beyond \$1 million in revenue.

Address: Omaha, NE

Website: <https://eoanebraska.com/>

Steel Works Health Accelerator

A three-month program led by UNeMed and UNeTech Institute that helps early-stage health and medical startups commercialize emerging innovations through mentorship, customer and market validation, go-to-market strategy, investor preparation, and support developing SBIR/STTR grant applications.

Address: 4601 Catalyst Court, Suite 1115, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://www.unemed.com/steel-works-health-accelerator>

The Combine

Nebraska's statewide AgTech incubator that helps food and agriculture startups commercialize their technologies through individualized coaching, industry mentorship, producer connections, investor readiness, and incubation space at Nebraska Innovation Campus.

Address: 2125 Transformation Drive, Suite 1000, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.nebraskacombine.com/>

Biotech Connector

A Nebraska-based life sciences commercialization program that helps biotechnology and healthcare startups connect with industry experts, investors, researchers, and commercialization resources to accelerate company growth.

Address: 1901 N 21st Street, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.biotechconnector.com/>

Nebraska Innovation Studio

A makerspace at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln that provides entrepreneurs, startups, and creators with access to advanced prototyping equipment, fabrication tools, training, and collaborative workspace to develop and commercialize new products.

Address: 2021 Transformation Drive, #1500, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://innovate.unl.edu/nebraska-innovation-studio/>

The Commonwealth Idea Lab

A founder-focused incubator that helps early-stage entrepreneurs validate business ideas, build an MVP, develop go-to-market and revenue strategies, gain early customer traction, and prepare for grants, accelerators, and investor funding through structured coaching, mentorship, and cohort-based learning.

Address: 5425 N 103rd Street, Omaha, NE 68134

Website: <https://www.thecommonwealthomaha.com/startup-pathway>

NextMinds

A peer community hosted by The Commonwealth that brings together ambitious professionals and emerging leaders for facilitated discussions, networking, and personal and professional development through meaningful conversations and shared learning experiences.

Address: 5425 N 103rd Street, Omaha, NE 68134

Website: <https://www.thecommonwealthomaha.com/next-minds>

UNeTech Institute

Omaha's university-supported startup incubator that helps commercialize innovations from UNO and UNMC by connecting researchers, entrepreneurs, investors, and industry partners to launch and grow technology-driven companies.

Address: 4601 Catalyst Court, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://www.unetech.org/>

Opportunity Corps

A UNeTech Institute entrepreneurship and mentorship program that helps aspiring founders overcome barriers to entrepreneurship through customer discovery training, mentorship, team-based venture development, and hands-on startup education inspired by the National Science Foundation's I-Corps program. The program has supported cohorts such as Women in STEAM and Black and African American entrepreneurs.

Address: 4601 Catalyst Court, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://www.unetech.org/opportunity-corps/>

Nebraska I-Corps

A customer discovery program that teaches researchers and early-stage entrepreneurs how to validate market demand, engage potential customers, and refine commercialization strategies using the National Science Foundation's I-Corps methodology. Alumni of the I-Corps program have the opportunity to participate in the Lab2Launch Mentorship Matchmaker event to connect with investors, leaders, and mentors in the startup ecosystem.

Address: 2021 Transformation Drive, Suite 2220, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.nutechventures.org/nebraska-introduction-to-customer-discovery/>

TCD eCenter

An incubator where startup companies and entrepreneurs can access resources and obtain assistance to reap the benefits from various available services.

Address: 1620 Broadway, Scottsbluff, NE 69361

Website: <https://www.tcdne.org/business-entrepreneurs/tcd-ecenter>

Elevate Program

A 12-month entrepreneurship scholarship program offered by Nest in Kearney that supports aspiring and active Central Nebraska entrepreneurs with free or discounted coworking space, weekly mentorship and accountability meetings, educational resources, and a supportive community designed to help them build sustainable businesses.

Address: 2224 Central Avenue, Kearney, NE 68847

Website: <https://nestspace.co/elevate/>

Entrepreneurial Support Organizations

Nebraska Business Development Center

NBDC provides no-cost, confidential business consulting, market research, financial guidance, and government contracting assistance to help entrepreneurs start, grow, and scale their businesses throughout Nebraska.

Address: 6708 Pine Street, MH200, Omaha, NE 68182

Website: <https://www.unomaha.edu/nebraska-business-development-center/>

NU Connections

A University of Nebraska initiative that connects entrepreneurs, researchers, and businesses with university expertise, research capabilities, talent, and commercialization resources to accelerate innovation and economic growth across the state.

Address: University of Nebraska Campuses

Website: <https://nebraska.edu/nu-connections/>

Grow Nebraska

A nonprofit organization that helps Nebraska entrepreneurs grow through business training, marketing support, e-commerce opportunities, grant programs, and statewide promotion of locally owned businesses.

Address: 421 W Talmadge Street, Suite #1, Kearney, NE 68845

Website: <https://grownebraska.org/>

Nebraska Startup Academy

A statewide entrepreneurial education program that provides founders with workshops, mentorship, peer learning, and practical resources to help launch and grow scalable startups.

Address: 1111 N 13th Street, #119, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://www.nestartupacademy.org/>

Nebraska Department of Economic Development

NDED supports business growth through grants, financing programs, workforce initiatives, and economic development resources that help entrepreneurs and companies start, expand, and invest in Nebraska.

Address: 245 Fallbrook Boulevard, Suite 002, Lincoln, NE 68521

Website: <https://opportunity.nebraska.gov/>

Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development

LPED works to grow Lincoln's economy by supporting business recruitment, startup development, workforce growth, and entrepreneurial initiatives that strengthen the region's innovation ecosystem.

Address: 1128 Lincoln Mall, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.selectlincoln.org/>

StartupLNK

Lincoln's entrepreneurial community platform that connects founders, investors, mentors, events, resources, and organizations to support startup growth and collaboration across Nebraska.

Address: 1128 Lincoln Mall, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.startuplnk.com/>

Open Range

A Nebraska nonprofit that connects entrepreneurs, innovators, and rural communities through statewide programming, networking events, educational resources, and initiatives.

Address: 1229 Millwork Avenue, Suite 304, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://openrange.org/>

UNeMed

UNeMed is the technology transfer and commercialization office for UNMC and UNO, helping researchers, faculty, staff, and students turn university innovations into marketable products and companies. It supports entrepreneurs through intellectual property protection, licensing, startup formation, funding guidance, and connections to investors and industry partners.

Address: 4601 Catalyst Court, Suite 1115, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://www.unemed.com/>

Midlands African Chamber

The Midlands African Chamber empowers entrepreneurs and small businesses through networking, business education, accelerator programs, access to capital, advocacy, and economic development initiatives that foster inclusive business growth across the region.

Address: 7930 Blondo Street, Suite 100, Omaha, NE 68134

Website: <https://midlandsafricanchamber.com/>

Greater Omaha Chamber

The Greater Omaha Chamber supports business growth through economic development, workforce initiatives, advocacy, networking opportunities, and programs that help entrepreneurs and companies start, expand, and succeed in the Omaha region.

Address: 808 Conagra Drive, Suite 400, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://www.omahachamber.org/>

Lincoln Chamber of Commerce

The Lincoln Chamber of Commerce connects businesses through advocacy, networking, leadership development, and economic development initiatives while supporting entrepreneurs and strengthening the Lincoln business community.

Address: 1128 Lincoln Mall, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.lcoc.com/>

SCORE

SCORE Lincoln provides free mentoring, educational workshops, business planning resources, and expert guidance from experienced volunteer business leaders to help entrepreneurs start, manage, and grow successful businesses.

Address: 2124 Y Street, Flat 238, Lincoln, NE 68503

Website: <https://www.score.org/ne/lincoln/>

SourceLink Nebraska

A free online resource navigator that connects entrepreneurs with business support organizations, funding opportunities, educational programs, and a statewide calendar of startup events through a searchable database of Nebraska resources.

Address: 6708 Pine Street, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://sourcelinknebraska.com/>

Silicon Prairie News

The leading media outlet covering entrepreneurship and innovation across Nebraska, providing startup news, founder stories, ecosystem updates, and resources that connect entrepreneurs with opportunities throughout the region.

Address: 1402 Jones Street, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://siliconprairienews.com/>

Techstars Omaha powered by Open Range

The local Techstars Startup Community Partnership that strengthens Nebraska's startup ecosystem by connecting founders with world-class mentorship, educational programming, investor networks, and the global Techstars community.

Address: Omaha, NE

Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/techstars-omaha/>

The Commonwealth Omaha

A collaborative coworking community in Omaha that provides entrepreneurs, startups, and remote professionals with flexible office space, networking opportunities, educational programming, and a supportive entrepreneurial community.

Address: 5425 N 103rd Street, Omaha, NE 68134

Website: <https://www.thecommonwealthomaha.com/>

NUtech Ventures

The technology commercialization affiliate of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, helping researchers and entrepreneurs protect intellectual property, launch startups, and bring innovative technologies from the lab to the marketplace.

Address: 2021 Transformation Drive, Suite 2220, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.nutechventures.org/>

RISE Lincoln

A free professional community that empowers women through networking events, leadership development, mentorship, and coaching communities designed to foster personal growth, meaningful connections, and career advancement across Lincoln's business ecosystem.

Address: Lincoln, NE

Website: <https://www.riselincoln.org/>

Tech Nebraska

Nebraska's statewide technology association that brings together founders, technology leaders, businesses, policymakers, and communities to strengthen the state's tech ecosystem through advocacy, networking, educational programming, and pro-innovation public policy.

Address: 1128 Lincoln Mall, Suite 302, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://technologynebraska.com/>

ONEBiz

Omaha's free online business resource portal that helps entrepreneurs start, grow, and operate their businesses by providing customized startup checklists, licensing guidance, connections to local business resources, and access to technical assistance and funding opportunities.

Address: 1819 Farnam Street, Suite 502, Omaha, NE 68183

Website: <https://onebiz.cityofomaha.org/>

ABLE Lincoln

A nonprofit networking organization that connects business leaders and entrepreneurs through monthly speaker events, meaningful relationships, and conversations that strengthen the Lincoln business community.

Address: 6735 Leesburg Court, Lincoln, NE 68516

Website: <https://able-lincoln.com/>

Nebraska Tech Collaborative

A workforce initiative convening leaders across the state to attract, develop, and retain tech talent and entrepreneurs to enable greater economic prosperity for Nebraska.

Address: 2120 South 72nd Street, Suite 800, Omaha, NE 68124

Website: <https://aksarben.org/ntc/>

Omaha 100

A nonprofit community development organization that helps entrepreneurs and small business owners access affordable financing, technical assistance, and business education.

Address: 2401 Lake Street, #130, Omaha, NE 68111

Website: <https://www.omaha100.org/>

Recurring Events & Conferences

Note: Some events/conferences may have already taken place in 2026.

One Million Cups

A free weekly entrepreneur meetup where founders present their startups, receive community feedback, and connect with fellow entrepreneurs, mentors, investors, and business leaders in a supportive networking environment.

Locations: Don't Panic Labs (Lincoln), Millwork Commons (Omaha), Central Community College Entrepreneurship Center (Grand Island), Intersect (Norfolk)

When: Every Wednesday, 8:30am – 10am

Website: <https://www.1millioncups.com/s/communities>

Open Coffee

A weekly networking event at Crescent Moon Coffee that brings together entrepreneurs, founders, investors, and community members for informal conversations, relationship building, and collaboration over coffee.

Location: Crescent Moon Coffee

When: Every Thursday, 8am – 9:30am

Website: <https://downtownlincoln.org/do/open-coffee>

AgTech Connect

Nebraska's premier annual agriculture technology conference, bringing together entrepreneurs, producers, researchers, investors, and industry leaders to showcase emerging innovations, foster partnerships, and accelerate AgTech commercialization.

Location: Nebraska Innovation Campus

When: Annually (typically in July)

Website: <https://www.agtechconnect.co/>

IO Summit

A bi-annual innovation and entrepreneurship conference in that brings together startup founders, corporate innovators, investors, creators, and community leaders from across the Midwest to share ideas, explore emerging tools and technologies, and build connections that accelerate innovation.

Location: Lincoln, NE

When: Bi-annually (typically in April)

Website: <https://www.theiosummit.com/>

Startup Week

A week-long celebration of innovation across Nebraska. Throughout the week, the entrepreneurial community comes together to learn from one another, make new connections, and celebrate the work happening here.

Locations: Lincoln/Omaha/Ashland, NE

When: Annually (typically in November)

Website: <https://openrange.org/suwk>

UNeTech Investor Summit

An annual event that showcases high-growth university-affiliated startups and emerging technologies, connecting founders with angel investors, venture capital firms, and strategic partners from across the Midwest.

Location: The Catalyst

When: Annually (typically in May)

Website: <https://www.unetech.org/unetech-investor-summit-2025/>

Innovation Week

An annual series of events hosted by UNeMed that celebrates innovation, research, and entrepreneurship at UNMC and UNO through educational seminars, startup showcases, networking opportunities, and awards recognizing Nebraska researchers, inventors, and startups.

Location: Durham Research Center

When: Annually (typically in October)

Website: <https://www.unemed.com/innovation-week>

Pitch Black Conference

An annual entrepreneurship conference, hosted by the Midlands African Chamber, that provides founders with educational sessions, networking opportunities, pitch

competitions, and access to investors and business resources to help accelerate business growth.

Location: MCC Institute for the Culinary Arts

When: Annually (typically in May/June)

Website: <https://midlandsafricanchamber.com/events/pitch-black-conference-2027/>

Tech Nebraska Summit

The state's flagship technology conference, bringing together technology leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, investors, and innovators for discussions on emerging technologies, workforce development, public policy, and the future of Nebraska's tech ecosystem.

Location: Omaha Marriott Downtown at the Capitol District

When: Annually (typically in October)

Website: <https://technologynebraska.com/event/2025-tech-nebraska-summit/>

The HIVE / The LNK

Bi-monthly networking events hosted by the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce that brings together small business owners and entrepreneurs to build relationships, share ideas, and grow their professional networks.

Location: Rotating

When: Monthly (events alternate)

Website: <https://www.lcoc.com/hiveLnk>

MakeShift Maker Meetup

A community makerspace in Lincoln that brings together makers, entrepreneurs, engineers, artists, and creators through weekly meetups, hands-on workshops, shared tools, and collaborative projects that foster innovation, technical skill development, and entrepreneurship.

Location: MakeShift

When: Every Monday, 5:30pm – 7:00pm

Website: <https://makeshiftlincoln.org/>

Idea Pub

Sponsored and hosted by UNeMed, the event aims to connect UNMC and entrepreneurs with resources in the Nebraska startup ecosystem.

Location: The Catalyst

When: Monthly (last Thursday of the month, 9am – 11am)

Website: <https://www.unemed.com/series/idea-pub-morning-edition>

Scale Omaha

Organized by Nebraska Startup Academy, an event where successful entrepreneurs, leaders and tech innovators share their experiences scaling a business or product.

Location: Millwork Commons

When: Monthly (third Thursday of the month, 4pm – 6pm)

Website: <https://go.nestartupacademy.org/c/scale-omaha>

Service Provider Directory

Venture Best

A fractional finance and accounting firm that provides startups with outsourced CFO, controller, bookkeeping, financial modeling, fundraising support, and strategic financial guidance to help companies scale efficiently.

Address: 201 N 7th Street, Suite 315, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.venturebest.com/>

Zelle HR Solutions

A human resources consulting firm that helps businesses with recruiting, compliance, employee relations, compensation, benefits, leadership development, and outsourced HR support.

Address: 5825 S 14th Street, Suite 201, Lincoln, NE 68512

Website: <https://www.zellehr.com/>

Don't Panic Labs

A Nebraska software development and product strategy firm that partners with startups and established companies to design, build, and scale custom software products while providing technical leadership and engineering expertise.

Address: 330 S 21st Street, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68510

Website: <https://dontpaniclabs.com/>

Appsky

A Nebraska-based software development company that helps startups and businesses build custom web applications, mobile apps, SaaS platforms, and digital products through full-service product design and engineering.

Address: 4601 Catalyst Court, #2076, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://appsky.io/>

Visient Consulting

A business and technology consulting firm that helps businesses improve operations, implement technology solutions, develop business strategies, and execute digital transformation initiatives.

Address: Lincoln, NE

Website: <https://visientconsulting.com/>

The Casslo Group

A sales and leadership consulting firm that helps early-stage startups and growing companies build scalable sales processes, develop high-performing leaders, and create people-first organizations through hands-on coaching, sales strategy, and leadership development.

Address: Omaha, NE

Website: <https://casslogroup.com/>

Fathom Creates

A branding, marketing, and creative agency that helps businesses grow through brand strategy, website design, digital marketing, content creation, video production, and integrated marketing campaigns.

Address: 2124 Y Street, Flat 212, Lincoln, NE 68503

Website: <https://fathomcreates.com/>

Lutz

The largest locally owned business solutions firm, providing startups and growing companies with accounting, tax, outsourced CFO and accounting, M&A advisory, HR, technology consulting, and financial planning services to support every stage of business growth.

Address: 115 Canopy Street, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.lutz.us/>

Codebuddy

A software development platform and service that combines AI-powered tools with professional engineering support to help entrepreneurs and businesses plan, build, and launch scalable custom software faster and at a lower cost than traditional development.

Address: 3201 Pioneers Boulevard, #35, Lincoln, NE 68502

Website: <https://www.codebuddy.com/>

Coworking/Collaborative Spaces

Fuse Coworking

A collaborative coworking space in Lincoln that provides entrepreneurs, startups, remote professionals, and small businesses with flexible office space, meeting rooms, networking opportunities, and a supportive community designed to foster innovation and business growth.

Address: 151 N 8th St, Fifth Floor, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://www.fusecoworking.com/>

Intersect Coworking

A coworking space and startup incubator in Norfolk that provides entrepreneurs, startups, freelancers, and remote professionals with flexible workspace, business programming, mentorship, networking opportunities, and incubator resources to help grow Northeast Nebraska's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Address: 509 W Norfolk Avenue, Norfolk, NE 68701

Website: <https://www.intersectcoworking.com/>

Catalyst

An innovation and entrepreneurship hub in Omaha that brings together startups, corporate innovators, investors, and ecosystem partners through collaborative workspace, educational programming, events, and resources.

Address: 4601 Catalyst Court, Omaha, NE 68106

Website: <https://www.catalystoma.com/>

Millwork Commons

Omaha's urban innovation district that brings together entrepreneurs, startups, artists, educators, and businesses in a collaborative neighborhood focused on innovation, creativity, workforce development, and community-building.

Address: 1229 Millwork Avenue, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://millworkcommons.com/>

Nebraska Innovation Campus

A research and innovation campus affiliated with the University of Nebraska–Lincoln that connects startups, established companies, researchers, and entrepreneurs through collaborative workspace, research partnerships, prototyping resources, and programming designed to accelerate innovation and commercialization.

Address: 2021 Transformation Drive, Lincoln, NE 68508

Website: <https://innovate.unl.edu/>

Elevator

A coworking and co-warehousing community designed for entrepreneurs, e-commerce brands, creators, and growing businesses, offering flexible office and warehouse space, logistics support, and a collaborative network that helps companies scale without long-term leases.

Addresses: 1200 N Street, Suite 500, Lincoln, NE 68508

1402 Jones Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68102

Website: <https://elevatorspace.com/>

The Grove

A coworking space operated by Nebraska Startup Academy, providing early-stage founders with collaborative workspace, mentorship, educational programming, and a milestone-driven community designed to help startups validate, build, and scale their businesses.

Address: 1111 North 13th Street, #119, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://www.nestartupacademy.org/the-grove>

Modus Coworking

A premium coworking space in downtown Omaha that offers fully furnished offices, flexible workspaces, conference rooms, and professional amenities, creating a collaborative environment where entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses can grow and connect.

Address: 1901 Howard Street, Omaha, NE 68102

Website: <https://moduscoworking.com/>

Nest:Space

A community-focused coworking space in downtown Kearney that provides entrepreneurs, startups, freelancers, remote workers, and small teams with flexible workspace, private

offices, meeting rooms, 24/7 access, networking opportunities, and business support programs.

Address: 2224 Central Avenue, Kearney, NE 68847

Website: <https://nestspace.co/>

Pitch Competitions & Challenges

Note: Some competitions/challenges may have already taken place in 2026.

SPSW Pitch Competition

An opportunity for early-stage founders to pitch their startups to a panel of investors and business leaders for cash prizes, valuable exposure, and connections to Nebraska's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Location: Millwork Commons

When: Annually (typically in October/November)

Website: <https://siliconprairienews.com/events/startup-week/spsw-pitch-competition/>

EGA Pitch Competition

Hosted by the Midlands African Chamber, an opportunity for entrepreneurs to compete for grant funding, receive expert feedback, and connect with investors, mentors, and business leaders.

Location: AfroFest Omaha

When: Annually (typically in September)

Website: <https://midlandsafricanchamber.com/ega-pitch/>

Startup Weekend

A three-day entrepreneurial competition where participants form teams, validate business ideas, build prototypes, and pitch their startups to a panel of judges while receiving mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs, investors, and industry experts.

Location: The Catalyst

When: Annually (typically in June)

Website: <https://openrange.org/startup-weekend/>

JumpStart Challenge

An innovation challenge hosted by the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development that brings together students, entrepreneurs, and professionals to develop and pitch creative solutions to real-world business challenges presented by local companies and organizations, with winning teams receiving cash prizes, mentorship, and valuable industry connections.

Location: Lincoln, NE

When: Annually (typically in September/October)

Website: <https://www.selectlincoln.org/jumpstart-challenge>

Big Idea Buffalo County

A live pitch competition that gives entrepreneurs, students, and business owners across Buffalo County the opportunity to present new business ideas, compete for cash and prizes, and gain access to mentorship, professional services, workspace, and other resources.

Location: Kearney, NE

When: Annually (typically in October)

Website: <https://buffalocounty.org/big-idea>

Big Idea Norfolk

A Shark Tank-style pitch competition where students and Norfolk-area entrepreneurs present business or product ideas to a panel of judges and community members for the chance to win startup funding, business coaching, professional services, and other resources to help turn their ideas into viable businesses.

Location: The Cove at Midtown Event Center

When: Annually (typically in October)

Website: <https://bigideanorfolk.com/>

Startup Resource Library

Recommended Books

- **The Lean Startup**
 - A framework for building successful startups through rapid experimentation, customer feedback, and continuous iteration, helping founders reduce risk by validating ideas before investing significant time and capital.
 - Website: <https://theleanstartup.com/book>
- **Venture Deals**
 - The definitive guide to venture capital financing, helping founders understand term sheets, fundraising negotiations, investor expectations, and the legal and financial mechanics behind venture-backed startups.
 - Website: <https://venturedeals.com/>
- **Zero to One**
 - This book challenges entrepreneurs to build truly innovative companies by creating entirely new markets rather than competing in existing ones, emphasizing the importance of developing unique, defensible businesses with long-term competitive advantages.
 - Website: <https://www.amazon.com/Zero-One-Notes-Startups-Future/dp/0804139296>
- **Founding Sales**
 - A practical guide for first-time founders on building an early sales process, finding product-market fit, hiring the first sales team, and creating a scalable go-to-market strategy for a growing startup.
 - Website: <https://www.foundingsales.com/>
- **Accelerated: A Guide to Innovating at the Speed of Change**
 - This book, by Nebraska entrepreneur and innovation leader Brian Arding, is a guide for founders and business leaders navigating rapid change, offering frameworks and tools to experiment with new ideas, adapt to uncertainty, and turn opportunities into valuable products and businesses.
 - Website: <https://www.amazon.com/Accelerated-Guide-Innovating-Speed-Change/dp/1544531990>

Podcasts

- **Acquired**
 - This podcast explores the stories behind some of the world's most successful companies through in-depth conversations about their founding, growth strategies, acquisitions, and the key decisions that shaped their success.
 - Website: <https://www.acquired.fm/>
- **All-In**
 - A weekly podcast featuring leading entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and operators discussing startups, technology, venture capital, economics, politics, and the biggest trends shaping business and innovation.
 - Website: <https://allin.com/>
- **20VC**
 - This podcast features interviews with top venture capitalists, founders, and technology leaders, offering insights into fundraising, investing, company building, and the evolving venture capital landscape.
 - Website: <https://www.thetwentyminutevc.com/>
- **Masters of Scale**
 - This podcast features conversations with world-renowned founders, CEOs, and business leaders who share practical lessons and strategies for building, leading, and scaling successful companies.
 - Website: <https://mastersofscale.com/>
- **Inside Outside Innovation**
 - A weekly podcast that focuses on raw stories, real insights, and tactical advice from the best and brightest in startups and corporate innovation.
 - Website: <https://insideoutside.io/io-innovation-podcast/>

Newsletters

- **StrictlyVC**
 - A daily newsletter covering venture capital, startups, fundraising, acquisitions, and emerging technology, providing founders and investors with

timely insights into the people, deals, and trends shaping the innovation ecosystem.

- Website: <https://strictlyvc.com/>

- **Term Sheet**

- A daily newsletter, published by *Fortune*, that delivers breaking news and analysis on venture capital, private equity, startup fundraising, mergers and acquisitions, and the broader private markets.
- Website: <https://fortune.com/tag/term-sheet/>

- **Silicon Prairie News**

- The leading publication covering startups and entrepreneurship across Nebraska, featuring founder stories, ecosystem news, investment activity, and events.
- Website: <https://siliconprairienews.com/>

- **Inside Outside Innovation**

- A weekly newsletter that provides innovation leaders the latest insights on talent, technology, and the future of innovation. Thousands of startups and corporations look to The IO Newsletter to help them understand the latest research, connect with other leaders, and accelerate their learning.
- Website: <https://mailchi.mp/97fb2476fc70/ionewsletter>

Understanding Startup Valuations

One of the first questions nearly every founder asks before fundraising is, "What is my company worth?" While it seems like a straightforward question, the answer is often much more nuanced than most first-time entrepreneurs expect.

Unlike mature businesses, early-stage startups typically have little revenue, limited operating history, and few tangible assets. As a result, traditional valuation methods—such as discounted cash flow analyses or earnings multiples—are rarely applicable. Instead, startup valuations are largely determined by what investors are willing to pay after considering a variety of factors, including the strength of the founding team, the size of the market opportunity, customer traction, product differentiation, competitive landscape, and the company's potential to generate significant returns in the future.

In other words, an early-stage valuation is not a measure of what your company is actually worth today. It is a negotiated price that reflects both the company's current progress and investors' confidence in what it can become.

Because of this, founders should avoid viewing valuation as a trophy or a measure of success. A higher valuation is not always better. The goal is to establish a valuation that provides enough capital to grow the business while setting the company up for future fundraising success.

One of the most important considerations when raising capital is determining how much money to raise. Rather than choosing an arbitrary amount, founders should work backward from the milestones they hope to achieve over the next 12 - 18 months. Investors generally expect each financing round to provide enough runway for the company to reach meaningful inflection points that substantially increase its value. These milestones might include launching a product, finding product-market fit, acquiring paying customers, reaching meaningful revenue, hiring key employees, or demonstrating a repeatable sales process.

The objective isn't simply to survive for another year—it is to create enough progress that the next fundraising round can be completed at a significantly higher valuation.

The amount raised naturally varies depending on the stage of the business. While every company is different, there are some general guidelines that founders can use as a starting point.

Stage	Typical Raise	Typical Valuation	Typical Company Progress
Pre-Seed	\$50k - \$500k	\$1M - \$6M	Idea, prototype, or early MVP
Seed	\$500k - \$2M	\$5M - \$15M	Early customers and initial traction
Series A	\$2M - \$10M	\$20M - \$50M+	Product-market fit and scalable growth
Series B+	\$10M - \$50M+	\$60M - \$150M+	Rapid scaling and market expansion

Note: These benchmarks are based on typical rounds in Nebraska.

When evaluating an investment opportunity, many Midwest investors—including Invest Nebraska—think about valuation through three primary lenses.

First, the company must raise enough capital to provide approximately 12 - 18 months of runway while accomplishing meaningful milestones. Every dollar raised should have a purpose. Investors want to understand exactly how the capital will be deployed and why those expenditures will materially increase the value of the business before the next financing event.

Second, the valuation should allow founders to maintain meaningful ownership of the company. Raising capital always involves dilution, and while dilution is an unavoidable part of venture-backed growth, excessive dilution early in a company's life can create long-term challenges. Founders who give away too much ownership in their first few rounds may eventually lose the incentives and flexibility needed to continue building the business. Nationally, institutional seed rounds often result in approximately 20% dilution, which generally strikes a healthy balance between providing investors with meaningful ownership while preserving founder incentives.

Finally, investors must believe the valuation provides an opportunity to generate attractive returns. Venture capital operates on a portfolio model where a small number of exceptional companies generate the majority of overall returns. Because many investments will ultimately fail, investors must believe each successful company has the potential to return many times their original investment. For example, if a company raises capital at a \$10M valuation, investors typically need to believe it has the potential to become a \$100M company or larger over time. If that outcome appears unlikely, the valuation may simply be too aggressive relative to the company's current stage and risk profile.

One mistake many first-time founders make is assuming they should always seek the

highest valuation possible. While receiving a higher valuation may seem like a victory, it can actually create significant challenges later if the company fails to grow into that valuation. Imagine a startup raises \$2M at a \$20M valuation. Eighteen months later, the company has made progress but has not grown enough to justify a substantially higher valuation. The next financing may need to occur at the same valuation—or even lower. These "flat rounds" and "down rounds" can make fundraising significantly more difficult, negatively affect employee morale, trigger investor protections, and create unnecessary dilution. In many cases, accepting a more reasonable valuation initially results in a much healthier fundraising trajectory over the life of the company.

Founders should also recognize that valuations in Nebraska and the Midwest often differ from those seen in Silicon Valley. Headlines frequently highlight billion-dollar startups and unusually large funding rounds on the coasts, but those companies operate in a unique ecosystem characterized by intense investor competition, abundant capital, and higher operating costs. Nebraska investors generally place greater emphasis on capital efficiency, disciplined execution, customer validation, and sustainable growth. Because startups in Nebraska often require less capital to achieve similar milestones, fundraising rounds and valuations may be somewhat lower than those seen in coastal markets. This is not a disadvantage. In many cases, founders retain more ownership, build stronger fundamentals, and create healthier businesses as a result.

Another concept that founders often overlook is that investors evaluate opportunities from an infinite portfolio perspective, not in isolation. They are constantly comparing your company to dozens—or even hundreds—of other investment opportunities. They consider whether your valuation is consistent with companies they've previously funded, whether your traction justifies your proposed price, and whether your business offers a compelling risk-adjusted return relative to other startups competing for their capital. Understanding this perspective helps explain why two companies with similar products may receive very different valuations depending on their execution, traction, market timing, and overall investment opportunity.

Ultimately, valuation is a balancing exercise rather than a negotiation to "win." The best financing rounds are those in which founders receive enough capital to accomplish meaningful milestones, investors obtain sufficient ownership to justify the risks they are taking, and both parties believe the company is positioned to create substantially more value before its next round of financing. When that alignment exists, everyone benefits.

At the end of the day, founders should remember that the objective is not to maximize

today's valuation—it is to maximize the long-term value of the company. A fair valuation today creates the foundation for successful fundraising tomorrow, allowing founders to continue building a business that generates lasting value for employees, customers, investors, and themselves.

Understanding Fundraising Instruments

Once you've determined how much capital to raise and have developed a reasonable valuation, the next decision is how to raise that capital. The legal structure used to complete an investment is known as the fundraising instrument or investment vehicle.

There is no single "best" fundraising instrument. The right choice depends on your stage, the complexity of the financing, investor preferences, legal costs, and your future fundraising plans. Early-stage companies often prioritize speed and simplicity, while later-stage companies generally move toward more structured equity financings.

The most common fundraising instruments are outlined below.

SAFE (Simple Agreement for Future Equity)

The SAFE, developed by Y Combinator, has become the most common financing instrument for pre-seed startups. Rather than purchasing equity immediately, investors provide capital today in exchange for the right to receive equity when the company completes a future priced financing round.

A SAFE is not debt—it does not accrue interest, have a maturity date, or require repayment under normal circumstances. Instead, the investment converts into equity during a future financing event, typically using either a valuation cap, a discount, or both.

Advantages

- Simple and inexpensive legal documentation
- Quick to complete
- No repayment obligation
- No interest accrual
- Delays valuation negotiations until the company has more traction

Disadvantages

- Future dilution can be difficult to predict
- Multiple SAFEs can create a complicated capitalization table
- Founders may underestimate how much ownership they are giving away

Best suited for: Idea-stage and pre-seed companies raising their first institutional or angel capital.

Convertible Note

A convertible note is similar to a SAFE in that investors provide money today that converts into equity during a future financing round. Unlike a SAFE, however, a convertible note is a loan.

Convertible notes typically include:

- An interest rate
- A maturity date
- A valuation cap
- A conversion discount

If the company does not complete a qualifying financing before the maturity date, the note may become due or require renegotiation, although many investors choose to extend the maturity rather than demand repayment.

Advantages

- Familiar structure for many investors
- Delays valuation negotiations
- Often easier to negotiate than a priced round

Disadvantages

- Creates debt on the company's balance sheet
- Interest accrues over time
- Maturity dates can create pressure if fundraising takes longer than expected

Best suited for: Early-stage companies when investors prefer debt-like protections or when SAFEs are not appropriate.

Priced Equity Round

A priced equity round is the traditional venture capital financing structure. Instead of waiting for a future conversion, investors purchase shares of preferred stock at an agreed-

upon valuation.

Because ownership is established immediately, priced rounds require substantially more legal documentation than SAFEs or convertible notes. Typical documents include:

- Stock Purchase Agreement
- Investors' Rights Agreement
- Voting Agreement
- Right of First Refusal Agreement
- Updated Certificate of Incorporation

Priced rounds also introduce investor rights that may include board representation, information rights, protective provisions, and pro rata participation rights.

Advantages

- Clear valuation and ownership structure
- No future conversion uncertainty
- Preferred by many institutional venture capital firms
- Establishes a clean capitalization table

Disadvantages

- Higher legal costs
- Longer negotiation process
- More investor rights and governance provisions

Best suited for: Seed, Series A, and later institutional venture capital financings.

While every company is different, the following serves as a useful general guide.

Company Stage	Common Investment Vehicle
Friends & Family	SAFE or Convertible Note
Pre-Seed	SAFE
Seed	SAFE or Priced Equity Round
Series A	Priced Equity Round
Series B+	Priced Equity Round

Ultimately, the best fundraising instrument is the one that aligns the interests of founders

and investors while positioning the company for future success. Early-stage founders should prioritize simplicity whenever possible. As companies mature and attract institutional venture capital, financings typically become more structured and include additional governance and investor protections.

Remember, the investment instrument is simply a tool. What matters most is raising the right amount of capital from the right investors at terms that allow both the company and its investors to succeed over the long term.